

Moral Thinking: An Introduction To Values And Ethics

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Week - 02

Lecture -10

Explaining Moral Terms - 2

Now, in the series of concepts, next we talk about, Love. Now, Love has many ramifications and understandings. But, we are looking at it, Love as a source of ethics. And, we have seen other concepts, which are used around ethics. But, how can Love be a source of ethics. Well.

As a source of ethics, it talks about, fellow feeling about fraternity, and eventually about the ethics of care. Right. So, a lot of philosophers, and a lot of philosophical thinking, moral thinking, has taken place with, Love as the foundational cornerstone. And, by love here, I mean the sense of fraternity, the sense of care, that we have towards our fellow beings.

That, we are not looking, that human beings, the moral framework, the moral domain, that they have, does not come out from principles or rationality, but out of a simple feeling of love, that comes from towards their brethren. So, Ethics of Care, particularly talks about, Ethics as being rooted or sourced in love. Now, Ethics of Care has two very important components, which we can understand as, Context and Relational. Now, what is meant by here. By context, is meant that well, the moral domain arises, only out of the context.

So, let us think of an example. When your immediate neighbour, whom you know very well, whom you interact on a daily basis, suddenly is affected with a disease, or affected with a trouble, vis-a-vis another person far away in another continent, whom you do not know, but is affected by the same trouble. And, you may be just note of it, through the newspaper. Say, a new form of a disease. You are likely to be more affected by the first, your neighbour, rather than by this person at a distance, with whom you do not have any proximity.

So, a lot of moral thinking has wanted to make Ethics, independent of the context. But

whereas, Ethics of Care acknowledges, accepts, and rather celebrates being contextual, that our concern for other, comes from the context, from the association that we have, and from the relationship, that we have with the other person. So, ethics of care, is also a dominant school of moral thinking, which looks at Ethics as relational. That, because there are relations between human persons, human beings, we are likely to feel more compelled, for moral thinking and decision-making, in people, who are in our proximity. So, now this is another way.

Now, the standard critique of such a theory, will always be critiquing, that well, this makes it partial. That this is partial, to whom we know, and thereby, unfair to the stranger. And yes, that is an accepted feeling, that the accepted feature of the Ethics of Care, that one tends to be concerned, or care to offer care, to give care more to a person, whom one knows personally, rather than someone who is different. And, if we reflect phenomenologically, on our own behaviour, and the way human beings associate, we can see the effect of Ethics of Care, or see how it is in operation, in this particular, in the framework of our lived experience. Now, closely associated with Ethics of Care is, Virtue Ethics.

And, Virtue Ethics asks a very crucial question. In fact, it changes the typical moral thinking question, that talks, and from, what is the right thing to do, versus what sort of a person, should I be. So here, character or motive, becomes more important, than rules or principles, or consequences of an action. So, it moves from being act-based, to agent-based.

Right. So, this again is connected with Ethics of Care, and love as the source of moral thinking, and as a predominantly strong concept in moral thinking. Let us think of an example. A malicious person, may still have it within his power, to perform actions, that do not reflect that malice. But, the malice exists. How would you assess this.

So, let us take an example of a patient, who is say in coma, is not able to do any actions, but is conscious, and can have volitions and intentions. Now, that person, if he is looking at the caregiver, with a sense of gratitude, or a sense of envy, either way, that these two cases, these two patients, let us assume them as two patients. One, both in a state of physically immovable, or unable to express their emotions physically. One with gratitude towards their caregiver, and one with envy and anger towards their caregiver. Now, both of them have, two different emotions towards their caregiver.

Can we make a difference between them. Virtue Ethics would say, yes. Whereas, the lack of their physicality means that, they cannot act out, or effect their moral standpoint. But, does that make the moral standpoint irrelevant, for the Virtue Ethicists.

Of course, no. Definitely, no. And, probably for most of us, no. Because, an ill will or a goodwill, even though it is not capable of being expressed, still is an ill will or a goodwill, and is the denominator of moral actions. Right. Here in the example given, when a malicious person, may still have it within his power to perform actions, that do not reflect that malice.

Right. So that, if somebody is sniffing out, or doing something good, but still has malice within them, and the malice exists, how would you look at it. Let us think of a lived experience example of this, which would connect, even more to you. And, even more to most of us. The case of sexual harassment. Now, sexual harassment as an intent or a gaze, not as a physical act, can still be experienced, or felt, or even regarded as harassment, if it is not acted upon, but that the gaze, and the legal system of India has started recognising, has recognised that, the gaze itself can also be held as an example of sexual harassment or assault.

So, for love as a concept, one can also look at, what we would understand as, Bhakti in the Indian tradition. That well, in the Bhakti tradition, where one seeks to unite with fellow human beings, with God. And, there is a certain, all the goodness that emerges, emerges from this conjunction with the Divine, and conjunction with fellow human beings, not as strict principles to be followed. So, whatever emerges from love, becomes right. What emerges from love, becomes right action.

So, this is an example of love, which stands as right action. We will talk about, Virtue Ethics more, when we talk about Ethical Theories. For the moment, you should be aware of love, as the foundation of the Ethics of Care, and how it is connected with Virtue Ethics. And, when Virtue Ethics talks about, agent based approach, rather than an act based approach. That is what is to be taken into account.

Now, the final concept for this particular introduction to concepts, is the notion of Purusha Arthas. We will talk about this, in greater detail, when we talk about Ethics in the Indian tradition. However, let us take a look at Purusha Arthas, or how it is talked about in the Indian tradition. So, Purusha Arthas, or as it should be written in the diacritical marks. Well, these are, what is the purpose or the meaning of being a human being.

So, what are the ends or goals of life. So, the Indian tradition, typically the Upanishadic Hindu tradition, divides it into four categories. Many of us would have known of it, right from our upbringing. They are Dharma, Artha, Kama, and Moksha. Now, these are divided into, social and personal.

Artha is material well-being. Kama is satisfaction of desires. Dharma is moral duties. And finally, Moksha, or which is intensely personal, is liberation or spiritual.

So, what is the guide. So, Purusha Arthas have very often been looked or understood, as a part of Virtue Ethics. Because, instead of giving blanket, edicts, and rules to follow, what Purusha Arthas are talking about, are what are the goals of life. So, material well-being. So, anybody who thinks that, Indian Philosophy is otherworldly, or material denying, needs to be corrected. Because, Artha is a valid and valued social goal of Purusha Arthas.

That means, material well-being. So, material well-being is to be celebrated. Gamma, or the satisfaction of desires. It is not just sexual desire, but it is all kinds of desires. The whole fact that, we can have desires, and satisfy them, is again a goal of human life.

Imagine, it is considered as a Purusha Artha, that is a goal or an end of human life. However, Dharma or moral duties, are the duties, where the moral component enters strongly. And, whenever there is a conflict between Dharma and Artha or Kama, Dharma prevails. So, we are looking at Dharma as something, which prevails over Artha and Kama. Or, Kama and Artha have to be enjoyed, under the purview of Dharma.

With this, that governs our social interaction, when we move to the sphere of personal, there it is moksha, or liberation, or spiritual self-realisation, that we aim at, as the final goal of life. So, in that sense, again to the critics of Indian thinking, who look at Indian philosophy as being essentially otherworldly, that yes, we need to agree that, there is an otherworldly component. An intense desire for personal liberation, is the final Purusha Artha of human existence, to look for liberation or spiritual self-realisation. So, now with this, we come over the important concepts of Purusha Artha, and the other moral concepts, that you may come, some of the important moral concepts, that you may come across in moral thinking. But, after that, we look at some more developed concepts.

And, I will start with paper called, The Virtue of Selfishness, by celebrated author, and a Lithirathi or Ayan Rand, on the value of selfishness, and how a moral argument is made. Now, the reason this paper has been chosen is, it is both freely available. It is been a very popular part of a literature. Those of you, who may have read, the Fountainhead, or any of the works of Ayan Rand, even if you have not read, I will share the link of this particular paper. So, this is a typical combination of a literature, and a philosopher.

So, where the philosophy is expressed in the forms of a piece of story. So, here, this

paper turns common sense on its head, by arguing for the, making a virtue out of selfishness. But, we look at, how the author defines selfishness, and what we can make sense of it. .