


Psychological Aspects of Social Issues

Chapter 1
Ethics and the Examined Life


1



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

2



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

3

● ● ● | 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

4

● ● ● | “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

5

● ● ● | Studying Ethics

- Descriptive ethics
- Normative ethics
- Metaethics
- Applied ethics

11



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

12



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



13



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



14

● ● ● | Carol Gilligan

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



Carol Gilligan

15

● ● ● | Philosopher's 3 modes of study

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

16

● ● ● | Professional Ethics Codes

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

17



Elements of ethics

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

20





Religion and morality

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

22



● ● ● | Religious people need moral reasoning because...

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

23

● ● ● | 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?”

24

● ● ● | 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

25



Readings

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

26
