Everyday Morality
in a Physical World

"It is forbidden to kill; therefore all murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets."
— Voltaire

"Do you really mean to tell me the only reason you try to be good is to gain God's approval and reward, or to avoid his disapproval and punishment? That's not morality, that's just sucking up, apple-polishing, looking over your shoulder at the great surveillance camera in the sky, or the still small wiretap inside your head, monitoring your every move, even your every base thought."
— Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*

"One of the greatest tragedies in mankind's entire history may be that morality was hijacked by religion."
— Arthur C. Clarke

"We all love animals. Why do we call some 'pets' and others 'dinner'?"
— k.d. lang

"There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written. That is all."
— Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

"It's discouraging to think how many people are shocked by honesty and how few by deceit."
— Noël Coward, *Blithe Spirit*

"What have I always believed?
"That on the whole, and by and large, if a man lived properly, not according to what any priests said, but according to what seemed decent and honest inside, then it would, at the end, more or less, turn out all right."
— Terry Pratchett, *Small Gods*

"So far, about morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after."
— Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*

"[T]he infliction of cruelty with a good conscience is a delight to moralists. That is why they invented Hell."
— Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays*

"Waste no more time arguing about what a good man should be. Be one."
— Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*

"Cowards can never be moral."
— Mahatma Gandhi

"The assumption that animals are without rights, and the illusion that our treatment of them has no moral significance, is a positively outrageous example of Western crudity and barbarity. Universal compassion in the only guarantee of morality."
— Arthur Schopenhauer, *The Basis of Morality*

An Australian city outer suburb council, *MyHomeTown Council*, has just opened a new community pool complex for its rate-payers. The council has deliberately set the entrance fees to be affordable for all members of society regardless of their economic circumstances. People commonly recognise that obesity and inactivity are some of the great challenges facing our society, and this is the council's recent initiative to address this problem by encouraging community physical exercise. The broad availability of this new pool fulfils a core council value of providing services that are accessible to all ratepayers.

The pool is run on a day-to-day basis by a small management committee, made up of two council staff and five local community representatives. The residents of the electorate are seen as ethnically diverse but socially conservative.

A local leader of a small cultural group has requested a three-hour session for women only to be set aside each week. It is forbidden for women of their group to be seen bathing in public by men. Therefore, the pool would need to be restricted to women only, including staff. Naturally, this would affect the staffing arrangements to ensure the appropriate numbers of female staff qualified to supervise during these sessions.

So far there's been considerable reaction against any special privileges for minority groups that adversely affect the broader community. In this particular case, people feel that community tolerance is being misused to condone oppressive cultural practices. However, without such sessions, the women of this group would not be able to attend the pool and gain the social and health benefits enjoyed by other community members. To complicate matters, other groups have heard of this request and, if successful, are likely to want similar 'exclusive' sessions for men only, for particular disabilities, for different cultural requirements, and so on.

Imagine you are observing the pool management committee discussing the proposal. They are to decide whether or not to accept the proposal for an exclusive female-only weekly pool session.

Morality as seen by Philosophy and Psychology

What is morality?	Most important intuitions, emotions, rules, and beliefs – informal, non-adjudicated - associated with human social interactions.
Moral Foundations (Jonathan Haidt)	Moral receptors: (1) Care/harm; (2) fairness/reciprocity; (3) loyalty/in-group; (4) respect/authority; (5) purity/sanctity *Suggested that positions (1) & (2) held by socially liberal while (3)-(5) are emphasised by conservatives*
Moral obligations	Concentric circles of concern: (1) obligations to special people – relatives and prior commitments; (2) general obligations to others with whom we interact; (3) broader obligations to humanity
Three moral 'ethics' (Richard Shweder)	(1) Ethic of *autonomy* (protect individuals); (2) ethic of *community* (protect group entities); (3) ethic of the *divinity* (protect 'souls' from physical degradation)
Moral realism?	Does moral truth exist independent of human reactions to things, in the nature of things? **Moral relativism?** Is moral truth relative to a cultural group or, even, the individual or are there universal truths?

Normative Formulations		Virtue Ethics	Utilitarianism	Deontology	"Golden Rule"
	Principle	Consistency with virtues of a good person seen as primary to moral decision-making	Concern with consequences of action assessed on maximising happiness; applies to human and non-human animals; alternatives are: preference (satisfaction of desires or preferences) & rule (consequences of rule applications)	Concern with duties or rules regardless of consequences. Duties/rules can be derived from religious faith, societal norms, or reason.	Popular aphorism for the ethic of reciprocity; prevalent in most cultural and religious traditions.
	Typical question(s)	What would a virtuous person do?	Will this maximise human happiness?	Which act is most consistent with my duties?	How would I want to be treated in the same situation?
	Adverse case(s)/problems	Ascertaining what a virtuous person thinks without referring to duties and consequences; very non-specific in nature	Sacrificing the individual for the group e.g. body parts harvesting; difficult to determine who is affected and what measure of desirable outcome	Maintaining a duty or rule can lead to harmful consequences e.g. avoid lying even to save an innocent life	Assuming the intentions and preferences of another; may not allow for circumstances (e.g. convicted criminal does not want to be jailed, as I would not want)
	Free-will implications	Assumes some free-will	Free-will not necessary	Assumes free-will	Assumes free-will
	Supporter(s)	Aristotle	John Stuart Mill; Peter Singer	Immanuel Kant	Most traditions

Psychological systems	Evolutionary origins	Emotional responses	Cultural virtues	Shweder's "ethics"	'Western' social outlook
Harm/care	Sensitive to suffering of own offspring; Extended to family & non-family members	Feelings of compassion and protectiveness	Kindness; compassion; nurturing	Autonomy	Liberal & Conservative
Fairness/reciprocity	Alliance formation and cooperation - reciprocal altruism	Anger; gratitude; guilt	Justice; rights; autonomy		Liberal & Conservative
In-group/loyalty	Living in kin-based groups of few dozen individuals; Evolved to strong social emotions for one's co-residing in-group and distrust for other groups	Belongingness; group pride; rage at traitors, profiteers, and slackers	Loyalty; patriotism; self-sacrifice	Community	Conservative
Authority/respect	Living in hierarchically-structured in-groups where dominant members get respect and deference for protection	Respect; fear	Leadership – with good qualities of magnanimity, fatherliness, and wisdom; 'Followership', discipleship		Conservative
Purity/sanctity	Meat-based diet and risk of rotten carcasses generalised to concept of disgust; Transformed into a social issue applied to appearance, bodily activities in general, and religious activities in particular	Disgust	Elevated living in a less carnal (physical) way; nobility; asceticism; purity	Divinity	Conservative
Liberty/constraint (provisional)			Freedom of lifestyle; minimal government interference		Liberal (lifestyle); Conservative (minimum govt)

Family Values – moral position emphasising the role of the traditional family in safeguarding 'correct' moral behaviours and attitudes.	**More:** In-group/loyalty, Authority/respect, Purity/sanctity; **less:** Harm/care, Fairness/reciprocity
Gay marriage	**Conservative rejection**: (1) unacceptable changes to traditional institution of marriage (In-group/loyalty, Authority/respect, Purity/sanctity); (2) impossible acceptance of 'unnatural' physical practices (Purity/sanctity); **Liberal acceptance**: (1) acceptance of rights of individuals to make free choices (fairness/reciprocity); (2) sanction of no-harm outcomes that lead to personal happiness (harm/care).

One of the most radical and provocative of these accounts was proposed by Jonathan Haidt. According to Haidt's "social intuitionist" model, emotional capacities involving affect and intuition do almost all of the work in generating moral judgments (Haidt, 2001). Reason, on the other hand, is relegated to the role of a lawyer or public relations agent, whose job it is to offer public, post-hoc justifications for judgments after they have been made. Figure 1 is a simplified depiction of the model Haidt defends.
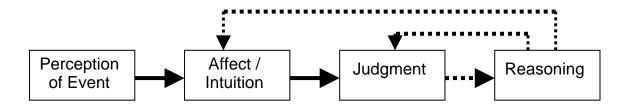

Figure 1: Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model

The first step in the process leading to moral judgment, in this model, is the perception of a morally relevant event. The second box represents "moral intuitions," which rapidly and spontaneously appear in consciousness in response to the witnessed moral situation. The person experiencing these intuitions normally lacks any awareness of having gone through a process of reasoning to arrive at them. Rather, Haidt characterizes these intuitions, which he holds to be the fundamental determinants of moral judgment, as affective reactions – quick flashes of disgust or anger, for instance. Often, the entire process stops once the intuition gives rise to a judgment. However, when circumstances require the person to justify her judgment, she will engage in conscious reasoning in order to produce a justification. This *post-hoc* reasoning process usually supports the affective intuition, but will occasionally override the initial affective judgment - and it may even occasionally affect the system responsible for affective intuitions. Since neither reasoning nor the downstream effects of reasoning need always occur, we've represented them with dashed arrows in Figure 1.

In support of this model, Haidt offers an extensive array of empirical findings. Among the most striking of these is a study in which participants were presented with vignettes, like the one that follows, which engender substantial affect but which are carefully designed to rule out most of the justifications that participants are likely to come up with.

> Julie and Mark are brother and sister. They are traveling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least, it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making

love, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other. What do you think about that? Was it okay for them to make love? (Haidt, 2001, 814)

Haidt found that participants typically answer "immediately," insisting that the behavior was wrong. When asked why, they begin "searching for reasons" (814). But the most obvious reasons to oppose incest, like the risk of pregnancy, the higher probability of having a child with birth defects, or acquiring an unsavory reputation, do not apply in this case. When the experimenter, playing the devil's advocate, points this out, the typical participant will readily acknowledge the point, but will still not withdraw his initial judgment. Rather, he will insist that his judgment is correct even though he cannot offer any reasons in support of that judgment. The conclusion that Haidt draws from this phenomenon, which he calls "moral dumbfounding," is that reasoning typically plays no role in the production of moral judgment.

In another important experiment, Wheatley & Haidt (2005) hypnotized participants and told them to feel disgust when they encountered the emotionally neutral words 'take' or 'often'. Participants were then asked to judge vignettes in which people behaved in morally problematic ways or in entirely unproblematic ways. Half of the participants were given versions of the vignettes with the hypnotic cue word included, while the other half received nearly identical versions of the vignettes with the hypnotic cue word omitted. This is one of the morally problematic vignettes:

Congressman Arnold Paxton frequently gives speeches condemning corruption and arguing for campaign finance reform. But he is just trying to cover up the fact that he himself [will take bribes from / is often bribed by] the tobacco lobby, and other special interests, to promote their legislation. (781)

And this is the morally neutral one:

Dan is a student council representative at his school. This semester he is in charge of scheduling discussions about academic issues. He [tries to take/often picks] topics that appeal to both professors and students in order to stimulate discussion. (782)

The presence of the hypnotic cue word in the morally problematic scenarios led the participants to assess the transgressions significantly more harshly, while in the unproblematic scenarios, the presence of the cue word led a significant number of participants to judge that the agent's actions were morally questionable! Participants were asked for comments at the end of the study and, Wheatley and Haidt report, "the post hoc nature of moral reasoning was most dramatically illustrated by the Student Council story. Rather than overrule their feelings about Dan, some participants launched an even more desperate search for external justification. One participant wrote: 'It just seems like he's up to something.' " (783)

Another account of moral judgment in which emotion plays a major role has been proposed by Joshua Greene. However, on Greene's account, reasoning also plays a role in the production of moral judgment in an important class of cases. Greene et al. (2001) administered fMRI scans to participants while they made judgments about how people should behave when confronting a number of moral dilemmas. The dilemmas were divided into two groups. The first group involved "impersonal" moral situations like the classic "trolley problem," where one must choose whether to flip a switch to divert a runaway trolley from a track on which it will run over five individuals to a track on which it will only kill one. The second group of dilemmas, the "personal" moral situations, included cases like the "footbridge problem" – a variation on the trolley problem where, rather than flipping a switch, one must decide whether to push an overweight man off a footbridge to stop a trolley that will kill five people if it is not stopped. The fMRI scans revealed that brain areas associated with emotion were much more active during contemplation of the personal moral dilemmas. In addition, most people judged the actions described in the personal moral dilemmas to be less permissible, and those who did judge them to be permissible took longer to make their judgments. Greene et al. believe this last finding to be a type of interference effect, where participants must suppress their tendency to judge the action impermissible.

Though Greene does not offer an explicit psychological model, his interpretation of these data suggests a model that would look something like Figure 2.
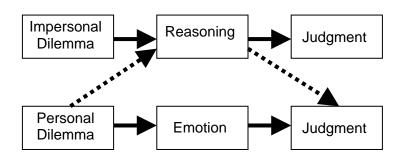

Figure 2: Greene's Model of the
Processes Underlying Moral Judgment

In this model, personal moral dilemmas trigger emotion systems, which then play a major causal role in producing a moral judgment. Impersonal moral dilemmas, however, leave the judgment to reasoning systems. The role of reasoning in personal dilemmas is either diminished or entirely absent – the dotted lines in Figure 2 represent the claim that reasoning can play a minor role in personal moral dilemmas. Although Greene's model accords reasoning a more substantial role than Haidt's, a central feature of both models is the heavy emphasis on the causal efficacy of emotion in the production of moral judgments.

A Guide to Moral Decision Making
Chris MacDonald, Ph.D.
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This guide is intended only as an aid. It is not a formula, and it does not guarantee good decisions. The order of the steps is not crucial, and may vary from one situation to the next.

A. Recognizing the Moral Dimension

The first step is recognizing the decision as one that has moral importance. Important clues include conflicts between two or more values or ideals.

B. Who Are the Interested Parties? What are their Relationships?

Carefully identify who has a stake in the decision. In this regard, be imaginative and sympathetic. Often there are more parties whose interests should be taken into consideration than is immediately obvious.

Look at the *relationships* between the parties. Look at their relationships with yourself and with each other, and with relevant institutions.

C. What Values are Involved?

Think through the shared values that are at stake in making this decision. Is there a question of *trust*? Is personal *autonomy* a consideration? Is there a question of *fairness*? Is anyone to be *harmed* or *helped*?

D. Weigh the Benefits and the Burdens

Benefits – broadly defined – might include such things as the production of goods (physical, emotional, financial, social, etc.) for various parties, the satisfaction of preferences, and acting in accordance with various relevant values (such as fairness).

Burdens might include causing physical or emotional pain to various parties, imposing financial costs, and ignoring relevant values.

E. Look for Analogous Cases

Can you think of other similar decisions? What course of action was taken? Was it a good decision? How is the present case like that one? How is it different?

F. Discuss with Relevant Others

The merits of discussion should not be underestimated. Time permitting, discuss

your decision with as many persons as have a stake in it. Gather opinions, and ask for the reasons behind those opinions. Remember that your ability to discuss others may be limited by expectations and rules about confidentiality.

G. Does this Decision Accord with Legal and Organizational Rules?

Some decisions are appropriately made based on legal considerations. If one option is illegal, we should at least think very seriously before taking that option. Decisions may also be affected by rules set by organizations of which we are members. For example, most professional organizations have Codes of Ethics which are intended to guide individual decision making. Institutions (hospitals, banks, corporations) may also have policies that limit the options available to us.

Sometimes there are bad laws, or bad rules, and sometimes those should be broken. But *usually* it is ethically important to pay attention to laws & rules.

H. Am I Comfortable with this Decision?

Sometimes your 'gut reaction' will tell you if you've missed something.
Questions to be asked in this regard might include:
    1) If I carry out this decision, would I be comfortable telling my family about it? My clergyman? My mentors?
    2) Would I want children to take my behaviour as an example?
    3) Is this decision one which a wise, informed, virtuous person would make?
    4) Can I live with this decision?

Please feel free to use, copy, and share this Guide (for private use). If you reprint/publish it, please let me know where.
If you find this Guide helpful, please let me know. If you have comments or criticisms, I would value your input.

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Analysis Steps

(1) Overall Area of Argument

- Try to identify the overall area of arguments and its boundaries. What concerns the argument and what does not?
- What is at stake with this argument? E.g. Problem of Evil – rational belief in a God worthy of worship.

(2) Your Presuppositions

- Each of us comes with presuppositions and attitudes that may affect our understanding of the arguments, unless we are totally unfamiliar with the area. What are they? It is better to explicate rather than left unsaid.

(3) Major Claims

- Identify the major claims, and there may be more than two. For example the *Problem of Evil* (Suffering) probably has, at least, the following claims. Firstly, a perfectly good and all-powerful God is rationally consistent with evil or suffering in our lives. Secondly, a perfect good God is inconsistent with the presence of any evil (or suffering) in the world. And, thirdly, the prevalent and indiscriminate nature of suffering makes the existence of a perfectly good God (worthy of worship) as highly implausible.

(4) The Facts

- Try to establish any basic facts associated with the area of argument. People affected; issues involved; times and places involved; and previous histories.
- Who are supporting or promoting the arguments?

(5) The Arguments

- Identify the premises, assumptions, and arguments used to establish the various conclusions.
- Try to work up the **best** arguments of each argument.

(6) Checks and Challenges

- Challenge the arguments - do they necessarily lead to the claimed conclusions? Challenge with counter-examples.
- Check **ethical implications**
  drawn from: Hugh Mercer Curtler, *Ethical Argument: Critical Thinking in Ethics, 2nd ed*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)
  - **Respect for Persons** (treat people as the ends and not the means). So pushing the large man in the trolley experiment to save five others would not be acceptable. People have rights like 'right to continue living'.
    - Associated rights question: Can human rights be forfeited for some people like Adolf Hitler?
  - **Fairness to others**.
    - Do not harm, deceive, or coerce
    - We also have positive obligations to others

- - Similar to the Golden rule (play by the same rules)
  - o Consistent with 1 and 2, adopt a **rule for action that will increase the happiness** of a majority of those affected by the rules.
    - - Happiness = fulfilment.
    - - Focus on working with rules that produce overall happiness rather than calculate overall happiness act by act.
  - o Be alert to any **practical consequences**. Compromising some of the moral-based decisions may be necessary in everyday life. However discussing these compromises is vital.

(7) Critical Thinking Skills

- **Critical thinking skills**: premises (reasons) leading to conclusions. (1) Ask 'Why?'; (2) Check for suppressed or unexpressed premises; (3) Challenge the support for the premises as factually correct or plausible (use 'counterexamples') and strength of connections with the conclusions (entailment versus plausibility).
- **Traps and Pitfalls**: (1) Appeal to the people ("everyone does that"); (2) Straw Man deliberately weaken the argument before refuting; (3) Begging the Question the conclusion is presupposed in the premise e.g. Opium induces sleep because it has a soporific quality. (Wikipedia); (4) illicit appeal to authority e.g. known to be in the minority or not area of qualification; (5) appeal to emotion 'looks as guilty as sin'; (6) red herring distracting introduction of an unrelated idea or argument; (7) false dichotomy typically presenting two choices as the only when there could be more; (8) attack the person instead of the argument; (9) post-hoc looking for a cause simply because one event followed another.
- **Analogies**: be careful that analogies are not the same as the actual things or events.

Morality

- Behaviours and attitudes, relating to the most important aspects of human interactions, including life, death, reproduction, and birth. Often involves physical/emotional harm.
- Most people operate with a belief in overarching 'non-codified' principles or values that should guide our actions e.g. do not kill; do not harm; do not restrict freedom. Contravention needs justification. The lack of codification distinguishes morality from the legal code.
- In our culture, there appears to be an underlying tension between universal principles (e.g. 'do not kill', 'do not deceive') and tolerance for differences of social/cultural group behaviours. This seems less prevalent in societies with more 'enforced' cultural uniformity.
- **Contrary view**: most traditions and most people see morality as a fully-aware conscious process, dependent on the exercising of human free-will. However the sciences (such as psychology and cognitive sciences) are showing that much of our behaviour operates at an automatic sub-conscious level with our conscious awareness being limited and easily influenced by external factors. A camera is a good analogy with most behaviour run on 'auto' mode with the occasional need for 'manual' (self-aware) settings.

Descriptive and Normative Discussions

- **Descriptive** - describing people's attitudes and behaviours when interacting with self-declared moral situations e.g. experimental results, surveys, brain scans
- **Normative** - discussing the desirable or undesirable aspects of people behaviours and attitudes e.g. leading a 'good' life; doing the 'right' thing; using 'ought' or 'should' words; condoning or condemning people's behaviour. Many philosophers believe that a commitment of widespread overarching principles or values ('universalism') is necessary for normative discussions to take place.

Universalism

- **Universalism** - this is the belief that there are at least some moral values or principles that are true regardless of time or place. So certain values are always true, such as 'do not kill' without significant justifications. Typically people who hold this belief also see moral values as **objective**, having an existence and truth independent of any particular person or group viewpoints.
- **Cultural (moral) relativism** – here values are determined by and answerable to the local culture with no reference to any universal standards. With no universal standards, separate cultural values are not open to critical evaluation from another culture, so there would be no common basis for evaluation. Presumably we are then limited to describing the values and practices of the particular culture but unable to engage in meaningful normative discourse across cultures.
- **Personal feelings** – now all moral judgements are simply expressions of feeling – disgust, delight and so on. Again, we are limited to describing a person's stated feelings and accompanying behaviour. Evaluative normative discourse (what's right and wrong) depends on common rational values for evaluation and would not be available if one sees moral judgements as purely expressions of personal feelings. Our opposition to another's behaviour would become our expression of disgust or disapproval (for example) with no rational basis for support. As soon as we attempt to rationalise such opposition, we are appealing to some to external values, implying some sort of overarching superior principles.
- Potential **justifications for common universal values** and, hence, for normative talk:
  - *Philosophy*   universal Logic and Reason (e.g. rational justification by Kant of categorical imperatives; utilitarianism claims that the ultimate goal for humans is happiness.)
  - *Theology*   God
  - *Naturalism*   common biological inheritance (scientific view)

Emotion and Reason

- Moral intuitions and judgements seem to involve human emotion (not subject to rational analyses) and reason (subject to rational analyses). Each tradition has different views on the roles play by both.
  - *Philosophy*   mostly reason as its intellectual toolset is primarily committed to rational discourse.
  - *Theology*   emotion and reason with dominance of reason with the intellectual elites and emotion with practitioners.

        o   *Naturalism*   emotion and reason e.g. mostly emotion from Haidt or mostly reason from Hauser both based on common evolutionary inheritance. Green sees it differently with both reason and emotion operating together depending on the agent's personal involvement with the moral situation.

Duties and Consequences

- Philosophy has different ways of judging moral situations. **Duty-based** (and corresponding rights-based) morality is concerned with the inherent 'good' of the action instead any resulting consequences. Intentions are important. Complicated moral situations typically lead to a conflict of completing duties that are difficult to resolve. Also another question is whether any moral duties are absolute or can they be justified by good reasons. Finally, although often intuitively acceptable, duty-based analysis can lead to unacceptable situations e.g. not lying to save a life.
- **Utilitarianism** is concerned with consequences of an act to assess its morality. Duties and rights are not relevant. Utilitarianism proposes morality on maximising of happiness and minimising of pain for all those affected (including for some - non-human animals) regardless of rank. Therefore the aim of happiness is the only accepted universal value. Again this can lead to uncomfortable conclusions like deliberately sacrificing one person to help many others. To deal with these situations, some philosophers consider the *preferences* of those affected rather than the act itself. Finally, utilitarianism seems unrealistically demanding as a practical technique with the need for act by act calculations to determine the morality of situations. Some philosophers promote *rule utilitarianism* to suggest applying rules leading to increased happiness to cover most situations, rather than situation by situation calculations. This is starting to incorporate some aspects of duty-based ethics.
- **Scientific research**: work done in brain scanning suggests we operate in both modes under different circumstances. One series of experiments attempt to overload the brain with decision-making while participants respond to moral situations. Results suggest the more occupied then the more utilitarian approach one takes to moral judgment-making. Related work by Joshua Green also suggests that moral dilemmas involving 'up close and personal' action evokes a more emotional response to leading to duty/rights based judgements while more 'remote' situations may be more utilitarian in nature. For example, in the trolley experiment the unacceptability of pushing the large man ('up close') to save a net of four people versus the acceptability of flicking the siding switch ('remote') to save the same number.

Social Settings

- This is the often overlooked aspect of moral judgement-making. In fact morality can be considered as a social construct and only meaningful within a social context.
- We evolved as highly social animals where our survival depended on co-operation. There has always between a tension between gaining and sharing resources. As we have become more secure in our physical survival and as our social structures have become more complex, the co-operative aspects of our behaviour have become crucial in our success.
- Different societies place difference emphases on individual versus group needs. We live in a very individualistic society with emphasis on individual rights. Arguments about same-sex marriage and abortion often involve a conflict between the individual rights for happiness and the traditional social values and continuity of society. We are more likely over time to support individual rights arguments (despite resistance by conservative segments of our society) to triumph over traditional values. However most communities in the world place a much greater emphasis on group solidarity and respect for traditional values. I therefore expect much greater resistance to change on these issues and much slower to change and, perhaps, to alternate more group-oriented solutions.
- Psychological research shows the considerable influence of external events that affect our judgements, including our moral judgements. 'Priming' is the term to describe changing our responses by modifying our environments in surprisingly unrelated ways e.g. hot/cold drinks on interviewers. We appear mistaken to believe that we are simply self-aware individuals interacting with each other in all-knowing ways.

Rational Argument Framework

- drawn from: Hugh Mercer Curtler, *Ethical Argument: Critical Thinking in Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Framework

1. *Respect for Persons* (treat people as the ends and not the means). So pushing the large man in the trolley experiment to save five others would not be acceptable. People have rights like 'right to continue living'.

    1. Associated rights question: Can human rights be forfeited for some people like Adolf Hitler?

2. *Fairness to others.*

    1. Do not harm, deceive, or coerce

    2. We also have positive obligations to others

    3. Similar to the *Golden* rule (play by the same rules)

3. Consistent with 1 and 2, adopt a rule for action that will *increase the happiness of a majority* of those affected by the rules.

    1. Happiness = fulfilment.

    2. Focus on working with *rules* that produce overall happiness rather than calculate overall happiness act by act.

4. Be alert to any practical consequences. Compromising some of the moral-based decisions may be necessary in everyday life. However discussing these compromises is vital.

Features of the Ethical Perspective

1. Concern for consequences (to counter short-term self-interest).

2. Neutrality (all persons claims considered equally versus family members). "*Veil of ignorance*" (John Rawls) where the decision-maker does not know his or her place.

3. Imagining oneself as victim or recipient of the act and not just as the moral agent.

Devising a Procedure

1. **Critical thinking skills**: *premises* (reasons) leading to *conclusions*. (1) Ask 'Why?'; (2) Check for suppressed or unexpressed premises; (3) Challenge the support for the premises as factually correct or plausible (use 'counterexamples') and strength of connections with the conclusions (entailment versus plausibility).

2. **Traps and Pitfalls**: (1) *Appeal* to the people ("everyone does that"); (2) *Straw Man* deliberately weaken the argument before refuting; (3) *Begging the Question* the conclusion is presupposed in the premise e.g. Opium induces sleep because it has a soporific quality. (Wikipedia); (4) *illicit appeal to authority* e.g. known to be in the minority or not area of qualification; (5) *appeal to emotion* 'looks as guilty as sin'; (6) *red herring* distracting introduction of an unrelated idea or argument; (7) *false dichotomy* typically presenting two choices as the only when there could be more; (8) *attack the person* instead of the argument; (9) *post-hoc* looking for a cause simply because one event followed another.

3. **Analogies**: be careful that analogies are not the same as the actual things or events.