CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

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CHAPTER SEVEN

PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGY?

Psychology may be defined as the science of human and animal behaviour or the scientific study of behaviour and underlying mental processes (Smith, 1998). This also entails the application of the science to human problems. The first part of this definition treats psychology a science while the second part of the definition is about the application of psychological principles to life's problems. This, however, does not mean that psychology is the only science of human and animal behaviour.

BRANCHES OF PSYCHOLOGY AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

One way of describing the scope of psychology is to discuss some of the major specialty, areas or disciplines. Among some of psychology's areas of specialty are clinical, counseling, school and educational, experimental, physiological, industrial/organizational, developmental, community, environmental, social and personality.

Clinical psychology

This area of psychology is concerned with aberrant, maladaptive or abnormal human behaviour. It covers the diagnosis of psychological disorders and treatment of same by means of psychotherapy. Clinical psychologists typically work in hospitals, health training and research institutions as well as in universities.

The University of Ibadan is a very large community consisting of students, academic and non-academic staff. It is important to note that, as students and staff of the University engage in their studies and work, different forms of stressors are encountered from time to time.

Relationships, psychological as well as economic situations of all kinds also generate various forms and levels of stress among members of a community as large and as complex as the University of Ibadan. It therefore makes sense for the University of Ibadan to identify and harness the psychological skills that personnel in psychology department do have. When the university identifies and harnesses such skills and knowledge and puts same to beneficial use by staff and students of the university, the quality of life and well-being of unimaginable number of staff would be enhanced.

Counseling psychology

This branch of psychology is similar to clinical psychology. The difference is that counseling psychology places emphasis on people who have milder emotional and personal problems. Counseling psychology may use psychotherapy while attending to problems. People consult counseling psychologists with specific problems, e.g. career choice and family problems.

Counseling psychology, like clinical psychology, stands a good chance of helping students and staffs to take vital decisions bordering on some of the mild problems they might have. It is assumed that many students and staff engage in unethical practices because they neither have deep insight into their problems nor have received good counseling. It is argued that fully exploiting the benefits that counseling psychology offers could be a good step to promoting the moral conduct of staff and students of the University of Ibadan, rather than depending solely on Disciplinary Committees.

School and educational psychology

School and educational psychologists work with children to evaluate learning and emotional problems. They are specialists in learning and teaching. Because serious emotional problems often abound in the early grades, many elementary schools employ psychologists whose training combines courses in child development, education and clinical psychology.

The realm of school psychology is the diagnosis of learning difficulties and remedy of such difficulties. Educational psychology may include school psychology. It is however, involved with more general, less immediate problems than school psychology or school counseling. Similarly, it is concerned more with increased efficiency of learning in schools. Educational Psychology applies psychological principles of learning and motivation to the curriculum. Good application of school and educational psychology principles at the University of Ibadan can improve the quality of learning and teaching among students and academic staff. This will go a long way to reducing cult activities and other undesirable behaviours among students and staff of the University. This way, more ethically desirable behaviour will be attained on the campus.

Experimental psychology

Experimental psychology is concerned with the causes of behaviuor, how behaviour is modified and how people retain these modifications, the processing of information in thinking, how human sensory systems work to allow people to experience what is going on around them, and the factors that urge them on and give direction to behaviour. Many experimental psychologists are engaged primarily in work that applies directly to practical problems. Experimental psychologists indulge in basic research, studying such human and animal processes as learning and memory, thinking, sensation and perception, motivation, and emotion.

The University of Ibadan and its host communities stand to gain a lot if the university motivates researchers in the Department of Psychology to, in collaboration with other colleagues, experimentally study behavioural variables that can lead to better understanding, explanation, control and prediction of behaviour. This, too, will make many members of the university community more ethically responsive as they discharge their daily responsibilities.

Physiological psychology

Physiological psychology concerns itself with the relationship of the brain and other biological activities to behaviour. Physiological psychology is part of psychology as well as part of neurobiology (a broader field), which is the study of the nervous system and its functions.

Physiological psychology studies are also relevant to the University of Ibadan. Physiological processes are mostly studied experimentally and findings of those researches can be used to improve activities and processes in the university's sports and health units. In sports, physiological psychology knowledge can help maximise performance among athletes and also prevent injuries. Unethical practices, such as the use of drugs to enhance athletic performance enhancement will be minimized. In the health sector, such knowledge will help the University community members take informed preventive health measures that will make employees become more responsible members of the university community.

Industrial and organisational psychology

The subfield of industrial/organisational psychology seeks to apply psychological principles to practical problems of work and commerce. It is concerned with the application of psychology to the problems of industries and organizations.

Over the past several years, the University of Ibadan has been bedeviled with many work and relationship-related problems involving its staff and students. Industrial/organisational psychology knowledge and skills, if

applied to (solving) the university's work and productivity problems, will definitely stem the wave of unethical practices such as mismanagement of funds, abuse of office, absenteeism, sexual harassment and abuse. Fundamentally, industrial/organisational psychology can improve recruitment and selection as well as promotion, placement, and disengagement processes at the University of Ibadan thereby promoting high discipline and ethical consciousness.

Developmental psychology

This area of psychology seeks to understand complex behaviours by studying their beginnings and the orderly ways in which they change with time. Child psychology is a major component of developmental psychology. It is both basic and applied. If principles of developmental and child psychology are understood and applied to the management of children, adolescents and even adults, many developmental problems experienced at the University of Ibadan would be eliminated and the entire university and its host community would be the better for it.

Community psychology

This is a relatively new area of specialisation in psychology. Community psychologists generally apply psychological principles, ideas, and points of view to help solve social problems. Also, they help individuals adapt to their work and living groups. Some community psychologists are clinical psychologists. They target prospective and actual problems of individuals in society with their programmes. Others are less concerned with mental health and might focus on ways of improving community relations.

Community psychology comes handy in solving the myriads of problems that the University of Ibadan has faced in recent time, problems such as bad driving, deaths arising from cult clashes, increase in the presence of stray animals, among others. The application of community psychology would enable many members of the university community to adapt well to their environment and function in more responsible and ethically desirable ways.

Environmental psychology

Environmental psychology focuses on the ways in which behaviour influences, and is influenced by the physical environment. Environmental psychologists are concerned with the ways in which buildings and cities, for instance, serve or fail to serve, human needs. They also investigate the effects of extremes of temperature, noise and air pollution. There is no doubt that the University of Ibadan equally stands to benefit from the knowledge and practice of environmental psychology. Refuse dumps, pools of water, roads that are dug and not covered, smoke from burning materials, trees that are cut down and left indiscriminately as well as lawns that are trampled upon are

common sights on the campus of the University of Ibadan If the knowledge and skills of environmental psychology are applied in these areas, the University of Ibadan will stand to benefit much from such application.

Social and personality psychology

The primary focus of social psychology is on the understanding of how other people and their behaviours affect other individuals. Social psychology's areas of interest include social perception, attitude formation, change, stereotypes, love, marriage, bystander apathy, and legal applications. Equally, social psychology is interested in how people perceive and interpret their social world and how their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours are influenced by others. They are concerned with social relationships between and among people.

On the other hand, personality psychology is interested in studying the thoughts, emotions, and behaviours that define an individual's personal style of interacting with the world. Lillie (1966) has observed that of all the specialties of psychology, social psychology most adequately covers the subject of ethical behaviour.

Obviously, social and personality factors are responsible for many of the unethical practices that people indulge in. For instance, nepotism and tribalism are hinged on attitude formation, long-held stereotypes, and refusal or inability to embrace change. Therefore, understanding, putting to use personality and social psychology principles in the management of and relationships in the University of Ibadan will help minimise many of the unethical practices that border on people's personality and social orientations. University community members, for instance, will become more concerned about what happens to their neighbours who might not necessarily be from their own village, town, or ethnic group. Love and marriage relationships will also be improved, thereby boosting ethical responsiveness among the Ibadan University community.

THE MEANING OF ETHICS AND ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

The essence of ethical behaviour, as observed by Patterson (2002), is succinctly captured by the saying, "do unto others as you would have done unto thyself". Ethical behaviour is characterised by honesty, fairness and equity in interpersonal and other relationships. Ethical behaviour respects the dignity, diversity and rights of individuals and groups of people.

Typically, a discussion on ethics and ethical behaviour would likely call for the use of phrases such as "My friend ought not to have done this," "It is a good thing for him to be his brother's keeper." "He is an exceptionally nice person." "His character is questionable," or "It is always right to speak the truth," Although commonly used in discussions, these statements are not as

simple as they appear to be. That is why people may contradict them. Morality (a term sometimes interchangeably used with ethics) and psychology go together. Morality tells us what we ought to do; but Rachels (1995) notes that there is little point to it if we are not able to do as we ought.

The provisional definition of ethics that we have given here seems to have two implications on conduct with which ethics is concerned. Firstly, ethics deals with human actions and not with the actions of the lower animals. Secondly, ethics appears to be confined to the study of the conduct of human beings living in societies. On this note, some moralists would indeed go further and hold that the standards of ethics only apply to the relations of men with one another, that the conduct studied in ethics is not only conduct done in a society, but conduct that affects some other member or members of that society.

Lillie agrees that it is worthwhile including a reference to society in the definition of ethics to remind us that, if it were not for his social background, a human being would not be a real human being capable of right and wrong actions. Aristotle is said to have expressed this by saying, "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god."

Way back in 1926, Lev Vygotsky observed that moral concepts and ideas vary, depending upon the social environment, and what is considered bad at one time and in one place, elsewhere might be considered the greatest of all virtues. And if there are any common features in all these different manifestations of moral consciousness that can be identified, this is only because certain common elements shared by every human society were once part of the social order.

Thus, from the standpoint of social psychology, ethics must be looked upon as a certain form of social behaviour that was established and evolved in the interest of the ruling class, and is different for different classes (Vygotsky, 1926). This is why there has always existed a morality of the ruler and a morality of slaves, and this is why epochs characterised by crises have represented the greatest crises of morality.

It is said that in the schools of ancient Sparta, children were forced to wait upon a common table while the adults had their meals. A child had to steal something from the table, and he would be punished only if he could not do this, or only if he were caught red-handed. The moral lesson of this experiment was to steal and not get caught. Such an ideal was entirely conditioned by the Communist order of the closed aristocratic society of Sparta, in which concern for property did not constitute the standard of

morality, in which stealing, therefore, was not considered a sin, but where force, craftiness, cunning, and composure constituted the ideal of all citizens of Sparta, and where the greatest sin was the inability to deceive someone else and to control one's emotions.

Quite a number of terms are commonly used in judging human actions by ethical standards. For instance, many people say that an action is 'good' or 'bad,' 'right' or 'wrong', 'moral' or 'immoral'. It is also said, for instance, that someone 'ought' to do an action, that he 'should' do it, or that it is our 'duty' to do it; and of another kind of action, we say that we 'ought not' to do it, we 'should not' do it, or it is our 'duty' not to do it. Of these terms, 'good' and 'bad', are probably the most common, but they are also the most troublesome.

The primary difficulty with these words stems from the fact that they are used ambiguously in common speech. In fact, the word, 'good' as commonly used merely indicates an attitude of mind in favour of the object or event to which the term good is applied, and nothing more, so that almost anything may be termed, good if anyone finds himself in favour of its existence even to a very limited degree (Lillie, 1966).

Essentially, therefore, ethics is a field of study which seeks to ask questions on and provide answers about human conduct in societies. Nonetheless, the challenge posed to students of ethics in their bid to commonly understand and agree on the meanings of words in the discipline, is great indeed.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGY, ETHICS AND THE OTHER MORAL SCIENCES

Psychology seeks to explain, describe and predict behaviour. It is a descriptive or positive science. Positive sciences describe objects or phenomena as we observe them with our eyes and other sense-organs, or in the case of mental processes, like desiring and willing, as we observe them by introspection or looking inside our minds. Psychology, as a positive science, does not judge its objects in any way. There is a group of sciences, however, which does not deal directly with observed facts but which deal, as systematically and completely as is possible, with the standards or rules or norms or criteria by which we judge certain objects, and these sciences are called normative sciences. Examples of normative sciences are aesthetics, logic and ethics. Aesthetics deals systematically with the standards by which we judge objects of perception, commonly sights and sounds, to be beautiful or ugly. Logic deals with the standards by which we judge statements to be true or false, and ethics deals with the standards by which we judge human actions to be right or wrong.

The normative sciences differ from the positive sciences in one more way; they do not merely describe the standards by which we judge; they are also concerned with the validity or truth of these standards (Lillie, 1986). As earlier observed in this chapter, the business of psychology is to explain conduct, and not to judge it either by justifying it or by condemning it; to justify or condemn is the business of ethics. Nevertheless, while psychology cannot justify or condemn actions, it appears reasonable to think that psychological explanation of an action may affect our ethical judgment of them.

Although all moral choice can be seen as personal choice, some choices can be seen as an economic choice or an ethical choice, "described by some ethical code or regulated by ethical relationships with others." This branch of psychology is concerned with how these issues are perceived by ordinary people, and so is the foundation of descriptive ethics.

Ethics should be distinguished from the other sciences dealing with human conduct with which it may be confused, it is important to note that there are certain sciences in which we describe human conduct without expressing any opinion about its value or making any judgment about it. Today, the most scientific description of human conduct is probably that given by psychology, and one school of modern psychology, the behaviourist school, holds that the sole subject-matter of a really scientific psychology is conduct or behaviour. Of all the branches of psychology, social psychology most adequately describes among other things conduct in its social relations, and this is the kind of conduct with which ethics is chiefly concerned.

Human conduct is one of the subject areas of sociology, which may be defined as the science of human society. Although the study of individual conduct has now become the sphere of social psychology rather than sociology, sociology still has for its subject-matter the social institutions and customs which form the background of all human conduct and especially the conduct directed towards other human beings which is the special concern of ethics. Anthropology, in its sense as the science of man deals with more than conduct; it deals with the physical and mental characteristics of people which only affect their conduct indirectly. These three sciences, psychology, sociology and anthropology, all provide us with facts about human conduct; and a general knowledge of such facts is a necessary preliminary to making true judgments about human conduct. Yet, just because these sciences are positive sciences which avoid judgments of value of any kind, we are not very likely to confuse them with ethics.

Sociologists describe facts; they do not judge or evaluate them in any way. Ethics must take into account the opinions of ordinary men on ethical

matters, and, to this extent, ethics is dependent on this descriptive science, which we may label the "positive science of morals'. The word, 'morals,' is used with a variety of meanings, for the science of ethics, itself, for actions regarded as good and right, and for the rules according to which such actions are done. Morals were originally derived from the Latin word 'mores', meaning customs, and so may be appropriately used for men's customary ways of judging human conduct.

Ethics is primarily a part of the quest for truth and the motive for studying it, is the desire for knowledge. Ethics aims at finding out the truth about the rightness and wrongness of human conduct. A mere knowledge of ethical principles is not sufficient to keep anyone in the paths of virtue. Therefore, there is no guarantee that the man who understands by means of ethical study the difference between right and wrong will necessarily follow the right.

In a similar vein, there is no reason to doubt that, if other influences are favourable, the knowledge of ethics will give some help in the pursuit of goodness. The student of ethics is more likely to be right in his application of moral rules to a particular case than the man who has an equal knowledge of the circumstances of the case but no knowledge of ethics. He is likely, among other things, to be less biased and more comprehensive in his outlook. The chief value of ethics, therefore, is in the development of width of outlook and seriousness of purpose in dealing with moral matters generally. Lillie (1966) observes that these are qualities of outstanding and permanent value in the good man, and there is every reason to think that the student of ethics has more chance to attain them than the ordinary man.

PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AS BASIS OF ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

For centuries, philosophers and experts in religion have attempted to explain the basis of ethical behaviour or moral psychology without arriving at a consensus. In psychology, which is a relatively young discipline, interest in moral reasoning became noticeable with the works of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and Jean Piaget (1896-1980). Other psychologists including Carl Jung, Erik Erikson, Abraham Masiow, and Carl Rogers also contributed to the development of moral psychology However, increased interest in moral reasoning became more pronounced at the turn of the 1960s.

A number of psychologists including Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, John Reed, Jane Loevinger, and R.D. Laing developed theories which are based on the idea that moral behaviour is made possible by moral reasoning. Their theories subdivided moral reasoning into so-called stages, which refer to the set of principles or methods that a person uses for ethical judgment.

The first and most famous theory of this type was Kohlberg's theory of moral development, which we shall amply dwell on in this paper. Kohlberg is famous for his work in moral education, reasoning, and development. Being a close follower of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, Kohlberg's work reflects and perhaps even extends his predecessor's work.

.Kohlberg's stages of moral development

Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development were conceived to explain the development of moral reasoning. This theory holds that moral reasoning, which is the basis for ethical behaviour, has six identifiable developmental stages. Kohlberg determined that the process of moral development continued throughout the lifespan.

Kohlberg's six stages were grouped into three levels: pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Following Piaget's constructionist requirements for a moral model, it is not possible to regress backward in stages (although none function at their highest stage at all times). It is also not possible to 'jump' stages; each stage provides a new, yet necessary, perspective, and is more comprehensive, differentiated, and integrated than the former.

Level 1 (pre-conventional)

1. Obedience and punishment orientation
2. Self-interest orientation

Level 2 (conventional)

3. Interpersonal accord and conformity. (This is also designated *the good boy/good girl attitude*).
4. Authority and social-order maintaining orientation. (This is also called *Law and order morality*).

Level 3 (post-conventional)

5. Social contract orientation
6. Universal ethical principles (This is also known as *Principled conscience*)

Pre-conventional

The pre-conventional level of moral reasoning is especially common in children, although adults can also exhibit this level of reasoning. Reasoners in the pre-conventional level judge the morality of an action by its direct consequences. The pre-conventional level consists of the first and second stages of moral development, and is purely concerned with the self. It is egocentric.

In **stage-one**, individuals focus on the direct consequences that their actions will have for themselves. For instance, an action is perceived as morally wrong if the person who commits it gets punished. Furthermore, there is no

recognition that others' points of view are any different from one's own view. This stage may be viewed as a kind of authoritarianism.

Stage two espouses the's *in it for me* position, right behaviour being defined by what is in one's own best interest. Stage two reasoning shows a limited interest in the needs of others, but only to a point where it might further one's own interests, such as "you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours". In stage two, concern for others is not based on loyalty or intrinsic respect. For the stage two theorists, the perspective of the world is often seen as morally relative.

Conventional

The conventional level of moral reasoning is mostly associated with adolescents and adults. People, who reason in a conventional way, judge the morality of actions by comparing these actions to societal views and expectations. The conventional level consists of the third and fourth stages of moral development.

In **stage three,** the self enters society by filling social roles. Individuals are receptive of approval or disapproval from other people as it reflects society's accordance with the perceived role. They try to be a *good boy* or *good girl to* live up to these expectations, having learned that there is inherent value in doing so. Stage three reasoning may judge the morality of an action by evaluating its consequences in terms of a person's relationships, which now begin to include things like respect, gratitude and the 'golden rule'. Desire to maintain rules and authority exists only to further support these stereotypical social roles.

In **stage four,** it is important to obey laws, dictums and social conventions because of their importance in maintaining a functioning society. Moral reasoning in stage four is thus beyond the need for individual approval exhibited in stage three; society must learn to transcend individual needs. A central ideal or ideals often prescribe what is right and wrong. If one person violates a law, perhaps everyone would; thus there is an obligation and a duty to uphold laws and rules. When someone does violate a law, it is morally wrong: culpability is thus a big factor in this stage as it separates the good from the bad.

Post-conventional

The post-conventional level, also known as the principled level, consists of stages five and six of moral development. Realization that individuals are separate entities from society now becomes salient. One's own perspective should be viewed before the society's is considered.

In **stage five,** individuals are viewed as holding different opinions and values, and it is paramount that they be respected and honored impartially.

Issues that are not regarded as relative like life and choice should never be withheld or inhibited. In fact, no single choice is considered correct or absolute. In a similar vein, laws are regarded as social contracts rather than rigid dictums. Those that do not promote general social welfare should be changed when necessary to meet the principle of *the greatest good for the greatest number of people*. This is attained through majority decision, and inevitably compromise. In this way, democratic government is ostensibly based on stage five reasoning.

In **stage six**, moral reasoning is based on abstract reasoning using universal ethical principles. Laws are valid only insofar as they are grounded in justice, and a commitment to justice carries with it an obligation to disobey unjust laws. In this way, an action is never a means but always an end in itself. One acts *because* it is right, and not because it is instrumental, expected, legal or previously agreed upon. While Kohlberg insisted that stage six exists, he had difficulty finding participants who consistently used it. It appears that people rarely, if ever, reach stage six of Kohlberg's model.

Kohlberg, based on his empirical studies of persons across their life-span, came to realise that some people evidently had undergone moral stage regression. He was faced with the option of either conceding that moral regression could occur, or revise his theory. Kohlberg chose the latter, postulating the existence of sub-stages wherein the emerging stage has not yet been adequately integrated into the personality.

Theoretical assumptions (philosophy)

Kohlberg's theory is not value-neutral. The picture of human nature which Kohlberg begins with is the view that humans are inherently communicative and capable of reason, and they possess a desire to understand others and the world around them. The stages of Kohlberg's model refer to the qualitative moral reasoning that people adopt, and thus do not translate directly into praise or blame of the actions or characters of persons. In order to argue that his theory measures moral reasoning and not particular moral conclusions, Kohlberg insists that the form and structure of moral arguments is independent of the content of the arguments, a position he calls *"formalism"*.

Kohlberg's theory revolves around the notion that justice is the essential feature of moral reasoning. By the same token, justice relies heavily upon the notion of sound reasoning based upon principles.

Kohlberg's theory understands values as a critical component of the right. Whatever the right is, for Kohlberg, it must be universally valid across societies (a position known as "moral universalism"); there can be no

relativism. Moreover, morals are not natural features of the world; they are prescriptive. Nevertheless, moral judgments can be evaluated in logical terms of true and false.

According to Kohlberg, a person who progresses to a higher stage of moral reasoning cannot skip stages. For example, one cannot jump from being concerned mostly with peer judgments (stage three) to being a proponent of social contracts (stage five). However, when one encounters a moral dilemma and finds ones current level of moral reasoning unsatisfactory, one will look to the next level. Discovery of the limitations of the current stage of thinking drives moral development as each progressive stage is more adequate than the last. This process is constructive, that is to say, it arises through the conscious construction of the actor, and is neither in any meaningful sense a component of the actor's innate dispositions, nor a result of past inductions.

Progress along the stages of development occurs because of the actor's increased competence in both psychologically and socially balancing conflicting value-claims. The name of *"justice operation"* is given to the process which resolves the dispute between conflicting claims and strikes equilibrium between them. Kohlberg identifies two of these operations in *"equality" and "reciprocity"*, which respectively involve an impartial regard for persons (i.e., irrespective of who the individual persons are), and a regard for the role of personal merit. For Kohlberg, the most adequate result of both operations is *"reversibility"*, where a moral or dutiful act within a particular situation is evaluated in terms of whether or not the act would be satisfactory even if particular persons were to switch roles within the situation (also known colloquially as "moral musical chairs").

Knowledge and learning contribute to moral development. Specifically important are the actor's *view of persons* and their *social perspective level,* each of which becomes more complex and mature with each advancing stage. The view of persons can be understood as the actor's grasp of the psychology of other persons. Similarly, the social perspective level involves the understanding of the social universe, differing from the view of persons in that it involves a grasp of norms.

Kohlberg used moral dilemmas to determine which stage of moral reasoning a person uses. The dilemmas are short stories that describe situations in which a person has to make a moral decision, yet they provide no solution. The participant is asked what the right course of action is, as well as an explanation as to why.

MORAL DILEMMA

Kohlberg's Moral dilemma: the Heinz example

A dilemma that Kohlberg used in his original research was the druggist's dilemma: *Heinz Steals the Drug in Europe.*

A woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to produce. He paid $200 for the radium and charged $2,000 for a small dose of the drug. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about $1,000, which is half of what it cost He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. (Kohlberg, 1963, p. 19)

Should Heinz break into the laboratory to steal the drug for his wife? Why or why not?

From a theoretical point of view, it is not important what the participant thinks that Heinz should do. The point of interest is the *justification* that the participant offers. Below are examples of possible arguments that belong to the six stages. It is important to keep in mind that these arguments are only examples. It is possible that a participant reaches a completely different conclusion using the same stage of reasoning:

- Stage one *(obedience):* Heinz should not steal the medicine, because he will consequently be put in prison.
- Stage two *(self-interest):* Heinz should steal the medicine, because he will be much happier if he saves his wife, even if he will have to serve a prison sentence.
- Stage three *(conformity):* Heinz should steal the medicine, because his wife expects it.
- Stage four *(law-and-order):* Heinz should not steal the medicine, because the law prohibits stealing.
- Stage five *(human rights):* Heinz should steal the medicine, because everyone has a right to live, regardless of the law. Or: Heinz should not steal the medicine, because the scientist has a right to fair compensation.
- Stage six *(universal human ethics):* Heinz should steal the medicine, because saving a human life is a more fundamental value than the

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property rights of another person. Or: Heinz should not steal the medicine, because that violates the golden rule of honesty and respect.

Criticisms

One criticism of Kohlberg's theory is that it emphasises justice to the exclusion of other values. As consequences of this, it may not adequately address the arguments of people who value other moral aspects of actions. For example, Carol Gilligan, a student of Kohlberg's, has argued that Kohlberg's theory is overly *androcentric*. His theory was initially developed based on empirical research using only male participants. Gilligan argued that it did not adequately describe the concerns of women. According to Gilligan, women tend to develop through a different set of stages from men. Her position is that theories on moral development do not need to solely focus on the value of justice.

Other psychologists have questioned the assumption that moral action is primarily reached by formal reasoning. For example, social intuitionists claim that people often make moral judgments without weighing concerns such as fairness, law, human rights and abstract ethical values. If this is true, the arguments that Kohlberg and other rational psychologists have analyzed are often no more than *post hoc* rationalisations of intuitive decisions. This would mean that moral reasoning is less relevant to moral action than it seems.

Another group of psychological theories that have implications for the nature of ethics are based on evolutionary psychology. These theories are based on the assumption that the behaviour that ethics prescribe can sometimes be seen as an evolutionary adaptation. For instance, altruism towards members of one's own family promotes one's inclusive fitness.

Loevinger's stages of ego development

Jane Loevinger's stages of ego development includes nine sequential stages, each of which represents a progressively more complex way of perceiving oneself in relation to the world. These stages include: infancy (typified by absence of ego); impulsive (being curbed by restraints, rewards and punishments); self-protective (characterised by externalisation of blame and opportunistic hedonism); conformist (judged by behaviours externally not by intentions); self-aware (characterised by distinctiveness of self from norms and expectations); conscientious (internalisation of rules); individualistic (awareness of inner conflicts); autonomous (concern for emotional interdependence); and integrated (presence of fully worked out identity).

The contextual importance of the theories discussed

Most human developmental theories (psychoanalytic, Kohlberg, Erikson), stress the importance of developmental stages in the lives of children and adults. Parents and other significant others are instrumental to making success of children's developmental stages. In the context of Nigeria, however, the changing trends in parenting readily comes to mind as a problematic area. Many are concerned about the increasingly lesser personal attention that parents and society pay to children in Nigeria today. This seemingly dwindling attention to children has implications on the children's development and society in general.

Human developmental theories also stress the importance of material, emotional and psychic resources (e.g. nutrition, clothing, shelter, love, attention, and even discipline) that children need to grow up normally. Again, it is a fact that the social, economic realities in Nigeria today, coupled with the wrong priorities that many parents have, are causing parents to deprive their children of much needed material and non-material resources. This trend portends serious danger to the society. Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalytic theory, dwells on the problems of fixation (refusal to grow and mature) and regression (looking at the past) when normal developmental stages are not followed adequately. Could we say, then, that fixation, regression, and some other developmental factors account for the increasing incidence of unethical behaviours that we are having in Nigeria today?

Looking also at Kohlberg's stages of moral development in the context of Nigeria today, one is tempted to reason that the increasing incidence of unethical behaviour calls for a modified approach in developing individual and collective moral reasoning in the country. The individual and collective consciences of Nigerians need to be worked upon so that what is good remains good and what is moral remains moral. Almost all the stages that Kohlberg talked about seem to be problematic with most segments of the Nigerian society today. Perhaps, socialization agents (parents, schools, places of worship, etc.) and the Nigerian society need to consciously re-examine child disciplinary issues relating to normal child upbringing that Kohlberg mentioned in his theory. Critical issues such as obedience and punishment orientation, law and order morality, principled conscience, and the appreciation of justice as an essential feature of moral reasoning need to be revisited and appreciated by Nigerians in order for an ethically conscious society to evolve.

A few Nigerian moral dilemmas

At different points in their lives, people's interests and values correspond with other people's interests while also differing with others. Our individual

and collective consciences, as well as upbringing and values, determine how we approach certain situations and indeed react to such situations. Issues also present moral dilemmas to us or not depending again on our moral upbringing, backgrounds, or consciousness. In different areas of calling in Nigeria today, people are frequently presented with all kinds of moral dilemmas. A few examples would serve our purposes here.

In Academics

As a university teacher, what should I do when my student who happens to come from my village fails woefully in my course? Should I give such a student free marks to pass my course in 'flying' colours?

-What do I do to other students who have similar problems but who do come from my town or ethnic group?

-Should I obtain sex from a female student in exchange for marks to such a student, especially when she is the one offering sex?

-Should I recommend my lazy and unproductive staff who does eye service to me for promotion and overlook my productive staff whom I see as being 'disrespectful' to me?

-As a Head of Department or Admissions Officer, do I use different criteria to admit or not admit people from different religions, ethnic groups, etc?

-As someone in charge of an office, how do I handle moral dilemmas involving employing unqualified candidates that are related to me and sending away candidates that are more than qualified but not related to me?

In politics

As a politician, should I get elected into an office on a clean slate or should I rig elections to be able to get into an office?

-When I am in power and in charge of public funds, should I use these for the common good or for my personal aggrandisement and for the good of 'my people' only?

Others

- As a medical doctor, should I make quick money by helping people procure abortion?

-When I am called upon to testify to medical issues as a professional, do I collect bribes and give false testimony?

-As a human resource officer or an accountant, do I feed fat on salaries of ghost workers?

- As a policeman, should I take bribe because my colleagues are involved in the practice or should I remain honest and discharge my duties responsibly?
- As a tax officer, do I remit all the taxes I collect to government or do I feed fat on them?

These are some of the moral dilemmas that millions of Nigerians in their different callings face everyday. It needs to be stated here that sound and ethical behaviour is needed to overcome these and other moral dilemmas that people face from time to time.

THE NEED FOR SOUND ETHICAL STANDARDS IN THE SOCIETY

Ethics are the rules and guidelines that we use to make judgments of right and wrong. They embody the ideals we should strive for and how we should behave. Ethical behaviour is characterised by honesty, fairness and equity in interpersonal, professional and other relationships. Standards for ethical conduct vary depending on the social and political context of each country.

Within the human sub-cultures across the earth, there is a chaotic mixture of personal behaviour systems because human beings differ in their goals, aspirations, and motivations. The fact that human beings differ in their goals, aspirations, and motivations, coupled with limitations in resources, make human populations almost always vulnerable to conflicts. At the psychological level, there are a relatively small number of individuals in the society who have and present maladaptive or 'abnormal' behaviour.

At the societal level, sociologists talk about society members' deviation from the norms and values of the society. Moral human behaviour therefore optimizes the survival and nourishment of the human species. Any other behaviour is harmful (immoral, unethical).

Each person is personally accountable for his or her actions. All persons have a shared responsibility to uphold ethical behaviour and in this respect, conduct is not only regulated by laws but also by ethics or morality. In a similar manner, fairness which is rooted in sound ethical behaviour corrects or supplements law. Indeed, morality also constitutes a formidable source of law in many societies. Thus, any society that has weak ethical base is not only prone to injustice, unfairness, dishonesty, and disrespect but also most likely heading towards anarchy.

Psychologists have to consider ethical issues because they deal with people and study their behaviour on a daily basis. The study of ethics is one of the more difficult areas of psychology because there are no clear answers. However difficult, the study of and the gaining of ethical knowledge give a

person some help in the pursuit of goodness. The student of ethics is more likely to be right in his application of moral rules to a particular case than the man who has an equal knowledge of the circumstances of the case but no knowledge of ethics. He is likely, among other things, to be less biased and more comprehensive in his outlook (Lillie, 1966).

The chief value of ethics therefore is in the development of width of outlook and seriousness of purpose in dealing with moral matters generally. These are qualities of outstanding and permanent value in the "good man," and there is every reason to think that the student of ethics has more chance to attain them than the ordinary man (Lillie, 1986).

CONCLUSION

Ethics is, primarily, a part of the quest for truth and the motive for studying it is the desire for knowledge. The business of psychology is to explain human conduct and not to judge it either by justifying it or by condemning it; to justify or condemn is the business of ethics. While psychology cannot justify or condemn actions, it appears reasonable to think that psychological explanations of an action may affect our ethical judgment of them. For instance, provocation may help in determining the why and extent of behaviour. A fuller knowledge of psychological factors in an action may sometimes increase rather than lessen our condemnation; telling lies with malicious intent is certainly worse than lying in ignorance.

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