

Contemporary Moral Problems (*chapter 1*)

by
Ma. Louise A. Lim

DLS-College of Saint Benilde

Book Review for IT-ETHIC



This work is licensed under a

[Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Philippines License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/philippines/).

Preface

This book is a compilation of my reflections, learning and discussions of the issues which concerns Contemporary Moral Problems.

Table of Contents

Contemporary Moral Problems (Chapter 1)

i.	James Rachels: Egoism and Moral Scepticism.....	4
ii.	John Arthur: Religion, Morality, and Consequence.....	5
iii.	Friedrich Nietzsche: Master and Slave Morality.....	6
iv.	Mary Midgley: Trying Out One's New Sword.....	7
v.	John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism.....	8
vi.	James Rachels: The Debate over Utilitarianism.....	9
vii.	Immanuel Kant: The categorical Imperative.....	10
viii.	Aristotle: Happiness and Virtue.....	11
ix.	Feinberg: The nature and value of rights.....	12
x.	Ronald Dworkin: Taking Rights Seriously.....	13
xi.	Annette Baier: The Need for More than Justice.....	14
xii.	John Rawls: A Theory of Justice.....	15

Egoism and Moral Scepticism

What I expect to learn:

1. Understand what psychological egoism is.
2. Understand what ethical egoism is.
3. Be able to distinguish the difference between the two.

Quote:

“Clearly, if either of these views is correct, then the moral institution of life is very different than what we normally think. The majority of mankind is grossly deceived about what is, or ought to be, the case, where morals are concerned.”

Review:

Let us first define the meanings of psychological egoism and ethical egoism. What is psychological egoism? According to Glaucon, psychological egoism is the view that all men are selfish in everything that they do and that the only motive from which anyone ever acts is self-interest. On the other hand, ethical egoism is defined as a normative view about how men ought to act. It says that regardless of how men do in fact behave, they have no obligation to do anything except what is in their own interests. In this chapter it has also discussed about the arguments on the skeptical views. In my own understanding, most of our acts are motivated by our self-interest. In other words we tend to become selfish because most of the time we do certain acts or things because we want to. We often base it on our self-interests. If we think first about the benefits we are going to have before doing an action then this is one sign of a selfish act. We become selfish if we want to do things that are only for our own benefit and do not care on other people’s feelings. In contrast to that, if we do things that are against our own wills wherein someone else would benefit from it then this action is considered to be an unselfish act. From this chapter I have realized that every decision we make is based on our own preferences, selfishly or unselfishly.

What I have learned:

- Every decision we make is based on our own preferences.
- I have understood the concept of psychological egoism.
- I have understood the concept of ethical egoism.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is the difference between psychological and ethical egoism?
2. What was the legend of Gyges all about?
3. What makes a person’s actions selfish?
4. What makes a person’s actions unselfish?
5. What are the arguments on the skeptical views?

Religion, Morality, and Consequences

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand John Arthur's concept on Religion.
2. To understand John Arthur's concept on Morality.
3. To understand John Arthur's concept on Consequence.

Quote:

"Morality, then, is influenced by religion, but morality's social character extends deeper."

Review:

In John Arthur's point of view, morality does not depend on religion. There are some questions we need to first ask ourselves. Where do we base our actions? What influences the way we think over certain things? It is not true that without religious motivation people will not do good things. I agree that morality does not depend on religious beliefs. How do we know that we have a moral code? Well according to this chapter a person would know his or her moral code by evaluating the behavior of others and to feel guilt at certain actions when he or she performs them. Not everyone believes to only one God, there are various religions that different people worship to. Although we have different religions, our morality is not affected by it. We do not base our actions on our religious beliefs. We base them on our principles, our values. Religion serves as a guide on what are the right things to do and it only guides us to prevent from doing something that is not good. Morality is social.

What I have learned:

- Morality is not dependent on religion.
- We do not base our actions on religious beliefs.
- Religion is not necessary for moral motivation.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is morality?
2. Does morality need religion?
3. What motivates a person?
4. How is morality and religion different?
5. What is Arthur trying to point out?

Master and Slave Morality

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand Friedrich Nietzsche's concept.
2. To know what Master Morality is.
3. To know what Slave Morality is.

Quote:

"The noble type of man separates from himself the beings in whom the opposites of this exalted, proud disposition displays itself: he despises them."

Review:

Let us first identify the difference between a master and a slave morality. What is master morality? According to Friedrich Nietzsche, master morality is that which emphasizes power, strength, egoism and freedom. In other words master morality are the ones who rule the others and has the power to be on top. What is slave morality? As defined by Nietzsche, slave morality is which that calls for weakness, submission, sympathy and love. In my understanding, slave morality is the one that is being dictated by the people in higher positions. According to Nietzsche, a person can only be either a master or the slave. In this chapter I learned that there can never be only one morality in this world. If that is the case then there is a great possibility that we will encounter a lot of chaos and rivalries among those who desire to have the highest rank or the greatest power. There should always be a leader and follower.

What I have learned:

- Master morality is the leader.
- Slave morality is the follower.
- There should always be either a master or a slave morality.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is Master Morality?
2. What is Slave Morality?
3. How can one be noble?
4. What is the concept of Friedrich Nietzsche?
5. Describe a noble type of man.

Trying Out One's New Sword

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand Mary Midgley's concept on Moral Isolationism.
2. To know what makes moral isolationism immoral.
3. To understand how important it is to consider a basis before we make judgments.

Quote:

“Isolating barriers simply cannot arise here. If we accept something as a serious moral truth about one culture, we can't refuse to apply it – in however different an outward form – to other cultures as well, wherever circumstances admit it.”

Review:

In this chapter Mary Midgley discussed what moral isolationism is. Based on her definition, moral isolationism is a culture view that we cannot criticize especially if we do not understand it very well. He used the older Japanese culture as an example wherein one tries out a new samurai sword on a chance wayfarer. For her, moral isolationism is the same as immoralism because it forbids any moral reasoning.

Most of the time we often criticize on certain things without really knowing the real story behind it. We often judge the people based on what we think we see. I think that Mary Midgley is right on what she is trying to point out. We must not immediately judge a person or a situation in looking in only one perspective. We may find other cultures very different from our beliefs but that is just a normal way of thinking. Before we get to judge something we should learn to see things not just from where we stand but from different perspectives as well.

What I have learned:

- We should not criticize cultures which we do not understand.
- We must not judge other people easily.
- Moral Isolationism is also an act of immoralism.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is Moral Isolationism?
2. Why does Moral Isolationism become immoral?
3. Why should we have basis before we judge on to something?
4. Why is there a need to consider the different perspectives and beliefs of cultures?

Utilitarianism

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand Mill's concept of Utilitarianism.
2. To know how one can achieve happiness.
3. To be able to see where can one find his happiness.

Quote:

"The end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined, the rules precepts for human conduct, by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible."

Review:

John Stuart Mill discussed his view on the concept of Utilitarianism. According to him, Utilitarianism is that which accepts the foundation of morals, utility and the greatest happiness principle. We should make sure that our actions are in right proportion as we tend to promote happiness. Happiness is something we get in return if we do what we think is right. Happiness is a satisfaction that can be gotten from either a thing or one's actions. In his view, a person should be the one to pursue his or her own happiness. Everything we do should result to our own satisfaction. Our happiness. Mill's view on utilitarianism is to be able to attain pure happiness. I think that it is important to know how to attain happiness through our own efforts.

What I have learned:

- Being happy is also being satisfied.
- I learned that it is important to be happy.
- Happiness is not seen, it is felt.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is utilitarianism?
2. Why does a person needs to be happy?
3. What makes a person happy?
4. What is the principle of happiness?
5. What is John Stuart Mill trying to point out to us?

The Debate over Utilitarianism

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand James Rachels' concept.
2. To have knowledge on the argument on utilitarianism.
3. To understand what utilitarianism really is.

Quote:

“Right actions, it says, are the ones that produce the most good. The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable as means to that end.”

Review:

James Rachels discussed classical utilitarianism and its three propositions and these are the actions that is to be judged in virtue of the consequence, assessing consequences and calculating the happiness or unhappiness that will be caused. In this chapter Rachels did an argument whether how utilitarian is right in saying that we should consider the consequences of our actions while incorrect in ignoring other important moral considerations such as merit.

I think everyone desires to have his or her own happiness. Who does not want to be happy? Who would choose sadness over happiness? Of course most of us would prefer to be happy than to be sad.

What I have learned:

- Happiness gives a big impact on our lives.
- I have learned why Rachels made an argument over Utilitarianism.
- I learned that three proportions of utilitarianism.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is utilitarianism?
2. How can one achieve happiness?
3. Why does happiness matters to us?
4. What is James Rachel trying to point out?
5. Does happiness have consequences?

The Categorical Imperative

What I expect to learn:

1. To learn the definition of motive of duty.
2. To know what is good will.
3. To understand the concept of Immanuel Kant.

Quote:

"A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes--because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end; it is good through its willing alone--that is, good in itself."

Review:

In this chapter it talked about how a person performs an action of good will. Each one of us may have different gifts of nature such as courage, intelligence, wit, judgment and many more. It depends upon us on how we make use of these gifts we possess. According to Kant, the gifts of nature can also be extremely bad and hurtful when the will of our actions are not good. We should be thankful of all the gifts of fortune that God has blessed us with. We should use it in a good way, for the benefit of each one of us. With this not only that we will feel happy but to others as well. How do we show good will? It is said that a good will is not good because of what it affects or accomplishes--because of its fitness for attaining some proposed end. It is good through its willing alone. Most of the times whenever we do or decide over certain things we always consider the outcome or the results afterwards. According to Kant this action does not show a good will but rather it is an action of selfishness. A good will is something that comes from the will itself and not thinking about what is going to happen after. A good will is an action wherein one finds an inner pleasure in spreading happiness around them and can take delight in the contentment of others as their own work.

What I have learned:

- A good will is not always good, it depends on the willingness of the person who does it.
- Our actions should be based on how we treat humanity.
- We must not focus on the results of our actions.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is good will?
2. How do we show good will?
3. What are the qualifications of a good will?
4. What is the motive of duty?
5. How does the motive become good or bad?

Happiness and Virtue

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand Aristotle's concept on Happiness and Virtue.
2. To know where can one get happiness.
3. To know how happiness and virtue relates with each other.

Quote:

"Human beings seek happiness, and that happiness is not pleasure, honor, or wealth, but an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue."

Review:

According to Aristotle there are three prominent types of life and these are enjoyment life, political life and contemplative life. The goodness of a person is sometimes measured in his honors and successes. Some says that having virtue is better than being honored. I think most of us are probably seeking to the goodness of life. We pursue our happiness in our own ways. What are the things that make us happy anyway? It may be from our families, friends, wealth and through us. Happiness is desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else. In this chapter, it identified what causes happiness to us. Some identify happiness with virtue, some with practical wisdom, others with a kind of philosophic wisdom; some is accompanied by pleasure or without pleasure while for others it may be with external prosperity. Every one of us can have happiness in many ways. It does not matter on where happiness is coming from. What matters is that we become happy. For Aristotle happiness is the best, noblest, and the most pleasant thing in the world. It depends upon us on how we want to pursue happiness and make the most out of it.

What I have learned:

- One should pursue his/her own happiness.
- Happiness does not depend on the wealth, happiness comes from within.
- Happiness is desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is happiness?
2. How is happiness and virtue related to each other?
3. What makes a person happy?
4. What can one have virtue?
5. What is Aristotle saying about happiness?

The Nature and Value of Rights

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand the concept of Joel Feinberg on the nature and value of rights.
2. To understand what human right is.
3. To know the consequences if there is no rights for every one.

Quote:

"To claim that one has rights is to make it in such a manner as to demand or insist that they be recognized."

Review:

Joel Feinberg talked about the nature and value of rights. He said that rights are morally important and each and every one of us should have our rights. Human rights are the basic rights and freedom to which all humans are entitled. The "doctrine of the logical correlativity of rights and duties" say that first, all duties entail other people's rights and second, all rights entail other people's duties. He used Nowheresville as an example. In this place they lack rights, if they did something wrong no one is accountable to anyone else and no one has the right to complain about it. It is our right to have rights. In this way we will become fair on the way we treat other people. We will be obliged to follow the rules and regulations in order to avoid problems and chaos to arise. It is just right that whoever breaks the law should face a consequence and make up for what he or she did. The law will be a guide on how we are supposed to treat other people.

What I have learned:

- Every human being has the right to have rights.
- It is very important that everywhere we go there should be human rights.
- Rights are morally important.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is Human Right?
2. Why is human rights morally important?
3. How can one have his or her own rights?
4. What will be the consequences if there is human rights?
5. What is Joel Feinberg trying to say about the nature and value of rights?

References:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights

Taking Rights Seriously

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand Ronald Dworkin's concept on rights.
2. To understand the government's perspective on rights.
3. To know how to take rights seriously.

Quote:

"There is a clear difference whether saying that someone has a right to do something in this sense and saying that it is the right thing for him to do, or that he does no wrong in doing it."

Review:

When I read this chapter, the first statement that Ronald Dworkin said is that if people has the right to do something, then it is wrong to interfere with them. I think what he means is that we are responsible for our own actions. Basically as human being we need to have equal rights and no one should interfere with it. Dworkin discussed how the government sees the rights of each and everyone of us and issue concerning whether citizens have some moral rights against their government. An example would be the issues with regards to the freedom of speech. We all know that everyone has their right to express themselves and speak out their minds. But in some cases, the government itself is the one that tries to stop and prevents the people from saying things against them or things that could do harm on them. In this particular situation, the question is that what happened to our freedom of speech? Don't we have the right voice out ourselves? Does the government has the right to zip our mouths? In Ronald Dworkin's point of view, it is wrong. Dworkin is trying to point out that when we try to interfere on the rights of other people then it is considered as breaking of one's rights.

What I have learned:

- I learned that we must not interfere on the rights of other people.
- I learned that we should respect other people's rights.
- I learned that we should take rights seriously.

Integrative Questions:

1. Give examples of the rights that our legal system recognizes?
2. What is the concept of Ronald Dworkin?
3. How do we take rights seriously?
4. What have you learned from Dworkin's concept on rights?
5. What do you think of human rights?

A Theory of Justice

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand John Rawls' concept on theory of justice.
2. To know Rawls' idea of a justice.
3. To understand the importance of having justice.

Quote:

"A theory of justice depends upon a theory of society in ways that will become evident as we proceed. All social values are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage."

Review:

According to John Rawls, there are two principles of justice. The first principle involves equal basic liberties and the second principle concerns the arrangement of social and economic inequalities. The first one is that each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others. The second one is that social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both reasonably expected to be to everyone's advantage, and be attached to positions and offices open to all.

What I have learned:

- I learned the two principle of justice.
- I learned that justice is necessary for moral righteousness.
- I learned that our social values plays an important role in our personality.

Integrative Questions:

1. What are the two principles of justice?
2. What is John Rawls trying to point out?
3. Why is justice necessary to us?
4. Explain the first principle of justice.
5. Explain the second principle of justice.

The Need for More Than Justice

What I expect to learn:

1. To understand Annette Baier's concept.
2. To have an idea of what justice could do.
3. To know why Baier thinks there is a need for more to justice.

Quote:

"Autonomy and justice is the same tradition that provided justifications of the oppression of those whom the primary right-holders depended on to do the sort of work they themselves preferred not to do."

Review:

I think what Annette Baier is trying to point out in this chapter is that to have justice is not enough for moral rightness but rather it still seeks for more. According to Baier, moral maturity is important because one can show respect for fellow persons. He used the women as an example on the issues that they can possibly be involved in. As much as possible in order to avoid chaos from arising then I think we should learn to value one's right and learn to respect. In this way there will be respect with one another. The rights of the people are all equal which means that we must not violate each others rights. We must learn to value and respect it as a sign of respect even to ourselves. I think that wherever we go and whoever we encounter, the respect to human rights should still remain there. If we respect other people then it reflects to what kind of human beings we are.

What I have learned:

- I learned that justice is not enough to prove moral rightness.
- It is our responsibility to respect human rights.
- We must not take advantage of our fellow people.

Integrative Questions:

1. What is justice?
2. How can you have justice?
3. Why is it important to have justice?
4. Why is justice not enough?
5. What is Baier trying to point out?