

RUAHA CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES

SUBJECT:	SOCIAL ETHICS
ACADEMIC YEAR:	2022/ 2023
SEMESTER.	ONE
COURSE CODE:	RFH 112
CLASSES:	BSCSE, BCS, BEHSIT

1.0. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The course will deal with:

- The concepts of philosophy.
- Branches of philosophy.
- The concept of ethics.
- Types of ethics.
- Factors in human behaviour.
- Motives in human behaviour
- Basic principles of ethics.
- Ethical theories.
- Authority in moral judgment.
- Human person.
- Society, authority and obedience in social context.
- Principles and values of social order.
- Life and health.
- Sexuality, marriage, and family.

1.2. OBJECTIVES AND PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The course aims at enabling students meet the following:

1. Understand the nature and genesis of social moral problems in order to make appropriate and meaningful responses to them in the light of divinely inspired principles.
2. Be equipped with mental tools to make rational sense of the ethical concerns in both personal and social spheres.
3. Learn how social reality manifests itself in the family, in the association of work, in private property, and social spheres.

NB.

- ❖ Semester length is 17 weeks (15 of lectures and 2 weeks for university examination).
- ❖ Pass mark for course work or continuous assessment is 16 out of 40% (tests, assignments, seminars, and attendance).
- ❖ Pass mark for university examination is 40% out of 60%

1.0 PHILOSOPHY – ETYMOLOGY AND MEANING

1.1 Origin

The term philosophy is derived from two Greek words: philo (love) and sophia (wisdom), which literally means "love of wisdom." As far as love is concerned, we all have a sense of what love means, but what exactly is wisdom?

Although there are many different ideas about what wisdom is, we can define it as *the proper understanding about the nature of reality*. The wise person, then, has a correct understand about his own nature, the nature of the universe, and the nature of God. This understanding at the same time informs and influences the way he/ she lives his life.

1.2 Meaning

Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental concerns/ problems, connected with issues of existence, knowledge, values etc. Philosophy is distinguished from other ways of addressing such problems by its critical, generally systematic approach and its reliance on rational argument to achieve at what is real.

1.3 Branches of Philosophy

Concentration should be made on the *four core* branches of philosophy namely: *Metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and logic*. Note that, there are other branches of philosophy such as: aesthetics, social and political philosophy, philosophy of language, philosophy of education, philosophy of law, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, philosophy of technology, philosophy of religion, to mention but a few.

1.3.1 Metaphysics (Beyond the physical)

Originally, metaphysics is derived from the Greek word 'meta ta physika' to mean '*beyond or after physics*'. Metaphysics is a discipline of what is beyond (meta) nature (physika) of an object above the mere material. It

is the study of the most general aspects of reality that are beyond the scientific or mathematical realm, for instance, aspects like identity, the nature of the mind, and free will, existence of soul, and the afterlife. It is viewed as the knowledge of things which lie beyond sense experiences.

1.3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology or sometime called the theory of knowledge stems from the Greek words episteme (knowledge) and logos (word/speech). It is the branch of philosophy dealing with the nature, origin, scope and possibility of knowledge.

Being the study of knowledge, epistemology concentrates on the processes by which the truth of something can be achieved. Thus, it tries to address questions as: What is knowledge? What can I know? How is knowledge acquired? Can we be certain of anything? References can be made to some of the famous epistemologists are Descartes, Kant and Hume.

1.3.3 Ethics (Moral philosophy)

Ethics is the systematic study of the fundamental principles underlying morality. The purpose of doing this is to discover what types of conduct are good, right, bad or wrong. In general, ethics is a search for knowledge of good life and right conduct. Famous works on ethics are by philosophers as early as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Nietzsche.

2.3.4 Logic

The word *logic* originates from the Greek word (logos) meaning *thought or reason*. Logic is most often said to be the study of arguments and right reasoning. It is the tool that philosophers use to study other philosophical categories.

Good logic includes the use of good thinking skills and the avoidance of logical fallacies. Logic enhances clarity of thought and systematization of

principles. It tries to avoid the imaginary or assumptions without real logical proof.

2.0 ETHICS

2.1 Origin

The word ethics goes back to the ancient Greek "ethos" meaning character, habit, customs, ways of behaviour, etc. It is also called *moral philosophy*. The words *moral/morality* come from Latin word "mos/ mores pl." signifying customs, habit, character, behaviour, etc.

The terms *ethics* and *morality* are often taken as synonyms, but sometimes they are distinguished, however, in the sense that **ethics** deals with principles, general judgments, and norms by which we ought to live, whereas, **morality** has been further elaborated as action or behaviour which is concerned with 'good' or 'evil', of particular traditions, groups or individuals (Steven, 2002).

2.2 Meaning

Ethics is a philosophical study of morality. It is a science concerned with moral behaviour. It propounds the principles which make our conduct moral. It involves learning what is right or wrong. Here, the word right as derived from a Latin word "*rectus*", literally means 'straight' or 'according to rule'. This puts much emphasis on the need of observing principles which make our conduct right or straight.

Ethics therefore, is a process of inquiry and reflection of moral issues as it emphasizes on what ought to be done to achieve what is good and what ought not to be done to avoid what is evil. As a philosophical discipline, it studies the values and guidelines by which we live. It is a normative/regulative science in as much as it regulates and directs human's life and gives the right direction to one's existence. So, the general study of goodness and right action is the main task of ethics (Abeson, Riziel, and Nielsen, 2006).

Otherwise, the concept and meaning of ethics can facilitate the understanding of what **Social Ethics** is. Generally, Social ethics is the sum of all guidelines and principles that a group of people have decided to refer to in order to be recognized and accepted. It leads people to organize their interests and desires in view of their meaning and their consequences, so as to decide what they want most.

Briefly, ethics as a branch of philosophy investigates the questions "What is the best way for people to live?" and "What actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances?" In practice, ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime.

2.3 Types of Ethics

There are three subdivisions of ethics as normative ethics, meta-ethics, and descriptive ethics.

2.3.1 Normative ethics

Normative ethics being a branch of ethics evaluates standards or norms by which we can judge human action to be right or wrong. It is mainly concerned with what ought to be done rather than what is the case. So, normative ethics affects our lives at all levels: personal, interpersonal, social, and environmental as it gives us practical guidelines or norms that we can apply to real life situations. Based on this, it is sometimes referred to as applied ethics (Boss, 2004).

2.3.2 Meta-ethics

Meta-ethics is concerned, in particular, with matters of existence (ontology), meaning (semantics) and knowledge (epistemology). As a philosophical discipline, it deals with analysis of the meaning and nature of terms by asking questions as What is the meaning, nature, function of ethical terms like right, wrong, good and bad? What is the analysis of terms like action, conscience, free will, intention, promise excuse, motive,

reason, responsibility etc? With these questions, meta-ethics does not consider whether an action is good or bad, rather it questions the goodness and badness of morality itself is? It does not propound any moral principles or goal for action. It has been primarily interested in classification and philosophical understanding of terms (Armstrong, Botzler, 2004).

2.3.3 Descriptive ethics (Comparative ethics)

Descriptive ethics deals with what people actually believe to be right or wrong. It evaluates human actions on the basis of law and customs. In fact, different societies have structured their moral principles which are not forever. They tend to change from time to time and expect people to behave accordingly. Descriptive ethics then, studies moral beliefs and practices of different cultures and describes to others about what is good, bad, right, or wrong.

Descriptive Ethics is sometimes known as comparative ethics because it compares the ethics of past and present. It also has some inputs from other disciplines such as Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology and History to explain the moral rightness and wrongness.

3.0 FACTORS IN HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

3.1 Introduction

It is very essential to understand human behaviour in today's world as the existence of the organization depends on the employees/ individuals. Without understanding human behaviour it is very difficult to work and live in any organization.

All organizations are composed of individuals, with different personality, attitudes, values, perception, motives, aspirations and abilities. The main reason to understand behaviour is that individuals are different. No two individuals are similar. Individual differences are many for example some

employees are motivated to work and some are not. This can be due to several reasons.

Before we proceed to understand human behaviour, it is better to know what the term behaviour means. **Behaviour can be defined as a response/s which is observed directly/ indirectly.**

3.2 Factors affecting human behaviour

Behaviour is affected by factors relating to the person, including:

3.2.1. Physical factors

This involves issues of age, health/ illness/ pain, influence of a substance or medication, rewards, punishment etc.

3.2.2. Personal and emotional factors

This includes personality, beliefs, expectations, emotions etc.

3.2.3. Life experiences

This entails issues pertaining to community life, culture, friends, events etc.

3.2.4. Personal needs and wants.

Note that, the ethical order of man is driven from his nature and of being to which his action is related according to the ethical principles (action follows being). The goal to be achieved is the most decisive criterion for decision of what is to be approved ethically good and what is to be rejected as unethical.

3.3 Motives in human behaviour

The motives behind a person's behaviour can include:

3.3.1 Views beyond the natural phenomenon (Religious view)

3.3.2 Attitudes.

3.3.3 Disposition.

3.3.4 Basic or fundamental options.

Further Readings

Abeson, Riziel, and Nielsen (2006). "Ethics, History of" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Donald M. Borchert.

Armstrong, S., and Botzler, R., (2004). *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, 3rd ed. USA, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Boss.J, (2004). *Ethics for Life*, 3rd ed. A text with readings, USA,
McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

Steven, L. (2002). *A Guide to Ethics*, USA, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

PART 02.

4.5 End of Human Act

A human person does not act aimlessly. Every human act, no matter how trivial/minor it is, is done with some intention. So, the end or intention of a human act is the purpose/goal that prompts one to perform such an act. The purpose of a human act is significant because it defines the nature of the act and it reveals the moral judgment of the doer.

Generally, the end is the purpose or goal of an act. It can be the end of the act itself or the end of the doer. The end of the act is the natural termination or completion of an activity. For instance, the end of eating is nourishment but that of reading is comprehension and that of a basketball game is scoring a goal.

The end of the doer is the motive or reason why a person performs an act. For example, a student saves money because she/he wants to buy something or use it for vacation.

4.6 Kinds of End

There are several kinds of end of the doer namely: proximate and remote, intermediate, and ultimate.

4.5.1 Proximate End

The Proximate End is the purpose which the doer wishes to accomplish immediately. Example: arriving in the destination after a long journey.

4.5.2 Remote End

Remote End is the purpose which the doer wishes to accomplish sometimes later. Example: Eating – its proximate end is the satisfaction of one's hunger, while its remote end is the promotion of one's health.

4.5.3 Intermediate End

The intermediate end is that which is sought as a means for obtaining another thing. The intermediate end may either lead to another intermediate, or an ultimate end (ref. examples below).

4.5.4 Ultimate End

The ultimate end is that which is desired for its sake. It completes the act and stops the further activity. For example, a student may think of his/her graduation as his/her ultimate purpose. The series of activities that engage him/her in school, like attending

classes, writing reports, joining clubs, and passing the exams are his/her intermediate ends leading to the ultimate end of obtaining an academic diploma or degree.

4.7 Stages to Reach the End

There are numerous component parts that make up the complex human act. For our sake, let us deal with only six of them.

- Apprehension of the good/ end by the intellect.
- The willing/volition to acquire it.
- Deliberation/discussion about means.
- Consent to means by the will.
- Choice of means
- Execution.

4.8 Last End

The last end is that object in which the agent's desire rests. It is that object which, by its very nature, requires that all actions be subordinated to it, and that in it all desires shall rest. For instance, a student may indulge in exercises in order to win a prize, because, by gaining an award/prize, he will please his parents, and by striving to please his parents he will please God. In this act of the student, the prize is the nearest end, his parents a farther end, and God the last end.

4.9 Morality of Human Act

The morality of a human act depends on: the object chosen; the end in view or the intention; and the circumstances of the action. The three make up the sources, or constitutive elements of the morality of a human act. Moral standards on the other hand involve the rules people have about the kinds of actions they believe are morally right and wrong.

4.10 Principle/ Doctrine of Double Effect

There are instances in human life when man is confronted with two or more necessary evils. In such situations, ethical principles are to be made clear. This principle aims to provide specific guidelines to undertake when it is morally permissible to perform an action in search of a good end in full knowledge that the action will also bring about bad results. For instance, *in the case of a pregnant mother whose womb is affected by cancer and it is clear that if operation cannot be done, the mother and the baby might lose their lives. But if the operation can be performed one of the two will survive.*

Applying the preference rule (Double Effect) to this matter, four conditions are to be followed:

- The action itself must be good.
- The evil effect may not be willed but only foreseen and tolerated.
- The intention of the agent must be good.
- There must be a grave reason to justify the admission of indirect evil object.

4.0 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF ETHICS

4.1 Human Act and Act of man

4.1.1 Human Act

Human act (actus humanus - Latin) is an act of decision, **whose source is in rational knowledge and free will.** It is an act which originates from the will with a full knowledge of the end or goal to which the act leads. For the human act is an act of the will, and the will cannot act unless the intellect proposes to it something to which it may tend, i. e., something good. The will is the power of tending to a good which the intellect proposes to it. **So, an act to be a free act and consequently a human act, it is to be done without any internal or external pressure. It is to be achieved with full knowledge, freedom, and voluntariness.**

4.1.2 Act of Man

Not every act that a human being does is a typically human act. Human activities like the circulation of blood, heartbeat, over which normal people in general have no control are not classified as human acts. **Such acts which are beyond the control of humans and those which they share in common with animals are called as Acts of humans.** So, **act of man is the act achieved without knowledge, consent, and any state of voluntariness.**

4.2 Elements of Human Act

Two essential elements constitute a human act: **The intellectual element and the volitive element.**

4.2.1 Intellectual Element

Knowledge is one of the important qualities which distinguish humans from other sentient/ emotional beings. The human act is voluntary when its different elements and its implications are sufficiently known by the agent or the doer prior to the operation of

the will. This process of knowing entails certain important conditions or stages.

- Adequate knowledge of the aspired object.
- Intention to the action whose object is to be pursued.
- Judgement on the value of the act.

The fulfilment of the above elements is found to be essential based on the fact that a human person cannot consciously and freely will something without having proper knowledge about what the object one is concerned with and therefore conscious of the act one is to perform in order to achieve the desired aim.

4.2.2 Volitive Element

Another important characteristic which sets apart the human person from animals is that of voluntariness or what we commonly designate as **free will**. *It is the task of the intellect to conceptualize the good, to propose it to the will as something desirable, and to judge the suitability of the means in its attainment.* When we hold a person morally responsible for his/her action, we assume that the act was done *freely, knowingly and willingly*.

4.3 Obstacles/ Impediments to Human Act

In the process of performing a human act, the individual might encounter certain obstacles. The factors (obstacles) may impede fully or partially the working of the intellect and free choice of the will. This section elaborates some of the main impediments which might affect either the intellectual or the volitive element (or both together) of the human action.

4.3.1 Ignorance

To a great extent, ignorance affects the intellectual dimension/ aspect of the human act. It is viewed as lack of enough knowledge in an individual with regard to the nature or moral quality of an act

one is performing or proposes to perform. Ignorance is mainly twofold: *Invincible ignorance and vincible ignorance.*

4.3.1.1 Invincible ignorance

This is a kind of ignorance which cannot be dispelled by reasonable diligence. Such ignorance almost renders the act performed as involuntary and consequently the individual may not be imputable for the act for what is unknown cannot be the object of volition.

4.3.1.2 Vincible ignorance

Vincible ignorance can be eliminated by the application of reasonable diligence. Here the agent has not put in enough effort to gain the required knowledge and as such the concerned person is guilty or imputable for the act performed under such type of ignorance.

4.3.2 Passion

Feelings or passions are emotions or movements of the sensitive appetite that incline us to act or not to act in regard to something felt or imagined to be good or evil.

Passion is often viewed as a powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, for instance, an experience of strong hatred or sexual desire. So, the intensity of the emotions causes difficulties in making balanced and objective deliberation. There are two categories of passion: *Antecedent and Consequent.*

4.3.2.1 Antecedent passion

This refers to passion brought out without the consent of the will, and as such, a person might not be fully responsible for it.

4.3.2.2 Consequent passion

This is a kind of passion which is within the control of the will; therefore the agent is responsible for the arousal of the passion and as such accused for the act.

4.3.3 Habit

Habit is an acquired tendency of doing something as a result of repeated practices. It may be voluntary or involuntary depending on whether it was done with consent of a person or without. Habits though exert certain force they can be overcome by committed efforts.

4.3.4 Fear

Fear is an impression resulting from a threatening evil difficult to avoid. It may be grave or mild according to whether it is caused by a grave evil or only by a mild evil which can be easily avoided. Fear hampers the use of reason and merely reduces the degree of voluntariness, and as such usually lessens its culpability.

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Applying the preference rule (Double Effect) to this matter, four conditions are to be followed:

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- The intention of the agent must be good.
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Supplementary Readings

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Armstrong, S., and Botzler, R., (2004). *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence*, 3rd ed. USA, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.

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Composta, D., (2000). *Moral Philosophy and Social Ethics*. Bangalore:
TPI.

Steven, L. (2002). *A Guide to Ethics*, USA, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.



4.10 Law

4.10.1 Meaning

It is an ordinance of reason promulgated by one who has care of the community for the common good or common welfare. It is there to govern or regulate human behaviour.

4.10.2 Types of law

Law can be categorised as:

4.10.2.1 Eternal law

God is its source. It is meant to govern all things that exist in the mind of God. Eternal law directs the universe as a whole to the common good of God Himself. **It, therefore, is the ultimate source of all law and the ultimate directive principle of all acts and motions of creatures to their proper ends.**

4.10.2.2 Natural law

Natural law (unwritten law) **can be viewed as law given by birth, inborn, not made by human beings.** It is the **fundamental principle of that directs human acts.**

It has the elements of **universality, and stability** in the sense that the law is applied by all people and absolutely essential, example: **Do good and avoid evil.** Under this, everybody is bound to obey independently under the guidance of the will.

4.10.2.3 Civil/Human law

It directly concerns the external acts of human beings. **It commands certain acts that dispose men to become virtuous and forbid other acts that lead to vice and tend to make life in society impossible.** Civil law is an **interpretation of natural law in concrete situations.**

Generally, the end or purpose of law is the **common good** whereas the function of law is to direct human acts to achieve the common good or common end; such as **peace, tranquillity, order, development, perfection**, just to mention but a few. So, where there is no law, there emerges chaos, disharmony and lack of order.

4.11 Life of virtue

4.11.1 Meaning

More specifically, Virtue is a habitual, well-established readiness or disposition of man's powers directing them to some specific goodness of action. ***It is one's permanent disposition to perform morally good acts.***

A virtue is not a natural endowment. Nobody is born good or bad. Acts, conduct, and habits make one good or bad. ***Virtue is an acquired habit as a result of rewarding repetitions of good or right actions.*** As a habit, it is killed by prolonged neglect and, or repeated contrary actions.

Virtue originates from the free will which is capable of operative habits. So, virtue is an operative habit. The will is the subject of virtue and by itself is an operative power. Generally, human acts are acts governed by the will. And, only human acts become virtues as long as the will approves them morally good and acceptable.

4.11.2 Life of Virtue

A life of virtue is a life in the good control of reason and rational desire. It comes from good will which loves the morally good and inclines all actions and natural capabilities toward the morally good. The good will's love of the morally good is the key to all life of virtue. ***A life of virtue is a life in accord with virtues.***

4.11.3 Types of Virtues

Virtues can be classified as: *Natural and Supernatural.*

4.11.3.1 Natural virtues

Natural virtues result from good actions that are frequently repeated, example - generosity, patience etc.

4.11.3.2 Supernatural virtues

Supernatural virtues are **virtues that we cannot acquire unless God disposes our souls in a special manner**. Supernatural virtues can be further divided into *theological (divine) virtues and moral virtues*.

4.11.3.2.1 Theological virtues

Theological virtues originate from God Himself as the immediate object. They include: *faith, hope, and charity*.

4.11.3.2.2 Moral virtues

Moral virtues serve as means for arriving at God, our last end. They regulate our relations to our fellow men and to all creatures. They include:

- **Prudence** (enlightens the reason as to what should be done).
- **Justice** (inclines the will to render to everyone his/her due).
- **Temperance** (moderates the pleasures).
- **Fortitude** (assists in the adherence to a reasonable course of action when there is difficulty either in acquiring good or avoiding evil).

4.12 Justice

Justice, being a moral virtue, may be defined as ***the strong and firm will to give to each his/her due. It is a habitual disposition whose subject is the will. It is the objective right that is owed to each person and community***. Justice facilitates the unbiased search for objective right and so determines the will to acknowledge and fulfil that

right as known. As far as natural law is concerned, the virtue of **epikeia** applies here.

4.12.1 Kinds of justice

4.12.1.1 Commutative justice

Commutative justice **is that which obtains between equals, normally between persons but also between a person and a group considered as a moral person.** Its aim is the utility of both parties who exchange their goods or services. It demands that one strive for a fair standard of giving and receiving in return, and forbids encroaching on the rights of others, **for instance, by theft, fraud, or unjust damage.**

4.12.1.2 General or legal justice

General or legal justice **seeks the common good, and here the community is the bearer of rights;** it is attained in the promulgation of laws that further the common good in the individual's obeying such legislation so as to achieve that good.

4.12.1.3 Distributive justice

Distributive justice intends the good of each individual as a member of the community. It is related to legal justice in the sense that, the more the individual devotes his efforts to the common good, the more the community should also devote to his good.

4.13 Right

A right is a person's moral claim to the means of reaching an end that is his/her, and that a person is objectively responsible for reaching. As a rational and free being, a person has the moral responsibility to choose those means that will lead to his/her natural and ultimate end. **Men generally have a right to do what is right for them. And since a man is born with this nature and with specific ends, such rights or claims can be called natural rights.**

Among man's *natural rights*, **the right to life is basic**, for without it none of the others can be securely exercised; and since the right to life is a right to properly human life, other natural rights are implicitly included in this first one.

Man has a right, then to:

- Freedom of conscience.
- Worship God, and to work toward his/her final end
- Follow his/her vocation in life.
- Education.
- Employment.
- Adequate family income.
- Private possession of wealth.
- Association with other human beings.
- Opportunities for spiritual and cultural development.
- Freedom of expression and of action within the bounds set by law.
- Free movement.
- Work.
- Vote.
- Be elected.

4.13 Conscience

Unlike justice and right, **conscience is an act of judgment**; it is the knowledge that accompanies an action and notifies the agent of its rightness or wrongness according to ethical laws or principles. **It is an inner source of truth. It is an innate voice that tells us the right thing to do in a given situation.**

Conscience works together or in connection with two mental human faculties being: **the intellect and will**, since the two faculties are used to make decision or judge what is right and wrong. **Thus, to go against a sure or certain conscience is to go against one's very self; and is morally wrong.**

Further Readings

- Beauchamp, L., (2001). *Philosophical Ethics: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, Boston: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.
- Billington, R., 2003). *Living Philosophy: An Introduction to Moral Thought*, 3rd ed.,London, Routledge.
- Boss J., (2004). *Ethics for Life; A text with Readings*, 3rd ed. USA, McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Composta, D., (2000). Moral Philosophy and Social Ethics. Bangalore: TPI.
- Nyaki C., (2017). *Philosophical Ethics*, Tanzania, Ndanda Mission Press

Lecture 4

5.0 ETHICAL THEORIES

A theory is a set of interrelated concepts, definitions, and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena (Kerlinger and Lee, 2000).

Most ethical theories are mixed theories, sometimes predominantly teleological (concerned with consequences) and sometimes mainly deontological (not concerned with consequences). In order to have more insights with regard to the ethical theories, let us survey the following theories of morality.

5.1 Ethical Egoism (Thomas Hobbes 1588-1679)

Hobbes - English Political Philosopher - believed that **human beings are egoist by nature; and that without societal rules to control human natural selfishness, life would be solitary poor, nasty, brutish and very short.**

Critique

- It fails to take into consideration the fact that human beings are not isolated from each other, and that the moral and immoral actions of all persons affect other people around them.

5.2 Ethical utilitarianism (Jeremy Bentham 1748-1832)

The theory maintains that **an act is right (moral) if it is useful in bringing about a desirable or good end. So, everyone should perform that act or follow that moral rule that will bring about the greatest good or happiness.**

Critique

- The theory has a subjective outlook since what is viewed by someone as something good cannot be viewed as good for all.

5.3 The Theory of Duty – deontology (Immanuel Kant – 1724-1804)

Immanuel Kant - German philosopher and scientist - held that **nothing is good in itself except a good will, and a good will is one that wills**

to act in accord with the moral laws regardless of interests or consequences.

He further argued that **reason was the second most important human attribute** and that it was possible to set up valid absolute moral rules on the basis of reason alone without reference to any supernatural being or by empirical evidence.

Critique

- The theory discounts outcome as a valid factor in evaluating the morality of an action. While it is not necessarily wise to rely solely on outcome (as in utilitarianism), it is not a good idea to completely ignore the outcome altogether.

5.4 Human Right Theory (John Locke 1632-1704)

The British political philosopher – John Locke – believed that **every human being has certain rights that derive from their own nature and not from their government or its laws.** The legitimacy of government, in fact, rested on the respect that it afforded these natural rights.

Critique

- The theory did not consider the claims of all people, even though the language speaks in universal terms. John Locke's actual focus was the protection of the rights of European men who owned property. Women, along with indigenous peoples, servants, and wage laborers, were not recognized as full rights-holders.

5.5 Ethical subjectivism (René Descartes 1596–1650)

Ethical Subjectivism maintains that **moral opinions/judgments are based on feelings and attitudes of the persons who think about a particular phenomenon and nothing more. In this view, there is no such thing as objective right or wrong.**

Accordingly, collective moral opinions come about when many people agree on ethical matters. There is no ultimate right and wrong to aspire to, only the rights and wrongs currently considered valid in a society.

Critique

- It overlooks the fact that a person can be mistaken in his/her moral beliefs or can be wrong in his/her moral evaluation.
- It may lead to some people believing that if they approve of something, it must be good though too bad it is (I approve of killing so it must be good).
- If moral statements have no objective truth, then it becomes so hard to blame people for behaving in a way that is *wrong*, for instance, if *murder* has no objective truth, then how can we justify punishing people for murder? We can only justify punishment for *murder* on the basis of the objective truth that most normal people in society disapprove of it.

5.6 Ethical Relativism (Protagoras 485-415 BCE)

Protagoras - the first known relativist in Western culture - is best known for his claim that, "*Of all things the measure is Man*", *of the things that are, and of the things that are not, and that everything is relative to individual experience, judgment, and interpretation*. So, what is either morally right or wrong is different from one person to another, from one culture to another culture.

Therefore, according to ethical relativism, there is no absolute truth, only the truths that a particular individual or culture happen to believe. For instance, *it would be morally wrong for Sarah to have an abortion if Sarah believed that abortion is always morally wrong*. Conclusively, there are no universal moral standards guiding human morality.

Critique

If the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on a society's norms, then it follows that one must obey the norms of one's society and to diverge from those norms is to act immorally. This means that if I am a member of a society that believes that homosexuality is morally permissible, then I must accept that practice as morally right. But such a view promotes social conformity and leaves no room for moral reform or improvement in a society.

- Relativism therefore deprives people of any means of raising moral objections against terrible social customs provided that those customs are approved by the codes of the societies in which they exist.

5.7 Ethical Hedonism (Epicurus 342-270 BCE)

The term hedonism is derived from Greek *hedone*, meaning *pleasure*. Ethical hedonists proclaim that **pleasure is the most important search of mankind and the only thing that is good for an individual. Hedonists believe that pleasure is the only good in life, and pain is the only evil.** Thus, the life's goal of every person should be to minimize pain and maximize pleasure, more specifically pleasures of the senses.

Critique

- Pleasure is essentially a subjective feeling, and only the individual is the competent judge of how much pleasure or pain a course of action affords him. What is more pleasurable for one may be less for another.

5.8 Ethical Altruism (French sociologist Auguste Comte in 1850s)

The term *altruism*, initially derived from Latin *alter*, meaning *other*. Altruism, therefore, is an ethical doctrine that holds that **individuals have a moral obligation to help, serve, or benefit others, if necessary at the sacrifice of self-interest.** More precisely, an action is

morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable to everyone.

Critique

- The idea that it is virtuous to treat others as more important than oneself is degrading and demeaning to the self and hinders the individual's pursuit of self-development, excellence and creativity.
- There is no rational ground for asserting that sacrificing yourself in order to serve others is morally superior to pursuing your own self-interest.

Supplementary Readings

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