MODULE 2

Ethical Theories and Frameworks

Introduction

Ethical theories and frameworks provide structured approaches to evaluating right and wrong, helping individuals and societies make moral decisions. Different ethical theories offer varying perspectives on what constitutes ethical behavior, emphasizing consequences, duties, virtues, or personal beliefs.

1. **Utilitarianism** – A consequentialist theory that evaluates actions based on their outcomes, focusing on maximizing overall happiness or utility.

2**. Deontology** – A duty-based approach emphasizing adherence to moral rules and principles regardless of consequences.

3. **Virtue Ethics** – A character-based ethical framework that prioritizes virtues and moral character in ethical decision-making.

Each of these theories provides a unique lens through which ethical dilemmas can be analyzed, influencing decision-making in personal, professional, and societal contexts.

Topic 1: Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory that argues for the goodness of pleasure and the determination of right behavior based on the usefulness of the action's consequences. This means that pleasure is good and that the goodness of an action is determined by its usefulness. Its root word is "**utility**", which refers to the usefulness of the consequences of one's action and behavior.

When we argue that wiretapping is permissible because doing so results in better public safety, then we are arguing in a utilitarian way. It is utilitarian because we argue that some individual rights can be sacrificed for the sake of the greater happiness of the many.

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) are the two foremost utilitarian thinkers. Their system of ethics emphasizes the consequences factions. This means that the goodness or the badness of an action is based on whether it is useful in contributing to a specific purpose for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism is consequentialist. This means that the moral value of actions and decisions is based solely or greatly on the usefulness of their consequences; it is the usefulness of results that determines whether the action or behavior is good or bad. While this is the case, not all consequentialist theories are utilitarian.

For Bentham and Mill, utility refers to a way of understanding the results of people's actions. Specifically, they are interested on whether these actions contribute or not to the total amount of resulting happiness in the world. The utilitarian value pleasure and happiness; this means that the usefulness of actions is based on its promotion of happiness. Bentham and Mill understand happiness as the experience of pleasure for the greatest number of persons, even at the expense of some individual's rights.

The Principle of Utility

In the book An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation(1789), Jeremy Bentham begins by arguing that our actions are governed by two "sovereign masters" -- which he calls **pleasure and pain**. These "masters" are given to us by nature to help us determine what is good or bad and what ought to be done and not; they fasten our choices to their throne.

The principle of utility is about our subjection to these sovereign masters: pleasure and pain. This principle refers to the motivation of our actions as guided by our avoidance of pain and our desire for pleasure. It is like saying that in our everyday actions, we do what is pleasurable and we do not do what is painful. On the other hand, the principles also refer to pleasure as good if, and only if, they produce more happiness than unhappiness. This means that it is not enough to experience pleasure, but to also inquire whether the things we do make us happier. Having identified the tendency for pleasure and the avoidance of pain as the principle of utility, Bentham equates happiness with pleasure.

Mill supports Bentham's principle of utility. He reiterates moral good as happiness and, consequently, happiness as pleasure. Mill clarifies that what makes people happy is intended pleasure and what makes us happy is the privation of pleasure. The things that produce happiness and pleasure are good; whereas, those that produce unhappiness and pain are bad.

Mill argues that we act and do things because we find them pleasurable and we avoid doing things because they are painful. If we find our actions pleasurable, Mill explains, it is because they are inherently pleasurable in themselves or they eventually lead to the promotion of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Bentham and Mill characterized moral value as utility and understood it as whatever produced happiness or pleasure and the avoidance of pain. The next step is to understand the nature of pleasure and pain to identify a criterion for distinguishing pleasures and to calculate the resultant pleasure or pain.

What Bentham identified as the natural moral preferability of pleasure, Mill refers to as a **theory of life**. If we consider, for example, what moral agents do and how they assess their actions, then it is hard to deny the pursuit for happiness and the avoidance of pain. For Bentham and Mill, the pursuit for pleasure and the avoidance of pain are not only important

principles--- they are in fact the only principle in assessing an action's morality. Why is it justifiable to wiretap private conversations in instances of treason, rebellion, espionage, and sedition? Why is it noble to build schools and hospitals? Why is it good to improve the quality of life and the like? There is no answer than the principle of utility, that is, to increase happiness and decrease pain.

Four Theses of Utilitarianism

1. **Consequentialism**: The rightness of actions is determined solely by their consequences.

2. **Hedonism**: Utility is the degree to which an act produces pleasure. Hedonism is the thesis that pleasure or happiness is the good that we seek and that we should seek.

3. **Maximalism**: A right action produces the greatest good consequences and the least bad.

4. **Universalism**: The consequences to be considered are those of everyone affected, and everyone equally.

Principle of the Greatest Number

Equating happiness with pleasure does not aim to describe the utilitarian moral agent alone and independently from others. This is not only about our individual pleasures, regardless of how high, intellectual, or in other ways noble it is, but it is also about the pleasure of the greatest number affected by the consequences of our actions.

Utilitarianism can lead to selfish acts. It is neither about our pleasure nor happiness alone; it cannot be all about us. If we are the only ones satisfied by our actions, it does not constitute a moral good. If we are the only ones who are made happy by our actions, then we cannot be morally good. In this sense, utilitarianism is not dismissive of sacrifices that procure more happiness for others.

Therefore, it is necessary for us to consider everyone's happiness, including our own, as the standard by which to evaluate what is moral. Also, it implies that utilitarianism is not at all separate from liberal social practices that aim to improve the quality of life for all persons. Utilitarianism is interested with everyone's happiness, in fact, the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Justice and Moral Rights

Mill understands justice as a respect for rights directed toward society's pursuit for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. For him, rights are a valid claim on society and are justified by utility.

Mills expounds that the above-mentioned rights referred are related to the interests that serve general happiness. The right to due process, the right to free speech or religion, and others are justified because they contribute to the general good. This means that society is made happier if its citizens are able to live their lives knowing that their interests are protected and that society (as a whole) defends it. Extending this concept to animals, they have rights because of the effect of such principles on the sum total of happiness that follows as a consequence of instituting and protecting their interests. It is not accidental, therefore, that utilitarians are also the staunchest defenders of animal rights. A right is justifiable in utilitarian principles in as much as they produce an overall happiness that is greater than the unhappiness resulting from their implementation.

Utilitarians argue that issues of justice carry a very strong emotional import because the category of rights is directly associated with the individual's most vital interests. All of these rights are predicated on the person's right to life.

In this context, our participation in government and social interactions can be explained by the principle of utility and be clarified by Mill's consequentialism. Mill further associates utilitarianism with the possession of legal and moral rights. We are treated justly when our legal and moral rights are respected. Mill enumerates different kinds of goods that he characterized as rights and are protected bylaw. Mill understands that legal rights are neither inviolable nor natural, but rights are subject to some exceptions.

Mill creates a distinction between legal rights and their justification. He points out that when legal rights are not morally justified in accordance to the greatest happiness principle, then these rights need neither be observed, nor be respected. This is like saying that the law is not morally justified and, in this case, even objectionable.

Topic 2: Deontology

Duty and Agency

Viewed objectively, duty means anything that ought to be done or omitted. Subjectively, duty means the moral obligation of a person to respect the rights of others. As a moral obligation, duty binds the will or it is laid on the will. Duty may come in six kinds namely, natural, positive, affirmative, negative, perfect, and imperfect. A natural duty is one imposed by

the natural law such as the duty to preserve human life. Positive duty is one which comes from positive law such as the duty to hear mass on Sundays and to pay taxes. Affirmative duty refers to the moral obligation to do an act. Negative duty refers to the moral obligation of a person to avoid or omit something an example of which is “do not steal”. A perfect duty is one which obliges one under strict justice such as the payment of a just wage. Lastly, an imperfect duty is one which does not obligate a person from the standpoint of justice, but from the standpoint of charity or other virtues. Giving donations during calamities can be a perfect example (Babor, page 222).

The word deontology derives from the Greek words for duty (Deon) and science (or study) of (logos). In contemporary moral philosophy, deontology is one of those kinds of normative theories regarding which choices are morally required, forbidden, or permitted. In other words, deontology falls within the domain of moral theories that guide and assess our choices of what we ought to do (deontic theories),in contrast to those that guide and assess what kind of person we are and should be(aretaic [virtue] theories). And within the domain of moral theories that assess our choices, deontologists—those who subscribe to deontological theories of morality—stand in opposition to consequentialists (Stanford).

Deontology is best known for the study of duty and obligation. The main proponent is none other than Immanuel Kant, a German enlightenment philosopher who wrote, Groundwork Towards a Metaphysics of Morals in 1785. In this work Kant brings our attention to the fact that we, human beings, have the faculty called rational will, which is the capacity to act according to principles that we determine for ourselves. Rational will set humans different from animals. Furthermore, rationality consists of the mental faculty to construct ideas and thoughts that are beyond our immediate surroundings. This is the capacity for mental abstraction, which arises from the operations of the faculty of reason. Thus, we have the ability to stop and think about what we are doing. We can remove ourselves mentally from the immediacy of our surroundings and reflect on our actions and how such actions affect the world. We can imagine a different and a better world, and create mental images of how we interact with other people in that world. Like an architect first constructs her blueprint of a house in her mind. When the draft of that construction is drawn, she can give instructions to masons and carpenters on how to build the actual house, which becomes the second construction. The first construction consists in how we imagine things and the second on implementation. Through the capacity for imagination and reflection, we conceive of how we could affect, possibly even change the world we live in.

On the other hand, the rational will refers to the faculty to intervene in the world, to act in a manner that is consistent with our reason. Unlike animals, humans have reason which intervenes between impulse and act. We have the ability to stop and think about what we are

doing to evaluate our actions according to principles. Simply stated, we are not only reacting to our surroundings and internal impulses, but are also conceiving of ways to act according to certain rational principles. In many cases the rational will is victorious over bodily impulses. This triumph clarifies the meaning of rational will, the capacity of a person to be the cause of her actions based on reasons and not merely to mindlessly react to the environment and base impulses. In philosophical discussions about human freedom this capacity is called agency, which is the ability of the person to act based on her intentions and mental states.

Going back to Felipe, the moment he discovered that the bag pack was left behind, he reacted according to his rational will- to return the bag and its contents. He determined that it was his duty to return it inasmuch as his rational will had conceived such duty.

Hence, to act according to a duty is a specifically human experience. Animals, if it is true that they do not possess the faculty of rational will, cannot conceive of having duties. This is the starting point of deontology. We may claim that as long as we have rationality, there will always be the tension between our base impulses and our rational will.

Autonomy

Kant claims that the property of the rational will is autonomy, which is the opposite of heteronomy. "Autonomy" refers to self-law (or self-legislating), and "heteronomy" means other law. Consider the trivial example of brushing one's own teeth—+ which is not yet a moral dilemma but is sufficient to explain the difference between autonomy and heteronomy. As far as we can tell, children do not like to brush their teeth, but parents know that children should to maintain oral hygiene. In that regard, parents are the ones that legislate the principle that children should brush their teeth before they go to bed and impose such a principle by using threats or incentives. Decades later, these children would soon realize that proper hygiene is a must and brushing is an imposed activity before going to bed. Putting all these together, it also refers to the willing of the adopted principle into reality. Are they autonomous? Yes, certainly.

According to Kant, the will is thus not only subject to the law, but it is also subject to the law in such a way that it gives the law to itself (self-legislating), and primarily just in this way can the will be considered the author of the law under which it is subject. Imagine a policeman who apprehends a suspected criminal by forcing him on the ground and putting handcuffs on his wrists. Incidentally, subject comes from the Latin words sub (under) and jacere (to throw). When combined, the two words refer to that which is thrown or brought under something. The will must comply with the law, which is the authority figure.

On one hand, heteronomy is the simple legislation and imposition of a law by an external authority. Their parents are the authority figures, and the law is imposed externally by rewards or punishments. In other words, autonomy belongs to the grown-up and already

rational individuals who have adopted such a law about brushing their teeth. They regularly impose such a law on themselves out of the enactment of the will to follow the law. The distinguishing point here is the locus of the authorship of the law. In any given scenario where a person complies with the law, we ask where the author is, whether it is external or internal. If the author of the law is external, the will is subjected to an external authority, thus a heteronomous will. In contrast, if the author was imposing the law unto himself, then we describe the will as autonomous.

Kant claims that there is a difference between rational will and animal impulse. He reiterated that the choice that can be determined by pure reason is called "free choice." That which is determinable only by inclination (sensible impulse, stimulus) would be animal choice. Human choice, in contrast, is a choice that may indeed be affected but not determined by impulses and is therefore in itself not pure but can nevertheless be determined to do actions from pure will.

Thus, there is a difference between what determines a choice or decision, whether it is caused by a sensible impulse or by pure reason. Bodily instincts and desires, such as the urge to eat, drink, sleep, or have sexual intercourse, comprise the set of human compulsions for survival and the propagation of the species. Kant calls this set of actions that are caused by sensible impulse animal choice or arbitrium brutum.

On the other hand, there is a choice or action that is determined by pure reason. Free choice argues that freedom resides in his capacity of reason to intervene, to “mediate” within arbitrium brutum. This mental capacity is what makes the intervention possible between stimulus and reaction. With the faculty of reason, a person can break the immediacy of stimulus and reaction by stopping to deliberate and assess possible alternative actions.

What does it mean for a human to be affected but not determined by sensible impulse? It implies that we are indeed basically animals, but we cannot be reduced to mere animality. This is where the correlative conjunction “not only…but also” is useful. When we claim, “The human person is not only an animal but is also rational,” we admit to two possible causes of our actions: sensible impulses and the faculty of reason. Human freedom resides in that distinction.

Autonomy is a property of the will only during instances when the action is determined by pure reason. When the action is determined by sensible impulses, despite the source of those impulses being nevertheless internal, it is considered heteronomous. We can thus make the conclusion that heteronomy of the will occurs when any foreign impulse, whether it is external or sensible, is what compels a person to act. In contrast, autonomy is the property of the will in those instances when pure reason is the cause of the action.

Universalizability

To figure out how the faculty of reason can be the cause of an autonomous action, we need to learn a method or a specific procedure that will demonstrate autonomy of the will.

A substantive moral theory immediately promulgates the specific actions that comprise that theory. As such, it identifies the particular duties in a straightforward manner that the adherents of the theory must follow. The set of Ten Commandments of the Judeo-Christian tradition is an unambiguous example of a substantive moral theory. The specific laws are articulated mostly in the form of straightforward moral commands: “Honor your father and mother,” “You shall not kill,” and so forth.

In contrast, a formal moral theory does not supply the rules or commands straightaway. It does not tell you what you may or may not do. Instead, a formal theory provides us the “form” or “framework of the moral theory. To provide the “form” or “framework” of a moral theory is to supply a procedure and the criteria for determining, on one’s own, the rules and moral commands. Metaphorically, we can think of a cookbook as akin to a formal moral theory. In using a cookbook, we are given instructions on how to cook certain dishes, but we are not given the actual food themselves, which would be “substantive.” In a recipe, for example, anyone could add a slight variation to the ingredients and sequence of steps. To be exact, a formal moral theory will not give us a list of rules or commands. Instead, it will give us a set of instructions on how to make a list of duties or moral commands.

Kant wrote in 1785 the Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten, which embodies a formal theory in what he calls the categorical imperative, which provides a procedural way of identifying the rightness or wrongness of an action. Furthermore, he mentioned, "Act only according to such a maxim, by which you can at once will that it become a universal law."

There are four key elements in this formulation of the categorical imperative, namely action, maxim, will, and universal law. Kant states that we must formulate an action as a maxim, which he defines as a “subjective principle of action“. We have many maxims in our daily lives, and we live according to them. A maxim that is universalizable is a personal rule adopted and complied with by everyone, thus imagining a maxim as a law that everyone ought to follow.

The test for universalizability makes possible that self-legislation, for the result of the categorical imperative, is nothing other than the capacity to distinguish between permissible and impermissible moral acts. Any rational will can then begin the work of producing a list of duties, what a rational and autonomous will believes to be right and wrong actions.

Topic 3: Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is a philosophy developed by Aristotle and other ancient Greeks. It is the quest to understand and live a life of moral character. This character-based approach to morality assumes that we acquire virtue through practice. By practicing being honest, brave, just, generous, and so on, a person develops an honorable and moral character. According to Aristotle, by honing virtuous habits, people will likely make the right choice when faced with ethical challenges.

To illustrate the difference among three key moral philosophies, ethicists Mark White and Robert Arp refer to the film The Dark Knight, where Batman has the opportunity to kill the Joker. Utilitarians, White and Arp suggest, would endorse killing the Joker. By taking this one life, Batman could save multitudes. Deontologists, on the other hand, would reject killing the Joker simply because it's wrong to kill. But a virtue ethicist "would highlight the character of the person who kills the Joker." Does Batman want to be the kind of person who takes his enemies' lives? " No, in fact, he doesn't.

So, virtue ethics helps us understand what it means to be a virtuous human being. And it gives us a guide for living life without giving us specific rules for resolving ethical dilemmas.

Virtue ethics is the ethical framework that is concerned with understanding the good as a matter of developing the virtuous character of a person. Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle is a known authority on the study of ethics. Aristotle came up with a comprehensive and programmatic study of virtue ethics in his book entitled Nicomachean Ethics.

Aristotle conceives of ethical theory as a field distinct from the theoretical sciences. We study ethics in order to improve our lives, and therefore its principal concern is the nature of human well-being. Aristotle follows Socrates and Plato in taking the virtues to be central to a well-lived life. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy)

Both Plato and Aristotle affirm rationality as the highest faculty of a person, and having such a characteristic enables a person to realize the very purpose of their existence.

Happiness and Ultimate Purpose

According to Aristotle, an act a person does is directed toward a particular purpose, aim, or what the Greeks called telos. A person's action manifests a good that one aspires for. Every pursuit of a person hopes to achieve a good. A person pursues a career, aiming for the good, that is, to provide a better future for one's family. Therefore, the good is considered to be the telos, or purpose, for which all acts seek to achieve. According to Aristotle, older individuals would agree that the highest purpose and the ultimate good of man is happiness, or for the Greeks, eudaimonia. One can therefore say that happiness seems to fit the first criterion of

being the final end of a human being. But one should remember that if one accumulates wealth, for example, one would want to have not just richness but also power and other desirable things as well, such as honor and pleasures.

How does a person arrive at her highest good? If an individual's action can achieve the highest good, then one must investigate how she functions, which enables her to achieve her ultimate purpose. If one performs the function well, then one is capable of arriving at happiness. Furthermore, what defines human beings is one's function or activity of reason. This definitely makes one different from the rest of the beings.

What defines a person, therefore, is his or her function or activity of reason. One's action, to be considered as truly human, must be an act that is always in accordance with the dictates of reason. A dancer, for example, becomes different from a chef because her function is to dance, while the chef's is to cook. A good individual, therefore, stands closer to meeting the conditions of happiness because her actions are of a higher purpose. The local saying "madaling maging tao, mahirap magpakatao" can be understood in the light of Aristotle's thoughts on the function of a good person. Any human being can perform the activity of reason; thus, being human is achievable. However, a good human being strives hard in doing an activity in an excellent way. Therefore, the task of being human becomes more difficult because doing such activity well will take more effort on the part of the person.

Virtue as Excellence

Achieving the highest purpose of a human person concerns the ability to function according to reason and to perform an activity well or excellently. This excellent way of doing things is called "virtue" or "arête" by the Greeks. According to Aristotle, virtue is something that one strives for in time. One does not become an excellent person overnight. This means that being virtuous cannot be accomplished by a single act. It is commendable if a minor participant in a crime becomes a whistleblower, exposing all the grave acts that were committed by his cohorts. But one should be careful in judgment of immediately calling that individual a "person of virtue." Being an excellent individual works on doing well in her day-to-day existence.

According to Aristotle, excellence is an activity of the human soul, and therefore, one needs to understand the very structure of a person's soul, which must be directed by her rational activity in an excellent way. The human soul is divided into two parts according to Aristotle: the irrational element and the rational faculty. The irrational element consists of the vegetative and appetitive aspects. The vegetative aspect functions as giving nutrition and providing the activity of physical growth in a person. As an irrational element, this part of man is not in the realm where virtue is exercised because, as the term suggests, it cannot be dictated by reason. The vegetative aspect of the soul follows the natural processes involved in the

physical activities and growth of a person. Whereas, the appetitive aspect works as a desire in itself, which is an impulse that naturally runs counter to reason and most of the time refuses to go along with reason. Thus, this aspect belongs to the irrational part of the soul. Sexual impulse, for example, is so strong in a person that one tends to ignore reasonable demands to control such impulse. However, unlike the vegetative aspect, the desiring faculty of man can be subjected to reason.

In contrast, the rational faculty of man exercises excellence in him. One can rightly or wrongly apply the use of reason in this part. This faculty is further divided into two aspects: moral, which concerns the act of doing, and intellectual, which concerns the act of knowing. These two aspects are basically where the function of reason is exercised.

One rational aspect where a person can attain excellence is in the intellectual. faculty of the soul. This excellence is attained through teaching. Through time, one learns from the vast experiences in life where she gains knowledge on these things. One learns and gains wisdom by being taught or by learning. Intellectual excellence can be philosophic and practical. Philosophic wisdom deals with attaining knowledge about the fundamental principles and truths that govern the universe. It helps one understand in general the meaning of life. Practical wisdom, on the other hand, is an excellence in knowing the right conduct in carrying out a particular act. In other words, one can attain a wisdom that can provide us with a guide on how to behave in our daily lives.

In carrying out a morally virtuous life, one needs the intellectual guide of practical wisdom in steering the self toward the right choices and actions. Knowing the good is different from determining and acting on what is good. But a morally good person has to achieve the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom to perform the task of being moral. For Socrates, moral goodness is already within the realm of intellectual excellence. Knowing the good implies the ability to perform morally virtuous acts. For Aristotle, however, having intellectual excellence does not necessarily mean that one already has the capacity for doing the good. Knowing the good that needs to be done is different from doing the good that one needs to accomplish.

Therefore, the rational faculty of a person tells us that she is capable of achieving two kinds of virtue: moral and intellectual. Moral virtue is also attained by habit. An amorally virtuous man for Aristotle is someone who habitually determines the good and does the right actions. Moral virtue is acquired through habit. Being morally good is a process of getting used to doing the proper act. The saying “practice makes perfect” can be applied to this aspect of a person. Therefore, for Aristotle, a person is not initially good by nature. A moral person habitually chooses the good and consistently does good deeds. It is in this constant act of choosing and doing the good that a person is able to form her character. It is through one’s character that others know a person. Character then becomes the identification mark of the

person. The Filipino term "pag-uugali" precisely reflects the meaning of "moral." character. One can have mabuting pag-uugali (good character) or masamang pag-uugali (bad character).

Going back to the example given in the introduction, one can surmise that if we rely on the above-mentioned study, children tend to mimic the violence they watch on television, and such a habit could develop into a character that can tolerate behaviors that are hostile in nature.

Moral Virtue and Mesotes

Practical wisdom involves learning from experiences. Knowing the right thing to do when one is confronted by a choice is not easy. In attaining practical wisdom, one may initially make mistakes on how reason is applied to a particular moral choice or action. But, through these mistakes, one will be able to sustain practical wisdom to help steer another's ability to know morally right choices and actions. In other words, one is able to mature and grow in his or her capacity of knowing what to do and living a morally upright life.

This is why when it comes to life choices, one can seek the advice of elders in the community, those who gained rich life experiences and practical wisdom, because they would be able to assist someone's moral deliberation. Parents can advise their children to behave in front of family members and relatives. Senior Members of the community, like priests, counselors, and leaders, may also guide the young members on how relationships with others are fostered.

Bro. Armin Luistro, with his practical wisdom and experience, has observed the possible effect of television violence on the young, so he issued guidelines on television viewing for children. He says that good values instilled in children are "sometimes removed from the consciousness of young people" because of television violence. As the former Secretary of the Department of Education, he possibly learned so much about the consequence of such a situation on the young. As maintained by Aristotle, it is the middle, intermediate, or mesotes for the Greeks that is aimed at by a morally virtuous person.

Based on Aristotle, a morally virtuous person is concerned with achieving her appropriate action in a manner that is neither excessive nor deficient. In other words, virtue is the middle or the intermediary point in between extremes. One has to function in a state where her personality manifests the right number of feelings, passions, and abilities for a particular act. Generally, feelings and passions are neutral, which means that, in themselves, they are neither morally right nor wrong. When one shows a feeling of anger, we cannot immediately construe it as a morally wrong act. But the rightness or wrongness of feelings, passions, and abilities lies in the degree of their application in a given situation. It is right to get angry at an offensive remark, but it is not right to get angry at everyone just because you were offended by

someone. One can be excessive in the manner by which she manifests these feelings, passions, and abilities. But one can also be deficient in the way she expresses these. But one can also be deficient in the way she expresses these.

An amorally virtuous person targets the mesotes. For Aristotle, the task of targeting the mean is always difficult because every situation is different from another. Thus, the mesotes is constantly moving depending on the circumstance of where she is. The mean is not the same for all individuals. As pointed out by Aristotle, the mean is simply an arithmetical proportion. Therefore, the task of being moral involves seriously looking into and understanding a situation and assessing properly every particular detail relevant to the determination of the mean. Mesotes determines whether the act applied is not excessive or deficient.

In relation to the news article, the government and its agencies responsible for protecting and assisting the young in their personal development should act in view of the middle measure. The government could have dismissed the issue or could have banned television shows portraying violence. But such extremes censure the citizen's freedom of expression and artistic independence, which can result in another issue. Wisely, the government acted on the side of the middle measure by going through a series of consultations to address the issue of television violence, implementing the rules and guidelines for viewing safety, dedicating 15% of television airtime for child-friendly shows, and enforcing a television violence rating code that took into account the "sensibilities of children." It seems that the government acted in a manner that is not deficient and excessive.

Aristotle's discussion ultimately leads to defining what exactly moral virtue is—"a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, that is, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it."

Moral virtue is firstly the condition arrived at by a person who has a character identified out of her habitual exercise of particular actions. One's character is seen as a growth in terms of the continuous preference for the good. Secondly, immoral Virtue, the action done that normally manifests feelings and passions, is chosen because it is the middle. The middle does not fall short of or exceed the proper proportion by which these feelings or passions should be expressed. Aristotle adds that the middle is relative to us. This does not imply that mesotes totally depends on what the person identifies as the middle. Such a case would signify that Aristotle adheres to relativism. But Aristotle's middle is not relative to the person but to the situation and the circumstance that one is in. This means that in choosing the middle, one is looking at the situation and not at oneself in identifying the proper way that feelings and passions should be dispensed.

The rational faculty that serves as a guide for the proper identification of the middle is practical wisdom. The virtuous person learns from her experiences and therefore develops the capacity to know the proper way of carrying out her feelings, passions, and actions. The rational faculties of this person, specifically practical wisdom, aid in making a virtuous person develop this habit of doing the good. An amoral person in this sense is also someone who is wise. Habits for Aristotle are products of the constant application of reason in the person's actions. One sees Aristotle's attempt to establish a union between the person's moral action and knowledge that enables him to achieve man's function.

Aristotle clarifies further that not all feelings, passions, and actions have a middle point. When a mean is sought, it is in the context of being able to identify the good act in a given situation. However, when what is involved is seen as a bad feeling, passion, or action, the middle is non-existent because there is no good (mesotes) in something that is already considered a bad act. When one murders someone, there is nothing excessive or deficient in the act: murder is still murder. Further, there is no intermediary for Aristotle in the act because there is no proper way that such an act can be committed.

In the study mentioned wherein children are beginning to consider violence as "a way to solve problems," it seems apparent that they would like to think that there is somehow a "good" in an unjust act since it can become a problem-solver. If violence becomes a tool by which difficult situations are addressed, then it can be construed by children as bearing some positive value. Aristotle's view is contrary to this. View: As an act, violence, in itself, is bad. A person cannot employ violence as if it were a virtue or a middle measure in between vices of being "deficient" in violence or being "excessive" in the same act. There is something terribly wrong in such a demonstration. Aristotle also provides examples of particular virtues and the corresponding excesses and deficiencies of these. The table below shows some of the virtues and vices:

Excess	**Middle**	**Deficiency**
Impulsiveness	Self-control	Indecisiveness
Recklessness	Courage	Cowardice
Prodigality	Liberality	Meanness

In the table, Aristotle identifies the virtue of courage as the middle, in between the vices of being a coward and being reckless. Cowardice is a deficiency in terms of feelings and passions. This means that one lacks the capacity to muster enough bravery to carry herself appropriately in a given situation. Recklessness, on the other hand, is an excess in terms of one's feelings and passions. In this regard, one acts with a surplus of guts, so she overdoes an act in such rashness and without any deliberation. The virtue of having courage is being able to

act daringly enough but also being able to weigh up possible implications of such an act so that she proceeds with caution.

It is only through the middle that a person is able to manifest her feelings, passions, and actions virtuously. For Aristotle, being superfluous with regard to manifesting a virtue is no longer an ethical act because one has gone beyond the middle. Being overly courageous (or "super courageous"), for instance, does not make someone more virtuous because precisely in this condition, she has gone beyond the middle and therefore has "moved out" from the state that is virtuous. Therefore, one can always be excessive in her action, but an act that is virtuous cannot go beyond the middle. Filipinos have the penchant of using superlative words like "over," "super," "to the max," and "sobra" in describing a particular act that they normally identify as virtuous. Perhaps Aristotle's view on virtue is prescribing a clearer way by which Filipinos can better understand it.

MODULE 3

Moral Reasoning and Ethical Decision Making

INTRODUCTION

The story of humanity appears to be the never-ending search for what it means to be fully human in the face of moral choices. The major ethical theories or frameworks: utilitarianism, natural law, Kantian deontology, and virtue ethics are never final nor definite in application. Each represent the best attempts of the best thinkers in history to give fully thought-out answers to the questions "What ought I do?" and Why ought I to do so?" This quest has not reached its final conclusion; instead, it seems that the human condition of finitude will demand that we continue to grapple with these questions. (1) The questions of what the right thing to do is and why are questions that all human beings-regardless of race, age, socioeconomic class, gender, culture, educational attainment, religious affiliation, or political association-will have to ask at one point or another in their lives; (2)Neither the laws nor rules of one's immediate community or of wider culture of religious affiliation can sufficiently answer these questions, especially when different duties, cultures, or religions intersect and conflict; (3) Reason has a role to play in addressing these questions, if not in resolving them. This last element, reason, is the power that identifies the situations in which rules and principles sometimes conflict with one another. Reason, hopefully will allow one to finally make the best decision possible in a given situation of moral choice.

Ethics allows one to rationally deliberate in determining a person's ethical responsibility to herself, society and environment. This brings life to the moral agent, the one who eventually must think about her choices and make decisions on what she ought to do. Ethical thought and

decision- making are done by an agent who is shaped and dictated upon by many factors within her and without. If we understand this, then we shall see how complex the ethical situation is, one that demands mature rational thinking as well as courageous decision-making.

TOPIC 1. The Moral Agent and Context

The one who is tasked to think about what is "right" and why it is so, and to choose to do so, is a human individual. Who is this individual who must engage herself in ethical thought and decision- making? Who one is, in the most fundamental sense, is another major topic in the act of philosophizing? The Greeks were known for the saying "know thyself ". Ramon C. Reyes a Filipino philosopher in his essay "Man and Historical Action "explained that "who one is "is a cross point. By this, he means that one's identity, who one is or who I am, is a product of many forces and events that happened outside of one's choosing. Reyes identifies four cross points: the physical, the interpersonal, the social, and the historical. Who one is, firstly, is a function of physical events in the past and material factors in the present that one did not have a choice in. Humans are members of the species Homo Sapiens and therefore possess the capacities and limitations endemic to human beings everywhere.

An individual is also the product of an interpersonal cross-point of many events and factors outside of one's choosing. One did not choose her own parents, and yet her personality, character traits, and her overall way of doing things and thinking about things have all been shaped by the character of her parents and how they brought her up. People around such as siblings, relatives, classmates, and eventually workmates help shape the character of an individual.

A third cross-point for Reyes is the societal: "who one is "shaped by one's society. The term "society "here pertains to all the elements of the human groups- as opposed to the natural environment- that one is a member of. "Culture "in its varied aspects is included here. Reyes argues that "who one is "molded in large part by the kind of society and culture-which, for the most part, one did not choose-that one belongs to. Filipinos have their own way of doing things, their own systems of beliefs and values, and even their own notions of right and wrong. The third cross-point interacts with the physical and the interpersonal factors that the individual and her people are immersed or engaged in.

The fourth cross-point according to Reyes is the historical, which is simply the events that one's people has undergone. In short, one's people's history shapes "who one is "right now. For example, the Philippines had a long history of colonization that affected how Philippine society has been formed and how Philippine culture has developed. Christianity, for good or bad, has formed Philippine society and culture, and most probably the individual Filipino, whether she

may be a Christian herself or not. The historical cross-point also interacts with the previous three.

According to Reyes, "who one is "is also a project for one's self. This happens because a human individual has freedom. This freedom is not absolute: one does not become something because one chooses to be. Even if one wants to fly, she cannot, unless she finds a way to invent a device that can help her do so. This finite freedom means that one has the capacity to give herself a particular direction in life according to her own ideal self. Thus, for one's existence is in the intersection between the fact that one's being is a product of many forces outside her choosing and her ideal future for herself. Ethics plays a big role of forming one's self. What one ought to do in one's life is not dictated by one's physical, interpersonal, social, or historical conditions.

Using Reyes' philosophical lens, we can now focus on one of the major issues in ethical thought: What is the relationship between ethics and one's own culture?

Culture and Ethics

A common opinion many people hold is that one's culture dictates what is right or wrong for an individual. For such people, saying "when in Rome, do as the Romans do" by St. Ambrose applies to deciding on moral issues. This quote implies that one's culture is inescapable, that is, one has to look into the standards of her society to resolve all her ethical questions with finality. How one relates to oneself, society and other elements with the natural world are all predetermined by her membership in her society and culture.

Filipino traits sometimes end up as empty stereotypes, especially since one may be hard put to think if any other culture does not exhibit such traits. Such example is hospitality, where it is manifested differently among Filipinos and Chinese. Thus, to simply say that there is a "Filipino way "of doing things, remains a matter for discussion. We hear claims from time to time that "Americans "are individualistic; Filipinos are communal," a supposed difference that grounds, for some people, radically different sets of moral values. But one may ask: Is there really any radical difference between one culture's moral reasoning and another's? Or do all cultures share in at least some fundamental values and that the differences are not on the level of value but on the level of its manifestation in the context of different socio-historical-cultural dimensions? One culture, because of its particular history, may construct hospitality in a particular way and manifest it in its own customs and traditions. Yet, both cultures honor hospitality.

The America philosopher James Rachels provided a clear argument against the validity of cultural relativism in the realm of ethics. Rachel defines cultural relativism as the position

that claims there is no such thing as objective truth in the realm of morality. The argument of this position is that since different cultures have different moral codes, then there is no one correct moral code that all cultures must follow. The implication is that each culture has its own standard of right or wrong, its validity confined within the culture in question. However, Rachel questions the logic of this argument: first, that cultural relativism confuses a statement of fact, which is merely descriptive, with a normative statement. Rachel provides a counter argument by analogy: just because some believed that the earth was flat, while some believe it is spherical, it does not mean that there is no objective truth to the actual shape of the earth.

Beyond his criticism of the logic of cultural relativism, Rachels also employs a reduction ad absurdum argument. It is an argument which first assumes that the claim in question is correct, in order to show the absurdity that will ensue if the claim is accepted as such. He uses this argument to show what he thinks is the weakness of the position. He posits three absurd consequences of accepting the claim of cultural relativism. First, if cultural relativism was correct, then one cannot criticize the practices or beliefs of another culture anymore as long as that culture thinks that what it is doing is correct. But if that is the case, then the Jews for example, cannot criticize the Nazi's believed that they were doing the right thing. Secondly, if cultural relativism was correct, then one cannot even criticize the Nazi's plan to exterminate all Jews in World War II, since obviously, the Nazis believed that they were doing the right thing. Secondly, if cultural relativism was correct, then one cannot even criticize the practices or beliefs of one's own culture. If that is the case, the black South African citizens under the system of apartheid, a policy of racial segregation that privileges the dominant race in a society, could not criticize that official state position. Thirdly, if cultural relativism was correct, then one cannot accept the moral progress which may happen. The fact that many societies now recognize women's rights may not necessarily represent a better situation for these women and children at present. Furthermore, Rachels argues that recognizing and respecting differences in cultures do not necessarily mean that there is no such thing as objective truth in morality. He also reiterated that cultural relativism can recognize and respect cultural differences and still maintain the right to criticize beliefs and practices that she thinks are wrong, if she performs proper rational deliberation.

Thus, the challenge of ethics is not the removal of ones culture because that is what makes one unique. Instead, one must dig deeper into her own culture in order to discover how her own people have most meaningfully explored possibly universal human questions or problems within the particularity of her own people's native ground. Thus, hospitality, for example, may be a species-wide question. But how we Filipinos observe and express hospitality is an insight we Filipinos must explore because it may be in our own practices that we see how best we had responded to this human question. It may be best because we responded specifically to the particularity of our own environmental and historical situation. One can then

benefit by paying attention to her own unique cultural heritage because doing so may give her a glimpse into the profound ways her people have grappled with the question of “what ought I do? “

Ethics, therefore, should neither be reduced to own’s own cultural standards, nor should it simplistically dismiss one’s own unique cultural beliefs and practices. The latter can possibly enlighten her toward what is truly ethical. What is important is that one does not wander into ethical situations blindly, with the naïve assumption that the ethical issues will be resolved automatically by her beliefs and traditions. Instead, she should challenge herself to continuously work toward a fuller maturity in ethical decision-making. Moral development then is a prerequisite if the individual is to encounter ethical situations with a clear mind and her values properly placed with respect to each other. We shall discuss moral development further but let us now focus on the relationship between one’s religion and the challenge of ethical decision-making.

Religion and Ethics

Many people who consider themselves “religious “assume that it is the teachings of their own religion that define what is truly “ right “ or “ wrong “, “ good or “ bad “. The question of the proper relationship between religion and ethics, therefore, is one that demands philosophical exploration. There are many different religions in the world. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism are four of the largest religious groups in the world at present, based on population. The Philippines is predominantly Roman Catholic, yet many other religions continue to flourish in the archipelago. Beyond all the differences, however, religion in essence represents a group’s ultimate, most fundamental concerns regarding their existence. For followers of a particular religion, the ultimate meaning of their existence, as the existence of the whole reality, is found in the beliefs of that religion. Therefore, the question of morality for many religious followers is reduced to following the teachings of their own religion. Many questions arise from this assertion.

A critical, philosophical question that can be asked, vis-à-vis ethics, is “What exactly does sacred scripture command?” This is a question of interpretation since even the same passage from a particular religious tradition can have many different interpretations from religious teachers even from within the same tradition. According to Ramon C. Reyes, interpretation of a particular passage or text is the product of an individual’s embodiment and historicity. Any reading or interpretation is also influenced by the situation of the reader. This implies that the moral agent in question must still, in full responsibility, challenge herself to understand using

her own powers of rationality, but with full recognition of her own situatedness and what her religious authorities claim their religion teaches.

Second, one must determine what justifies the claim of a particular religious teaching when it commands its followers on what they "ought to do ". Relevant to this is Plato's philosophical question in his dialogue Euthypro. When something is "morally good ", is it because it is good in itself and that is why God commands it, or is it good because God simply says so? If a particular preacher teaches her followers to do something because it is what their sacred scripture says that. If the preacher simply responds "that is what is written in the sacred scripture ", that is tantamount to telling the follower to stop asking questions and simply follow. Here, the critical-minded follower might find herself at an unsatisfying impasse. History reveals that there were people who twisted religious teaching that brought harm to their followers and to others. An example is the crusades in the European Middle Ages. European Christians, massacred Muslims, Jews, and even fellow Christians to recapture the Holy City of Jerusalem. A contemporary example is when terrorists or extremists use religion to justify acts of violence they perform on fellow human beings. The problem here is not that religion misleads people; the problem is that too many people perform heinous acts simply because they assumed they were following the teachings of their supposed religion, without stopping to think whether these actions are harmful. The philosophical-minded individual therefore is tasked to be critical even of her own set of beliefs and practices and to not simply follow for the sake of blind obedience.

These critical questions about one's culture and religious beliefs show us the need for maturity or growth in one's morality, both in terms of intellect and character. The responsible moral agent then is one who does not blindly follow eternally-imposed rules, but one who has a well-developed "feel "for making informed moral decisions.

TOPIC 2. Moral Deliberation

There is a big difference between a young child's reasoning on the right thing to do and the manner a morally mature individual arrives at an ethical decision. This necessary growth, which is a maturation in moral reasoning, has been the focus of study of many theorists. One of them is the American moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg who theorized that moral development happens in six stages, which he divided into three levels. The first level is pre-conventional which corresponds how infants and children think. The consequences of one's actions divided into two stages. The first stage of reasoning centers around obedience and the avoidance of punishment: to a young child's mind, an action is "good "if it enables one to escape from punishment, "bad" if it leads to punishment. Later, a child enters the second stage of reasoning and learns to act according to what she thinks will swerve her self-interest; thus, what is "good "at this age is what the child thinks can bring her pleasure. Kohlberg used the

term re-conventional to refer to these two stages since at this age, a young child basically thinks only in terms of the pain (punishment) or pleasure (reward) brought about as a consequence of her actions. Thus, her concentration is on herself and what she can feel, instead of her society's conventions on what is right or wrong.

The second level of moral development according to Kohlberg is the conventional since this is the age in which older, adolescents, and young adults learn to conform to the expectations of society. This is the time when one learns to follow the conventions of her group. This second level is divided into two stages: the third and fourth stages of moral development. The third stage is when one begins to act according to what the larger group, she belongs expects of her. The individual here assumes that what will benefit her best is when the other members of her group approve of her actions. The general tendency at this age is to confirm first to the values of one's immediate group, such as her family, playmates, or later on, barkada. Older children and adolescents eventually begin to value the expectations of the larger group they belong to, whether it be their school, religion, or state. The fourth stage is achieved when a person realizes that following the dictates of her society is not just good for herself but more importantly, it is necessary for the existence of society itself. The individual at this stage values most of the laws, rules, and regulations of her society, and thus her moral reasoning is shaped y dutifulness to the external standards set by society.

In Kohlberg's reasoning, people who merely follow the rule and regulations of their institution, the laws of their community or state, the doctrine of their religion-even if they seem to be the truly right thing to do- are trapped in this second or conventional level, which is still not yet the highest. For Kohlberg it is a psychological theory, that attempts to describe the stages of a person's growth in moral thinking. The morally mature individual, for Kohlberg, must outgrow both (1) the pre-conventional level, whose pleasure-and-pain logic locks one into self-centered kind of thinking, an egoism, as well as (2) the conventional level, which at first glance looks like the sensible approach to morality. The second level might, de facto, be the way that many (if not most) adults think about morality, that it is simply a question of following the right rules. The great insight of Kohlberg, however, is that a truly morally mature individuals must outgrow eve the simple following of supposedly right rules.

The third and highest level of moral development for Kohlberg is what he calls post-conventional since the morally responsible agent recognizes that what is good or right is not reducible to following the rules of one's group. Instead, it is a question of understanding personally what one ought to do and deciding., using one's free will, to act accordingly. This level, which is also divided into two stages, represents the individual's realization that the ethical principles she has rationally arrived at take precedence over even the rules or conventions that her society dictates. An agent has attained full moral development if she acts

according to her well-thought-out rational principles. In the earlier stage of this level of moral development in the fifth stage, the moral agent sees the value of the social contract, namely, agreements that rational agents have arrived at whether explicitly or implicitly in order to serve what can be considered the common good are what one ought to honor and follow. This notion of common good is post-conventional in the sense that the moral agent binds herself to what tis theoretical community of rational agents has identified as morally desirable, whether the agent herself will benefit from doing so or not.

The sixth and highest stage of moral development that exists even beyond the fifth stage of the social contract is choosing to perform actions based on universal ethical principles that one has determined by herself. One realizes that all the conventions of society are only correct if they are based on these universal ethical principles; they must be followed only if they reflect universal ethical principles.

The significance studying the different ethical theories and frameworks becomes clear only to the individual who has achieved, or is in the process of achieving, moral maturity. For someone who is still in Kohlberg's pre-conventional or conventional stages, moral valuation remains a matter of seeking reward or avoiding punishment, or at best, a question of following the dictates of other people.

Feelings in Moral Deliberation

Emotions or feelings have long been derided by purely rationalistic perspectives as having no place in a properly executed moral decision. This prejudice, however, needs to be re-examined thoroughly. Although some emotions or feelings can derail one from a clear-minded decision in an ethical situation, it is also not possible that human choice can be purged of all feelings; the moral agent, after all, is neither robot nor computer. A more realistic attitude toward decision-making is to appreciate the indispensable role emotions have on an agent's act of choosing. Aristotle precisely points out that moral virtue goes beyond the mere act of intellectually identifying the right thing to do. Instead, it is the condition of one's character by which the agent is able to manage her emotions or feelings. Aristotle reiterated that, cultivating one's character lies in learning to manage one's feeling. In Aristotle's Book II of the Nicomachean Ethics, "Anyone can get angry-that us easy… but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everyone, nor is it easy. "Doing the right thing for Aristotle is being able to manage one's feelings so that she is actually driven or propelled to do what she already sees (intellectually) as right.

Moral Problems

What must a morally mature individual do when she is confronted with a moral problem? Moral problems require set of rational deliberations. In doing so, several steps have to be undertaken. The first step is to determine the level of involvement in the case at hand. We must therefore identify which activity we are engaged in, whether we are making a judgment on a case that we are not involved in or if we truly need to make a decision in a situation that demands that we act.

After ascertaining our involvement in the potential moral situation, we then need to make sure of the facts. The first fact to establish is whether we are faced with a moral situation or not. We must set aside all details that have no connection to the situation. We must also identify whether an item in consideration is truly factual or merely hearsay, anecdotal, or an unfounded assumption, and thus unsupportable. This is where such things as "fake news "and "alternative facts "have to be weeded out. Letting such details seep into our ethical deliberation may unfairly determine or shape our ethical decision-making process, leading us into potentially baseless choices or conclusions. The responsible moral individual must make sure that she possesses all the facts she needs for that particular situation, but also only the facts that she needs- no more, no less.

The third step is to identify all the people who may potentially be affected by the implications of a moral situation or by our concrete choice of action. These people are called the stakeholders in t particular case. Identifying these stakeholders force us to give consideration to people aside from ourselves. The psychological tendency of most of us when confronted with an ethical choice is to simply think of ourselves, of what we need, or of what we want. When we identify all the stakeholders, we are obliged to recognize all the other people potentially concerned with the ethical problem at hand, and must think of reasons aside from our own self-serving ones, to come up with conclusions that are impartial, though still thoroughly involved.

The next step is to determine how stakeholders are affected by whichever choice the agent makes in the given ethical situation, as well as to what degree. Not all stakeholders have an equal stake in a given moral case; some may be more favorably or more adversely affected by a particular conclusion or choice compared to others. A person's awareness of these probabilities is necessary to gain a more comprehensive assessment of the matter at hand in order to arrive at hopefully stronger reasons for making a definite ethical conclusion or choice.

After establishing the facts and identifying the stakeholders and their concerns in the matter, the ethical issues at hand will be identified. First thing is to clarify whether a certain action is morally right or morally wrong. The second type involves determining whether a

particular action in question can be identified with a generally accepted ethical or unethical action. An example would be on the ethical value of the death penalty. The third type points to the presence of an ethical dilemma. Dilemmas are ethical situations in which there are competing values that seem to have equal worth. One has to identify the fundamental values in conflict in such a situation in order to assess later if a workable solution to the ethical problem can be negotiated that will somehow not end up surrendering one value for the sake of another. The individual must try to find the best balance possible that may honor the competing values. The individual must therefore identify the probable consequences that a particular choice of action will bring to the stakeholders concerned in order to determine which choice possibly is the best, given the situation. The popular "Robin Hood "scenario is an example of such. Usually put in the question, "Is it right to steal from the rich in order to feed the poor? "What one is confronted here is a situation in which two competing values are in conflict with another.

The final step, is for the individual to make her ethical conclusion or decision, whether in judging what ought to be done in a given case or in coming up with a concrete action she must actually perform. Real ethical decisions are often very difficult enough to make and for so many different reasons. Not all the facts in a given case may be available to the agent for her consideration. The responsible moral individual, however, must forge on realizing full well that cultivating one's capacity for mature moral choice is a continuing journey. Aristotle recognizes the importance of continuous habituation in the goal of shaping one's character so that she becomes more used to choosing the right thing. A moral individual is always a human being whose intellect remains finite and whose passions remain dynamic, and who is always placed in situations that are unique.

The Value of Studying Ethical Theories or Frameworks

What then is the role of ethical theories or frameworks in the continuing cultivation of one's capacity for moral choice? These ethical theories or frameworks may serve as guideposts, given that they are the best attempts to understand morality that the history of human thought has to offer. As guideposts, they can shed light on many important considerations, though of course not all, in one's quest to answer the twin questions of "What ought I to do?" and "Why ought I to do so? "

Utilitarianism pays tribute to the value of impartiality, arguing that an act is good if it will bring about the greatest good for the greatest number of those affected by the action, and each one of those affected should be counted as one, each equal to each. Utilitarianism, arguably, puts more value on the notion of "common good "compared to any of the other ethical frameworks we have covered.

The natural law theory, on the other hand, puts more emphasis on the supposed objective, universal nature of what is to be considered morally good, basing its reasoning on the theorized existence of a "human nature ". This theory has the advantage of both objectivity and a kind of intuitiveness. The latter pertains to the assumption that whatever is right is what feels right, that is, in the innermost recesses of one's being or of one's conscience because what is good is imprinted in our very being in the form of natural inclinations.

Kantian deontology puts the premium on rational will, freed from all other considerations, as the only human capacity that can determine one's moral duty. Kant focuses on one's autonomy as constitutive of what one can consider as moral law that is free from all other ends and inclinations-including pain and pleasure as well as conformity to the rules of the group. This shows Kant's disdain for these rules as being authorities external to one's own capacity for rational will.

From valuing all human beings to intuiting what is universally good and to practicing one's autonomy in determining what ought to do, all of these explore the possible roles of reason and free will in identifying what ought to do in a given moral situation. What Aristotle's virtue ethics in the end for the habituation of one's character to make any and all of these previous considerations possible. To weigh the collective happiness of human beings, to choose to act on what one's innermost nature dictates, and to practice one's autonomy regardless of all other considerations especially those that impinge on one's will: these are lofty goals for human reason and will. But what can possibly sustain or brace a moral agent so that she is able to maintain the effort to implement such rigorous demands on the part of reason? Aristotle's answer is he solid resolve of one's character, which can only be achieved through the right kind of habituation.

The responsible moral individual must test the cogency and coherence of the ethical theory or framework in question against the complexity of the concrete experience at hand. In such a spirit of experimentation, the moral individual is able to play of the theories against one another, noting the weakness in one for a particular case and possibly supplementing it with the strengths of another.

TOPIC 3. Self, Society, and Environment

In the realm of the self, as noted earlier, one has to pay attention not just on how one deals with oneself, but also on how one interacts with other individuals in personal relations. One may respond to the demand for an ethically responsible "care for the self "by making full use of the different theories or frameworks.

John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, though seemingly a hedonistic theory given emphasis on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain, elevates the human element above the animalistic

and above the merely selfish. Mill builds on the earlier version of utilitarianism, the one espoused by Jeremy Bentham, which first posited that what makes an action good is that it brings about the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Greatest happiness for Bentham then means quantity, but not just for oneself since the other half of his maxim refers to "the greatest number "that points to the extent or number of people affected by this happiness.

Thomas Aquinas' natural law theory states as its first natural inclination of the innate tendency that all human beings share with all other existing things; namely, the natural propensity to maintain oneself in one's existence. Any action therefore that sustains and cultivates one's biological or physical existence is to be called bad or evil. Aquinas thus specifies that taking care of one's being is a moral duty that one owes to herself and to God. The moral philosophy of Aquinas calls on a person to go beyond what she thinks she wants and to realize instead what her innermost nature inclines her to do, which is the promotion of life, of the truth, and of harmonious coexistence with others.

Kant's deontology celebrates the rational faculty of the moral agent, which sets it above merely sentient beings. Kant's principle of universalizability challenges the moral agent to think beyond her own predilections and desires, and to instead consider what everyone ought to do. His principle of humanity as end in itself teaches one to always treat humanity, whether in her own self or in any other individual, as the end or goal of all human actions and never merely as the means. Kant goes beyond simply telling people to not use others as instruments. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with using a human being as a means or a tool for one's own purposes because human interaction is not possible without that happening. What Kant is concerned with is when someone merely uses a human being whether another person or herself, and forgets to treat that human being as the goal or purpose of an action in and of herself, and forgets to treat that human being as the goal or purpose of an action in and of herself.

Aristotle's virtue ethics teaches one to cultivate her own intellect as well as her character to achieve eudaimonia in her lifetime. For Aristotle, one's ethical or moral responsibility to herself is one of self-cultivation. Aristotle is quite forgiving when it comes to individual actions, knowing full well the difficulty of "hitting he marks "in a given moral situation. The realm of the personal also extends to one's treatment of other persons within one's network of close relations. Utilitarianism's recognition of the greatest happiness principle shows that even in interpersonal interaction, what must rule is not one's own subjective notion of what is pleasurable.

Natural law theory, through its recognition of the inviolable value of human life whomever it belongs to, immediately offers an ethic of interpersonal relationships. Coupled with this, the value that Aquinas gives to the production and care for offspring, as well as to the

promotion of the truth and the peaceful and orderly social life, provide guidance on how one ought to relate with her close relations.

Kant's deontology recognizes the principle of humanity as end in itself and as a cornerstone of ethical decision-making because this theory recognizes the full autonomy of every single rational agent. Thus, one must not abuse either oneself, nor one's fellow human beings by treating them as mere means.

Finally, Aristotle's Virtue Theory teaches that one must always find and act on the mesotes whether in treating oneself or any other human being. This mesotes points to the complexity of knowing what must be done in a specific moral situation, which involves identifying the relevant feelings that are involved and being able to manage them. It happens too often in one's personal relationship with others, whom one is close to, that "feelings "get in the way of forming meaningful, constructive bonds.

Social Life: In the Philippine Context and in the Global Village

One's membership in any society brings forth the demands of communal life in terms of the group's rules and regulations. Philippine society, for example, is made up of many ethnolinguistic groups, each with its own possibly unique culture and set of traditions. The demands of the nation-state, as seen in the laws of the land, sometimes clash with the traditions of indigenous culture. One example is the issue of land ownership when ancestral land is at stake.

Mill's utilitarian doctrine will always push for the greatest happiness principle as the prime determinant of what can be considered as good action, whether in the personal sphere or in the societal realm. Thus, Filipinas cannot simply assume that their action is good because their culture says so. Instead, the fundamental question ought to be, "Will this action bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number?" An individual must therefore think carefully whether her action, even if her culture approves of it, will truly benefit everyone affected by it. The notion of the "greatest number "can also go beyond the borders of one's own perceived territory.

Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, in his natural law theory, has a clear conception off the principles that should guide the individual in her actions that affect her larger society. Once more, human life, the care and education of children, and the promotion of truth and harmonious social living should be in the mind of an individual when she performs actions directed to the larger whole. For Aquinas, no harmonious social life will be possible if individuals that comprise such a society do not value human life, telling the truth and peaceful coexistence.

Immanuel Kant argues for the use of the principles of universalizability and of humanity as end in itself to form a person's autonomous notion of what she ought to do. According to Kant's framework, if a person is to follow any of these heteronomous laws, it must not be in any way contrary to it. Kant is not saying that a person ought not to follow any heteronomous laws. Instead, she must make sure that if she were to follow such a law, that she understands why it is truly the right thing to do. More positively, citizens of a particular ought to make sure that the laws and rules that they come up with are actually in line with what universalizability moral duty will prescribe.

Aristotle's virtue ethics prescribes mesotes as the guide to all the actions that a person has to take, even in her dealing with the larger community of people. Virtues such as justice, liberality, magnificence, friendliness, and rightful indignation suggest that they are socially-oriented Aristotelian virtues. A person ought to be guided by them in her dealings with either the local or the wider global society. Within the Philippines, there are around 175 ethnolinguistic groups, each with its own language and culture, and therefore each with its own set of beliefs and practices. Filipino workers abroad, on the other hand, perform their jobs in other countries, and so they must balance the need for acculturation on one hand and keeping one's Filipino identity on the other. Temperance once again presents itself as one Aristotelian virtue other than, justice in dealing with the other participants in social intercourse.

The Non-Human Environment

Questions of environmental ethics, of the ethical or moral responsibilities human beings have toward the non-human world, only appeared in the twentieth century. Previously, most ethical theorists focused more on interhuman relations rather than human-to-non-human relations.

In the case of utilitarianism, some scholars point out that this hedonistic doctrine that focuses on the sovereignty of pleasures and pains in human decision-making should extend into other creatures that can experience pleasures and pains; namely, animals. One of the sources of animal ethics is utilitarianism. Animals themselves cannot become moral agents because they do not seem to have reason and free will. Some would therefore argue that since the greatest happiness principle covers the greatest number of creatures that experience pleasure and pain, then that number should include animals. Humans are expected to make moral decisions and must always take into account the potential pleasure or pain that they may inflict on animals. There is a general call for actions that do not just benefit humans but the whole ecosystem as well, since it is possible that nonhuman creatures might be harmed by neglecting the ecosystem.

Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, may not necessarily talk about the physical environment and human moral responsibility to it as such, but one can try to infer from his philosophy that certain actions should be avoided because they do not produce a harmonious, peaceful society.

Lastly, according to Aristotle, one becomes a better person if she learns to expand her vision to see beyond what is merely at close hand. One must see beyond the satisfaction of immediate economic needs and make sure that harming the environment for the sake of such will not eventually lead to something much worse.

A Closing that is Really an Opening

The four frameworks have proven to be some of the most influential in human thought and should serve as an introduction to other theories or to further discussions on moral philosophy. The more productive use of these frameworks instead is to employ them as beginning guides to one's further exploration into the topic of morality. Realizing the finitude of human understanding and of the capacity to make choices, but at the same time hoping that one's best attempt at doing what is right mean something in the end-these are part and parcel of making informed moral decisions.