

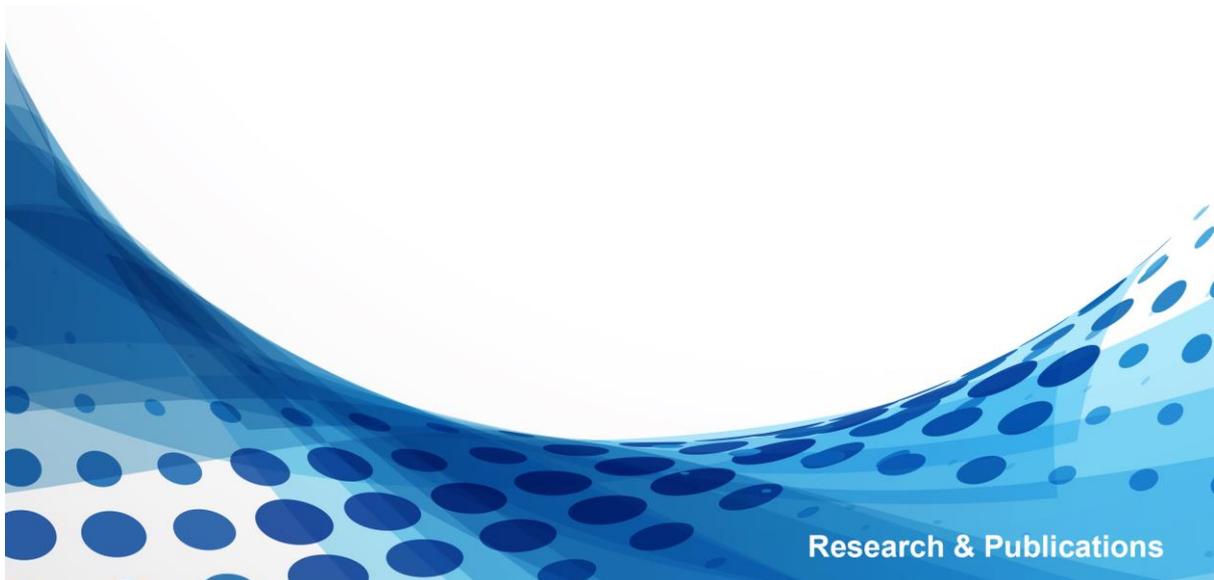


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Towards an Integrated Framework for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

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Research & Publications

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Towards an Integrated Framework for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

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Abstract

Ethics play a critical role in voluntarily yet collectively directing a society towards achieving peace, harmony, and prosperity. Although most cases involving ethical violations are simple and clear to resolve, some cases yield conflicts of opinion amongst the different schools of thought of ethics. Resolving these dilemmas requires first being sensitive to various ethical and unethical forces being engaged in a situation and acquiring a framework to settle the conflict between the numerous possible ethical forces. This paper proposes an integrated approach to resolving life's ethical dilemmas. First, it refines the set of fundamental ethical values, which will help discard the confirmed unethical choices and exhaustively contain all the different prospects of acts that can be deemed ethical from different viewpoints. Further, it comprehensively enunciates the different types of ethical dilemmas that could be generated out of the conflict between the elemental values of the set of fundamental ethical values. Finally, it contributes a framework to resolve the dilemma that caters to the different possibilities of conflict generation and exhaustively settles them.

Keywords: ethical dilemma, ethical decision-making, morals, truth, compassion, justice.

Towards an Integrated Framework for Resolving Ethical Dilemmas

Introduction

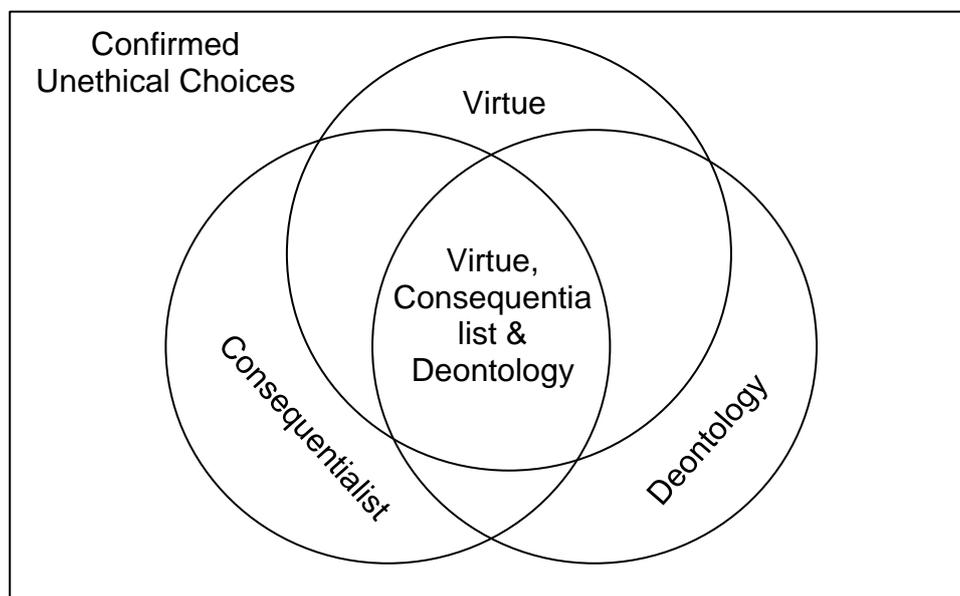
An organization comprises individuals from varied backgrounds and interests conglomerating at a common platform to pursue common goals. Due to such ingrained diversity in any organization, deliberate or undeliberate infringement of others' rights and hindrance to the performance of duties is common. Therefore, employees prefer a workplace that fosters an ethical environment so that they are not unjustifiably bogged down by others but can express themselves freely. The same applies to society since it is nothing but the organization of people interacting with each other to pursue their common cultural goals. An ethical culture in a society is necessary for the peace, harmony, and prosperity of the constituents of the society. The requirement of an ethical climate within a society cannot be emphasized enough. When ethics is vital to a society's progress, it is crucial to clarify what makes an act ethical.

Three major schools of thought that have attributed different reasons to classify an act as ethical have emerged over time. The schools of thought are - virtue ethics, deontological ethics, and consequentialism. According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, virtue ethics posits that the moral character of the person acting determines the ethical nature (Hursthouse and Pettigrove, 2007); deontological ethics claims that any action's ethical nature can be determined based on whether the act follows a set of predetermined rules or moral norms (Alexander and Moore, 2007) and consequentialism states that the consequences of the action, or of something related to that act, such as the motive behind the act determines the ethical nature of an action (Sinnot, 2012).

Even though these three schools of thought differ in their opinions on the recipe of an ethical act, all three agree that an action cannot be ethical if taken with a malicious intention by following an unscrupulous path to harm society. Therefore, all these three schools of ethics

agree upon some actions to be indisputably deemed unethical in all situations. For example, neither virtue, deontological or consequentialist ethics deem being dishonest by engaging in corruption to make personal fortunes ethical. Therefore, some concrete unethical values can be differentiated from ethical values. For example, ethical values such as empathy, honesty, and equity can be distinguished from unethical values such as jealousy, deceit, and discrimination. Therefore, the first step towards understanding the recipe of an ethical act is to differentiate the set of ethical values from the unethical ones. The possible ethical choices are shown by the region enclosed within the circles in venn diagram 1. The area except the three circles representing different ethical schools of thought represents the confirmed unethical choices. Figure 1 shows the venn diagram of action space distinguishing different schools of ethics and the confirmed unethical choices.

Figure 1. Different Schools of Ethics and Unethical Choice



Even though among the ethical values, virtue, deontological and consequential ethics endorse character, rules, and consequences respectively to be determining the ethical nature of any action, detecting the set of fundamental ethical values can enhance the understanding of

each of the ethical schools of thought. For example, philosophers propounding virtue ethics can get deeper insights into what values a person of good character generally displays in their actions, philosophers supporting deontological ethics can obtain the ethical values to base the set of rules or duties upon, and consequentialist philosophers can realize actions based on which values generally have the potential to lead to better consequences. In most cases, each three schools of thought will propose the same course of action to approach a situation. This convergence is shown by the central intersecting area of the Venn diagram of the three circles representing different schools of ethics in diagram 1. However, in some cases, these three schools of thought might propose different courses of action, leading to the emergence of a situation of an ethical dilemma.

According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, an ethical (moral) dilemma occurs when there are two or more righteous or virtuous choices, all choices can be espoused, but only one of the many choices can be adopted (Terrance, 2018). For example, one often finds oneself in a situation where speaking the harsh truth might be unkind to the others, while being kind and not telling the truth might lead to undesirable consequences. In such cases, it gets difficult to choose between the ethical values of honesty and kindness. To resolve such a dilemma and gain clarity on the right course of action, it is essential to be first sensitive to the different ethical values applicable to the situation. For example, suppose one is unaware of the possibility of choosing both honesty and kindness. In that case, one makes an uninformed choice of adopting either of the choices without being aware of the other possible course of action, even if the other choice could be more ethical. For example, one who exclusively adopts honesty without being aware of the possibility of being kind in the same situation would also deliver the truth to children in the harsh, raw form without being sensitive to the response it would generate in them.

Therefore, to make a more informed ethical decision by being sensitive to different ethical values applying to the situations and also to discard the undisputable unethical choices, we need to refine the set of fundamental ethical values such as liberty, fairness, and authenticity. With these ethical values refined, we further need to develop a framework that can resolve conflicts or dilemmas between these ethical values, such as the one we saw between honesty and kindness. The paper is further structured as follows. In the next section, we present the literature review on the fundamental ethical values and provide a simplified representation of them. Next, we show how conflicts or dilemmas could be generated amongst the fundamental ethical values and give some popular case studies. Further, we render a conceptual framework to resolve the ethical dilemmas. Discussion, limitations, and conclusion follow later.

Literature Review on Fundamental Ethical Values

One of the most ancient contributors to the field of ethics is religion. Religions have contributed immensely to the development of cultures worldwide and the commonly cherished values or ethics. Hinduism and Jainism lay out the five abstinences in the Patanjali Yoga Sutras (Bryant, 2015) and Jain Mahavrata (S., 2016). These abstinences are Ahimsa (nonviolence), Satya (truthfulness), Asteya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (self-restraint), and Aparigraha (non-hoarding). The five precepts given in Panchshila (Harvey, 2000) by Buddha are the moral code that remains eternally relevant according to Buddhism. Lord Buddha taught to abstain from falsehood, abstain from theft, abstain from killing, abstain from sexual misconduct, and abstain from intoxication. In the Bible (Alter, 2018), the ten commandments state the ethical code. Of these ten commandments, the last six commandments tell how people should treat each other. It says that one should honor father and mother, shall not murder, shall not commit adultery, shall not steal, shall not bear false witness against one's neighbor, and one shall not covet.

There have been several contributions to the identification of basic ethical values by secular organizations as well. Kinnier et al. (2000) compiled a short list of ethical (moral) values that many secular and religious groups universally accept. They studied the values cherished by secular organizations such as American Atheists, American Humanists, and the United Nations and religious texts of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. After the study, they compiled a short list of universal moral values to be as follows:

1. Commitment to something greater than oneself
 - To recognize the existence of and be committed to a Supreme Being, higher principle, transcendent purpose, or meaning to one's existence.
 - To seek the Truth (or truths)
 - To seek Justice
2. Self-respect, but with humility, self-discipline, and acceptance of personal responsibility
 - To respect and care for oneself.
 - To not exalt oneself or overindulge - to show humility and avoid gluttony, greed, or other forms of selfishness or self-centeredness.
 - To act in accordance with one's conscience and to accept responsibility for one's behavior.
3. Respect and caring for others (i.e., the Golden Rule)
 - To recognize the connectedness between all people
 - To serve humankind and to be helpful to individuals
 - To be caring, respectful, compassionate, tolerant, and forgiving of others
 - To not hurt others (e.g., do not murder, abuse, steal from, cheat, or lie to others)
4. Caring for other living things and the environment

Similarly, Schwartz (2005) compiled a list of core universal moral values which corporations could employ to develop their organizational codes of conduct. He undertook a thorough study from three different sources: 1) corporate code of ethics, 2) global codes of ethics, and 3) the business ethics literature. Studying these, he found convergence on the three sources of standards and proposed six universal moral codes for corporations to implement:

1. Trustworthiness (including notions of honesty, integrity, transparency, reliability, and loyalty)
2. Respect (including notions of respect for human rights)
3. Responsibility (including notions of accountability, excellence, and self-restraint)
4. Fairness (including notions of process, impartiality, and equity)
5. Caring (including the notion of avoiding unnecessary harm) and
6. Citizenship (including notions of obeying laws and protecting the environment)

There have been some well-established attempts to codify ethical principles in specific areas such as healthcare, business, technology, politics, and the environment. For example, one of the influential and popular approaches in healthcare ethics is the *principlism* approach by Beauchamp and Childress (2001). The *principlism* approach considers the four ideals of autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. Similarly, the code of ethics for UN personnel involves values such as independence, loyalty, impartiality, integrity, accountability, and respect for human rights.

Considering the above ethical (moral) values, we propose simplifying the classification of ethical values into just three basic categories: justice, compassion, and truth. We can show that each of the ethical values that have already been mentioned above can be associated with either justice, compassion, or truth. The justice criteria posit that people should get what they

deserve. Fairness in the distribution and retribution is justice. The notion of equity is also closely related to justice. Since nature unbiasedly treats everybody in accordance with their deeds, everybody is equal before nature. Similarly, equity would mean that the manufactured biases and discriminations vanish from society, and every life is treated without the taint of manufactured inequalities. Therefore, being impartial is also being just. Justice also implies owning responsibility for one's own deeds; thus, responsibility and accountability are also associated with justice. Therefore, concepts like justice, fairness, equity, impartiality, responsibility, and accountability can be collectively categorized as justice.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, compassion is the sympathetic consciousness of others' distress and a desire to alleviate it. Being non-violent is a way to not increase others' suffering and thus be compassionate with others. By having self-restraint, one can be sacrificial towards their own unrestrained desires and compassionate towards the unfulfilled needs of others. Moreover, a compassionate society understands each others' perspectives and does not act in a way that hurts others. Since imposing constraints on others that restricts one from serving is a way to hurt them, a compassionate society is also a free society. Showing respect is a way to be compassionate towards others since being respected for what one is alleviates suffering by generating a sense of acceptance and appreciation for oneself. Forgiving is a way to show compassion by understanding others' pain and compulsion that compels them to bring about a mistake. Tolerance is similarly being compassionate to the shortcomings of others by being sympathetic to the factors that cause them. Caring for oneself and others brings about a desire to alleviate the suffering of others. Thus, non-violence, self-restraint, freedom, respect, acceptance, forgiving, tolerance, and caring for oneself and others can all be collectively termed as compassion.

Truth is the property of being in agreement with reality. Realizing the connectedness between all people is a way of being in tune with reality. Committing to a higher principle

acknowledges the subservience to nature or the higher principles that have created life. These are the truths of the universe and life. Some other truths are related to the day-to-day conduct within society. Being honest is representing what one thinks to be truthful. Having integrity is showing sincerity and authenticity. Transparency is being and showing what one truly is. Loyalty and reliability are being true to the allegiance to a person or institution. Trustworthiness is the ability to be relied on as truthful. Therefore, terms like honesty, integrity, sincerity, authenticity, transparency, loyalty, reliability, and trustworthiness can be collectively categorized as truth.

While there are truths or realities of life and the universe, being truthful or adopting truthfulness is about following a process/path of being honest, sincere, and authentic as one pursues his goal. In this study, we conceptualize justice and compassion as characteristics of the outcomes, whereas truth is considered a characteristic of the path. Next, we describe the dilemmas that emerge when there is a conflict between pursuing just outcomes, compassionate outcomes, and the truthful path.

Ethical Dilemmas

These ethical values help one in discarding the confirmed unethical options. Although such ideals of ethical values often provide clarity to those who value being ethical by discarding the unethical options, sometimes even these well-laid ethical values lack in providing a clear single ethical choice to well-intentioned people. While many choices we face in day-to-day life involve clearly understood ethical and unethical options, some may also involve a choice between two ethical ideals. For example, ethics-oriented people will clearly differentiate between whether to steal to enjoy luxuries and whether not to steal and live a mediocre life. However, certain circumstances may leave ethical people perplexed when they have to choose between two ethical ideals, such as being just at the cost of being uncompassionate versus being compassionate at the expense of being unjust.

To make ethical decision-making even more complicated, principled actions might sometimes lead to unwanted consequences, or unprincipled acts might lead to the wanted consequences. While the cases where principled actions lead to wanted consequences do not pose a challenge for a person wanting to be ethical, such people often get confused when they can envision right actions producing bad results or wrong actions producing good results. Moreover, there might be situations where one does not know the right aim to aspire for. In such cases, since the consequences are fuzzy for the actions, choosing the action is challenging. Sletteboe (1997) discusses three conditions where an ethical dilemma emerges. These are 1) two or more alternatives to choose between, 2) a wanted option leads to an unwanted consequence 3) a choice where one does not know what the right thing to do is. We aim to analyze dilemmas through such a fabric and, in turn, provide a framework that resolves all these types of dilemmas.

Our approach to understanding ethical dilemmas will encompass all three possibilities of dilemma generation. We propose that to analyze ethical dilemmas, the outlook of dividing the ethical approach into the path leading to justice, the path leading to compassionate outcomes, and the truthful path can lead to a finer analysis than a categorization into consequentialist, deontological, and virtue ethic path. By adopting this outlook of categorizing the ethical approach into a just, compassionate, and truthful path, we propose that it gives an opportunity to resolve not only the popular debate between the deontological approach and the consequentialist approach but also other types of dilemmas which can arise. The deontological path can be seen from the outlook in the paper as being truthful to one's formed moral rules or duties. Therefore, truth also subsumes following the deontological rules or duties. Since justice and compassion are outcome-based ethics, the popular debate of the deontological and consequentialist approaches can be understood by the ethical dilemmas of truth versus compassion or truth versus justice.

Moreover, this outlook of categorizing the ethical approach into a just, compassionate, and truthful path can also help us analyze and resolve ethical dilemmas arising within a consequentialist approach, such as those arising between justice and compassion. While considering all the permutations of ethical dilemmas that can be faced between these three ethical ideals, we will further solidify our understanding with examples. Therefore, while seeing the examples, we will see ethical dilemmas between desirable consequences (e.g., justice vs. compassion) (Type 1 as per Sletteboe (1997)) and between desirable consequences and righteous actions (consequences vs. deontology, e.g., compassion vs. truth) (Type 2 by Sletteboe (1997)). While providing a framework to resolve ethical dilemmas, we will also render a road map for resolving the third type (Type 3) of dilemmas articulated by Sletteboe (1997), where one is unsure of the right aim to choose for. To illustrate the dilemmas, let us take a look at the below-mentioned dilemmas:

Case 1 (Trolley Problem)

There is a famous thought experiment in ethics called the trolley problem. In the trolley problem, a trolley is in the course of running over five people who are tied to the default trolley track. However, the driver can pull a lever that results in the change of trolley route where the consequence would be the death of a single person who has been tied to the alternate track. Here, the driver faces the dilemma of choosing between desirable consequences of justice versus compassion. The single person tied to the alternate route was not destined to be killed; therefore, his death would not be justified. However, the death of one person in this accident would be more compassionate than the death of 5 people.

Case 2 (Same-sex Marriage)

On the one hand, the physiological reality of the human body is suitable for the marriage of two opposite sex, and childbearing, which is necessary for the survival and progression of the species, is only possible through the marriage of the opposite sex. Therefore, one goal of

justice, in this case, is to be responsible towards progressing our species and to be accountable to the laws of nature. However, yet another interpretation demands compassion for the love between two people and autonomy of the individual beings to make independent decisions for themselves. Therefore, legalizing same-sex marriage is an ethical dilemma between two conflicting desirable consequences.

Case 3 (Reservations)

Is it ethical to reserve seats in a university for people with backward backgrounds? By reserving seats, one can confer justice to the unjust behavior to the community by the society in the past. However, we can provide justice to the meritorious students by not keeping any reservations. Therefore, this is an ethical dilemma between two different desirable just consequences.

Case 4 (Rescuing your friend)

To understand the ethical dilemma of righteous action of being truthful versus desirable compassionate consequences, let us consider yet another hypothetical probable situation. There is a murderer who wants to kill your friend. Knowing this situation, your friend asks for your help hiding him at your house, and you agree to help him. The murderer gets a hint, knocks on your door, and asks whether your friend is in the house. If you speak the truth, your friend will be killed. However, if you want to save your friend, you will have to tell a lie.

Case 5 (Killing of Dronacharya in the Mahabharata)

In the famous epic of Mahabharata (Ganguly, 1884), the Pandavas, after many unsuccessful peace attempts, decided to wage war against their brothers Kaurava for the unjust they were doing to society. Since the battle was fierce and the *Kaurava* warriors were mighty, *Pandavas* could not penetrate the *Kaurava's* defences. They were faced with many dilemmas where they could just rely on unprincipled action to progress towards triumph. In one such incident, to kill *Dronacharya*, the impregnable guru of the Pandavas, and *Kauravas* fighting

from the side of the Kaurava clan, Pandavas had to create a deception by deliberately speaking half-lie. They wanted to disorient Drona by making him falsely believe that his son *Ashwatthama* had been killed while, in fact, an elephant named Ashwatthama had been killed. So, even when just a common elephant, like many other animals and soldiers in the war, Pandavas deliberately publicly announced that Ashwatthama had been killed without publicly mentioning that it was an elephant. Here, if they had not crafted this deception, Drona would have pierced the Pandavas' army and significantly affected the chances of providing justice to society. Hence, it could be termed as an ethical dilemma of righteous action of being truthful versus desirable just consequences.

Case 6 (Richard Parker)

As presented in Sandel (2010), a storm had hit a small ship with four crew members. The four crewmen lost the ship and shifted to a lifeboat. However, they did not have enough food supplies. They survived in the sea for eight days with the food supplies they had. During that time, 17-year-old cabin boy Richard Parker fell ill by drinking seawater. Since they had no food supply and no other option left, Stephens and Dudley suggested they kill one of them so that others could survive. Upon thinking further, Dudley suggested to Stephens that they should kill Parker since he was anyways ill, to which Stephens agreed. They killed Parker and survived for the remaining days until they were rescued. Were the actions of Stephens and Dudley ethical? Were they right to think that killing one of them was right so that the others could survive and possibly contribute to society later? Or was the act of killing unjust in itself? This is an ethical dilemma between desirable consequences of compassion versus justice.

Case 7 (Surrogacy)

As presented in Sandel (2010), William Stern and Mary Beth Whitehead got into a contract. According to the contract, Whitehead would become pregnant with Stern's sperm. She will bear the child and deliver it to the Sterns. She will terminate her maternal rights to the

child, and Sterns will adopt the child. Stern would pay Whitehead \$10000 after all such proceedings. However, after delivering the child, Whitehead threatened that she would kill herself if she were separated from the child. When it became clear that she would not return the baby to the Sterns, they filed a case in court. Since the contract was enforced, the truth required Whitehead to hand the child to Sterns. However, the compassion brought forth through the mother-child bond would call for breaking the contract. This is a case of the ethical dilemma between righteous action of being truthful versus desirable compassionate consequence.

Case 8 (Abortion)

Consider the case of abortion. In abortion, the living foetus is killed if the pregnant woman does not want the child. In extreme cases such as rape, there are often solid reasons for the woman not to want the child. At the same time, there are cases when parents want to abort the child because of the child's gender. No matter what the reasons are for the mother wanting to abort the child, there is always a dilemma whether any reason is strong enough to kill a life. On the other hand, there is a question of whether autonomous women should be constrained to bear a child that she does not want. Therefore, this is an ethical dilemma of desirable consequence between compassion for the child versus compassion for the mother. Table 1 compiles the ethical dilemmas into the above-mentioned categories to provide a comprehensive view.

Table 1. An Overview of Ethical Dilemmas

Compassion vs. Justice	Compassion vs. Truth	Justice vs. Truth	Justice vs. Justice	Compassion vs. Compassion
Trolley Problem	Rescuing your friend	Ashwatthama Dilemma	Reservation	Abortion
Same-sex marriage	Stern-Whitehead case			
Stephen-Dudley case				

Resolving Ethical Dilemmas: Explaining Moral Thought and Action

The above cases show that resolving an ethical dilemma is a profound challenge. Rest (1986) discusses four crucial components that factor in during the process of ethical decision-making. First, there needs to be a proper interpretation of the situation and sensitivity to the different choices available. Having got this sensitivity, there should be a coherent and robust judgment mechanism to refine the ethical action. However, just deciphering the ethical action is not enough. There must be enough motivation to rise above biased emotions and act according to what objective evaluation of the situation suggests one to do. The last step involves having the courage to act accordingly.

The above-mentioned four-step mechanism involves both moral maturation capacities and moral conation capacities, as Hannah et al. (2011) discussed. The various moral maturation capacities that assist in developing sensitivity and judgment capacities consist of moral complexity, meta-cognitive skills, and moral identity. Moral complexity refers to the internal system developed to interpret the situation and organise the inputs to provide meaning. After interpreting the system, meta-cognitive skills facilitate analyzing the choices available and the possible consequences of undertaking each of those choices. Moral identity also plays a crucial role since the inputs our attention drives towards collecting are affected by what one identifies with and thus considers important, and the analysis we undertake based on these inputs is also to optimise for what we identify ourselves with.

Moral conation is also affected by moral identity, according to Hannah et al. (2011). The stronger the moral identity, the more motivated one is to preserve it. Moreover, conation is impacted by the ownership one has of the situation. The psychological responsibility one feels over the ethical nature of their actions and those of others around them motivates one to

behave ethically. Apart from that, confidence also affects the implementation of ethical actions. If one feels confident to organize and put up their perspective to influence others, one has more potential to behave ethically in the face of adversities. Finally, courage to stand up for ethical actions even when that requires facing difficult emotions like fear or sacrificing on a personal level contributes to strengthening moral conation.

Although translating the wish to be ethical into action is thus a grueling process, it can be facilitated if one has a coherent and robust judgment mechanism, among other contributing factors. This framework can reinforce sensitivity to various forces at work in any situation, expand the moral identity, boost confidence and give the courage to do what is right. Wicks et al. (2017) furnish a better understanding of the context of ethical dilemmas by considering the different positions to approach a dilemma. They categorize the approaches into four domains focused on actions, agents, outcomes, and relations. They articulate the tension between each of them and state the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Parmar et al. (2016) contribute by constituting a stepwise approach to resolving a dilemma. They recognize the steps as understanding the situation, generating alternatives, improving alternatives, crafting a recommendation, and iterating. The literature review of ethical decision-making models by Cottone and Claus (2000) and Cottone, Tarvydas, and Hartley (2021) presents numerous frameworks rendered by different academicians. Table 2 below presents a summary of steps in ethical decision-making models, compiled from Cottone and Claus (2000) and Cottone, Tarvydas, and Hartley (2021).

Table 2. *Summary of Steps in Ethical Decision-Making Models*

Corey, Corey, and Callanan (2007)	Forester-Miller and Davis (1996)	Hass and Malouf (2005)	Keith-Speigel & Koocher (1985)	Rae, Fournier, and Roberts (2001)	Sperry (2007)
Identify the problem.	Identify the problem.	Identify the ethical problem.	Describe the parameters.	Gather information.	Enhance ethical sensitivity and anticipation.
Identify potential issues involved.	Apply the ACA code of ethics.	Identify the legitimate stakeholders.	Define the potential issues.	Consider legal and ethical guidelines.	Identify the problem.
Review relevant ethical guidelines.	Determine the nature of dilemma.	Identify relevant standards.	Consult legal and ethical guidelines.	Generate possible decisions.	Identify participants affected by the decision.
Know applicable laws and regulations.	Generate potential courses of action.	Review the relevance of existing standard.	Evaluate the rights, responsibilities, and welfare of involved parties	Examine possible outcomes, given context.	Identify courses of action and benefits/risks for participants.
Obtain consultation, consider possible and probable courses of action.	Consider potential consequences, determine course of action.	Evaluate the ethical dimensions of the issue and specify a primary ethical dimension if possible.	Generate alternate decisions.	Implement best choice and evaluate.	Evaluate benefit/risks context considerations.
Consider possible and probable courses of action.	Evaluate selected course of action.	Consult and review codes of ethics, review literature, consider ethical principles.	Enumerate the consequences of each decision	Modify practices to avoid future problems.	Consult with peers and experts.
Enumerate consequences of various decisions.	Implement course of action.	Generate a list of possible actions.	Estimate probability of outcomes of each decision.		Decide the most feasible option and document the decision process.
Decide on the best course of action.		Do cost/benefit analysis and choose the best option.	Make the decision.		Implement, evaluate, and document the decision.
		Evaluate the new course of action for effect (seen, unforeseen) on people.			
		Judge whether course of action can be implemented.			
		Implement the chosen action.			

Table 2 (Continued) *Summary of Steps in Ethical Decision-Making Models*

Stadler (1986)	Steinman, Richardson, and McEnroe (1998)	Tarvydas (1998)	Tymchuk (1986)	Welfel (2006)
Identify competing principles.	Identify the problem.	Interpret situation.	Determine stakeholders.	Develop ethical sensitivity.
Secure additional information.	Identify the relevant ethical standard.	Review problem or dilemma.	Consider all possible alternatives.	Identify relevant facts and stakeholder.
Consult with colleagues.	Determine possible ethical traps.	Determine standards that apply to dilemma.	Consider consequences for each alternative.	Define central issues in the dilemma and available options.
Identify hoped-for outcomes.	Frame preliminary response.	Generate possible and probable courses of action.	Balance risks and benefits to make the decision.	Examine relevant ethical standards, laws, and regulations.
Brainstorm actions to achieve outcomes.	Consider consequences of that response.	Consider consequences for each course of action.	Decide on level of review.	Search out ethics scholarship.
Evaluate effects of action.	Prepare an ethical resolution.	Consult with supervisors and peers.	Implement the decision.	Apply ethical principles to the situation.
Identify competing non-moral values.	Get feedback from peers and supervisor.	Select an action by weighing competing values, given context.	Monitor the action and outcome.	Consult with supervisor and respected colleagues.
Choose a course of action.	Take action.	Plan and execute the selected action.		Deliberate and decide.
Test the course of action.		Evaluate course of action.		Inform supervisor and take action.
Identify steps, take action, evaluate.				Reflect on the action.

In all these approaches, the researchers mention steps such as applying ethical principles to the situation, considering the consequences of each decision, and deciding the best course of action. However, these steps are not further supported by guidelines on the 'how' of applying the principles, interpreting each decision's consequences, or deciding the best course of action. Therefore, these guidelines seem too general to be adopted to resolve ethical dilemmas. Thus, although these papers contribute to solving relevant questions to ethical decision-making, they lack in catering to all the possibilities of conflicts exhaustively and

providing rigorous guidelines all the way until the final decision is made. The present study, along with refining the fundamental ethical criteria, aims to provide a framework that exhaustively caters to all the conflict possibilities between these criteria and furnishes an end-to-end road map that facilitates all the way from identifying the ethical dilemma to deciding which ethical criteria should be given precedence to evaluating the constituent of an ethical act in order to facilitate the process of ethical decision making.

Framework to Resolve Ethical Dilemmas

Choose global betterment over local betterment

The first challenge that we discovered was the possibility of the existence of multiple ethical options amongst the various possibilities of choice. We had seen how these ethical dilemmas between desirable consequences could result from confusion, for the sake of simplicity in choosing justice or compassion, if such possibilities existed together. To resolve such ethical dilemmas between two desirable consequences, we propose that the paths of each perceivably conflicting ethical criteria of justice and compassion are all the same if the domain of influence of our actions includes everyone and the time frame under consideration is long enough.

The butterfly effect, in chaos theory, states that a slight change in the complex deterministic nonlinear systems such as the system of our universe can result in large differences in the later stages. For example, a tiny butterfly flap in some distant part of the world, let us say in Brazil, can change the air pressure and cause a tornado in India. Similarly, each minute action has consequences on the whole of the universe. For example, a simple act of compassion to a beggar by giving him food has consequences that are not limited just to the beggar. The act of compassion on the beggar can positively influence all who see food being given. The food one provides him can give him the strength to find work and contribute to

society. Alternatively, the food supplied can make him more dependent on others for his survival. The tasty food one sacrifices for the beggar gives the donor strength to restrain himself from getting too engaged in pleasures. Therefore, since we are all connected in some sense, the small act of compassion for a beggar has various implications that eventually affect everything else in our universe.

Considering the cumulative effect of any action for everyone, a compassionate act towards someone might be uncompassionate to society overall. For example, being merciful (and thus compassionate) towards a criminal and not punishing him might lead to the trivialization of similar crimes in society. Therefore, we can see that to be compassionate towards the whole society and impede crimes, the ethical action would be to punish the criminal. Therefore, justice to society is tantamount to being compassionate towards society. When we cumulate the effect over the whole universe in the long term (as explained in the next subsection), the ethical concepts of justice and compassion converge towards the same approach to the situation. The universal laws that human society should try to mimic and align itself with, also suggest the same. The law of cause and effect is the law that is both justice and compassion simultaneously. The effect should be in accordance with the cause, which is justice. If someone has committed a crime, he should be punished, whereas if someone serves society, he should be celebrated and promoted. Only since every life functions based on the law of cause and effect, there is faith that everything is perfect. Nature is compassionate to all life because it is just and balanced. Since it is just and balanced, everybody is assured that the effect of being good and kind is always received proportionately.

To understand what is the ethical thing to do in any dilemma, it is necessary to consider the effect of each competing ethical criterion on society at large. Since we know that the influence of each ethical outcome-based criterion (justice and compassion), when extended over the whole society (in the long term), is the same, we should choose the action where we

can foresee the best influence on the whole society. By doing so, we would be able to discard those options whose influence might seem ethical at the local level but are, in fact, detrimental on a more global (societal) level. For example, being merciful towards the criminal might seem compassionate on a local level where we have just considered the effect on the criminal. However, when we consider how justice to the criminal can uplift society and make it safer, we understand that the effect of justice, in this case, is best for the extended scope of society. Therefore, the necessary condition to solving the ethical dilemmas between two desirable consequences is to broaden the scope of influence and find the option that results in the best of the whole.

Choose long-term betterment over short-term betterment

While evaluating potential consequences, it is important to prefer those choices which lead to the long-term betterment of all rather than the short term. Short-term betterment might restrict one to the locally (temporally) optimal state while missing out on reaching the globally (temporally) optimal state. For example, let us take the example of cheating in an exam when one is sure of not getting caught. Cheating in an exam might result in receiving better marks than one deserves. This action might have some positive consequences for oneself in terms of receiving an award, job, scholarship, etc. However, when considered from the long-term perspective, the lack of knowledge and the tendency to take shortcuts might make one less fit for employing the benefits one has received.

Not just one gets stuck in the local optima while considering the short-term betterment, one also could face long-term unhappiness if one has short-sightedness. For example, although constraining people's liberty is not compassionate to people who savor consuming drugs, governments have put laws to restrict/prohibit drug usage in various parts of the world. Governments have to make such decisions even though many people enjoy consuming drugs. Although such laws disappoint people in the short term, it saves people from getting addicted

and losing control over their actions because of getting high with drugs in the long term. Therefore, compassion in the long term is better than compassion in the short term. In yet another example of the case of justice, being strict with children when they commit an innocuous mistake might prohibit them from engaging in similar unjustified behaviors in the short term because of fear of the repercussions. However, giving them time to understand the consequences of their actions and learn from their experiences might sometimes let them voluntarily integrate and undertake the more justified actions in even other aspects of life in the long term. Therefore, in cases where justice in the long term is different from justice in the short term, one must choose justice in the long term over the one in the short term.

Therefore, to resolve the ethical dilemma between two desirable consequences, in addition to extending the scope of influence and finding the choice that leads to the betterment of the whole society, one needs to broaden the temporal dimension to analyse the impact on the whole society in the long term. The paper proposes that the just and the compassionate act, just like the principle of cause and effect, will be the same when the long term impact on the whole society is considered. Therefore, the dilemma between just and compassionate acts will cease to exist when one considers the long term effect on the whole society. Therefore, practically, whichever option amongst the two conflicting choices of justice and compassion does one deem to be better for the whole society in long term should be considered the ethical act. One should consider that option to be both just and compassionate and the other alternative just a locally (both inclusion or temporal dimension wise) optimal alternative.

Choose action leading to better consequences even if it needs undertaking unprincipled actions

Another challenge that we discussed that confuses many well-intentioned people is the dilemma of principle versus consequence. Is it ethical to pursue the right action when that action leads to bad results, or should one even pursue the wrong action when it has the potential

to produce good results? To resolve such confusion, it is important to understand what makes any action right or wrong. Although some guidelines such as those given by the religions are necessary to trace the ethical action, no action is right or wrong in itself. Even the act of killing is not always wrong. Imagine there was a terrorist who was threatening to explode a bomb and kill several others. If there were a chance to kill the terrorist and stop the bomb from exploding, killing would have been the right action. Therefore, the righteousness of any action is not decided by the act but by the consequences it can achieve.

Moreover, even if someone tries to follow certain moral rules or duties even by neglecting the consequences, one is bound to face conflicts between these different rules or different duties. For example, when someone takes a vow in marriage, one rule or duty to follow could be to protect the vow. Protecting the vow could conflict with the other adopted rules or duties - let us say, being honest. For example, one of the vows in marriage is to support and join in others' joy. However, if the source of the partner's joy is the unhappiness of others, then the rule of being honest contradicts the vow of supporting and sharing others' joy. It is questionable whether one can come up with a set of rules or duties to follow that are non-paradoxical. To form such a system of rules, one would need to form meta-rules or duties that help in deciding the order of preference of each of the rules or duties in different situations. Therefore, the rules or duties cannot be absolute, and following these rules or duties is not always right. These rules or duties should emerge from some fundamental rule or duty which could not be compromised irrespective of the context and consequences. To find such a fundamental rule or duty and form a system of non-paradoxical rules or duties irrespective of context and consequences is an irresolute task.

One of the most rigorous methods to create moral codes was given by Kant, a champion of deontological ethics. Kant formulates that one should "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law" (Kant &

Wood, 2018). As mentioned in the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy paper on Kant's Moral Philosophy by Johnson and Cureton (2004), the four-step process to form a universal law is as follows – "First, formulate a maxim that enshrines your proposed plan of action. Second, recast that maxim as a universal law of nature governing all rational agents, and so as holding that all must, by natural law, act as you yourself propose to act in these circumstances. Third, consider whether your maxim is even conceivable in a world governed by this new law of nature. If it is, then, fourth, ask yourself whether you would, or could, rationally will to act on your maxim in such a world. If you could, then your action is morally permissible."

Johnson and Cureton (2004) give an example to explain this four-step process to validate a universal law. If one wants to check whether giving false promises to reap benefits is an ethical act, one should conceive of a world where everyone tries to deceive others to get what they want. In such a world, no one would believe in the promises of others since they know that such words don't matter. Therefore, in such a world, my promise will cease to have any effect, and since my promise needs to be given credibility for me to reap benefits from the others, this act can't be a universal law. In yet another example, one should not kill anybody because if everybody starts killing each other, there would be anarchy. In such anarchy, one is also vulnerable to being a victim of violence. Therefore, in such a world, there is no safety in life, and without being alive or secure, one cannot enjoy the possible benefit that ensues after killing someone. Therefore, the outcome of this thought experiment should be a rule or duty that one should not kill.

However, general rules or duties, which are outcomes of a context-free situation, might not apply to the specific real-life context, making the situation unique. Jean-Paul Sartre (Linsenbard, 2007) also criticizes this following abstract universalized maxims which are independent of the historical, social, political, geographical or temporal context. For example, in the above-mentioned thought experiment, one does not cater to the context that the person

to be killed is a terrorist and is threatening to blow up the place, or the person carrying out the killing is the police. Therefore, general rules or duties are bound to get irrelevant in some extreme specific situations, and one would need to form rules or duties for as many situations one faces. This essentially translates to reacting to the consequences since the thought experiment Kant suggested where we extend the applicability of maxim to the universe to find contradictions in the hypothetical consequences of, for example, no one believing in promises of others or emergence of violence in an anarchist world, is consequentialist in nature.

Although most of the time, the consequences of following the principled path is the best for the society, in some extreme cases like that of Mahabharata or the case mentioned above, the unprincipled action might lead to better consequences for society. Moreover, even in cases when adopting the principled path is the ethical choice, it is ethical because those principles have the power to create good results for society. For example, Scanlon (1977) says that protecting human rights, which is considered a principle that some schools of ethics consider to be necessary to adhere to, can only be justified by the consequences on the society it has the potential to create. Therefore, if a conflict between adopting principled action leading at most to short-term benefits if not totally non-desirable outcomes and unprincipled action leading to long-term benefits for all arises, one must prefer the unprincipled path over the principled path.

Choose the truthful/principled act in case of uncertainty of outcomes

It is often more challenging to predict the long-term consequences of actions than the short-term ones. Even sometimes, the short-term consequences are not predictable. The consequences depend on so many factors that are not directly in one's control, and it often is also difficult to predict those external factors that influence the consequence. Mukundananda (2013) explained in his commentary on Srimad Bhagavad Gita that many factors such as our efforts, our past conditionings, the efforts of others, the cumulative inclinations of all the

stakeholders, the place, the time, etc. together contribute to the results achieved in a particular situation.

For example, let us say there is a suspected criminal. It is not certain whether he has committed a crime or not, let us say being involved in terrorist activities. There is no other way to prove his crime with certainty other than his confessing about it. Is it right to torture the suspected criminal so that he confesses his crime or to punish him without being sure of his culpability? If the suspected criminal is guilty, punishing him will lead to a positive consequence of restricting further terrorist activities and sending a message to other terrorists about the consequences of their actions, while if the suspected criminal is innocent, penalizing him would lead to a decline of faith in the executive force and the law system of the country. The consequences of the act of punishing do not entirely lie in the hands of executive force but also on the history of the suspected criminal and the response of the common citizen to the perceived justice.

Therefore, when consequences are unpredictable or possibly antithetical, and one is not sure about the right aim to choose, it is essential to weigh the different possibilities practically. There is no situation where one can be entirely sure about realizing a particular outcome. Similarly, one is not always in a situation where one cannot predict the consequences with a certain confidence. Therefore, when the principled and consequential paths differ, there will always be a tussle between the belief in the power of principled action to bring good consequences and the desirable consequences one can analyze and imagine as the outcomes of an alternate unprincipled action. Therefore, in cases when there is no surety of reaching desirable outcomes, one should, by default, adopt the principled path with the belief that it will bring good outcomes for society in the long term. However, suppose one is relatively confident about the long-term consequences of any principled action, and it is not desirable. In that case, adopting the unprincipled action is justifiable if it can produce desirable results.

Include the unintended indirect consequences in analysis

However, whenever we adopt an unprincipled action, it is essential to examine that the consequences are evaluated for the betterment of the whole society and not for selfish reasons. It is important to realize that sometimes for personal benefits, we try to find reasons for it to be beneficial for society even if it is not, and justify the action. Bandura (2014) states that people don't ordinarily engage in harmful acts until they justify the morality of that action. While justifying, the harmful conduct is made "personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes." This is called moral justification. One should always be aware of this trap and choose unprincipled action only and only if it really benefits society.

While considering the effect of taking unprincipled action on the whole society, one should also factor in society's social ethics. Taking an unprincipled action is against the social ethics and thus also results in creating anarchy in the society by justifying going against social ethics. Even if one has adopted unprincipled action for the benefit of the whole society, others will get influenced by such actions and, without understanding the context, are using unprincipled actions even for their individualistic benefit. For example, many people justify violence by citing the same action being adopted by Krishna in Mahabharata while not acknowledging the intent behind the war in Mahabharata being the benefit of all and not just their own. Also, when one adopts unprincipled action for the intended betterment of society, many times, the individual reputation gets put at stake. Krishna had put his reputation of being just and ethical at stake when he proposed various wicked means in the war, such as killing Guru Drona by telling a half-lie. Thus, one must also factor in the harmful effects of adopting an unprincipled path, such as losing reputation or giving others an excuse for perpetuating unprincipled actions, while imagining the consequences. Therefore, adopting an unprincipled

action for better consequences to society is definitely not a wrong option, but definitely is a choice that needs enough careful consideration.

Act proactively with the best intentions

While considering the consequences on the whole society in the long-term, it is not necessary that the human mind is able to factor in all the forces applied to the situation due to limited cognitive abilities and selective attention, distortion, and retention. Dearborn and Simon (1958) show that one will selectively perceive those aspects of the situation that are related to their goals. Therefore, to make our perception more inclusive and exhaustive, we must practice being more and more inclusive in the concern we have towards the world and responsive to whatever inputs we receive from the surroundings. However, since we are always a work in progress, there will always be some limitations. Therefore, since our cognition is limited and perception is selective, what we expect and what happens are quite different, especially when considered for society over the long term. However, it is important to be honest about the efforts and have the purest of intentions while making ethical decisions.

Mukundananda (2013), in his commentary on the Indian philosophical text *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, states that there is no control over the results of the actions, but having pure intentions and doing what one thinks is righteous helps one become joyful and equanimous. Society should aim to make its citizens aware of the benefits of having pure intentions and motivate them to voluntarily choose ethical actions for the benefit of society and their own selves. It has also been recognized that behaving ethically reduces suffering and increases happiness amongst those behaving ethically and those they are interacting with (Harvey, 2012). One of the motives behind being just or compassionate, or truthful, as we discussed, is definitely the betterment of the world. However, this is not the complete story. There is a shloka in Rig Vega: '*Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha*'. The shloka literally means that there is a twofold motive behind conducting any act. One of them is to ensure the well-being of all on

earth (universe). However, the other motive is to liberate oneself from one's limitations (Singh, 2005).

Both these motives are, in a way, not separate from each other. Only by intending for the well-being of all on earth can one liberate oneself from the self-constructed boundaries and limitations. The other way round is also true. A natural consequence of liberating oneself is a feeling of love for all. Harvey (2012) mentions that the benefits of self and others are intertwined to such an extent that helping others helps one's own self, and helping one's own self enables one to help others more. Therefore, the consequences of being just or compassionate or truthful are not just limited to ensuring the betterment of the world, but having such an undistorted concern about the world shatters one's own limitations. Therefore, whenever there is a doubt about whether an act will lead to the betterment of the world, one alternate way to decipher the ethicality of an act is to analyze whether the act leads to the dissolution of one's own boundaries or limitations. Moreover, if one is not able to perceive or infer clear supremacy of any act in terms of the consequences on the society, one can judge the ethicality of an act from the consequences on one's own psychological and spiritual growth.

For example, let us say that your grandfather earns a pension and you have plans to use that money that you think will help the members of a nearby village become safe and prosperous. The only challenge is that your grandfather disagrees with your plans, and you must keep him bound to force him to sign the checks. Moreover, there is no way for anybody from outside to know that you are keeping your grandfather muzzled, and therefore, there is no possibility for anybody else to get negatively influenced by your act or for your reputation to be put at stake. At the same time, many lives in the village will be saved, and many in the village will get the opportunity to serve society in a better way. Even though you want to use the money for society's betterment, you are not sure because you have to be unjust to your grandfather. Here, even though the perceived benefits to the society are positive in every way

since nobody will get to know the injustice done with the grandfather, one should consider the consequences of doing so on one's own psychological and spiritual growth and act accordingly.

Even after all these considerations, there is a chance that one is not able to perceive one action to be supreme than all others clearly. In those cases, one must not resort to no action. With the intention to do best for the world and one's own self in the long term, whatever one deems to be the right action, one must act according to it. In the worst case, one can always adopt the path one perceives to be the most truthful or principled and act according to it. One must also understand that no action is completely perfect. All actions have some negative consequences. Even the basic act of breathing disturbs/kills the microorganisms that come in contact with it. However, that does not make breathing unethical. While breathing, one's attention is on the service one can render because of being supported by the universe through the act of breathing. Therefore, each action will have negative consequences, but the intention behind giving the best to society in the long term is necessary to make it ethical. While undertaking any action, one must accept the negative consequences as an aftermath of the situation but keep an uninterrupted focus on the positive consequences that happen for the larger scheme of things. For example, Arjun's act of waging war against Kauravas should be considered an ethical act because he did not perceive war as an act of killing his brothers but as an act of rendering justice to the society by stopping cruel and unfair rulers. Therefore, what one's intentions are and where one's focus is while doing an act determines the ethicality of an act.

The characteristics of the 'best' consequences

We have, till now, considered the criteria for choosing the ethical action. The criteria, as mentioned, involved choosing what is realistically 'best' for society in the long term. However, there are multiple ways to interpret the 'best' for society in the long term. One way to calculate the 'best' is to sum up the pleasure and pain each goes through in society as an

effect of the action. However, such a method falls short of considering the sustenance effect. Pleasure and pain can result in addiction and repulsion, making happiness unsustainable in the long term. For example, temperate laws around drug indulgences might give pleasure to the community in the short term but result in various adverse outcomes in the long run. Therefore, while evaluating the 'best' consequences, one should wish to produce happiness that sustains in the long term.

Also, the 'best' for the whole is not equivalent to the 'best' for the majority, even if it maximizes the sum of all individual receptions. The 'best' for the whole means the act that results in the long-term betterment of each life. The basic assumption here should be that the betterment of each life lies in the betterment of society and the betterment of society lies in the betterment of each life. Such an understanding comes from the realization that pain in the short term might even result in sustained happiness in the long term. For example, it is possible that pain caused due to resisting the temptation of getting high with drugs might transform into eventual sustained happiness in the long term. Similarly, it is possible that immediate pain caused to the majority by not fulfilling their desires and wants because satisfying those is not justified or compassionate for all might result in their own sustained happiness in the long term. For example, if the majority might want to further their exclusive interests and exploit the minority while pursuing these goals, it is not the 'best' for all in the long term. To make it even more concrete, ethnic cleansing of the minority community is not 'best' for society because it does not produce sustained happiness for all in the long term and thus is not justified or compassionate. If we integrate this understanding, the long-term sustained happiness of each life lies in the betterment of the society and vice versa is also true.

Another possibility of confusion while deciding what constitutes the 'best' is related to agent relativity. If the consequences are evaluated from an agent-neutral perspective, spending resources on one's own family when there are people who cannot afford basic amenities like

food seems to be unethical. However, consequences are not to be evaluated from an agent-neutral frame of reference. The rationale behind this proposition is that even though the intention behind any act should be the welfare of the world, the responsibilities towards those who are near to one, such as one's own family, community, and nation are more prominent than responsibilities towards a more distant group for the welfare of the world. If everybody performs their responsibilities to those who are local to them, everybody's needs in the world will be taken care of. However, if one serves others at the cost of serving those near them, there will be no one to take care of the near ones.

If the intention behind serving those who are local is the welfare of all and thus is global, they would not exploit others/ those who are distant for the benefit of those who are local/ nearer. For example, educating one's own children is considered ethical because educating them will make them abler to serve the world. However, getting involved in corruption to illegally reserve a seat for one's own child in a prestigious college is not ethical because it exploits the deserved rights of others and grabs something which is not rightfully theirs. The purpose of empowering near and dear ones will be to empower the whole world and not to possess what belongs/ should belong to others. Therefore, service to the near ones first is the service to the universe. This is what Mahatma Gandhi referred to as swadeshi (Prabhu & Rao, 1996). Swadeshi is the philosophy of acting locally for the global benefit of all. Therefore, agent relativity is necessary to decide the 'best' course of action.

To sum up, when an ethical dilemma emerges,

1. Choose global betterment over local betterment.
2. Choose long-term betterment over short-term betterment.
3. Choose action leading to better consequences even if it needs undertaking unprincipled actions.
4. Choose the truthful/principled act in case of uncertainty of outcomes.

5. Include the unintended indirect consequences in analysis.
6. Act proactively with the best intentions.

The Figure 2 given below assembles all these guidelines into a single flowchart. Firstly, the flowchart guides one to imagine the consequences for oneself and all the relevant others. Therefore, this step encompasses the integration of different vantage points of the stakeholders and the consequences to the individual's psychological and spiritual growth. Furthermore, the flowchart guides to imagine the consequences in the long-term time frame. When the consequences for all in the long-term are imagined, the flowchart reaches the first checkpoint where if the consequences are not just or compassionate for all in the long term, the flowchart guides the subject to restart the whole process with another possible action/response to the dilemma. Here, it is implicitly assumed that the betterment of each stakeholder, including that of the subject, lies in the betterment of the society in the long term. Therefore, an action can be just or compassionate to all stakeholders in the long term, even if it is unjustified or hurtful for some of the stakeholders in the short term. However, for an action to be just or compassionate to all stakeholders, one must be able to envision how the action, even if unjust or hurtful to some stakeholders, is just or compassionate to all stakeholders in the long term.

If the action qualifies through this checkpoint, the flowchart guides the subject to check if the action is truthful or principled. If the action is truthful or principled, then the action is just, compassionate and truthful. Therefore, the subject can directly proceed to undertake the action. However, if it is not truthful or principled, the flowchart guides the subject to consider the unintended indirect consequences such as reputation loss or supplying an excuse to others for committing untruthful acts. If the subject does not think that the integrated consequences are worthy of being undertaken, the flowchart guides the subject to restart the process by assuming another alternative action. However, if the action gets through this checkpoint, the flowchart directs the subject to confirm that the imagined consequences are most likely to be

realized. If there is relative uncertainty about the imagined consequences to be realized, the flowchart ushers the subject to adopt the truthful or principled action. If in this whole process, one does deem any of the action alternatives to be suitable to be undertaken by the standards of this flowchart, then one should not become passive or inaction but proactively adopt the most truthful or principled action.

Figure 2. *Flowchart of Ethical Decision-Making Process*

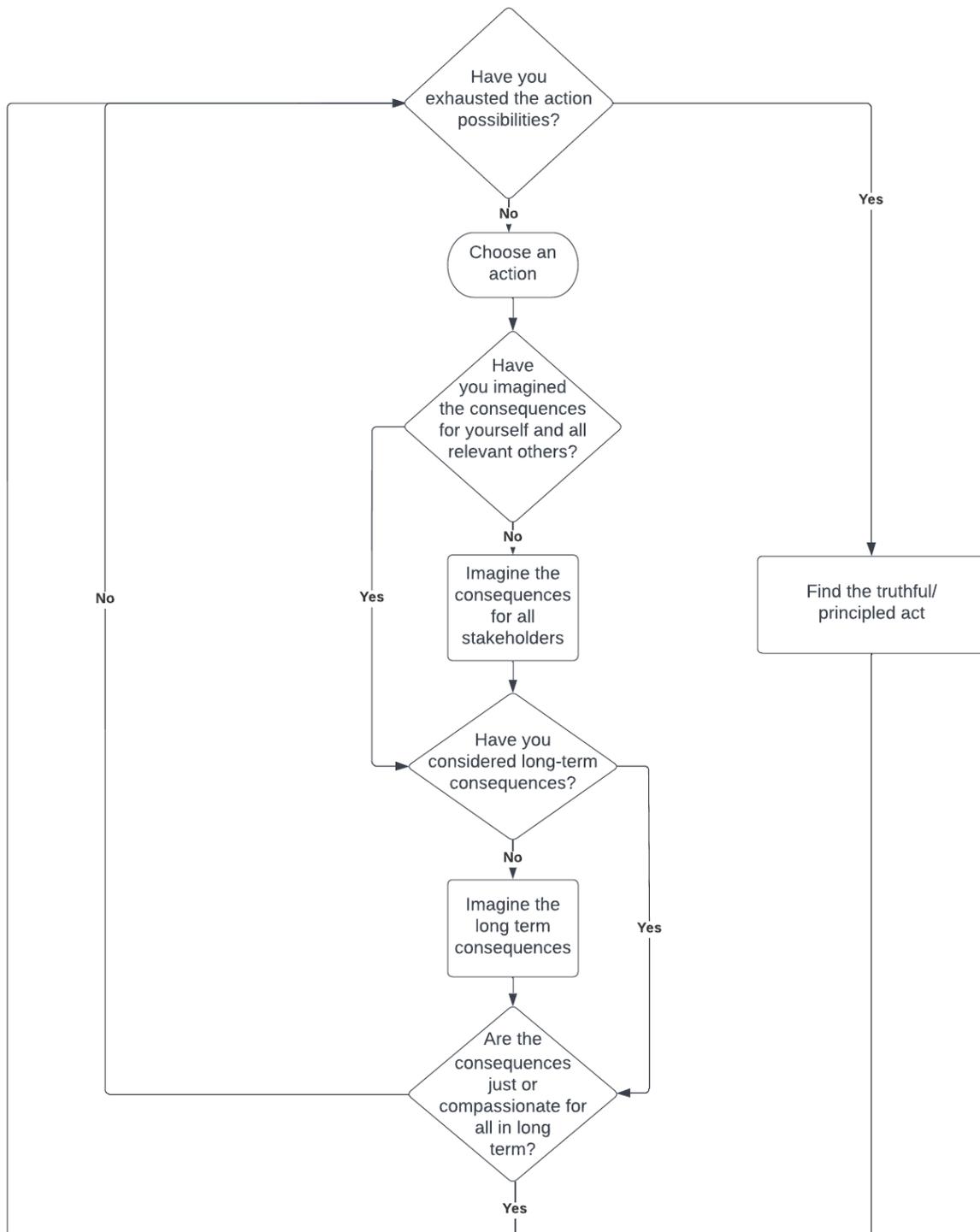
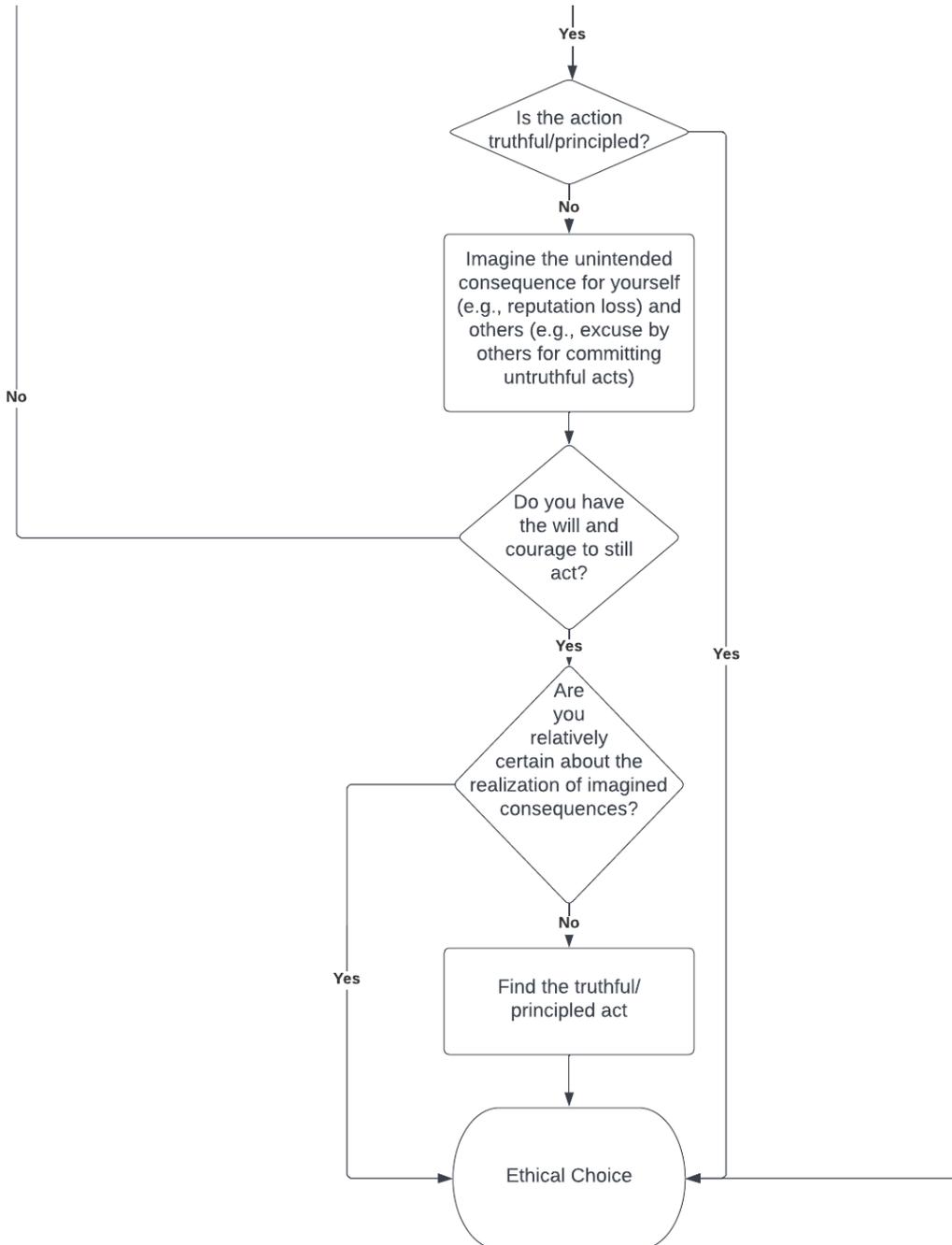


Figure 2 (Continued). *Flowchart of Ethical Decision-Making Process*



Discussion

This framework could have wide-ranging implications for all individuals, organizations, and institutions. This framework's first and obvious application is in structuring, formulating, and articulating one's thoughts while facing an ethical dilemma. One way of making decisions while facing an ethical dilemma is based on intuition. Intuition, no doubt, is quite helpful but often is subjected to one's own biases and irrationalities (Kahneman, 2011). Therefore, employing this framework while facing ethical dilemmas helps ask the right questions to structure, formulate and articulate one's thoughts. The questions that help one resolve the ethical dilemma should not be biasedly selected but should be context-independent. Bandura (2014) suggests that people justify immoral acts by providing a moral or socially worthy purpose to the action. The first step to do so is to selectively pick the questions to be evaluated to provide moral or social purpose to one's immoral act. For example, people often engage in corruption, thinking that engagement in corruption is not for their personal benefit but for the benefit of family or friends. They selectively ask themselves whether the act is beneficial to the family or friends to deem an act ethical. However, in doing so, they don't factor in the impact on the extended family- the society. Therefore, this framework helps one overcome one's own biases and irrationality by asking context-independent right questions that should assist one in ethical decision-making.

The other benefit is that the framework provides a means for expressing and communicating oneself. If this framework is well established as the procedure to resolve ethical dilemmas, everybody has the means to explain one's actions as a response to these instituted questions. Once one has gone through it, one should document their thoughts about each

question before taking action while facing an ethical dilemma. Once one has documented their thoughts, if some objection is raised as a response to the action, one would have the opportunity to prove that they have taken the actions with the best of intentions and by employing the best of their capabilities. The managers of organizations can make it a practice amongst their teams to regularly use this framework to share employee's thoughts with them to understand their perspectives. Therefore, this framework can be integrated with the organization's training modules.

The other scope for employing it to express oneself is in the judiciary system of the society. There are instances where it can get ethical to break the law for the best interest of all. For example, let us say the doctor is operating on a patient under anaesthesia with the patient's consent. However, while executing the operation, the doctor realizes that a further procedure is needed to save the patient upon seeing the patient's condition. However, the patient has not given consent for that. In such cases, the ethics might drive the doctor to perform the additional procedure, while the law may direct the doctor otherwise. In such cases, this framework can be acknowledged by all the stakeholders, including the judiciary system and the patient, to grant one to take the hard decision of breaking the law while facing minimum negative consequences. Furthermore, this framework can also be integrated into the educational curriculum to teach the art of ethical decision-making. Characters from the case studies such as those of Ramayana and Mahabharata should be taken and evaluated from this framework's point of view to teach what makes an act ethical. Therefore, this framework has varied applications in helping oneself get clarity and expressing oneself better in organizations and institutions in cases of ethical dilemmas.

Limitations

The framework contributes a necessary fabric to undertake an ethical act. However, this framework does not ensure that two different people reach the same notion of ethicality while

using it. Neither are the authors proposing or endorsing the view that it is required to adopt the exactly same approach by different people in the same situation and time. Authors believe that being ethical is more of an art than a science. Therefore, there could be more than a single ethical approach to the same situation simultaneously. Two different acts in the same situation at the same time can be ethical. However, we propose that although there could be multiple ethical approaches, any ethical act must adhere to the above-mentioned framework from the subject's point of view. Two different subjects can have different notions of what is justice or what is compassion. They could imagine the consequences to different degrees of depth. They could adopt varied assumptions about the external forces driving the consequences. They could include different stakeholders' points of view and weigh the benefit of the stakeholders differently. There are so many factors because of which the notion of ethicality might change individually. However, any ethical act must consider what is realistically the best for everybody in the long run, to the best of the subject's capabilities.

Any act is not just a function of ethics but also of the subject's morals. For example, if hypothetically, Rama and Krishna were exposed to the same situations, there is a scope for both of them to undertake different yet ethical actions because morality for both of them is different. Rama could work to establish the rule of law in the society while at the same time, Krishna could propose undertaking unlawful means to reach better consequences for the society. However, both of these should be the approaches that they individually endorse to be realistically the best for society in the long run. One's morals could be inclined more towards being compassionate than justice at the local level. It is advisable for them to practice being compassionate and parallelly expand their domain of inclusion to attain compassionate outcomes for all in the long run. This way, they could eventually converge to what is both justice and compassion at the global level since justice and compassion is the same at the global level. Therefore, one limitation is that this prescriptive framework does not render a single

common answer to ethical dilemmas. Each one should go through this framework and act according to what according to them adheres to the framework.

Another limitation of this paper is that the framework is just a theoretical construct. When this framework will be adopted by individuals, organizations and institutions, empirical evidence could be gathered about its relevance, robustness and reliability. So, one of the further works could be to find ways of employing this framework at various different places and finding the responses from various stakeholders getting affected by the use of it. Another further work could be to generate information and knowledge with this framework as the base. Various stories and case studies catering to different contexts could be generated to be disseminated amongst people with different backgrounds to convince them about the necessity and legitimacy of the framework.

Conclusion

Ethics, being such an important contributor to the society's voluntary yet collective growth, necessitates promulgating characteristics of the ethical act into the society. Ethical acts can be distinguished from the unethical acts by a two-step process, as shown in the paper. The first step constitutes finding the different ethical forces involved in the situation. Various ethical values such as honesty, equality, kindness, etc. can be, as shown in the paper, simply classified into justice, compassion and truth. All the actions that do not cater to either the path of justice, compassion, or truth can be deemed to be confirmed unethical choices. Just and compassionate acts are outcome-oriented acts, while being truthful is a process-oriented act.

Some situations involve the availability of more than one perceivably ethical choice that can be undertaken. These cases, called ethical dilemmas, involve a quandary in choosing between just, compassionate, or truthful paths. There are three possibilities for the generation of ethical dilemmas- 1) When there are two different desirable outcomes 2) When the truthful act leads to an undesirable outcome, and a desirable outcome can only be reached by an

untruthful act 3) When one is uncertain about the outcomes and thus does not know the right thing to do. Multiple hypothetical and real-life examples such as the trolley problem, rescuing your friend problem, reservation, and abortion elucidate one of these dilemmas.

While multiple factors such as sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and courage contribute toward discharging an ethical act, there is a special role of mental frameworks in assisting in developing these factors in oneself. The framework contributed by this paper suggests one be mindful of these details while facing an ethical dilemma.

- Choose global betterment over local betterment.
- Choose long-term betterment over short-term betterment.
- Choose action leading to better consequences even if it needs undertaking unprincipled actions.
- Choose the truthful/principled act in case of uncertainty of outcomes.
- Include the unintended indirect consequences in analysis.
- Act proactively with the best intentions.

The framework has wide-ranging implications for individuals, organizations, and institutions. By employing this framework, individuals can be significantly aided in making bias-free ethical decisions. This framework can also be used as an agreed procedure to adopt in cases of ethical dilemmas and can be used to express one's intention while making a tough ethical decision. The framework can also be used to improve one's ethical decision-making capabilities. Therefore, the framework can be applied in various sectors such as business, judiciary, education, etc. A little effort in making the ethical decision-making process more systematic will go a long way in making the society peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous.

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