Sound Moral Psychology behind Ethics Education

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Ethics is a philosophical discipline. Nevertheless, ethics is often taught – especially in armies and in civil life – by non-philosophers and to people with little training in philosophy. It is therefore not surprising that what is taught under the label “ethics” and how it is taught sometimes lacks the conceptual rigor and coherence characteristic of a philosophical discipline. A consequence of this is that in some courses views within and about ethics are taught which rest on dubious or even incoherent conceptual grounds. That is, however, not the only pitfall in ethics education. A second problem is that moral judgment is a complex phenomenon comprising different intuitive and conscious processes which are sensitive to social and other contextual constraints. It is therefore probable that a pure armchair approach in philosophy, which neglects state of the art moral psychology, soon finds itself tangled up in speculations too far removed from empirical facts to be applicable in the real world.

1 To keep things simple, I shall not distinguish between ethics and morality, fully aware that such a distinction is important in other discussions.

This does not mean that philosophy and empirical science pursue exactly the same ends with exactly the same methods, but that philosophy forges, examines and changes conceptual frameworks which are suited to the natural world. In what follows below I shall begin with an account of moral decision-making which is sensitive to intuitive and conscious processes while also allowing for social and other contextual influences. The account stems from moral psychology and is therefore based on empirical fact. I shall then draw attention to some conceptual problems and argue that revision is required to make it philosophically acceptable. In a subsequent part, a different (and more specific) account of moral judgment will be introduced to complement the original account of decision-making. The result will be an account of moral decision-making which has a much wider scope of applicability.

The account of moral decision-making under discussion below is the Interactional Dual-Process Model of Moral Decision Making (IDP) developed by Seiler, Fischer and Ooi. It is designed to explain decision-making when faced with moral dilemmas. I shall argue that the account is not satisfying because it features a view of moral perception which is not conceptually watertight. I propose to fix this by adopting part of John Mikhail’s account of moral perception. The upshot will be that the resulting account – the Extended Dual-Process Model of Moral Decision Making (E-IDP) – promises to explain all sorts of moral judgment (not just moral dilemmas).

**IDP and Its Conceptual Weakness**

The Interactional Dual-Process Model of Moral Decision Making (IDP) developed by Seiler, Fischer and Ooi has five components, which they call “aspects”. Here are these five aspects with the official descriptions:

1. **moral perception**: the individual perceives the inherent moral conflict of the eliciting situation
2. **internal dual-process**: the individual undergoes the internal dual-process of reasoning and intuition
3. **moral judgment and decision**: the individual achieves a moral judgment and decision
4. **post hoc reasoning**: the individual undergoes a post hoc reasoning process to further support or adjust his or her previously made judgment
5. **social interaction**: the individual’s social interaction with others during and after the problem-solving process influences his or her internal dual process to reach a more elaborated or new moral judgment and decision.