
UNIT 1 HUMAN VALUES

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing the students to the understanding of moral values and to the contemporary debates of objective and anti-objective schools on the metaphysical aspects of ethics. The debate is mainly centered on the question if values are objective or determined by subjective factors like culture and society. While presenting the different views, this unit adopts a critical attitude to these schools and points out the lacunae in their arguments.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The question that we will pose now is to know if there are objective moral values. Those who say 'yes' are moral objectivists. Those who say 'no' are the anti-objectivists or subjectivists. But what do we understand by "objective" values? In order to understand this, it is useful to make a distinction, concerning values, between the *model of perception* and the *model of the taste*. According to the model of perception defended by the objectivists, something is desired or approved, because it has a value. There are things in the world which have values and it is of this fact that we desire them. According to the model of taste upheld by the subjectivists, the good, a thing has a value because it is desired. "It is desire that gives foundation to value". Indeed, the partisans of these two models agree on the fact that there is a logical equivalence between desires and values: it is commonsense to say that we prefer good to evil, that we do not like that which has a negative but like that which has a positive value. If something is desired, it has a positive value for the one who desires it and if something has a positive value; it is desired by the one who apprehends it. It would then be conceptually inconsistent to say that one desires something that has a negative value. (To the idea that some people can wish evil deliberately, it is always possible to answer that those people attribute a positive value to evil and for them, evil is good). If one admits this equivalence between desire and value, then the task is to know which of the two is most fundamental. For the partisans of the model of perception, value is more fundamental than desire, while for the partisans of the model of taste, desire is more fundamental than value. It is to be noted that desire should not be understood in a very narrow sense of the term, but it should be understood largely so as to include preference, approval, appreciation,

emotion, etc. The idea is that we have a *pro-attitude* in relation to something if and only if we attribute a positive value to it.

Let us then try to define objective value: A value is objective if it is more fundamental than the pro-attitudes in relation to it, i.e., if it exists independently of our desires, preferences, emotions etc. *A moral objectivist adopts the model of perception.* In this sense, a moral objectivist is a moral realist. One is objectivist or realist about a thing, if he/she accepts that a thing exists independently of our mind, the way in which we represent it or desire it. (This thesis has to be distinguished from a more extensive thesis called cognitivism which upholds that the evaluative statements have values of truth: This is more extensive, for it includes certain versions of relativism upholding that all evaluative statements are either true or false (Mackie). Objectivism implies cognitivism, but not the other way). (We will thus hold here moral objectivism and moral realism as synonymous). (It is useful to adopt a narrow definition of objectivism: A value is objective not because it is independent of *all* attitudes in relation to it, but *only* of pro-attitudes. Thus, a value that would depend on our beliefs, but not on our desires could be considered as objective in a limited sense of the term.) *On the contrary, the anti-objectivists support a model of the taste:* values do not exist independently of our attitudes of desires, preferences, approvals, etc. Had we no desires, there would be no values. If we consider the distinction between the noun “value” and the verb “to value”, we can say that the objectivists think that the noun comes first (it is because *X* has a value that we value it), whereas the subjectivists think that the verb comes first (it is because we value *X* that it has a value).

Anti-objectivist approach to ethics denies that there are objective values or norms. We tend to think that infanticide is bad placing it on equal parance with “snow is white”. This is precisely what the anti-objectivists reject: not that they hold infanticide as good. For them, infanticide *in itself* is neither good; it is not independent of our pro-attitudes. Anti-objectivism adopts a position which may be called relativism, in a large sense of the term. Relativism is a thesis which holds that values depend on individual or collective attitude towards them. We have already seen that values are often classified into three types: epistemic values (true, false), aesthetic values (beautiful, ugly) and ethical values (good, bad). There are also three corresponding types of relativism. Epistemic relativism holds that the claim of truth value of statements depend on individuals or group. Aesthetic relativism holds that what is beautiful or ugly depends on people or cultures. Moral relativism, which is of interest to us here, supports that what is good or badly depends on individuals or cultural groups.

1.2 SIMPLE SUBJECTIVISM

Simple subjectivism claims that all moral statements are true. Truth is what I approve of. It is a relativist position which means what I hold is true for me and what you hold is true for you. It differs from person to person, so it is called modal of taste. They accept both the ontological version and semantic version. *Ontological version* means that no objective value can exist independent of the subject – this version is also known as Meta physical version. For e.g.: when I say smoking is bad, it depends on me (subject). *Semantic version* means that we give meaning to every truth claim. Each statement made by each person is true according to each one. According to them no statement is false because truth is relative. This is called infallibility. Therefore all moral statements are true.

Subjectivism goes against contextual sensibility. For instance let us imagine Ram and Sharma are walking the river side, suddenly a boy fell into the river and was drowning seeing this Sharma asked Ram to jump into the river and save him but Ram does not know swimming so he refused to jump into the river and save the boy. In this case, from the subjectivist position if we look at what Ram did was right, because he thought that if he jumps in he will also lose his life for he does not know swimming. But at the same time he is ignoring the objective value that life is precious.

Subjectivists claim that all moral statements made by all are true, so they respect the difference of opinion among the statements that in turn becomes an objective value. There is a possibility of contradiction in this school of thought, for each one claim that what he holds on to is true according to him. There is *no line of demarcation* in simple subjectivism. But in general what you like may or may not be good. For example: you may like smoking but smoking is bad to health. There are *intrapersonal conflicts* that are ideas change over a period of time, what I hold on to be true at present need not remain true at all times. Preferences are subjected to change and in this change of preference there is a claim of objective value. Subjectivists hold that no objective value can exist independent of the subject, but then there is an objective value exists independent of the subject. If there is no objective value how can one say that the present preference is better than the past. For example: once I thought that Marshall was bad but now I changed my opinion about him and realized that he is a good fellow. *Interpersonal conflicts*: since everyone has his/her own opinion on every matter, there arises conflicts between two or more persons in their view of claims on a specific matter, but which is true we do not know unless there is an objective value, which subjectivists reject to be independent of the subject. These *moral conflicts (intrapersonal and interpersonal) cannot be solved* if we look at the problem from the subjective point of view, because they claim that there are no objective value existing independent of the subject but there are objective values existing independent of the subject. Therefore there is an *impossibility of the moral dissent*.

1.3 SUBJECTIVISM OF MACKIE

Mackie accepts the ontological version that no objective value can exist independent of the subject, but he rejects the semantic version of subjectivism and so all moral statements are false. There is no objectivity existing but every time we make a statement we are pretending or claiming to have objectivity in all our statements when there is no objectivity in all our claims. This argument is called argument from queerness; that is consciousness does not exist, but when we speak about consciousness we speak as though it really exists, there is no way in which we can prove it. When we say that a table exists one can prove it, for one can see it, touch it but we cannot see or touch consciousness.

Every value should lead one to action. Moral judgments are good that give reason for actions. If moral judgments are good that give reason for actions then moral judgments should give categorical (there should not be any conditions like if's and but's) reason. But the problem with this is that there are no categorical reasons. Therefore all moral judgments are necessarily false.

What then is of interest in Mackie's theory compared to simple subjectivism? Firstly, it is closer to common sense than is simple subjectivism: We have observed that there are some reasons to think that common sense tends towards objectivism in terms of values (descriptive form of

evaluative statements, common beliefs in a *good* response to moral dilemmas). Simple subjectivism has to attribute to common sense a thesis which is not its own.

Does Mackie's theory of the error address the problems of infallibility and the impossibility of moral conflict? With regard to infallibility, Mackie's idea is that in matters of morality, far from being right, we are always mistaken. But does this change in approach lead us to any gain? We would probably like to accept that while we can be right sometimes, we can be wrong at other times, for if we are always mistaken, we would never have any means of making intra-subjective or inter-subjective evaluations: the judgments of Martin Luther King are as false as those of Caligula. That is not different from simple subjectivism. With regard to the impossibility of moral conflict, Mackie's theory does make an attempt to resolve: in so far as our judgments claim to speak about the external objective things, two judgments made on a same thing can be contradictory. In the case of simple subjectivism, we do not even claim to speak about the same thing, therefore dissension is impossible. But in the case of Mackie's theory of error, we do claim to speak about the same thing, Barack Obama, Bush and myself, when we discuss partial abortion, dissension is possible. But it is not that one of us is right, but both are wrong. However, the objection that we cannot account for inter-subjective or intra-subjective comparisons still remains. Such comparisons cannot be founded.

1.4 CULTURAL RELATIVISM

This school of thought on one hand accepts both the ontological and semantic version and says that all moral statements are true. On the other hand they accept the ontological version and reject the semantic version and say that all moral statements are false. Therefore all moral statements may be true or false. This school takes a relativist position in which each group claims what they hold is true according to them.

Since they claim the subjectivist position they also have the same advantages of the subjectivism that is respect for difference in cultural context. Since there are diversities of culture there is respect for difference that brings out the notion of tolerance. But indirectly they are holding on to objectivity. There are diversities of moral norms and practices according to different cultures which are fundamental and derived. If so there are no objective values. Therefore cultural relativism is true. These diversities and differences are out of superficial beliefs but everywhere in all most all the cultures the same objective values exist. The same objective value can be executed in different ways in different cultures. For example, in one of the African countries, Fathers of the families are killed when they are in their 50's or 60's. They believe that if their fathers die early with good health, and when they are reborn, they will be healthy. So as a sign of more love and respect towards to their fathers, they kill them early that before they become attacked by the diseases of the old age. But for the people of the other cultures, when they look at this kind of above mentioned practice, they will see it as an act of asininity (foolishness). In all the cultures we have great respect for our parents but we show it to them in different ways. Therefore whatever people of all the culture do is right according to them but they act on a particular objective value indirectly. Here the tolerance as an objective value is held by all the cultures. Moreover, each individual is a member of various groups at the same time like cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious and so on. The values that exist in each of these groups can conflict with each other. It is up to each individual's choice to resolve the conflicts.

1.5 RATIONAL CONSTRUCTIVISM

According to this school of thought moral truths do exist in so far as they are constructed. They do not exist if you do not construct it. We can construct moral truths through rational agreement. Something is morally good because we agree through reason. This can be questioned saying who decides something as morally good or what is rational or non-rational? The answer is that there is an ideal observer who does not exist but an imaginative figure. This ideal observer is well informed and impartial.

There is no special faculty except reason that you can make comparative judgments. For example: Adolf Hitler's action is wrong and Martin Luther King's action is right. Whatever is decided is coherent (rational).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Define Simple subjectivism.

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2) What is meant by Ontological version of subjectivism?

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3) What are the intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts in Simple subjectivism? Can it be resolved? Why?

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4) What does Mackie object against the simple subjectivists? Or State theory of Error.

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5) Clarify the position that cultural relativists hold.

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6) What is the fallacy of argument?

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7) What is 'Rational Constructivism'?

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1.6 EMOTIVISM OF AYER

The argument of Ayer in favor of Emotivism is related to its adhesion to logical positivism, an influential philosophical current at the beginning of the century which sought to apply in philosophy the same methods as in science. The logical positivists proposed the principle known as “verifiability criterion of meaning” to test if a claim is cognitively meaningful (in the sense of being true or false): A claim is cognitively meaningful if and only if it is either *analytic* (true because of logical connections and the meaning of the terms) or *empirically verifiable* (some conceivable set of experiences could test whether it was true or false).

An analytic statement is one that is true because of logical connections and the meaning of terms. An example would be “All bachelors are single”. We know that this is true, not by doing an empirical investigation, but by understanding the terms and logical connections. Since “bachelor” means “single man”, the statement means “All single men are single”. Ayer recognizes that analytic statements don't have to be empirically verifiable in order to make truth claims. For a statement to be empirically verifiable, some possible observations must be able to make it highly probable. Ayer's famous example was “there are mountains on the other side of the moon”. Even though during the life time of Ayer, this statement could not be tested, it was still was in principle verifiable, since descriptions of possible observations made the statement probable. The positivists thought that “God exists”, for example, fails the test since it is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable. So they thought that “God exists” is neither true nor false; it lacks cognitive meaning and has only emotive meaning. So they called “God” a pseudo-concept. This view was popular once, but it is no longer popular today partly because this view itself is neither analytic nor empirically verifiable, so is meaningless on its own terms.

Ayer's logical positivism implies that moral judgments are cognitively meaningful if and only if they are either *analytic* or *empirically verifiable*. Ayer was sure that moral judgments are not analytic. Following Moore, he also rejects naturalistic definitions (for example, “good” = “approved by the society”) because they conflict with how we use language (for example, in ordinary speech it is not contradictory to say “some things approved by the society are not good”). Naturalistic definitions fail also because they try to define an emotive term (like “good”) using non-emotive terms (like “approved by the society”). It follows that moral judgments are not cognitively meaningful; they only have emotive meaning. Ethical truths are impossible. Emotivism is a form of non-cognitivism, the view that there are no moral truths.

Ayer reasoned this way: Truth claims (except for analytic ones) must be empirically verifiable. But moral judgments are not empirically verifiable since “good” is not definable in empirical terms. And moral judgments are not analytic (since they are not true by definition). Since moral statements are neither empirical nor analytical, moral statements are neither true nor false. It

follows that moral judgments are not truth claims. But then they must be emotive. Ayer thus concludes that moral judgments are neither true nor false, but are merely expressions of feelings. “X is good” means something like “Hurrah for X.”

What is advantageous of emotivism over simple subjectivism is that it avoids affirmation that all moral judgments are true. If a person says “It is a good thing to kill homosexuals and gypsies”, subjectivist must show that it is a true judgment (since the statement itself only expresses a particular attitude of this person). For Ayer, on the contrary, this statement is not true. But the problem is that it is not false either. Still worse is that we cannot favor the champions of human rights over this person. Comparative moral judgments remain impossible. As in the case of Mackie’s theory of the error, we are left to wonder if there is any progress at all in Ayer’s emotive theory.

Another objection to emotivism consists in calling into question the first premise of its argument: the positivist premise according to which a true or false statement is either empirical or analytical. The problem is that this first premise seems to refute itself: this premise itself, as we have just shown above, is neither analytical nor empirically verifiable. Generally, those who hold that “Any thesis must be verifiable by experience” rally up against the objection that this thesis itself is not verifiable. The majority of the logical positivists reformulated their thesis when they noticed this contradiction.

The third objection is that not all moral statements can be translated into emotive expressions. “Do what is good” does not correspond to “Do what is hurrah.”, nor can “Hurrah for good people.” be rendered as “Hurrah for hurrah people.” We do not see how emotivism can account for the difference between moral statements and moral imperatives. The fourth difficulty is that we do not seem to be speaking of our emotions when we make moral judgments.

In conclusion, we can say that the sophisticated developments of Ayer, while helping us to avoid certain difficulties imbedded in simple subjectivism, run into the same basic problems. The common problem is to account for *comparative* moral judgments, which would presuppose that some moral judgments are more correct than others. If all moral judgments are equally true (simple subjectivism), equally false (theory of the error), neither truth nor false (emotivism), claiming that some moral judgments are truer than others will necessarily be false.

1. 7 REALISM

Let us recall that there are two models: model of taste and model of perception. According to the former, values are derived from the desire of the subject (individual). Therefore desire comes first and then values proceed from it. This is also known as subjectivism. According to the latter, values exist first and something is desired based on the values. This is also known as objectivism. According to Realism, objective values really exist and they are not creation of individuals as subjectivists claim to be. They exist independent of the subject.

Realism is confronted with different challenges. According to Mackie there is no objective value exist independent of the subject, but the subject is necessary to internalize these values and to produce norms. Here he challenges the objectivists claim that objective value can exist

independent of the subject. What is the faculty through which you can see the objective value if it exists independently, how can you know them without the subjects.

David Hume an empiricist talks about two faculties that are desire and reason. Desire is something that ought to be. It is about your desire of what should be an ideal thing. It cannot be judged as true. Reason describes what is of the case. Reason can be further divided into beliefs and facts. Beliefs can be said true or false with what is the fact. Faculty of reason involves beliefs and facts. Reason is given priority than desire. This faculty of reason represents the world as it is, with the help of reason we can make judgments whether something is true or false. Reason is extrinsically related to action and conforms to the society. Here the self gets adjusted to the world. Faculty of desire involves desire and passions. It represents the world as it should be. It cannot make judgments that can be said true or false. It is intrinsically related to the action and conforms to the individual. Here the world gets adjusted to the self. Here David Hume holds that moral convictions resulting from values are motivating factors that lead us to an action (moral internalism). Moral beliefs are not the motivating factors for action. Moral convictions cannot be beliefs but objectivism claims that convictions belong to beliefs (moral value). Therefore moral objectivism is false.

Logical problem in objectivism is that there is no necessary connection between reason to desire and values to norms. This connection cannot be possible. For instance, from the fact that society is unequal we cannot say that the society must be unequal.

1.8 INTUITIONISM

Intuitionism is like mathematical truth, that only by a matured mind it can be known. The argument from intuition holds that happiness is a fundamental or intrinsic value that cannot be known except through intuition. It cannot be explained in other values.

Intuition is non-natural. Why so? It is because “good” cannot be reduced to natural properties. For example, subjectivists claim that good is what I approve of and the constructivists would claim that good is what is agreed upon rationally and cultural relativists would hold that good is what the group approves of. Here good can be reduced to natural properties. But for Thomas Moore good is something that which cannot be reduced into natural properties. In his opinion good is non-natural and it cannot be defined. It is a primitive and a simple concept. If at all it has to be defined, it can be defined only in analytical properties. For example, bachelors are unmarried. The predicate is already contained in the subject.

There are two types of reduction: conceptual and metaphysical. Conceptual reduction is what it signifies. For example, a doctor means somebody at service, but in reality it is not necessary that they should be at service all the time. Metaphysical reduction deals with what it is. For example, Prathap is my cousin, water is H₂O. When I say “good,” it cannot be metaphysical but conceptual. Good does not contain the value in its very being. Not all metaphysical things can be explained in analytical properties. In the example given to the metaphysical reduction, cousin is not contained in the being of Prathap, but in the example of conceptual reduction the predicate is already contained in the subject, so it is analytical properties. So only through analytical properties (in relation to the other) good can be defined.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) State Moore's position on Non-Naturalism.

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2) What is Logical Positivism?

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3) Clarify the stand point of Realism.

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4) What is the psychological challenge by David Hume?

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5) What is Non-natural? How can it be defined?

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6) What is the argument from intuition?

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1.9 LET US SUM UP

Each one of these theses has an advantage which is also the principal difficulty of the other. The advantage of objectivism is that it makes it possible to make judgments owing to the fact that as regards morals, one is right or wrong. It is a point to which we seem to hold when it comes to morals and is in agreement with some of our intuitions of common sense. We do ask ourselves what our moral decisions should be in such and such situation. We wonder if we should lie or not in a given situation, what should we do with our money, time, life etc. By raising these questions, we assume that they have answers. If we hesitate between two actions and wonder which one is morally better to choose, we presume that one of them is indeed morally better than the other. This means that we generally tend to think that there are actions that are *objectively* better than

others. Retrospectively, we often wonder “did I make the right choice?” Lastly, we sometimes discuss ethical issues with others with the presumption that we are right. We seek to convince others by rational means with the assumption that our opinions are good. Therefore, in a general way, we suppose that in matters of ethics, we can be right or wrong. Moral objectivism thus makes it possible to account for our actions: we are right when our evaluative judgments are true, and they are true when they correspond to objective values. In other words, moral objectivists can apply to ethics the same criteria of objectivity as scientists who apply it in science: Our statements are true by virtue of objective facts of the world. Just as the statement “it rains” is true if and only if it rains, the statement “it is bad to lie” is true if and only if it is in fact, bad to lie. The objectivists argue the value judgments, as we have seen, are expressed not in imperative form like in normative judgments, but in indicative form. The evaluative statements have a classical descriptive form. “Romeo is generous” or “Othello is rancorous”, have the same form as “Julie is blond” or “the earth is round”. Apparently these are statements that describe the factual state of affairs, which can be true or false. The fact that the evaluative statements seem to aspire for truth, there is a reason in favor of objectivism.

Inversely, the anti-objectivists do not find sufficient grounds to explain why in matter of ethics, some can be right while others are wrong. For them, ethics is a matter of taste, of appreciation, and as goes the proverb “taste and colors are of personal preference”. Ethics, therefore, is not an affair of beliefs, of true or false, but an affair of desire: things have values or not depending on if we like them or not. And our desires and preferences are beyond dispute: they are neither true nor false. There is no such thing as a “false desire” or a “false” preference, because we cannot evaluate desires with the ell of what is in the world: most of the time, it can even be necessary, we desire what do not exist. Desire is on the same equal footing as truth. If ethics is all about all our desires, how do we account for moral judgments which presuppose that we can either be right or be wrong?

But anti-objectivists argue from the practical aspect of ethics. An essential aspect of ethics is that our morals convictions make impact on our actions. Ethics is not purely a theoretical activity disconnected from action. What we believe to be morally good or bad determines (at least partly) what we are willing to do. Ethics is not purely contemplative, if so we would be satisfied only to know what true values are. It intends to have a practical impact. However, *objectivists precisely seem to reduce ethics to an enterprise of knowledge by neglecting its practical aspect*. While insisting on beliefs over desires, on truth over action, on the world as it is over the world as it should be, objectivists make of ethics a purely contemplative discipline. As opposed to this, the anti-objectivists, while insisting on the role of individual preferences and desires in matters of ethics, help us connect better our preferences to actions and better understand why ethics leads us to act in one way rather than another way. Ethics is not a subject matter of contemplation, but of action. If there are objective values, we can at best contemplate them. The contrary, that is, to proceed to values from our desires enables us to explain the motivating nature of the latter.

To resume, if objectivism can well explain the possibility of error in ethics, it cannot sufficiently explain the relation between morals and actions. On the contrary, the anti-objectivists explain this relation better, but do not sound convincing when it comes to the discussion of if one can be right or wrong in ethical issues. Ethics is related both to truth and to action. We would like to be able to hold on to both ends of the string. But apparently, insisting on truth leads to the loss of its

relation to action and it is also true of the opposite. This tension constitutes a constant background of our presentation of debates between objectivists and anti-objectivists. This debate, in the last analysis, concerns meta-ethics. Our preoccupation is not to know what true values are, but to know if objective values exist (whatever these values may be). If we succeed to defend the existence of objective moral values, then we can wonder which values are objective. In other words, the meta-ethical objectivism seems to be a necessary precondition to the study of normative ethics: if there are no objective values, it is useless to ask if abortion is good or bad.

1.10 KEY WORDS

Truism: a statement that is clearly true and does not therefore add anything interesting or important to a discussion.

Intrinsic: belonging to or part of the real nature of something or somebody.

Extrinsic: not belonging naturally to somebody or something; coming from or existing outside somebody or something rather than within them.

Consequentialism: school of thought that gives importance to judgment on actions of a person and not to the person. Action is judged not the person.

Cognitivism: represents schools of thought which say whether all moral judgments or statements are true or false.

1.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 HUMAN VIRTUES

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

The Theory of morality which makes virtues the central concern is called virtue ethics. We shall explore the chief ideas of virtue ethics especially in the philosophy of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle and the contemporary western philosopher MacIntyre. We shall also engage in discussion with regard to virtues from the point of the view of the Asian religious traditions, notably Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. In this unit, we seek to specify some major criticisms against virtue ethics.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Among the major currents that now dominate moral philosophy, virtue ethics counterbalances the influence of Kantianism. While the Kantian ethics attempts to relativize the ethical importance of happiness, virtue ethics rejects the Enlightenment project that founds morality on reason and brings to the forefront the question of happiness and that of nature. By what logic is this shift made possible and how does it reconcile altruism inherent in Kant's ethics of duty with more personal research of our own happiness?

In the legacy of Kant, one cannot define morality from within the framework of happiness because that would make desire to be the foundation of the moral will and desire by definition varies from individual to individual. If everyone is in search of one's own happiness, the very content of one's happiness is strictly personal: This would sacrifice any attempt to conceive a universal moral law. In order to prevent moral conscience from relativism in the pursuit of goals, Kant opposed the pursuit of happiness by consciousness of duty enabled through the categorical imperative, as a universal obligation. Yet in recent decades we are witnessing in ethics, a resurgence of the need for happiness, not as the maximization of pleasure as in the case of utilitarianism, but as the perfection of one's own existence. This idea through reinstated by some contemporary writers such as Alasdair MacIntyre (*After Virtue*) or as Elizabeth Anscombe (*The Modern Moral Philosophy*), is as old as the Greek thinkers like Aristotle. Virtue – in the Aristotelian sense of the term – is a form of excellence in the realization of one's being.

Thus virtue ethics as one of the major approaches in normative ethics is in contrast both to the approach which emphasizes duties (deontology) and to that which emphasizes the consequences of actions (consequentialism). Suppose someone in need should be helped, an utilitarian will point to the fact that the consequences of doing so will maximize one's well-being, a deontologist will emphasize the fact that, in doing so the agent will be acting in accordance with a moral rule such as "Do unto others as you would like others do to you" and a virtue ethicist will underscore that helping that person would be benevolent and therefore virtuous.

2.2 ARISTOTLE AND HIS CONCEPT OF *EUDAIMONIA*

Aristotle is one of the founders of the Virtue Ethics in Greece. He says that the human person is a rational animal. Human person has got the ability to reason out which serves as the essential characteristics and functions of the human being. This essential characteristic of being rational leads to achieve a particular goal or end which Aristotle calls virtue. This position is called as the 'Teleological Position'. Action oriented life is based on an assumption what do you want to do? But virtuous life presupposes the question 'what do you want to be?' or 'what kind of person you are aspiring to be. For example, a good carpenter aims at the virtue that is a good sense of aesthetics.

"*Eudaimonia*" is an Aristotelian term loosely and inadequately translated as happiness. It is not what we think of in an ordinary way. *Eudaimonia* means the flourishing of human life. Aristotle recognizes that actions are not pointless because they have a purpose. Every action aims at some good. For example, the doctor's vaccination of the baby aims at the baby's health. Furthermore, some actions are done for their own sake (*ends in themselves*) and some other actions are done for the sake of some other end (*means to other ends*). Aristotle claims that all actions that are ends in themselves also contribute to a wider end, an end that is the greatest good of all. That good is *eudaimonia*. In other words, *eudaimonia* is happiness, contentment, and fulfilment; it's the name of the best kind of life, which is an end in itself and a means to live and fare well. In his opinion virtuous thinking of human being leads to a good action that further cultivates good habits. These habits develop virtuous characters that lead to the final goal that is *eudaimonia* (happiness).

Virtues are of two types. They are intellectual virtues and moral virtues. Intellectual virtues are that which can be taught and learnt. Prudence is one such virtue. We can easily learn from others as to how to be prudent. Moral virtues can be achieved by repeatedly doing an action that becomes a habit. These cultivated habits lead to achieve the ultimate happiness. Aristotle also says that virtue is a golden mean, that which lies in the middle of the two extremes. For example, courage as a moral virtue lies between the two extremes namely cowardice and fool-hardiness. Four important virtues, according to Aristotle, are Wisdom, Prudence, Temperance and Fortitude (courage).

All virtue ethicists are indebted to Aristotle in some way. Almost all of them give importance to the character of a person rather than compliance with certain norms of right behaviour. This does not mean that they ignore moral obligations; rather they affirm the primacy of virtues because according to them moral obligations can only be derived from virtues. Hence the virtue ethicists do not primarily concern themselves with questions like if lying is wrong; they would rather seek to address if lying in a particular situation is detrimental to the honesty of the person. It becomes

clear then that the virtue ethicists consider that mere adherence to moral precepts does not satisfactorily respond to challenges in leading a moral life. A full-blown ethics should take into account many factors such as motives and intentions, which are largely neglected by the duty-based ethics. Kant's 'duty for duty's sake' offers no place for motives. In other words, we do not act out of loyalty or honesty. It may be the duty of a son to take care of his ailing mother, but if he does without being motivated by love, his moral life seems incomplete. Hence moral virtues alone can ensure human flourishing.

2.3 VIRTUES AND ACTIONS

How virtues are related to actions? Are they related at all? How does an adherent of virtue ethics judge his/her own actions and those of others to be right or wrong? If someone tells a lie to avoid paying a debt, an adherent of virtue ethics instead of taking recourse to the moral norm "do not lie," would judge the action of lying as wrong based on the virtue of honesty, for lying lacks the virtue of honesty. And honesty for a virtue ethicist is integral to human flourishing. The virtue ethicist has been cultivating the virtue of honest over the years, not only in the case of lying but also in other actions. Thus acting honestly is part of his/her very person and his/her actions reflect his/her virtuous character. In other words, his/her actions naturally flow from what kind of person he/she is rather than from adhering to specific moral norms.

Virtue ethicists develop virtues not only because it leads them to happiness but also it enables human flourishing in general. Hence they evaluate their actions not only in the light of results they produce for them but also for others. Similarly they judge not only their actions but also those of others to see if those actions lead to human flourishing. Thus the guidance they seek in living out a moral life is not so much from the clearly laid out norms as from virtues that promote human flourishing. Not moral norms but persons who lead virtuous life become moral ideal. As the philosopher Louis Pojman says, they look for moral ideals in persons without focusing on abstract reasons.

2.4 EVALUATING VIRTUE ETHICS

As we have noted earlier, virtue ethics offers a better motive for the action one does than the duty-based ethics. Saving a life of someone only out of the sense of duty seems to lack a better motivation like compassion and kindness, which can be expected only from a person who has developed these virtues in him/her. It is also important to note that duty-based ethics somehow neglects some of the essential aspects of moral life, namely the emphasis of being a good person leading a virtuous life.

While there are such positive aspects in virtue ethics, which is not accounted by duty ethics, there are also some limitations in virtue ethics. The critics of Virtue Ethics specify at least three difficulties with regard to this ethical approach. First of all, they lack moral principles and ethics without specific principles cannot guide us in deciding the moral choice of an action. For example, when someone steals money, what would be a morally right act in dealing with that person? Virtue Ethics at best can tell us that we have to follow the model of virtuous persons. It does not specify or give guiding principles as to what virtuous persons would do exactly in that situation. The problem with virtue ethics, as is pointed by many philosophers is that it presents its argument in a circular way: the action if a virtuous person is right and the right action is the

one done by virtuous person. If we need to avoid this circularity, we need other guiding principles which go beyond virtue ethics.

Secondly, there is a lack of moral judgment in virtue ethics. A person may be virtuous but he/she may still not be able to distinguish right action from wrong action especially if he/she is not knowledgeable in a particular field. For example a virtuous person who is a neophyte as far as scientific developments are concerned will not be able to say if stem cell research can be permitted or forbidden. In other words, the rightness or wrongness of an action does not fully depend on the virtuous character of a person. There are moral standards that are independent of the character of a person to judge the moral rightness or wrongness of an action.

Thirdly, there can be situations in which virtues enter into conflict with one another. For example if a person comes across a dilemma situation of his/her friend brought to trial and he/she is a witness. If the person tells the truth, which means he/she is dishonest, his/her friend will end up in prison for a few years. If the person wants to save his/her friend to show loyalty to his/her friendship, he/she will necessarily tell lie which implies that he/she is dishonest. Which of these two virtues honesty and loyalty, is to be pursued in this situation? Virtue ethics does not seem to provide us a satisfactory answer. This is true of all such dilemma situations. What does virtue ethics have to say about dilemmas – cases in which different virtues conflict? Justice prompts us to kill the person who is a reckless murderer, but love forbids it. Honesty demands that truth be told even if hurts, while compassion might suggest lying. What shall we do? Of course, the same kinds of dilemmas are generated by conflicts between the rules of the duty-based ethics. Deontology and virtue ethics share the conflict problem. The proponents of the duty-based ethics suggest that such conflicts between norms of duty can be resolved by determining the prominence of one norm over another. This, however, does not seem to be possible in virtue ethics unless otherwise there are other guiding principles to ascertain as to which virtues are more important than other virtues.

2.5 DEONTOLOGY VERSUS VIRTUE ETHICS

Virtue ethics is “concerned with Being rather than Doing,” It is “agent-centred rather than act-centred.” Critics maintained that it was unable to provide action-guidance and hence, rather than being a normative rival to utilitarian and deontological ethics, it could claim to be no more than a valuable supplement to them.

Immanuel Kant, in his duty-based ethics emphasizes on doing the duty for the sake of duty, which is also the stand of all other deontologists in general. For example, if a wife falls sick, it is obviously the duty of her husband to take care of her. Duty-based ethics does not give any motivation other than duty. Virtue ethics offer us virtues like loyalty, compassion, love and the like as motivations to do one’s duty in an effective way. Good virtues motivate us to do our duties.

Sometimes this duty-based ethics goes against common sense. For example, during the war time thousands and thousands of innocents like women and children are brutally killed by the army. But army men follow the duty-based ethics, so they simply kill the innocent in order to execute their plan that which is part of duty as army men. Virtue ethics, however, has inspired many thinkers to give the right place to principles without making them absolute. As William Frankena

notes rightly, “principles without traits [virtues] are impotent and traits without principles are blind.”

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) State the process by which the teleological position achieved from the view of Aristotle.

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2) What does the virtue ethics emphasize: action or person? Give reasons.

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3) Explain in brief what is meant by the term ‘*Eudaimonia*’?

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4) What are the types of virtues?

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5) Give valuable explanations to the following statement- ‘Virtue lies in the middle’ or State what is meant by ‘Golden Mean’?

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7) What are the disadvantages of Virtue Ethics?

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2.6 ETHICS OF CARE

Ethics of Care is a very powerful and influential version of virtue ethics though some might consider it to be an independent moral theory in its own right. Developed mainly by feminist thinkers like the woman psychologist Carol Gilligan, this account of virtue ethics dwells chiefly on the different ways in which men and women think of moral problems. According to Gilligan,

men make moral decisions on the basis of rights and justice while women make moral decision on the basis of caring and feeling for others and their view-points. According the approach of men towards moral issues can be termed 'ethics of justice' while that of women can be called 'ethics of care.' Thus the ethics of care emphasizes close personal relationships and moral virtues such as compassion and sympathy. It calls for a change in our perception of morality and of virtues, laying greater emphasis on virtues exemplified by women, such as taking care of others, patience, the ability to nurture, self-sacrifice, etc. It is not clear if we can maintain that women and men adopt different approaches to virtues. Be that as it may, there must be place for care in virtue ethics along with other virtues such as justice and honesty.

2.7 MACINTYRE: RELATIVITY OF VIRTUES

In the contemporary era, Alasdair MacIntyre is a major figure in the recent revival of interest in virtue ethics and also the ethics of care, which gives importance to the body with regard to the conduct of human beings. In his *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues?* (1999), he affirms that morality cannot be thought outside of biology in so far as human person is an embodied being and not just pure rational mind as is presented within the framework of dualistic philosophy. He says that virtues change according to the context. In the period of Homer, physical strength was considered to be the virtue. In the period of Athens (Socrates and Aristotle), moral integrity was considered as a virtue, whereas during the Middle Ages when Christianity thrived, spiritual strength was considered to be the virtue. MacIntyre took a relativist stand that virtues are relative that is to say that the virtues differ in different contexts. He concludes that these differences can be attributed to different practices that generate different conceptions of virtues. Each account of virtue requires a prior account of social and moral features in order to be understood. Thus, in order to understand Homeric virtue we need to look its social role in Greek society. Virtues, then, are exercised within practices and social forms of activity that are coherent and seek to realize goods internal to the activity. Virtues enable us to achieve these goods. There is an end (*telos*) that transcends all particular practices and it constitutes the good of a whole human life.

Thus MacIntyre's approach to ethics is more in terms of understanding moral decisions than finding an absolute rule for choosing how to behave in any similar case. It is relativistic in terms of morality, and believes it useless to try to determine absolute rules of conduct, either through Kantian categorical imperative or utilitarian calculus of utility maximization and welfare.

2.8 VIRTUES IN ASIAN RELIGIONS

Confucianism: While Aristotle emphasises nurturing virtues through habitual ways of behaviour by individuals, Confucius holds that the humaneness (*jen* or *ren* which can also be translated as kind-heartedness or benevolence) is derived from the web of social relationship. Hence leading a virtuous life does not consist so much in living accordance to one's inner nature, as was thought by Aristotle, but meeting the requirement of relationship in which we find ourselves. We are not isolated individuals but part of the social network. Hence the most basic of all virtues is "humaneness." All other virtues such as righteousness and faithfulness flow naturally from humaneness. For example, in the relationship of citizen and ruler, the prime virtue is righteousness and in friendship, it is faithfulness. Be it righteousness or faithfulness, all virtues are associated to the greatest virtue of humanity, that is, humaneness. Thus Confucius brings in the social character of human person which allows for a harmonious society.

Buddhism: Both Aristotle and Confucius give importance to the human person, be it individually or collectively in their frame of virtue ethics, Buddhism adopts completely a different approach, for the concept of 'self' as a substance does not fall in line with the main teachings of Buddhism. Human is made up of five *skandas* which are on changing. There is no permanent 'self.' The imagined entity called self only leads to desire and attachment, which in turn further lead to suffering. So virtues are neither self-actualizing as in the case of Aristotle, not society-centred as in the case of Confucius. Instead it consists in freeing 'oneself' and 'others' from suffering. If desire is the cause of suffering, then the virtues that would free us from suffering would be tranquillity and non-attachment. In order to arrive at these virtues, we should be truthful both in thought and speech.

Taoism: Taoism takes its inspiration from Buddhism with regard to the idea of flux and non-permanence. To be virtuous would then mean that going with the flow just like water in a stream, analogy given by Tao Te Ching. The flow of water is not an image of the weak but of the strong because its flow cannot be resisted. A true Taoist must let him/her go along the currents, taking control of one's senses, body and mind. This is possible only through selfless, spontaneous, simple and serene life.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What are the virtues that men and women possess according to Carol Gilligan?

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2) State MacIntyre's Relativist position on virtue and cultural contexts.

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3) Explain the basic difference of Confucians, Buddhists and Taoists from the stand of Aristotle on Virtues.

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2.9 LET US SUM UP

The basic contention of virtue ethics is that moral actions are derived from virtues. Aristotle, the main proponent of virtue ethics from the western tradition hold that the greatest good of human life is *eudaimonia*, human flourishing and to achieve this, we should cultivate virtues. And a virtue is a golden mean between two extremes. The resurgence of virtue ethics in the contemporary era through eminent thinkers like MacIntyre points out to the lack in duty-based ethics, thus insisting that ethics involves not merely actions impelled by duty but also motives

and intentions. While Aristotle's virtue ethics rests on human individual, virtue ethics as developed by some Asian religions emphasize social relationship and non-attachment. Whatever be the pitfalls of virtue ethics, it remains relevant and forms part of ethical theories.

2.10 KEY WORDS

Eudaimonia: term introduced by Aristotle that is translated as happiness. The term means to flourish is the aim of human person.

Deontology: a school of thought which holds on to the view that rules/ norms are more important than values.

Teleology: the theory that events and developments are meant to achieve a purpose and happen because of that. *Telos* means end.

2.11 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 HUMAN RIGHTS

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- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Rights
- 3.3 Development of Human Rights
- 3.4 A Critical Look at Some Specific “Human Rights”
- 3.5 The Right to Life
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3.0 OBJECTIVES

We shall seek to understand the important aspects of rights in this unit, first by briefly expounding the different foundations of human rights, then by giving a brief account of the historical development of human rights. We shall also critically evaluate human rights. Special attention is given to the right to life as this unfolds the relation between ethics and human rights in general

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A simple working definition of a “right” is that it is a well-founded claim. Historically various bases or foundations have been put forward to ground different rights. We will need to critically assess these in a moment. For instance, the British empiricist John Locke (1632-1704) who inspired the writing of both the American and the Indian Constitutions, recognized that the free gifts of Nature (land, forests, the water in lakes and rivers, fresh air, the flowers and fruits that grew wildly) belong to no one but if you “mixed your labour” with any of them, you acquired a “right to private property” of them. The water in the stream belongs to everyone, but the water that I went and fetched in my bucket belongs to me. The trees in the forest are anyone’s, but the one I cut down is mine. So too as regards the fruit and flowers that I have carefully picked. Fair enough. But, what if I put my labour to erecting a fence around a whole lake? Does that entitle me to private ownership of this entire “free gift of Nature,” such that I can reserve its watery wealth all to myself or, perhaps, charge a fee to anyone who wants to draw a bucket from it? Marxists as we know have no problems with private ownership of “consumer goods,” that is, goods that we use or “consume” directly – a computer, bicycle, food, a house, clothes and so on. But they are firmly opposed to private ownership of producer goods, that is, goods that are used to produce other goods – factories, fuel, tools, agricultural land and so on. Not everyone would go along with them, in some virulent anti-capitalists. Some “rights,” such as the right to life, liberty and free speech are allegedly rooted in our very human nature and so are “inalienable” (no one can deprive us of them). How many are these and which ones are they? Has the State the right to curtail them, in emergencies, for a limited period? And has the State the right to execute capital punishment; if so, on what grounds? These are but some of the issues we have to come to grips with in this chapter.

3.2 RIGHTS

As different rights may lay claim to different foundations, it might be worthwhile to classify them according to these sources, to avoid confusion and misunderstanding. Now, perhaps the most important basic distinction we can make is between positive and natural rights and their corresponding duties.

A “natural right” as the very term indicates, is one that is founded on our very human nature, adequately understood. For instance, the very fact that we are embodied beings, lays upon us the duty to take reasonable care of our bodies. Whence arises the fundamental human right to food, clothing and shelter. We have a right to adequate supplies of these, along with the proper means to obtain them (the right to a decent job and a living wage). Of course, this means that we should make proper use of our human qualities of intelligence and freedom and not overindulge any of our appetites, such that we ruin our health in the process. This also means that we recognize that other persons have an equal right to such goods and we may not go on an unbridled spree of “having more,” amassing private supplies of the above-mentioned necessities such that other persons are deprived of their possibility of access to them. “Positive rights,” on the other hand, are those granted us by virtue of law. Thus, the laws of the State lay down who has the right to vote (usually a citizen of either sex, who has passed the legal age of eighteen).

Now, inasmuch as an authentic “natural right” is rooted in my human nature, no individual or organization can take it away from us: “natural rights” are thus “inalienable.” Our various Constitutions actually do not “grant” us these rights; at best, they merely recognize and guarantee them. A particular State may refuse to acknowledge a particular “natural right,” in which case it would be acting beyond its proper power. It may legally prevent a person from exercising his or her human rights, but it can’t really *remove* one’s claim to them. Few, however, would deny the State right to suspend in an emergency, certain “natural rights” of the citizens, *temporarily* for the common good. Thus, during a flood or in the aftermath of an earthquake, the State may request private agencies to transport food and medicine to the affected areas or to rush the injured to hospital. Some amount of freedom of speech may be curtailed in times of war lest enemy agents have easy access to information that would jeopardize the security of the nation and its citizens.

3.3 DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The initial points of rights were mainly freedom, security, property and resistance to oppression (statement of 1789), which are inspired by liberalism and are considered as rights to be protected against the state. Later versions add the concerns of dignity and wellbeing (education, health, etc.), which, inspired by socialism in a broad sense, are considered as rights to be guaranteed.

The first generation of human rights is that of civil and political rights. These are rights of the individual to confront the state if it acts contrary to the political freedom of the citizens. Historically, these rights already in the embryonic British customary constitution developed in the late eighteenth century and were recognized during the American Revolution (1787) and the French Revolution (1789). These rights include civil liberties which guarantees freedom to the individual to do anything in so far as it does not harm others, right to life, prohibition of slavery, prohibition of torture and inhuman, prohibition of arbitrary detention, freedom of marriage and of parentage, and right to private property (considered by the Declaration of 1789 as a natural and inalienable right of human person, Articles 2 and 17). Political rights include the right to

vote, the right of resistance to oppression, the right of peaceful assembly including freedom of religion.

The second-generation rights are rights that require government intervention to be implemented. The individual, unlike in the case of resistance, is here able to require the State to take some action. The State must guarantee some rights to its citizens in return for abandonment of a part of their freedom. They are called social rights because they result from the experience of social struggles.

Historically, most of these rights have been recognized in the aftermath of the Second World War. Nevertheless, the right to work and to social protection was claimed at the outset of the French Revolution of 1789 and enrolled in the law of March 19, 1793, which states that every human person is entitled to his/her livelihood through work if he/she is capable to work or through free relief if he/she is unable to work. The care of providing for the subsistence of the poor is a national duty. Similarly, Article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights and Citizen of 1793 affirms that the State owes subsistence to unfortunate citizens, either by providing labour or providing the means of existence for those who are unable to work. There is some conflict between the rights to be safeguarded against the state and the rights to be guaranteed by the state. This is because of the opposition between two conceptions of human rights: liberal and socialist.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which upholds rights such as right to social security (article 22), right to work (article 23) and right to education (article 26), is accompanied by two United Nations International pacts on civil and political (first generation) and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (second generation) (December 16, 1966). Both pacts have rarely been signed together; the countries of the West Block signed the first more willingly while those in Eastern bloc signed the second.

The human rights of the third generation revolve around the fundamental principle of equality and non-discrimination. Some of the major concerns are the environmental law, considerations of bioethics, right to development, and the right to peace. Some like Emmanuel Kobra Quashigah speak of a fourth generation of rights that would be global, so all actors in society would benefit from implementing these rights. However, the content of these rights is not clear. They contain certain rights of the third like environmental law and bioethics. However there is a shift from freedom to substantive equality.

The source of law in the field of human rights is the existence of the individual, while the source of law in democracies, by definition derives from the general will. When these two sources of law conflict, society must find a balance and a way to reconcile these two imperatives. For example, we have freedom of expression, but the criminal law prohibits insulting a neighbour, and we have the fundamental right to marry, but civil law prohibits marriage between brothers and sisters in many countries. The laws in these examples provided do not violate human rights but this raises the difficult question of what “acceptable” limits that the law may impose on human rights in a democratic society governed by the right.

It is possible that democracy can come into conflict with human rights. The democratic principle makes legitimate a priori any determination made in the popular will, and recognizes no higher

authority than the rule of the people. Accordingly, there is no universally accepted philosophical, political or legal solution as satisfactory if the majority of people, directly or through officers democratically elected, would support a policy contrary to human rights. A democratic state can violate human rights. To avoid this, it is generally accepted that they must limit the sovereignty of the people by independent safeguards, a role often taken by the courts (at national level, by constitutional judges or Supreme Courts).

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Define Rights.

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2) Explain Natural Rights and positive Rights.

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3.4 A CRITICAL LOOK AT SOME SPECIFIC “HUMAN RIGHTS”

It is necessary for us to take a closer look at certain basic human rights that touch upon issues that are very much “in the news” or part and parcel of our everyday experience. Let us critically assess their meaning and foundation.

The Right to Private Property: Private property – even of producer goods is a natural human right, but it should not be forgotten that “the free gifts of nature” also have a social function. This is because this right is rooted in our very human nature as well as in the very make-up of the commodities concerned, in addition.

Private property is an inalienable human right because in as much as we are embodied beings, we need a certain supply of material goods to provide for our growth, health and well being as well as that of our family members. This would include a reasonable right to “store up” for future plans and emergencies. By that same token, we also have a right to a reasonable amount of entertainment, rest and leisure for the purpose of recreation after hard work. We need to literally “re-create” ourselves, our energies and strength so as to be able to work more efficiently and productively in the future. Now, as scientific progress is made and lifestyles change, we may make legitimate demands for more sophisticated forms of amusement as well as more efficient labour-saving devices. All this is quite well ordered and constitutes part of human duty towards human inherent embodied nature.

On the other hand, the very nature of material goods cries out for some free and intelligent being to take possession of them, take care of them and help them develop more fully and freely. About the only things that we need and that we can find “ready-made” in the pure state of nature

are fruit, vegetables, air and water. For the rest, we need to plough, water, harvest, to weave and tailor, to graze and so on before we can avail ourselves of the “consumer goods” we need. A measure of research and development must also be undertaken to improve the quality and quantity of these necessities: they won’t simply develop themselves, collaborate and make scientific breakthroughs by “natural selection” and similar processes. Yes, the very nature of material things themselves requires that some free and intelligent agents help them to develop and come to their full flowering.

Of course, collective farms and State-ownership of industries can assure us of all these: there is no absolute need for private ownership, especially of “producer goods.” Very true, but history and very recent human experience gives us cause to hesitate. Recent facts have shown that humans do not take care of or manage efficiently that which does not directly belong to them. Life behind the former Soviet Union or in strict Communist China, before the “opening up” seems to bear this out. And don’t we in India repeatedly clamour for bringing back into the public sector many State-run industries – the electric supply, for instance – to rescue them from the morass of inefficiency and sub-standard quality in which they have become mired? It would seem that such enterprises thrive best when they are privately owned and directed, when they can face the challenge of competition by developing quality control, efficiency in management, research into better methods of production and so on. Admittedly, all this is motivated not so much by the desire to provide better goods and services but to ensure bigger profits. However, good business acumen recognizes that the two are inseparably connected. It would seem that a blanket ban on all private ownership of producer goods and to advocate only state ownership in this regard would be as disastrous as the reverse. Nor is this the conclusion of those who indulge in “armchair philosophizing,” rather is it borne out by those who have a nose for the facts, especially good business sense.

Of course, it is also an undeniable element of human experience that it is quite possible to “go overboard” with the burgeoning consumer mentality that suffocates and stifles us. The promise of consumerism – as heralded by globalization – assures us that “having more, producing more, hoarding more” is the answer to the deep-seated human quest for happiness. Happiness is a measure of having more (power and things), we are told. If one is not yet truly happy, it is due to the simple fact that he or she does not yet have enough. The purpose of human life and development is not to be more (human) but to have more. Hence, Ayn Rand and those of her like would see sharing as an anti-value and all appeals to rights and duties, to love and concern for the poor as merely “subjective,” foolish preying upon the heart and trying to make a “whim” into a universal norm. If “having more” is to be the ultimate goal of human life, it would make absolutely no sense to share, for that would involve having less. But what if the authentic goal of human life was to “be more” and “having more” a mere means to this? Wouldn’t that change the whole perspective? Sometimes we would “be more” by “having less” (sharing), thus enhancing our social being as a reasonable respite from the wanton and unceasing rape of nature, bequeathing insoluble problems for future generations? And wouldn’t this not only dehumanize millions yet unborn, but our very selves too, for it is harming society and nature, both of which are necessary for our growth?

3.5 THE RIGHT TO LIFE

This is perhaps the most basic of all fundamental rights, in the sense that if one were to deny it, all the others would have no meaning. Aquinas included it among the most basic practical first principles with which human beings are endowed: indeed, as the natural urge for self-preservation, it is one of those metaphysical drives which we share with all beings. In as much as human life is, in a special way something that stems from God's personal creative act, it is something sacred and no one, for any purpose whatsoever can, therefore arrogate to himself or herself the right to directly destroy an innocent human being. Even an atheist would have good reason to respect this right, for it is the basis of all the others and without it the rest would become derisory.

This does not mean that one cannot strike back, even kill, an unjust aggressor. The legitimate defence of individual persons as well as of societies, would allow one the right to do so. Thomas Aquinas justifies this on the grounds of the Principle of Double Effect. As he puts it in the book *Summa*, "The act of self-defence can have a double effect: the preservation of one's own life and the killing of the aggressor. The one is intended, the other is not." However, it stands to reason that if one were to use against a malicious assailant more violence than is necessary, this could hardly be justified as Aquinas reiterates. If a human person, in self-defence, uses more than necessary violence, it will be unlawful: whereas if he repels force with moderation, his defence will be lawful, nor is it necessary for salvation that a man omit the act of moderate self-defence to avoid killing the other man, since one is bound to take more care of one's own life than that of others.

Helder Camara teaches us, in his *Spiral of Violence*, to be wary of the definitely biased understanding of the term that vested interests and the powers project. We must recognize three distinct types of violence: structural violence, the violence that is constituted by unjust social or other structures (e.g. the caste system, various forms of apartheid and discrimination) which effectively debar persons of a particular sex, ethnic origin etc. from the enjoyment of certain fundamental human rights. Insurrectional violence occurs when oppressed people, unable to bear the injustices let loose on them by the bullying tyrannical powers that be, strike back desperately in rioting and other forms of civil unrest. Repressive violence takes place when the State calls in crack troops, maybe even helicopter gunships, to rain down ruthless firebombs and bullets on the revolting peasantry or slum-dwellers, whose make-shaft weapons and rag-tag "army" are no match for them. Eventually this latter form of violence sets up even worse and more inhuman structures to keep the people in control. A time is reached when the latter can "take it no more" and the weary round starts all over again. Thus, there is a cycle of continually escalating violence.

The significant thing is, as Helder Camara, the prophetic pastor of Recife points out, only the second instance is qualified as "violence": the first and third are described as "public order" and "restoring the public order", respectively. This is yet another example of how the dominant class rules over every aspect of life – including deciding how key words in the vocabulary are to be defined and used invariably, in a way that justifies the status quo and those who wield the reins of power in any given society.

In today's warped set-up, where violence is frequently the first reaction to an unwelcome development (college students – even school kids – attacking professors or teachers who didn't

give them a good mark, or stabbing former partners who had “ditched them”), we cannot praise too highly those who call for reconciliation, dialogue and healing. Catholic church in its document on *The Church in the Modern World* concurs, “We cannot fail to praise those who renounce violence in the vindication of their rights and who resort to methods of defence which are otherwise available to weaker parties, too”. However, a small provision is added: “injury to the rights and duties of others or of the community itself” is to be avoided. However, this should not necessarily oblige us to go along with the great votary of ahimsa, Mahatma Gandhi, when he teaches that, “Every murder or other injury no matter for what cause, committed against another, is a crime against humanity.” Aquinas and other authoritative thinkers would have another view. Paolo Freire would also differ with Gandhi on this matter, though not all would approve of his reasoning, all the way. The violence of the oppressed in certain cases, though they may seem “as violent as the initial violence of the oppressor” is of a qualitatively different stamp. That of the oppressor is universally dehumanizing: it reduces both its victims as well as its perpetrators (though for different reasons) to a sub-human conditional man. The violence of the oppressor “prevents the oppressed from being fully human”; that of the oppressed “prevents the oppressor from dehumanizing himself” (the oppressor is almost invariably a male). In as much as the oppressed uses violence because of its desire “to pursue the right to be human” and, in “fighting to be human, takes away the oppressor’s power to dominate,” it thereby rescues him from the dehumanizing act of degrading both himself and the other, it cannot be put on the same level as oppressive violence.

After all, the real subject of political power is the people who, in effect delegate some of this power (e.g. to provide basic necessities, security and so on) – either tacitly or by election – to their representatives and the functionaries they employ for this purpose. Now, if and when these representatives prove themselves unworthy or incapable of fulfilling this commission, the people obviously have the right to depose them and replace them with others whom they find fit. Now this is normally done in and through the election process however, other efficacious means could be established, with the consent of the people and enshrined in the National Constitution and it should be carried out by due process of the law.

However, when there is a Government, so entrenched in its power that no legal means can oust it (as the military regime of Myanmar), assuredly the people would have the right to violent revolution to achieve its legitimate aim. Even Aquinas grants that. Furthermore, he even goes on to say that when such times of civil revolt, unrest and dissension arise, “it is the tyrant” (or the tyrannical government) “that is more guilty of sedition,” for it is the real party who “fosters discord and dissension among the people in order to lord it over them more securely”. Salvino Azzopardi lists the five conditions under which Scholastic tradition permits an oppressed people to revolt. They are as follows: the abuse of power is really excessive and habitual, all peaceful means have been employed in vain (e.g. passive resistance, active, but not violent protests, etc.), no more violence than is necessary, no harm is done to innocent third parties (e.g. loss of their lives, their property, etc.), and no greater evil is foreseen to ensue.

However, with all respect to the Scholastic tradition, we may wonder how useful such stipulations can be to would-be revolutionary leaders in a concrete situation, apart from very general guidelines. How does one go about trying to fulfil these requirements in a practical way? For instance, how does one restrain the use of violence? Perhaps it is not an impossible task, but

it is too complex an issue to be written off with the trite recommendation that it be taken care of. Then, how does one determine who is an “innocent third party” in cases of large-scale structural injustice? And just how would one provide practical safeguards against the suffering of the innocent, even if one *could* identify them? And what is the criterion to decide, not just that the abuse of power has been “excessive and habitual,” but that *all* peaceful means have actually been employed? And suppose one is reasonably certain that the Government is a kind of “wild repressive steam-roller that would show no respect for peaceful protesters. In that case, could one proceed directly to the use of violence? How does one arrive at the assurance that no greater evil would result from the uprising?

In most cases, whether the people revolt or not, depends on how widespread and horrendous is the oppression they are facing. Eventually, when they are convinced that “they cannot take it anymore”, that all reasonable bounds have been crossed, they make some desperate resolve to the effect that it would be better to go down fighting rather than die by degrees amidst the humiliation of their women and children? For the most part, they are well aware that they have no chance – underfed, untrained and poorly equipped against a few well-fed, well-trained and well-armed regulars. Jaya Prakash Narayan, the former firebrand revolutionary, who was eventually converted to non-violence, confides to us that it was more for pragmatic reasons (will it work?) than for moral ones (is it right?) that he abandoned the path of popular violence and insurrection.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Explain Right to Life.

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2) Briefly write on Private Property.

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

Human rights are the inalienable rights of all human beings, whatever be their nationality, place of residence, sex, ethnic or national origin, color, religion, language or any other condition. We all have the right to exercise our rights without discrimination and on an equal footing. These rights are interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. The universal human rights are often expressed and guaranteed by law, in the form of treaties, customary international law, general principles and other sources of international law. International law on Human Rights states that governments are obliged to act in a certain way or refrain from certain acts to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups.

Human rights are inalienable. They can not be revoked except in specific circumstances and in accordance with a specific procedure. The right to liberty may, for example, be limited if a court finds the person guilty of a crime. All human rights are indivisible, whether civil or political, including the right to life, equality before the law and freedom of expression, economic, social and cultural rights as the right to work, social security and education, or collective rights as the right to development and self-determination, are indivisible, interrelated and interdependent. The improvement of one right facilitates advancement of others. Similarly, deprivation of rights has a negative effect on others. The non-discrimination is a universal principle in international law of human rights. The principle exists in all the major treaties on human rights and serves as a central theme of certain international conventions such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

3.7 KEY WORDS

Embodied: to express or represent an idea or a quality.

Dehumanize: to make somebody lose their human qualities, such as kindness, pity, etc.

Scholastic: connected with schools of education, mainly based on religious principles and writings.

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UNIT: 4 HUMAN DUTIES

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- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Deontology
- 4.3 Different Types of Norms
- 4.4 Distinction between Values and Norms
- 4.5 Ross and Prima Facie Duties
- 4.6 John Rawl's Theory of Justice
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- 4.8 Key Words
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we shall focus on the moral importance of duties. In order to do so, we shall briefly study the ethical theory called deontology which gives importance to norms over values in matters of Ethics because norms are directly related to duties than values are. A brief discussion on different types of norms and the relatedness to norms and values is undertaken in order to show how understanding of norms are linked to duty-based ethics. Finally, we shall study the Prima Facie duties of Ross and the Theory of Justice according to Rawls, both upholding human duty to commit to some ethical principles.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The word duty is etymologically traceable to the Latin word, *debitum*, a debt, that which is owed to another. Duty is thus the obvious correlative of right. If I have a well-founded claim (right), then others are morally bound to at least not hinder me from having access to it. On the other hand, as a member of the human community, I find myself side by side, shoulder to shoulder and cheek by jowl with other persons who – if the right we are concerned with is genuinely rooted in human nature – may also claim the same right. Now, this would lay on us the “duty” to respect their rights too. Each of us has certain duties to oneself, to other persons, to nature (the environment) and to God, all in which are firmly rooted in our common human nature.

4.2 DEONTOLOGY

It is common to say that the scope of ethics is to tell us what is to be done or not to be done, of obligation and of prohibition. The term of deontology comes from the Greek *deon*, meaning duty or obligation. Whereas values are expressed as evaluative statements in the indicative, norms are expressed as prescription such as “do this” or prohibition in the imperative: “Do not steal”. It is necessary to distinguish various types of norms.

The most well-known deontological ethics are religious laws, which set out a code of rules that must be followed. Put simply, deontology is about following the rules. The most influential philosophical deontological ethics are those of Immanuel Kant. Kant doesn't ground morality in God's will, or in the seemingly arbitrary moral codes of particular cultures. Morality is grounded in reason itself, and the demands of morality can be discovered through rational reflection.

Reason enables us to be free from self-imposed immaturity. The principle of duty forces us to be willing to do something and impels the autonomous will. There is an autonomous will that is intrinsic value. This intrinsic value proceeds from the principle of duty. That I have a duty towards something alone activates me towards that autonomous will, that is, in the case of a mother and a child, be a good mother is a principle of duty that is intrinsically self-imposed that leads to the autonomous will to be loving and caring. Autonomous will is dependent on the rules.

Norms are given as imperatives – categorical and hypothetical imperatives. While speaking about reason in the sense of duty Kant introduces the notion of good will. Nothing can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will. Intelligence, judgments and other talents of the mind, however they may be named, or courage, perseverance, as qualities of temperament, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many aspects; but these gifts of nature may also become extremely bad and mischievous if the will which is to make use of them, and which, therefore, constitutes what is called character, is not good. Reason is imparted to us as a practical faculty, that is, as one which is to have influence on the will. We have to then develop the notion of will which deserves to be highly esteemed for itself and is good without a view to anything further, a notion which exists already in the sound natural understanding, requiring rather to be cleared up than to be taught, and which in estimating the value of our actions always takes the first place and constitutes the condition of all the rest. In order to do this we will take the notion of duty, which includes that of a good will, although implying certain subjective restrictions and hindrances.

To secure one's own happiness is a duty, at least indirectly, for discontent with one's condition, under a pressure of many anxieties and amidst unsatisfied wants, might easily become a great temptation to transgression of duty. But here again, without looking to duty, all human persons have already the strongest and the most inclination to happiness, because it is just in this idea that inclinations are combined in one total. If the general desire for happiness did not influence one's will, and supposing that in one's particular case was not a necessary element in this calculation, there yet remains in this, as in all other cases, this law, namely, that one should promote one's happiness not from inclination but from duty, and by this would one's conduct first acquire true moral truth.

4.3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF NORMS

Just as there are positive, negative, and neutral values, there are obligatory, prohibitive and permissive norms. An obligatory action is one which obliges us to do: it is an *obligation*. An action is prohibited or proscribed if we should not do it. An action is permissible if it is neither obligatory nor prohibited: it is allowed to do it. In English there are two adjectives to express the obligatory or prohibitive character of actions: *right* and *wrong* (to be distinguished from the adjectives *good* and *bad* which express values): an action is right if it is in conformity with the obligation and wrong if it is not in conformity with it or violates a prohibition.

Just as there are ethical values and non-ethical values, there are ethical norms and non-ethical norms. Thus “do not suck your thumb,” “keep left when you drive” are respectively prohibitive and prescriptive statements in imperative form expressing norms but not *de facto* ethical. Here again, the distinction between ethical and non-ethical norms is not obvious to demarcate. What is essential is to retain that not all norms are *senso stricto* ethical.

A *fundamental* ethical norm is one that is not derived from any other, but from which other norms can be derived. For example, “it is bad to divert funds,” depends on a more fundamental norm according to which “it is bad to steal” (which itself can be derived from yet another norm more fundamental to this). On the basis of an ethical value according to which it is bad to steal and of a non-ethical proposition, according to which diverting funds is a form of stealing, it can be concluded that it is bad to divert funds. Similarly, on the basis of a value according to which it is forbidden to kill, other norms of the same type can be inferred: “it is forbidden to decapitate others,” “to dissolve him/her in the acid,” etc. It is to be remarked that to derive an ethical value from a more fundamental ethical value, it is necessary to integrate into reasoning a *non-ethical* proposition whose gravity would depend on a particular context. Thus to infer “it is forbidden to dissolve others in the acid” from a more fundamental norm “it is forbidden to kill others”, it is necessary to add a non-ethical proposition, namely “to dissolve others in the acid amounts to kill them”. This may seem trivial, but by a stretch of imagination, it is not difficult to conceive a passionate scientist inventing a means of surviving dissolution: in such a context, the prohibition to kill others does not imply the prohibition to dissolve them in the acid.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is Duty?

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2) Explain Deontology of Kant and its implications.

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4.4 DISTINCTION BETWEEN VALUES AND NORMS

It seems *prima face* that norms flow from values: what is to be done comes from what is good. If we have values, then we have norms. For example, if we can make an evaluative statement “it is good to help the most deprived”, then naturally follows the prescriptive statement “we should help the most deprived”. Conversely, it seems that if we should not do something, the necessary implication would be that this something is bad: “It is forbidden to lie” would imply that lying is bad. This can suggest that in the last analysis there is equivalence between values and norms: an action is good if and only if it should be done. If such is the case, why do we distinguish values from norms? Do we need really both two concepts? Are they not two ways of expressing the same idea? This is not as simple as it may appear at least for three reasons if not more.

Firstly, all evaluative statements are not related to actions, whereas all normative statements are related to actions. Only actions are prohibited or obligated. We cannot prohibit the Mount Everest, nor can we prohibit suffering, but on the contrary we can be stupefied at the sight of the former and we can deplore the latter. The applicability of values is broader than that of norms. There is thus a vital distinction between the two. How can we pass from values to ethical norms? If an action is good, then it should be done, but if a state of affairs or an agent is good, then what is to be done? For example, what should be done once we know that happiness is good? There is a consequentialist response according to which our moral action should be such that it paves way to the maximum of intrinsic values. Accordingly, consequentialism is an ethical theory which enables us to establish a link between axiology and deontology. For consequentialist philosophers, if a state of affairs *S* is good, then it follows that we ought to promote *S*, simply in virtue of the meanings of these two words: 'good' and ought are logically related (McGinn considers it a fallacy). We find then equivalence between values and norms: *x* has a positive *value* if it *must* to be promoted, and *x must* to be promoted if it has a positive *value*. However, consequentialism has been disputed (That being said, certain philosophers hold this version of consequentialism as a common sense thesis accepted by everyone). In addition to this, even if there is a reciprocal implication between values and norms, that does not justify their identification: once again, a statement that something is beautiful in no way expresses an obligation.

Secondly, certain non-ethical factors prevent us from drawing norms from values. "It is good to clean the floor" implies that "it is an obligation to clean the floor," but only if it is possible to do so. Such a possibility depends on certain conditions like if there is a vacuum cleaner, if the agent in question has the physical abilities to do it, etc. The idea that the ability to carry out an action is a necessary condition to the obligation of that action can be justified as follows: there is a close connection between concepts of duty and fault: not to achieve one's duty is to expose oneself to blames, legitimate reproaches, reprimands, punishments or remorse. However we cannot reproach someone not to have done something that is not within his ability. Nor can we reproach him/her for an action which he/she could not but do. If we must act, then not to act implies being exposed to reproaches (duty to blame). We are exposed to reproaches only if had the ability and still did not do it (blame to ability). Therefore, we are obliged only if we have the ability to act (duty to ability). It then follows that norms are not directly derived from values: we *should* do what is good in so far as we *can* do it. Equivalence between norms and values is therefore objectionable.

It is clear enough that a genuine destitute, one who has been unjustly refused opportunities for a decent job and a living wage – for himself/herself and the family – must be provided for, as per the demands of strict justice, not "benevolent charity" and if we know of such a person – whether that person comes to us begging or not, we have a duty and obligation to provide for him or her from our resources, obviously as long as we and our family members are not grossly incapacitated by that. Indeed, we should ally with some service group that reaches out to such unprivileged people. Our real responsibility is to help such persons find some means of employment so that, as a responsible human beings endowed with human dignity, they would be able to provide for themselves and their families by their own independent efforts.

4.5 ROSS AND PRIMA FACIE DUTIES

Several values can enter in conflict. D. Ross thus admits three intrinsic values (the fact of admitting several intrinsic values is called pluralism): virtue, knowledge, and pleasure. But he also admits seven duties *prima facie*: fidelity (hold your promises), reparation (repair the evil you have done to others), gratitude (return the goodness you have got from others), justice (changes the distributions of pleasure and happiness which do not go with the merit), generosity (make good out of others), self-improvement (improves your virtues and your knowledge), no ill will (do not do evil to others). Three values, seven duties: there is no direct and immediate correlation between the two. Mulligan in his book *From Appropriate Emotion to Value* mentions three other reasons in order not to confuse norms and values on the basis of the differences between normative statements and axiological statements. 1. There are comparative expressions for values (“better than,” “worse than”, but no comparative expression for norms. 2. There is a distinction between determinable axiological predicates (good, bad) and determinate axiological predicates (courageous, cowardly), but no such distinction exists in normative expressions. 3. Determinate properties imply determinate natural properties: Thus, to be courageous would imply to be put into test by fear and to surmount it. Normative properties do not seem to imply natural properties (except that “ought” implies can). Normative properties are only indirectly related to natural properties and this relation is mediated through axiological properties.

The reason for which equivalence is objectionable here is that since several values are allowed (pluralism), they can, in certain circumstances, enter in conflict with one another. Thus, it can be necessary to lie to avoid the death of somebody. If so, then one cannot derive the normative statement “it is forbidden to lie” directly from the evaluative statement “it is bad lie”: A third statement has to be added, “on condition that no other value is injured.” In short, there are at least three obstacles to the derivation of norms from values: 1. Values are related only to actions, 2. A good action is obligatory only if it is possible and 3. An action having a positive value is obligatory only if it does not have any other negative value. Thus the implication of values in norms does not seem to be convincing. However it seems reasonable to say that ethical values are more fundamental than ethical norms: It is necessary to promote *X* because *X* is good. The opposite seems absurd: It is not *X* is good because it is necessary to promote *X*. Therefore intuitively there is a priority of axiology over deontology, even if one cannot necessarily deduce deontology only from axiology. This thesis of the priority of values over the standards has sometimes been disputed, for example, by Kant and by other philosophers known as prescriptivists. This thesis, however, was clearly defended by Max Scheler, in opposition to Kant, the former reproaching the latter for having reversed this order of priority: “anything of positive value ought to be, and anything of negative value ought not to be. The interconnection set up in these axioms is not reciprocal but *unilateral*: every *ought* has its *foundation* in values, but values are *not* founded in the ideal ought.”

The distinction between values and norms that we have just presented allows us to understand why we can define ethics neither as a discipline dealing with values, nor as a discipline dealing with norms for duties. This is because on the one hand, ethics is related to both values and norms, so we cannot restrict it to a simple theory of values or of norms and on the other hand, there are some values (“Julie is pretty”, “This melody is superb”) and some norms (“Do not suck your thumb”) which are not ethical. In short, ethics is not limited only to a study of what one must do, and in some cases what one must do does not concern ethics. Nor can it be resumed

as a study of values since ethic is partly related to norms and not all values are of ethical significance.

4.6 JOHN RAWLS' THEORY OF JUSTICE

John Rawls is an American philosopher. He raises the question, what is the principle of justice? Principle of justice is that which brings satisfaction to all both in quality and quantity and so it is not challenged. For instance, the grading system of examination brings out this principle of justice. It brings satisfaction to all the students. Each one is rewarded based on his or her hard work. In some tradition this kind of principle exists but is not accepted because the tradition itself is unjust. An example for such an unjust society is the one where the principle of slavery is dominant. By principle, a slave should go back to his owner and serve him till the end of his life. In India too we have caste system where certain people are considered as low caste servants of the society and are obliged to perform all menial jobs.

Rawls says that we have to possess a new method besides these two positions. He brings in a novel idea that is based on self-interest and rationality. We are not sufficiently enlightened because of the influence of the society, so we are restricted. All traditions are potentially unjust in some way or the other; we live under the veil of ignorance. The more you are out of ignorance the more the principle of selection will come closer to justice.

How to be enlightened out of ignorance? The general facts of human nature, for example, nobody wants to be abused or insulted. It is a fair procedure so the principle is fair; no person wants to be a part of a handicapped group because we want to be on the safer side. Principle is that every generation should have equal resources in order to bring justice to all.

Two general principles of justice of Rawls:

1. Principle of equal liberty: each person should have equal right to everything. Egalitarianism where equality is practised to the full extent.
2. Principle of difference: here the greatest benefit to the least advantaged section. For example, reservations for the deprived sections of the society.

Both these principles seem to be contradicting but they are related. Though the first principle allows everyone to get involved in all fields, the second principle helps the less privileged to compete equally with the more privileged because the former lack the resources to achieve what they want, while the latter have the means and resources in plenty. This second principle is called positive discrimination and this type of justice is called distributive justice as different from the retributive justice.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

- 1) Explain fundamental norms and Derived norms.

2) Explain John Rawls Theory of Justice.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

The “ought” represents a fundamental experience of moral conscience. This is the principle that guides human behavior. Duty is an imperative: “one ought to do what is to be done.” This reflects the absolute form of the imperative of morality. Taken in this sense, duty is synonymous to moral obligation. However, this obligation is distinct from strict necessity, because what is obliged can be done or not.

In his famous “Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals” (1785), Kant tries to show that duty, far from being born out of experience, is an ideal of pure reason and an a-priori value. Indeed, experience as such does not provide universal and necessary norms. If we were to base morality on experience and facts from within a particular cultural group, it would not be valid for all rational beings. But for Kant a categorical imperative is such that it is valid for all human beings. Kant thus makes a distinction between categorical imperative hypothetical imperative. The moral sense of duty is a categorical imperative, that is, it is not dependent on any “ifs” and “buts” unlike the hypothetical imperative, an action is to be done to achieve an end: “if you want to get this, do that.” The categorical imperatives are given in the form of norms. Hence Kant and other deontologists give priority to norms over values. This is why Ross speaks of prima facie duties and Rawls speaks of justice as an imperative.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Deontology: a school which holds that rules or norms are more important than values.

Axiology: school of thought which says that values are more important than rules or norms.

Imperatives: a thing that is very important and needs immediate attention or action.

Autonomous will: means a self-imposed freedom, that is a intrinsic value and which prompts one to act.

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