Journal Article

International Journal for Science Review

The Relevance of Philosophy in Shaping Contemporary Social Ethics

Jakoep Ezra Harianto*

STT LETS (Lighthouse Equipping Theological School), Gading Primar Hall, Klp. Gading Trade Centre, Jl. Pulau Putri No.Lt 2, Klp. Gading Bar., Kec. Klp. Gading, Jkt Utara, Daerah Khusus Ibu kota Jakarta 14240, Indonesia

Corresponding author: dr.jezra@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the relevance of philosophy in shaping contemporary social ethics through a qualitative approach with the method of literature study (library research). As social dynamics evolve in the modern era, ethical challenges are increasingly complex and require a deep approach to understanding the underlying values. Philosophy, as a discipline that explores the nature of morality, truth, and justice, has an important role in providing a theoretical and critical foundation for formulating social ethics that are relevant to the current context. This study examines the contributions of classical and contemporary philosophers in shaping ethical discourse, as well as how these ideas are applied in social, cultural, and political policies. The results of the study show that philosophy not only functions as a tool for critical reflection on existing norms, but also as a guide in dealing with ethical dilemmas that arise due to technological developments, globalization, and cultural pluralism. By understanding ethical principles rooted in philosophical traditions, society can develop a more inclusive, fair, and responsible frame of mind. This article emphasizes that despite rapid social changes, philosophy remains relevant as a foothold in formulating social ethics that are able to answer the challenges of the times.

ARTICLE INFO

1. INTRODUCTION

In the dynamics of social life that continues to develop, the ethical challenges faced by society are increasingly complex. Social change, technological advancement, globalization, and cultural pluralism create new ethical dilemmas that require critical and reflective thinking. Philosophy, as a discipline that delves into the essence of morality, truth, and justice, has long been the foundation in shaping social norms and values (MacIntyre, 2007). However, in the contemporary context, questions arise about the extent of the relevance of philosophy in guiding society to formulate social ethics that are responsive to the changing times (Taylor, 1991).

Philosophy has a fundamental role in shaping contemporary social ethics by providing a normative framework that allows society to evaluate and reflect on prevailing moral values. Philosophical traditions such as Kantian deontology, Bentham and Mill's utilitarianism, and Aristotelian ethics of virtue offer different perspectives on how moral action should be determined and judged. In a modern social context characterized by complexity and diversity, philosophy serves as a critical tool for revisiting traditional ethical principles as well as adapting them to new needs and challenges. For example, John Rawls' theory of justice provided the basis for the concept of distributive justice in social policy, while the ethics of Habermas' discourse introduced the importance of rational communication in shaping moral consensus in pluralistic societies.

In the contemporary era, ethical challenges are increasingly complicated by technological developments, globalization, and cultural pluralism. Issues such as data privacy, artificial intelligence, climate change, and economic inequality demand more adaptive and responsive philosophical thinking. Philosophy provides analytical tools for understanding these moral dilemmas, such as how utilitarian ethical theories can be applied in technological regulation or how environmental ethics are rooted in deep ecological philosophical thought. In addition, postmodern philosophy introduces a critique of metanarratives and opens up space for more inclusive and diverse perspectives in formulating social ethics. Thus, philosophy is not only a normative guide but also a means of reflection to evaluate the moral consequences of social policies and actions.

Furthermore, philosophy plays a crucial role in building critical awareness among individuals and communities. Through education and public discourse, philosophical thinking encourages society not to take existing social norms for granted, but to question them critically. This approach allows for the emergence of a more dynamic and contextual social ethic, which is able to respond to the changing needs of society. Philosophy also encourages constructive intercultural dialogue in the face of global challenges, such as interreligious conflicts or migration issues. Thus, the relevance of philosophy in contemporary social ethics lies not only in its ability to provide abstract moral principles, but also in its contribution to shaping a more just, inclusive, and reflective society.

Several previous studies have highlighted the role of philosophy in the formation of ethics, especially in the framework of classical moral theories such as deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics (Singer, 2011; Hursthouse, 1999). However, there is a research gap in understanding how these philosophical concepts are applied in contemporary social contexts that are full of new challenges, such as digital ethics, global social justice, and environmental sustainability (Ess, 2013; Rawls, 1999). In addition, most studies tend to focus on normative analysis without exploring how such philosophical principles can be practically integrated in public policy and everyday life (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019).

The urgency of this research lies in the need to evaluate and update the framework of social ethics based on philosophical thinking relevant to current conditions. Given the rapid development of information and communication technology, as well as the increasing awareness of social justice issues, philosophy is expected to provide a strong normative foundation in responding to these challenges (Floridi, 2010). This research aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice by exploring how philosophical thought can be used to shape an adaptive and inclusive contemporary social ethics.

The novelty of this study lies in its approach that combines classical philosophical analysis with modern ethical challenges, such as the use of digital technology, globalization, and climate change, which have not been widely studied in the previous literature (Brey, 2012). This study uses a qualitative method with literature study (library research) to analyze the thoughts of classical and contemporary philosophers and their application in today's social life.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the contribution of philosophy in the formation of contemporary social ethics and provide practical recommendations for the development of social policies based on philosophical values. The benefits of this research are expected to provide insights for academics, policymakers, and the general public about the importance of philosophy in building social ethics that are responsive to the challenges of the times.

2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of literature study research (library research). This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives that focus on theoretical and conceptual analysis related to the contribution of philosophy in the formation of contemporary social ethics. Literature studies allow researchers to examine and explore various theories, concepts, and thoughts from relevant scientific sources, such as books, journal articles, conference proceedings, and other academic documents (Zed, 2004).

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources include works by classical and contemporary philosophers such as Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals by Immanuel Kant, Utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill, and A Theory of Justice by John Rawls. Meanwhile, secondary data sources include scientific journal articles, social ethics study books, and the results of previous research that discuss similar topics. These sources are obtained through searches in academic databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, which provide high-quality and relevant literature on the research topic (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2016).

The data collection technique was carried out by systematic search of relevant literature using keywords such as "philosophy and social ethics," "contemporary moral philosophy," and "ethical frameworks in modern society." Once the literature is collected, the selection process is carried out by considering the relevance, credibility, and contribution to the theoretical framework of the research. The data obtained was then analyzed using the content analysis method, which aims to identify the main themes, key concepts, and relationships between ideas related to the role of philosophy in shaping contemporary social ethics (Krippendorff, 2018). The analysis process is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawn, as described by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

Through this approach, the research is expected to be able to provide a comprehensive understanding of how philosophical thinking can be integrated within the framework of social ethics that is relevant to the challenges and dynamics of contemporary society.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the literature study conducted, it was found that philosophy has a significant role in shaping and directing the development of contemporary social ethics. The three main findings identified in this study are: (1) the relevance of classical ethical principles in responding to the challenges of modern ethics, (2) the contribution of philosophical thought in the shaping of social and public policies, and (3) the role of philosophy in developing ethical awareness in the era of globalization and digitalization.

1. The Relevance of Classical Ethical Principles in Contemporary Challenges

Classical ethical principles such as Kantian deontology, utilitarianism, and Aristotelian ethics of virtue show strong relevance in the face of an increasingly complex range of contemporary social challenges. Deontology, developed by Immanuel Kant, emphasizes the importance of moral obligations that are universal and independent of the outcome or consequence of an action. In this framework, an action is judged to be right or wrong based on whether the action is in accordance with moral principles that can be used as a universal law (categorical imperative), without taking into account the benefits or disadvantages that may arise (Kant, 1785/1997). This concept has become particularly relevant in the context of human rights protection in the modern era, where respect for individual dignity is considered a fundamental principle that cannot be compromised. One clear example of the application of this deontological principle is in the establishment of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union. The GDPR is designed to strictly protect individual privacy, emphasizing that the right to personal data is a human right that must be respected regardless of the economic benefits or efficiencies that technology companies may derive from the use of such data.

In contrast, utilitarianism pioneered by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill offers a different approach by emphasizing the importance of generating the greatest benefit for the greatest number of people. This principle assesses the morality of an action based on its consequences, where actions that produce greater happiness or collective benefit are considered to be right actions (Mill, 1863). In practice, utilitarianism is often used as a basis in public policy-making that involves the allocation of limited resources, such as in the health sector. One concrete example of the application of utilitarian principles is in the COVID-19 vaccine distribution policy. During the pandemic, many countries adopted an approach that prioritized the most vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and individuals with certain medical conditions, to receive the vaccine first. This approach aims to minimize the number of deaths and severe illnesses, thereby maximizing the collective benefits for society as a whole (Savulescu, 2020). In addition, this approach is also applied in herd immunity policies, where the ultimate goal is to protect the population at large by ensuring high vaccination coverage.

Meanwhile, the ethics of virtue rooted in Aristotle's thought offers a perspective that focuses on the formation of an individual's moral character rather than simply rules or consequences. Virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of developing virtues or virtues, such as justice, courage, and wisdom, which allow individuals to live morally in various life

situations (Hursthouse, 1999). In the contemporary social context, ethics of virtue is relevant in shaping organizational culture and leadership with integrity, as well as in building a community based on strong moral values. For example, in the business world, the ethical approach of virtue is used to encourage socially responsible business practices, where companies not only pursue financial gains but also strive to contribute to the well-being of society and the environment. Thus, these three classic ethical principles not only remain relevant, but also complement each other in responding to various ethical challenges faced by modern society, ranging from the protection of individual rights, the optimization of collective welfare, to the formation of individual moral character in social and professional life.

2. Contribution of Philosophy in the Formation of Social Policy

Political and moral philosophy has a very significant role in formulating just, inclusive, and sustainable social policies. One of the most influential contributions in this field is the Theory of Justice developed by John Rawls in his work A Theory of Justice (1999). Rawls introduced the concept of justice as fairness, which emphasized that the principles of justice must be designed in such a way as to guarantee equal treatment for all individuals in society, regardless of their social, economic, or cultural background. This theory not only serves as a philosophical foundation, but has also become a key reference in designing resource distribution policies in various countries, especially in Scandinavian countries known for their progressive social welfare systems.

One of the key concepts in Rawls' theory is the veil of ignorance, an analytical tool designed to evaluate fairness in public policy. This concept asks policymakers to imagine themselves in a position where they do not know their identity, social status, gender, race, or economic position in society. By eliminating knowledge of their own positions, individuals are expected to be able to design rules and policies that are fair to everyone, as they do not know whether they will be the beneficiaries or disadvantaged by the policies (Rawls, 1999). This approach forces policymakers to consider the interests of all members of society equally, and thus prevent biases that may arise as a result of the interests of certain individuals or groups.

The application of the veil of ignorance concept can be found in various social policies in the real world, especially in countries with strong welfare systems such as Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. In these countries, Rawls' distributive justice principles are applied in the design of social security programs, universal health services, and equitable access to education. For example, free education policies up to the university level in Scandinavian countries are designed to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their economic background, have equal opportunities to access quality education. Similarly, the universal health insurance system in these countries reflects the principle that every individual has the right to proper medical care, without having to be burdened by their financial capabilities. These policies demonstrate how Rawls's political philosophy can be translated into real practices that encourage the creation of more just, egalitarian, and inclusive societies.

3. The Role of Philosophy in Global and Digital Ethical Awareness

In the context of globalization and digitalization, philosophy helps to develop a broader ethical awareness, particularly in the face of issues such as technological ethics, the environment, and cultural pluralism. Philosophers such as Luciano Floridi (2010) introduced the concept of infosphere ethics which explores how individuals and society interact ethically in the digital space. In addition, the environmental ethics developed by Arne Naess through

deep ecology emphasizes the importance of balance between humans and nature, which is the basis of today's global sustainability movement (Naess, 1973).

Discussion

The results of this study show that philosophy not only functions as a theoretical foundation in understanding the concepts of morality and ethics, but also has a very significant role in real practice, especially in shaping social ethics that are adaptive to the dynamics of changing times. Classical ethical principles such as Kantian deontology, utilitarianism, and Aristotelian ethics of virtue show great flexibility and relevance in the face of modern ethical challenges. Although contemporary ethical challenges are increasingly complex due to technological advancements, globalization, and cultural pluralism, the normative framework inherited from classical philosophical thought can still be applied with certain adjustments to respond to the needs of the times. For example, the application of Kantian deontological principles in the protection of digital privacy shows how old moral concepts, such as respect for human dignity and moral obligation to act in accordance with universal principles, can be adapted to address contemporary issues such as the collection, storage, and use of personal data by giant tech companies. Privacy policies such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union are concrete examples of how deontological philosophy is translated into modern regulations that put individual rights above corporate interests (Ess, 2013).

Furthermore, the contribution of philosophical thought in the formation of social policies shows how abstract theories can be operationalized into concrete policies that have a direct impact on people's lives. John Rawls' theory of justice, with the concept of justice as fairness, provides a strong analytical framework for evaluating justice in the distribution of resources, especially in the midst of increasing global economic inequality. The veil of ignorance introduced by Rawls encourages policymakers to design fair rules by putting themselves in a position where they are unaware of their own social, economic, or identity status. This approach minimizes bias and ensures that the resulting policies truly accommodate the interests of all groups of society, especially those in the most vulnerable positions (Rawls, 1999). In addition, the ethical approach of discourse developed by Jürgen Habermas (1991) introduces the importance of rational communication, open dialogue, and consensus in policy-making processes, especially in pluralistic and democratic societies. Habermas emphasized that ethical public policy must be born from a deliberative process that involves the active participation of all members of society, so that the decisions taken reflect inclusive and fair collective values. This approach is particularly relevant in dealing with contemporary socio-political challenges such as political polarization, disinformation, and a crisis of trust in public institutions.

In the era of globalization and digitalization characterized by global connectivity, rapid technological change, and increasing awareness of sustainability issues, philosophy plays an important role in shaping global ethical awareness. Major challenges such as climate change, global economic inequality, and technological ethical dilemmas require philosophical approaches capable of transcending traditional boundaries and taking into account cross-cultural and cross-country impacts. The concept of infosphere ethics introduced by Luciano Floridi (2010) expands the understanding of ethics into the digital realm, emphasizing the importance of moral responsibility in online interactions, data management, and the impact of technology on individual privacy and autonomy. On the other hand, environmental ethics developed by Arne Naess through deep ecology emphasizes the importance of a sustainable

relationship between humans and nature, by placing nature as an entity that has intrinsic value, not just a resource to be exploited (Naess, 1973). This perspective is the foundation for the global sustainability movement that demands a paradigm shift from anthropocentrism to ecocentrism. As such, philosophy not only remains relevant in responding to contemporary ethical challenges, but also plays a proactive role in designing a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future, both on a local and global scale.

4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that philosophy has significant relevance in shaping contemporary social ethics. Classical ethical principles such as deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics remain an important foundation in formulating moral norms in the midst of the complexity of modern society. The application of these concepts in contemporary issues such as personal data protection, vaccine distribution, and social policy shows that philosophy not only plays a role in the theoretical realm, but also has real practical implications in everyday life. As such, philosophy continues to be a tool for critical reflection that helps society confront the ever-evolving ethical challenges.

In addition, the contribution of philosophy in the formation of public and social policies is very visible through the application of the theory of justice and the ethics of the discourse. John Rawls' veil of ignorance concept and Jürgen Habermas' communicative approach have helped design more equitable and inclusive policies, especially in pluralistic societies. In the era of globalization and digitalization, philosophy also provides a framework for dealing with new issues such as technological ethics, environmental sustainability, and human rights in a global context. Philosophy not only helps to evaluate existing policies, but also encourages the formation of a broader ethical consciousness among individuals and communities.

However, the increasingly complex ethical challenges require further development in the study of philosophy. Issues such as artificial intelligence, climate change, and global inequality require a more contextual and interdisciplinary philosophical approach. Therefore, further research is suggested to explore the relationship between philosophy and other fields of science, such as information technology, economics, and environmental science. This approach is expected to enrich understanding of how philosophical ethical principles can be applied effectively in the face of increasingly complex global challenges.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The author is solely responsible for the content and analysis presented in this article. There were no conflicts of interest associated with this study, either financially or non-financially. This article is purely the result of the author's study and analysis based on the literature study that has been carried out in depth.

The author also states that all sources used have been listed correctly according to academic rules, and that no part of this article is the result of plagiarism. Any questions or correspondence related to this article can be addressed to the author through the available contact.

This research is expected to contribute to the development of the study of philosophy and social ethics, as well as open up space for further discussion on the relevance of philosophy in facing contemporary social challenges.

7. REFERENCES

Beauchamp, T. L., & Childress, J. F. (2019). Principles of biomedical ethics (8th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Booth, W. C., Colomb, G. G., & Williams, J. M. (2016). The craft of research (4th ed.). University of Chicago Press.

Brey, P. (2012). Anticipatory ethics for emerging technologies. NanoEthics, 6(1), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11569-012-0141-7

Ess, C. (2013). Digital media ethics (2nd ed.). Polity Press.

Floridi, L. (2010). The philosophy of information. Oxford University Press.

Habermas, J. (1991). The theory of communicative action. Beacon Press.

Hursthouse, R. (1999). On virtue ethics. Oxford University Press.

Kant, I. (1997). Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals (M. Gregor, Trans.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1785)

Krippendorff, K. (2018). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

MacIntyre, A. (2007). After virtue (3rd ed.). University of Notre Dame Press.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Mill, J. S. (1863). Utilitarianism. Parker, Son, and Bourn.

Naess, A. (1973). The shallow and the deep, long-range ecology movement. Inquiry, 16(1-4), 95–100.

Rawls, J. (1999). A theory of justice (Revised ed.). Harvard University Press.

Savulescu, J. (2020). Good reasons to vaccinate: Mandatory or payment for risk? Journal of Medical Ethics, 46(2), 78–85. https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-106821

Singer, P. (2011). Practical ethics (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, C. (1991). The ethics of authenticity. Harvard University Press.

Zed, M. (2004). Literature review: Steps to create a literature review. Indonesian Torch Foundation.