

Designing a Course on Moral Inquiry

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PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. The Goals of a Course on Moral Inquiry

1.1. Traditional moral education

The term “moral education” typically conjures up the vision of getting the young conform to the moral codes and values of the elders in the community in which they are growing up. Implicit in this paradigm of moral education is the yearning for *cultural reproduction*: the desire of the older generation to reproduce their own beliefs, values, codes of conduct, habits and practices among the young.

Most parents do want their children to imitate them. Parents who worship god gnomon want their children to worship god gnomon, parents who practice law want their children to practice law, and parents who eat mutton but not beef want their children not to eat beef. Many attempts at moral education are propelled by this idea to shape our children in our image. Philip Atkinson’s “The Importance And Method Of Teaching Children Morality”

(<http://www.ourcivilisation.com/moral2/moral3.htm>) is a prototypical example of this form of moral education. “Moral Education - A Brief History of Moral Education, The Return of Character Education, Current Approaches to Moral Education” in online education encyclopedia (<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2246/Moral-Education.html>) provides an overview of a number of variants and alternatives.

While such desire for self-cloning is quite “natural” (in the sense of being widespread among members of the human species, but not in the sense of something desirable), it is not clear that it is in the best interests of children or that it serves the purposes of education. Nor is it clear that

getting the young conform to the old is not a form of indoctrination or propaganda.

1.2. Goals of a Course on Moral Inquiry

If education is to be grounded in critical thinking and inquiry, we want the young generation to

- be familiar with the current beliefs, values, codes of conduct, habits and practices
- question and critically evaluate these beliefs, values, codes of conduct, habits and practices, and
- decide for themselves what to believe, what to accept, and what to do.

This means that education should be designed as a form of liberation, not as propaganda to promote unquestioning uncritical obedience to authority.

The purpose of a course on moral inquiry is not instilling *our* moral values on children, make them follow our moral codes of behaviour, or get them to imbibe our moral judgments: such an activity, as pointed out above, would tantamount to indoctrination. Rather, its purpose is to help them develop the capacity to engage in rational inquiry on moral judgments and moral theories. This includes helping them construct their own individual moral theories in a rigorous way, develop the ability to critically reflect on their moral theories in relation to their moral judgments, and engage in rational debates on moral theories and moral judgments.

Most of us confronted with moral choices at a personal level as an individual (e.g., is it morally right for me to smoke after having promised my mother not to?) and at a collective level as the member of a community, the citizen of a country or as a member of the human species (e.g., is the death penalty morally justifiable?) We may therefore formulate the goals of course on moral inquiry as follows:

<p><i>Goals of a course on moral inquiry</i></p> <p>A) to help each student reflect critically on his/her moral judgments, and construct a personal moral theory from which his/her judgments would follow,</p> <p>B) to sensitize students to the diversity of moral judgments and moral theories across individuals and communities, and to explore the moral core shared across normal members of the human species in spite of the diversity of moral codes,</p> <p>C) to help students construct a collective moral theory within a group (the group ranging from two individuals to a community or the whole of humanity) such that</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(1) those judgments that they agree on would follow from this theory, and</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">(2) the legitimacy of at least some of the judgments that they disagree on can be settled on the basis of the theory, and</p> <p>D) to help students develop the capacity to engage in public moral debates on the basis of a shared moral theory of the kind outlined in (C).</p>
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1.3. Morality vs. Ethics

A brief note about the distinction between the terminology of morality and ethics before we proceed. We will use the term *ethics* to refer to a set of societal codes of conduct, typically approved by an institution or profession, as in the case of medical ethics and lawyer's ethics. In this sense, ethics and the *laws* of a judiciary are parallel. In contrast, *morality* is a matter of the deeper values and general principles (rather than codes of conduct.)

Though ethical codes and the laws of a legal system generally have their roots in moral values and principles, there can be situations in which moral principles conflict with ethical codes and laws. Thus, the ethical codes of catholic confession demand that what someone confesses is kept confidential, but what happens of a confessor reveals that he is a serial killer, and discloses to the priest the identities of the next twenty victims?

Readers who are familiar with philosophical theories of morality, and are wondering about consequentialist and deontological moral theories (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics>) are advised to look at the appendix that makes clear why I am not following the philosophical approaches to normative ethics.

PART II: PERSONAL MORAL THEORIES

2. Constructing and Evaluating Personal Moral Theories

A moral theory is a set of *general principles* (based on a set of moral values) such that when combined with the facts of a particular action/practice, a set of logical consequences (“predictions”) can be derived from these principles. To illustrate, take for the idea of “Thou shalt not kill”, the equivalent of which is found in all moral communities. To convert this into a moral principle, we need to formulate it with greater precision. Not kill what? Human beings? Humans and other animals? Does this apply to insects as well? Monocellular organisms? Suppose we formulate the principle as follows.

Principle 1: Destroying the life of X is morally wrong, where X =

- a) any living organism
- b) any living organism belonging to the animal kingdom
- c) any living organism with a central nervous system
- d) any living organism with consciousness
- e) any human being, or
- f) any human being of my group (where “my group” = my family/my community/my religion/my country/...)

Suppose students are presented with then following scenario, and are asked for their moral judgments on Zeno’s practice:

Scenario 1

Zeno kills cats to amuse himself.

Chances are that they would say that Zeno’s practice is immoral. What moral principle does this judgment follow from?

Suppose the students choose Principle (1a): Destroying the life of any living organism is morally wrong. We can use an expanded version of an Aristotelian syllogism to derive the judgment from the principle.

A brief note on syllogism first. A syllogism is a set of propositions that includes

- (i) major premises,
 - (ii) minor premises, and
 - (iii) a conclusion
- (and optional intermediate steps.)

Here is famous example of syllogistic reasoning found in logic textbooks:

All human beings are mortal	(major premise)
Socrates is a human being	(minor premise)
It follows therefore that Socrates is mortal	(conclusion)

A major premise is a general statement that applies to the whole population. In the above example, the population is that of the members of the human species. A minor premise is a statement that applies to a particular individual or sample of the population. The minor premise in the above example applies specifically to Socrates. The conclusion applies to Socrates.

Let us employ (a slightly expanded version of syllogistic reasoning to justify the judgment that Zeno's killing of the cat was morally wrong:

Zeno kills cats.	(what is given: min pr)
Destroying the life of any living organism is morally wrong.	(princ 1a: major pr)
A cat is a living organism.	(our knowledge: minor pr)
Killing destroys life.	(our knowledge: minor pr)
Therefore Zeno's practice destroys the life of living organisms	(intermediate step)
It follows therefore that Zeno's practice is morally wrong.	(final conclusion)

The first step in learning to engage in rational moral inquiry is learning to *formulate* one's moral principles clearly and precisely, and to *justify* moral judgments in terms of syllogistic reasoning as illustrated above. Implicit in this activity are the following requirements on rational moral inquiry:

Requirement (1): Every moral judgment should follow as a logical consequence ("prediction") of the general principles of the moral theory we subscribe to, when combined with the facts of the action/practice being judged.

Requirement (2): If a logical consequence of the moral principles is inconsistent with a moral judgment, we must revise either the principles or the judgment.

Let me illustrate requirement (2). Suppose, after giving the derivation above, students are given another situation: Athena took antibiotic pills, thereby destroying some of the bacteria in her body. Did she do anything morally wrong? Chances are that they would say that she didn't. However, given principle (1a) and the fact that bacteria are living organisms, it follows that Athena's action was morally wrong. Hence, their moral judgment is logically inconsistent with a predication derived from the theory. Given requirement (2), they now have the option of either revising the judgment (They can judge Athena's action as immoral) or revising the principle (e.g. they can choose principle (1b) instead of (1a)).

Suppose they choose (1b). We can now offer additional scenarios (counterpart of "data" in moral inquiry) to test the theory. If Apollo killed a worm, did he do something immoral? ((1b) predicts that he did.) What if he killed a mosquito? A rat? ...

We can also move on to difficult areas. What if Zeus is a judge and he sentences a murderer to death? Even if the students choose (1e) or (1f), it would follow that Zeus did something that is immoral. If we do not share this judgment, how do we satisfy requirement (2)?

3. The Concept of Choice

In the preceding section, we introduced the idea of *rigour* in the construction of a moral theory. Rigour of theory construction (whether in the moral, scientific, mathematical or aesthetic domains) involves the maximization of the explicitness of theoretical propositions, their clarity, and their precision. In what follows, we take a look at the components of that are needed in the architecture of a rigorous moral theory.

Suppose students are given the following scenarios for thought experiments:

Scenario 2:

Zeno, a bomber pilot, is ordered to bomb either village A or village B, both inhabited by innocent civilians. Village A has a population of ten, while village B has a population of a hundred. If Zeno disobeys the order, some other bomber pilot will be ordered to bomb both villages, which means at least one of the two villages would be destroyed anyway. What is morally the right thing to do for Zeno?

- Option A: bomb village A
- Option B: bomb village B
- Option C: refuse to bomb either village

Scenario 3:

A gang of terrorists have attacked and taken over a village. Apollo, one of the villagers, is given a neighbour's cat, and is ordered to kill it. He is offered two ways of killing the cat. One of them involves slowly torturing the cat for a day at the end of which the cat will die. The other involves a quick and painless death for the cat. If Apollo refuses to kill the cat, the terrorists will torture and kill all the villagers. What is morally the right thing to do?

- Option A: kill the cat painlessly
- Option B: torture and kill the cat
- Option C: refuse to kill the cat

Chances are that they would choose A in both cases. For a moral theory to derive this judgment, they would need to introduce a couple of additional elements in the theory.

Take the choice between A and B. Notice that they both involve killing, and hence the violation of principle (1a/b/c). A theory that has only some variant of principle (1) will yield the judgment that options A and B are both morally wrong, and leave us at a stalemate. To derive A as the right action, students would need to incorporate the idea of *choice* in the architecture of the moral theory:

Meta-principle 1: Given a set of options, choosing the best moral option is morally the right thing to do.

Among the three options provided in the two scenarios, we intuitively recognize that option A is the best one. Given meta-principle 1, it follows that this is the right thing to do.

We may now point out to students that meta-principle 1, though necessary, is not sufficient. What makes option A the best one? Take options A and B in scenario 2. Though both involve destroying human lives, B involves destroying more lives than A. Based on this observation, they might be invited to consider the following meta-principle:

Meta-principle 2: All else being equal, harming fewer creatures is better than harming more.

It follows from meta-principle 2 that killing 10 villagers is better than killing 100 in scenario 2. Given this result, meta-principle 1 says that killing 10 villagers is the right thing to do. Hence, in the absence of a better or equally good alternative, they would need to incorporate this principle into their theory.

Intuitively, it is easy to see that option A is better than option B in scenario 3 as well, but this time the difference between the two options is not a matter of number. The reason why B is worse is because it involves causing suffering in addition to causing death. To cover this case, they would need an additional moral principle:

Principle 2: Causing suffering X is morally wrong, where X =

- a) any living organism
- b) any living organism belonging to the animal kingdom
- c) any living organism with a central nervous system
- d) any living organism with consciousness
- e) any human being, or
- f) any human being of my group (where “my group” = my family/my community/my religion/my country/...)

If we assume that an organism can suffer only if it has a central nervous system (i.e., amoeba and worms are not capable of suffering), parameters (a) and (b) are redundant for principle 2. However, the formulation of principle 2 can be left as it is to make it parallel principle 1.

Given a theory that includes both principle (1c/d) and principle (2c/d), it follows that option B in scenario 3 violates both (1) and (2), while option A violates only (1). Intuitively, we recognize that this is the reason for A being the better option. To cover this, meta-principle 2 would need to be expanded along the following lines.

Meta-principle 2 (rev): All else being equal,
a) harming fewer creatures is better than harming more.
b) violating fewer principles is better than violating more.

Given (2b), it follows that option A in scenario 3 is the better one, and from meta-principle 1 it follows that this option is the morally right one.

We may now invite the students’ attention to option C in the two scenarios: they do not involve an action that causes death or suffering. Rather, they are both instances of refusal to kill or to torture. How, then, is option A better than option C?

A moment’s reflection reveals that the reason why option C is worse than both A and B is that the refusal to act results in far worse situations of death (and suffering). What is immoral is not merely *action* that results in death or suffering, but also *inaction* that causes death or suffering. To help students see this clearly, let us confront them with the following scenarios.

Scenario 4:

Zeno is at a neighbour’s party. Apollo, whom Zeno dislikes intensely, is also at the party. Apollo has a rare condition which, when he has an attack, needs a particular medicine in ten minutes without which he will die. He gets the attack at the party, but he hasn’t brought the

medicine with him. He knows that Zeno has the medicine at his home and it would take him only two minutes for him to get it. He begs Zeno to lend or sell him a couple of pills, but Zeno refuses, saying, “Get it from somewhere else.” Unfortunately, it would take at least half an hour to get the pills from his home or some other source, and Zeno knows this, but he is obstinate in his refusal. Apollo dies in ten minutes. Was it morally right of Zeno not to give Apollo the medicine?

Scenario 5:

A young boy has tied up a live cat, and burning it with a candle. Hercules walks by, sees the boy torturing the cat, and walks off, even though he could have easily prevented the torture. Was it morally right of Hercules not to have intervened to save the cat?

It is extremely unlikely that any normal student would judge Zeno and Hercules to be morally blameless in these scenarios (unless (s)he has been brainwashed by a philosophy teacher committed to a deontological theory of morality. If we judge Zeno and Hercules to have incurred a moral offense, it would be an offense of inaction, not an offense of action: the sin of omission, not the sin of commission.

To accommodate cases like this, students would need to revise their moral principles along the following lines:

Principle 1 (rev): Choosing an option (of action or inaction) that results in the death of X is morally wrong, where X =

- a) any living organism
- b) any living organism belonging to the animal kingdom
- c) any living organism with a central nervous system
- d) any living organism with consciousness
- e) any human being, or
- f) any human being of my group (where “my group” = my family/my community/my religion/my country/...)

Principle 2 (rev): Choosing an option (of action or inaction) that results in the suffering or non-lessening of the suffering X is morally wrong, where X =

- a) any living organism
- b) any living organism belonging to the animal kingdom
- c) any living organism with a central nervous system
- d) any living organism with consciousness
- e) any human being, or
- f) any human being of my group (where “my group” = my family/my community/my religion/my country/...)

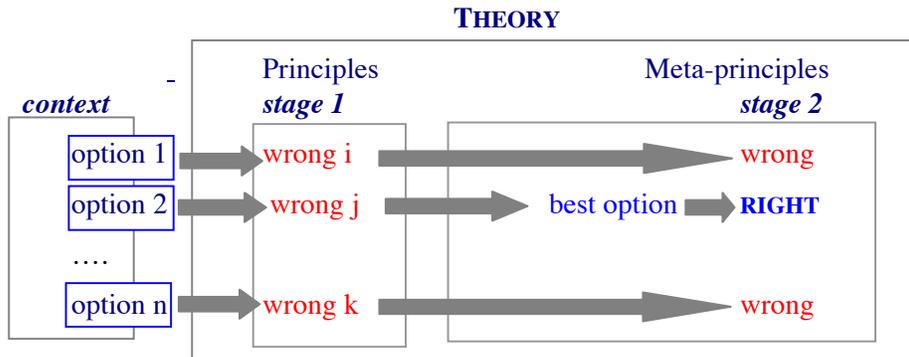
The distinction between the sin of omission and the sin of commission was what underlay the controversy of the Siamese twins Mary and Jodie a few years ago. Though they didn’t know why they judged the choices differently, the parents took the sin of commission to be graver than the sin of omission (I am told this is the standard Catholic view) and refused to give consent for the surgery, while the doctors, taking both to be equal, wanted surgery. (See http://www.publicpolicy.umd.edu/IPPP/reports/Vol%2021Winter2001/Winter%202001_21_1.6.pdf).

4. Logical Properties of Moral Reasoning

4.1. Two stage reasoning

In section 2, we proposed the use of Aristotelian syllogism as model for moral reasoning to derive moral judgments from the principles of a moral theory. In section 3, however, we outlined a two-stage process of the derivation:

- Stage 1: Given each option and the context of the action/non-action, deducing the moral judgment on the choice of that option from the principles of the moral theory.
- Stage 2: Using the meta-principles, selecting the best option (the least immoral choice) as morally the right choice, thereby judging the other options as immoral.



Stage 1 can be done in terms of Aristotelian syllogism, but stage 2 has the effect of canceling the outcome of stage 1, which is not possible within the model of classical syllogism. So we need to look for an alternative model of reasoning.

Let us go back to scenario 3 in section 3 to illustrate the architecture of the two-tier reasoning above. For the sake of explicitness, we will indicate the moral judgments at the first stage in terms of numbers to indicate degrees of morality, increasing numbers indicating higher degrees of immorality.)

Derivation stage I

- Option A: Kill the cat painlessly. This action violates principle 1 (c/d) and hence is morally wrong (degree of immorality:1)
- Option B: Torture and kill the cat. This action violates principle 1 (c/d) and principle (2c/d). Hence is morally wrong (degree of immorality: 2)
- Option C: Refuse to kill the cat. This option would result in the torture and death of all the villagers, thereby violating principles (1c/d) and (2c/d). Hence it is morally wrong (degree of immorality 2:n where n is some number greater than one. While A and B involves only one cat each, C involves many human beings, hence the higher number.)

Derivation stage 2

Among the three options, A has the least degree of immorality. Hence, by meta-principle 1, A is morally the right thing to do.

Note that the conclusion at stage 2 reverses the conclusion at stage 1. At stage 1, we concluded that option A is morally wrong, but at stage 2 we conclude that it is morally right.

4.2. Defeasibility of conclusions, violability of principles, and context dependence

A mode of reasoning that permits judgment reversals of this kind is called *defeasible* reasoning. Classical syllogistic reasoning (of the Aristotelian kind) is non-defeasible: once a conclusion is reached, no amount of additional considerations can defeat it. In contrast, defeasible syllogism has the potential to reject its initial conclusions in the light of further considerations. What we need for the derivation of moral judgments from a moral theory is defeasible syllogism.

This discussion shows that moral principles are *violable*, not absolute. It also shows that the conclusions arising from moral principles are *context dependent*. Even though we accept the principle that killing is immoral, whether or not that principle yields the judgment that a given action/practice is (im)moral depends on the specific details of the context.

Here is a set of scenarios to solicit moral judgments from students. The derivation of moral judgments in each of these cases calls for defeasible reasoning involving context dependent application of violable moral principles.

Scenario 6:

Zeno stabbed Apollo in the stomach. Luckily, Apollo was rushed to a hospital and his life was saved. However, the wound hurt Apollo very much once he came out of anesthesia.

Scenario 7:

Hercules is a surgeon. He cut open Apollo's stomach to remove a cancerous growth. However, the wound hurt Apollo very much once he came out of anesthesia.

Scenario 8:

Socrates traveled in a time machine to the middle ages. He came across a sight that horrified him. A sixteen year old girl was accused of being a witch by a hysterical mob, and was being burnt alive. She was screaming "Kill me quickly please, kill me quickly please.", because instant death would have been a boon for her. Socrates had a loaded rifle in his hand, so he shot and killed her instantly. Had he not done it, she would have died any way, but only after intensely painful burning for a while.

Here are a few variants of scenario 3 each of which calls for defeasible reasoning, but this time the theory needs to be fine-tuned further:

Scenario 9:

A gang of terrorists have taken over a village. Apollo, one of the villagers, is taken to a neighbour's child and his cat, and is ordered to kill either the cat or the son. If Apollo disobeys, the terrorists will torture and kill all the villagers, including the child (but not the cat.) What should Apollo do?

Scenario 10:

A gang of terrorists have taken over a village. Apollo, one of the villagers, is taken to a neighbour's ten year old child and ninety year old grandfather, and is ordered to kill either the cat or the son. If Apollo disobeys, the terrorists will torture and kill all the villagers, including the child (but not the grandfather.) What should Apollo do?

After they have gone through a bunch of thought experiments of this kind, further refined their theory, and derived their judgments from a set of clearly and precisely articulated moral principles, the students will be ready to tackle complex public issues like euthanasia, abortion, capital punishment, imprisonment for attempted suicide, war, stem cell research, and so on.

4.3. Reasoning with incomplete information

A consequence of defeasibility and context dependence of moral reasoning is that *our moral judgment on a given scenario may keep changing as more and more information is brought in*. To see this, let us consider some of the variants of scenario 2:

Scenario 2: (repeated)

Zeno, a bomber pilot, is ordered to bomb either village A or village B, both inhabited by innocent civilians. Village A has a population of ten, while village B has a population of a hundred. If Zeno disobeys the order, some other bomber pilot will be ordered to bomb both villages, which means at least one of the two villages would be destroyed anyway. What is morally the right thing to do for Zeno?

- Option A: bomb village A
- Option B: bomb village B
- Option C: refuse to bomb either village

Scenario 2a: (variant 1)

Zeno, a bomber pilot, is ordered to bomb either village A or village B, both inhabited by innocent civilians. Village A has a population of ten, while village B has a population of a hundred. What is morally the right thing to do for Zeno?

- Option A: bomb village A
- Option B: bomb village B
- Option C: refuse to bomb either village

Scenario 2b: (variant 2)

Zeno, a bomber pilot, is ordered to bomb either village A or village B, both inhabited by innocent civilians. Village A has a population of ten, while village B has a population of a hundred. As it happens, all the inhabitants of village B are murderous terrorists who have access to nuclear weapons and are planning to use nuclear arsenal on all the major cities of Europe, North America, Australia and Asia. If Zeno disobeys the order, some other bomber pilot will be ordered to bomb both villages, which means at least one of the two villages would be destroyed anyway. What is morally the right thing to do for Zeno?

- Option A: bomb village A
- Option B: bomb village B
- Option C: refuse to bomb either village

If students are given scenario (2a) first, the most likely choice would be C. But given the additional information in (2), they would choose A. But given the further contextual details of (2b) the choice would be option B. This property – that of a previously accepted conclusion being rejected when additional information provided – is called *non-monotonicity* in the literature logic.

4.4. Three valued logic

Another characteristic that needs special mention is that moral reasoning employs a three-valued logic. Aristotle held that every proposition is either True or False, with no possible intermediate state. This axiom is called the Law of Excluded Middle. Following this law, classical logic employs a two-valued (binary) system of truth, the values being True and False. In the twentieth century, many mathematicians and logicians have proposed a number of many-valued systems of logic that has three or more truth values. An system that uses the values of True, False, and Unknowable, for instance is a three-valued (ternary) system.

The system of logic used in the criminal court in most legal systems is two-valued: the accused is

either guilty or not guilty (innocent), with no intermediate possibility. In contrast, Scottish law, namely, guilty, not guilty and not proven. The system of logic we have implicitly assumed in our inquiry is three-valued: virtuous (morally desirable), immoral (morally undesirable) and morally neutral.

5. Knowledge and Motivation

Before addressing the more challenging task of constructing collective moral theories to make collective decisions on public issues, there is one more issue that we need to tackle, namely, *knowledge* of the consequences of the (in)action, and the *motivation* for (not) acting. Consider the following scenarios.

Scenario 11:

Bill is tied up on a chair with a bomb attached to him. The bomb is connected to a switch at a distance, far enough for someone else to operate without any danger. Jack is near the switch. As it happens, Jack hates Bill. He turns on the switch. The bomb explodes, and Bill dies.

Scenario 12:

Bill is tied up on a chair with a ticking time bomb attached to him. The bomb is connected to a switch at a distance, far enough for someone else to operate without any danger. John is near the switch. "Please turn off that switch and save me, John." Bill shouts. As it happens, John hates Bill. He doesn't switch it off, but stands watching. The bomb explodes, and Bill dies.

Scenario 13:

Unknown to John, Bill is tied up on a chair in John's basement, with a ticking bomb attached to him. The bomb is connected to the switch in John's bedroom. John walks into the bedroom, and turns on the light switch. The bomb explodes, and Bill dies.

Scenario 14:

John decides to kill Mary because he hates her. He plants a bomb in her bedroom. The bomb goes off when Mary is asleep, and she dies.

Scenario 15:

Bill decides to kill Liz because he hates her. He plants a bomb in her bedroom. The bomb goes off, but unknown to Bill, Liz was staying with a friend that night, so she doesn't die.

Scenario 16

Jack decides to kill Sue because he hates her. He plants a bomb in her bedroom. But the bomb happens to be defective, and so it doesn't go off. Sue doesn't die.

Scenario 17

Ben decides to kill Betty because he hates her. He looks for a bomb to plant in her bedroom, but in spite of his best efforts, he can't find a bomb. Betty doesn't die.

Scenario 18

Jeff hates Daisy and wants to kill her. But he doesn't, because he is afraid that he would go to prison if he did.

The theory we have developed so far is not sufficient to derive the judgments on the actions/inactions in these scenarios. It would be a challenge for students to develop the theory further to cover these cases as well.

6. Thinking Critically about Personal Moral Codes

Let us suppose that I am offered a plate of chicken salad at a dinner party and I refuse. A friend asks, “How come? Are you allergic to chicken?” I reply, “No, I regard eating chicken as immoral.” My friend raises a quizzical eyebrow. By requirement (1), I am obliged to show that my judgment derives from my personal moral theory. I can do so by appealing to principle (1a) rev.

The derivation of my moral judgment would take the following path:

The chicken in the salad comes from chickens killed for food. By eating the salad, I am contributing indirectly to destroying the life of chickens, however small that contribution might be. Therefore, given principle (1a), it follows that eating chicken salad is immoral.

My friend glances at my plate with rice and vegetables, and asks, “But by the same principle, doesn’t it follow that eating rice and green vegetables is also immoral? After all, you are contributing to destroying the life of plants, so why are you eating them?”

At this point, I have two options. I can maintain my theory, and accept the consequence that eating rice and green vegetables is immoral, and hence I am currently engaged in an immoral activity. Alternatively, I can revise my theory such that it predicts that eating rice and green vegetables is not immoral. This I can do by replacing principle (1a) instead of (1c).

My friend the critical thinker is not satisfied.

“Do you eat eggs?” he asks.

“I used to,” I reply, “but not any more.”

“How come? Moral reasons?”

“Yes. I think eating eggs is immoral.”

“Why? An egg is not an organism with a central nervous system. So why is it immoral?”

As my friend correctly points out, my moral judgment does not follow from my theory. Hence by requirement (2), I must expand or modify my theory. In response, I can either revise my judgment about the immorality of eating eggs, or modify my theory. Suppose I take the second path, and revise (1c) as follows:

Principle 1c’:

Actions that contribute to the destruction of the life (including potential life) of organisms with a central nervous system are immoral.

From version 3, it correctly follows that eating fertilized eggs is immoral. But eating unfertilized eggs would not be so. But I find myself judging that to be equally immoral. How do I justify this judgment? Adding the following principle to the theory would yield the appropriate result:

Principle 2: Prohibition against causing suffering

Actions that cause suffering to living organisms are immoral.

The derivation of my moral judgment from this principle would be as follows:

The eggs that I eat come from chicken grown in factories under extraordinarily cruel conditions — crowded in small cages, burnt off beaks, and so on. By eating eggs, I am indirectly contributing to the chickens’ suffering, however small that contribution. Therefore, given principle 2, eating eggs, fertilized or not, is immoral.

My skeptical interrogator has more things up his sleeve.

“Do you give your students poor grades for poor assignments?”

“Of course I do,” I reply.

“Aren’t you causing them suffering? Is it moral to give them poor grades?”

My friend is right. I need to either acknowledge that my action is immoral, or modify my theory such that it predicts that the action of giving low grades to students is not immoral even though it causes suffering.

What I have illustrated above is a way of critically evaluating personal moral theories in their own terms, using what we may call the hermeneutic mode. My friend need not share my moral judgments. But he enters the hermeneutic circle of my theory, *and checks whether my judgments agree with my theory*. The academic canon that underlies this mode of functioning is called **coherence**:

Coherence:

The totality of our beliefs, values, goals, norms, principles, judgments, and practices/actions should be

- a) maximally *interconnected* and *unified/integrated*, and
- b) free of *logical inconsistencies*.

In moral inquiry, condition (a) demands that a small number of moral principles yield a large number of diverse moral judgments. And condition (b) demands that the moral judgments predicted by the theory are not logically inconsistent with each other or with the actual moral judgments. We will come back to the coherence conditions in part II.

7. Beyond Death and Suffering

In the preceding sections, we focused on the value of life and the value of absence of suffering. Needless to say, to develop a comprehensive personal moral theory, we would need to make decisions on what other values we must ask ourselves if we need to incorporate justice, honesty, integrity, compassion, courage, loyalty, chastity, sexual fidelity, obedience, and so on. Did Zeno do morally the right thing if he accidentally broke an expensive vase, and when asked who broke it, replied that he didn’t know? Did Athena do the right thing if he promised her dying mother that she would not marry her lover Apollo, with no intention of keeping the promise? Did Aphrodite do the right thing if she engaged in prostitution to save the lives of twenty orphans? Was Hercules doing the right thing when he kept flattering his boss to improve the likelihood of his getting promoted? Students need to struggle with questions of this kind and develop their personal moral theories further before engaging in debates on public policies including laws and ethical codes which have moral implications.

To illustrate, consider the question of justice in scenario 19.

Scenario 19

Zeno has four students: Jack, Jill, Sue and Ben. He likes Jack and Jill, but dislikes Sue and Ben. In the final examination, Jack and Sue submitted equally good excellent answers, while Ben and Jill submitted equally poor mediocre answers. Zeno gave A to Jack, B to Ben and Jill, and C Sue.

Chances are that students would judge Zeno’s action to be immoral, but this judgment cannot be derived from the principles governing death or suffering, as giving undeserved higher grades is as immoral as giving undeserved poorer grades. To address such scenarios, students need to come up with a theory of justice, articulating what constitutes injustice.

A few other scenarios that can provoke critical reflection on existing practices while providing practice in theory construction are given below.

Scenario 20

In the educational institutions in the land of Zarmagon, students have to pay the teachers (in schools and in universities) for the services they render. Each teacher is free to set his own rates. In the same institution, a highly sought after teacher may charge his clients ten times the fee charged by a less skilled teacher teaching the same subject. A government appointed and government paid board of paper setters design the examination questions, and another government appointed and government paid examiners grade the student papers. How just is this system?

Scenario 21

The legal system in the land of Aarmagon allows for an option between imprisonment and fine for every crime. For instance, a person convicted of stealing a bag of rice or a cell phone could spend a year in jail or pay a fine \$5,000, and a person convicted of murder could spend 20 years in jail or pay a fine of \$100,000. How just is this system?

Scenario 22

The land of Barmagon offers an option between free public education and expensive private education for school and college students. Public education requires students to attend schools and colleges in their respective neighbourhoods, but students who opt for private education can attend any private schools. The public schools in expensive neighbourhoods have highly paid excellent teachers while those in poor neighbourhoods have poorly paid mediocre teachers. How just is this system?

Scenario 23

In the land of Carmagon, prosecution lawyers are appointed and paid by the government, but defense lawyers are in private practice. Each defense lawyer is free to set his own rates. In the same court, a highly sought after lawyer may charge his clients ten times the fee charged by a less skilled lawyer defending an accused for the same alleged offense. On the basis of the evidence and arguments presented by the prosecution and defense lawyers, a government appointed and government paid judge arrives at a verdict on whether the accused is guilty or innocent. How just is this system?

PART III: COLLECTIVE MORAL THEORIES

7. Variability of Moral Judgments across Individuals and Communities

In the preceding sections, we restricted ourselves to scenarios on which almost all normal members of the human species have the same judgments. Now, we all know that matters of morality are deeply controversial: there is considerable and startling controversy in moral judgments across different communities, and across individuals within the same community. My favourite scenario to illustrate the variability is scenario 19:

Scenario 24

Gail's husband Jake is terminally ill, and without treatment, will not live more than a few weeks. The treatment is expensive, and the family can't afford it, for they are poor. Zeno, a wealthy man, secretly offers Gail a deal: that he will pay for the treatment if she sleeps with him. Gail finds his proposal repulsive, but she sleeps with him and saves her husband's life. Nick, Jake's friend, finds out, and tells Jake. Jake promptly divorces Gail on the grounds of adultery.

Ask each student to provide their judgments on what each of the individuals in this scenario did, using the categories of (a) *virtuous*, (b) morally the *right* thing to do, (c) morally the *wrong* thing to do, and (d) morally *neutral*.¹ It is crucial that the students do not consult each other to do this. So it might be a good idea to distribute a form of the kind given below, and ask each student to circle the his/her personal judgment:

<i>Actions</i>	<i>Moral judgments</i>			
Zeno offers Gail to pay for the treatment if she sleeps with him, and pays her after she sleeps with him.	virtuous	morally right	morally wrong	morally neutral
Gail finds the proposal repulsive, but she sleeps with him and saves her husband's life.	virtuous	morally right	morally wrong	morally neutral
Nick finds out, and tells Jake.	virtuous	morally right	morally wrong	morally neutral
Jake divorces Gail on the grounds of adultery.	virtuous	morally right	morally wrong	morally neutral

If the students come from different cultural backgrounds or have reflected on matters of morality, the range of variability is likely to increase. I have found it from experience that when the number of students who choose each of the sixteen boxes in the above table is added up and revealed to students, most of them are shocked by the variability.

Scenarios of this kind that reveal variability within then classroom can be supplemented by information on the moral codes of different communities across time and space. Some of my favourites from the domain of sexual morality are the following:

1. In the community that I grew up in (a matrilineal Nair community in Kerala, a state in Southern India), there is a general expectation that one gets married to one's father's sister's offspring or mother's brother's offspring. Marrying or having sex with one's father's brother's offspring or mother's sister's offspring is forbidden as incest. Among the Tamil Brahmin communities in India, it is okay for a woman to marry her maternal or paternal uncle however, but the recommended marriage practice of the Nair community being prohibited as incest. In most western communities, the recommended practices of both the Nair community and the Tamil Brahmin community would be prohibited as incest.
2. Some communities prohibit polygamy, forbidding both polygyny (a man being married to two ore more wives at the same time) and polyandry (a woman being married to two ore more husbands at the same time). Some communities allow polygyny but not polyandry. What is less known, however, is that there have been and still are communities that allow polyandry as well (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyandry>)
3. In traditional Indian communities, a bride is required to be a virgin (though bridegrooms are forgiven for not being virgins). Premarital sex is strictly forbidden for females. A teen age girl who is discovered to have had premarital sex would find it hard to find a

¹ Notice that we are using a four way system rather than a three way system referred to in section 1.4. Ask yourself if moral reasoning actually needs a four way system.

- husband, and would be a cause of sorrow and shame for the parents. This asymmetry is found in many traditional societies. The Old Testament, for instance, carries a law which says that a bride who turns out to be not a virgin should be stoned to death. In many current western communities, however, premarital sex is nearly the norm. It is common for twenty five year old women to remain unmarried, but if they are also virgins, their peers and elders would consider them odd or having some problems.
4. In 1758 a physician called Tissot asserted that masturbation was a terrible sin, and was medically dangerous. He was succeeded by Sylvester Graham who held a similar position. Their views became quite influential, and as a result, masturbation has been judged as a grievous moral offense in many traditional Christian communities (<http://www.ellenwhiteexposed.com/criticc.htm>) Modern medicine dismisses the medical claims of Tissot and Graham as baseless mythology. And many educated communities these days view masturbation as morally neutral, and in some cases to be encouraged as a natural process.
 5. In western societies, when guests arrive at the home of hosts for dinner, it is quite common for the guests and hosts of the opposite sex to kiss each other on the cheek. In contrast, traditional Indian societies judge an adult male kissing an adult female on the cheek as immoral. A male guest kissing the hostess would trigger a prompt slap from the hostess instead of a kiss in return, and getting thrown out by the host.
 6. St Augustine held the view that taking sexual pleasure, even between husband and wife, was sinful. Since sexual activity is necessary for reproduction and hence for the survival of the species, he advocated sexual activity devoid of sexual pleasure. This view of sexual pleasure as inherently being morally wrong has had a profound influence on western institutions and various versions of monotheistic religions. The custom of female circumcision (cutting off the clitoris) is probably grounded in the view that it is immoral for women to have sexual pleasure. Needless to say, this view is hardly shared by non-traditional societies.
 7. Some societies view oral sex and anal sex as immoral. In Singapore, for instance, oral sex and anal sex were legally prohibited: you could go to prison if it was proved in court that you had oral or anal sex with your legally married spouse. The ban was lifted in 2007 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/24/gayrights.uk>) but gay sex continues to be a criminal offense. It was only in 2 July 2009 that the Indian penal code struck out section 377 which treated “unnatural sex” (any sexual intercourse other the standard penile-vaginal one) as a criminal offense (<http://www.indianexpress.com/news/i-never-thought-of-myself-as-a-criminal.-the-court-mercifully-agrees/484476/>).

It would be a good idea to pose the following question to the students:

In each of the cases in (1)-(7), imagine yourself being born and brought up in each of the divergent communities. What are the chances that you would not hold the moral judgments that you currently hold, and that your moral judgments would follow those of the community that you happen to be brought up in?

Critical reflection on this issue is an important step in the awareness of *arbitrariness* in many (not all) culturally transmitted moral codes of behaviour.

8. Minimizing Arbitrariness: Coherence and Shared Grounds

If students recognize that such arbitrariness in the moral systems they subscribe to is undesirable, the obvious question is what we can do about it. The answer is that the combination of the coherence canon we enunciated earlier and the canon of shared grounds – two of the core canons of academic inquiry – offers a fairly robust solution:

1) Coherence: The totality of our beliefs, values, goals, norms, principles, judgments, and practices/actions should be

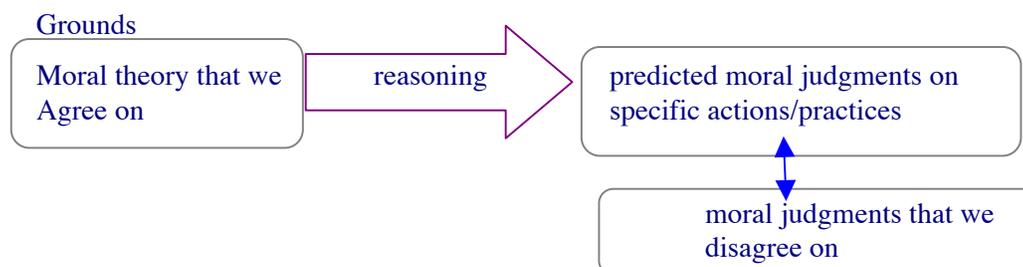
- a) maximally *interconnected and unified/integrated*, and
- b) free of *logical inconsistencies*.

2) Shared grounds: An argument will be judged as sound only if the grounds of argumentation are acceptable to the judge.

Corollary: Disagreements can be settled only on the basis of grounds acceptable to both parties. Before engaging in a debate on an issue, therefore, the debating parties should clearly identify the grounds they agree on and negotiate further agreement, such that they can base their arguments on what they agree on.

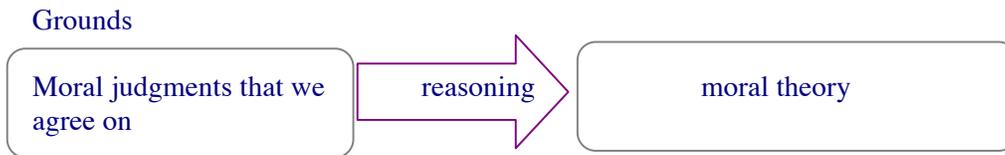
In academic inquiry, one of the staple ways of interconnecting and integrating pieces of data (in science), moral judgments (in moral inquiry) or conjectures (in mathematics) is to show that they *follow from a small number of theoretical principles*. As far as moral inquiry is concerned, therefore, it means that every individual should strive to make sure that every one of his/her moral judgments follow as predictions of his/her moral theory. If there are judgments that the theory does not make any predictions about, the theory is not connected to the judgment ((1b)), and if it does make a prediction (and hence is connected) but the prediction contradicts the actual judgment, the theory is logically inconsistent with the judgments ((1b)). Satisfying the condition of coherence would therefore be the first step in minimizing arbitrariness. This is what we attempted to do in part II.

Turning to the condition on shared grounds, we have already seen that there are many moral judgments that human beings within and across communities disagree about. To engage in a rational debate on moral judgments (e.g. is stem cell research morally justified? Was US morally justified in sanctioning water boarding to elicit information from the terrorists?), we need to appeal to a shared moral theory as the grounds.

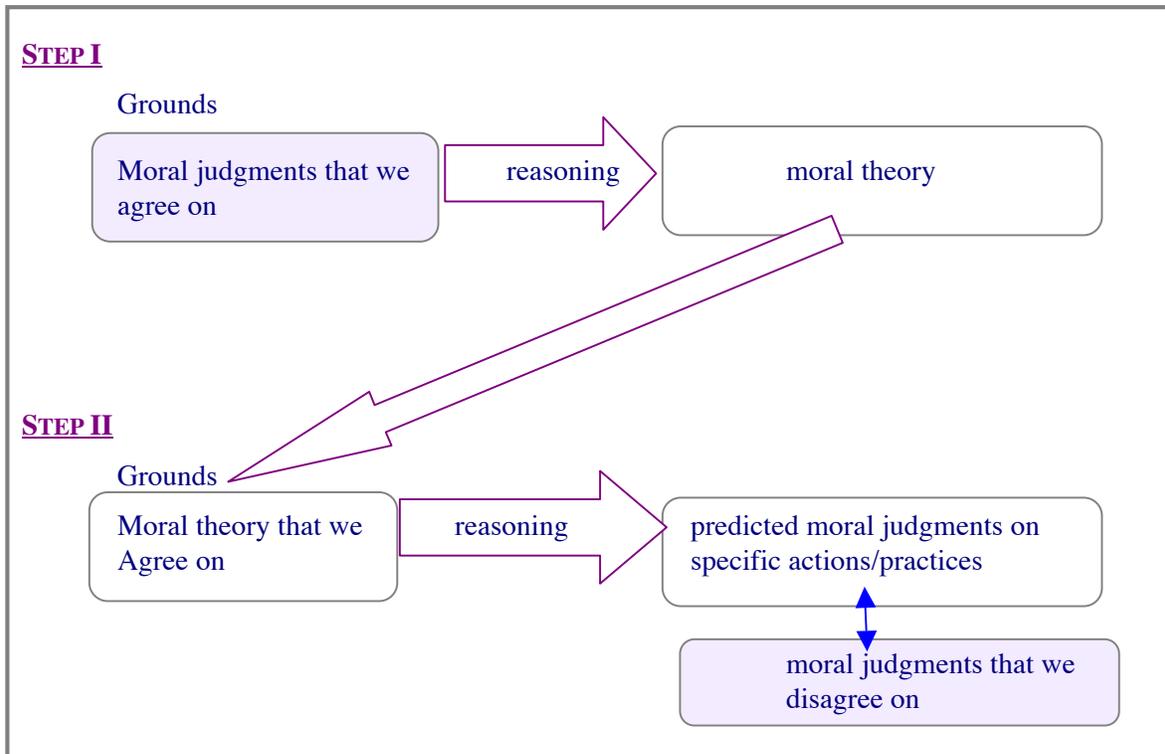


Unfortunately, humanity does not yet have a moral theory that is accepted across communities or even across individuals within the same community. Hence, the first step is to construct a moral

theory that we agree on. To do this, we need to appeal to the moral judgments that we agree on.



This means that settling our disagreements on controversial moral issues (e.g., stem cell research, capital punishment, ...) is a two step process:



How does this translate into action? Let us begin with a simple case. Consider the following scenario:

Scenario 25

Jake suffers from Kleptomania, a psychological disorder that makes patients unable to resist the urge to steal, for which he has been sentenced to imprisonment a few times. A week after the last time he came out prison, he was walking through the make up section of a departmental store, where he found a brightly coloured lipstick. He has no wife or girlfriend, but Jake stole the lipstick nevertheless, right in front of the uniformed security guard who promptly turned him over to the police.

Did Jake commit a moral offense? If we elicit judgments from students, chances are that some would say yes and some would say no. To settle the disagreement and decide whose moral judgment we should accept, we should appeal to a moral theory that we agree on (step II). Luckily, as far as the particular community of students taking the course on moral inquiry are concerned, we already have a collectively agreed on moral theory, namely, the one we developed in part 1. We may therefore derive the predicted moral judgment on scenario 19 from that theory.

There is a high chance that a preliminary moral theory based on the shared judgments on

scenarios of the kind illustrated in (1)-(23) would predict that Jake did not commit a moral offense. If so, those who hold the view that Jake committed a moral offense have only two options:

Option 1: Revise their judgment, and subscribe to the view that Jake did not commit a moral offense.

Option 2: Find additional scenarios that yield non-conflicting judgments from the students in class, and show that these judgments require a modification of the collective moral theory of the class (step I), and then demonstrate that the judgment that this new theory predicts the judgment that what Jake did was immoral.

Scenario 26 is a trickier variant of scenario 25:

Scenario 26

Ben got into a heated argument with Jo and killed her in the heat of a moment. He was beside himself with grief and guilt, and has been flogging himself every day as self-inflicted punishment.

The following information might prove relevant to the discussion of this scenario.

Research in neuroscience shows that serial killers have the following genetic, neurological and environmental profile.

Genetic: MAOA gene, responsible for violence

Neurological: damage to the orbital cortex (the region of the brain just above of orbit of the eyes, responsible for decision making), the anterior part of the temporal lobes (the region of the brain near the ears)

Environmental: exposure to traumatic violence during teenage.

(watch http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/jim_fallon_exploring_the_mind_of_a_killer.html)

Given that a serial killer is has a mental illness brought about by the combination of genes, brain physiology and environment, how responsible is serial killer responsible for his actions? Does he deserve punishment or medical treatment?

10. Separating moral principles from indoctrination and emotive clouding

In the preceding discussion, we suggested that the grounds on the basis of which we build a collective moral theory – at the level of two individuals, a community, or the human species – are the moral judgments that the participants of the collective inquiry agree on. Now, there are four interacting factors that can potentially influence our moral judgments:

Moral indoctrination: the arbitrary codes of conduct that we have imbibed from the community that we have grown up in, the do's and don'ts that our elder's have prescribed to us.

Our moral instincts: the largely implicit moral conscience that we have as members of the human species.

Our moral principles: the explicit moral axioms that we have come to choose on the basis of conscious reflection and reasoning

Emotive clouding: emotional reactions and disturbances that we might mistake for moral instincts.

We may depend on our moral instincts, supplemented by conscious reflection and reasoning, to guide us in our search for a collective moral theory, but it is important to factor out the confounding effects of moral indoctrination and emotive clouding on our moral judgments, such

that we do not confuse these issues with our moral instincts.

As a child, I was led to feel that people drinking alcoholic beverages and women wearing clothes that show off their torso in public (as in the case of a bikini) were immoral. Premarital sex, movies that show men and women kissing on the lips, disobeying elders, and eating beef were also judged as immoral. As an adult who has reflected systematically on societal moral codes, it strikes me that these are arbitrary moral codes that my community indoctrinated me with during my formative years. Why should the practice of dating, prevalent in many modern societies, be judged as immoral? Why shouldn't the practice of caning disobedient children, prevalent in many traditional societies, be judged as morally shockingly offensive?

Separating the effects of the societal moral codes from the moral instincts is as hard as separating true perceptions from illusions. Until we have worked through the physics and cognition of colours and constructed a reliable scientific theory of both, it is hard to realize that our perception of the noon sky as blue is an illusion, and that there is no such thing as a blue sky. The same lesson holds for moral intuitions as well. To instill among students an awareness of this problem, it would be useful to get them to critically reflect on each of the cases discussed in the section on variability across individuals and communities are excellent for the exploration of indoctrination.

The confounding factor of emotions that are not matters of morality but are typically confused with moral intuitions is more difficult to deal with. To get a feel for this, consider the following scenario:

Scenario 27: Zeno has a large number of cats, dogs, and monkeys as his pets. Whenever he runs out of meat, he kills one of them, cooks it, and eats it. Is this practice immoral?

Scenario 28: Whenever an orphan who has no friends or relatives dies in an accident, Mauline collects the dead body, cooks it and eats it. Is this practice immoral?

Chances are that even those students who are meat eaters would be disgusted by then practices of Zeno and Mauline. But is that reaction a moral judgment or an emotion of disgust? If we are told that Zeno and Mauline also have the habit of eating excrement, we would feel disgusted, but in this case we know that this is not a moral judgment. Why should the practices in 27 and 28 be judged as immoral then? It would be hard find a rational justification for such a judgment.

Confront the students with the following questions:

Scenario 29: Suppose you have a dream in which we drop a stone slab on a baby and the baby dies. You now wake up and realize that the whole thing was only a dream. Would you be emotionally disturbed even after realizing that you did not do anything that is morally objectionable, that your dream experience was illusory? If you would, are you guilty of something that is immoral?

Scenario 30: Imagine a doll that is made so lifelike that you think it is a baby. Suppose you accidentally drop a stone slab on the doll and think you have just killed a baby. If you are a normal human being would be devastated. A minute later you discover that it was only a doll, not a baby. Would your emotional disturbance continue even after realizing that it was not a real baby? If it would, would that constitute a moral judgment on yourself?

Moral judgments arising from moral instincts are emotional responses, but the emotional responses revulsion in 29 and 30 arise from what has been called the "yuk factor", not moral instincts. (see <http://www.philosophyetc.net/2004/09/moral-emotions-yuk-factor.html>) To see that this is indeed so, let us ask if you would judge Xena and Zauline to be morally culpable in 31 and 32:

Scenario 31: Zeno has a dream in which he drops a stone slab on a baby and the baby dies. He now wakes up and realizes that the whole thing was only a dream. Is Zeno guilty of something that is immoral?

Scenario 32: There is a doll that is made so lifelike that Zauline thinks it is a body. She accidentally drop a stone slab on the doll and thinks she has just killed a baby, and is devastated. A minute later she discovers that it was only a doll, not a baby. Was Zauline's dropping of the stone slab immoral?

11. Collaborative Theory Construction: from Groups to the Human Species

When I reflect on the harm that I indirectly cause to cows by drinking milk from factory grown cows and ask myself whether it is morally right on my part to drink such milk, I am engaged in a personal moral decision, for which I consult my personal moral theory. But when my wife, my daughter, and I consider the moral consequences of our investing in organizations that pursue immoral goals, we need to have a moral theory that the three of us share. And when a university tries to deal with a controversy on the penalties for plagiarism, the debate must be based on collectively shared moral theory at the institutional level. Finally, world wide debates on stem cell research and capital punishment presuppose a moral theory for the human species, shared across religious and cultural groups.

As the world gets smaller, the need for the pursuit of a collectively shared moral theory for the human species becomes urgent. Without such a shared basis, rational debates would be replaced by political squabble of pushing the agendas of one's own group.

12. Thinking Critically about Societal Moral Codes

Since a substantial part of societal indoctrination through do's and don'ts center around sexual morality, questions such as the following may prove useful in critically scrutinizing the codes of conduct we have been exposed to in our formative years:

Question 1: Consider service businesses such as restaurants, teaching, nursing, and physiotherapy, and massage. In each of these cases X provides a service to Y, and in return Y pays money to X. We do not judge any of these as immoral. Why, then should we judge prostitution as immoral (as long as it is not degrading to the prostitute, and does not harm the family life or health of the customer)?

Question 2: Suppose a husband and wife do not subscribe to sexual fidelity. They love each other, but have no sexual jealousy, and hence each is perfectly comfortable about his/her spouse sleeping with others. Are they immoral in their practice of adultery?

Additional questions:

Question 3: Is it morally right to choose to become a criminal lawyer, knowing that the even if are convinced that your client is guilty, you need to argue that he is innocent, and become a prosecution lawyer knowing that even if you are convinced that the accused is innocent, you would be arguing to establish his guilt and send him to prison?

Question 4: If the president of a university or country gets ghost writers to write his speeches and delivers those speeches as his, is it morally right in that university/country to punish students/citizens for plagiarism?

Appendix: Philosophical Moral Theories

Readers who are familiar with the philosophical literature on morality may have come across the debates on consequentialist and categorical moral theories.

Consequentialist moral theories (also called Utilitarian) hold that whether or not choosing an action/practice is judged to be virtuous, immoral, or morally neutral is to be judged by its consequence. These theories also hold that when confronted with a set of options (including the choice of non-action) and no other, we choose that option whose consequences are maximally virtuous and minimally immoral. Consequentialist theories need to employ defeasible deductive reasoning to derive moral judgments. Some versions also hold that such reasoning can be done in terms of a cost benefit analysis, by assigning a single number to all costs and benefits.

Categorical moral theories (also called Deontological) hold that some actions/practices are inherently virtuous, immoral or morally neutral, regardless of their consequences, and regardless of the available options. This means that non-action is exempt from moral judgment. Categorical theories employ non-defeasible deductive reasoning to derive moral judgments.

In contrast to both, **Buddhist** moral theories hold that it is not the action/practice or the choice between alternative options, but the motivation for choosing a particular option that is judged to be virtuous, immoral, or morally neutral. These theories also need to use defeasible deductive reasoning.

This way of classifying theories as package deals conflates important questions and creates unnecessary confusion. These questions can be stated as follows:

A) What do we judge? Answers:

1. Actions. Non-actions are not subject to moral approval or disapproval.
2. Choice from available options, including the choice of non-action.
3. Motivation for a given choice from available options.

B. Are moral judgments context sensitive? Answers:

1. No. Actions /choices/motivations are inherently virtuous, immoral or neutral, no matter what their context is.
2. Yes. The same action/choice/motivation can be virtuous, immoral or neutral, depending upon its context.

C. What mode of reasoning do we use in deducing moral judgments? Answers:

1. Non-defeasible deductive reasoning.
2. Defeasible deductive reasoning.

D. Are all morally desirable and undesirable states of affairs reducible to a single measure?

Answers:

1. Yes. For instance, if the pain of an individual being tortured is assigned a value of -10 and the pleasure of an individual watching the torture is assigned a value of $+1$, then thirteen individuals deriving pleasure from the torture would override the pain of the tortured individual.
2. No. The weight of pain for one cannot be overridden in defeasible reasoning by the

weight of the pleasure for another.

If we combine (A.1) and (B.2), for instance, it would not be either consequentialist or categorical. It would be a mixture. Similar remarks apply to the responses to the other questions.

These issues are all about the *form* of moral theories, not about the *content* of moral axioms. For instance, they say nothing about the choice between “Actions that take away the life of a human being are immoral.” vs. “Actions that take away the life of a creature with a central nervous system is immoral.”, between “Causing pain to a human being is immoral.” And “Causing pain to any living organism is immoral.” They say nothing about the choice between “Premarital sex is immoral.” and “Premarital sex is morally neutral.” While it is important to consider the formal architecture of moral theories, the choice between competing architectures is possible only in terms of their success in deriving correct predictions from substantive moral axioms.