

Example of ethical theory and its application case study

[Environment](#), [Pollution](#)



Introduction

There have been increased awareness on ethical business and environmental degradation within the recent decades. Just like human, organizations are held responsible for their actions. This paper explores the ethical theories and concepts as they apply to the case study of the OK Tedi Copper Mine. The new CEO of BHP, Paul Anderson had just come in office and faced with the task of managing what people had referred to as the world's greatest ongoing " environmental disaster" (Velasquez, 2012).

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a normative ethical theory that places the locus of right and wrong solely on the consequences or outcomes of choosing one action over the other policy. In doing so, it moves beyond the interest of an individual and takes into consideration the interest of others. It is a form of consequentialism, which advocates that whether an action is wrong or right depend entirely its outcomes or consequences (Mill, 1859). As such, actions are right as long as they bring the overall good of the available choices. Otherwise, it is wrong. Consequentialists hold that actions are right when they maximize the good. Jeremy Bentham equated good consequences with pleasure, which is measured in terms of duration, intensity, propinquity, certainty, purity, and extent (Bentham, 1907). John Stuart Mill modified Bentham's philosophy by arguing that pleasure differs in quantity as well as quality and the maximum good involves highest quantity as well as quality of pleasure.

The principle of utility can be applied to either particular actions or general

rules. The principle of utility is applicable directly to alternative act in a situation, where the right action is defined as the one that brings the best consequences or results. Act utilitarian can be applied to the decisions made by both BHP and the government of Papua New Guinea in order to identify the action that brings the best results. From the case study, an examination of the engineering, environmental, and risk aspects of managing the mine and its waste came up with four options. After careful analysis of the options, it was apparent that none of the options presented a good solution for the environmental implications of the mine. The first option found that dredging would continue to affect continue to lower the sand level and increase flooding. Additionally, dredging would immerse more funds and fail to address continued degradation of the forest. Constructing a new storage facility would also require significant amount of funds. Continued operation of the mine without doing anything would increase the environmental impacts. Even though closing down the mine would reduce environmental impact and shorten the time required for the river to recover, it could have devastating economic and social impact on the population around the mine. The criticism to utilitarian point of view is that it is difficult to attain a full knowledge and probably the consequences of the actions. All the options available in the case have consequences but it would be hard to identify the one that would produce happiness without affecting the environment. Closing the mine will reduce environmental impacts but the local community would suffer because the mine is their sole source of livelihood. As such, the best option would be to continue mining and device other means of checking the environmental impacts of the activity.

Kantian deontology

The deontological approaches to ethics usually contrast with teleological or consequential approaches. Teleological theory is goal oriented and holds that a morally right act is the one that results into overall good and does not consider the action in itself (Darwell, 2003). However, deontological theory is not goal oriented and holds that the rightness or wrongness of an act cannot be explained in terms of its consequences, but rather its own features.

Kant's theory questions the fundamental source of morality, and in so doing, he concludes that the source of morality is the ability of human beings to make rational decisions. Kant's deontological ethics maintains that an action is only moral when it is done out of duty, rather than consequences. It therefore implies that it is of no moral concern as to how things turn out for any given action. The important thing is the action of the individual performing the action. Kantian deontology

Emphasizes what is the right thing to do rather than what is the good thing to do.

According to Kant, actions are intrinsically right or wrong, regardless of the consequences. As such, both BHP and the government of Papua New Guinea have an intrinsic duty to prevent harm to humans and the environment at any cost. The ethical issues to be addressed from Kant's ethical perspective include environmental degradation resulting from the activities of the mine. The ongoing dumping of waste was devastating the ecology of the tropical rainforest and wetlands through which the river followed, and it had also affected thousands of people living along the riverside, whose subsistence depended on farming and fishing (Velasquez, 2012). However, the

government of Papua New Guinea and villagers did not want the mine to shut down because they depended on it economically despite the continued dumping into Ok Tedi River and environmental degradation. According to Kant, intention is more important than the consequence and the government of Papua New Guinea could have made a decision to close the mine in order to protect humans and the environment. Anderson's decision to close the mine was the best as it was categorically imperative.

Justice

There are many form of justice including distributive justice, redistributive justice, and compensatory justice. Distributive justice concerns with assigning rewards and burdens as if from a common source. The fundamental principle of distributive justice is that benefits and burdens should be assigned, where those equal in relevant ways should receive equal treatment and those unequal in relevant ways receive treatment unequal in proportion to their inequality.

Rawls

A Theory of Justice (1971), by John Rawls is a Kantian liberal in that principles of justice should be universalizable, and as such, the only way to ensure that people select fair principles of justice is to make sure that they are not aware of the consequences of the principles they select. Rawls proposes a theoretical person shrouded in a "veil of ignorance", who must design a fair or just society without foreknowledge of his or her status in the society. By viewing things from an objective vantage point called the "original position", the individual will devise a system of justice that addresses the plight of

those in the lowest rank in the society. The individual will feel compelled to do so because she or he may end up in such a devastating situation and will demand to be adequately provided for. Rawls believe that a society can on be just if there is equality and fairness and believes that this veil of ignorance can help identify and avoid the biases. An example of application of Rawls theory of justice is on the issue of equitable pay and collective bargaining.

A precise way to identify the ethical issue is to start with how Rawls view the understanding intergenerational equity, where one must assume the perspective of a generation placed along a band of generations, but without knowledge of its exact location. This perspective does not prefer one generation over another and should annihilate discounting practices because in effect, it eliminates any justification for compromising future generation. It is appropriate to think about the dilemma of constructing a new storage facility and dredging to understand that short-term auger with Rawls' view that proper policy making in the context of the environment and the force of his ethical vantage point.

Nozick

In his book *Anarchy, The State and Utopia*, Robert Nozick dedicates a good portion of the book refuting Rawls' claims, specifically on Rawls' conception of distributive justice with regard to economic inequalities. Nozick's entitlement theory claims that we can tell whether a distribution of wealth is just or not by considering its history. The resulting distribution of wealth is just if the wealth was transferred legitimately. If that was not the case, then

it is necessary to ask whether the injustice was rectified according to the third principle. Nozick holds that as long as the economic inequalities arise from voluntary exchange, they do not qualify as unjust.

Nozick addresses the ethical issues of environmental degradation where he gives two case of pollution, first is where the pollution outweighs the benefits, and second is where the benefits outweigh the cost (Nozick, 1974). He argues that in cases where the benefits outweigh the cost of environmental degradation, then compensation should be paid to the aggravated parties. It has however been argued that environmental pollution would in most cases affect non-consenting individuals in an involuntary way.

Rights

A right is a justified claim on others (Sharp, 2006). For example, if I have right to freedom, then I have a just claim that people should leave me alone. In other words, people have the responsibility or duty to leave me alone. If I have a right to clean water, then I have a justified claim that water sources are not polluted. Every person deserves a right. The UN's declaration of rights specifies the right to work, the right to own property, the right to select freely employment, the right to leisure and right, and the tight to fair payment. Immanuel Kant refuted the relativity philosophy of the English Utilitarians. He maintains that morality is not relative, but pure and absolute.

Applied to the case, in the OK Tedi dispute, the parties settled on an institutional means of opening the case for public debate. The court could not determine the amount of compensation that the company could pay

villagers who were not included in the original agreement, to which the company was a party. The public debate recognized that the villager had the right for a clean environment and it was the duty of the company to stop damaging it. additionally, the need of the local villagers and environmental rights were not considered against the needs and rights of the final consumers of the products to which the mine produced.

Normative ethical relativism

Normative ethical relativism is a common form of normative relativism. This theory claims that the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by the prevailing opinions of the cultures in which they take place (Quintelier & Fessler, 2012). However, it has been shown that different values that exist between cultures do not justify the moral theories particular to each culture. As such, the existence of moral differences cannot justify normative relativism. For the OK Tedi Copper Mine case, the government of Papua New Guinea decided to continue operating the mine despite the resulting negative environmental impacts. The decision to close the plant would render many people jobless and the government would lose revenues from the plant. The prevailing opinions of the villagers around the mine supported the idea of continued operation of the mine because of the economic benefits.

Conclusion

Evidently, environmentalists do not appear to make consistent moves as anti-abortionist and animal rights activists. In contrast to individual fetuses and individual animals, environment concerns are holistic or systemic. This

make it hard for the above discussed ethical theories to address the concerns of doing ethical business that does not produce harm to the environment and neighboring communities. Various ethical theories give conflicting opinions on how to handle environmental concerns such as pollution. From the case study, it is evidently hard to devise a solution to the devastating impacts of the mine. The best means of stopping environmental degradation is to close the mine but this have negative implication on the government and the villages as they depend on the mine for economical and social gains. Additionally, there is no effective means of controlling environmental degradation and as such, the best possible option is to go with the opinion of the villagers and the government.

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