

REDEFINED MORAL INTUITIONS AND PRINCIPLES: THE CASE OF THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY

INTUIÇÕES E PRINCÍPIOS MORAIS REDEFINIDOS: O CASO DA COMUNIDADE LGBTQIA+

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Abstract

The moral gap of the LGBTQIA+ community can be possibly resolved by redefining moral intuitions as a priori, a formal device devoid of content. This redefinition criticizes the classical thesis of objectivity that moral facts and moral knowledge are eternally valid for all humanity. This line of reasoning is absurd; hence, facts and information are revealed gradually and vary from period to period according to some emergency. Moreover, the claim to objectivity is problematic with the recent moral issues, like the LGBTQIA+ community. The principle is incompatible because of its established truth, where the LGBTQIA+ community is excluded. In addressing the gap, this paper proposed that: Firstly, moral intuitions such as good, right, better, ought,

and their opposites should be taken as formal device, hence a priori. From these moral intuitions a moral principle can be generated where objectivity is a product of careful reflection and deliberation of rational person. This contrast with the classical thesis of objectivity that moral principles has eternal validity for all humanity. Secondly, in application, the paper argues that the LGBTQIA+ community can be a content of moral intuitions, hence of moral principle supported by the availability of facts and information of the period.

Keywords: LGBTQIA+ community. gender and equality. moral intuitions. moral principle. inclusivity.

Resumo

O hiato moral relacionado à comunidade LGBTQIA+ pode ser possivelmente resolvido por meio da redefinição das intuições morais como a priori, um dispositivo formal desprovido de conteúdo. Essa redefinição critica a tese clássica da objetividade, segundo a qual fatos e conhecimentos morais seriam eternamente válidos para toda a humanidade. Tal raciocínio é absurdo; portanto, fatos e informações são revelados gradualmente e variam de período para período conforme surgem novas necessidades. Além disso, a reivindicação de objetividade torna-se problemática diante de questões morais recentes, como as que envolvem a comunidade LGBTQIA+. O princípio mostra-se incompatível devido à sua verdade estabelecida, na qual a comunidade LGBTQIA+ é excluída. Para enfrentar esse hiato, este artigo propõe que: Em primeiro lugar, intuições morais como bom, correto, melhor, dever e seus opostos devem ser tomadas como dispositivos formais, portanto a priori. Dessas intuições morais pode ser gerado um princípio moral, no qual a objetividade é produto de reflexão cuidadosa e deliberação de pessoas racionais. Isso contrasta com a tese clássica de objetividade, segundo a qual princípios morais possuem validade eterna para toda a humanidade. Em segundo lugar, em sua aplicação, o artigo argumenta que a comunidade LGBTQIA+ pode constituir conteúdo das intuições morais e, portanto, dos princípios morais, apoiada na disponibilidade de fatos e informações do período.

Palavras-chave: comunidade LGBTQIA+. gênero e igualdade. intuições morais. princípio moral. inclusividade.

Introduction

In his article entitled “The Objectivity of Moral Judgments” (1927), Mr. Wright presents a *via media* position between the opposing views of moral judgments, as subjective or objective. The former anchored the moral judgments on either an individual moral belief or the moral consciousness of society in the period. The latter defines moral judgment based on the assumption that there is an absolutely valid moral principle for all humanity at all times. Although Mr. Wright still affirms that moral judgments still adhere to these two alternatives, a modification is necessary to accommodate some of the moral issues at present, given the considerable facts and information. He proposed that moral intuitions such as "good, right, better, ought," and their opposites should be understood as “*a priori*”, a formal device devoid of any content (Wright, 1927, 147). This notion of moral intuitions as “*a priori*” is objective; hence, this reflects the truth of mathematics that is universally agreed upon by all humanity at all times. This undermines the classic assumption that moral intuitions have a pre-existing content derived either from religion or from cultural tradition handed down from one generation to the next. This understanding of moral intuitions as a formal device whose content is derived from human experiences of the generation, is important in accommodating moral issue/s of the generation like the LGBTQIA+ community. This paper argues that the moral conflict within this community is not necessarily grounded in any moral theories and principles, but rather on the content we place on moral intuitions that may have been generated from the previous generation, which may not be appropriately applicable to the generation under evaluation.

The first part of the paper explains moral intuitions and why these intuitions should be “*a priori*”. This theory suggests that the content of morality is constantly modified and improved, given the availability of facts and information of the period. Although moral judgments are still an interplay of both the subjective and objective, where the former is understood as moral consciousness of a particular period or social group, the latter is a product of careful reflection and rational deliberation of human beings (Wright, 1927, 147). This modified version of objective and subjective moral judgments proposed by Mr. Wright is important in understanding the moral issue of the LGBTQIA+ community. The second part argues that the LGBTQIA+ community can be a content of moral intuitions stipulated in either the Kantian device or the Utilitarian device. By way of conclusion, the paper supports the redefined moral intuitions and principles in bridging the gap between morality and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Methodology

The method employed in this research is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek word τ (hermeneuein), meaning to interpret, and its derivative τ (hermeneia) meaning interpretation (Demetrio, 2001: 1). Hence, hermeneutics as a method aims at recapturing the meaning of a text systematically interpreted to unveil the underlying coherence or sense (Demeterio, 2001:1). In addition, textual analysis was also used alongside hermeneutics. The textual analysis primarily focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text being studied (Arya, 2020), in this case, "The objectivity of moral judgments" (1927) by William Kelley Wright. While hermeneutics is used to examine, interpret, and look for a possible connection or application of the content to an issue under investigation, the LGBTQIA+ community. They were categorized according to themes to communicate findings that reflect knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Byrne, 2001). In order to achieve a coherent and conclusive stand for the hermeneutic inquiry as the "fusion of horizons"(Annells, 1996), other related articles were also utilized.

Redefined moral intuitions

William Kelley Wright (1927) defines moral intuitions like "good, right, better, ought," and their opposites, or at least some of them, as "a priori" concepts (147). These concepts follow the timeless principles of mathematics for all humanity. They are placed as a holder or purely formal device, devoid of content. They function like the X and Y in geometry and the P and Q in symbolic logic. Viewed as empty containers, the concepts are instrumental in clarifying assumptions that they have a pre-existing content handed down from generation to generation and used as a standard for moral evaluations. This assumption is problematic and even the source of the historical struggle of the LGBTQIA+ community. The moral gap that exists between this community is not primarily grounded on the irreconcilability with any moral theories and principles, but rather on the assumption that these principles have a pre-existing content that exclude the LGBTQIA+ community. For instance, religion, as the greatest critic of this community, adheres to the absolute moral standards stipulated in the Sacred Scriptures and Oral Tradition. In the Catholic Church, for example, the susceptibility of LGBTQIA+ individuals to homosexual acts are absolutely condoned and regarded as an objective moral disorder and a violation of the natural law. This follows the doctrine of sexuality that is morally appropriated only to heterosexual intercourse in the fulfillment of the procreative

nature which humanity shares with the Divine Creator. Thus, any action that does not fulfill this purpose is morally forbidden (McNeill, 2015). This is grounded on the absolutist moral principles that are nonoverridable, inviolable, and exceptionless and assumed universal objective validity (Pojman & Fieser, 1990: 32). Thus, the irreducibility of this moral principle to accommodate the LGBTQIA+ community seems impossible and irreconcilable. However, a compromise is plausible by understanding the interplay between moral knowledge and the availability of facts and information during the given period. Facts and information are not eternal; they are revised or modified in each generation when prompted by some new emergency. This idea changes the notion that morality is anchored to a timeless universal moral standard valid for all humanity. Instead, the paper argues that morality is constantly improving from its current level of development and modified when conflicts arise (Dahl, 1996). Morality as a science of human action is an activity that is studied rationally and systematically and whose conclusions seek to be exact (Boylan, 2000, 2). As empirical science, morality anticipates the idea that there is still something that can be discovered, and perhaps this includes the LGBTQIA+ community, whose facts and information are made available in this generation. The argument for this community may appear flimsy, but it is because they are judged with the moral consciousness of the past or the full data about this community are not yet available or are not fully understood (Wright, 1927).

Redefining moral intuitions as "a priori", devoid of any content, is important in reconciling the enduring conflict against the LGBTQIA+ community. Acknowledging that morality is incomplete and that there is still something to be discovered can be an avenue in accommodating moral issues of the time, like the LGBTQIA+ community. Disagreement of the issue is possible because of conflicting moral principles; however, a consensus of decisions may be achieved through careful reflection and rational consideration of intrinsic values that the LGBTQIA+ community may offer to the rest of humanity. This argument follows the subjective aspect of the principle which according to G.E. Moore must be gotten from human experience, hence synthetic (Wright, 1927: 149) in this case the LGBTQIA+ community. However, this content to be placed in moral intuitions must be the moral consciousness of the generation where facts and information are made available. It is absurd, if not logical, to use the moral lens of the past generation, whose facts and information are not necessarily the content of the present generation. The moral conflict with the LGBTQIA+ community is not necessarily a disagreement of principles or religious ideals, but rather a misunderstanding of facts and information. For the absolutists, facts and information are eternal, hence the moral principles. However, this is not

the case for facts and information are revealed gradually in every period prompted by some new emergency. Thus, moral consciousness is a consciousness of people in every generation supported by the availability of facts and information. If facts and information are a necessary content of morality that should be placed in moral intuitions, it follows that the LGBTQIA+ community can be a viable content of morality in this generation. Thus, understanding moral intuitions as a formal device devoid of content and the consideration of facts and information in every generation can be an alternative in reconciling the enduring gap between the LGBTQIA+ community.

Redefined moral principles and the case of the LGBTQIA+ community

The argument of moral intuitions that is explored in this paper, proceeds the idea that moral principles are also devices devoid of content. The content of the good to be attached to moral intuitions can be evaluated time and again through the Utilitarian and Kantian tests. The Utilitarian device identifies the good with pleasure and measures it quantitatively. The principle states that morality is all about maximizing happiness and minimizing pain. An action is good when it produces happiness and evil if it produces the reverse of happiness. This principle is encapsulated in their famous maxim “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” (Gillon, 1985: 1411). The Utilitarian test of the good is of great value in determining what ought to be done, anything that would tend to diminish the total amount of pleasure experienced by mankind, or where we should refuse to approve a measure that would clearly tend to increase the amount of happiness (Wright, 1927). While the Utilitarian device considers the good as more fundamental, the Kantian device, on the other hand, takes the notion of right as the most fundamental over the good. This Kantian device is expressed through the categorical imperative, a fundamental moral principle of human beings (Guyer, 1995).

These devices have been used in evaluating moral actions since the time when moral consciousness appeared to humanity. Although it has been criticized and, in some sense, successfully refuted, nonetheless, it remained an effective means of evaluating human action. For instance, a utilitarian device evaluates the rightness and wrongness of an act based on the result or consequences. An act is right if it either brings about more pleasure than pain or prevents pain, and an act is wrong if it either brings about more pain than pleasure or prevents pleasure from occurring (Pojman and Fieser, 2012). Although the principle is focused on the public interest as the greater good and may disregard the minorities like the LGBTQIA+ community, utilitarianism applies a collective approach to the outcomes of decision-making, which are significant for the LGBTQIA+ community whose struggle for

recognition is central to their interests (Place et al., 2021). Furthermore, Place et. al. (2021) added that utilitarianism can provide a moral consciousness towards a respectful public relation with the community, who were frequently disregarded and discriminated against. Although the principle adheres to the principle of utility as identical with happiness or pleasure, these concepts mean different things to different people. And imposing one's definition of the terms means forcing one's own values or mores on others (Harris, 2012). In the case of the LGBTQIA+ community, the dispute is rooted in the differences of mores, collective representations, and stereotypes of the past generations with the present (Wright, 1927). Disagreement on the moral permissibility or impermissibility of the LGBTQIA+ community may oftentimes result in argument *ad baculum*; however, through thoughtful reflection, rational consideration of intrinsic values, and moral consequences, we may be able to make an impartial and inclusive decision where gender preferences are no longer an issue of moral concern (Wright, 1927: 152). Although the pursuit of pleasure has been critically criticized or devalued because it reflects the instinctual tendencies of human person that is destructive and self – gratifying nonetheless, pleasure is still an index of happiness that promotes the good of the individual in pursuing his/her goal towards achieving a fulfilled and a purpose driven life.

A Kantian device can also be used as a moral lens for the LGBTQIA+ community, specifically the means–end principle or the ethics of respect for persons. The principle is stipulated in this way: “Those actions are right that treat human beings, whether you or another person, as end and not simply as a means” (Harris, 2012). The principle categorically forbids objectification of a person regardless of cultural differences and gender preferences. The capacity of the person to freely decide and pursue his/her goals and aspirations in life defines the means–end principle. Harris (2012) added that “treating a person as an end” means respecting the conditions necessary for his/her effective functioning as a moral agent. This device can be effectively applicable in the case of the LGBTQIA+ community, following the interrelated means–end principle, such as the conditions of moral agency, the principle of forfeiture, and the principle of equality (Harris, 2012).

The condition of moral agency is essentially embedded in a person as a moral agent. As a moral agent, a person has the freedom to regulate his/her actions without any compulsion. The LGBTQIA+ community is a moral agent and has the right to be protected from any kind of discrimination and coercion that diminishes their freedom. Furthermore, as moral agent, they have the right also to pursue the well–being they deserve in carrying out their chosen goals and aspirations. Like any other human beings, the LGBTQIA+ community has the right to an undiminished

level of purpose and fulfillment and deserves to be treated in a nondiscriminatory way (Harris, 2012). While the condition of agency necessitates a person's freedom and well-being, the principle of forfeiture, on the other hand, asserts that a person should be treated as an end in itself. As such, any discriminatory act against the LGBTQIA+ community is morally forbidden because it forfeits both their freedom and our freedom and well-being as well as the right to be equally treated with the rest of humanity.

This moral consciousness with the LGBTQIA+ community is driven by the fact that this generation is better off because we are provided with sufficient facts and information about their existence and can make decisions in the light of knowledge and experiences available in this period. Thus, the moral conflict with the LGBTQIA+ community is driven by this context, and our sensitivity rendered to them is a product of our moral consciousness about the struggle for acceptance and recognition. This had been a criticism of Edwards and L'Etang (2013), where most research focuses only on a heteronormative agenda and fails to acknowledge the identities or values of the LGBTQIA+ community. Acknowledging the unique role of the community in the public sphere is important according to Bourdieu (1984) as cultural intermediaries for public relations. Recognizing the LGBTQIA+ community as Place et al. (2021) argue, we may be able to address power inequalities and incite social change.

Crafting objective, inclusive moral principles is possible because human beings are rational, who aim for the summum bonum or a flourishing life. The moral law or norm is created in order to serve this purpose because morality is first and foremost concerned with making people happy, and reason is just a practical means of helping them fulfill their desires (Pojman & Fieser, 1990). Kant (1965) argues that reason is sufficient for establishing the moral law as something transcendent and universally binding on all rational creatures. The laws or norms that can be crafted from the LGBTQIA+ community have the assurance of promoting the common good of humanity. Human beings are rational and determined to create laws or norms that would best serve the interests of humanity. Although human beings are vulnerable to crimes and other vices, social institutions will always be there to regulate and control the irrational tendencies of human beings. Social control will always involve a coordination of instinctive tendencies to render people, so far as possible, wise, courageous, just, benevolent, chaste, temperate, economical, and regardful of intellectual values (Wright, 1927). Wright continued those human instincts can never be permitted to develop in a random way into sentiments that would be unfavorable for the welfare of individuals and the common good of society.

Conclusion

The article argues that the moral conflict of the LGBTQIA+ community is grounded in the preconceived content placed in moral intuitions and moral principles. Hence, we are judging the present with the moral lens of the past generation, which is irreconcilable because facts and information may vary. The LGBTQIA+ community is a fact of the generation, and morality is simply the moral consciousness of the society in which he/she live (Wright, 1927). This is the subjective aspect of morality, whose content must be derived from human experiences over a period. On the other hand, the objective part of morality is no longer an adherence to established moral principles that have an eternal validity for all humanity; rather, objectivity is generated through impartial deliberation and careful reflection on the concerned issue, in this case, the LGBTQIA+ community. This objectivity of moral judgment is necessary as a control mechanism against humans' native instincts that can be destructive and contrary to the demands of associated life and the principle of citizenship. Although the subjective aspect of morality is vulnerable to the destructive human instincts however, the objective part of it with the help of social institutions will never permit to develop the instincts randomly into sentiments that would be unfavorable to the welfare of individuals and the common good of humanity, instead an assurance that sentiments can be rationally guided and cultivated into character traits that would render humans as wise, courageous, just, benevolent, chaste, temperate, economical, and regardful of intellectual values (Wright, 1927). These redefined moral principles can be an avenue for the LGBTQIA+ community in their never-ending struggle for acceptance and recognition. This development of sensitivity towards the LGBTQIA+ community in the Philippines, for instance, has been testified according to Equaldex's equality index of 57/100, making the country one of the most LGBTQIA+ friendly countries in Southeast Asia (Arcelo et al., 2023). Moreover, by redefining moral intuitions as a priori, a formal device devoid of content, it is more judicious for the LGBTQIA+ community as a content that ought to be attached to the good, which can be ethically evaluated in either a Utilitarian or Kantian test (Wright, 1927). However, if the dispute is still irresolvable and a consensus of decisions is unattainable, it is not because of a failed moral principle, but rather the full data to which these tests should be applied are not available or are not fully understood (Wright, 1927).

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