


Psychological Aspects of Social Issues

Chapter 1
Ethics and the Examined Life


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Outline/Overview

- o Ethics and morality – definitions/
sources & connections
- o Easy paths to ethics
- o Studying ethics
 - Descriptive, normative, meta, and
applied ethics
- o Elements of ethics
- o Morality and religion

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Ethics and Morality-definition and sources

- o Ethics is?
- o Morality is?
- o Where do beliefs come from?
- o How do we learn and internalize?
- o Assimilate?

- o We “Do Ethics” all the time

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● ● ● | Ethics is concerned with moral values

- Dictates many things about how we will live our lives
- Don't have to do any serious exploration or thinking
 - Accept ready-made framework
 - Foreclosure – Erikson

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● ● ● | “Easy Paths”

- Drawbacks to foreclosure?
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
- Other easy paths:
 - Follow your feelings
 - Morality is relative to each person
 - Can be worse than foreclosure

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● ● ● | Studying Ethics

- Descriptive ethics
- Normative ethics
- Metaethics
- Applied ethics

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Descriptive ethics

- o main goal: explain/describe how people go about making ethical decisions
- o “scientific study of ethics”
- o Psychology - seminal work by Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan

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Jean Piaget

- o Two stages
- o Moral realism - rules are absolute and inflexible
- o Morality of cooperation - realize that rules are made and thus can be changed by people



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Lawrence Kohlberg

- o Pre-conventional - 1: Avoid punishment (punishment-obedience)
- o 2: Personal gain (market exchange) personal needs determine
- o Conventional - 3: Good boy / Nice girl (interpersonal harmony) what pleases others
- o 4: Law & order (rules need to be followed) respects authority
- o Post-conventional - 5: Social contract - social agreement on standards
- o 6: Universal ethical principles - individual conscience



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Carol Gilligan

- o Feminist theorist
- o Ethic of care
- o Kohlberg used only men in initial studies



Carol Gilligan

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Philosopher's 3 modes of study

- o Normative ethics
 - Study and assess soundness of principles
- o Metaethics
 - Examine meaning and underlying logic
- o Applied ethics
 - Applying moral norms to specific situations

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Professional Ethics Codes

- o Medicine
- o Law
- o Psychology
 - APA ethics code
 - General principles vs. standards
 - Conflict in the field – aiding interrogations
- o Spell out duties/obligations/prohibitions

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Elements of ethics

- o 1. Reason – logical argument/ reasoning
- o 2. Universality –moral norms must apply equally across situations
- o 3. Impartiality – all people are equal and should be treated the same
- o 4. Moral norms dominate –moral norms supersede other types of norms

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Religion and morality

- o Can they be separated?
- o Potential problems
- o Which word of god?
- o Interpreted by people
- o Strong beliefs can eliminate need for reasoning?

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Religious people need moral reasoning because...

- o Religious codes of conduct can be vague providing guidance that can be conflicting
- o Resolving conflicts – gives us a path to resolving conflicts
- o Productive discourse encouraged – built upon a set of common ethical concepts

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God as “Maker of morality”

- Moral law is handed down from on high
- What is this known as?
- Right actions are those that are willed by God
- Classic chicken-egg problem
 - Socrates first articulated: “is an action morally right because God wills it or does God will an action because it is morally right?”

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Divine command theory

- Leibnitz rejection: If there is no standard of “goodness” - God becomes less praiseworthy
 - If arbitrary will and not reasonableness rule, justice becomes simply whatever is most pleasing to the most powerful
- Rebuttal is that since God is all good, he would only have us do what is good

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Readings

- Phillips
- Plato
- Dennett
- Be sure that you understand the main ideas of each
- Can discuss in class if anything unclear

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