

# PHI104: Introduction to Ethics

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## **ETHICS**

### **Ethics: Three definitions of ethics**

- Ethics may be defined as the normative science of the conduct of human beings living in societies – a science which judges the conduct to be right or wrong, good or bad or in some similar way.  
(William Lillie, *An Introduction to Ethics*)
- Ethics is a branch of philosophy; it is moral philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments. (W. K. Frankena, *Ethics*)
- Ethics may be defined as philosophical inquiry into the nature and grounds of morality.  
(Paul W. Taylor, *Principles of Ethics: An Introduction*)

### **The purpose of ethics**

- Ethics is necessary to resist social chaos where life is horrible, impure or miserable in other words 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.
- Ethics is a set of rules that if followed by nearly everyone, will promote the flourishing of nearly everyone.
- These rules restrict our freedom but only in order to promote greater freedom and well-being.
- The five purposes of ethics are:
  1. To keep society from falling apart;
  2. To minimize human suffering;
  3. To promote human flourishing;
  4. To resolve conflicts of interest in just and orderly ways;
  5. To assign praise and blame, reward and punishment and guilt.

### **Ethics and religion**

- Morality and religion both are related to duties and obligations. Both call for the exercise of conscience. Morality as well as religion emphasizes goodness, truth and peace.
- The practice of morality need not be motivated by religious considerations. Moral precepts need not be grounded in revelation or divine authority as religious teachings are.
- Ethics is grounded in reason and human experience.
- Religion includes wider range of duties than morality, for example, worship, rites, prayer etc. are among the most important of religious duties but morality has only an indirect concern with such duties in so far as they affect a man's conduct in relation to his fellow-men.
- Religion is characteristically an emotional experience whereas morality is grounded in reason.
- Religion is knowledge based, morality is action based. For religion theoretical study of knowing God is essential; knowledge is all important toward the behavior of the self. For morality knowledge is for the sake of action.
- Religion has its center in God; morality has its center in man. Not to harm anyone is moral duty, whereas, to be loyal to the supernatural God and to follow God's commands are religious duties.

### **Ethics and law**

- The aim of ethics and law is human welfare. Ethical rules are to secure welfare of the members of the community; state laws act as keeping peace among the citizens of the

state.

- Ethics is a normative or idealistic science which emphasizes moral values, on the other hand, laws emphasize on certain legality in order to maintain social security and progress of the society. Law is always to the protection of human rights and welfare so it is with ethics.
- Both ethics and law are dependent on value in order to fulfill their aims.
- Ethics is related with voluntary actions of individual person; law is related with collection of people.
- Ethics examines on the basis of moral value; law is based on the interest or utility of the people.
- Ethical laws are unwritten undocumented but laws are written and documented.
- Ethical bindings are should or ought, laws are forced to be followed otherwise punishment will be faced.

### **Ethics and psychology**

- Ethics is a normative science of conduct of human beings and psychology is a science of behavior of human beings as well as animal beings.
- Both ethics and psychology study voluntary, involuntary and non-voluntary behavior of human beings.
- In order to evaluate a certain conduct ethics reviews the will, motive, intention and desires of the individual. Ethical studies of conduct require a focus on the psychological stages of the individual. These show similarities between the two subjects.
- But ethics is evaluative science whereas psychology is a factual science. Methods of ethics are analytic and deductive, methods of psychology are experimental and inductive. The scope of psychology is broader than that of ethics.

## DEONTOLOGICAL AND CONSEQUENTIAL THEORIES

### **Deontological Moral Theory**

**Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)**

**His main works:** *Critique of Pure Reason*

*Critique of Practical Reason*

*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*

#### **Kant is:**

- a deontologist (believes in duty for duty's sake).
- an absolutist (accepts unqualified, unconditional motives as good and believes in no exception).
- a rationalist (faith on reason as the guide of morality).

#### **The Good Will:**

- For Kant, a good motive or a good will is central.
- While there are many things, which we call good, a good motive is the only thing that has intrinsic value.
- Goodness is to be found in an inner quality of will, motive or intention and not in an outward performance or the consequences of one's act.
- The true object of reason is to produce a will, which is good in itself, since nothing else is always and necessarily good.
- Other things, like intelligence, courage and happiness are usually good, but they may be used so as to promote evil.
- Intelligence or courage, when used to carry out an evil purpose, may increase the evil.
- In order for the motive to be good, a man must act from a sense of duty.
- Good will alone is praiseworthy and that means acting out of pure respect for moral law.
- A good will or good motive is therefore the indispensable condition of the moral life.

#### **The Categorical Imperative:**

- The moral law expresses in the "categorical imperative".
- The categorical imperative is a direct command to act.
- A hypothetical imperative depends upon an "if" and is conditional.
- According to Kant a hypothetical imperative is not an expression of the moral law.
- The categorical imperative is the voice of duty, the sense of "ought" within the morally sensitive person.
- It is a priori or derived from the reason itself.
- The categorical imperative is expressed in two general rules.
- The first general rule states that "Act only on maxims which you can at the same time will to be universal law".
- It means that we should act in such a way that the principle for our actions could become a universal law.
- Thus in order for an action to qualify as moral we should always be able to affirm that all people at all times and places should follow the same principle of conduct, e.g., promise keeping, truth telling.
- The second general rule states that "Treat every rational being including yourself always as an end, and never as a mere means".

- It emphasizes respect for persons and affirms that people should not be used just as instruments or objects.
- Lying and suicide are condemned because in both instances we are treating someone (or the individual himself) only as a means. Here human beings are used as objects and not as persons.
- The dignity of persons are denied when we use them as means to get the desired ends.
- Kant holds that we must treat people as ends rather than as means.

### **Consequential or Utilitarian Ethical Theory**

#### **J.Bentham (1748-1832) & J.S.Mill (1806-73)**

- Consequentialism as an ethical theory holds that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends not on the intentions of the person performing the action, but rather on the consequences of the action.
- Utilitarianism is known as consequentialism.
- Utilitarianism is based on the assumption that the ultimate aim of all human activity is happiness.
- Utilitarianism is a form of hedonism.
- According to utilitarianism an act is right if it promotes a balance of pleasure over pain.
- Utilitarianism believes that greatest happiness for greatest number is good and the reverse is bad.
- Utilitarianism is based on two main principles: (1) the utility principle implies pleasure, advantage; (2) the consequentialist principle implies result or end of the action.
- Utility is that property in any act or object whereby it tends to produce an advantage, a benefit, pleasure or happiness.
- Consequence refers to the result of the action which it produces.
- Utilitarianism deals with the probable consequences of various possible courses of action in any circumstance.
- From the various possible courses of action whichever is the most likely to bring about the most happiness (or at least the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness) is the right action.
- For Bentham probable consequences are calculated by hedonic calculus.
- Hedonic calculus serves the quantitative measurement for pleasure and pain experiences.
- The calculus determines some pleasure more preferable to other on the basis of intensity, duration, certainty, nearness, fruitfulness, purity and extent.
- The quantitative measurement is provided by Bentham.
- The qualitative distinction among pleasures plays an important role in Mill's theory.
- For Mill "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied".
- For Mill quality rather than quantity of pleasure determines the moral value of any act.

#### **Negative Utilitarianism**

- States that an act which originates less pain and suffering is more ethical than producing more pleasure.
- Emphasizes avoidance of pain and suffering than enhancement of pleasure.
- Believes in minimization of pain and suffering than maximization of pleasure.
- Believes in the prohibition of excessive and unnecessary experiments on animals.

- Puts restrictions on animal farming and meat diets.
- Encourages biodiversity on the basis of preservation and conservation policy regarding forestry and wild animals.
- An act is good if it gives less pain and suffering to the consumers.

## **PERFECTIONISM**

### **Perfectionism**

- Perfectionism believes in self-realization of the individual.
- Perfection refers to perfection of character or rational control of feelings, emotions and desires.
- According to perfectionism happiness is the goal of life which can be attained by the exercise of the soul.
- Happiness springs from the harmony of desires done by reason.
- Perfectionism emphasizes the realization of the ideal rational or social self in intimate relationship with others in society.
- Self-realization means realization of rational self and not of the sentient self.
- Self-realization refers to the development of personality; it consists in actualization of immense potentialities of the self.
- Self-realization means the achievement of health, happiness, knowledge, beauty and virtue, which are the ideal of human life and specially achievement of that ideal which fits in with a person's inborn aptitudes.
- Unfolding the aptitudes will raise him to the height of his personality through which he can make his best contribution to the progress of humanity.
- Self-realization of different persons depends upon the development of different aptitudes.
- In every case it means the realization of an ideal, rational or social self in co-operation with society.
- Self-realization is accompanied with happiness which is an index of perfection.
- Prominent perfectionist philosophers are Plato, Aristotle and Hegel.

### **Die to Live**

- According to Hegel, the self must die as a narrow, personal individual and must live the richer, wider life of the spiritual universe beyond him.
- Hegel does not advocate the total destruction of sensibility for the higher life of the self but control of it by reason and also transformation of it into an expression of the higher life of reason. Self-realization can be achieved through self-abnegation.

### **Be a Person**

- According to Hegel, we should constitute our personality out of our individuality.
- We should realize our higher self by subjugating our lower self.
- Personality is the identification of a person, we should raise ourselves to the utmost to realize our personality and also respect that of others.
- Hegel says, be a person and respect others as person.



## **ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS**

### **Environmental ethics**

- The study of the ethics of human interactions with and impacts upon the natural world and natural systems; the branch of ethics concerned with practical issues (such as pollution and biodiversity preservation) and matters of principle arising from such interactions.

### **Anthropocentrism (human centered)**

- A stance that limits moral standing to humans, confines the scope of morality and moral concern to human interests and regards nothing but human well-being as valuable intrinsically.
- This theory holds that only humans have moral value; we do not have direct responsibilities to the natural world.

### **Non-anthropocentrism**

- This theory grants moral standing to such natural objects as animals and plants.
- This theory upholds animal rights and taking care of threatened extinction of many plant and animals species.

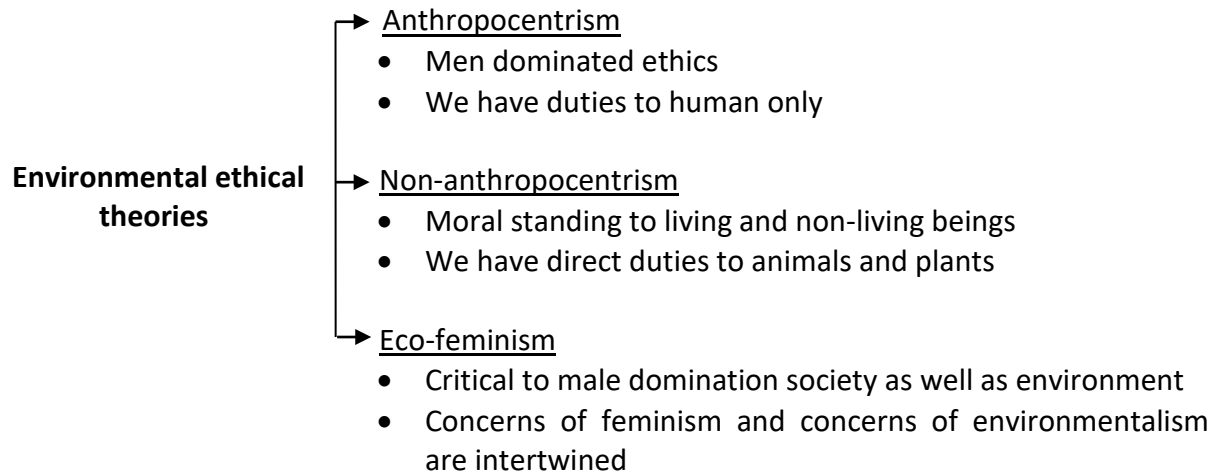
### **Holistic theory**

- A theory which locates independent value in wholes (such as specie or ecosystems or society as a whole) rather than in individual organisms or members of society.
- We have moral responsibilities to collections of individuals rather than those individuals who constitute the whole.
- Our ethical duties are drawn to collections or 'wholes', e.g., species, populations, ecosystem, etc.

## **ECO-FEMINISM → ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS AND FEMINISM**

### **Concerns of environmental ethics.**

- Humanity's relationship to the environment.
- Understanding of and responsibility to nature, and obligations to leave some of nature's resources to posterity.
- Environmental ethics is the study which makes awareness of human duties toward the nature as well as how to resist disaster.



### **Eco-feminism**

- Eco-feminism originated from the term “ecofeminisme”, first introduced by Francoise d'Eubonne in 1974.
- Eco-feminism is the position that there are important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature, an understanding of which is crucial to both feminism and environment.
- Eco-feminism is a synthesis of feminism with environmentalism.
- The synthesis arises from the idea that the domination of women reflects the same patterns of thought and behavior as the domination of nature.
- Some of the most important connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature are conceptual.
- There exists a conceptual framework to dominate women and nature.

### **Conceptual Framework**

- A conceptual framework is a set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions which shape and reflect how one views oneself and one's world.
- It is a socially constructed lens through which we perceive ourselves and others.

### **Oppressive Conceptual Framework (OCF)**

- An oppressive conceptual framework is one that explains, justifies and maintains relationship of domination and subordination.
- Patriarchal oppressive conceptual framework explains, justifies and maintains the subordination of women by men.

### **Two features of oppressive conceptual framework**

- The first feature is that the OCF tends to interpret the world by means of value dualism Ñ opposed pairs of concepts, one of which is traditionally valued as superior and the other as inferior.

#### **Value dualism**

##### **Superior values**

Culture  
Reason  
Male  
Mind  
Human  
Normal

##### **Inferior values**

Nature  
Emotion  
Female  
Body  
Nature  
Deviant

- The second feature of OCF is called a logic of domination which is used as justification of subordination.
- The logic of subordination is stated in the following way.
  - (i) Humans do, and plants and rocks do not, have the capacity to consciously change the community they live.
  - (ii) Whatever has the capacity to consciously change the community in which it lives is morally superior to whatever lacks this capacity.
  - (iii) Thus, humans are morally superior to plants and rocks.
  - (iv) For any X and Y, if X is morally superior to Y, then X is morally justified in subordinating Y.
  - (v) Therefore, humans are morally justified in subordinating plants and rocks.
- This 1st set of argument is pointing to logic of subordination between human vs. nature.
- The 2nd set of argument is between man vs. women.
  - (i) Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physicals; men are identified with the human and the realm of the mental.
  - (ii) Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to whatever is identified with the human and the realm of the mental (which is superior).
  - (iii) Thus, women are inferior to men (the superior).
  - (iv) For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y.
  - (v) Therefore, men are justified in subordinating women.
- Combining these two features, we arrive at the idea that culture in general is justified in dominating nature in general or that men in general are justified in dominating women in general.
- Eco-feminism holds that the logic of domination that is used to justify the domination of humans by gender, racial or ethnic, or class status is also used to justify the domination of nature.
- Therefore, eco-feminism brings change in traditional feminist issues and includes naturism as a legitimate feminist issue.
- Feminism is the movement to end sexist oppression.
- It involves the elimination of all factors that contribute to the systematic domination or subordination of women.

- A feminist issue is any issue that contributes in some way to understanding the oppression of women.

**Feminist Issues**

- Equal rights concerning education, property, food and work and wages, marriage and divorce and child custody.
- Feminist issues are believed to be conceptual ones.
- Environmental degradation and exploitation are feminist issues because an understanding of them contributes to an understanding of the oppression of women.

**Eco-feminists:**

- Begum Rokeya, Karen Warren, Val Plumwood.

## **PUNISHMENT**

### **Punishment**

The goals of punishment

- The goals are several and diverse, including vindicating the law, crime prevention and offender rehabilitation. Philosophical disputes over punishment focus on which goal is to take priority over others and why.
- There are three theories of punishment.

**Philosophers:** Hume, Kant, Hegel, Bentham, Rashdall.

### **1. The deterrent theory**

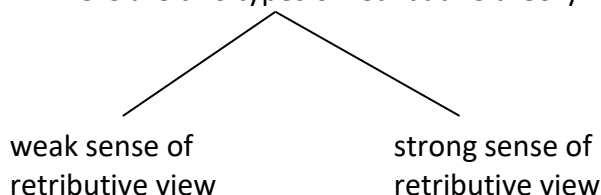
- This theory is also known as preventive punishment.
- This theory judges punishment as an example, punishment sets an example to prevent crime.
- The goal of punishment is to refrain others from doing crimes. It is said that — punishment on you is not for stealing lamb but that no one will steal lamb in future, it is for this that you are punished.
- This theory approves of capital punishment.
- According to the deterrent theory the purpose of punishing anyone who has done wrong is to deter others from doing the same wrong.
- This view treats human beings as means to the goals.
- Human beings are not lifeless objects or machines; therefore, they cannot be treated as means to the ends.
- Moralists criticized capital punishment as creating an example to the good of others.
- Critics of the theory hold that deterrent punishment alone cannot restrain offender; punishment frightens, instead of frightening offender raising moral sentiment in the offender rather plays positive role in the prevention of crime.
- Moralists often object to this view of punishment because the offender is treated merely as a means to the good of others.

### **2. The reformatory theory.**

- According to this theory the aim of punishment is to reform the character of the offender himself.
- This theory holds that inflicting pain on a man is the best way to reform him.
- It is reasonable to believe that the suffering of pain may often have a good effect on the offender.
- It has been seen that physical pain serves as a warning and a stimulus to changing one's habits and the pain inflicted by legal sentence may in many cases have the same effect.
- Human beings are by nature moral and obedient to laws, it is due to social mismanagement and due to the errors in the personality or character that man violates laws and morality.
- If society can cleanse corruptions, inequalities and other social diseases which lead to corrupt a man we may find less offenders.
- Therefore, this theory does not approve capital punishment rather upholds punishment as a method to the reformation of the personality and character of the offender.

### **3. Retributive theory**

- According to this theory punishment is right in itself, that is fitting that the guilty should suffer and justice requires punishment.
- Though punishment is evil but the theory holds that the offender should be punished than prosper more than the virtuous and at the expense of the virtuous.
- In this view, the function of criminal law is to punish offences or immorality in order to maintain a kind of cosmic distributive justice.
- In its simplest form the theory holds that the aim of punishment is to make the offender suffer what his victim has suffered.
- This theory justifies the law of 'an eye for an eye' and 'a tooth for a tooth', that is to say, equal punishment to equal offence.
- The offender must get punishment equal to the crime.
- This theory claims 'as you sow so you reap' and also supports capital punishment.
- There are two types of retributive theory



#### **Weak sense of retributive view:**

- According to this type of retributive theory nature and depth of the crime as well as the situation and other relevant matters must be considered.
- There are other factors, like, the situations, provocation, instigation, intention of the offender, age, mental disposition etc. which are required to be accounted before taking punishment.
- The weak version does not support capital punishment.

#### **Strong sense of retributive view:**

- In the strong sense of the view it is believed that in order to punish the offender only the type and weight of the crime should be counted.
- Other background factors of the crime must be avoided or ignored.
- The strong version supports capital punishment.

## **RELATIVISM**

### **Relativism**

- In the field of morality, there is a theory which argues that moral rules are not absolute.
- What is right in one society may be wrong in another society.
- Moral rules are variable and changeable, relative to the community, society or culture.

### **Absolutism**

- Absolutism, on the other hand, means 'perfect in quality' or 'complete'. The term absolute also means 'not limited by restrictions or exceptions'.
- Absolute moral ideals are same for everyone and valid for all time. Absolutism does not believe in cross-cultural principles of morality.

### **Cultural Relativism**

- Moral rules vary culturally. Moral norms are said to be relative to particular cultures.
- A theory which holds that morality is relative to specific cultures is called cultural relativism.
- Ethics deals with value questions, what is good and what is bad.
- Ethics also deals with rules of conduct.
- Regarding the judgment of conduct different societies have different rules of conduct.
- Judgments of conduct are founded on the rules.
- Since different societies follow different norms or rules it is said that the rules which are applicable in one society are not applicable in another society.
- Members of one society may act in conformity with rules of their own society. Therefore, moral judgments depend on culturally defined rules.
- What is good or right depends on what one's own society approves of and what is bad or wrong depends on what one's own society disapproves of.
- Relativism is the belief that good and bad are determined by the given moral rules of a particular time and place.
- This theory of moral relativism also upholds that there are no universal absolute moral rules.
- Moral practices are believed to be changing rules whereas absolutism believes that moral rules are unchanging and such rules are applicable to everyone, i.e., moral rules are universal.
- Absolute moral rules are same for everyone and valid for all time.
- Absolutism does not believe in cross-cultural principles of morality.

### **Descriptive Relativism**

- Descriptive relativism is a sociological and empirical theory in moral issues.
- According to this theory there are certain facts about moral values which can be empirically proved to show that all moral values are relative to particular culture.
- People of a particular culture follow norms approved by their own culture.
- A sociologist can prove such a claim empirically and holds that such rules or norms are not universal
- Descriptive relativism holds that moral norms vary from society to society and norms are not common in all cultures.
- According to descriptive relativism, it is wrong to say that moral norms are general and universal.

## **RAWLS'S THEORY OF JUSTICE**

### **The Notion of Original Position**

- This is also known as the argument of original position which Rawls has used in his book *A Theory of Justice* in order to arrive at conclusions about fairness and justice.
- If you were given the opportunity to choose the principles which should govern the best possible society you might be biased in various ways towards your own class, profession, gender, religion, ethnicity and so on.
- Rawls here proposes a kind of thought experiment, a hypothetical situation in which all the facts about your self are kept hidden from you behind a veil of ignorance.
- You have to imagine not knowing whether or not you have a job, what sex you are, whether you own a family, where you live, how intelligent you are, whether you are an optimist, a pessimist, a drug addict.
- At the same time, you have a good understanding of politics and economics, the basis of social organization and laws of human psychology.
- You are also aware of some basic goods which are required for almost any lifestyle, and these include certain freedoms, opportunity, income and self-respect.
- Rawls calls this situation of ignorance about your own place in society 'the original position'.
- In this hypothetical state of the original position which principles would it be rational for someone to adopt for the society?
- The idea of asking this question is to eliminate all the non-relevant features of our actual lives, which otherwise tend to intrude in our assessment of what sort of society there should be.
- Rawls assumes that principles of rationally chosen under the conditions of the original position would have a special claim to being just once, and that, other things being equal, we should adopt them.

### **Two basic principles**

- Rawls is in search of basic principles which shall guide our state/society so that there should be no difference between any individuals, because in the original position all the elements that distinguish us one from another are already been removed.
- The principles then, should be ones on which the participants would agree.
- Through this thought experiment, Rawls comes up with two basic principles, one is concerning with liberty, the other with the just distribution of goods.
- These principles hold his basic political conclusions which are liberal and egalitarian.

#### **1. The liberty principle**

- The liberty principle states that a rational person would want that everyone in the society is entitled to have the same right to basic liberties as anyone else, otherwise that person might end up a victim of discrimination.
- What are these basic liberties?



- These are liberty of conscience, freedom to entertain whatever religions or secular beliefs you may find convincing are the examples.
- The basic freedoms a state is not justified in curtailing.
- State may intervene only when one's liberty is threatened by another.
- The rule of law is necessary to guarantee the various liberties which each member of a society has a right to.

## **2. Just distribution of goods**

- Principle of just distribution of goods consists of two other principles — a) the fair equality of opportunity principle and b) the difference principle.
- a) The fair equality of opportunity principle states that social or economic inequalities associated with particular offices or jobs can only exist if these offices or jobs are open to everyone under condition of fair equality of opportunity.
- No one should be excluded from, for instance, the best-paid jobs, on non-relevant grounds such as sexual orientation or race.
- This principle of equality of opportunity includes provision of education to allow all people to develop their talent.
- b) The difference principle insists that any social or economic inequalities should only be tolerated on condition that they bring greatest benefits to the most disadvantaged members of the society.
- This is an implementation of a strategy known as 'maximin'.
- Maximin means 'maximise the minimum' which explains that choose the option which gives the best deal for the worst case.
- Consider the example of fair wages in a just society.
- Imagine two situations:
- In the first situation, most people earn a high wage, but ten percent of the population can barely earn enough to survive.
- In the second situation, although the average standard of living is far lower, the worst off ten percent of the population have a reasonable standard of living.
- Rawls claims that the second of the two situations is preferable because it guarantees that everyone in the society will be achieving a reasonable standard of living, the worst off are not that badly off.
- In the first situation, however, although there is a good chance of ending up quite well off, there is also a significant risk of being on a wage that barely allows you to survive.
- Adopting the maximin strategy, we should minimize the worst risks, and should opt for the second situation.

## **Difference Principle**

The principle chosen by rational people from behind the veil of 'ignorance', is explained in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls holds that due to the veil of ignorance no one knows the identity of the person and in this situation everyone is equal. The principle requires that social benefits and burdens are allocated in such a way as to make the position of the least well-off as good as it can be.

**Distributive Justice**

The problem is to lay down principles specifying the just distribution of benefits and burdens; the outcome of which everyone receives their due. A common basis is that persons should be treated equally unless reasons for inequality exist; after that the problems include the kind of reasons that justify departing from equality, the role of the state in rectifying inequality and the link between a distributive system and the maximization of well-being.

**Retributive (rectificatory) justice**

This is the idea of seeking to balance an injustice by rectifying the situation, or by regaining an equality that the injustice overturned. It is most simply summed up in the principle of 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth'. Rectification suggests taking from the offender and giving to the injured party, whereas retribution acknowledges that this is sometimes impossible (e.g. if the victim is dead), but embodies the idea that an offence may 'cry out' for punishment, and that the moral order is out of balance until this is administered. Retributive justice could provide the safeguard in the sense that not only the violators are identified following a fair process but also that they are punished accordingly and the harm is repaired.

## **BIOETHICS**

Bioethics is a part of practical ethics. It is defined as the critical examination of the moral dimensions in decision-making in health related contexts and in contexts involving the biological sciences.

Bioethics arises and develops in response to the moral crisis created by scientific and technological advances. Advances observed in medicine include the development of antibiotic, the introduction to birth control pills, the discovery of powerful psychotropic drugs, new resuscitative and life supportive techniques such as artificial respiration and dialysis; organ transplantation, novel reproductive procedures, cloning and human genome. These technological advances have created situations of choice in the face of which traditional values and principles are inadequate. We are faced with new ethical issue of how to make distinction between quality of life and biological life. The medical professionals confront with situation to choose between the principles of sanctity of life and quality of life. For example, withdrawal of life support was certainly not an issue before cardio respiratory function could be supported technologically almost indefinitely. Now the health care professionals are in a dilemma to choose between sanctity of life and the quality of life. Bioethics has to deal with such situations by offering ethical reasoning consistent to the context.

It is certain that new medicines and new technologies in health care field have always been concerned about doing good for patients and avoiding infliction of harm. It is also certain that it has become much more difficult to draw the line between what constitutes doing good and what constitutes doing harm. Keeping this in mind bioethics attempts to focus on ethical studies. What makes ethics important in health care professionals is, from a practical point of view, not so much that it informs us about a moral truth or rule, but prepares us for right action in difficult situations. The focus on “right action” is relevant for decision-making.

### **Principles of bioethics**

Bioethical theory comprises three main principles – autonomy, beneficence and justice. Other subsidiary principles are – informed consent, truth-telling and confidentiality.

### **Research Ethics**

Research ethics is based on the premise that it is ethical to experiment on humans in carefully controlled conditions. Ethical considerations governing human experiments is based on the belief that it is ethical under carefully controlled conditions to study on human being's mechanisms of health and disease and to test new drugs, biological products, procedures, methods and instruments that give promise of improving the health of human beings, of preventing or treating their diseases or postponing their untimely deaths.

### **Areas of Bioethics**

Bioethics is a fundamental ethical model of moral reasoning oriented to the field of medicine. As such bioethics pervades many aspects of medical field within its scope, for example, abortion issue, issues related to the use of anencephalic babies as organ donors in regard to the therapeutic transfer of fetal tissue, in respect of research with embryos and their use in some of the new reproductive technologies, and in the treatment of the most severely impaired infants and adults. Thus different aspects of research bioethics are in the purview of bioethics. The areas of bioethics also include law and legal issues, environmental and gender issues.

## **EUTHANASIA**

- ‘Euthanasia’ is originally a Greek word which means ‘a good or happy death’. At present euthanasia is used to mean ‘mercy killing’, i.e., killing legally; it also means allowing someone to die.
- There are differences between an act of murder or killing and what is medically allowing to die or killing legally for the sake of releasing a life from severe pain or suffering.
- In this way the term euthanasia is used to mean mercy death or mercy killing.

### **Allowing Someone to Die**

- The phrase ‘allowing someone to die’ is applicable in the case of a terminally ill person when further treatment to cure is unnecessary, a patient in such a situation should be allowed to die a natural death in comfort, peace and dignity.
- This phrase refers to the situation of refusal of giving any further treatment to the terminally ill patient since the treatment can no longer help a dying patient.
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### **Arguments against Allowing Someone to Die**

- **The possibility of finding cures**

— We should not deny the patients the opportunity to be cured of their illness. Cure by new medicines are constantly being discovered and there are so called ‘miracle cures’, that is, cures which happen even when medical knowledge apparently does not work. It is believed that a miracle cure might happen or a scientific cure might be discovered which will lengthen patient’s life or cure him completely.

- **The impossibility of opting for death**

— It is argued that medicine is for curing disease, we must always choose life. Medicine exists to save lives, not end them. Choosing death as an alternative to life is to nullify the very basis for medicine. This will result discouraging the doctors and also patients’ distrust in doctors.

- **Interference with God’s divine plan**

—The final argument against allowing someone to die states that God can create and take away life and that human beings should not be permitted to allow people to die. According to this argument, we must use all our ability and every method at our command to save, protect, preserve and extend human life until the creator has decided that it is time for a terminally ill

patient to die.

### **Mercy Death (Assisted Suicide)**

- Terminally ill patients belong to a situation unable to take away his own life. In such a situation, the terminally ill person asks or appoints someone to help the person to release from the misery. This is voluntarily giving permission to end his life.
- Mercy death means request or demand from the side of the patient to terminate his life. Therefore, mercy death means taking a direct action to terminate a patient's life because the patient has requested for it.

### **Arguments against Mercy Death**

- **Irrationality of mercy death** — It is argued that people who request mercy death though are not in imminent danger of dying, their lives may now be so radically different that they would rather not desire to live anymore. For example, a physically active person who will be paralyzed permanently from neck down the body because of a serious accident, for this person life will be meaningless in the paralyzed situation.
- It is also argued that people who are suffering from such pain in such a state of fear and depression cannot simply make rational decision. If such people will patiently wait to see what therapy and medical science can do for them, may be they will adjust to their situation and change their minds about dying.
- **The religious argument** —The religious argument maintains that killing is bad regardless of the motive and states. From religious standpoint no one has the right to take innocent people's lives, even at their request.

### **Mercy Killing**

The phrase 'mercy killing' refers to someone's taking a direct action to terminate a patient's life without the patient's permission. Mercy killing is involuntary where patient's permission or request is unnecessary but killing is done since the terminally ill patient's life is no longer meaningful. Mercy killing is done in a situation when if the patient is able to give permission or request, he would express a desire to die.

### **Arguments against Mercy Killing**

- **Direct violation of the principle of value of life**

— Mercy killing is a direct violation of the principle of value of life, since it is usually involved in taking the life of an innocent person. It is argued that murder is unethical regardless of the motive; therefore, mercy killing is nothing less than pre-planned murder. In the case of mercy killing people, either have not given or cannot give their consent to the termination of their lives.

- **The domino argument**

— It is believed that since the consent of patients cannot be obtained, an external decision about the worth or meaning of their lives has to be made, but this sets a dangerous precedent.

— In the first place, who has the right to decide whether any person's life has value or is meaningful?

—Secondly, what standards are to be used in making such a decision?

—Thirdly, won't the sanctioning of such an action set a dangerous precedent for eliminating old, senile people as they may be considered 'useless' to a 'youth oriented' society? Can we allow such decisions to be made? If so, by whom are they to be made?