Ethics and Moral Philosophy in Modern Society: An Overview

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Watch your thoughts; they become words.
Watch your words; they become actions.
Watch your actions; they become habits.
Watch your habits; they become character.
Watch your character; it becomes your destiny

—FRANK UTLAW

Introduction

The main purpose of this paper is to show that there is no such thing possible as an ethical and moral philosophy in modern society. We all help to determine the content of ethical philosophy so far as we contribute to the race's moral life. In other words, there can be no final truth in ethics, until the last man has had his experience and said his say. In the one case as in the other, however, the hypotheses which we now make while waiting, and the acts to which they prompt us, are among the indispensable conditions which determine what that "say" shall be.

Meaning and Definitions of ethics and moral philosophy

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that used to study ideal human behavior and ideal ways of being .The approaches to ethics and the meanings of related concepts have varied over time a among philosophers and ethicists ex. Aristotle believed that ideal behaviors were practices that lead to the end goal of human society which is synonymous with a high level of happiness or well being.

According to Kant an 18th century philophers and ethicist, belived that ideal behavior was acting in accordance with one's duty. On ethics, Kant wrote works that both described the nature of universal principles and also sought to demonstrate the procedure of their application. Kant maintained that only a "good will" is morally praiseworthy, so that doing what appears to be ethical for the wrong reasons is not a morally good act. Kant's emphasis on one's intent or reasons for acting is usually contrasted with the utilitarian tenet that the goodness of an action is to be judged solely by its results. Utilitarianism is a

hypothetical imperative, if one wants they must do. Contrast this with the Kantian ethic of the categorical imperative, where the moral act is done for its own sake, and is framed: One must do or alternatively, one must not do.

For instance, under Kantian ethics, if a person were to give money to charity because failure to do so would result in some sort of punishment from a god or Supreme Being, then the charitable donation would not be a morally good act. A dutiful action must be performed solely out of a sense of duty; any other motivation profanes the act and strips it of its moral quality.

The pursuit of moral knowledge dates back to Ancient Greek philosophers, but it is mostly the influence of Enlightenment moral thought that continues to shape ethics today. There are many well-known philosophers in the history of ethics, including the Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, but some of the most important modern influences include such people as Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, D.W. Ross, C.L. Stevenson, Alasdair MacIntyre, and John Rawls.

Ethics is the philosophical attempt to answer Socrates' question of how one should live. This is a very general question, which could for any individual translate to "How should I live?" It is important however to note that not all answers to this question are answers of the ethical type. One could conclude that one should live a self-indulgent life without any kind of logical contradiction. Moral philosophers study this idea, known as "egoism," as well, and the question "Why be moral?" is because of this distinct from Socrates' question.

It is also important to note that Socrates' question not only allows for non-ethical answers but also answers from different ethical theories. His question is not the same as Kant's question "What is my duty?" or the egoist/utilitarian question of "How can we be happy?" There are many different ways of answering Socrates' question, and answers from the Categorical Imperative to the imperative "Sit on the couch and watch television" are equally answers to it, but Ethics attempts to find through reason the best answer to the question.

Objectives of the paper

- Define the terms of ethics and moral philosophy in modern society
- Evaluate the different approaches of ethics
- People are always involved with one's moral and ethical decisions
- Every moral decision affects someone's life, self esteem, or happiness level.

Ethics is a term. Many people think ethics has to do with a set of social conventions or a religious decree. In professional philosophy we do not typically consider this to be the definition of ethics. Philosophical ethics could be called the study of what is good and bad. Generally, philosophical ethics concerns itself with discovering a system one may use to determine who or what is good, or with evaluating systems that others have proposed. In ethics, a premium is placed upon defining "the good". Different approaches to defining the good, the nature of moral properties, the source of moral knowledge, and the status of moral facts have played an important role in shaping various branches of moral theory. The three major divisions of ethical philosophy may be called Virtue Ethics, Deontology, and Consequentialism.

Ethical mandates from society and church do not qualify as genuine philosophical ethics.

This last statement causes concern in that it reeks of negative presuppositions. First of all, ethical mandates always have ethical undertones. It is inescapable. An ethical mandate may not fit certain schools of thought, but then certain schools of thought can be erroneous. All ethics are religious by nature, if one defines religion as an attempt to discover the good. Ethics stem from the question "What is right?" Whoever decides the answer to that question is a law maker.

Ethics, often called Morality interchangeably, tries to answer "How should one live?" given that we already live in a society. Everyone is born with a place in society even if it is only "Stranger," and accordingly everyone has expectations for action placed upon them. One is expected to act a certain way as a brother, a friend, and a passer-by. Ethics primarily concerns itself with this realm of individual action. For the most part, ethical theories attempt to develop a system of obligations that we have towards others. Obligations that are common among different theories are the obligation to tell the truth, the obligation to help those in distress, and the obligation not to murder. Of course, most of the theories allow for flexibility based on the situation such as the ability to help in this circumstance and whether one has any other, higher obligations.

Philosophical ethics

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that explores the nature of moral virtue and evaluates human actions. Philosophical ethics differs from legal, religious, cultural and personal approaches to ethics by seeking to conduct the study of morality through a rational, secular outlook that is grounded in notions of human happiness or well-being. A major advantage of a philosophical approach to ethics is that it avoids the authoritarian basis of law and religion as well as the subjectivity, arbitrariness and irrationality that may characterize cultural or totally personal moral views. (Although some thinkers differentiate between "ethics," "morals," "ethical" and "moral," this discussion will use them synonymously.

Conclusion

Final conclusion is that the stable and systematic moral universe for which the ethical philosopher asks is fully possible only in a world where there is a divine thinker with all-enveloping demands. If such a thinker existed, his way of subordinating the demands to one another would be the finally valid casuistic scale; his claims would be the most appealing; his ideal universe would be the most inclusive realizable whole. If he now exist, then actualized in his thought already must be that ethical philosophy which we seek as the pattern which our own must evermore approach. In the interest of our own ideal of systematically unified moral truth, therefore, we, as would-be philosophers, must postulate a divine thinker, and pray for the victory of the religious cause. Meanwhile, exactly what the thought of the infinite thinker may be is hidden from us even were we sure of his existence; so that our postulation of him after all serves only to let loose in us the strenuous mood. But this is what it does in all men, even those who have interest in philosophy. The ethical philosopher, therefore, whenever he ventures to say which course of action is the best, is on no essentially different level from the common man. "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; therefore choose life that thou and thy seed may live"--when this challenge comes to us, it is simply our total character and personal genius that are on trial; and if we invoke any so-called philosophy, our choice and use of that also are but revelations of our personal aptitude or incapacity for moral life. From this unsparing practical ordeal no professor's lectures and no array of books can save us. The solving word, for the learned and the unlearned man alike, lies in the last resort in the dumb willingness's and unwillingness of their interior characters, and nowhere else. It is not in heaven, neither is it beyond the sea; but the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth and in the hear, that thou mayest do it.

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