
UNIT 1 NATURE AND SCOPE OF ETHICS

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims at introducing the students to the philosophical need for Ethics starting from a brief discussion of Moral law and how the human person in his or her process of growth intuitively the ethical principles. Discussions pertaining to the dynamics of morality is undertaken to show how on the one hand new situations call for new responses from moral point of view and on the other hand certain fundamentals of ethics remain the same in so far as there is something of a common human nature adequately understood.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us begin our study of Nature and Scope of Ethics by understanding what we mean by moral law. But two things need to be clarified before we raise the question with which we are concerned here. First, the moral law is called 'law' only metaphorically, or if one prefers, analogically. The primary meaning of law is "a rule of action, promulgated by him/her who is in charge of a community in view of the common good". This is called positive law. If the legislator is considered to be God, it is divine positive law; if the legislator is human person, and it is human positive law. Human positive law can further be subdivided according to what the common good aimed at. (e.g. civil law, criminal law, commercial law, etc.) In a case, a positive law lays down rules to be observed by human persons. It is prescription. Then there is another sense of 'law' which is quite different. In this sense it is a formula expressing a constant of behaviour of things and of persons. So we have physical law (including laws studied in physics, chemistry, biology, etc.), psychological law, sociological law, etc. (Since the constant of behaviour among human persons is less fixed and foreseeable than that among things it is more of a statistical constant). As distinct from positive law, this kind of law is called 'natural law'. It is descriptive. It can also be called prescriptive to the extent if it is considered as willed by God and includes the divine positive law, and descriptive to the extent that this divine will is the ultimate cause of the constant of behaviour in things and human persons. However, moral law corresponds exactly neither to the positive law nor to the natural law. On the contrary, the sense of the 'absolute should' is an immediate datum of the moral consciousness itself.

Secondly, in the language of Moral philosophers, moral law includes not only general and abstract rules of action (e.g. "do good and avoid evil"), or, in our language, the sense of the absolute should, but also particular and concrete precepts (e.g. help the poor, obey legitimate

authority, be truthful, do not kill the innocent, adultery is wrong, etc.). These particular and concrete precepts, we are here calling the specifications of the moral law.

Hence our question: How are the general data of the moral consciousness particularized and concretized in specific precepts and what is the cause of this difference among men? In terms of moral value, we can raise this question as follows. If the moral value par excellence is human person's self-realization as human how can this moral value determine specific moral values? And why is there disagreement as to whether such and such an action is a 'good' (moral value) or not?

1.2 MORAL INTUITIONISM

All 'deontological' theories agree that there must exist some rule or law which 'enforces' moral value and that it is natural to human person, intuitively known. There is then an element of 'intuition' in all of them – no matter how they conceive of it and the way they approach it, whether as 'conscience' (Ockham), 'Logos' (Stoics), 'moral sense' (Shaftesbury), the 'a-priori categorical imperative' (Kant), 'right reason' (Thomas Aquinas and Suarez). This element of moral 'intuition' is also found in the 'teleological' theories whether implicitly or even explicitly. It is implicitly found in the concept of '*autarxia*' (Epicurus), in that of '*eudemonia*' (Aristotle), and explicitly in the concept of 'right reason' (Hobbes), in the 'conscientious feelings of mankind' (Mill).

And in fact the more the idea of moral obligation is prominent in an ethical theory, the more explicit becomes the recourse to this element of 'intuition' (or 'direct perception'). This element of 'intuition' is strongly emphasized by meta-ethicists who maintain that moral language is 'objective' and therefore 'informative'. But here again, they differ as to what the 'object' of this moral intuition is. This difference is explainable by the difference in their meta-ethical theories regarding the meaning of moral 'good.' Hence for some, this object is the 'rightness of specific acts' (Carritt, Prichard) for others it is a kind of moral property, simple and indefinable in non-moral terms (Moore), for others, it is a general principle (e.g. the 'the principle of utility' itself – Sidgwick) or a set of principles (e.g. the 'Prima facie' duties of fidelity, reparation, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement and non-maleficence – Ross). In ethics the philosophy which insists on the necessity of moral intuition is called Ethical Intuitionism.

But even the most insistent of all moral philosophers on this element of intuition in the moral consciousness, namely Kant, not only does not deny, but, on the contrary, explicitly states that the moral judgment includes elements derived from experience (which are therefore '*a-posteriori*' as opposed to the '*a-priori*' element). Kant denies the possibility of deriving particular and concrete moral precepts from the concept of practical reason alone. For this the study of human nature is necessary.

Similarly, Thomas Aquinas distinguishes between the 'first principles' of the *synderesis* which are 'self-evident', intuitively known by all, and which cannot be deleted from the human heart, and the 'secondary and more specific principles' which are derived from the former 'as if by way of conclusion from premises' what is implied here is that this secondary principles require reflection. Thomas speaks of the difficulty involved in applying general principles to concrete cases. Even though principles whether theoretical or practical can be evident in themselves, they

may not be so evident to us. And this is due, according to Thomas, to wrong persuasions on the part of human person.

Saurez is perhaps even more explicit in his doctrine that even the secondary principles – which like the primary are self-evident in themselves – require a certain amount of thought and experience. This is truer of the tertiary principles which require study and discursive thought. But all moral principles can be derived from self-evident principles. One notable difference between Thomas and Suarez is that the former derives the concrete principles in a way corresponding to ‘human person’s natural inclinations,’ the latter derives them in a way corresponding to a legal system. For Suarez these precepts have their immediate norm the ‘good’ of human nature. The need of experience and reflection is similarly – indeed even more insisted upon by contemporary ethicists. Why this greater insistence?

1.3 HUMAN PERSON IN SEARCH OF HIMSELF/HERSELF

What we are dealing with here is to see whether a general principle such as ‘serious promises should not be lightly broken’ is ‘self-evident’ and therefore be counted among the ‘first principles’ intuitively known by everybody. If yes, how is it derived from the very first self-evident principle that ‘good is to be done, evil to be avoided?’ Is it merely by a kind of logical deduction? And if it is ‘self-evident’ in itself but not known by all, is it because of some accidental reason such as ignorance or bad habit? Finally, if it is not ‘self-evident’ how is it that human person has today come to agree that such a general principle is correct (that it is amoral value)?

To speak more specifically of thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, Suarez and Ross are we to say that the examples they give of first principles (or of *pirma facie* duties) are meant to serve merely as examples or are we to say that they are meant to be included among the first principles themselves? In the first case we could perhaps disagree that the examples they give are good examples but still agree with their doctrine that there exist first principles intuitively known by every man. The question would be then which are these first principles. In the second case to question the aptness of the examples would be to question their doctrine itself. Irrespective of what such thinkers actually mean we have got to study the problem in itself.

If there is any principle that cannot be denied, it is the immediate data of moral consciousness. If these data cannot be denied they are self-evident. They are self-evident not as principles, that is, as formulae but as data whether they are thematically formulated or not. The immediate ontological foundation of the moral obligation is human inter-relatedness and that the norm for moral good (as distinct from the moral right) is human person as a social being. We have also reflected how the only moral precept which is immediately given that is self-evident and cannot be justified on a mere moral level is that human person should be human (as an individual and social being). Hence all other precepts (what we are here calling specifications of the moral law) must somehow or other flow from this fundamental precept that a person should realize himself/herself as human.

Human consciousness is in a process of becoming. Human person is becoming moral and more himself and in the process his awareness of himself develops. He/she has been continuously asking himself the question what he is. Human person is in a never-ending search of

himself/herself. The more he/she grows the more he/she becomes conscious of himself/herself as human person the more he/she is himself/herself. Moral consciousness is a part or an aspect of human consciousness. The more human person becomes himself/herself the more he/she becomes conscious of what he/she should be. This leads to the emergence of moral precepts specifying evermore clearly the conduct of human person.

Hence the moral precepts (moral values) flow from the first fundamental moral precept that human person should be himself/herself (the moral value par excellence not by way of mere logical deduction or of mere mediate inference. The former are related to the latter not simply as logical conclusions or as implicitly correlated to their premises. Logic has got to do with ideas, with mere ideas. It cannot be denied that this relation of the explicit to the implicit of the clear to the unclear to the unclear of the concrete to the abstract is here present. But it is present in the sense that a continuously developing human consciousness is related to its stages past and future of its development. Existence is more than logic.

If what we are saying about the progressive development of human consciousness, and therefore of moral consciousness is true one can easily understand the development of morals from the cave-man to modern human person from ancient slavery to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was approved without a dissenting voice in the United Nations General Assembly in 1948.

Ignorance of the moral precepts is therefore not necessarily the result of perverse customs as if this result were accidental. It is a fact of experience that perverse customs not only weaken the will to pursue the moral good but darkens the mind to recognize what the moral good is. But this is more easily possible on an individual level. Here we are placing ourselves on the level of mankind and its historical progress. This ignorance and the variety of morals can be explained by human historicity itself, that is, by the historical progressive development of his human moral consciousness.

However, we must not easily take it for granted that this development has always and everywhere been a linear progress. It may have suffered setbacks, reverses and regress. We need not go into that. What is more pertinent here to ask is whether we should reasonably suppose that human person has now attained the some of his/her self-consciousness and of his/her moral consciousness. What is reasonable to suppose according to us is that he/she has not. Apart from the fact that one cannot predict the future, contemporary moral problem of the morality of abortion hinges to a great extent on whether one should consider the human foetus a human person. The so-called women's liberation movement indicates no matter what its merits and demerits are that women have not been treated as full human persons everywhere in the world. One could think of many other indications. If progress is still possible it can only be done by the passage of time and on the part of human person by experience and by his reflection on his own experience.

1.4 LOVE AND THE MORAL PRECEPTS

Here we wish to bring into focus the more salient moments of our reflection on the subject bringing them to bear upon the topic at hand. To recognize human inter-relatedness as the immediate ontological foundation of the moral order and to act accordingly can be expressed in

terms of love. Love is therefore the existential basis of the moral order. This leads us already to start thinking that love is the basic moral activity.

The primary intuitively grasped demand that human person realizes himself as a human person is particularized and concretized in moral precepts. This too can be expressed in terms of love. Universal love is particularized and concretized – it is objectified – in the moral precepts. Hence as love not just one moral virtue among others but the form of all of the moral virtues, so too love is not just one moral precept among others but it is the form of all of them. It is what makes moral precepts moral precepts. Indeed it could hardly be called a precept since taken by itself in a non-objectified sense, it does not prescribe anything definite. And in the same way one can hardly call the moral realization of oneself as human as an obligation. This too taken by itself in a non-objectified sense does not oblige human person to do anything specific. And there is hardly any meaning in the saying that human person should love (love cannot be enforced) so too there is hardly any meaning in the saying that human person should fulfil himself as human.

If love is the form of the moral precepts and if love – like human moral consciousness – is a progressive affair this means that acting according to the moral precepts is acting according to love but that this awareness admits of degrees. This means that love can also be considered to be not only the beginning of the moral life but also its end. At the beginning it is present as a seed – which is more than mere potentiality but already an actuality albeit in a seminal form. The seed can develop into a fully mature and fully conscious love. And if it is in love that human person perfects himself as human, it is in this fully mature and fully conscious love that he/she does so.

Many factors go in this process of maturing of self-fulfilment. No matter how logically we can distinguish one human faculty (or aspect) of human person from another human person is a totality one integrated whole. As it is not the intellect which understands but human person by his intellect so too it is not with his/her heart that human person loves but human person by his heart (but heart is one's whole being). Love is an existential relation involving my whole existence.

Suffice it here to remark already that though human person can develop one or other of his/her faculties independently of the rest (or at least quasi independently) one cannot develop himself/herself as a human person without developing the core of his/her being namely his/her love and this is not achieved by mere study and reflection – although these can be very useful – but by doing. As scholastics say the operation is the perfection of being.

1.5 THE DYNAMICS OF MORALITY

Here we examine two questions which are intimately linked. In an evolutionary visions of human person to what extent can we say that morality (that is, the specification of the moral law) are universally valid for all human persons to what extent can we say that they are unchangeable? If one maintains their universal validity one is charged with absolutism with holding the opinion of a static nature of human person incompatible with present day theories about man's dynamic and evolutionary nature. If on the other hand one were to maintain a relative validity one would fall into a philosophically untenable moral relativism. Can the dilemma be overcome?

The Evolutionary nature of human person and of his human consciousness has long been recognized one way or another. Charles Darwin gave the theory of evolution a biological basis. An Evolutionary view of the world and of human person is today at the basis of a great deal of scientific philosophical and theological thinking. The thinking of such human persons as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and of Aurobindo comes of course spontaneously to mind.

Herbert Spencer is perhaps the best known Evolutionary ethicist. He starts by observing that both human and animal conduct consists in acts adjusted to ends. The higher we proceed in the scale of Evolution the easier it becomes for us to obtain evidence of purposeful actions directed toward the good either of the individual or of the species. This purposeful activity forms part of the struggle for existence waged between individual members of the same species or between different species. But this type of conduct is according to Spencer an imperfectly evolved conduct. In a perfectly evolved conduct which is ethical conduct in the proper sense of the word this struggle for existence will yield place to cooperation and mutual help. Egoism and altruism will be both transcended. This leads Spencer to distinguish between absolute and relative ethics. Absolute ethics is an ideal code of conduct formulating the behaviour of the completely adapted human person in the completely evolved society. Relative ethics is the nearest approximation to this ideal according to the more or less perfectly evolved society in which human person happens to find him/her.

Spencer adopts the utilitarian ethical principle. In fact he takes happiness to be the ultimate end of life and measures the rightness or wrongness of actions by their conduciveness to this end. From a nascent state when this utilitarian principle was dependent on non-ethical (e.g. authoritarian) beliefs it gradually developed to become independent and as suggested by the theory of evolution, it will continue to evolve and reach an ideal limit.

Happiness however depends on the fulfilment of some conditions. And these conditions are the observances of certain principles and rules which causally determine human welfare. Spencer acknowledges the existence of moral intuitions which however are the slowly organized results of experience received by the race. In other words an induction from experience handed down from one generation to the other ends up by becoming an instinctive moral reaction. Evolution is moving towards the emergence of the highest form of life. Happiness as the supreme end of human person is the concomitant and virtue is the condition for its attainment. In the preface of the fifth and sixth parts of his the principles of ethics subsequently withdrawn Spencer confesses that the theory of Evolution has not provided as much practical guidance as he had hoped. What is peculiarly Spencer's is his interpretation of Evolution as a teleological process directed towards the establishment of a higher and higher moral order.

1.6 THE CONSTANT AND THE VARIABLE IN MORALITY

Whether or not man has evolved from sub-human beings it is not for us to decide. But we can easily accept the theory that this human consciousness itself has natured and developed. At the beginning human person was not necessarily conscious of himself/herself as human as we today are. On an individual level this progress in human consciousness is a fact of experience. The child is a human being but as it grows it becomes more and more conscious of itself as a human being. We can accept this theory even on the level of mankind as such to explain how the moral law is particularized and concretized in specific moral precepts.

Human consciousness involves one's consciousness of oneself as an individual and as a social being. Moral consciousness is an integral part of human consciousness. Primitive human (to call him so) must have been morally conscious – otherwise we are not entitled to call him/her human at all. So if moral consciousness belongs essentially to human consciousness as such – and in a univocal and not in an analogical sense – it has been a kind of constant in all the later stages of man's evolution. However, on the accepted theory that the human and therefore moral consciousness has been developing, the different stages of this development can be reasonably considered as the variable in human evolution.

If we speak of moral consciousness at all – whether of the primitive human or ours – we must speak of it in terms of the immediate data of consciousness as foundation on the human order more precisely on human inter-relatedness and these data to be in conformity to human reason and to be conducive to the self-realization of human person as human. But human moral consciousness has been evolving. This change takes different forms some of which are easily understandable and afford no real problem to ethics some are not so easily understandable and therefore afford some difficulty.

As human person becomes more and more conscious of himself as human – as an individual and as a social being – he/she becomes more conscious of his/her human inter-relatedness and of his/her rights and duties as a human person. This clearer self-consciousness is obviously concretized and particularized in specific moral precepts. Even at one given stage of human moral consciousness different people living in different human situations (situations affecting their inter-relatedness) will live a more or less different moral life. Such human situations can arise out of geographical, climatic and economic conditions.

Again since moral consciousness has been in fact intimately linked to and condition by religious consciousness, different religious beliefs have produced different moral values. And a change in religious consciousness has often wrought a corresponding change in morality. The history of religion affords us with many examples (e.g. human sacrifice, burning of witches, saturnalia, etc.). This change is primarily and directly in religious consciousness and only secondarily and indirectly in moral consciousness. It is a change in the religiously conditioned morality.

However, a change in civil law governing the mores of the people does not necessarily mean a change in morality. When a civil law declares that something is legal it does not mean to say that it is moral. Civil law as such does not pass a moral judgment. Legal means allowed as far as the state is concerned. It is not the business of the state as such to promote the moral beliefs of one section of its population as against those of another. This is important to remember today when many countries proclaim themselves to be secular – today when society is increasingly pluralistic.

The variable in morality raises the important question regarding the kind of certitude we can have in moral matters. To put it bluntly if what is believed to be morally right today can be proved to be morally wrong tomorrow and vice-versa can one be absolutely certain of what is morally right or morally wrong? In more philosophical terms if human person is conditioned by his/her existential situation and if human (and moral) consciousness is always in a process of

development and is dependent on physiological, cultural, social, psychological environmental and other factors, can he/she ever be certain of having reached objective moral truth if there is such a thing as moral truth?

At the very outset, we have to distinguish carefully between moral relativity and ethical relativism. Moral relativity is simply the view that different people especially in different civilizations and cultures have or have had different moral beliefs and what is believed to be morally right at a given time or place may be believed to be morally wrong at a different time or place. This is an undeniable empirical fact. But ethical relativism is the philosophical theory that no foundation exists, there is no universal moral norm (or basic moral principle), but what is morally right is relative to the individual or group of men in question. If such a theory can give reasons for such a position (as Sartre does), it is ethical relativism in the strict sense. If it cannot give reasons but simply admits that it is strictly impossible to say what is morally right and morally wrong it can be reasonably called ethical skepticism.

In an evolutionary view of human being, that is, on the accepted theory that human consciousness of himself/herself is increasingly developing, can we pretend to say the last word on what human person is? Obviously not. Human person's knowledge of his/her self is a progressive and dynamic knowledge, always tending towards a better and better understanding. In this sense human person's knowledge of himself/herself is relative. And if this is true his/her moral knowledge is also relative in so far as it is progressive and far from complete.

However an attentive study of the evolution of human person's self-consciousness and of moral knowledge helps one discover a certain constant progression, that is, human person is becoming more and more himself/herself. He/she is becoming more and more conscious of what he/she really is. His/her moral knowledge helps him/her to recognize himself/herself and others more and more as persons. Like in all spheres of knowledge a time of questioning debate and temporary disagreement is necessary in moral knowledge if progress is to be made. Indeed a state of incertitude on some issues is a pre-requisite and the pre-supposition of every progress. But whatever has been achieved is a definite acquisition – even if this acquisition remains still open to further advance and a deeper understanding.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Explain Absolute Ethics and Relative Ethics.

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2) How are love and moral precepts related?

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3) How do the concepts of love and moral percepts help to build an ethical society?

4) What is the notable difference between Aquinas and Saurez's idea of self-evident or moral principle?

1.7 LET US SUM UP

Human person both is and is becoming; he/she is an "is-in-becoming." And this is because he/she is both essence and existence, rather he/she is and essence-in-existence. He/she is act and potency or here again he/she is act-in-potency. He/she is spirit and body, better still, spirit-in-body. In existential terms he/she is freedom and he is existentially situated, that is to say he is freedom-existentially situated.

Human person is both an end-in-himself and for others a particular human and social being. He/she can only find his self-perfection in the perfection of others. Hence the dialectical tension in human knowledge of moral law. The tension between the "is" and the "ought" between intuition and experience (or the *a-priori* and the *a-posteriori*) between the static and the dynamic the constant and the variable the absolute and the relative. We can go on like that an infinitum.

1.8 KEY WORDS

Moral Intuition: All 'deontological' theories agree that there must exist some rule or law which 'enforces' moral value and that it is natural to human person, intuitively known. There is then an element of 'intuition' in all of them – no matter how they conceive of it and the way they approach it.

Absolute Ethics: Absolute ethics is an ideal code of conduct formulating the behaviour of the completely adapted human person in the completely evolved society.

Relative Ethics: Relative ethics is the nearest approximation to this ideal according to the more or less perfectly evolved society in which human person happens to find him/her.

1.9 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 2 IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGES OF ETHICS

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- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Challenge of Situation Ethics
- 2.3 Cultural and Ethical Subjectivism
- 2.4 Morris Ginsberg's "On the Diversity of Morals"
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- 2.7 Further Readings and References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

While spelling out the importance of ethics in so far as it affects human conduct and behaviour in the society, this unit seeks to respond to some of the important challenges to ethics as a philosophical discipline particularly from certain approaches to make ethics itself relative. Thus we attempt to look at some of the figures in the tradition of Western Philosophy like Fletcher and Ginsberg, figures representing these challenging currents of thought and we offer an in-depth evaluation of their positions.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the philosophical treatise which studies human behaviour and tries to determine what is right or wrong behaviour. It is also called moral philosophy. (from the Greek '*ethos*' and the Latin '*mores*' which mean 'custom', 'ways of behaviour', 'human character'). That there is in man a spontaneous awareness of a distinction between 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour is an indubitable fact. But philosophy, here like elsewhere, cannot content itself with simply registering facts, it tries to reflect on the 'meaningfulness' of such facts, establish them (or reject them) on a rational basis, understand their implications, draw their practical consequences and above all intuit their ultimate cause (if any).

Our study of ethics is also conditioned by some philosophical assumptions, which we take to be philosophically established in other treatises. Perhaps the three principal ones are: the possibility of meta-empirical knowledge, the ontological structure of reality and man as a rational and free being (philosophically established in critical, ontology and psychology respectively). For us, therefore, ethics is an attempt not only to 'understand' what is and what is not right human behaviour, the empirical and meta-empirical 'ground', if any, of the distinction between right and wrong behaviour, but also to see whether the conclusions thus drawn can serve as objective norms for practical conduct.

The importance of ethics is obvious. From as far back in history as we can tell, man has always sought to know how to lead a 'good' life and to draw up rules of conduct. Thinkers of all cultures tried to explain in what this 'good' life consisted and, especially, why precisely it was 'good'. It is not so much that traditional moral values are questioned (e.g. the 'just' war, inviolability of life in cases of the hopelessly suffering and of unwanted pregnancies, sexual intercourse only between the legally married, indissolubility of marriage, etc.), but, more radically still, that the very 'meaningfulness' of an unchanging and universally valid morality is brought into question.

The causes of this modern questioning are hard to pin down. Certainly the spread of education, advances in science and technology, problems arising from modern way of living like the ever-increasing urbanization, easier communication media, faster means of travel whereby people of one culture come in closer contact with people of another culture, etc are some of the causes.

But if, as we have already implied, moral thinking is intimately linked with philosophical thinking in general, it might very well be that these causes, whatever they might be, are to be sought for on a deeper human level. Human person, perhaps, is not so much asking about the morality of this or that human act, but, more deeply still, about himself: the meaning of his life, the direction of human history, the significance of the human world he lives in, the ambit of his knowledge and the possibility of his ever getting an answer to the questions he asks. Ethics, of course, cannot dream of suggesting answers to such radical questions. But it might well prove to be a 'way of approach' to questions which lie beyond its own field of enquiry.

2.2 THE CHALLENGE OF SITUATION ETHICS

Situation ethics is the kind of approach to morality we might expect from an existentialist, who tends to reject the very idea of human nature – or any nature or “essence”, for that matter. Joseph Fletcher, the former dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, Cincinnati and professor of Social Ethics, Episcopal Theology School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, published his classical Situation Ethics in 1961. At the onset, he presents his view as the golden mean between the two reprehensible extremes of legalism and antinomianism. Unlike the latter, he assures us, “The situationist enters into every decision-making situation armed with the ethical maxims of his community and its heritage.” There is no question of throwing out all laws, rules and commandments. However, he “treats them with respect as illuminators of his problems” but is prepared to “compromise them or set them aside in the situation if love seems better served by doing so”. Now that last phrase serves to characterize what makes Fletcher describe as “Christian” his whole approach to morality. Fletcher even takes a swipe at “Kant’s legalism,” which produced universal laws like “a lie is always wrong”. He asks, “But what if you have to tell a lie to keep a promised secret?” and answers, “May be you lie and, if so, good for you if you follow love’s lead.”

When we adopt a critical approach, we cannot but record our dissatisfaction as regards the carelessness with which Fletcher defines his position. If Aristotle and anyone who hold some sort of “natural law” morality are to be counted among the situationists, that grouping has been emptied of almost all precise meaning. The only ones excluded from that nomenclature would be the extreme legalist and antinomians, and would they be so numerous and so influential to warrant the setting up of whole “new morality”? Just about any system of deontological ethics that is open to prudence and casuistry is already sufficient to respond to the difficulty. And when Fletcher pens something to the effect that, “Situation ethics goes part of the way with natural law, accepting reason as the instrument of judgment, while rejecting the notion that the good is ‘given in the nature of things, objectively,” one cannot help wondering whether he had really understood natural law and objective morality properly, at all.

Fletcher has, to say the least, a rather legalistic definition of love. So long as an act is done “selflessly” without the agent seeking any clearly manifest material gain, it is a moral act. Even the sickest of mentally deranged acts could also be roped in as ethically laudable if they were

done without any demonstrably material profit being sought in the process. But if love is selflessness, before we can assess its rightness or wrongness, shouldn't we first enquire into the nature of the self? Besides, as one might well ask, why should love be the norm of morality and not hate? Ultimately one can only answer that question by saying that love enhances one's personhood, one's "human nature adequately considered." It makes one more fully human, more fully alive. And hate does not do that. This obliges us to recognize a more basic and deeper norm 'love in itself.'

To give Fletcher his due, one has to admit that he does give the impression that he has done some critical reflection on love and its authentic meaning, even if it wouldn't stand up to anything like a deeper metaphysical query. He trots out some fancy terminology from Tillich to this end: Using terms made popular by Tillich and others, we may say that situationalism is a method that proceeds, so to speak, from (1) its one and only law, *agape* (love), to (2) the *sophia* (wisdom), containing many "general rules" of more or less reliability, to (3) the *kairos* (moment of decision, the fullness of time) in which the responsible self in the situation decides whether the *sophia* can serve there or not. Whence he goes on to make a highly simplistic summary of how the rival ethicists proceed: "Legalists make an idol of *sophia*, antinomians repudiate it, and situationists use it."

Finally, Fletcher, taking his cue from Socrates to the effect that the unexamined life is not worth living, suggests that "unexamined ethical maxims are not worth living by." and then he unleashes a salvo on the maxim that "*The end does not justify the means.*" On the contrary, he asks, "If the end does not justify the means, what does?" And he answers, "Obviously, 'Nothing.'" Whence his another proposition of situation ethics, "Only the end justifies the means; nothing else." In the light of the preceding, this boils down to say that anything done out of love (the means) is thereby justified or made morally good. He is careful to quickly add, "Not any old end will justify any old means" only love would do the job. And then he tops it off with another chilling remark, "Being pragmatic, the situationist always asks the price and supposes that in theory and practice everything has its price. *Everything*, please note. Even for a 'pearl of great price' whatever it is – might be sold for love's sake if the situation calls for it." This kind of remark is chilling because it can be used to justify the suicide bomber who blows himself up with a host of innocent civilians – and, as we have seen, Fletcher actually does that.

Even if we don't fully endorse Fletcher and his brand of situation ethics, is there something we can learn from what he has tried to tell us? He is reminding us of a timeless and oft-forgotten maxim: unless an action, however good in itself, is done with the motive of sincere love, it has no real ethical value, whatsoever.

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Define Ethics and its importance.

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2) Illustrate Joseph Fletcher's Situation Ethics.

2.3 CULTURAL AND ETHICAL SUBJECTIVISM

There is a quite understandable objection that any kind of ethical system based on human nature (however adequately considered.) has to face and that stems from the undeniable fact of cultural relativism. In one culture polygamy is viewed as right and moral; in another it is roundly condemned; not too long ago certain tribes in the South Sea Islands considered the painless killing off of one's parents a filial duty, most of us would be horrified at the very idea. Sometimes within the same country or culture, there are splits: Some Indians disapprove of the remarriage of widows, others have no problem with it; People across the globe are radically divided on the morality of birth control and divorce. Now, if there were some kind of common human nature upon which all moral laws are based, how do we explain these wide divergences – even contradictions?

Furthermore, studies in anthropology and sociology have led us to accept cultural relativism: there is no one culture which can be seen as superior to others, we are told. Each culture makes sense, is sufficient unto it-self within its own religious and philosophical presuppositions. It would be grossly unfair for one culture to arrogate to it-self the right to stand on judgment on another one. And even if one were to claim that he/she is not critiquing an alien culture from his/her cultural standpoint, but from the fancied "neutral ground" of "common human nature", isn't that, to say the least, rather naive? For he/she would be, in effect, advocating an understanding of human nature mediated by the "pre-understanding of his/her own culture, however subjectively convinced he/she may be that strict detachment is being observed. And, in any case, in the practical order of things, it would end up by the economically and politically dominant culture foisting itself upon all weaker ones, obliterating all "native" or "local" cultures and "little traditions" in one vast process of cultural domination? In fact, isn't this what "globalization" amounts to and haven't we all been most vocal in finding fault with it?

Let us begin our response to these very pertinent questions with one important introductory remark. Many of the people who are up in arms at any mention of a common natural law confuse it with the rigid formalism of the Kantian "categorical imperative." Nothing could be more wrong. The categorical imperative of Kantian morality could not but enjoin strict and absolute submission, without any possibility of the least exception. To make matters worse, they had to be motivated by a purely internal drive – not out of love for anyone or anything external to the agent, not even love of one's country, God, family or friends: it had to be nothing but "duty for duty's sake". All this is enough to make any self-respecting antinomian see red, to say the least.

Kant was determined that his system of ethics have an autonomous source. Basing mortal conduct on external grounds – the will, of God (Occam) or of positive law (Durkheim) would be to ask for trouble. An atheist would be deprived of any moral foundation and positive law would scarcely help matters: it is susceptible to so many variants, often on the basis of vested interests

and corruption, that it would afford, at best, a very shaky moral set-up. On the other hand, Kant's agnostic epistemology, influenced by Hume, rendered it quite impossible to take the "natural law," based on human nature, as the norm of morality. As the first Critique had argued, we cannot know the 'thing-in-itself' (the *noumenon*) and human nature is one of those things, precisely. The only solution was for him to ground it among those a priori practical principle built into our very mental makeup, parallel to those speculative principles that *The Critique of pure Reason* has uncovered. These a priori synthetic judgments were endowed with the qualities of strict universality and absolute necessity. One could as much expect exceptions to moral laws as one could require, say, the Principle of Identity or Contradiction to allow for contravention on the basis of special circumstances.

But, if one were not to go along with Hume and Kant and accept that not only is there a common human nature in which we all participate, but can discern what basically constitutes it, the problem is dispersed at once. In the first place, this doesn't open the door to all manner of cultural exploitation and foisting questionable pre-understandings and perceptions onto recalcitrant people and their cultures. The basic make-up of all humans or "common human nature" would comprise the following data: we are embodied beings with a capacity to transcend space and time, are social by nature, rooted in a world and have some sort of relatedness to the ultimate: only that and nothing more. No host of uncritical "commonness" are being smuggled in as a kind of packaged deal, forcing people to accept certain attitudes to people, places, things and even God as constituting our "common human nature".

Furthermore, sense perception is a necessary constituent of human nature and this, in itself, opens the door to certain relativism – perceptual relativism. Now this opens the door to a whole range of divergences within and between cultures. For if all people are seeing, hearing, smelling and tasting the same objects, they are not necessarily apprehending them in the same way. There is the possibility of "acquitted tastes" and some people acquire them, while others don't. Accepting a common human nature does not oblige us to subscribe to a single, common view of things, as rigid and unchanging as the Kantian categorical imperatives. Inasmuch as much of culture is built on sense perception there is plenty of scope for a certain cultural relativism.

However, not all cultural differences can be reduced to the mere relativeness of our perception of things. Sometimes it stems from a broader and wider interpretation of whole complexes of interrelated experiences. A particular local, regional or even national customs or rite may imply a judgment that people of a particular gender, ethnic or religious background are either non-persons or rather inferior version of the species. As a result, they are disqualified from enjoying certain privileges and rights that another dominant group claims exclusively for it. In cases, such as these, where a clear ethical bias is manifest, one has every right to challenge and critique the culture concerned. Cultural divergences, based on a questionable hermeneutics and implying arrant discrimination against certain people cannot justify itself on the grounds of cultural difference.

2.4 MORRIS GINSBERG'S "ON THE DIVERSITY OF MORALS"

Professor of Sociology at the University of London from 1929-1954, just one year before his retirement, Ginsberg delivered the Huxley Memorial lecture on the phenomenon of apparent ethical relativism that anthropologists and sociologists were unearthing in cross cultural studies.

It would be pertinent to quote in anticipation, the conclusion he arrives at, after a long and patient scrutiny of the facts. Amidst variations moral codes everywhere exhibit striking similarities in essentials. There are no societies without rules of conduct, backed by the general approval of the members. There are none which do not regard that which contributes to the needs and survival of the group as good, none which do not condemn conduct interfering with the satisfaction of common needs and threatening the stability of social relations. As Ginsberg sums it up insightfully, "It might be argued that the diversity of moral judgments affords no more proof of their subjectivity than the diversity of judgments regarding matters of fact throws any doubt on the possibility of valid scientific judgments about them"

He then goes on to detail six different contexts wherein a certain variation in moral practices may be noted between and within certain nations and cultures. In sum, they are as follows: (1) Variations in the view as to whom moral rules were held to be applicable. (2) Variations arising due to differences of opinion as to the non-moral qualities of certain acts and their consequences. (3) Variations arising from the fact that the same act appears to be seen differently in different situations and contexts. (4) Variations arising due to a difference of emphasis on different elements comprising moral life. (5) Variations arising from the possibility of alternative ways of satisfying primary needs. (6) Variations due to differences of moral insight and general level of development, ethical as well as intellectual.

The range of persons to whom moral rules are held to be applicable: Anthropologists like Taylor recognize a certain "natural solidarity," comprising a measure of mutual forbearance, helpfulness and trust as constitutive of all societies. Everyone felt somehow bound to his or her neighbour by certain societal bonds of shared care and responsibility. However, there was a divergence of view as to who really were ones neighbours. Initially, and quite understandably, "neighbour" was rather narrowly understood to be only those of one's own family, tribe or clan and very often it was only the males who, in the full sense, were considered moral persons to whom societal norms in all fullness had to be applied. However, what constitutes one's "neighbourhood" is not a particular set of racial features or one's sex but "human nature adequately considered" and so moral laws have to be applied to all persons, irrespective of their age, sex, social status or nationality. No law was understood as discriminating against ones neighbour: there was only a mistaken perception as to what the term meant. It could well be that vested interest's made use of this confusion to justify their breaking of promises and agreements to colonised natives. After all, if the natives had no souls, then they were mere sub-humans and the ethical prescriptions didn't apply in their case.

Differences arising from the growth of knowledge concerning certain acts: This is perhaps best exemplified with the medical discovery, in fairly recent times, of the role played by microbes in generating disease. This has given us new responsibilities as regards cleanliness and hygiene: hospital staff may be guilty of criminal neglect if they are careless in these areas nowadays something totally unheard of in ancient period. Again, it was only in the eighteenth century that people desisted from torturing and burning to death alleged "witches." At that time, such people were seen as being guilty of heinous crimes and, due to their pernicious influence or occult powers could cause serious bodily harm to peoples, bring about natural disasters and jeopardize not only their own salvation, but of others as well. As Lecky, remarks "granted these propositions, there was no moral difficulty in drawing the conclusion that... [They]...should be

put to death.” Happily, we live in more enlightened times and developments in psychology and sociology have helped us recognize the folly and error underlying such views.

The same act is seen differently in different contexts/cultures: Divergences, here, are very often the result of ethical laws and principles being couched in a very brief formula. As a result, the passage of time or a wholly new set of circumstances in a different climate or culture yield examples of “differences” in ethical behavior as regards the “same” act when, on closer study, we realize that these are totally different ones altogether. What constitutes “usury” in one place may not be so in another, depending on the standard of living. A simplistic condemnation of “aggression” may only apparently be broken in the case of a pre-emptive strike where one nation attacks another because it has reasonable grounds to believe that the other is planning a full scale invasion. In a society where there is no established system of properly conducted law courts, self-redress may be a legitimate option, whereas it would be condemnable wherever there is a working network of judiciary procedures.

Variations due to differences of emphases in moral responsibility: Even if there is a universal agreement that we should do what is right and spurn all that is evil, there may be differences of view as to what is the ultimate reason we should do so: it may mean, as Ginsberg summarizes it, “Because it is the will of God and that will may be considered inscrutable; or it may mean because of the love of God, or because of the love of men, not so much because they are worthy of it, but because they are the objects of divine love and enabled by the Incarnation; or again for prudential reasons because it would lead to beatitude in this or another world.” Sometimes, a particular stress may lead to a certain imbalance if there is no critical reflection accompanying the trend. Irrational feelings of love and devotion may land one in the extremes of fanaticism. An over-stress on faith may lead to a neglect of justice. Self-discipline may wind up in repulsive forms of masochism. It is not so much ethical relativism that is to be blamed for all these oddities, but a lack of the cultivation of a spirit of self-criticism and *recta ratio*.

Variations due to different ways of fulfilling basic needs: This arises when people, though they may be in agreement as to what constitutes the most basic needs of humans (“first order values”), different societies and cultures seek to fulfill them by alternative ways (“second order values”). For instance, most communities favour the monogamous marriage and the sex-rules associated with it: the association of sex with enduring companionship, the fusing of sex with tenderness, the enhancement of the parental relationship through shared interest in the upbringing and love of children, providing security to children by the experience of parent’s love for them and for each other and so on. These are all “first order values” and all cultures recognize these. However, they may seek different ways to realize these ways other than monogamous marriage and its customary practices. Thus, in Bantu society (in Africa), physical attraction, affection and companionship usually follow quite different channels. Instead of seeking these within the context of monogamy, “quite different channels” are followed for each of the above-mentioned “second order values”, “a man desiring his wife, loving his sister and seeking companionship among his male relatives and friends.” This is where there is ample scope for dialogue and exchange, where people of different cultures can challenge each others’ presuppositions and customs, seeking how to more fully and deeply realize the basic goals (“first order values”) that they all respect. In our more enlightened times of freedom of enquiry and dialogue, when we have come to realize that no culture is perfect and infallible and that we have a lot to learn even

from those we don't quite agree with, such exchanges can prove beneficial to all the parties concerned and no one will come away from serious and sincere sharing with quite the same convictions and presuppositions with which he or she entered into it.

Divergences due to the particular level of mental development: The development of mental, and therefore, moral acumen may be gauged, Ginsberg says, from five perspectives: (a) The degree of universalism that a moral system envisages: this is a matter of assessing whether the moral code stops with the confines of the family, tribe or clan or whether it goes on to include rules governing how one should deal with the larger family, embracing people of all nations, ethnic groups, cultures and religions and making no discrimination according to sex, age or religion; (b) The range or comprehensiveness of experience embodied in the particular moral code: obviously the moral code of a small group that takes out a kind of nomadic existence by hunting and gathering will be very sensitive to issues linked with rather limited way of life, but it will be lacking as to guidelines for business, economic and inter religious relationships; (c) The extent to which the underlying moral codes and principles that are the basis of any moral system are brought to light and scrutinized as to how justified they are and whether they have been made to fit together coherently and harmoniously; (d) The extent to which there is a separation of moral codes from law and from religion: this is important because if no clear demarcation is made, the principles of the dominant religion will be taken as the basis of law and morality and this will imply scant respect, if any, for people who don't subscribe to the doctrines of the dominant religion: obviously, there should be left scope for individual decision in certain matters and the law should not employ its machinery to oblige everyone to act as if he or she was not in full accord with the teachings of a given religion; (e) The extent to which moral systems permit, even encourage, self-criticism and self-direction: a system which assumes that even adults are too immature to make their own religious and moral decisions and refuse to tolerate even the mildest form of dissent, even when presented non-violently is certainly inferior to one that assures for a public debate on complex issues and in the light of contemporary development in the social sciences.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

We have exposed the main challenges to Ethics arising from Situation Ethics, Subjectivism and the divergence of morals. In our conclusion, we would like to emphasise that we should not commit the mistake to the effect that the more technologically developed and industrially refined a culture is, the more enlightened it will be, in the sense of the five norms outlined above by Ginsberg. Nor should we assume that access to the media and information technology would necessarily create a society made of people who are more critical and less likely to be led astray by unscrupulous demagogues and cleaver dicks who're hell bent on making a fast buck for themselves at whatever cost to other people, the environment and the future generations. Globalization, today, is proceeding along very unethical lines and has been elaborated by a culture that prides itself on being a model for all the world, one whose very pretensions to democracy and family values cloud well be questioned.

It is by what Pannikar calls a "diatopical" exchange – a dialogue between cultures – that societies can learn from one another, challenge each other and grow together, without being obliged to model themselves on one allegedly "higher" level of intellectual development. Some cultures may have a lot to offer others from one angle while they need to learn from others as regards

another aspect. Paolo Freire, for instance, opined that third world cultures should learn from the technological development of the west but, in their turn, have a lot to offer the latter from the way they have learnt to preserve family values and a less destructive way of relating to nature. In all this, it is human nature adequately considered that is to be repeatedly brought into the area of discussion, sharing and debate whenever we feel decisions and judgments have to be made.

Check Your Progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Mention the six contexts of Ginsberg's Diversity of Morals.

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2) What is diatopical exchange of Pannikar?

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2.6 KEY WORDS

Situation Ethics: Is the kind of approach to morality we might expect from an existentialist, who tends to reject the very idea of human nature or any nature or essence.

Perceptual Relativism: sense perception a necessary constituent of human nature, this in itself opens the door to certain relativism.

Kairos: moment of decision, the fullness of time.

Masochism: the enjoyment of something that most people would find unpleasant or painful.

2.7 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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UNIT 3 ETHICS IN HISTORY OF INDIAN PHILOSOPHY

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- 3.7 Ethical Concepts of Hindu Tradition
- 3.8 Ethics in Buddhism
- 3.9 Jaina Ethics
- 3.10 Let us Sum up
- 3.11 Key Words
- 3.12 Further Readings and References

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To give the students of philosophy general glimpse of ethics in Indian tradition
 - To enable them understand the ethical consciousness of India
 - To enumerate various ethical concepts of different Indian philosophical and religious traditions
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3.1 INTRODUCTION

Moral consciousness is an undeniable fact of human experience. The moral sensibility is something essential for the peaceful society and the work. Even gods are believed to incarnate to restore righteousness and peace in the society. Down through the centuries, many religious teachers, and philosophers were interested in the rational ground of morality. The caste duties of the Hindus prescribed in the *Dharmasastras* are well articulated commands, which are meant to regulate the life of the community. Ethics as a speculative science is based on the foundations of the moral behavior of man, but a substantial portion of the moral codes are based on religious beliefs, social customs and traditions. When we take the Indian ethics too the morality is very much based on certain beliefs, customs and traditions of Indian religions.

It is true that the foundations of Indian ethics can be sought in the metaphysical and the theological beliefs in the form of worship, prayers and in the form of ideals and principles that directed man's life in the society. When we speak of Indian ethics, we cannot deny the intimate relationship that prevails between ethics and Hindu or any other religion. Ethics and religion are so closely related and whatever may be the religion, it contains within itself some system of morality for the guidance of its followers. And thus Indian ethics is the indispensable part of Hindu religion and other religions of Indian origin. Indian ethical ideals and principles are very much found in the Vedas and in other Indian literatures and in other teachings of the Indian religions.

Like religion and art, morality also is an institution of life for anyone to adopt in his life. By this institution of morality one's actions from the moral point of view might be branded as good or bad, right or wrong, praiseworthy or blameful etc. And again by morality one may be entitled to

judge others' action as good or bad, right or wrong. In this sense morality can be regarded as a particular way of looking at issues of character and conduct. It is in this sense of morality, that we talk of human beings as moral agents but not of animals, we also talk of moral concepts, laws and principles etc for a morally good or morally right life.

Morality means conscious living within the frame of certain principles of conduct laid down by those regarded as authorities. So in general morality as an institution of life consists in the awareness of an important distinction between what is and what ought to be. So men should live not merely in the light of what is but also what ought to be. Specifically speaking morality is the awareness of a living based on a distinction between our animal demands and the demands of the higher faculties of human life, which make the human distinct from the animals.

Since the ancestors of Hindus in India were spiritual in nature they fixed their attention on a life beyond death. They regarded the human soul (inner being) as an eternal entity co-existing with the Supreme Being. They believed that every human soul goes to the round of births, rebirths and reaps the fruits of actions. When a soul comes to be associated with the gross material body, it is bound to perform certain deeds and in conformity with laws divine, reaps the fruits thereof. The belief is that, if good deeds are performed, happiness results and if evil deeds are performed, misery falls to the lot of the doer. The human soul never dies; it can never remain without doing 'actions' and can never claim exemptions from reaping the fruits of its deeds. It reaps as it sows. Any man ultimately looks for happiness which is the fruit of *Karma* and so he should necessarily know what is good and what is bad. Every law giver and every thinker of India in ancient period felt, the supreme necessity of framing certain rules of conduct and of presenting the ultimate end to which all the life of a human being is to be directed in this lesson on Indian ethics we will be dealing with the Hindu ethics, some ethical notions of Buddhism and Jainism.

3.2 SOURCES OF MORAL IDEALS IN INDIA

Any human being in the society is called to live and lead a moral life. To lead a moral life, he needs certain guidelines and principles of morality to do certain deeds and to abstain from certain deeds. What is the primary source of morality in India? The answer could be the authority of the Scriptures especially that of the Vedas, after the Vedas, the authority of the *Smrtis* is accepted. So Vedas (*Srutis*) and the *Smrtis* (*Dharmasastras* of Manu) taken together, have been regarded as the source of morality. Of these two (Vedas and *Smrtis*), the Vedas are regarded as superior. In the event of a conflict between the two, the verdict of the Vedas prevails. Besides *Srutis*, *Smrtis* and practices of good people conscience and reason also play a role in the matters of morality. The inner conscience also is the source and test of morality. This means that even the desire arising out of right will or determination may serve as a source or guide to morality. Right will is to be identified and decided. In recent times, especially; in the thoughts of Gandhi, and Aurobindo, conscience has been accorded a very important place as giving the final verdict regarding questions of morality and immorality.

The very concept of Indian morality is both authority based and social reasoning. Both in Buddhism and Jainism reason has been given a prestigious place. In Jainism right faith is given the first place among the three jewels. One is advised to use his reason in ascertaining the validity and worth of the precepts before following them. In Buddhism too the use of personal reason is neither disallowed nor despised. The four noble truths are to be followed but even then

Buddha says wherever there is disagreement, questions can be asked for removing doubts. In modern Hindu thought, reason is given better place, especially in the ideas of Vivekananda and Gandhi. For them reason is not the source of moral ideas, but yet they believe in the role of reason in the matters of morality. Hence, the primary role is given to Vedas and Smritis as the fundamental source of morality in Indian tradition, but besides them, all the above mentioned sources also played their roles in deciding the question of morality and immorality in Indian tradition.

3.3 ETHICS: ITS MEANING IN INDIAN TRADITION

The Indian term for morality and ethics is '*dharma*'. *Dharma* comes from the root '*dhr*', which means to hold together. And thus the function of *dharma* is to hold the human society together for its stability and growth. Right conduct is essential if the human society is to survive. The *dharma* in Hinduism is co-extensive with morality. *Dharma* in the Vedas refers to the highest truth and power and it is very much understood as the performance of Vedic sacrifices and other rituals in the Vedas and *Dharmasastras*. So *Dharma* is understood in Vedas as duty par-excellence. *Dharma* is also generally understood as the duties of humans according to one's own caste and stage of life (*Varnasrama Dharma*). And thus many Hindu thinkers say if one does his duty; he will achieve either heaven or a better birth in the next life or even prosperity here and now. Thus the Hindu concept of *dharma* has been recognized by its very close association with ritualistic and caste-oriented duties. And the purely moral sense of duty is overshadowed. But yet the Hindu thinkers advocate and recommend the practice of moral virtues and moral norms, which make a man as man. These moral virtues are called *Sadharana Dharma* or universal duties. Hence the term *dharma* in Hinduism has two connotations 1) performance of ritual sacrifices and duties according to one's own caste and the second is the practice of moral virtues and norms. So when we speak of *dharma* as morality, it includes all the duties one ought to perform and all the virtues he ought to practice to attain *moksha* or liberation.

3.4 ETHICS IN VEDIC PERIOD

When we speak of Indian ethics, its early beginnings have to be traced from the Vedas, particularly the Rig Veda. One of the central ethical concepts of the Rig Veda is '*ṛta*', a conception of unifying order or moral law, pervading all things. The concept '*ṛta*' has given rise to two other important concepts, the concept of *Dharma* and the concept of *Karma*. The concept *Dharma* has got so different and divergent meanings, but generally it is known as duty. The concept *Karma* signifies that there is a uniform moral law, governing the actions of man and the rewards and the punishments appropriate to their actions. '*Ṛta*' is the foundation of these two concepts. The more important and essential element in the Vedic ethics is that of love and worship offered to the gods in complete submission. Moral order or law is reflected in the right performance of sacrifices and so one who performs these sacrifices and the ceremonial duties laid down in the scriptures, would achieve the goal of eternal happiness in heaven. So the ethics of the Vedic Hindus is primarily a god-oriented ethics.

The highest goal of life for the Upanishads is no longer happiness as in the Rig Veda, but liberation from bondage to the transitory existence and the re-attainment of the inner essence of the soul. The Upanishadic ethics is primarily atman-centric and intellectualistic. The Upanishads declare that the Vedic sacrifices are totally irrelevant for the realization of *moksha*. And so man is

constantly exhorted to seek his individual liberation and not worry about other social, moral obligation. This kind of philosophical individualism definitely undermines the values of social morality. For the Upanishads, the identification and the realization of the self with Brahman is very important. In this metaphysical realm only we can speak of Upanishadic ethics. The oldest Upanishads say that the perfect sage is a saint who burns evil away and he is free from evil. So it is in the avoidance of evil, we can see the clear moral teaching in the Upanishads. Katha Upanishad declares in 1,2,24 that he who is always impure is born again and again that he fails to reach the highest goal. Good conduct is very much necessary for the attainment of man's metaphysical good (identification of the self with Brahman). And man who is wise is morally a good man whose nature approximates to the divine model (Kat.Up 1, 2, 24, Ch.Up 8, 6, 1). So the Upanishads are clear in saying that the man who has wisdom does not sin. He ceases to do evil and through his wisdom he annuls the evil of his former life.

3.5 ETHICS IN DHARMASASTRAS AND ITIHASAS

The institutes of Manu and other *Dharmasastras* are the main source books of both Hindu ritualism and social morality. The Upanishads emphasized the liberation of the individual, but the *Manusmṛti* subordinated individuality to social structures. Though individual, one belongs to a family and a sub-caste and he is always taken care by the family in which he is, and so the Hindu social morality is relativistic on several counts. Man's duties are accepted to be relative to time (*Yuga*) and place (*Desa*). The duties of a person are also strictly relative to his *Varna* (class) and the stage of Life (*Asrama*). Manu has decreed certain virtues as universal. They are, contentment (*dhairya*), forgiveness (*kshama*), self-control (*dhama*), non-stealing (*asteya*), cleanliness (*sauca*), coercion of the senses (*indriya nigraha*), wisdom (*dhi*), knowledge of the Supreme Atman (*vidhya*), truthfulness (*sathya*) and abstention from anger (*akrodha*) (VI: 91-92). These virtues are common, universal *dharma* (*Sadharana Dharma*), which can be called morality. Thus the *Dharmasastras*, Epics and the *Puranas* have their own specific goal but they seem to share more or less a common 'ethos' from the point of ethics.

3.6 WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IN THE GITA

The realization of the Supreme Reality through a life of righteous actions is the central well-knit theme of all the eighteen chapters of the Gita. Actions are to be performed with the realization of *Brahmajnana*. To attain the *Brahmajnana* one is advised to make a diligent search through devotion, renunciation and self-surrender. From attachment desire springs from desire wrath arises, from wrath comes infatuation, from infatuation loss of memory and mind and finally from loss of mind he perishes. So liberation from all kinds of bondages is possible only by the realization of the Brahman or surrender unto the Lord and vice versa, the realization of the Brahman is only through the liberation from all kinds of bondages. Actions are to be performed without any attachment to the fruit of the actions. This is one of the means of attaining *Brahmajnana*. Thus Gita emphasizes both on *Karma Yoga* and *Gnana Yoga* for the attainment of the Supreme Bliss, but yet *Karma Yoga* is superior to *Gnana Yoga*. Here *Karma Yoga* simply means a mode of realizing the Brahman through devotional meditation on the name of God, and the practice of one's own duties without any attachment. One will be blessed with *Brahmayoga*, which will lead him not only to moral success but also to the infinite spiritual joy and peace.

There is another way promoted by the Gita to attain the ultimate realization in life and liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, which is known as *Karma Yoga* (Path of activity). The *Gita* has described this way as the method of disinterested action (*Nishkama Karma*). To attain *moksha* one has to be freed from the bondage to one's own actions. So the Gita suggests the golden rule that actions should be done with the spirit of non-attachment to their fruits. Both the epics, *itihasas* have a bundle of ethical and moral codes and injunctions. The practical guidelines of the essential ethical ideals and thoughts of Hindu tradition.

Check your progress I

Note: Use the space for your answers

1. What are sources of ethics and their ideals in Indian tradition?

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2. Explain the ethics of Gita.

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3.7. ETHICAL CONCEPTS OF HINDU TRADITION

Doctrine of *Karma*

The doctrine of *Karma* states that whatever a man suffers or enjoys is the fruit of his own deed, a harvest sprung from his own actions, good or bad committed in his previous life. *Karma* is of four categories: 1) *Sanchita Karma*, which means the accumulated past actions 2) *Prarabdha Karma*, which means the part of *Sanchita Karma*, this results in the present birth itself. This is also called pre-destination 3) *Kriyamana Karma*, which means present willful actions or free will 4) *Agami Karma*, which means the immediate results caused by our present actions. *Karma* simply means action. And this *Karma* must remind us that what is called the consequence of an action is really not a separate thing but it is a part of the action and it cannot be divided from it. The consequence is the part of the action, which belongs to the future but yet the part is done in the present. Whatever a man sows he shall reap.

Transmigration of Soul

The doctrine of *Karma* and transmigration of soul are so closely bound up together. After the death of the body the life of the individual is continued in another body and so on in indefinite series. According to this theory, the soul though pure and blessed in itself, gets entangled in the *Samsara* (cycle of birth and rebirth). It is because of the *Karma* it passes through innumerable births (transmigration) before it regains its original state.

Supreme Goals (*Purusharthas*)

The dominant interest of the Indian thought is in the highest value of human life. There are four values, which give meaning to human life. They are called *Purusharthas*. They are as following

1) *Dharma* 2) *Artha* 3) *Kama* 4) *moksa*. *Dharma* is usually distinguished into *sadharana dharma* and *varnashrama dharma*. *sadharana dharma* refers to the duties of the universal scope and validity. There are ten cardinal virtues known as *sadharana dharma* according to Manu, endurance, patience, self-control, integrity, purity, and restraint of senses, wisdom, learning, and truth, absence of anger or non-violence. The *varnasrama dharma* refers to the duties of persons according to the castes and the stages of life. Thus '*dharma*' is considered to be a means value for attaining personality integration in the spiritual level or liberation.

The term '*artha*' generally indicates the attainment of riches and worldly prosperity, advantage, profit and wealth. *Kama* is a comprehensive term, which includes all desires: desires ranging from the cravings of the flesh and the yearnings of the spirit. In Hindu thought there is always a clear emphasis on the enjoyment of secular pleasures along with the emphasis on the realization of spiritual values. The uniqueness of the concept of *kama* and enjoyment in the Hindu ethics is that all of them were to be related to the spiritual goal of human existence and so the Indian ethics insisted on a regulated enjoyment. In every school of philosophy in India the first three *Purusharthas* are treated as the instrumental values, which directly or indirectly promote the *Parama Purusharthas* - the highest values of human life namely *moksa*. *moksa* is also known as by other names such as *mukti*, *apavarya*, *kaivalya* and *nirvana*. This liberation is intimately bound up with the *Karma* samsara, the doctrine of transmigration.

Svadharm

By this term we mean each individual has to grow to his best according to his own *dharma*, that is to say the principle of individual growth is called *Svadharm*. *Svadharm* is in relation to an individual's temperament and stage and duties in life, based on *varna* and *asrama*. It is made in terms of three *gunas*, the *sattva* (purity), *rajas* (virility), and '*tamas*' (darkness). These three qualities are found in each individual in varying proportions and thus this varying proportion of qualities is regarded as the basis of different types of actions and of four castes. The concept of *Svadharm* is very much based on these three classifications and it is well promoted by Indian ethical code that if the society is to function smoothly there should certainly be a hierarchical arrangement of functions and duties in it.

Varnadharm

In Hindu ethics, we find *varnasrama dharma* as a social stratification, based on above said *gunas*, profession and birth. Although theoretically it is justified to have such a classification of people in the name of their propensity and quality they possess in terms of their attitude, caste system in Indian ethics remains an issue. It has been very much practiced and all ethical principles and codes are based on it. By way of profession one's caste is determined in some ways, both in theory and in practice. This looks somehow fine and rationally justified. Yet social mobility in the ladder of categories of people is not very much practical and it is not ensured. Even if a person develops *sattva guna* and becomes a teacher of scriptures, he / she cannot become a 'Brahmin' for the very reason that he was not born a Brahmin. Although theoretically Hindu ethics preaches it, social mobility in such practice remains only an utopia. One's birth, *jati* determines everything in caste systems. A Sudra is denied of the right of undertaking purificatory rite in the form of investiture of sacred thread (Upanayana), which is supposed to give a man his second birth. He is not allowed to perform Vedic sacrifices or read or listen to the Vedas. Severest punishments were prescribed and carried out, if a Sudra even dared

to recite or had a chance to hear the Vedas. A Brahmin unconditionally deserved the greatest honour and all kinds of gifts. He could not be given any corporeal punishment. He was exempt from the state taxes. The severest punishments were prescribed for the offender of a Brahmin. Hence, Hindu ethics regarding *varnadharma* is still a contested and controversial moral and social code.

Stages of Life (Ashrama Dharma)

According to Hindu thought the life was divided into four stages or *Ashramas*: that of the *Brahmacari* (Studenthood), the student who is bound to celibacy. The second stage is *Grihastha* (the householder), and the third is *Vanaprastha* (the forest dweller) and the last is the *Sannyasin* (the mendicant). A man should pass through these stages regularly and no man should enter any stage prematurely. A man after having studied the Vedas or two Vedas or even one Veda, in due order, without breaking celibacy must enter into the householder order. And when the householder sees wrinkles in his skin and whiteness in his hair and sees his grand son, only then he must retire to the forest. After having passed the third portion of life in the forests and having abandoned attachments, the man wanders as an ascetic, which is the fourth portion of life. This succession is regarded as so important for the due development of the *Jivatma*, and the proper ordering of the society.

Hindu Rites - Samskaras

Sacrifices form the central theme of the Brahmanical religion and philosophy. The sacrifices not only please gods but also feed them. Through them the sins are also atoned. The important Vedic sacrifices are the *Srauta* sacrifices and the *Grihya* rituals. Besides all these rituals there are many personal or family sacraments known as *Samskaras*. These *Samskaras* are religious acts of purification and they are the ceremonies for sanctifying the body, mind and intellect of the individual, so that the person may become a full-pledged member of the community. For the performance of these sacraments, “*samkalpa*” or the mental attitude is the most important condition. The most important *Samskaras* are 1) *Garbhadhanam* or conception, *Pumsavanam*: (Ensuring a male offspring), *Simanthonnayanam* (Parting of the hair), *Jata-Karmam* (Birth-Ceremony), *Nama-karanam* or naming ceremony, *Nishkramanam*: taking the child out of the house so that it may see the sun, *Annaprashnam*: the first feeding of the child with solid food (rice) in the sixth month, *Chudakaranam*: the rite of tonsure ceremony, *Karnavedham*: Piercing of earlobes, *Vidhyarambam* (beginning of knowledge), *Upanayanam* (Initiation by a teacher), *Samavarthanam*, *Vivaha* (Marriage), *Antyesti* or Funeral Rights

Check your progress II

Note: Use the space for your answers

1. What are Hindu ethical ideals in Indian tradition?

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2. Write about your personal learning in this unit on Hindu Ethics.

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3.8 ETHICS IN BUDDHISM

The Buddha thought ten meritorious deeds for us to perform in order to gain a happy and peaceful life as well as to develop knowledge and understanding. The ten meritorious deeds are: 1. Charity 2. Morality 3. Mental Culture 4. Reverence or respect 5. Service in helping others 6. Sharing merits with others 7. Rejoicing in the merits of others 8. Preaching and teaching the *Dhamma* 9. Listening to *Dhamma* 10. Straightening one's views. Moral conduct benefits all Beings with whom one comes into contact. Mental culture brings peace to others and inspires them to practice *Dhamma*. Reverence gives rise to harmony in society. Service improves the lives of others. Sharing merits with others shows that one is concerned about others' welfare. Rejoicing in other's merits encourages others to perform more merits. Teaching, listening to the *Dhamma* is important factor for happiness for both the teacher and the listener. Straightening one's views enables a person to show to others the beauty of *Dhamma*.

There are ten demeritorious deeds from which the Buddhist are advised to keep away. These deeds are rooted in greed, hatred, and delusion and they will bring suffering to others. These ten deeds are divided into three sets: 1. Actions of the Body 2. Verbal Actions 3. Actions of the Mind. Bodily actions are killing of living beings, stealing, and unlawful sexual intercourse. 2. Four verbal actions are: Lying, Slander, Harsh Speech, and Meaningless Talk. 3. The other three actions of the mind are: Covetousness or being desirous especially of things belonging to others, ill-will, wrong views.

Buddhist morality judges an action good or bad basing on the intention or motivation from which it originates. If a person performs an action out of greed, hatred, delusion, his action is considered to be bad. On the other hand, if he performs an action out of love, charity and wisdom, his action is good. Love, charity and wisdom are known as the "the three Good Roots." Here the word 'root' refers to the intention from which that action originates.

In Buddhism a person's first duty is to cleanse him of the mental defilements of greed, hatred and ignorance. The reason for doing this cleansing is not because of fear or desire to please some Divine beings. If this is so, that would mean that the person is still lacking in wisdom. He is only acting out of fear like the little child who is afraid of being punished for being naughty. A Buddhist should act out of understanding and wisdom. He performs good actions because he realizes that by so doing he develops his moral strength, which provides foundation for spiritual growth, leading to liberation.

Five precepts

Telling about ten meritorious and ten evil actions, the Buddhism invites the lay Buddhists to adopt five precepts voluntarily to follow in order to live together in civilized communities with mutual trust and respect. Following these five precepts helps the lay Buddhist to make a spiritual

journey towards liberation. These five precepts are purely voluntary ones. A good Buddhist should remind himself to follow the five precepts daily they are as follows, I take the training rule to refrain from Killing living creatures, Taking which is not given, Sexual misconduct, False speech, and Taking intoxicating drugs and liquor. The precepts are the basic practice in Buddhism. They are also an indispensable basis for people who wish to cultivate their minds. Without some basic moral code, the power of meditation can often be applied for some wrong and selfish motive. These five refrains is called as *Pancasila*

Kindness and charity

The Lord Buddha proposes Universal Love or “*Metta*”. By this, Lord Buddha invites one to cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Speaking about charity Buddha says that the essence of true charity is to give something without expecting anything in return for the gift. A charitable person should not make other people feel indebted to him or use charity as a way of exercising control over them. He should not even expect others to be grateful. The act of true charity leaves both the giver and the recipient free. A real charity must proceed from the whole person as an act of his body, heart and mind. It should not be an act of generosity but it should be a “*Dana*” when a person performs “*Dana*”, he gives as a means of cultivating charity as a virtue. It reduces one’s craving and his selfishness.

Love for Animals

The Buddhists are encouraged to extend love for all living beings without restricting only to Human beings. Since every living being has a right to exist so it is not right for us to take away the life of any living being. It is unfair for us to deprive their living rights. If we believe that animals were created by someone for men, it would follow that men were also created for animals since some animals do eat human flesh. Buddhism says the destruction of any creature represents a disturbance of the universal order. Man’s cruelty towards animals is another expression of his uncontrolled greed. Our own existence on this earth may not be guaranteed if we do not take stern measures for the survival of other creatures.

3.9 JAINA ETHICS

Like Buddhism, Jainism also rejects Vedic ceremonialism and sacrificialism and also it takes ahimsa to be the most important ethical virtue and consequently denounces the Vedic sacrifices. In the observance of ahimsa, Jainism rather surpasses even Buddhism. In the observance of ascetic rituals also, Jainism goes further than Buddhism especially in the case of monks. The *pancamahavrtas* and *triratnas* form the ethics of Jaina tradition. Right knowledge, right faith and right conduct are known as *Triratnas* – or the three gems of Jainism. Right knowledge is the detailed cognition of the real nature of ego and non-ego, which is free from doubt, error uncertainty etc. It can be obtained only by studying carefully the teachings of the omniscient *Tirthankaras* or teachers who have already obtained liberation and therefore are fit to lead others out of bondage.

Then that preliminary faith should be supported by right knowledge again for having right faith based on general acquaintance (*samyag- darsana*) in support of right knowledge. Right faith does not imply that one must blindly follow the *Tirthankaras*. But one must have the right attitude of respect towards truth. Further by studying the teachings of the *Tirthankaras* one can

strengthen his belief. But these two are rendered useless unless they are followed by rigorous practice. Right conduct is the third indispensable (*samyag-caritra*) condition of liberation. It is this that enables one to stop the influx of new karmas and also to eradicate old ones. It consists in the control of passions, senses, thought, speech etc. Right conduct is therefore described as refraining from what is harmful and doing what is good. Right conduct enables man to liberate himself from bondage. The Jaina prescription for right conduct: One must follow the five great vows namely the *panca-maha-vrata* for the perfection of right conduct. They are *Ahimsa*, *Sathyam*, *Asteyam*, *Brahmacaryam* and *Aparigraha*. *Ahimsa* denotes abstinence from all injuries to life – either *trasa* or *sthavara*. *Satyam* is abstinence from falsehood. It is speaking what is true, good and pleasant. *Asteyam* refers to abstinence from stealing. *Brahmacaryam* pertains to abstinence from sensual and casual pleasures. One must refrain himself from *karma* of any form altogether either in speech talk or action. *Aparigraha*: By this what is meant here is that abstinence from all kinds of attachments. It lies in giving up attachment for the objects of five senses.

Check your progress III

Note: Use the space provided for your answers.

1. What do you understand about the uniqueness of Buddhist morality?

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2. Explain about the sources and foundation of Jaina Ethics.....

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3.10 LET US SUM UP

We come to know that the Indian religion, philosophy and morality are so integrally related and it is impossible to understand morality without a proper understanding of the religious and philosophical traditions in India. Ethics in India is a complex and multi-faceted one, being constituted of divergent and several religious and philosophical traditions. This diversity of metaphysical beliefs and valuational attitudes is reflected in Indian morality, which is diverse and multi-faceted as the rest of the Indian culture. But however we must not have any impression that there is neither any specific world view or ethos nor any definite moral code, which can be called Indian as such. Indian tradition has been receptive to new ideas and values but yet it has been choosing certain ideas to be incorporated in its religio-moral thought.

Hinduism also accepted the fact that man's *dharma* comprising of all his duties and virtues, changes with the changing times. Hindu religio-culture is very composite, so we need to choose those aspects of Hindu-religio culture, which are most in harmony with our modern values and we also need to frankly reject other ideals, which are not in harmony with modern values. From all these that we saw above, we can conclude this lesson on Buddhists ethics basing our concentration on the urgent call of Buddhism to the modern world today. Buddhism calls for tolerance in the world today so that peaceful co-existence among the people can be possible. The Buddha's advice is, "Let us live happily not hating those who hate us. Let us live free from hatred among those who hate us. Let us live happily and be free from ailment. Let us live happily and be free from greed among those who are greedy (*Dhammapada* 197-200). Buddha says, "If a person foolishly does the wrong, I will return to him the protection of my boundless love. The more evil that comes from him the more good will go from me. I will always give of only the fragrance of goodness.

3.11 KEY WORDS

Pancasila: Buddhist five precepts of refrain from Killing living creatures, Taking which is not given, Sexual misconduct, False speech, and Taking intoxicating drugs and liquor.

Dharma: Generally as righteousness and ethics

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UNIT 4 ETHICS IN THE HISTORY OF WESTERN PHILOSOPHY

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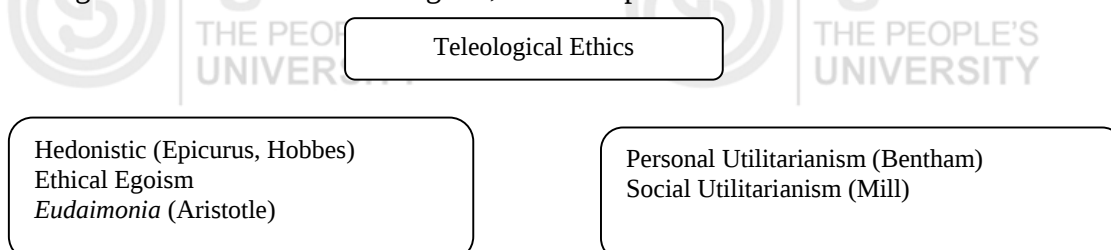
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4.0 OBJECTIVES

As Sir David Ross points out, in a classical work *Foundations of Ethics*, written over sixty years ago, there are, broadly speaking, two approaches to ethics. This is better known as the distinction between deontological and teleological ethics. The Greek word for an 'end', in the sense of a goal to be achieved, is *telos*. Hence, 'teleological' ethics comprises all those kinds of ethics which see the criterion of morality in terms of whether an action fulfills the overall total end of human life in general and of moral activity in particular. The word 'deontological' was coined by the British moralist, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), from the Greek word, *deon*, literally, that which is binding. Deontological ethics views the morally good in terms of doing one's duty. Deontology would be the science of moral duties. We shall see that these two approaches differ more in emphasis than anything else; they are not mutually exclusive water-tight compartments.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Let us start with teleological approach. Ever since Aristotle, practically the entire Western tradition of philosophizing has accepted his contention that the ultimate human end is "happiness." Now this could be understood as either exclusively, or with a strong stress on, individual or private happiness. This, in turn, can be understood in two further ways: as pleasure (but not in the narrow, crude sense that the term usually implies), in which case we have the school hedonistic ethics; or it can be seen as self-realization and this is the *eudaimonic* approach. The other alternative is to see happiness more from the standpoint of others, of the community. Thus the utilitarian ethics may once again be looked at from a personal or a social dimension. Summarizing all this in a convenient diagram, we can represent it thus



Deontological approach comprises a rather heterogeneous group of people whose sole title in common is that they look upon moral actions from the point of view of “duty” or “obligation”. In other words, it is the morally “right”, rather than the morally “good” which is their concern. The key question for them, then, is why the morally “right” should be so, in other words, what makes “duty” a “duty”? Some of the prominent philosophers of deontology are Ockham, Durkhiem, Kant and Aquinas

4.2 EPICURUS (CIRCA IV CENTURY BCE)

Epicurus sought to eliminate all unpleasant feelings like fear and anxiety from the contemporary psyche and promote emotions of well being, harmony and pleasure. Not surprisingly, he summoned his followers to meet in a beautiful garden (Epicureanism is, thus, sometimes called, the Philosophy of the Garden) and seek after pleasure. This was not the base ‘wine-women-and-song’ kind of thing that the English word ‘Epicurean’ now implies, but the appreciation of the nobler and higher refinements of life, such as friendship, art, music, and the like. Moreover, he stressed the quest, not for the fleeting, transitory thing, but that pleasure which might last for a life-time. In other words, absence of pain and serenity of mind (Greek, *atarxia*), rather than pleasure- gratification was his aim. Now *atarxia* was to be sought, first of all, by removal of all false fears, such as the fear of death and the fear of the gods. Such fears, like all vices, were “not conducive” to *atarxia*. Indeed, he saw the highest virtue of all to be *phronesis*, discernment, the ability to size up and estimate the quality and lastingness of pleasure and pain enshrined in various possible actions, so as to maintain a life in the best possible state of *atarxia*. What is relevant for us is Epicurus’ insight is that the criterion of morality is conduciveness to our human final end.

4.3 ARISTOTLE (IV CENTURY BCE):

Aristotle’s ethics begins with the observation that all beings seek their perfection. Humans are no exception to this universal principle and, indeed, ‘happiness’ is really to be founded in the attainment of human perfection or self realization. He then goes on to distinguish between two kinds of human actions that can help us attain authentic happiness and these are the moral and intellectual virtues. Virtue is defined as a habitual state or disposition of the soul and Aristotle is well-known for his dictum that virtue is golden mean between two extremes: thus courage is the mid-point between the “vice of excess” of foolhardiness and the “vice of the minimal,” cowardice. He gives pride of place and space to the five intellectual virtues: practical knowledge (*techné*), prudence (*phronesis*) ratiocination or the ability to make arguments and proofs thanks to logic (*episteme*) intuitive insight (*nous*) and wisdom (*sophia*), the highest and noblest of them all. It is wisdom which enables us to attain the true happiness which is our last end. It is clear that his is a teleological ethics par excellence: the guiding motive in it all is not law or obligation, but what is conducive to one’s end. In other words, for Aristotle, moral rightness or wrongness is seen more in terms of the “good” consciously intended by the human agent. Thus, moral badness is linked to ignorance in the sense that no one seeks evil knowingly and willingly, as such.

4.4 THOMAS AQUINAS (1224-1274)

Thomas Aquinas was arguably the greatest catholic luminary of the middle ages. This Dominican monk, basing his moral philosophy on the teleological *eudaimonia* of Aristotle stressed God as the ultimate end or “supreme good” of humans (as, indeed, of all beings). His

Christian convictions, however, led him to aver that only with the help of God's grace – a free, supernatural gift – could we attain our fullest encounter with our last end, in the next life. God has a plan for all creation – not a kind of fatalistically predetermined one, but rather a vision of creative development, enshrined in the dynamism of every being and directing it to its full flowering. In other words, God's eternal law for all beings is manifest in the natural law, inbuilt into their own natures or essences. This "natural law" is accessible to humans partly through revelation and partly through human reason.

The norm of morality for Aquinas, then, is ultimately God's eternal law or "eternal reason", but more proximately it is "human reason" which can work out its implications by critically reflecting on what the "natural law" entails. That which is in conformity with the demands of the natural law, as discovered partly by the right use of human reason, is morally good; that which is not, is morally bad. Obviously, for Aquinas, the norm of morality ("natural law") is intrinsic to the human act and not an extrinsic command or anything else outside of it.

Aquinas, inspired by Aristotle, distinguished between "speculative" and "practical" reason: the former had to do with theoretical knowledge, the latter with issues of a more practical import (action, more precisely, moral conduct). Furthermore, each of these could be subdivided into a more discursive or argumentative part (ratio, rationality) and a more intuitive aspect (*intellectus*). The intuitive part of speculative reason furnishes ratio with those basic "first principles" it calls upon to carry out its reasoning process (e.g. the principle of identity and contradiction). These "truths" are self-evident and do not require any "proof": indeed, as first principles, they cannot be proved but are the implicit propositions of all argumentation and proof used by ratio. In the same way, there are also some "self-evident" first principles of practical reason, called *synderesis*, such as, "Do good and avoid evil". Aquinas calls them the "first principles of the natural law". The above mentioned example is, of course, relevant to morals. But *synderesis* also has its bearing in other spheres of activity. Aquinas adds some illustrations. For instance, there are those which we humans share with all beings: the principle of self-preservation is one such. Then there are those we share with animals – procreation or reproduction is one of the most important of these. Then there are those which are proper to humans alone: besides the moral one quoted above, there are also similar obligations such as the need to live in society and to get to know about God. These, as we shall see, should not be identified with what we call "conscience".

From these "first principles" which, generally speaking are universal and unchanging, we derive "secondary and more specific ones" which, though also of universal and unchanging import, at least theoretically, are susceptible to change or adaptation in particular concrete cases. Thus, the secondary principle which directs one to always tell the truth and never utter falsehood may be relaxed when an unjust aggressor asks one to tell him where his father is hiding. This is, furthermore, how Aquinas explains how there appears to be variance among the moral practices of people. It is due to wrong argumentation from the first principles: thus, unknown to certain people, they accepted some perversions and corrupt practices as ethically sound. Finally we cannot omit mention of Aquinas' rather thorough treatment of the virtues, among which we must draw attention to prudence, which safeguards Thomistic ethics from the pitfalls of legalism and inflexibility.

4.5 WILLIAM OF OCKHAM (1290-1349)

This medieval Franciscan friar, an inveterate enemy of Thomism, is the person mainly responsible for having established a deep rooted empirical trend into British philosophy, a heritage that would be called upon and developed by Locke, Berkeley and Hume some five hundred years later. As a counterblast to the intellectualism of Aquinas, he championed voluntarism: Ockham appears to be concerned with upholding God's freedom and omnipotence (as he understood it) at all costs. Thus he refused to recognize the wrongness of human acts as stemming from any inherent quality in themselves, but wholly and entirely from the free decision of God, whose omnipotence was absolute, being restricted only by what would be logically contradictory.

But Ockham seems to confuse the whole issue by giving a place to both God's ordered power as well as right reason. The former refers to God's free decision, whereby he has established the actual moral order, opting to make certain actions right and other wrong. He would hardly make a general change in this matter. All this seems to conflict with his other notion which says that a morally good act should also be in conformity with the "right reason." Indeed, he goes along with the common medieval assumption that a person is obliged to follow what, according to his sincere conviction, is in conformity with it, even if he were in error. But this last idea seems to do more credit to Ockham's head than his heart. For if he thereby opened up the possibility for a person who does not accept divine revelation (how else, except through divine revelation could we come to know what is right and what is wrong, since God freely decides this), yet there seems to be a certain contradiction here: if "right reason" can somehow account for moral rightness, then it is not quite dependent exclusively on God's free choice.

4.6 THOMAS HOBBES (1588-1679)

In his classic book *Leviathan* named after the gigantic monster mentioned in the book of Genesis and which was his image of the all powerful state, Hobbes gave us his description of "man in the free state of nature", that is, before humans banded together to set up social structures and institutions. In a word, life was sheer hell in those times: man behaved unto man like a ferocious wild beast (*homo homini lupus*). Indeed that is why humans established the state: its primary aim was to prevent, by sheer superior brute force, humans from attacking each other, expropriating each others' property and tearing each other to shreds. The price each had to pay to attain this measure of peace and order was the sacrifice some of his freedom and his natural desire to possess everything for himself. Like Epicurus, Hobbes was a hedonist: pleasure was the motivating principle for him too. It was the naturally human desire for pleasure (in the form of peace, harmony and a longer life) that led him to set up the state. The state, then, enacted various laws to make humans behave in accordance with the laws of nature. Civil law would codify them in more precise and relevant forms proper to each nation. The state would need to be invested with all power and authority so that none would dare to challenge it. Then only would it be able to curb the natural urge of humans to rape, loot and tyrannize. Power is thus a necessary constituent of law. In effect, for Hobbes, actions are bad because they are forbidden, not the other way round. The source of moral rightness or wrongness, the criterion of morality, is what is the law says, whether it be divine law or positive (civil) law. The ethical teachings of Hobbes have been qualified in various ways. Some call it "Ethical Egoism" in as much as it is based on the allegedly natural and reasonable human urge to seek pleasure and self-preservation. Others prefer to dub it "Social Utilitarianism" because it grounds law on the desire of humans to live in

peace and harmony with each other. A third view is that it is a kind of “Moral Positivism” because it posits divine power (or God’s will) as the ultimate ground of moral good, as the sole criterion of morality.

4.7 JEREMY BENTHAM (1748-1832)

Bentham saw the ethical issue from a more individualistic point of view. His argument was that, since society is made up of individuals, it would be quite in order to view the whole subject from the perspective of individual utility-seeking as the basis of ethics. A “good” law, for Bentham, is one in which “utility” is effected resulting in pleasure or happiness to the party whose interest is concerned. Drawing apparently on Hobbes, he takes it as a clear datum that the seeking of pleasure and the avoidance of pain are the chief human motives in decision making. Yet, he emphasizes, he is not speaking merely of sensual pleasure but also that which arises from intellectual study and benevolent.

Most human beings, however, do not know precisely how to apply this standard in daily life, especially when it is a matter of making an option between multiple choices. To this end he offers “a felicific calculus” as a guideline for the common man in his decision making process. First of all, he observes, it would seem reasonable that one should choose that action which would bring about the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of persons for the longest stretch of time. He then proposes seven norms to help one in making such a measurement. It is all a matter of focusing on the pleasure concerned and checking out its intensity, duration, certainty, nearness, fecundity (its capacity to include other pleasurable sensations), purity (its freedom from any admixture of unpleasant sensations) and inclusiveness (the number of people affected by it). Bentham widened the meaning of pleasure to involve certain altruistic and “unselfish” elements. Be that as it may, the stress he put on the quantitative dimension of pleasure almost “begs for a misunderstanding”.

4.8 IMMANUEL KANT (1724-1804)

The “sage of Königsberg” was to have a major impact on the development of contemporary western thought. The second volume of his famous philosophical trilogy of the “critiques” was devoted to new and revolutionary insights into ethics. Right at the onset of his critique of practical reason he rejects all such system that is based on a “heteronomous” source, that is, on some principle or norm outside the human person. Were we to maintain such a point of view, he tells us, in effect, if a person had to reject that norm, and then there would be no basis helping him or her to be a moral person. Thus, he begins by noting that in us there are not only some a-priori (hence universal and necessary) principles of speculative knowledge in us, but similar principles of practical knowledge. In as much as these are a-priori, they constitute an internal norm of morality in man: “autonomous principles.”

For Kant, the only thing that can be called “good” without qualification is a “good will” – all other “goods,” such as health, wealth and long life can be used for bad ends: they are only relatively “good”. Now, what precisely is a “good will”? A will which acts for the sake of duty alone (and no other motive) is a good will. This is perhaps Kant’s way of telling us that a “good will” does not act out of self-interest. Be that as it may, the kind of language he used has given his doctrine a very “rigorist” appearance. This “duty” is rooted in the moral law itself, which, in turn, is manifest moral consciousness (a-prior synthetic practical judgments). Now,

“universality” is the very form of the moral law – so, once again, a certain rigidity is to be expected of its “categorical” demands: allowing the possibility of exceptions would do violence to this “universal” form of the normal law. The first general formulation of the basic categorical imperative is, for Kant, “I must act such that my way of acting could become a universal procedure.” There are other formulations popularized by Kant, especially “Never treat a person merely as a means,” but they always enshrine some kind of universality as constitutive of its very form. He derived three “postulates” from the undeniable fact of the categorical imperative: human freedom, the immortality of the soul and the existence of God. This is no contradiction of what he had maintained in the earlier Critique: there he held that one cannot prove these truths from pure reason, whereas in the second critique he says that practical reason can and must postulate.

4.9 JOHN STUART MILL (1806-1873)

Author of a treatise entitled, *Utilitarianism*, Mill was even more direct and explicit than Bentham in holding that “utility” or “the greatest happiness principle” should be “the foundation of morals”. However he seemed to widen his criterion to involve not just “the happiness of mankind, but “rather, of all sentient beings”.

But he went on to add further refinement and precision to Bentham’s initial approach. First, he stressed that there is also a qualitative difference between pleasures, and not just a quantitative one. Next, he suggested that what the individual seeks is not his personal or private happiness but the common happiness of all. He even endeavors to give a rational basis to the pleasure principle by appealing to “the conscientious feelings of mankind”, that is, the fact that everybody would say so.

Check Your Progress I

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) What is the common principle in Epicurus’, Thomas Hobbes’ and Jeremy Bentham’s philosophy?

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2) Briefly explain Aristotle’s views on virtues.

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3) What are the seven norms proposed by Bentham for the measurement of pleasure?

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4.10 EMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917):

A French positivist, whose thinking was affected by the rise of the natural sciences, he is also hailed as the father of Sociology. One of his key writings is the *Elementary Forms of Religious Experience*, in which he attempted to give a materialist (positivist) explanation even for religion. From his study of Totemism, which he held to be the originary form of all religions, he concluded that “the gods” were nothing more than the tribal society conceived symbolically. From this he concluded that religious rites, worship and dogma were nothing but various ways and means to make people accept and submit themselves to the laws and customs of their closed tribal group. This same approach he also employed to morality, too. Moral laws, then, are nothing but positive laws enacted by a given society to ensure its stability and preservation. In other words, the norm of morality is plainly and simply concrete positive law. It would be more accurate to call it sociological positivism as it is grounded on human social, rather than individual or private, law.

Durkheim has well brought out the link between human social consciousness and moral development. However he is loath to admit – against the views of even some of his later disciples – that there seems to be a common underlying structure, some kind of common principles at work everywhere, that is, the basis of the admitted diversity of moral set-ups. Again if morality is primarily a matter of “following the crowd,” how do we account for the emergence of radical thinkers who openly and daringly rejected and challenged the existing mores of a given society?

Check Your Progress II

Note: Use the space provided for your answer

1) Brief Durkheim’s materialist explanation of religion.

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2) Explain Kant’s views on moral obligation.

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3) Explain Thomas Aquinas’ views of moral philosophy.

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4.11 LET US SUM UP

It is quite common to find ethics defined, as Paul W. Taylor does, in an excellent introduction to this discipline: “Ethics may be defined as philosophical inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality”. We do not, however, find this approach very illuminating for, as we have seen,

“morals” is nothing but the Latin equivalent of the more Greek term, “Ethics”. If we try to avoid this “*idem per idem*” repetitive definition by saying it studies “the goodness or badness” or “the rightness or wrongness” of human actions, this does not get us much further because, as we have equally seen, terms like “good” or “bad”, “right” or “wrong” are susceptible to many understandings and so possible confusions are not quite dispelled. That is why we try to make clear in precisely what sense that they result in someone being better personal all-round (and not just in some restricted sphere – a good singer, or student, or tennis player).so our definition of ethics would run something as follows: Ethics is a branch of philosophy which studies human actions from the point of view of their enabling a person to become more fully human, more fully alive. We can therefore say that ethics is that branch of philosophy which studies what makes a person truly liberated.

Now, any worthwhile discussion of ethics, sooner or later, confronts us with the phrase “human acts”. We should pause for a moment to underline the meaning and significance of what these words imply. They are actually the legacy of old scholastic thought and still relevant today. We must need to distinguish between what could be called “acts of humans” and “human acts” (the Latin maintains the word play more neatly: *actus humanus* and *actus hominis*). A human act is an act put forward by a person acting in full capacity as human, i.e. out of full awareness and freedom – after all knowledge and free choice are what characterize humans as humans. Only when someone does something knowingly and freely can he/she be held accountable for that act and accordingly, be praised or blamed for it. If someone were, unknowingly, to drink a cup of poisoned tea, no one could accuse him or her of attempted suicide. One might say that what he or she had done was “objectively” a suicidal act (i.e. of itself it would bring about the person’s death or serious illness, if medical intervention were not sought immediately), but “subjectively” he or she could not be blamed for the act. This example should also make us realize that we cannot behave as if only “subjective morality” were important, since that is the area where praise or blame (“moral accountability”) comes in. if the action were “objectively wrong” in itself it would have some bad effects on the agent – psychologically and physiologically – even if he or she did not do it “full knowledge and full consent,” to use the time honoured formula. Ethics, then, is more concerned with actions done as a result of knowledge and free choice: only such actions make us better or worse persons all-round. Acts of humans, that is, actions done unintentionally, unknowingly (including doing an “objectively” wrong action while not knowing such an act is wrong) would not affect one all-round as a person.

4.12 KEY WORDS

Teleology: *telos* is a Greek word for ‘end’, in the sense of a goal to be achieved. So teleology means the study of end.

Deontology: means the science of moral duties

4.13 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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