



PHI203

Introduction to Ethics

Course Manual

ODL Edition

A.P. Ipadeola

Introduction to Ethics

PHI203



University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
Open and Distance Learning Course Series Development
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www.edutechportal.org

University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre
University of Ibadan,
Nigeria

Telex: 31128NG

Tel: +234 (80775935727)
E-mail: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng
Website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng

Vice-Chancellor's Message

The Distance Learning Centre is building on a solid tradition of over two decades of service in the provision of External Studies Programme and now Distance Learning Education in Nigeria and beyond. The Distance Learning mode to which we are committed is providing access to many deserving Nigerians in having access to higher education especially those who by the nature of their engagement do not have the luxury of full time education. Recently, it is contributing in no small measure to providing places for teeming Nigerian youths who for one reason or the other could not get admission into the conventional universities.

These course materials have been written by writers specially trained in ODL course delivery. The writers have made great efforts to provide up to date information, knowledge and skills in the different disciplines and ensure that the materials are user-friendly.

In addition to provision of course materials in print and e-format, a lot of Information Technology input has also gone into the deployment of course materials. Most of them can be downloaded from the DLC website and are available in audio format which you can also download into your mobile phones, IPod, MP3 among other devices to allow you listen to the audio study sessions. Some of the study session materials have been scripted and are being broadcast on the university's Diamond Radio FM 101.1, while others have been delivered and captured in audio-visual format in a classroom environment for use by our students. Detailed information on availability and access is available on the website. We will continue in our efforts to provide and review course materials for our courses.

However, for you to take advantage of these formats, you will need to improve on your I.T. skills and develop requisite distance learning Culture. It is well known that, for efficient and effective provision of Distance learning education, availability of appropriate and relevant course materials is a *sine qua non*. So also, is the availability of multiple platform for the convenience of our students. It is in fulfillment of this, that series of course materials are being written to enable our students study at their own pace and convenience.

It is our hope that you will put these course materials to the best use.



Prof. Isaac Adewole

Vice-Chancellor

Foreword

As part of its vision of providing education for “Liberty and Development” for Nigerians and the International Community, the University of Ibadan, Distance Learning Centre has recently embarked on a vigorous repositioning agenda which aimed at embracing a holistic and all encompassing approach to the delivery of its Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes. Thus we are committed to global best practices in distance learning provision. Apart from providing an efficient administrative and academic support for our students, we are committed to providing educational resource materials for the use of our students. We are convinced that, without an up-to-date, learner-friendly and distance learning compliant course materials, there cannot be any basis to lay claim to being a provider of distance learning education. Indeed, availability of appropriate course materials in multiple formats is the hub of any distance learning provision worldwide.

In view of the above, we are vigorously pursuing as a matter of priority, the provision of credible, learner-friendly and interactive course materials for all our courses. We commissioned the authoring of, and review of course materials to teams of experts and their outputs were subjected to rigorous peer review to ensure standard. The approach not only emphasizes cognitive knowledge, but also skills and humane values which are at the core of education, even in an ICT age.

The development of the materials which is on-going also had input from experienced editors and illustrators who have ensured that they are accurate, current and learner-friendly. They are specially written with distance learners in mind. This is very important because, distance learning involves non-residential students who can often feel isolated from the community of learners.

It is important to note that, for a distance learner to excel there is the need to source and read relevant materials apart from this course material. Therefore, adequate supplementary reading materials as well as other information sources are suggested in the course materials.

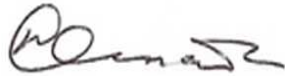
Apart from the responsibility for you to read this course material with others, you are also advised to seek assistance from your course facilitators especially academic advisors during your study even before the interactive session which is by design for revision. Your academic advisors will assist you using convenient technology including Google Hang Out, You Tube, Talk Fusion, etc. but you have to take advantage of these. It is also going to be of immense advantage if you complete assignments as at when due so as to have necessary feedbacks as a guide.

The implication of the above is that, a distance learner has a responsibility to develop requisite distance learning culture which includes diligent and disciplined self-study, seeking available administrative and academic support and acquisition of basic information technology skills. This is why you are encouraged to develop your computer skills by availing yourself the opportunity of training that the Centre’s provide and put these into use.

In conclusion, it is envisaged that the course materials would also be useful for the regular students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria who are faced with a dearth of high quality textbooks. We are therefore, delighted to present these titles to both our distance learning students and the university's regular students. We are confident that the materials will be an invaluable resource to all.

We would like to thank all our authors, reviewers and production staff for the high quality of work.

Best wishes.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Okunade', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Bayo Okunade

Director

Course Development Team

Content Authoring

A.P. Ipadeola

Content Editor

Prof. Remi Raji-Oyelade

Production Editor

Dr. Gloria O. Adedoja

Learning Design & Technologist

Folajimi Olambo Fakoya

Managing Editor

Ogunmefun Oladele Abiodun

General Editor

Prof. Bayo Okunade

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About this course manual

Introduction to Ethics PHI203 has been produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre. All course manuals produced by University of Ibadan Distance Learning Centre are structured in the same way, as outlined below.

How this course manual is structured

The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- If the course is suitable for you.
- What you will already need to know.
- What you can expect from the course.
- How much time you will need to invest to complete the course.

The overview also provides guidance on:

- Study skills.
- Where to get help.
- Course assignments and assessments.
- Margin icons.

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your study.

The course content

The course is broken down into Study Sessions. Each Study Session comprises:

- An introduction to the Study Session content.
- Study Session outcomes.
- Core content of the Study Session with a variety of learning activities.
- A Study Session summary.
- Assignments and/or assessments, as applicable.
- Bibliography

Your comments

After completing Introduction to Ethics we would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to give us your feedback on any aspect of this course. Your feedback might include comments on:

- Course content and structure.
- Course reading materials and resources.
- Course assignments.
- Course assessments.
- Course duration.
- Course support (assigned tutors, technical help, etc.)

Your constructive feedback will help us to improve and enhance this course.

Course Overview

Welcome to Introduction to Ethics PHI203

Traditionally, ethics usually asks questions about good and bad conducts, about rightness and wrongness of actions and about being a virtuous or a bad person. In recent times, however, the scope of ethics has been broadened. Ethics now raises questions about our moral obligations to the environment; whether what is moral is viewed the same way by men and women; the right way to act in businesses and professions; what should be our way of relating with those who are terminally ill; how we should handle the socially-different ones like lesbians and gays; and so many other questions about our contemporary world.

Course outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of Introduction to Ethics PHI203, you will be able to:

- *explain* the meaning of the word “ethics”.
- *justify* the need to be morally upright.
- *analyse* meta-ethical concepts.
- *analyse* feminist moral theory.
- *justify* the importance of ethical utilitarianism.

Timeframe



How long?

This is a 15 week course. It requires a formal study time of 45 hours. The formal study times are scheduled around online discussions / chats with your course facilitator / academic advisor to facilitate your learning. Kindly see course calendar on your course website for scheduled dates. You will still require independent/personal study time particularly in studying your course materials.

How to be successful in this course



As an open and distance learner your approach to learning will be different to that from your school days, where you had onsite education. You will now choose what you want to study, you will have professional and/or personal motivation for doing so and you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities.

Essentially you will be taking control of your learning environment. As a consequence, you will need to consider performance issues related to time management, goal setting, stress management, etc. Perhaps you will also need to reacquaint yourself in areas such as essay planning, coping with exams and using the web as a learning resource.

We recommend that you take time now—before starting your self-study—to familiarize yourself with these issues. There are a number of excellent resources on the web. A few suggested links are:

- <http://www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/resources/studyskill.pdf>

This is a resource of the UIDLC pilot course module. You will find sections on building study skills, time scheduling, basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis and memory skills (“remembering”).

- http://www.ivywise.com/newsletter_march13_how_to_self_study.html

This site provides how to master self-studying, with bias to emerging technologies.

- <http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>

Another “How to study” web site with useful links to time management, efficient reading, questioning/listening/observing skills, getting the most out of doing (“hands-on” learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing these web links were active. If you want to look for more, go to www.google.com and type “self-study basics”, “self-study tips”, “self-study skills” or similar phrases.

Need help?



Help

As earlier noted, this course manual complements and supplements PHI203at UI Mobile Class as an online course, which is domiciled at www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc.

You may contact any of the following units for information, learning resources and library services.

Distance Learning Centre (DLC)

University of Ibadan, Nigeria

Tel: (+234) 08077593551 – 55

(Student Support Officers)

Email: ssu@dlc.ui.edu.ng

Head Office

Morohundiya Complex, Ibadan-Ilorin Expressway, Idi-Ose, Ibadan.

Information Centre

20 Awolowo Road, Bodija, Ibadan.

Lagos Office

Speedwriting House, No. 16 Ajanaku Street, Off Salvation Bus Stop, Awuse Estate, Opebi, Ikeja, Lagos.

For technical issues (computer problems, web access, and etcetera), please visit: www.learnersupport.dlc.ui.edu.ng for live support; or send mail to webmaster@dlc.ui.edu.ng.

Academic Support



Help

A course facilitator is commissioned for this course. You have also been assigned an academic advisor to provide learning support. The contacts of your course facilitator and academic advisor for this course are available at the course website: www.dlc.ui.edu.ng/mc

Activities



Activities

This manual features “Activities,” which may present material that is NOT extensively covered in the Study Sessions. When completing these activities, you will demonstrate your understanding of basic material (by answering questions) before you learn more advanced concepts. You will be provided with answers to every activity question. Therefore, your emphasis when working the activities should be on understanding your answers. It is more important that you understand why every answer is

correct.

Assignment



Assignment

This manual also comes with tutor marked assignments (TMA). Assignments are expected to be turned-in on course website. You may also receive TMAs as part of online class activities. Feedbacks to TMAs will be provided by your tutor in not more than 2-week expected duration.

Schedule dates for submitting assignments and engaging in course / class activities is available on the course website. Kindly visit your course website often for updates.

Assessments



Assessments

There are two basic forms of self assessment in this course: in-text questions (ITQs) and self assessment questions (SAQs). Feedbacks to the ITQs are placed immediately after the questions, while the feedbacks to SAQs are at the back of manual.

Bibliography



Reading

For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of this course manual; these may be books, articles or websites.

Getting around this course manual

Margin icons

While working through this course manual you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this course manual.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarize yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study.

			
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Assessment</i>	<i>Assignment</i>	<i>Case study</i>
			
<i>Discussion</i>	<i>Group Activity</i>	<i>Help</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
			
<i>Note</i>	<i>Reflection</i>	<i>Reading</i>	<i>Study skills</i>
			
<i>Summary</i>	<i>Terminology</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Tip</i>

Study Session 1

What is Ethics?

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will explore the meaning of ethics, as an aspect of philosophy. We will also discuss the sub-divisions of ethics; and the views of early philosophers on ethics.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 1.1 *define* and *use* correctly the term “ethics”.
- 1.2 *discuss* the views of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle on ethics.

1.1 The Subject Matter of Ethics

Whenever we are worried or concerned with providing a plausible reason rather than just any basis for our moral decisions, we are doing ethics, although in a rudimentary way. Put simply, therefore, ethics is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature, origin, structure and justification of moral conducts.

Ethics concerns itself systematic, critical, conscious and rigorous reflections on the moral values that people live by

Ethics or moral philosophy concerns systematic, critical, conscious and rigorous reflections on the moral values that people live by. Issues and events of everyday life require that people make moral decisions and pass moral judgments on people’s actions, as well as their own conducts from time to time. For example, it is often said that “he was not supposed to behave that way”; “it is wrong to tell lie”; “it is good to help the needy”; “abortion is evil”, and so on. When we try to justify our preference for these and other rules that steer the way or manner that people behave, we are doing an ethics of some sort, although that is not all we mean by ethics.

As human beings, we cannot ignore the issue of morality because we cannot but live in societies. Peaceful and harmonious co-existence, however, demands that our actions are guided by some codes of conduct which are not necessarily coercive. Those codes of conducts are what we refer to as morality. The subject matter of ethics is morality. And it is in this respect that it is different from other main branches of philosophy like epistemology, metaphysics and logic.

Ethics, however, like other branches of philosophy, employs the tools of philosophy like conceptual analysis (an explanation of the idea), comparative analysis (a comparison of different and similar ideas) and

critical analysis (an evaluation of the idea at hand) to study the origin, nature, types, structures, principles of judgment and the justifications of the codes of conducts that guide our moral decisions and judgments. Hence, while ethics differs from other main branches of philosophy in its subject matter, it is similar to them in terms of the methods of enquiry which it uses.

On the other hand, it is very important to study the nature of morality because people can easily become emotional about the issue of morality to the tragic extent of maiming or killing those they consider immoral. An example is the various instances of massacre in the northern part of the country in recent times.

ITQ

Question

- What are the tools of philosophy that ethics employ?

Feedback

- Ethics employ philosophical tools such as critical thinking or analysis, conceptual clarification or analysis, and comparative analysis.

Basically, ethics can be divided into three main branches. The three branches are: **meta-ethics**, **normative ethics** and **applied ethics**. However, recent studies of ethics adopt some other perspectives to the study of the subject. Among the more recent views of ethics we have professional ethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, psychological approach to ethics, and so on.

Hint

We will discuss the branches of ethics in Study Session Three.

Generally, ethics involves a critical evaluation of the standards of morality that we hold. Ethics condemns standards that are life-threatening, or when they endanger or make difficult human well-being or human existence. On the other hand, ethics encourages those actions or codes of conduct that promote virtues of patriotism, fairness, honesty, kindness and other virtues which uphold human well-being.

In a bid to understand ethics which is our subject-matter in the whole of this course properly, it is important to see what some of the past philosophers have said about what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Different philosophers for ages have viewed ethics in different ways. Therefore, we will take a look at some of such philosophers in order to have better understand what ethics really is.

ITQ

Question

- Match the branches of ethics with their respective definitions in the table below:

I.	The study of ethical action
II.	A branch of analytic philosophy that explores the status, foundations, and scope of moral values, properties, and words.
III.	The branch of ethics which consists of the analysis of specific, controversial moral issues

Feedback

I. normative ethics, meta-ethics, and applied ethics.

1.2 Socrates, Plato and Aristotle on Ethics

Socrates was an ancient philosopher who lived in the city of Athens around 469-399 BC. He has the reputation of bringing philosophy down to the earth from heaven. The reason for this is partly that other philosophers that lived before Socrates were only concerned with the nature of the physical world or the universe. Socrates was the first philosopher to have concerned himself with the question of living a good life.

Socrates lived at a time when a group of philosophers known as the sophists were teaching the Athenian youths certain things which did not promote the course of morality. Socrates came on board at this time and helped to correct the wrong teachings of the Sophists. Socrates claimed that all he knew was that he knew nothing, but that like his mother, he was a mid-wife who could help people give birth to the knowledge in them. He did this through a method known as the dialectic method, by which he asked questions until he helped his respondents arrive at true knowledge.

Plato was also another ancient philosopher. He was a younger contemporary as well as the disciple of Socrates. Since Socrates left no writing, and since Plato, in all his writings known as Plato's dialogues, used Socrates as his spokesman, it is difficult to actually know where Socrates' ideas end and where Plato's begin. In view of the foregoing, it is difficult to separate the ethical ideas of Socrates and Plato.

Meanwhile, both Socrates and Plato hold that there exists an affinity between self-knowledge and virtue or the good life. Hence, there is a popular saying of Socrates that "man, know thyself". For the two philosophers, therefore, it is impossible to be knowledgeable and still do wrong at the same time. In other words, both Socrates and Plato are of the opinion that at the basis of every form of wrongdoing is ignorance.

Eudemonism An ethical doctrine that characterizes the value of life in terms of happiness

The opinion of Socrates and Plato that knowledge leads to virtue is also closely related to the theory of morality known as **eudemonism**. According to eudemonism, which is from the Greek word 'eudemonia' (happiness), a good action is that which brings happiness. Going by this idea, Socrates and Plato are of the opinion that only a virtuous person can

be truly happy.

It is important however to point out that contrary to the position of both Socrates and Plato, vice does not always result from ignorance. Put differently, one can easily criticize Socrates and Plato's ethical idea by pointing out that there are so many people who know that what they do is wrong and yet still go ahead to perform such an action. Does it mean that a murderer does not know that it is wrong to kill, even when he himself does not want to die? The answer of Socrates and Plato to this, going by their second idea, is that if a wrongdoer knew that by doing wrong he would not be truly happy, he would not do wrong. In essence, Socrates and Plato see good moral conduct or a good action in terms of an action that stems from knowledge or self-realization and is measured in terms of true happiness.

Socrates displayed an example of what he believed in on so many occasions in his life. In the first place, as a soldier he exhibited bravery and courage. Also, he showed tenacity and commitment in rigorous thinking, which enabled him to attain such a level of importance in philosophy. Lastly, when he was advised to escape from Athens, when he was about to be executed for the offence of impiety and inciting the youth against the Athenian society of his times Socrates refused to do so because that was clearly against his philosophy.

Aristotle was also another ancient philosopher. He was a younger contemporary and a pupil of Plato in his school known as 'The Academy'. However, many of his ideas are distinct from Plato's, and his ethics is one of such important distinct ideas. Aristotle's renowned work on ethics is known as the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This work was named after Nicomachus, who was Aristotle's father, because of the influence of medicine which was his father's profession and under which Aristotle was brought up and, which is evident in the ethical idea discussed by Aristotle.

Aristotle agrees with his master, Plato, that a life of virtue brings happiness. Happiness, in Aristotle's view, is that which is sought as an end in itself and not as a means to another end. For him, happiness is the ultimate good for man. It is that towards which all other intermediate ends are directed. However, to become a person of virtue, Aristotle propounded his theory of the golden mean.

Aristotle's aim in his work on the golden mean is to work out his idea of moral virtue or excellence of character. Excellence of character, for Aristotle, is a choice which lies in a mean.

Aristotle explains that of emotions, feelings and actions, there are two extremes, which are both bad and evil. On the one hand is excess, and on the other hand is defect or deficiency, while somewhere between the two lies the mean. The other two are vices, while, only the mean is a virtue.

Aristotle gives various examples of emotions and actions in relation to their excesses, defects and the mean. An example of this is confidence. According to him, rashness or foolhardiness is the excess; cowardice is the defect, while courage is the mean. For another form of action,

prodigality is in the excess; meanness is a defect, and generosity is the mean.

Aristotle also links his moral philosophy to his metaphysical idea of potentiality and actuality when he posits that although man is potentially virtuous, he does not automatically become virtuous. Rather, man actually becomes virtuous by his constant choice of virtuous acts, which overtime makes it become his habit. This, therefore, means that if one constantly chooses the mean of every action and emotion, one is moving towards the state of being virtuous.

Lastly, it is important to note that Aristotle does not recommend the same mean for everyone. Just like one eats in proportion to one's size and the nature of work one does to stay healthy, it is important to determine the mean of an action going by the peculiarities of the action. In Aristotle's view, this although, is not discovered through some hard-and-fast mathematical rules, yet it is knowable all the same. For Aristotle, therefore, we should as individuals, choose the mean relative to us.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, you learnt that ethics is the aspect of philosophy which studies morality. It attempts to mull over the reasons behind the actions we consider morally good and reasons why we hold some actions to be morally bad. Ethics does this by making use of the methods of enquiry which are employed in philosophy. We noted the three main branches of Ethics which are meta ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 1.1 (tests Learning Outcome 1.1)

What is the concern of ethics?

SAQ1.2 (tests Learning Outcome 1.2)

Discuss the views of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle on ethics.

Study Session 2

Morality

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will look at what makes an issue a moral issue. We will also look at some of the reasons why one needs to be moral, and problems with some of those reasons.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

2.1 *describe* moral issues.

2.2 *justify* reasons to act morally.

2.1 Definition of Moral Issues

Moral Issues the suggestion that we are duty bound, expected, obliged or required to do what is morally good or morally praiseworthy in order to be acceptable to other people.

The way we talk about **moral issues** usually suggests that we are duty bound, expected, obliged or required to do what is morally good or morally praiseworthy in order to be acceptable to other people. Apart from the fact that we have been told to be moral right from when we were growing up, many of us do not bother to ask ourselves the important ethical question of why we should be moral. A reflection on this question will require that we look at what makes an issue a moral one, and in the same vein, this will also enable us to look at some important reasons why we need to be moral.

In the first place, it is necessary to determine what makes an action right; what makes an action wrong, and what makes an action to be neither right nor wrong.



Case
Study

Task: Consider the case below. What is your judgment on the issue and why the reasons for holding such a view?

Teniola and Chinwe have been dating for a little more than four years now. Teniola suddenly has just made it known to Chinwe that he is no longer interested in the relationship. "It is difficult", as confessed by Teniola, but it is just what he has to do for reasons he is not willing to disclose to Bala, Ola, Chukwura and Bako, who are all friends to Chinwe and Teniola. The problem between the two began recently when Teniola started "behaving differently", according to Chinwe. However, after knowing the details behind the jilting, the four friends do not seem to agree on whom to blame. Chinwe confesses that Teniola started "behaving funny" after aborting the last pregnancy. According to her, that was the fifth time he asked her to abort a pregnancy he was

	<p>responsible. Meanwhile, luck was not on their side on this occasion, as the doctor who helped to get rid of the pregnancy for which told them she would never need an abortion again because she would never be able conceive. On his part, Teniola tells them that as the only child of his parents, he cannot afford to marry a woman who cannot have children. After the friends listened to the two of them, this is what they have to say:</p> <p>Bala: How on earth could Teniola be so mean and callous? Didn't he know he was the only child of his parents when he got the lady impregnated and told her to abort the pregnancy? Infact, I hate him for that.</p> <p>Ola: Well, as for me, I blame the two of them. They are both adults, and therefore, should be held responsible for whatever decision they take.</p> <p>Chukwura: I think society is to blame for what has happened to Teniola and Chinwe. The reason is because as undergraduate in a Nigerian university, they are supposed to live more comfortably. If the economic condition of society has not been so harsh, they would have been able to support themselves and their unborn children. Even if they opted for abortion, they would have been able to afford a much better means of getting rid of the pregnancy.</p> <p>Bako: I'm of the opinion that the girl and her parents are to blame for this whole mess. She was supposed to object either to being slept with, or to aborting the pregnancy. And as for her parents, they were supposed to bring her up more properly, so that she can distinguish between what is good for her and what is likely to harm her.</p>
	<p>Remarks</p> <p>The story above shows that a moral issue can generate a variety of reactions and opinions from different people. The reason has to do with the unique features of moral issues.</p>

2.1.1 What makes an Issue a Moral Issue?

An issue is amoral issue if the reason why people view it differently is a function of what they believe rather than what they prefer. In considering a moral issue, belief rather than preference dominates. This is the reason why even if two persons hold opposing views about the issue at hand, their point of disagreement usually stems from their irreconcilable beliefs. For example, at a point in history, the people of Calabar in Nigeria were killing their twin children. They were not doing this all because they wanted to, felt like they should or preferred to do it, but just because of their belief that twins were evil. When Mary Slessor came to Africa and saw the people killing their twins, she corrected them from the standpoint of her own belief and was successful in addressing the issue because she corrected their beliefs.

An issue is a moral issue if the issue brings about or generates a special kind of feelings. Moral issues are those that elicit certain kinds of feelings and reactions from people. Such feelings and reactions are different from, but in some respects, similar to those elicited by some other experiences like religions, aesthetics, cognition, learning and knowledge. In other

words, moral issues are those that are capable of generating such feelings as feelings of justification, satisfaction and commendation, or feelings of shame, regrets, remorse and guilt.

Furthermore, a moral issue is that which involves, in many cases, actions that affect other people. In the course of our interactions with people around us, and now with the help of devices like mobile phones and computers, even with people in far places, we are expected to behave in certain ways. The reason for this is that we necessarily live in societies and cannot live alone. Put differently, since humans are by nature, social animals, certain issues necessarily come up as a result of their social interactions, which are moral issues

Lastly, moral issues are those that can potentially or even actually help or hurt other people as well as ourselves. In other words, moral issues are those issues that are not only capable of hurting people physically but can also hurt them emotionally. For example, even an issue that seems to concern only one person, take suicide as an example, still ends up affecting other people because family members and friends of someone will mourn if the person takes her life.

Having examined the various features of moral issues, it is important at this point to look at the reasons why it is important to be moral.

ITQ

Question

- Which of the following is a moral issue?
 - a) A man decides not to take his life seriously.
 - b) A man decides to steal from his neighbour.

Feedback

- The first is not a moral issue because it does not satisfy the conditions for an issue to be called a moral issue while the second is because it satisfies these conditions. These conditions are that the issue must generate a special kind of feeling, it affects others or can even hurt them in any way, and it generates different positions as regards it. These conditions are not met by the first issue.

2.2 Why should I be Moral?

There are many reasons usually given why one needs to be moral. The reasons include:

The Divine Command Reason

One important reason commonly given why we need to act morally is that which argues that in order for us to please God, we must do what God commands. Meanwhile, for many adherents of this position, it is held that what God commands is that we should act in such a way that other human beings are shown kindness and not intentionally hurt or destroyed. Furthermore, it is stated, as a means of supporting this

position, that God will reward those who act in line with his directives and that he will punish those who go against what he commands.

However, as it is important to point out that in spite of the fact that the Divine Command Reason seems so persuasive, it is not without some problems. First, a supporter of this reason will have to prove it that there is actually God and that he is powerful enough to punish or reward people. Also, since this reason, in most cases, is based on a premise that assumes immortality, someone who holds this reason will also be confronted with the problem of proving the idea that man actually survives death.

Benefits of Morality to the Moral Agent Reason

Another reason that is widespread, especially in Africa, is that which holds that eventually, the nature of this world is such that good things will come or happen to a moral person, while evil will happen to an immoral person. Among Yoruba people in south-western Nigeria, for instance, it is a popular saying that “ika a ka onika, rere a beni rere”. This Yoruba saying translates as “evil will come upon the wicked, while goodness will come to some that is good”. In the same vein, among some Asian people, there is a notion known as the law of *karma*. This is a universal law that is believed to make sure that everyone reaps what she sows.

Just like we have seen in our consideration of the Divine Command Reason, the view that what one does will eventually happen to one also has some problems. Experiences have shown, some of the times that bad things sometimes happen to good people. Meanwhile, a response to this objection is that eventually, some who does good will still see that it pays to be good because in the meantime, she will be compensated for whatever misfortune she has suffered.

Fairness or Common Interest Reason

This reason holds that since human beings live in groups, called societies, it is in our mutual interest to be moral. It is argued that for us to live meaningfully, we must live together in peace and harmony. However, living in peace and harmony will be unattainable unless we resolve to live morally. It is explained that if you act the way you like, even if what you like is immoral, and I do the same, how and when I like it, then survival will be unbearable, if not totally impossible.

This seems to be a very remarkable reason why we need to act morally. This is because; there is hardly anybody, in his right mind, who will not want to live meaningfully and peacefully. Even those who do evil still desire a level of adherence to moral rules from other people; like Yoruba people say: “abenilori ki if e ki a mu ida koja lori e”, which means, someone whose duty it is to behead, cannot even allow a sword to pass near his head in all, the fairness reason seems to be the most plausible reason of the reasons that we have examined so far.

Morality is Right Reason (Based on Synthetic a Priori)

This is a reason for morality that follows a line of argument similar to that put up by Immanuel Kant in arguing for his categorical imperative. According to this line of reasoning, in order for morality to retain its meaning, we have to act morally. What this means is that if we keep acting against standards of good moral conducts, morality will soon lose its meaning. An implication of this is that at this point, it will become self-contradictory to use the word morality. This is because nobody will take anybody serious again whenever the word is used. Put simply, therefore, this reason posits that good sense requires that we act morally, and that acting immorally implies that one goes against the stipulations of good sense. For example, if a moral rule that “it is good to be kind” is repeatedly violated; it will get to a time that the word, kindness, will no longer be meaningful because nobody will believe it again, when someone talks about it.



A critical evaluation of *morality is right reason* shows that it is a good reason for being moral. An important question, however, is that “are men always rational?”

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we examined the basic features of moral issues. The first feature of moral issues is that moral issues are those which involve a difference of belief and not a matter of preference. Also, moral issues are those which involve a specific kind of experience. The third feature of moral issues is that moral issues are those which involve a specific kind of situation, i.e., such acts as those that affect other people. We identified, in the course of this Study Session that reasons to be moral include the fact that God demands that we should be moral. Finally, it is argued that we need to be moral because morality is right, it pays a moral agent and that it is needed for the purpose of fairness.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ2.1 (tests Learning Outcome 2.1)

What are moral issues?

SAQ2.2 (tests Learning Outcome 2.2)

Why do you act morally?

Study Session 3

Branches of Ethics

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will examine the branches of ethics, which are meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

3.1 describe the following branches of ethics:

- meta-ethics
- normative ethics
- applied ethics

3.1 Meta-Ethics

Meta

Beyond, transcending and or encompassing

Meta-ethics The branch of ethics which inquire into the meaning, nature, type, justification and source or origin of moral norms or moral standards

Going by its etymology, the word '**meta**' means beside, after, behind, beyond, transcending or above. Therefore, we can define meta-ethics as the branch of ethics which inquire into the meaning, nature, type, justification and source or origin of moral norms or moral standards. In other words, meta-ethics seeks to find out the explanations behind or at the base of moral norms. **Meta-ethics** does not pass moral judgments by stating which actions are morally right or which are morally wrong. It rather merely tries to raise questions about the meaning, nature and source of a moral standard. Meta-ethics is also concerned with the nature of moral judgements and whether they are objectively true or not.

In the twentieth century, it was believed in analytical philosophy that the whole content of ethics is meta-ethics. This stems from a distinction identified between fact and value or between is and ought in this school of thought. Fact refers to a description of a state of affairs, while value is believed to involve the ideal and a prescription of that ideal. In analytical philosophy, it is held that that philosophy is an abstract intellectual enquiry and so does not have any business with value. Put differently, philosophy is held to be value-neutral. In other words, analytical philosophy relies on this distinction to reach the conclusion that the whole of ethics is meta-ethics.

On the other hand, it is indeed held that meta-ethics could in fact be value-neutral. It is explained that an analysis of the nature of morality does not entitle or force on to make moral judgments or moral conclusions. This mean, in essence, that only an analysis of morality is expected of meta-ethics, it needs not reach conclusions or take a position.

Meta-Ethics as an Analysis of the Meaning of Morality

- In the first place, meta-ethics raises questions about the meaning of moral standards. Put differently, it offers explanations about what we mean when we make moral statements. For example, what we really mean when we say “stealing is morally bad”, “it is good to take care of the sick”, and so on. Meta-ethical theories like emotivism, subjectivism and prescriptivism are some of the meta-ethical theories in this regard.
- Furthermore, meta-ethics asks questions about the nature of morality or moral guidelines. In this respect, meta-ethics attempts to distinguish the types of sanctions that can be referred to as moral standards from sanctions or standards of other types. In the same vein, it also asks whether moral judgments are capable of being true or false; or whether they are universal or not in their application. Examples of ethical theories in this category include: moral scepticism, moral realism, moral universalism, moral relativism and so on.

Meta-Ethics as an Attempt to Explain the Origins of Moral Standards

- Meta-ethics asks questions about the origins of moral codes. In addition, it also examines the justification of an origin or source of moral standards. For example, the Divine Command Theory of morality offers a religious basis of moral codes. According to the Divine Command Theory of morality, our moral codes originate from God or the gods. In other words, theists favour this form of moral explanation that since God is respected and revered by all, he is also known to be a valid source of moral standards. Another theory which attempts to explain an origin of moral code is the social contract moral theory. For the social contract moral theory, morality emerged from people’s consent and agreement to live in a particular way, by encouraging actions that enhance socio-political well-being and prohibiting or discouraging actions that work against this.

3.2 Normative Ethics

Normative ethics *The aspect of ethics that takes care of questions that has to do with making the right choice or assessing our choices when it comes to moral issues.*

Normative ethics is the branch of ethics that is concerned with setting the criteria or standards of good moral conduct. The standards that people hold about what is good or bad, right or wrong and beneficial or evil, affect almost all other things that they do. In an attempt to avoid what is morally bad or encourage what is morally good, people refer to moral standards. Those moral standards are given by normative ethics in accordance with three main approaches to moral theories. The three approaches are: teleological or consequentialist theories, deontological theories and virtue ethics. Normative ethics, hence, is basically concerned with the standards of good moral conducts; how to arrive at those good standards; and justifications of good moral standards. Normative ethics therefore, helps in making right moral choices or in judging our moral

decisions through certain ethical theories.

3.2.1 Teleological Ethical Theories

Teleological *The doctrine that attempts to explain the universe in terms of ends or final causes.*

Hedonism *The philosophical doctrine that holds that pleasure is the highest good or the source of moral values*

Teleological or consequentialist theories are those ethical theories that see the goodness or badness of moral actions in terms of the consequences or the result that they bring about. They judge an action to be morally right if the result it generates is beneficial, and consider it bad if its result is evil, painful or harmful. For example, a type of consequentialist theories known as **hedonism**, the consequences of any particular action is measured in terms of the pleasure or pain it generates. In other words, for a hedonist, an action is considered to be morally good only if it is able to bring about a greater balance of pleasure over pain. In like manner, if an action brings about or is likely to bring about more pain than pleasure, then such an action is considered to be morally bad. Basically, we have three main types of hedonism. The first is psychological hedonism which holds that all that human beings pursue is pleasure. Or put differently, that humans, being who they are, are constantly in pursuit of pleasure, while trying to avoid pain. The other is evaluative hedonism, which holds that what we should pursue or try to maximize is pleasure and strive towards an avoidance of pain. Ethical hedonism is a form of evaluative hedonism. Lastly, we have reflective hedonism, which is of the view that the only thing that gives value to anything is pleasure. Examples of hedonists include: Epicurus, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

Epicureanism, a school of philosophy founded in the Hellenistic period by the ancient philosopher, Epicurus, is a form of hedonistic consequentialist theory. The theory holds that pleasure is the only good thing that should be sought for it. On the other hand, pain is the only evil which man innately desire to avoid, and should be avoided because it is evil all through and through. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Epicurus does not encourage sensual pleasure. Rather, he rates mental pleasure very high.

Eudemonism *The ethical doctrine that characterizes the value of life in terms of happiness*

Apart from hedonism, we also have another type of consequentialist theory which advocates that the goodness or badness of an action is to be measured according to the happiness or unhappiness its consequences produce. This is known as **eudemonism**. For a eudemonist, an action is a morally good action if the consequences of the action bring about or can bring about a greater balance of happiness over unhappiness, and a bad action is an action that brings greater unhappiness than happiness.

An example of a consequentialist ethical theory is ethical utilitarianism. Ethical utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory which holds that a morally good action is that which brings about a greater amount of good than evil for the majority of people. And, on the other hand, an action which brings about a greater balance of evil for a greater number of people, or which only brings about a greater balance of good over evil for fewer people.

Another example of a consequentialist theory is ethical egoism. This is a type of ethical consequentialist theory that posits that a morally good action is that which generates a greater good for the self or the moral

agent, while an action is morally bad if it does not favour the moral agent or the self.

ITQ

Question

- What is hedonism?

Feedback

- Hedonism is the ethical position that an action is morally right if it brings higher pleasure above pain.

3.2.2 Deontological Ethical Theories

Deontological theories

Philosophical theories that state that the moral content of an action is not wholly dependent on its consequences

Deontological theories are the ethical theories which do not rely on consequences or results to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action. Deontological theories, in other words, focus on certain qualities of the moral standard to weigh the moral status of an action. Deontological theories appeal to such things as rules, right, duty, logical consistency and obligation to determine the moral status of an action. An example of a deontological theory is Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative. According to the categorical imperative, an action is morally right if and only if the moral agent can wish it to be made a universal rule without being involved in self-contradiction. Furthermore, Kant's categorical imperative also holds to be morally right, an action that treats human beings as an end in themselves rather than as a means to another end. Like every other deontological theory, you will notice that Kant's theory does not appeal to the fact that the outcome of an action chosen in line with the rules given is anything to consider in choosing the action.

Another deontological theory is the Divine Command theory of morality, which holds that what is morally right is what God, permits and commends and that what is morally wrong is what God forbids, not minding the consequences involved.

3.3.3 Virtue Ethics

Virtue ethics is the type of normative ethics which places emphasis on the moral status of a moral agent rather than merely on a moral action. Of vital importance to virtue ethics are issues like character and good life. Socrates, for example, sees a link between the ignorance of a moral agent and wrongdoing. Aristotle also, in his *Nicomachean ethics* encourages that one should develop oneself into a moral person because only a moral person can do what is morally good. To be a moral person, Aristotle holds that such a person should regularly choose to do what is morally good, in line with the mean. Among questions that virtue ethics raises are "what is the good life?", "how should one live?", "what type of person should one be?" and so on.

ITQ

Question

- Supply correct terminologies to the definitions below:
 - I. _____ theory holds that an action is morally good if the consequences holds a higher degree of happiness over unhappiness.
 - II. _____ theory holds that pleasure is the utmost good that should be sought while pain is the utmost evil that should be avoided.

Feedback

- I. Eudemonism
- II. Epicureanism

3.3 Applied Ethics

Applied Ethics The branch of ethics which examines the moral status of concrete social issues.

Applied ethics refers to the branch of ethics which examines the moral status of concrete social issues. It does this by using ethical theories which we have in normative ethics to assess practical issues of everyday life. When faced with making moral decision on any particular or definite moral issue, more often than not, we usually desire to know what the moral status of such an issue generally is. For example, we ask whether it is always wrong to kill, cheat, lie, go for an abortion, assist with euthanasia, use up the environment, and so on. Also, we usually desire to know whether some of those practical moral issues are occasionally justifiable or not.

Some Fundamental Issues in Applied or Practical Ethics

Applied ethics deals with different social and political moral issues which for the purpose of convenience have been put in groups. The groups have been so constituted to deal with issues of similar concerns. Some of the groups include: bioethics, gender ethics, sexual ethics, journalism ethics, info-ethics, professional ethics, business ethics and environmental ethics.

- **Bioethics, medical ethics and genetics** deal with the morality of issues like abortion, euthanasia, allocation of scarce resources in the health sector, human experiments, genetic testing and screening, cloning and so on. In this sense, questions that are of interest include whether it is morally good to abort an unwanted pregnancy; whether end of life decisions are within the power of a doctor or his hopelessly sick patient, or whether these are beyond the bounds of their determination; or whether it is morally permissible to use humans, or even animals, for medical experiments and researches, and so on.
- **Environmental ethics** is the aspect of applied ethics which raises questions about the moral and appropriate ways of relating with the physical environment. For example, one of the current concerns of environmental ethics is the issue of global warming and the way we cause the ozone layer to deplete. Also, it asks whether it is moral for us to use up the environment without putting the interest of future generations into consideration, or whether we have some moral obligation toward the environment.

- **Sexual ethics** is that which looks at issues like prostitution, homosexuality, lesbianism, zoophilia, pedophilia, polygamy, etc. For example, it interests sexual ethics to know whether it is morally right to condemn homosexuals, and whether prostitution can be morally justified based on some reasons, and so on.
- **Business ethics** is interested in the morality or otherwise of certain business and professional practices. For example, if the issue of whether the loyalty of a whistle-blower (a person who exposes wrongdoing within an organisation) is supposed to be to his employer or to the public.
- **Gender ethics** is the aspect of applied ethics which is about the unequal treatment between men and women on the one hand and an application of the standards of morality of the female gender to practical moral issues, on the other hand. For example, it promotes love, relationship and partiality in dealing with practical moral problem, in opposition to men's way of judging those issues, which emphasises justice and objectivity.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the branches of ethics, these are meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. We defined meta-ethics as the branch of ethics which studies the often neglected or overlooked aspects of morality which enquire into the nature of morality, as well as the meaning and sources of moral codes. We stated that normative ethics deals with setting of moral standards through ethical theories; while applied ethics deals with concrete or practical moral issues. Such issues can be socio-political, socio-economic or socio-cultural in nature, and they can be concrete moral issues about interpersonal relations.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 3.1 (tests Learning Outcome 3.1)

Mention and explain the branches of ethics that you have learnt in this study session.

Study Session 4

Ethical Relativism

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will examine the concept of ethical relativism. We will also discuss the two strands of the ethical theory.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 4.1 explain ethical relativism.
- 4.2 discuss the two strands of ethical theory.

4.1 Concept of Ethical Relativism

Sometimes, we notice some differences between the moral standards upheld by us and those valued by some other people. For example, it is possible to see someone who does not attach so much importance to the kind of value, say, “always respect anyone older than you”, which we have been taught at home and which we also practice regularly. When we come across someone like this, who does not value some standards which we were brought up to respect, it is usually a thing of surprise to us. This also happens in morality. Different people sometimes hold different, and even opposing, moral standards.

However, wondering this way shows that we are asking to know the ideal, the good standard or the normal and acceptable form of behaviour. Adherents of relativism, or simply relativists, are of the opinion that the rightness or wrongness of a moral action is determined by the moral standard upheld within the moral agent’s culture or society. In this lecture, we want to take a look at this position of relativists, see what their reasons for holding this view are and see what problems can come from acting in accordance with this view.

Ethical Relativism The ethical position that holds that the correctness or otherwise of any moral standard does not go beyond the confines of the culture or society of those who hold

Ethical relativism is a view in ethics which concerns itself with the differences observable in the moral standards of different cultures or societies. Simply put, ethical relativism is the ethical position that holds that the correctness or otherwise of any moral standard does not go beyond the confines of the culture or society of those who hold such a standard. Ethical relativism comes in two forms: it can be a view in meta-ethics or a position in normative ethics. Either way, it’s basically about the differences that we have in the way in which different societies or cultures approach moral issues.

such a standard

4.2 The Two Strands of the Ethical Theory

Put differently, we have two types of ethical relativism. These are: descriptive relativism and normative relativism.

4.2.1 Descriptive Relativism

Descriptive relativism

The type of ethical relativism that shows that different cultures or societies do in fact practice different ethical codes or that different societies adopt different and even at times opposing, moral norms.

Descriptive relativism is the type of ethical relativism that shows that different cultures or societies do in fact practice different ethical codes or that different societies adopt different and even at times opposing, moral norms.

For example, among some Indians who practice suttee, a widow is required to be burnt or cremated with her dead husband. To people of some other cultures, however, this practice is regarded as nothing but sheer wickedness. Among the Yoruba people in Nigeria also, a widow is asked to marry her dead husband's younger brother. This is frowned at, however, in some other cultures, where a widow is given the freedom to marry whoever she chooses to marry after the death of her husband.

Another example of variations in ethical standards can be found among the Eskimos who live in the polar region, an extremely cold area of the world. The Eskimos are said to have a practice whereby they leave their old people in the snow to die of cold. A person of another tribe, where it is believed that the aged should be taken care of and respected until they die naturally; will definitely be horrified by hearing that some people practice such a thing as that. The person will consider this wicked and immoral.

Meanwhile, what is important in dealing with the issue of differences in ethical standards of different cultures is the issue of the meaning of the moral value to those practicing the norm. In other words, there are times when the same moral value takes different and even seemingly opposing forms in different cultures. For example, in case of the Eskimos mentioned earlier, it is reported that the people believe that the state of a person's body at the time of death will affect the state of the body in the world of the dead. This is the reason why the people allow their old people to die when they are still strong, before their bodies are damaged by old-age. This means the Eskimos also believe, like other peoples, in taking care of their aged people and showing them kindness; but their practice will be condemned by someone who does not know the reason behind their practice.

ITQ

Question

- How will you define descriptive relativism?

Feedback

- This is the strand of ethical relativism that shows that different ethical standards are practiced by different societies or cultures.

4.2.2 Normative Relativism

Normative relativism The type of ethical relativism which holds that if one wants to determine whether an action is right or wrong, one should look at what the code of conduct of one's culture says about the issue

Normative Relativism is the type of ethical relativism which holds that if one wants to determine whether an action is right or wrong, one should look at what the code of conduct of one's culture says about the issue. This means, therefore, that what is good for someone is what his culture approves of and what is wrong is what his culture forbids.

There are reasons why relativists hold this position. In the first place, it is argued that there are no "culture neutral standards" whereby one can judge standards held by the different cultures. This means if someone condemns a moral standard held by another culture, it is because she is doing this from the perspective of her own culture, making her culture the yardstick for measuring the other culture. This, according to relativists is unacceptable. Therefore, relativists call for tolerance when we are confronted, especially with what we are not comfortable with, in other people's cultures.

On the other hand, relativists are of the opinion that since we learn morality from people within our societies from childhood, we need not go outside the confines of our culture to determine what is moral or immoral. In other words, relativists are of the view that other people also learnt about morality the way we did – that is from adults in their societies while growing up like us. In the light of this, then, it is posited that we cannot say that the other people's view of morality is better or more valid than the one we have been brought up with.

Lastly, relativists have argued that when we accept other people's beliefs about morality, it shows that we are displaying tolerance. This encouraged, however because it is believed that tolerance is a virtue needed to have peace that the world as a whole needs.

Normative ethical relativism, however, has some serious problems which question its being a good ethical theory. To start with, it is argued that since no society can exist in isolation, without interacting with other societies, certain practices of some cultures cannot be left unquestioned all because of tolerance. A good example of this is that of slave trade practiced by white men in earlier centuries.

In essence, it is argued against relativists that an objective standard that can successfully assess all cultures' moral standards is that a good moral standard must promote human well-being. And that more importantly, it must not be life-threatening or life-destroying. This means, therefore, that any moral standard that lacks the two qualities mentioned cannot be accepted as a good moral standard all because we want to show tolerance. For example, can practices like slave trade, suicide bombing, ritual killing and human trafficking ever be justified, all because we don't want to seem as if we are condemning other people's ways of life from the standpoint of our culture?

Finally, however, it is important to note that even the argument of those against relativism, stated in the previous paragraph, also has its own problems. What this means is that there are some moral issues that either way are neither life-threatening nor life-supportive, and still, different societies or cultures have different perspectives when it comes to such

issues. An example of this is polygamy. While some cultures see polygamy as moral, some other cultures see it as immoral. Nevertheless, polygamy in itself is neither harmful nor helpful, especially if the woman is not forced into the marriage. This shows, therefore, that when dealing with the issue of morality, we sometimes need to look beyond cultures to determine what is good or bad.

ITQ

Question

- What is normative relativism?

Feedback

- This is the strand of relativism that holds that in determining the moral value of an action, we have to look at what the ethical standard of one's society is.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we defined ethical relativism as the ethical position that holds that the correctness or otherwise of any moral standard does not go beyond the confines of the culture or society of those who hold such a standard. Relativists have put forward reasons why they hold this position and the most important of their reasons is that there is no culture-neutral standard to assess the different claims of the different cultures that we have. Relativism has, however, been criticized that what is good cannot be what destroys life. We also discussed the two strands of ethical relativism which are: descriptive and normative relativism.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 4.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 4.1 and 4.2)

Ethical relativism is an ethical theory that has two strands to it. Discuss.

Study Session 5

Ethical Absolutism

Introduction

In the previous Study Session, we discussed ethical relativism. In this Study Session, we will examine ethical absolutism, an opposite theory to ethical relativism. We will look at what ethical absolutism refers to and also examine some of the ethical theories which are examples of absolutism.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

5.1 *discuss* the claims of ethical absolutism.

5.2 *state* other ethical positions that are related to ethical absolutism.

5.1 Ethical Absolutism

When a thing is said to be **absolute**, it means such a thing is unquestionable, unequivocal, definite, unchangeable, rigid or final. Going by the word “absolute”, therefore, absolutism, which is the root word of the ethical idea that is our focus in this Study Session, is a position in ethics that holds that morality has certain rigid, unquestionable and unchangeable codes which are necessarily true whether or not people follow them.

While passing ethical judgements, we do not usually ask whether people are from our society or not before we praise or condemn their actions. In other words, it’s our general belief that morality is not culture or society-bound. We therefore, most of the times, view moral norms as applicable to all people everywhere and which cannot be changed depending on the issue at hand, the likely consequence of the action, and so on. This idea in ethics is referred to as ethical absolutism.

In most cases, deontological theories are absolutist theories, so also are certain religious moral rules. For example, Kant’s categorical imperative, which is an example of deontological theory, does not give room for exceptions when considering moral issues. Similarly, adherents of Christianity hold that it is always wrong to steal, irrespective of the purpose or the reason behind the act.

5.2 Ethical Positions in Relation Absolutism

Absolutism can be a form of another position in ethics, known as **ethical objectivism**. In this sense, correct moral standards are believed to be independent of people's beliefs, cultures, societies and periods of time. It is held that moral code has a life of its own and that this has nothing to do with whether or not people know and follow it.

***Ethical universalism** The idea in ethics which posits that the same moral code applies to all people everywhere*

On another note, ethical absolutism can also be a form of **ethical universalism**. Ethical universalism is an idea in ethics which posits that the same moral code applies to all people everywhere. It is argued that although different people sometimes follow different ethical codes, it is only those who follow the correct moral code that are right. Therefore those who follow some other ethical codes apart from the correct one are wrong. Universalists sometimes write as though such correct moral codes can be discovered, even though they don't always show us how to discover such correct moral code or codes. Meanwhile some of the positions in absolutism will, henceforth, be examined.

5.2.1 The Divine Command Theory of Morality

The Divine Command Theory holds that an action is right, if and only if, God commands it; and that an action is wrong if God forbids it. Therefore, the question of what is moral and what is immoral is a function of what asks us to do and what God commands us not to do. When God allows a thing, according to the Divine Command Theory, then such a thing or act is morally acceptable. In the same vein, when God commands a form of action or behaviour, such is regarded as being obligatory. Adherents of this position hold that God has the authority to determine what is morally acceptable and what is morally forbidden for us because we humans are his creatures and all that we live to enjoy come from him.

On the other hand, it is argued that since human beings have a component called the soul, he does not cease to exist after experiencing the bodily death. Man will therefore return to God after dying in this world and so, he will be rewarded if he has acted in obedience to God's commands, but will be punished, if he has acted against God's commands. Importantly, however, it is argued that God requires that his instructions be strictly adhered to, therefore, it is held that God's commands are absolute and so do not admit exceptions.

There are certain objections that can be raised against the claims of the Divine Command Theory of morality and these include:

Although, morality has to do with everyone as we have seen in the second lecture, yet it is evident that some people do not believe in God. In other words, there are atheists, who hold that God does not exist, and there are agnostics, who doubt that God exists. In a situation whereby we tie morality to God, how do we prove to such people that God actually exists, especially when we cannot see God?

Another objection to the Divine Command Theory is that it is difficult to know which religion has the authentic instructions of God. There are

many religions and they all claim to have the true commands of God. As observable from the different religions, what each religion upholds is sometimes contradictory with what another religion holds. To take the number of wives that a man is allowed to marry as an example, while Islam permits a man to marry up to four wives, Christianity does not allow a man to marry more than one wife. Meanwhile, each of these religions claim to emanate from God and to hold God's commands.

ITQ

Question

- Ethical objectivism is the ethical position that moral standards are independent of people's opinions, culture and time. True / false?

Feedback

- In fact, the position of ethical objectivism maintains that moral standards cannot be relative as our culture or period of existence does not matter.

Lastly, Socrates raised an important objection in the Plato's dialogue, *Euthyphro*. According to this objection, it can be asked whether those actions commanded by God are right simply because God commands them, or whether God commands them because they are right. If one affirms the first part of this dilemma, then a critic can argue that that means that God's commands are arbitrary and that this implies that even heinous acts like torture, rape and murder could be right if God commanded them. If one agrees, however, that God commands those actions because they are right, then a critic will argue that, in that case, we do not need God to discover which actions are right and which are wrong. Meanwhile, an answer to this objection is that although, those actions are right objectively, it however takes a super intelligence like God's to discover and command them.

5.2.2 The Natural Law Moral Theory

Natural Law Moral

Theory *The form of moral absolutist theory which holds that just like we have natural physical laws, we also have natural moral laws.*

The **Natural Law Moral Theory** is a form of moral absolutist theory which holds that just like we have natural physical laws, we also have natural moral laws. For example, it is a physical law of nature that whatever is thrown up, falls and comes down. Even this law of gravitation is known in Africa; which explains why ever before their contact with the West, Yoruba people have been saying "laala to lo s'oke, ile lo mbo" (meaning, however high a thing goes up, it will eventually come down). In essence, Natural Moral Law Theorists are of the view that there are natural moral laws, which apply to everyone, everywhere and those laws are immutable and incorrigible.

Epictetus, a member of a school of philosophy founded by Zeno around 300 B.C, is an important natural moral law theorist. He was a stoic who advocated a form of conformation to nature. He posited that just like we are

Thomas Aquinas is also another remarkable theorist who advocated that what is morally good is that which is natural. Aquinas was a philosopher in the medieval period of philosophy. He was a Church Father and a notable philosopher. According to Aquinas, there are natural moral laws and such laws are discoverable, and they are four in number. For him, these are:

- a) **Preservation of life.** According to Aquinas, any action whose purpose is to save or preserve life, rather than destroying it is a morally good action.
- b) **Marriage, Procreation and Family.** Any form of action or behaviour which promotes the institution of marriage and encourages giving birth to children is, in Aquinas view an action which is in agreement with the nature of man, and is also morally good.
- c) **Pursuits of Knowledge.** For Aquinas, the third natural moral law is that any action which is for the purpose of attaining knowledge cannot be morally wrong, especially if this is directed towards the knowledge of God.

5.2.3 Establishment and Maintenance of Good Social Order

Lastly, Aquinas holds that any action, whose aim is to bring about an orderly society, or to maintain order in society, is a morally good action.

For Aquinas, therefore, for a moral action to be right, it has to follow those natural moral laws, which he identified to be four in number. Any moral action which is, however, contrary to any of the natural moral laws is in Aquinas view, immoral. In other words, any action which promotes the natural good identified by Aquinas is, for him, right, while, any action that is destructive of them is wrong. It is on this basis that Aquinas condemns suicide.

Aquinas identifies actions with double effects. What this mean is that even Aquinas recognises that it is possible to destroy a form of good in an attempt to promote another good. He agrees to this, but cautions that this is permitted only on the ground that one does not do more than is actually necessary to protect the other good, and also on the ground that is not intentionally out to destroy the good. It is on this basis that killing in self defence is morally justified. It will be noted that Aquinas' idea is supposed to be a form of absolutism, however, the fact that he admits exceptions shows that he is not a thorough going absolutist.

A contemporary philosopher, John Finnis, is also an advocate of the natural law moral theory. However, instead of the four laws identified by Aquinas, Finnis identifies seven natural moral laws, which, according to him, are the basic forms of good. He gives his analysis of his version of the natural moral law theory in his book, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. The seven moral laws of Finnis are:

- i. Life
- ii. Knowledge
- iii. Play
- iv. Aesthetic experience

- v. Friendship
- vi. Practical reasonableness
- vii. Religion

5.2.4 Categorical Imperative of Immanuel Kant

Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative is a form of absolutist theory that posits that a form of action or a moral behaviour is right only if the maxim or principle that guides it could be willed by the moral agent to be universalised, without the agent being self-contradictory. What Kant implies by this is that a morally right action is not right because of some qualifications, consequences, or conditions attached to it. In his opinion, an action is, rather, right if it follows a maxim or guideline that conforms to duty.

On the final note, in addition to the various absolutists accounts examined, one problem that confronts an absolutist is that of how it is possible to discover such moral code. That is, whether there is a culture free or a period-neutral standard by which we can determine whether an ethical code is absolutely correct or absolutely wrong. Another problem with ethical absolutism is to ask ourselves whether we can sincerely overlook the consequences of our actions and follow rules blindly. For example, if a hired assassin asks a woman where her husband is, can it ever be appropriate for her to tell him the truth and get her husband killed? This is an example of questions that absolutists cannot afford to ignore. This is because either way, the woman is in a fix – it is either she lies or she ends up being an accomplice to murder. In other words, although moral relativism has some problems, moral absolutism also has certain problems with its claims as well.

ITQ

Question

- What is ethical universalism?

Feedback

- Ethical universalism is the ethical position that the same moral standards apply to everyone in every place.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we looked at an ethical position that is different from ethical relativism. Ethical absolutism, like we mentioned in the Study Session, is a position in ethics that holds that actions are either totally and always wrong or right. For ethical absolutism the rightness or wrongness of an action goes beyond the action itself. This accounts for the reason why a bad action can never be said to be good or acceptable simply because it is known to have a good consequence or effect. Also, according to ethical absolutism, the situation surrounding an action does not matter. Therefore, ethical absolutist theories usually follow rules to

determine the rightness or wrongness of moral actions.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 5.1 (tests Learning Outcome 5.1)

What is ethical absolutism all about?

SAQ5.2 (tests Learning Outcome 5.2)

Discuss two ethical positions that are related to ethical absolutism.

Study Session 6

Moral Responsibility and Determination

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will discuss the issue of moral responsibility. We will also examine the implications of the idea of determinism on moral responsibility.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 6.1 *explain* moral responsibility.
- 6.2 *explain* the word “Moral Excusability”.
- 6.3 *discuss* types of determinism.

6.1 Moral Responsibility

Sometimes, while making moral judgments, we are influenced or even compelled to judge one way or the other, based on our understanding of the circumstances surrounding the issue at hand. For example, we blame people for a misdeed, when we clearly understand that they could do otherwise. However on the other-hand, we overlook people’s faults, when we understand that they were compelled to do what they did, or that they were not totally in control of their choice at the time.

6.1.1 The Idea of Moral Responsibility

When a person is taken responsible for something, it means that the act was performed by the person, or that the person is answerable for the act. Generally, responsibility can be in two forms. These are **prospective responsibility** and **retrospective responsibility**.

Prospective responsibility involves things that are up to one to attend to or roles that one is expected to perform. Examples of prospective responsibility are the responsibilities of a mother towards her son or the responsibilities of a teacher towards his students. It is, therefore, obvious from the foregoing explanation, that moral responsibility is not a form of prospective responsibility.

Retrospective responsibility, on the other hand, is that which involves what we have done as well as the effects engendered by our actions, errors and oversights. This is the type of responsibility under which moral responsibility is. Responsibility is a very important concept to the whole idea of morality because of its important implications for accountability and punishment.

6.2 Moral Excusability

Moral Excusability *The idea that given certain conditions, people cannot be held responsible for wrong decisions or conduct. In other words, under certain circumstances, we tend to overlook holding people responsible for wrong moral actions*

Moral excusability refers to the idea that given certain conditions, people cannot be held responsible for wrong decisions or conduct. In other words, under certain circumstances, we tend to overlook holding people responsible for wrong moral actions. In another respect, moral excusability is a means of explaining a fault or an offence away, with the purpose of making people understand the reason why we did what we did wrong or the reason why we could not do the right thing expected of us.

Moral excusability is closely related to the issue of moral responsibility, and a look at it will enhance our understanding of moral responsibility. Reasons why people can be excused are four, according to some ethicists. These reasons include:

6.2.1 Ignorance of an Action's Consequences

It has been observed that the first reason why we excuse people when they do wrong is if they are not aware of the possible consequences of their moral actions. If people are not knowledgeable about the negative consequences which their actions are likely to bring about, we do not usually hold them responsible because we cannot expect them in such a circumstance to prevent such consequences that they are ignorant of. For example, in the past,

6.2.2 Presence of Constraints

On another note, we excuse people when we are aware of the fact that there were certain constraints which prevented them from doing the right thing. In case we know that people cannot help what they have done, we excuse them and do not hold them responsible for what they have done wrong. Constraints can be internal or external. External constraints are those restraints that come from outside forces or factors. For example, if a gateman leads assassins to his master's bedroom because the latter threaten to kill him if he refuses to do so, we might not blame the gateman for helping the assassins locate the master. However, if the gateman freely chooses to help his master's killers find him, then we cannot excuse his action.

Internal constraints, on the other hand, refer to a compulsion that comes from within a person, rather than from someone else. Such constraints are usually in forms of cravings, intense desires, obsessions and inclinations to do what is wrong. This shows that the person in question is helpless in the face of the control which compels her to do what she does. For example, if we know that someone is a pyromaniac we cannot hold the person responsible for setting a field on fire. This is because we have the understanding that although what compels the person comes from within, yet she cannot help the act or do otherwise. This is different from the case of someone who planned everything well before setting a place on fire

ITQ**Question**

Fill the blank spaces up with respective forms of responsibilities.

- I. _____ are those actions or role which one is expected to take up or perform.
- II. _____ involve the actions or effects of the actions which one has undertaken.

Feedback

- I. Prospective responsibilities
- II. Retrospective responsibilities

6.2.3 Presence of Uncontrollable Circumstances

Another reason for excusability in morality is that which involves events or circumstances that are beyond a person's control. We might not be justified in holding people responsible for a wrongdoing, if we are aware that the events leading to their action are beyond their control. An example is if someone is involved in an automobile accident, has been ill or is restrained by some unforeseen circumstances. For instance, if Ada is not able to pay her debt because robbers struck at her place the night before the day she promised to pay back the money. This, however, is different from a case of someone who deliberately refuses to pay back the money she owes as at when she promised to pay.

6.2.4 Absence of Alternatives

If we are aware of the fact that people do not have the opportunity, the skill or the ability to do the right thing, we usually excuse their wrong actions. Put differently, if we know that doing what we consider to be morally right requires certain special skills and abilities, which someone lacks, we cannot blame the person for her not doing the right thing. For example, if a sick child suddenly begins to convulse or faint, while only her younger sister is around, we might not be justified if we blame the girl for not reviving the sick sister. The obvious reason for the lack of justification for blaming the little girl is that she lacks the skill or the competence to revive the sister. This is, however, different from the case of a medical expert, who refuses to do anything to help the dying child.

6.3 Determinism and Morality

Determinism *Philosophical doctrine holding that every event, mental as well as physical, has a cause, and that, the cause being given, the event follows invariably.*

Determinism is an idea in philosophy, which holds that everything in the universe is controlled by causal laws or laws of nature. From this position, we can, therefore, infer that every event in the world can be predicted, if only one knows the prior conditions or the antecedents of such an event. Put differently, we can infer from the idea of determinism that every event including human cognition, decision and action are causally determined by certain universal laws. What this idea suggests is that human beings cannot but act in a particular way, or that they cannot

This theory denies the element of chance. It is opposed to indeterminism, which maintains that in phenomena of the human will, preceding events do not definitely determine subsequent ones.

decide to do other than what they have been conditioned to do.

This idea, however, has very serious implications for the idea of moral responsibility and moral agency in ethics. An implication of this view is that we are not justified in praising people for a laudable act, or condemning people for a wrong moral action, which they do. This is because when we hold people responsible either for a good action or a bad one, we do so from a general assumption that such an action emanated entirely from them. Moral responsibility can be seen to be incompatible with determinism. Many people believe that in the absence of the constraints that we have discussed, any other unclear reason behind a person's action cannot be reckoned with.

Determinists are of the idea, however, that our common belief in freewill is false and illusory. For ethical determinists, just like we are not in control of physical natural events like earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes and typhoons, we are not likewise in control when it comes to moral decisions and actions. They hold further that the fact that we do not always admit this fact emanates from our desire as humans to always want to believe we are in control of situations rather than being controlled.

In an attempt to consider moral responsibility in relation to determinism, three positions emerged to explain the likely relation between the two ideas. The three positions are: hard determinism, soft determinism and compatibilism.

6.3.1 Hard Determinism

Hard determinism

The view that everything in the universe is being controlled by certain natural laws and that this does not give room for a free choice of moral actions

Hard determinism is the view that everything in the universe is being controlled by certain natural laws and that this does not give room for a free choice of moral actions. According to hard determinists the reason why we think we are free to make choices is because we are ignorant; because we cannot predict what happens next, we think we can actually make things happen. For hard determinists, the fact that we think this way does not make it correct that we can really make things happen. If we can study nature more closely, we will understand how things work in nature and we will, thereby be able to make accurate predictions of events and moral actions.

Hard determinists explain that rather than choices emanating from our free will or volition, such things as our genetic inheritance and our society or environment compel us to act the way we do. For them, this line of reasoning is correct because there is no contrary evidence to disprove it.

Hard determinism as a position in ethics raises a number of problems. In the first place, hard determinism tolerates crimes, and this, to any right thinking person, is absurd. How can we say a robber, an assassin or a terrorist has done something wrong if we are aware of the fact that he has carried out the bidding of some natural laws which he cannot possibly disobey?

On the other hand, hard determinism, if true, shows that humans are not more intelligent than robots, automatons or animals. For example, consider this conversation:

You bastard, you left all the windows and doors of my house open and tipped off Jimmy Nightstick that I was away. Now all my stuff's been nicked!"

*"That sounds like **moral determinism** to me. Do you believe that Jimmy Nightstick is not an autonomous moral agent, but a mere automaton whose actions are the inevitable, unconscious consequences of mine? Well, if you think he's such an idiot I suggest you tell him so - here he comes now. By the way, I told him you shagged his wife."*

6.3.2 Soft Determinism

Soft determinism is the opposite of hard determinism. Soft determinism agrees with hard determinism that events in nature are causally determined by certain laws of nature which make it extremely difficult for things to happen other than they have happened, or other than they have been determined to happen, its claims are, however different from hard determinism's in that it holds that humans are not included in this determinism. It is of the view that although all other things in nature are affected by the natural causal laws, humans are, however, an exception to the rigid causation that takes place in nature.

This means that for an adherent of soft determinism, humans are entirely responsible for their moral actions, as they are not in any way affected by the causation in nature. In other words, when, as humans, we are confronted with a good action and a bad action, the freedom to choose to do either of the two reside entirely with us, and therefore, whatever we choose to do is a product of our freewill.

6.3.3 Compatibilism

***Compatibilism** seeks to reconcile determinism with freedom and moral responsibility.*

While both hard determinism and soft determinism deny any form of harmony between determinism and freewill, compatibilism holds a possibility of this. Advocates of **compatibilism** seek to reconcile determinism with freedom and moral responsibility. According to compatibilism, it is a fact that people are predetermined to act in a particular way, howbeit by their individual personal character, but that it is also a fact that people are free to act without the presence of any external physical restraints. In this sense, according to compatibilism, people are both free and determined; and therefore, both determinism and moral responsibility are correct.

In this way, going by the view of compatibilism, every action is caused by our desires, expectations, ambitions, habits and desires, rather than some external factors outside of us. Hence, it is believed that compatibilism is an improvement on hard determinism, which denies responsibility and also an improvement on soft determinism, which denies that actions are caused.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we focused on responsibility and determinations. We stated that the issue of moral responsibility is the issue of whether we can be justified in praising or blaming someone for a moral action is interconnected with the idea of whether or not the person freely chose to act the way she has acted. The foregoing is the basic concern of moral responsibility and determinism. We said that excusability as a concept in moral responsibility holds that given certain constraints, we cannot hold people responsible for wrongdoings. Hard determinism, soft determinism and compatibilism, which are the different forms of determinism, hold different ideas about the relation of determinism to moral responsibility.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 6.1 (tests Learning Outcome 6.1)

What do you understand by moral responsibility?

SAQ 6.2 (tests Learning Outcome 6.2)

On what conditions would an individual be excused of moral culpability of an action he commits?

SAQ 6.3 (tests Learning Outcome 6.3)

Differentiate between hard determinism, soft determinism, and compatibilism.

Study Session 7

Ethical Utilitarianism

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will take a look at an important consequentialist theory, ethical utilitarianism. We will the types of ethical utilitarianism.



Learning Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

- 7.1 discuss ethical utilitarianisms
- 7.2 identify types of ethical utilitarianism

7.1 Ethical Utilitarianism

Hint

Ethical and political doctrine known as utilitarianism was formulated by the British philosopher Jeremy Bentham toward the end of the 18th century and later expounded by the British philosopher James Mill and his son, John Stuart Mill. In his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789), Bentham explained the principle of utility as a means of augmenting the happiness of the community. He believed that all human actions are motivated by a desire to obtain pleasure and avoid pain. Because utilitarianism is a universal hedonism, not an egoistic hedonism like Epicureanism, its highest good is the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

Utilitarianism is a consequential ethical theory which sees morality in terms of the number of people affected by a course of action. This moral theory posits that the moral status of an action is measurable by the amount of non-moral consequences it brings about for those it affects. In other words, utilitarianism holds that only such actions which promote human greatest well-being are morally good and should be pursued by people. In essence, ethical utilitarianism advocates that moral agents should be neutral when considering the consequences that an action is likely to bring about. In this sense, therefore, what make an action right is its effects or consequences on the overall number of people, it affects or which it will affect, rather than the effects on the moral agent or some other persons, considered alone.

The idea of seeing moral rightness in terms utility has been viewed in different ways by different philosophers. Hence, the question of what is the utility or the favourable consequence that a good action is expected to have has been answered by utilitarian, alluding to the likes of pleasure,

happiness, knowledge, self-realisation, beauty and so on.

Bentham and Mill are hedonists who hold that what makes an action morally right is if it has a greater balance of pleasure over pain. According to Bentham, pain and pleasure are the two “sovereign masters” that nature has placed men under. They are as a result, the measurements for good and bad moral actions.

One important challenge that utilitarian have faced has been the issue of the yardstick which can be used in measuring utility. In response to this challenge, Bentham formulated the **hedonistic calculus**, a means whereby utility or pleasure and pain can be measured. In addition to the hedonistic calculus of Bentham, Mill also added the notions of quality and quantity to the assessment of pleasure and pain.

7.1.1 The Hedonistic Calculus

Jeremy Bentham identified seven criteria traditionally known as the hedonistic calculus. The hedonistic calculus is used in measuring or calculating pleasure and pain, in order to determine whether pleasure outweighs pain or not in which case the outcome says whether or not the action is morally right or wrong. The criteria include:

Intensity

This criterion deals with a view on how powerful or deep the pleasure that an action is likely to generate is. To this extent therefore, whether an action is morally or wrong is a function of whether the pleasure is more intense than the pain or the pain is more intense than the pleasure, which the action generates or is likely to generate.

Duration

This condition for measuring utility is that which holds that in determining the moral status of an action, in relation to the pleasure or pain it generates, we should consider the period of time in which the pleasure will be enjoyed or which the pain will be borne. In other words, whether the action is morally right will then be known as a result of looking at the period of time involved.

Certainty

This refers to an instance whereby it is considered important to examine the dependability of the pleasure that an action which is considered to be morally good is expected to bring about. Put differently, then, if the favourable outcome of an action, in the form of pleasure is certain then, the action is morally right but is wrong, if the other way round.

Propinquity

Propinquity is the condition which states that whether an action is morally right or wrong has to do with the how near or how remote the pleasure is. As a result, if the pleasure that an action is likely to bring about is near, then it is a good moral action, but is bad if the pleasure is remote.

Fecundity

This particular condition in the hedonistic calculus is that which maintains that for an action to be considered as being morally good, then its consequence in the form of pleasure must be such as is able to generate further pleasures. Put succinctly, a good moral action is whose favourable consequence is likely to produce more pleasurable occurrences.

Purity

In this sense, it is held that a morally good action must be that whose consequence in the form of pleasure is undiluted. This means that such pleasure must not be the kind that is mixed with some pain.

Extent

On the final note, Bentham avers that for an action to be considered morally good, then the scope or degree of the pleasure that the action generates or is likely to generate must be considered.

Apart from Bentham and Mill, some other recent advocates of utilitarianism include David Hume, Henry Sidgwick, R. M. Hare, Peter Singer and Hastings Rashdall. There are three main types of utilitarianism. These are: **act utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism and general utilitarianism.**

ITQ**Question**

- How will you describe hedonistic calculus?

Feedback

- It is a means through which we can measure utility and pain of an action. This means was developed by Jeremy Bentham.

7.2 Types of Ethical Utilitarianism

7.2.1 Act Utilitarianism

Act utilitarianism

The type of utilitarianism which holds that whenever we are faced with a moral decision, we should consider the moral action at hand in relation to the consequences it is likely to bring about

Act Utilitarianism is the type of utilitarianism which holds that whenever we are faced with a moral decision, we should consider the moral action at hand in relation to the consequences it is likely to bring about. In other words, **Act Utilitarianism** avers that all that we need in determining whether an action can be deemed morally good or not is to determine whether the action in particular, and the moment in time will generate a greater balance of good over evil. If the answer is in the affirmative, then the action is morally good, but if this is not the case, then the action is morally bad.

For example, going by act utilitarianism, in case Alheri wants to decide whether it is morally right to abort an unwanted pregnancy, all she has to do is to ask herself what the consequences is likely to be, that is, how it is likely to affect all the people concerned. In this case, for example, Alheri might have to consider the likely consequences in relation to herself, the foetus, the man who impregnated her, and so on. If she realises that the likely consequences of the abortion will bring about more good than evil for more of the people involved, then according to Act Utilitarianism, abortion is morally right for Alheri to go for.

Criticisms of Act Utilitarianism

Although, one important thing about Act Utilitarianism is that it acknowledges that every act is unique and distinctive and so it gives room for flexibility according to the demands of the issue at hand, yet Act utilitarianism is beset by a number of problems. The problems include:

1. It does not help in making quick decisions. There are times that we are faced with moral issues that need to be urgently responded to. At such times, the kind of time that we need to put into calculating the likely consequences of the particular action is not always available.
2. Also we bring children up by giving them rules concerning what to do or not to do, and concerning the type of individuals that we expect them to be. Act Utilitarianism is on this note not relevant to children as they generally lack the skills needed to do all the considerations for each action per time.
3. Another problem with Act Utilitarianism is that it loses sight of the fact the entire consequences of an action are not always immediately evident. Going back to the example of Alheri cited earlier, part of the short term consequences might be that if she aborts the pregnancy, she will be free to go back to school in order to complete her degree programme. However, a remote or long-term consequence might be that if anything should go wrong, she might not be able to become pregnant again in the future after getting married. In other words, one important problem with Act Utilitarianism is that since humans are not omniscient, it is difficult to know all the consequences of an action.
4. Lastly, on the criticisms of Act Utilitarianism, there is a serious problem of sincerity involved. This means that there are times that people, in spite of seeing beforehand that an action is likely to benefit just a few numbers of people; they still go ahead with it. The question to ask ourselves is that in the absence of rules, can people be trusted to be reliably objective enough to do what will not benefit them, but which will benefit a greater number of people?

7.2.2 Rule Utilitarianism

Rule utilitarianism holds that instead of calculating

In an attempt to remedy the shortcomings of Act Utilitarianism, utilitarian identified another type of utilitarianism. **Rule utilitarianism** holds that instead of calculating the good and evils that are likely to result from each

the good and evils that are likely to result from each particular moral action, we should rather appeal to rules that are likely to bring more good than evil, each time we need to make a moral decision

particular moral action, we should rather appeal to rules that are likely to bring more good than evil, each time we need to make a moral decision. In other words, rule utilitarianism is of the view that whenever we need to make moral decision, we only need to do so based on certain general rules which have overtime been known to help us in doing what always brings more good than evil to the generality of all affected by such actions.

This type of utilitarianism is better than act utilitarianism in that it is easier in teaching morality to children. Put differently, children who cannot calculate the likely outcomes of each moral action can easily remember rules earlier given them by adults with regard to making moral decisions. On the other hand, it saves time because it is easy to remember a rule like “thou shall not kill”, while it is not particularly easy to calculate the likely consequences of an action each time we urgently need to make a moral decision. Nevertheless, in spite of its strong points, especially in comparison to act utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism also has a number of faults which include:

- Rules that do not admit exceptions do not always have good consequences. If a moral rule does not give room for exceptions, there are times that the rigidity of such a rule will bring about an undesirable effect. Consider for example, if a woman should be aware of a rule that “thou shall not lie”, and she is thrown into a dilemma in which case she has to choose between lying and saving her husband’s life when an assassin asks her whether her husband is at home. Issues like the example cited do not always occur. However, it is very true they happen at one time or the other and it is obvious from our analysis of rule utilitarianism that it overlooks such issues with weighty consequences.
- Rules are made from our observation of actual individual occurrences. Rules do not just emerge. More often than not, when we make rules like “Do not commit adultery”, it is because of the ill consequences of individual cases of adultery that we have seen in the past. In this case therefore, we cannot really say that rule utilitarianism is successfully immune from all the problems that act utilitarianism has. In the same vein, if our formulation of moral rules is based on what we have observed in the past, there is no assurance that future occurrences will never negate or will always conform to what past occurrences suggest. This idea is strongly believed by Yoruba people who have a saying that “B’oni se ri ola le ma ri bee ni mu babalawo d’ifa oro-orun” (this means: tomorrow might not be like today, and that is why a priest inquire from *ifa* deity every five days).

7.2.3 General Utilitarianism

General Utilitarianism

The type of utilitarianism which posits that instead

General utilitarianism is the type of utilitarianism which posits that instead of calculating the likely outcomes of each moral action, or looking for a rule whose consequences with regard to each action will be

of calculating the likely outcomes of each moral action, or looking for a rule whose consequences with regard to each action will be favourable, we should rather look at what the consequences will be like if everyone acts one way or the other in relation to the issue at hand

favourable, we should rather look at what the consequences will be like if everyone acts one way or the other in relation to the issue at hand. This means that for a general utilitarian, what to consider when dealing with a moral issue is whether the consequences will be good or bad if everyone should decide to carry out or refrain from carrying the action out. However, the problem still persists that how are we to know what the consequences will be if everyone should do a particular thing, when in actuality, everyone has not and cannot do they said action.

ITQ

Question

- How does J. S. Mill measure utility and pain?

Feedback

- Mill introduced the notion of quality and quantity as a means of measuring pain and utility.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we considered the ethical theory known as ethical utilitarianism. Generally, utilitarianism is a consequential ethical theory which lays emphasis on the outcome of a moral action in determining the moral status of such action. Specifically meanwhile, we looked at act utilitarianism which holds that the consequences of each action is what needs to be considered before the action can be said to be good or bad. Also, we examined rule utilitarianism which purports that rules whose consequences produce more good than evil should be applied to in making moral decisions. Lastly, we looked at general utilitarianism as the last of the types of utilitarianism examined.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 7.1 (tests Learning Outcomes 7.1 and 7.2)

Discuss the different types of utilitarianism that you have learnt in this study session.

Study Session 8

Psychological Egoism and Moral Egoism

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will examine the various types of consequentialist theories which are: psychological egoism and moral egoism.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

8.1 discuss the following types of consequentialist theory

- ethical egoism; and
- psychological egoism.

8.1. Types of Consequentialist Theory.

8.1.1 Psychological Egoism

Psychological egoism is the argument that has often been used as a basis for the ethical theory of egoism. Adherents of this position hold that we are so constituted or naturally made up to see our personal interests over and above the other people's interests. The argument, therefore, is believed to follow from human nature. Psychological egoism is of the view that whatever we do, we do it because of the value or the advantages that it holds for us, or which we hope to derive from it.

In fact, it is argued that no matter how much benefit other people are likely to derive from an action, the moral agent cannot do it unless she stands to gain one thing or the other from its outcome. Some adherents of this idea even posit that it is absolutely impossible for someone to do something for other people if he does not have anything whatsoever to derive as benefit from it.

It is usual to object to this line of reasoning by citing various acts of kindness, which we have seen or heard about at one time or the other. For example, we might have heard of an instance whereby a man jumped into a house on fire just to save a child whose parents he hardly knew. We are likely to point out that can anybody have anything to gain from such an act of pure benevolence?

Furthermore, we might point out that when someone gives a beggar she's not likely to meet again in her lifetime money, can such ever emanate from self-interest? Or in the case of a philanthropist, who gives food and

clothing to refugees and the destitute, how can the have-nots that she's helping ever repay her for her generosity?

In response to these instances that seem to disprove the claims of psychological egoism, a psychological egoist usually appeals to intention. In other words, a psychological egoist usually points out that whether a not an action emanates from self-love or self interest is a function of the aim of the person who performs the action. He often argues further that at the basis of some seemingly altruistic acts are personal gains that the doer of the action hopes to get. For example, it is pointed out that people render help, most of the times because of the following reasons, and other reasons like them.

It is argued that a reason might be that the person wants to be helped too, if he, in the future, has a similar problem or has to face a similar situation. Also, it is pointed out that some help in order to be rewarded by God or a deity that they are devoted to. In addition, it is contended that some help the needy in order to be respected by many people and in order to be known as a good person. Another reason given is that someone might help someone else in a bid to satisfy her conscience or to have peace in her heart.

For a psychological egoist, these reasons, which we have mentioned, and other reasons like them, constitute the reasons why people actually help or perform the so-called benevolent acts. Put differently, a psychological egoist might agree that it is true that we do things for people or render help to them. However, her contention is that our aim is really to be happy or satisfied and that we have only used the help as a means of getting our aim.

If that is the case, therefore, goes the argument, people cannot really be said to be capable of being truly altruistic. In other words, a psychological egoist is of the view that if the world is actually the way she has described it, then it will be both unrealistic and unreasonable not to pursue their self-interests. This, therefore, is the basis that psychological egoists have found for ethical egoism.

Thomas Hobbes is an outstanding psychological egoist. He posits in his theory that right from the pre-civil society period when humans were still in the natural state called the state of nature, people had been selfish, and that all they pursued was what would benefit them alone. Hobbes holds further that even in spite of forming a civil society; they must be put in checks, and their conducts regulated by a very powerful sovereign, because of their selfish nature.

Criticisms of Psychological Egoism

An objection to psychological egoism can be raised in relation to its being used as the basis for ethical egoism. In this instance, the idea is self-contradictory. What this means is that if something is natural for someone, it is not reasonable to ask the fellow be or do that thing again. For example, it is natural for bats to hold tree branches with their feet and turn their heads down. In the light of this, it is what the animal does without waiting to be told to do so. In the same vein, it is not plausible to

prescribe that people should do what is in their self interest, if it is true that it is actually in the nature to be incapable of doing otherwise.

Another problem with the descriptive idea of psychological egoism is that what it appeals to in a bid to prove its point, which is intention, is not as observable as it portrays it. Intentions are private experiences. Therefore if intention is used to prove a point, it cannot be seen or measured, and as a result, the issue at hand cannot be proved or disproved. Such inconclusive evidence, therefore, is not helpful to lay a controversial issue to rest.

ITQ

Question

- Who among the following is an example of an outstanding psychological egoist?
 - a) J. S. Mill
 - b) Jeremy Bentham
 - c) Thomas Hobbes
 - d) Aristotle

Feedback

- The right option in this question is not options A and B. J. S. Mill and Bentham are utilitarians and not egoist while Aristotle also does not qualify as an egoist. The right option is Thomas Hobbes with his theorization on the nature of man in the state of nature.

8.1.2 Ethical Egoism

Ethical egoism is a consequentialist normative theory that holds that the moral status of an action is to be determined by its outcome in relation to the moral agent. Going by the foregoing, therefore, it is held that a morally good action is what generates a greater balance of good over evil for the moral agent.

Ethical egoism *The consequentialist normative theory that holds that the moral status of an action is to be determined by its outcome in relation to the moral agent*

As a result, if a moral agent wants to judge the moral status of an action, she must consider whether the action is likely to bring about a greater balance of good over evil for her. If that is the case, then the action is a good action, but if this is not the case, then the action is considered a morally bad action, according to **ethical egoism**. On the other hand, if someone is called upon to judge a moral action or adjudicate between two people having a moral conflict, ethical egoism holds that the person called upon to pass the moral judgment must do so having, as a matter of priority, his interest in focus.

It might be asked an ethical egoist whether what she means is that it is wrong to help other people. For an ethical egoist, this is not wrong in itself, as long as its long term effect will eventually be in the interest of the moral agent.

Talking about the interests of a moral agent, egoists do not seem to agree on what these interests are in particular. For an egoist who is also a hedonist, the interest that should be sought is **pleasure**. For another

egoist, however, this interest is **happiness**. In another egoist's view the interest that should be sought is **power**. For another, it is in the interest of a moral agent to seek **knowledge**. On the final note, however, for some ethical egoists, the moral agent's self interest to be sought is **self-realisation**.

Criticisms of Ethical Egoism

Ethical egoism, as laudable as it seems, poses a number of problems. In the first place, the problem of conflict of interests comes up. This means if everyone is encouraged to pursue him/herself interests, even at the expense of other people's interests, then there will constantly be clashes of interests. For example, if it is in the interest of a lender to collect twice as much as the original sum from a borrower; and it is also in the interest of a borrower to repay half as much as the original sum, or not even repay at all, how can our lives be free of constant conflicts and unending chaos? This rule is found to be in operation mostly among animals, as humans, however, can we hope to live meaningfully if we live by this rule.

In another respect, if one goes by the idea of ethical egoism on giving moral counsel, one is bound to give conflicting and inconsistent counsel to different people seeking counsel on the same moral issue. For example, if two children should come to an adult to ask her how they should handle a moral problem, if the adult should go by the principle of ethical egoism, then the children will definitely be more confused than before seeking the counsel. To illustrate this point, let us take a look at the following hypothesis:

Tayo: Uncle, please I need your advice. I borrowed some money from

Bitrus. Although, I promised to repay and I have some money with which I can pay, I just realised that I will not be able to buy some things which I so much love to buy, if I give him the money.

Uncle: Your duties and obligations are first to yourself, do what is in your best interest.

Bitrus: Uncle, I lent Tayo some money but I want to collect the money before the time that he promised to repay.

Uncle: Your duties and obligations are first to yourself, do what is in your best interest.

If one considers the advice of Uncle to Tayo and Bitrus, one will see the inconsistencies involved, if the two should follow the advice of the uncle. The implication of the advice is that Tayo is morally obliged to do all he can to evade the repayment, and Bitrus is equally morally required to collect the money before the date earlier agreed on by the two.

The third objection to the theory of ethical egoism is that, the other side of it in relation to giving moral judgments shows that it weakens the ideal or the appropriate moral point of view. What this implies is that if one goes by the idea of ethical egoism that a moral judge should look out for her own interest, rather than the interest of the moral agents, then it becomes obvious that the whole essence of moral judgement becomes ineffective. The reason for this is that moral judgement requires that an

ideal observer or judge be objective and impartial. In an instance, however, when a judge cannot keep this simple requirement of moral judgment, her activities become meaningless.

Lastly, ethical egoism as a moral theory frustrates the purpose of morality. One of the cardinal purposes of morality is to achieve peace and order in the society. Since a society is made up of more than one individual, morality presupposes that each person sacrifices a little of her interests in order to have a peaceful and orderly society. This is, however, contrary to the theory of ethical egoism. This shows, therefore, that ethical egoism is not in line with a very important reason for morality.

ITQ

Question

- For the ethical egoist, man should do that which satisfies his interests. What are these interests?

Feedback

- There are variant positions on what these interests are. Some opine that the interest that should be sought is happiness; for some, it is power; for some, it is pleasure; for some others, the interests that should be sought is knowledge; while some others, it is self-realization.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed psychological egoism and moral egoism. We stated that psychological egoism is a descriptive theory, which claims that humans have been observed to behave in a particular way. According to psychological egoism, human beings are naturally selfish and self-seeking. Ethical egoism, on the other hand, is a theory that prescribes how human beings should behave. According to ethical egoism, an action is morally good if it brings about a greater balance of good over evil for the moral agent, but an action is morally bad if it does not generate this positive result for the moral agent. An objection which critics have raised against the two theories is that it is self contradictory to infer that people should always seek their self interest from the premise that people naturally seek their self interest.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 8.1 (tests Learning Outcome 8.1)

Differentiate between psychological egoism and ethical egoism.

Study Session 9

Feminist Ethics

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will take a look at the differences in relations that gave rise to the various feminist movements and ideologies. We will also examine the idea of feminist ethics.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

9.1 *discuss* feminism.

9.2 *explain* the feminist moral theory.

9.1 The Concept of Feminism

Feminism

The commitment to eliminating the subordination of women

Feminism can be an ideology or a form of socio-political or socio-economic movement. Also, **feminism** has recently been seen as a very difficult concept to define because of the various, and often, very different strands of theories and ideologies that are displayed as feminism. However, in spite of these differences, Alison Jaggar has defined feminism as a commitment to eliminating the subordination of women. This commitment to showing, contending and discussing the fact that women are not inferior to men is, in Jaggar's view, what unifies the diverse strands of feminist theories.

Feminism began as a movement when it was observed that women were been put through certain unpleasant experiences, which mostly stemmed from the fact that women were regarded as being only a little bit better, or even in some extreme cases not better off, than non-human animals. These have been observed from the way women have been treated down the history.

For example, in some cultures, women are not allowed to own property. Therefore if a woman has any property at all, it belongs to either her father or her husband. Also, in some countries, women are not allowed to vote or hold public offices. Another example is that some cultures allow men to marry as many women as they like, but a woman is not permitted to marry more than one man at the same time.

In the same vein, in some societies, women earn much less than men for similar jobs that they do, in spite of the fact that she is not usually being paid for the domestic works that she does. Also, in a culture, when a

woman gets married, she is believed to have married the entire family and so even a year old child in the family is believed to be older than the woman, and therefore, she required to honour and respects the child the same way she honours and respect her husband. As a result, also, when her husband dies, she is asked to marry a younger brother to the dead husband, who might not even care about her. Finally, the height of this issue is observable in the *sutteeism* practiced by some people of Indian origin whereby, a woman is burnt or cremated with her dead husband.

All these and many other ways whereby women have suffered gave rise to some feminism movements, whose main objectives were to fight for equal treatments of men and women. Today, however, much of feminism is being done by scholars and this has given rise to various types of feminism. For example, we have liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, lesbian feminism and libertarian feminism, among others.

Apart from dividing up to several stands, feminism and feminist ideologies have also influenced many branches of human knowledge in no small way. In most cases, the approach of feminists has been critical of the way most of the disciplines have been going about their activities. Ethics has been one of such ideas, which has been affected by the emergence of feminism.

ITQ

Question

- Define feminism.

Feedback

- It is a reaction to the continued subordination and subjugation of the feminine folk. Feminism aims at eliminating this subordination that cuts across most, if not all cultures and religion.

9.2 The Feminist Moral Theory

Before Carol Gilligan's seminal work, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, in 1982, feminists (for example, Mary Wollstonecraft) had been working vigorously to argue that there is basically no fundamental difference between a man and a woman. Gilligan's work, however, altered the trend of the discussion as she tried to prove that there are actually some differences between men and women, as she discovered through her research as a psychologist. Feminist ethics is an outcome of this idea of male and female being different in the ways they approach moral issues.

Gilligan made use of two children as her research subjects. She gave them different moral problems and discovered that they responded differently. Her reason for using children was to discover the natural way either of the sexes would handle issues, before they conditioned to think or react in a particular way by society.

Gilligan gave the research subjects a thought experiment in which a man's wife is said to be sick and the man not having money to buy drugs for his dying wife. The city pharmacist, however, had the drugs that could cure the sick woman but was neither willing to give the man nor willing to sell on credit. Gilligan asked whether it would be appropriate for the man to steal the drugs. In the responses of her research subjects, she noted that the boy appealed to rules, while the girl displayed a kind of involvement of feelings and emotions. Also, it was noted that significantly, the male took the approach of justice, while the female took the approach of care.

The idea of the differences between the ways in which men and women approach moral issues have been examined from two different perspectives. From the research of Gilligan, it is obvious that her argument rests on the assumption that this difference is a natural one. However, another perspective views this difference as that which men have imposed on women. This line of thought states that because men have confined women to the home front and, thereby, forced domestic duties, otherwise called the private spheres, on them, women have developed a pattern of thought in accordance with this. It is explained further that men, on the other hand, designed the public sphere for themselves and have also, consequently, developed their thought and language in that direction.

Nevertheless, it is pointed out that while masculine ways of moral reasoning culturally emphasise rules, universality, justice, independence and impartiality, feminine ways of moral reasoning culturally emphasise relationships, particularity, empathy, care, interdependence and partiality. Going back, therefore, to Gilligan's story, the female will not just appeal to universal and impartial rules like: "Do no steal", "Save your wife's life", and so on. Rather, she will consider, among other things, how the man might feel if he helplessly watch his wife die. At the same time, it will interest her to consider how the pharmacist is likely to feel if his drugs are stolen. Also, she will deem it relevant to consider how the woman, after being cured, is likely to feel, if she discovers that her husband stole, as well as many other questions like these.

The feminist, Alison Jaggar, has contended that Western Traditional Ethics fails considerably because of the following shortcomings:

- It shows little concern for women's as opposed to men's interests and rights.
- It dismisses as morally uninteresting the problems that arise in so-called private world, the realm in which women cook, clean and care for the young, the old and the sick.
- It suggests that on the average, women are not as morally developed as men.
- It overvalues culturally masculine traits like independence, autonomy, separation, mind, reason, culture, transcendence, war, and death, and undervalues culturally feminine traits like interdependence, community, connection, body, emotion, nature, immanence, peace, and life.

Based on the foregoing reasons, Jaggar condemns traditional ethics, and advocates that feminist ethics is a better ethical theory in that it emphasises all the important points that traditional ethics overlooks.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we focussed on feminist ethics. We noted that feminism emerged from the milieu of the various oppressive experiences and the various forms of maltreatment that women have suffered in the history of man. We also examined the theory of feminism.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ 9.1 (tests Learning Outcome 9.1)

What is feminism?

SAQ 9.2 (tests Learning Outcome 9.2)

Discuss the feminist ethical theory.

Study Session 10

Importance of Ethics to Good Social Relations and Good Governance

Introduction

In this Study Session, we will examine another very important practical aspect of ethics which will take a look at the significance of ethics as a subject to everyday concerns of people as interpersonal relations, governance and leadership, and even the economy of a country.

Learning Outcomes



Outcomes

When you have studied this session, you should be able to:

10.1 *highlight* the practical usefulness of ethics and *discuss* the significance of ethics to human social existence.

10.1 Practical Usefulness of Ethics

There is a somewhat general belief that philosophy is an abstract discipline that has very little relevance, if any, for real life experiences. Ethics, however, is an aspect of philosophy that is not affected by this viewpoint. This is because ethics, as we have said earlier in previous Study Session, immensely deals with a lot of real life issues. This accounts for the reason why this Study Session focuses on such immensely practical aspects of human existence as social relations, as well as governance, leadership and the economy.

10.1.1 Ethics and Good Social Relations

Human beings cannot but interact since they live together in societies. The interactions make it necessary that they be guided by certain codes that can ensure harmony among persons in society. Such codes that do not necessarily require enforcement and sanctions are embedded in ethics. Ethics, in addition to definitions given earlier, can also be defined as a system of moral values or guidelines for behaviours. This means then that ethics cannot be overlooked when it comes to the kind of behaviour expected or needed for society to properly function.

Going back to normative ethical theories, it will be observed that most of the ethical theories discussed focus, in one way or the other, on the idea

of putting other people into consideration when deciding on the course of action to take, when faced with amoral decision. Utilitarianism, for instance, advocates that the general wellbeing of all concerned be considered when choosing a moral action. In the same vein, when there are different opinions about what is right or wrong in a particular situation, ethics helps to arrive at what is objectively or actually right when the philosophical tool of critical analysis is employed in screening the options at hand.

There cannot but be tension, strife and conflict in the society, unless the value of right relation or putting other people into consideration before embarking on, or in the course of carrying out a moral action, is inculcated into people in any society. Right relation, however, requires that relationships be based on the principles of trust, respect for people and their beliefs, safety, tolerance, mutuality of power, and protection of those who are weak or vulnerable.

The purpose of the ethic of good social relation is to have a society that is peaceful, and that which encourages progress among those in society and safety of their lives and properties. However, we cannot have this type of society unless we are able to imbibe as well as inculcate in other people, the ethical values mentioned above. In essence, it is important for us to note that ethics is a vital ingredient that cannot be ignored if we want to have good social relations in society.

ITQ

Question

- What is the aim of the ethics of good social relations?

Feedback

- The aim is to build a peaceful society and ensure progress as well as the safety of the citizens and their properties.

10.1.2 Ethics and Good Governance

Good Governance

A system of leadership that practices positive and admirable moral values

Good governance refers to a system of leadership that practices positive and admirable moral values. In other words, before we can say a country has good governance, those managing or controlling the affairs of such a country must be persons of positive moral values and must also be such as are producing results. The reason why the type of people in charge of a country's political affair matters a lot is because there cannot be any meaningful achievement unless these people champion the process of bringing progress about.

However, one serious obstacle to development in any country is corruption. In Nigeria, for example, corruption manifests in the following forms:

- 1) Nepotism (popularly referred to as “man-knows-man” within the society Nigerian society).
- 2) Denial of required services.
- 3) Taking and giving bribes, especially before contracts are awarded or services rendered.

- 4) Abuse of office in its various forms.
- 5) Poor time keeping.
- 6) Misappropriation of public funds by those in control of the rein of power.
- 7) Electoral malpractice.

In order to overcome these obstacles to development, however, it is important to implant moral values in our political system in Nigeria. Among the most needed ethical values are accountability, integrity, transparency in handling public issues, honesty (both on the part of those in government and on the part of the citizens in their relations to issues about governance), responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the citizens, and the freedom to choose leaders that people want through the instrument of free and fair periodic elections.

An adequate consideration of the moral values mentioned above stress the importance of ethics in the issue of good governance, as well as maintaining a corruption free society. Ethics, therefore, is a condition for having good governance in any society.

Study Session Summary



Summary

In this Study Session, we discussed the significance of ethics to good social relations and good governance. We pointed out, for instance, that corrupt practices like bribery, misappropriation of public funds, electoral misconduct and so on, are obstacles to good governance and sustainable development. We identified some moral values and ideals as a way out of the problems associated with corruption, as well as other problems that make good governance difficult. These values include integrity, accountability, transparency, and so on.

Assessment



Assessment

SAQ10.1 (tests Learning Outcome 10.1)

How relevant is ethics to good social relations and good governance?

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Notes on Self Assessment Questions (SAQs)

SAQ 1.1

In attempting this question, you are not just expected to give the definition of what ethics and stop there. No! You are expected to go further than that.

You are expected to recognize the fact that we, as humans, cannot live on our own in this world. In fact, it is important that we live in a society. What then happens if you live in a society? It means that you would have to relate with people and that would mean that there would be need to have rules. Imagine if you were the only one in the world, the idea of morality will not come in. In this light, it is common for you to hear statements such as, 'what you did was wrong', 'you have no moral right to do that', 'That was an immoral act', etc. All these expressions point to the fact that morality plays a major role in our living together as humans. It also should make you realize that we do only make evaluation of moral situations but we also pass moral judgments on moral situations.

You can then go ahead to define what ethics. In your definition of ethics, we would expect to take into consideration the fact that ethics involves a critical, thorough, and systematic evaluation or assessment of the moral values of our society. In other words, the concern of ethics is morality.

SAQ 1.2

When attempting a question as this, you are expected to discuss the position of each of the philosophers on ethics. The philosophers in this case are Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle.

As you have learnt in this study session, Socrates was the teacher of Plato and was personality that Plato used in his dialogues (or have you forgotten that you were told that Socrates did not have any writings of his own but it was Plato who used him in his writings. As a result, it is difficult to say which is Plato's idea and which is Socrates'. This nevertheless, you learnt that both believe that there is a close link between virtue and knowledge. The claim 'Virtue is knowledge' is traceable to them. By this they are saying that a man will only engage in a vice because he is ignorant. It is important that we point out here that knowledge here refers to self-knowledge or self-awareness. This is why Socrates said, 'Man, know thyself' and that 'An unexamined life is not worth living'. In other words, we need to search ourselves deep to come to that level of self-knowledge. When we attain this self-knowledge, for the two of them, we cannot engage in vices. Plato further holds that a life of virtue brings about happiness.

You may decide to criticize the position of the duo by raising fears about whether it is always the case that people commit vices out of ignorance. Are there no times that people are self-aware and yet engage in vices.

On his own part, Aristotle, a student of Plato, agrees with Plato that virtue leads to happiness but Aristotle goes a step further to say that this happiness is an end in itself and not a means to another end. How then does one become a man of virtue. For Aristotle, that lies in the golden mean – choosing the mean between the two extremes of emotions which are bad. For example, Aristotle holds that generosity (giving out money in the right proportion and for the right purpose) is a golden mean between two extremes, miserliness (not giving out money at all) and extravagance (giving out money anyhow). This mean, is not the same in all situations as you have to find it out yourself in that moral situation. You can also add that Aristotle believes that although man has the innate ability to be virtuous, it is his constant practice of choosing the golden mean that makes him virtuous.

SAQ 2.1

Let me ask you this question: Have you ever considered what a moral issue is? I know a smile just dropped off your mouth because you have rarely given it a thought. Anyway, from what you have learnt from this study session, you can point out at least four points that makes an issue a moral issue. You can even illustrate these points through the use of a case study.

The first point is that a moral issue raises different perspectives and this is because people hold different beliefs.

The second point is that a moral issue generates a special kind of feeling such as feelings of condemnation, praise, shame, etc. these feelings are due to the religious disposition, knowledge-base, etc. of each person.

The third point is that what makes an issue a moral issue is the fact that such issues affect other people. This is not unconnected to the fact that we live with people in the society and so our actions affect others as well.

Fourthly, these actions do not just affect others but also helps or hurts these people as well. This could be both physical as well as emotional.

SAQ 2.2

From what you have learnt in this study session, you can give different reasons to explain why you act morally and I believe the following will suffice in your reasons.

The first is the Divine Command Reason. This is the claim that you act morally because God has commanded that you should act morally. So, engaging in vices is tantamount to going against what God has said. You can criticize this position as you would have to prove the existence of God for you to validate your claim in this regard. This is because if you cannot prove that there is a God, then the argument of the Divine Command is faulted.

Another reason which is common is that you act morally because you have been trained to believe that if you act virtuously, good things will come to you and if you engage in vices, bad things will come to you. This position can also be criticized because we have seen instances where good people suffer and bad people live well. You can counter this criticism that the compensation may take time but it would surely come.

You can also hold that another reason why you act morally is because it is in the mutual interests of the society. When we act morally, it benefits us as well because our society is the better for it and we can live peacefully and meaningfully too.

You can also give the Immanuel Kant position that morality is right reason. What this means is that we should act morally if we want morality to retain its meaning. If we continue acting immorally, morality will eventually lose its sense and meaning and the implication will be terrible for all of us humans.

SAQ 3.1

As you have learnt in this study session, ethics can be divided into three broad branches which are metaethics, normative ethics, and descriptive ethics.

In your discussion of metaethics, you must take into consideration the fact that metaethics refers to that branch of ethics that is not concerned about setting a standard or an 'ought' condition. Rather, metaethics is concerned with understanding ethical properties, statements, origin and judgments or standards. Metaethics does not reach a conclusion on a moral issue but rather analyzes such issue.

In discussing normative ethics, you must point out that normative ethics is concerned about the 'ought' position. In other words, normative ethics sets a standard which is expected to be meant. Different theories are thrown up in setting these standards. All these ethical theories derive from the three approaches that normative ethics employ. These three approaches include the teleological or consequentialist theories, deontological theories, and virtue ethics.

The teleological or consequentialist theories hold that the rightness or wrongness of an action will depend on the consequences of such an action. You will do well by using case studies in your explanation of this approach. Examples of consequentialist theories are ethical utilitarianism and ethical egoism. You are expected to discuss what each of these theories cited entails.

The deontological theories hold that an action is either right or wrong in itself. They do not subscribe to looking up to the consequences of an action in determining its rightness or wrongness. Deontological theories appeal to rules, duties, obligations, or logical consistency in determining the moral value of an action. Examples of deontological theories are the divine command theory and Kant's categorical imperative. You are expected to explain what each of these theories you mentioned as example entails.

Virtue ethics is an approach in normative ethics where emphasis is placed on the moral status of the moral agent in determining the moral value of an action. This is traceable to Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*.

The third branch of ethics that we would expect you to discuss is applied ethics. It involves the examination of the moral status of practical social issues. It entails the application of the ethical theories in normative ethics to the analyses of these social issues. Some of the issues involved

in applied ethics include bioethics, gender ethics, sexual ethics, business ethics, and environmental ethics.

SAQ 4.1

Have you ever wondered why you feel dazed when you hear that a man offers his wife to his guest as entertainment? Have you even questioned the rationality of such an action? These differences in the positions of our cultures explain the focus of ethical relativism and should guide you when answering this question.

Ethical relativism is an ethical position that the rightness or wrongness of a moral standard will and can only be determined based on what the society or culture. In other words, you cannot condemn a man who gives his wife out as entertainment to his guest. The fact that your own culture considers it disgusting does not make it wrong in other climes. So to judge that action, we must make recourse to the culture that exhibits such. There are two strands to ethical relativism.

The first strand is descriptive relativism. What this strand is saying is that indeed there are variances in our societal and cultural practices which come to play in whatever our societies hold as their ethical codes or standards. Given the example that was cited earlier, you cannot condemn such an action just on the ground that it does not conform to the ethical standards of your people. Another example is situations in some cultures where when a guest is served a meal, he is expected to finish the food and even lick the dish or calabash with his tongue as this is a sign that he enjoyed the meal. An action as this considered gluttony in some other cultures. What is of importance in this regard is the meaning that each culture attaches to these cultural practices. Among the Koma people who offer their wives as entertainment, it is a sign that the guest is welcome as well as an indication that the host hides nothing from the guest and so shares his priceless jewel.

Normative relativism is the second strand. It holds that for one to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action, one must look within by assessing what one's culture says about such practices. Hence, it is the culture that guides us in determining what is right and what is wrong. Normative relativists give three grounds for their position. The first is that allowing for the position of others from other cultural background is an indication of cultural tolerance which is a necessary tool for co-existence and development. Two, they hold that there are no universal standards that we can use to judge other people's cultures. There are no culture neutral standards and so our assessment of other people's culture will be biased and will reflect our own perspective. The third point is that our training allows that certain values which are a product of our society to be instilled in us. From cradle till we mature, what we are told and trained with creates for us a box from which we judge others. Hence, we cannot have an objective analysis of the values of other cultures.

SAQ 5.1

From what you have studied in this session, we would expect that your definition of ethical absolutism will cover the fact it is an ethical position that morality is imbued with certain codes or standards which are true and do not change or falter whether or not people follow them. Most

deontological theories are absolutist in nature and examples are the divine command theory and the Kantian Categorical imperative.

SAQ 5.2

In the course of this study session, three of such theories that are related to ethical absolutism are discussed. So, I am sure you are discussing any two of divine command theory, natural law theory, and the Kantian Categorical Imperative. So which two would you like to pick. We would be picking the divine command theory and the Kantian Categorical Imperative.

The divine command theory is the ethical position that the rightness or wrongness of an action is a function of what God says. In other words, if God forbids an action, then it is morally wrong and He allows it, it is morally right. The strength of this argument lies in the claim that man is expected to do the will of the creator since he is a creature of that creator and he is meant to abide by all the creator sets. Similarly, since man has a soul, this soul will go and give reckoning after the man dies and so man should save his soul from damnation by doing the will of the creator.

You are expected to point out the problems that are evident in this ethical position. Chief among these problems is the question of whether there is a God anywhere. Even if there is a God, what happens to those who do not believe in the existence of the God/ will they also be bound by the dictates of this God?

Another problem is the question of which religion has the valid position on God given the fact that there is a multiplicity of religion with each claiming to be the best of others. Another problem is that raised by Socrates that are these commands right because God raised them or that God raised them because they are right.

The second version of ethical absolutism to be discusses is Kant's Categorical Imperative. This categorical imperative can be divided into two which are the Universal Law Application and the Respect for persons. What Immanuel Kant is saying with these positions is that an action is only right if and only if the moral agent can desire that the maxim guiding his action be universalized without him becoming self-contradictory. For example, if I want to steal, Kant would ask that I first make stealing a universal law – that everyone in the world is allowed to steal. Without doubt, I would not want someone to steal from me, hence, that rule has become self-contradictory and so it will be deemed by Kant to be morally wrong.

SAQ 6.1

When a teacher punishes a student for what the student did or aided in doing, why do you think the teacher punishes such a student? It is because the teacher believes that the student is answerable for that action in question. This is where moral responsibility comes in. Moral responsibility is a form of retrospective responsibility. That is, it is a responsibility for an action that has been performed. Moral responsibility refers to that situation in which the moral agent is held accountable or answerable for an action carried out. You will do well by giving examples to buttress your point.

SAQ 6.2

What this question raises is for you to identify the conditions under which someone will not be held responsible for an action he committed or aided. In that wise, whatever the answer you supply, we believe the following should be among:

- i. when the person is ignorant of the consequences of his action. It is possible that someone will carry out an action with another consequence in mind while what will turn out will be different;
- ii. when the person is faced with constraints. Such constraints may be internal or external.
- iii. When the person in question is left with no alternative in that instance. For instance, a person who cannot swim suddenly discovers that someone is drowning in his pool and there is no one around nor a means of reaching for help. You will not expect him to jump in the pool.
- iv. When the person faces uncontrollable circumstances. For example, I cannot hold you for infidelity (not keeping your promise) if you took ill a day before you were meant to fulfill that promise.

SAQ 6.3

This question concerns the realm of freewill and determinism. This idea is that if we do not have a hand in how things will happen, if regardless of our efforts what will be will be, then it will be out of place to hold us responsible for our actions. This is because our actions are determined by someone other than us. This is where hard determinism, soft determinism, and compatibilism come in.

Hard determinism is the position that all events in the world have been determined to happen by the activities of some natural forces. Thus, we cannot make things happen and we do not even qualify to be referred to as moral agents because we lack that freewill to make choices. In fact, when we are making choices, we chose what we chose because these forces have decided that that is what we will choose. The implication of this is that we cannot be held morally responsible since none of our actions is a product of our freewill. Unfortunately, this promotes vices as all you need to do is to say that forces have determined that that is what you will do.

Soft determinism is a little bit different from hard determinism. Soft determinism agrees with hard determinism that events in nature have been determined to happen the way they happen. However, soft determinism holds that humans do not fall within this realm of being determined. For them, humans have their freewill to choose their actions and are not caused in any way to act the way they act.

Compatibilism, on its own, tries to create a harmony between freewill and determinism. Compatibilism holds that while it is not deniable that people are predetermined to act the way they act, it is also not deniable that man has the ability to make a choice which also puts responsibility for his actions on him.

SAQ 7.1

What are the types of utilitarianism you learnt in this study session? How many did you mention? Yes! They are three and they are Act Utilitarianism, Rule Utilitarianism and General utilitarianism. I hope you still remember what each entails and how they vary from one another. Good! But before you go into talking about the types of utilitarianism, it is important you tell us what you understand by utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is the ethical principle that holds that the rightness of an action is measured based on whether it gives more happiness than pain or it affects the highest number of person positively than those it affects otherwise. In measuring this level of happiness above pain, we can use the standards of the hedonistic calculus which includes intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, and essence. The major proponents of this theory are Jeremy Bentham and W.D. Ross.

Act utilitarianism says that when we are faced with a moral dilemma, we should consider the moral action at hand in relation to the consequences that the action may possibly bring. So for that action I want to carry out, if its consequences will favour the highest good, then I can go ahead with it because such is morally good and if otherwise, it is morally bad. Act utilitarianism has been criticized on various grounds.

The first is that it is not applicable in real life. Most times when we are faced with a moral dilemma, we have to make quick decisions and so do not have that luxury of time to be assessing what the consequences of our action will turn out. Another criticism against the idea of act utilitarianism is that it is not applicable to children. This is because when we raise children, we raise them by giving them rules and so the notion of act utilitarianism will not come up as regards children. A third criticism against act utilitarianism is that it is not always the case that it is the consequence that we envisage that eventually turns out to be the actual consequence. In other words, it is possible for me to think that the consequence of my action will be A while it turns out to be B. a fourth criticism against the notion of act of utilitarianism is that there is the problem of sincerity. For instance, people know what the consequence of their action will be and yet go ahead with such.

On its own, rule utilitarianism says that we should not bother about thinking of what the consequences of our action will be but rather we should subscribe to the rule that is likely to produce more good above evil. In other words, the likelihood of the rule producing more good than evil would be the determinant for the action we would undertake. Just like act utilitarianism, rule utilitarianism is not without its criticism.

One major criticism against rule utilitarianism is that it is rigid and rules that are rigid rarely have good consequences. Rule utilitarianism does not allow for exceptions and in the light of that, it does not create room for situations where the rule will have to be bent. Another criticism of rule utilitarianism is that it does not escape itself from the criticisms that act utilitarianism is affected by. You know that rules are built from our observations in particular situations and so the rules will reflect the faults in act utilitarianism.

The third type of utilitarianism is the General utilitarianism. General utilitarianism holds that what we should consider is not what act

utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism suggests. For the general utilitarian, an action will be morally right if and only if it will be pleasant that everyone begins to engage in it and an action will be morally wrong if it will not be pleasant that everyone begins to engage in it. In other words, the consequences of an action were everyone to begin to do it will determine the moral value of the action.

SAQ 8.1

Psychological egoism is a position that has been held by people to prove the fact that men humans naturally are self-seeking. It is the position that it is quite natural for humans to seek that which will satisfy their own interest. What this means is that in all that I or you do, you and I will always seek to satisfy our own interests first. I am sure you are nodding your head in agreement. This position is what has been taken to be what leads us to the idea of ethical egoism. One question however readily comes to mind – how would you now regard the actions of philanthropists or people who love to help people? Those who are in support of psychological egoism will react to this question by saying that even philanthropists do what they do because they expect something in return or because of something. It may be because God mandated them to do so or that they are expecting blessings for doing that, or because it makes them feel good, or because they love the accolades they get, or because they have ambitions in the future, etc. This will thus show that self-interest is central to man's considerations on his actions.

Ethical egoism on its own is the ethical position that we must always seek or do that which satisfies our self-interests. Hence, for the ethical egoist, an action will be morally right if it holds more good above evil for the moral agent while an action will be morally wrong if such an action holds more evil for the moral agent. In other words, the moral value of an action will be a function of the range of benefits which the moral agent has to get. So if the benefits are less compared to the pain or liabilities, such an action is morally wrong and if the benefits that the action holds are more, such an action is morally right.

SAQ 9.1

Defining feminism will be a little bit problematic because there are many other ideologies that lay claim to feminism just as there are many strands or varieties of it. Feminism is an ideology or a socio-economic or socio-political position. Whichever way it is construed, feminism can be described as an effort towards removing the subordination of women within the society. There is no doubting the fact that our societies are male chauvinistic (they place men on a higher level than women). In fact, our religions are not anyway better because of the way women are treated. The place of women in religion is always marginal. History too has not been fair on women. Now think of examples from your society (both past and present) and religion to buttress this point.

Feminism is thus a reaction to the social relegation and subordination that women are made to face within the society.

SAQ 9.2

In attempting this question, we would expect you to bring to bear those things that you learnt in the second section of this study session. We would expect you to make reference to names such as Carol Gilligan, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Alison Jagar as well as the ideas that each of these feminist personalities represented.

If you take a sample of all the ethical theories that we have looked at or mentioned so far in the course of this course, you will discover that they are universal in nature (they believe that these theories are applicable in all places, in all situations, and at all times) and make appeal to justice and independence. These theories fall within the realm of what we call traditional ethics and it is the rigid position of traditional ethics that Alison Jagar criticizes. For her, feminist ethics is preferable to traditional ethics because it takes into consideration the peculiarity of each situation and condition. Her position builds from the seminal work of Carol Gilligan.

It must be mentioned that prior to Gilligan, feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft have been engaging in researches showing that there is actually no difference between the male folk and the female folk and so there is no basis for the social discrimination between them. Interestingly, Gilligan's work brought a new perspective to this discourse as she established through her research that there is actually a difference between the way men and women think. She proved this using a boy and a girl. Gilligan's choice of children is due to the fact that she believed that young kids have not yet been affected by the orientation of the society and so their thought will still be natural.

Gilligan posed a situation before the young lads – a man's wife is lying critically ill in the hospital and this sickness might resort to death. The man has been told to go to the pharmacist who has the drug which the woman needs but unfortunately the man does not have money to buy the drug and here the pharmacist too is not ready to sell the drug on credit. Would it be right for the man to steal the drugs?

In the response of the lads, the boy made recourse to rules and was rigid in his judgment but the girl put a lot of things into consideration – how would the man feel if his wife dies as a result of his inability to get her the drugs, how would the pharmacist feel if he finds out that the drug has been stolen, how would the wife feel when she, after getting well, feels when she discovers that her husband had stolen the drugs. This surely sets it that women are not rigid in their moral evaluation compared to men.

SAQ 10.1

This question is all about applying all that you have learnt in this course as well as PHI 103 (Philosophy of Value) to the practical happenings of life around you. Hence, what we expect you to do is to apply all the theories to the question of good social relations and good governance. If we may quickly ask – why do we even need ethics? Do you still remember what you learnt in Study Session 2?

You would agree with me that moral codes, unlike substantive laws are not enforceable. However, they still play a role in regulating human behavior. They help promoting peace and tranquility in our societies. In fact, all the theories that you have learnt in this course are targeted at

regulating human behavior with a view to promoting harmony and co-operation in our society. We expect you to use at least two of the theories that you have learnt in this course as a reference point. Whatever theories you may use, you will find out that by regulating our behavior, we would definitely have no choice than to live in peace with other people around us, thereby promoting and ensuring good social relations.

Ethics also has its fundamental roles to play in ensuring good governance. You will agree with us that good governance can only come when each person that finds himself at the corridor of power put other people into consideration before carrying out any action. This is what ethics enjoins us to do. We expect you to cite at least two ethical theories and relate how they can be of help in ensuring good governance or how they advocate good governance. Whatever theories you are using, you will agree that ethics condemns such acts as greed which is always a fundamental enemy of good governance. Ethics makes us take other people into consideration in all that we want to do.

Therefore, by promoting good social relations, ethics is also promoting good governance. After all, do you view bad leaders well? So, ethics advocates good governance as well.

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