Chapter 1. THE ROLE OF MORAL THEORY: Suggested answers

1.1 Exercises:

*1. Formulate a definition for each of the following and repeat the definition aloud to help you remember it: (a) prosocial emotion, (b) payoff matrix, (c) dominant strategy, and (d) Prisoner’s Dilemma.*

(a) **Prosocial emotions**are any of a person’s emotions that promote greater social cohesion or social bonds with other people. These emotions can be positive ones (like sympathy) or negative ones (like anger). What makes them prosocial is their context.

(b) A **payoff matrix** is a table like a spreadsheet with rows and columns telling what will happen for each person involved in a situation for each of a variety of different possible actions.

(c) A player has a **dominant strategy** when one option in a game (or game-like situation) will always give that person the best possible result, regardless of what choices any other players in the game make.

(d) A **Prisoner’s Dilemma** is a type of game (or game-like situation) where both players have a dominant strategy, but where, had they both followed a different strategy, they would have both been better off.

*2. The police arrest Mike and Nancy as suspects in a robbery and a murder. The police have enough evidence to convict each of them of the robbery, but not of the murder. However, the police can convict one of them of the murder on the testimony of the other. The police put each suspect in a separate interview cell and make each of them the following offer: If both keep silent, then they will each get 2 years in prison for burglary. If they both betray each other, then they will both get 5 years in prison for robbery and murder. If one betrays the other, but the other keeps silent, then the one who does the betraying will get 1 year in prison for the robbery while the other will get 10 years in prison for robbery and murder.*

*(a) Set up a payoff matrix to represent Mike’s and Nancy’s options.*

*(b) After checking to see that you have the correct payoff matrix, solve it to discover if it is a Prisoner’s Dilemma. Remember that if Mike and Nancy are rational, then they will try to minimize their prison time.*

(a) Their payoff matrix looks like this:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Mike |
| Keep Silent | Betray |
| Nancy | Keep Silent |  2 years2 years |  1 year10 years |
| Betray |  10 years1 year |  5 years5 years |

(b) Yes, this is a Prisoner’s Dilemma. They both have a dominant strategy to betray the other person. If Mike keeps silent, then betraying is better for Nancy (1 year instead of 2). And if Mike betrays Nancy, then betraying is also better for Nancy (5 years instead of 10). The same is true for Mike.

*3. Invent contexts in which the following function as prosocial emotions: (a) guilt, (b) anger, and (c) admiration.*

(a) Feelings of **guilt** when a person has done something to hurt another person can cause them to apologize and want to try to make it up to the other person. This can discourage them from similar future actions. It can also have the effect of strengthening social bonds between these two people, but also with other people. A lack of feeling of guilt in a case like that can cause people to feel less close and connected to the person who acted wrongly.

(b) **Anger** when directed at a person who has caused harm to a member of your social group can show the strength of your connection to that person and thus is prosocial. It can also deter the harm-doer from similar future actions.

(c) If one person **admires** someone who acts in ways that help other people, then it can strengthen a connection to that person and to the people who are being helped, and it can also encourage future helping by other people.

*4. Summarize, in your own words, how the Prisoner’s Dilemma Game suggests that reason alone cannot lead to social cooperation in all contexts.*

If a person has a dominant strategy, then it would not be rational to act in any other way that on that strategy. But in a Prisoner’s Dilemma Game people would be better off if there were some way to cooperate and not act on the dominant strategy. The dominant strategy recommends defecting, not cooperating in the game, so we sometimes need something more than pure rationality to act in a cooperative way that would make us better off.

*5. In the example in the text, what are the total gains from cooperation? How much more preference satisfaction is available for the two players to distribute between themselves if they cooperate than if they fail to cooperate?*

If the players in the game both cooperate they will have 2 + 2 = 4 units of satisfaction between them, but if they both defect they will only have 1 + 1 = 2 units of satisfaction between them, which is 2 less than the total for cooperating. So, the total gains from cooperation equals 2.

*6. Summarize, in your own words, how the results of the Ultimatum Game are evidence that people can use prosocial emotions to achieve social cooperation.*

The fact that people mostly offer a 50/50 split and are mostly inclined to accept a roughly 50/50 split means that emotions such as compassion or a sense of fairness motivate our actions, which will generally result in a fairer outcome. Without these prosocial emotions, people would have no reason not to offer a 99/1 split, and people would have no reason to reject any offer, no matter how small.

1.2 Exercises:

*1. Formulate a definition for each of the following and repeat the definition aloud to help you remember it: (a) Action-guiding feature of moral judgment, (b) agreement-seeking feature of moral judgment, (c) the is-ought gap, (d) the ought-implies-can principle, (e) the universalizability of moral judgments, and (f) the practice of reason-giving.*

(a)**Action-guiding feature of moral judgment:** When we make a moral judgment and that causes us to either want to do or want to refrain from doing the action, then that means that the judgment is playing a role in guiding us to act the way we do.

(b)**Agreement-seeking feature of moral judgment:**When we properly judge an action to be morally required or prohibited, we do not just make a judgment for ourselves. We also think we are making a judgment for reasons that other people can recognize and endorse. The endorsement of a moral judgment by others indicates their agreement with our judgment.

(c)**The is-ought gap:**Some statements say how things are (such as “hitting someone hurts them”) and other statements say how things should or should not be (such as “hitting someone is wrong”). Logically, we cannot jump directly from statements of the first type to statements of the second type. The logical break between them is the is-ought gap.

(d)**The ought-implies-can principle:**It is not reasonable to expect that a person has a moral obligation to do something that it is impossible for her to do. Being unable to do something is a justifiable defense against the claim that you are morally required to do it. This means that the fact that you ought to do something means that it must be possible that you can do it, or that you ought to do it implies that you can do it.

(e)**The universalizability of moral judgments:**Saying that moral judgments are universalizable is saying that moral judgments both can and do apply to all people. A moral judgment can apply in one situation while not applying in another, different situation, but the factors that determine whether or not it applies do not include who it is who might have to comply with the judgment.

(f)**The practice of reason-giving:**This practice implies that moral judgments must be based on reasons and those reasons must be strong enough to justify the judgment. If we do not have any reasons, or even if we just do not have reasons that are good enough, then the judgment is not justified and, in the worst-case scenario, is without any merit.

*2. Give an example, different from the ones in the text, of each of the following: (a) someone illegitimately crossing the is-ought gap, (b) a suggested moral requirement that violates the ought-implies-can principle, (c) a suggested moral principle that violates universalizability, and (d) an attempted moral distinction that lack a sufficient reason.*

(a) It is natural for people to want to take care of their family and not strangers; therefore, we ought to take care of our family and have no moral obligation to help strangers.

(b) If someone says that doctors have a moral obligation to save the lives of every patient they treat, then they are requiring the impossible, since some injuries and illnesses cannot be treated.

(c) Any proposed moral principle that is racist or sexist will be one that fails to be universal for non-moral reasons. For example, the claim that mothers have a moral obligation to care for infant children, but fathers do not.

(d) There is no morally relevant reason for a professor giving lower marks to work submitted by women students compared to equivalent work by male students.

*3. Summarize, in your own words, how the action-guiding feature of moral judgments arises from their emotional aspect.*

When a person judges something to be morally required of them, they will (typically) experience negative feelings about themselves if they fail to live up to their obligations. These feelings are prosocial emotions that help to make it the case that we will, in fact, do what we are morally required to do and thus they guide our actions.

*4. Summarize, in your own words, how the agreement-seeking feature of moral judgments arise from their rational aspect.*

When we try to reach an agreement with other people about any matter, we do so by trying to find reasons that we all accept that support that agreement. These reasons form the rational basis for the moral judgment we agree to.

1.3 Exercises:

*1. Formulate a definition for ethical relativism and repeat the definition aloud to help you remember it.*

**Ethical relativism** is the idea that whether something is morally right or wrong (morally required or prohibited) depends on the beliefs and customs of the society or culture that a person comes from. As a result, some action can be morally right for one person and wrong for another (morally required for one person and prohibited for another).

*2. Why are people tempted to be ethical relativists*?

When we look at the differences among the diverse cultures around the world (and in different historical eras), we see what looks like profound differences among them about what people believe are the ways of acting that are morally required or prohibited. To avoid being insensitive to the differences among cultures and to avoid seeming to impose our ways of thinking on other people, we can be tempted to accept ethical relativism as a way of avoiding criticism of others while keeping our own culture's ethical standards.

*3. Summarize the Respect-Does-Not-Equal-Uncritical-Acceptance argument against ethical relativism.*

It is not an act of disrespect to take the views of another culture seriously enough to ask whether those views can withstand scrutiny. But this sort of scrutiny is only possible if we accept that the ethical views of another culture are open to question and debate. To just accept as correct any moral standards of another culture simply because it has them is not to take its views seriously enough.

*4. Summarize the Too-Ghastly-to-Tolerate argument against ethical relativism.*

If we endorse the view that whatever the people of another culture accept as their ethical standards is right for them and cannot be criticized, then we could be forced to endorse all sorts of practices that we find abhorrent. We might be forced to accept that extreme forms of torture, for example, are not wrong because the people of some other culture believe that torture is justifiable.

*5. Summarize the Ethical-Conservatism argument against ethical relativism.*

If ethical relativism is correct, then it looks like there can never be any reason within a specific culture to criticize the moral standards of that culture. Since the only basis for accepting that a moral judgment is correct is that it is the judgment that people in a culture do make, then any proposed change to the ethical standards will automatically fail. This builds in a conservatism in moral systems that does not allow for any reform or change.

*6. Summarize the Non-Homogeneity argument against ethical relativism.*

Perhaps there were times and places in human history where we could find identifiably separate and uniform cultural groups, but in most places at most times we find diverse cultural groups of people living together in larger societies. According to ethical relativism, each cultural group has different moral rules. Given multicultural societies, however, it is unclear how the relativist can draw the boundaries between cultural groups or determine what the moral rules are for each one.

*7. Summarize the Not-All-Disagreements-Are-Ethical argument against ethical relativism.*

People can seem to disagree about ethical beliefs when in fact what they really disagree about are factual matters. Differences in religious beliefs, for example, are fundamentally differences about what beings (gods, for example) exist and what ones do not exist, what entities exist (souls, for example) and what ones do not, and what consequences there might be if the latter disobey the former. While non-moral facts alone do not decide moral facts, disagreements about non-moral facts can appear to be disagreements about moral ones. If we can come to some agreement about the non-moral facts, then the seeming disagreements that exist among different cultural groups can sometimes disappear as well, meaning that morality might be more universal than it might have appeared at first.

1.4 Exercises:

*1. Formulate definitions for each of the following and repeat each definition aloud to help you remember it: (a) moral agent, (b) identity-based ethical theory, (c) principle-based ethical theory, (d) consequence-based ethical theory, and (e) moral standing.*

(a) A **moral agent** is any one or anything that can comprehend moral ideas, arguments, and actions. Only moral agents can be morally responsible for their actions.

(b) An **identity-based ethical theory** is one where moral judgments come from our assessments of what kind of person the moral agent is through an examination of their character.

(c) A **principle-based ethical theory** is one that focuses on moral rules and the kinds or intentions or motivations moral agents have for following those rules.

(d) A **consequence-based ethical theory** is one that decides what actions are right or wrong, required or prohibited, based on the outcomes of those actions. What happens because of the agents acting as they do will decide the morality of the actions they perform.

(e) **Moral standing** is a moral property of any person, thing, or entity toward whom we can act rightly or wrongly and whom we must consider when we are considering our moral obligations.

*2. Give examples, different from those in the text, of (a) a being who is not a moral agent, (b) an identity-based ethical consideration, (c) a principle-based ethical consideration, (d) a consequence-based ethical consideration, and (e) a being whose moral standing is controversial.*

(a) A person who is suffering from a severe mental impairment, such as dementia, for example, might not be capable of being a moral agent.

(b) Whether or not a person is generous is a part of a person's identity and can be an ethical consideration.

(c) Whether or not a person intended to say something that is not true can be morally relevant to whether their false utterance was ethically wrong (they lied) or not (they made a mistake).

(d) Whether or not an agent's action causes people to become sick can be an ethical consideration.

(e) Whether or not all animals have moral standing is controversial. It might be uncontroversial that it is wrong to cause unnecessary pain and suffering to at least some animals, such as dogs, but this view is more controversial regarding other animals, such as mosquitos.

1.5 Exercises:

*1. Formulate definitions for each of the following and repeat each definition aloud to help you remember it: (a) virtue ethics, (b) care ethics, (c) moral duty, (d) moral rights, (e) justice, (f) non-psychological consequentialism, (g) utilitarianism, and (h) ethical egoism.*

(a) **Virtue ethics** is the view that certain characteristics of a moral agent are good (virtues) and others are bad (vices) and morality is fundamentally about the assessment who how virtuous or vicious the characters of people are.

(b) **Care ethics** sees morality as grounded in the close personal relationships among people and whether we act in ways toward each other that show an appropriate level of care and concern for other people and their well-being.

(c) A **moral duty** is a rule that we have a moral obligation to follow no matter what the consequences either for ourselves or others.

(d) **Moral rights** are moral claims that people can make about the actions of others that can impose restrictions or requirements on them. Individuals having a right to life means that other people are restricted from killing them, and a right to an education could require others to do things that would help to provide it.

(e) **Justice** requires us to avoid treating people in ways that are unfair or unequal, keeping in mind that circumstances can mean that treating people equally does not always mean treating people the same way.

(f) **Non-psychological consequentialism** is the view that what is right or wrong is decided by the effects of a person's actions, but the relevant effects to measure are not related to the psychology of people who might be affected.

(g) **Utilitarianism** is the view that right and wrong action is decided by which action, of the options available to an agent, will lead to the most good, where the good is measured in something such as pleasure, happiness, or some other psychological facts about people.

(h) **Ethical egoism** is the view that people have a moral obligation to make themselves as best-off as they can with no moral obligations to anyone or anything else.

*2. Classify the type of ethical reasoning implicit in the following examples and briefly explain why the reasoning fits this classification:*

*(a) A trainee manager finds that she must work 100 hours a week, compete all the time with fellow managers, and be very aggressive with employees. She worries about the sort of person she is becoming.*

The worry that she has is a virtue ethics kind of worry because it is a concern about how her work will affect her character. The references to competition and aggressiveness suggest that she is worried about how her job might reinforce these negative aspects of her character.

*(b) A trainee manager finds that he must work 100 hours a week, compete all the time with fellow managers, and be very aggressive with employees. He worries about how this will affect his family life, his friendships at work, and the collegiality of his workplace.*

This is a care ethics kind of worry. The concern expressed is about how personal relationships might deteriorate because he works so much. Personal relationships are at the heart of the ethics of care.

*(c) A Muslim shopkeeper refuses to charge interest on overdue customer accounts.*

This is duty-based moral reasoning because it is an expression of the Muslim moral principle that charging interest is wrong.

*(d) An NGO campaigns to stamp out sexual abuse in the film industry.*

This is moral rights reasoning, since the NGO’s implicit principle is that people have a right not to be subjected to sexual abuse.

*(e) Polluters should pay.*

This is justice-based reasoning, since the claim is based on the idea that it is unfair for people who did not make the mess to have to clean it up, and it is fair to require the ones who did make it to clean it up, or at least pay for the cleanup.

*(f) Governments should strive to maximize the production of scientific knowledge.*

This is non-psychological consequentialist reasoning because it assesses what the government should do based on the hoped-for outcome and that outcome is not rooted in human psychological states.

*(g) Governments should approach environmental problems by considering what would maximize human welfare.*

This is utilitarian reasoning because it looks to consequences as the measure of what should be done, and those consequences are directly based on psychological facts about people.

*(h)* People should look after themselves first.*.*

This is egoist reasoning. Another example would be, “You ought to cheat on the golf course if you can get away with it.”