Factual and Conceptual Issues

ANALYZING MORAL PROBLEMS

• Factual Issues
• Conceptual Issues
  – Application Issues
• Moral/Value Issues

Case 1:

• A new government law requires that the lead content of drinking water be less than 1.0 ppb (parts per billion). Melissa is a safety engineer who has tested her company’s drinking water by two methods. Method A gives a reading of 1.23 ppb. She must fill out a government report describing the quality of her company’s water. If the lead content exceeds 1.0 ppb, her company will be fined. She is contemplating whether to report the results from Method A or Method B.

A. Factual Issues

1. Facts vs. Factual Issues

“Facts”= known facts
“Factual Issues”= unknown facts, questions we have about what the facts are

Facts of Case 1:
Method A says 0.85 ppb
Method B says 1.23 ppb

Factual Issue of Case 1:
Which method is more accurate?

2. When we don’t have the time/resources to uncover the facts,we must resolve factual issues by making assumptions

- Reasonable assumptions
- Sincere assumptions

3. Different assumptions can result in different moral judgements. (This is itself does not make moral judgement “subjective.”)

Case 2:

• Sally is a mechanical engineer employed by General Motors to design automotive gas tanks. According to U.S. Government safety standards, the automobile must survive a moderate impact with no chance of the gas tank catching fire. In recent tests, cars that crashed at 35 mph had no fires, whereas 20% of cars that crashed at 45 mph had fires.

• Is Sally required by government standards to redesign the gas tank?
B. Conceptual Issues

1. A conceptual issue is a question about the meaning of a crucial term.

   Conceptual Issue in case 2:
   What counts as a “moderate impact”?

2. How do we settle conceptual issues?
   a. Sometimes definitions are stipulated in policies/laws
   b. Usually we rely on common understanding

Definition $\iff$ Paradigm

C. Application Issues

An application issue arises when there is a question whether a concept applies in a non-paradigmatic case.

Application issue in case 5:
Does Peter’s relationship with Bob present a conflict of interest?

Another example: “Stealing”
Paradigm Case: Breaking into someone’s home and taking money.
Non-Paradigm Case:
- Failing to return Borrowed money ($10.00)
- Not returning a borrowed pencil

Case 4:

Peter’s Company requires him to avoid a conflict of interest. They define a conflict of interest as follows: X has a conflict of interest when X has a personal interest that might lead X to act contrary to the interests of his/her client or employer, or the appearance of such an interest.

Peter is choosing between suppliers of components for his company’s products. Peter learns that one of the vendors is an old fraternity brother of his, Bob. Peter hasn’t seen Bob in 30 years. Peter wonders whether he is obligated to take himself out of the decision process because of this relationship with Bob.

Deciding Application Issues

-- make the concept more precise
and/or
-- get clearer about what the facts are

Solve and application issue by uncovering a deeper factual issue and/or conceptual issue

Case 5:

• Larry is an aerospace engineer employed by Boeing to design planes. He is a member of the Quaker religion, which is committed to nonviolence. (During wars, Quakers often refuse to serve as fighting soldiers, but will serve as medics.) Larry was hired by Boeing to design passenger airplanes; however, his boss has recently reassigned him to design military fighters. Larry must decide whether to accept the new assignment or quit and find a new job.

D. Moral Issues in the Narrow Sense/ Value Issues

Moral Issues arise when we have to make decisions about what is more valuable.

Moral Issue in case 5:
Larry must decide whether his career or his religion is more valuable to him.
It is easy to confuse moral and conceptual issues

Moralized (Value-laden) vs. Non-Moralized (Value-free) Concepts

Non-Moralized Concept: In defining the concept or deciding whether the concept applies in a given situation, you need NOT make a moral judgement.

Moralized Concept: In defining the concept or deciding whether the concept applies in a given situation, you must make a moral judgement.

“Bribe”= Paying a person to perform an act incompatible with his/her office or position.

“Exploitation”= Taking unfair advantage of another person for one’s own benefit.

“Paternalistic”= X acts paternalistically towards Y when X restricts Y’s freedom for Y’s benefit, as X understands the benefit.

The fact that a moralized concept applies does not automatically settle the question whether an action is right or wrong. There may also be a moral issue involved.

Case 3:

• Jerry’s company is competing for a contract to revamp the water treatment plants in country N where there have been numerous outbreaks of cholera. Jerry knows that the competing companies do not have the technological sophistication to do an adequate job. The public health minister of N tells Jerry that the contract us his only if he will pay the year’s rent on the minister’s vacation condo in Monte Carlo.
• Would this $100,000 payment count as a bribe?
• Even if it is a bribe, should Jerry’s company make the payment?

4. Distinguish between:

a. Presumptive Judgement: judgement about what is usually the case

It is in general wrong to pay or take bribes.

b. All-Things-Considered Judgement: judgement that takes all the particulars of a case into consideration

It might be right to pay a bribe to get your mother out of a concentration camp.