Ethics and Morality

- *Ethos* (Greek) and *Mores* (Latin) are terms having to do with “custom,” ”habit,” and “behavior.
- Ethics is *the study of morality*.
- This definition raises two questions:
  (a) What is *morality*?
  (b) What is *the study of morality*?
What is Morality?

- Morality can be defined as:

  A system of rules for guiding human conduct, and principles for evaluating those rules.

- Two points are worth noting in this definition:
  
  (i) Morality is a system; and
  (ii) It is a system comprised of moral rules and principles.

- Moral rules can be understood as "rules of conduct," which are very similar to "policies."
Rules of Conduct as “Policies”

- Policies range from formal laws to "informal, implicit guidelines for actions" (Moor, 1999)
- Moor suggests that every act can be viewed as an instance of a policy.
- There are two kinds of rules of conduct:
  
  (1) **Directives** for guiding our conduct as individuals (at the micro-level)
      “Don’t Steal”, “Do not harm others”
  
  (2) **Social Policies** framed at the macro-level
      “Software that used to invade the privacy of others”
Directives

*Directives* are rules (of conduct) that guide our actions and thus *direct* us to behave in certain ways.

- Rules such as "Do not steal" and "Do not harm others" are both examples of rules of conduct that direct us in our individual moral choices at the "micro-ethical" level (i.e., the level of individual behavior).
Social Policies

- Other rules of conduct guide our actions at the "macro-ethical" level by helping us frame social policies.
- Rules such as "proprietary software should not be copied" or "software that can be used to invade the privacy of users should not be developed" are examples of rules of conduct that arise out of our social policies.
- A correlation between directives and social policies (e.g., rules involving stealing).
Principles

- The rules of conduct in a moral system are evaluated against standards called *principles*.
- For example, the principle of "social utility," which is concerned with promoting the greatest good for the greatest number, can be used to evaluate a social policy such as "proprietary software should not be copied without permission."
Principles (continued)

- In the previous example, the *social-utility principle*
  
  **Example:**
  - Policy pertaining to proprietary software can be justified on the above moral grounds.

- A certain policy could be justified (on utilitarian grounds) by showing that following the rule for not allowing the unauthorized copying of software would produce more overall social utility (greater good for society).

Principles of evaluation based on Utilitarian ground
Figure 2-1: Basic Components of a Moral System

**Rules of Conduct**
(Action-guiding rules, in the form of either *directives* or social *policies*)

- Two types
  - Rules for guiding the actions of *individuals* (micro-level ethical rules)
    - Examples include directives such as: "Do not steal" and "Do not harm others."
  - Rules for establishing *social policies* (macro-level ethical rules)
    - Examples include social policies such as: "Software should be protected" and "Privacy should be respected."

**Principles of Evaluation**
(Evaluative standards used to justify rules of conduct)

- Examples include principles such as of social utility and justice as fairness
Four features of a moral’s system

- **Public**: everyone must know what the rules are
- **Informal**: No formal authoritative judges presiding over it
- **Rationality**: A moral system is rational and accessible to ordinary peoples
- **Impartial**: Morals rules are ideally designed to apply equitably to all participants
The term *value* comes from the Latin *valere*, which translates roughly into having worth or being of worth.

Values can be conceived as objects of our desires or interests. **Examples** of values include very general notions such as:

- happiness,
- love,
- freedom, etc.

Moral principles are ultimately derived from a society's system of values.
Philosophers distinguish between two types of values: 

- *intrinsic* values.
- *instrumental* values.

Any value that serves some further end or good is called an instrumental values are tied to some external standard.

Example:

- Automobiles, computers, and money.

Intrinsic values are valued for their own sake

Examples:

- life and happiness.
Core Values

- Another approach to cataloguing values is to distinguish *core values*, some of which may or may not also be intrinsic values, from other kinds of values.

- Moor (1998), for example, believes that values such as *life*, *happiness*, and *autonomy* are core values.

- Not all core values are also *moral* values.
Moral vs. Non-Moral Values

- Morals and values are not necessarily identical.
- Values can be either
  - moral or
  - non-moral.
- Reason informs us that it is in our interest to promote values that consistent with our own survival, happiness, and flourishing as individuals.
- When used to *further only our own self-interests*, these values are not necessarily moral values.
Moral Values

- Once we bring in the notion of *impartiality*, we begin to take the "moral point of view."

- We articulate a system of values having to do with notions such as autonomy, fairness, justice, etc., which are moral values.

- Our core moral values are, in turn derived from certain core non-moral values.
Figure 2-2: Components of a Moral System

Grounds for justifying moral principles

Moral principles and rules

Source of moral rules

Religion  Philosophy  Law

Principles of Evaluation

Rules of Conduct

Core Values
### Grounds for Justifying the Moral Principles

**Religion**  
(Obedience to Divine Command)

**Philosophical Ethics**  
(Ethical Theory and Logical Argumentation)

**Law**  
(Obedience to a legal system)

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#### Moral Principles

Principles such as social utility, duty, obligation, etc. are used as standards to evaluate and justify rules of conduct.

#### Rules of Conduct

Moral rules are derived from basic moral values (macro-level rules or *policies* such as "protect privacy"); micro-level rules or *directives* such as "do not cheat").

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#### Source of the Moral rules

**Basic Moral Values**

Moral values are derived from core non-moral values by using the notion of *impartiality*. (Examples include autonomy and respect for persons.)

**Core Non-Moral Values**

Non-moral values originate from desires and typically involve *rational* self interests. (Examples include: survival, security, pleasure, etc.)
Three Schemes for Grounding the Evaluative Rules in a Moral System

The principles are grounded in one of three different kinds of schemes:

- Religion
- Law
- Philosophical Ethics.

Consider how a particular moral principle can be justified from the vantage-points of each scheme.

Example:

- “do not steal.”
Approach #1: Grounding Moral Principles in a Religious System

- Consider the following rationale for why stealing is morally wrong:

  *Stealing is wrong because it offends God or because it violates one of God's (Ten) Commandments.*
  
  *It violates the commands of a divine authority.*
Approach #2: Grounding Moral Principles in a Legal System

An alternative rationale would be:

*Stealing is wrong because it violates the law.*

- Here the grounds for determining why stealing is wrong are not tied to religion.
- If stealing violates a law in a particular nation or jurisdiction,
- The act of stealing can be declared to be wrong independent of any religious beliefs that one may or may not happen to have.
A third way of approaching the question is:

*Stealing is wrong because it is wrong*

- independent of any form of external authority or any external sanctions.
- On this view, the moral "rightness" or "wrongness" of stealing is not grounded in some external authoritative source.
- Does not appeal to an external authority, either theological or legal, for justification.
Many philosophers and ethicists argue that, independent of supernatural or legal authorities, reason alone is sufficient to show that stealing is wrong. They argue that reason can inform us that there is something either in the act of stealing itself or in the consequences that result from this kind of act that makes stealing morally wrong.
Approach # 3 Continued

- In the case of both law and religion, specific sanctions against stealing exists in the form of punishment.

- In the case of (philosophical) ethics, the only sanction would be in the form of social disapprobation (disapproval) and possibly social ostracism. But there is no punishment in a formal sense.

- External conditions or factors, in the form of sanctions, are irrelevant.
Ethicists vs. Moralists

- Ethicists study morality from the perspective of philosophical methodology; they appeal to logical arguments to justify their positions.
- Moralists often claim to have all of the answers regarding morality.
- Many moralists also exhibit characteristics that have been described as "preachy" and "judgmental."
- Some moralists may have a particular moral agenda to advance.
Ethicists and Moralists (Continued)

- Ethicists, who use the philosophical method in their analysis and investigation of moral issues, must remain open to different sides of a dispute.

- An ethicist’s primary focus is on the *study* of morality and the application of theories.

- Ethicists approach the study of moral issues and controversies by way of standards that are both rational (based on logic) and impartial (open to others to verify).
Bernard Gert’s Scheme of a Moral System

- Morality is a *system*.
- It is like a game, but more like an *informal* game (e.g., a game of cards)
- It is *public* (open and accessible to all)
- It is *rational* (open to reason)
- It should be impartial (e.g., a “blindfold of justice”).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Informal</th>
<th>Rational</th>
<th>Impartial</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The rules are known to all of the members.</td>
<td>The rules are informal, not like formal laws in a legal system.</td>
<td>The system is based on principles of logical reason accessible to all its members.</td>
<td>The system is not partial to any one group or individual.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion Stoppers as "Roadblocks" to Moral Discourse

Discussion stoppers can be articulated in terms of the following four questions:

1. People disagree about morality; so how can we reach agreement on moral issues?
2. Who am I/Who are we to judge others and to impose my/our values on others?
3. Isn't morality simply a private matter?
4. Isn't morality simply a matter that different cultures and groups should determine for themselves?
Discussion Stopper # 1: People Disagree on Solutions to Moral Issues

People who hold this view fail to recognize:

(i) Experts in other fields of study, such as science and math., also disagree on what the correct answers to certain questions are.

(ii) There is common agreement about answers to some moral questions.

(iii) People do not always distinguish between "disagreements about factual matters" and "disagreements on general principles" in disputes involving morality.
Discussion Stopper # 1: People Disagree on Solutions to Moral Issues

- Experts in many fields disagree on fundamental issues.

Example:
- Linux is a better OS than Windows.
- C++ is a better programming language than JAVA.
- Light is composed of particles and other claim that light is composed of waves.

- Parameters and rules must be satisfied in order for a particular claim to qualify as acceptable in debates.
Common agreement on some moral issues:

- People have demonstrated considerable agreement on answers to some moral principles

**Example**: death penalty abortion

**Disagreement about principles vs. disagreement about facts**

- Richared De George (1999) has pointed out that in analyzing moral issues we need to be very careful to distinguish our disagreement about moral principles and factual values

- Example: Unauthorized exchange of proprietary information is a form of stealing
Discussion Stopper # 2: Who am I to Judge Others?

- We need to distinguish between:
  - “Persons Making Judgments” and “Persons Being Judgmental,” and
  - “Judgments Involving Condemnations” vs. “Judgments Involving Evaluations”

- Also, we are sometimes required to make judgments about others.
Discussion Stopper # 2: Who am I to Judge Others?

- Person making a judgment about “Linux is a better operating system than window.
- Judgmental is a behavioral trait exhibited by those who strongly opinionated or who tend to speak disparagingly of anyone who holds a positions on some topic that is different from their own
- Two types of judgments:
  - Involving condemnation
  - Involving evaluation
Discussion Stopper # 3: Ethics is Simply a Private Matter

- Many people assume that morality is essentially personal in nature.
- Morality must be simply a private matter.
- “Private morality" is essentially an oxymoron or contradictory notion.
- Morality is a public phenomenon (Gert).

Example: stealing is morally wrong
Discussion Stopper # 4: Morality is Simply a Matter for Individual Cultures to Decide

- According to this view, a moral system is dependent on, or relative to, a particular culture or group.
- There are some very serious problems with this view, which is called *ethical relativism*.
- Two positions involving relativism: *cultural relativism* and *moral relativism*.
At the base of cultural relativism is the following assumption:

(A) Different cultures have different beliefs about what constitutes morally right and wrong behavior.

This assumption (A) is essentially descriptive in nature.
Cultural Relativism Continued

- (the view that different groups have different conceptions about what is morally right and morally wrong behavior) is widely accepted

- Other social scientists have suggested that all cultures may possess certain universal core moral values.
Even if Cultural Relativism (assumption A) is true, does it logically imply the further claim?

(B) What is morally right or wrong for members of a culture or group can be determined only by that culture or group.

Note that (B), unlike (A), is a normative claim. Also note that to move from (A) to (B) is to move from cultural relativism to moral relativism.
Moral Relativism

- Moral relativism asserts that no universal standard of morality is possible because
  - Different people have different beliefs about what is right and wrong.

- From this inference, relativists appear to further suggest that, in matters of morality, anything goes.

- But this principle of reasoning is problematic because it is essentially incoherent and inconsistent.
Two cultures, Culture A and Culture B, adjoin each other geographically. The members of Culture A are fairly peaceful people, tolerant of the diverse beliefs found in all other cultures. And they believe that all culture should essentially mind their own business when it comes to matters involving morality. Those in Culture B, on the contrary, dislike and hostile to those outside their culture. Culture B has recently developed a new computer system for delivering chemical weapons that it plans to use in military attacks on other cultures, including Culture A.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stopper #1</th>
<th>Stopper #2</th>
<th>Stopper #3</th>
<th>Stopper #4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People disagree on solutions to moral issues.</td>
<td>Who am I to judge others?</td>
<td>Ethics is imply a private matter.</td>
<td>Morality is simply a matter for individual cultures to decide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fails to recognize that experts in many areas disagree on key issues in their fields.</td>
<td>1. Fails to distinguish between the act of judging and being a judgmental person.</td>
<td>1. Fails to recognize that morality is essentially a public system.</td>
<td>1. Fails to distinguish between descriptive and normative claims about morality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fails to recognize that there are many moral issues on which people agree.</td>
<td>2. Fails to distinguish between judging as condemning and judging as evaluating.</td>
<td>2. Fails to note that personally-based morality can cause major harm to others.</td>
<td>2. Assumes that people can never reach common agreement on some moral principles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fails to distinguish between disagreements about principles and disagreements about facts.</td>
<td>3. Fails to recognize that sometimes we are required to make judgments</td>
<td>3. Confuses moral choices with individual or personal preferences.</td>
<td>3. Assumes that a system is moral because a majority in a culture decides it is moral.</td>
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</tbody>
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