

Moral Thinking: An Introduction To Values And Ethics

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Week - 03

Lecture -15

Introducing Ethical Theories

Hello everyone. Today we begin the fourth module of the course on Moral Thinking, an Introduction to Values and Ethics. And, the fourth module talks about, Ethical Theories. But, before that, let me just go over the various modules, and the progress we have made so far. The first module, we started talking about, Value Theory. What is it to value? How valuation differs in different disciplines.

That valuation, as a part of making sense of the world, that we come across. Right. Then, we looked at, Intrinsic versus Extrinsic values. Universal and situational values, moral and religious values.

Then, we looked at concepts. That, we had concepts of good, right, duty, justice, equality, love, purushar. So, these are the conceptual vocabularies, to strengthen you, your vocabulary, to talk about moral claims, to make moral arguments. Then, we talked about, Egoism, Altruism, Ethical Relativism, and Ethical Universalism. Now, these are all moral concepts, that will help you, make a moral argument, to understand your moral argument.

Right. Now, we start, the Ethical Theories. We talk about, theories, which are Consequentialist, and Non-Consequentialist theories. And then, Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics, Ethical Rules, Situation Ethics, and Virtue Ethics. And finally, the takeaway of the course would be, A, looking at the Ethics in Indian tradition.

And B, looking at Applied Ethics cases, we will take up some issues and dilemmas, and try to articulate a moral argument around them. That, by this time, you should be clear that, that moral arguments can be made. And there are ways, better arguments can be made, and there are worse arguments. And how, one can argue on a moral matter, without making it a quarrel. So, looking at the basic assumptions of the various positions

proposed, and decide on, what is going to be the philosophy, to be followed.

Now, coming to Module 4, we are going to talk about, the first distinction between Consequentialist and Non-Consequentialist theories. Some theories, that depend on consequences, and some which are independent of consequences, as the name itself implies. Then, we look at various popular theories. Hedonism, to start with, which talks about pleasure. Utilitarianism, which is a further of theory of Hedonism and Consequentialism.

Then, Deontological Ethics, that is another kind of Ethics, which contrasts with Utilitarianism. Ethical rules, a particular philosopher called W.D. Ross, will take that as a case study. And, how he is tried to bring about an apparatus of rules, to make a moral system.

Situation Ethics, that well, depending on the situation, one reacts. And, Virtue Ethics, which is again another fresh new perspective, landed down both from Aristotle to modern day Indian philosophy, also looking as Ethics, from a virtue point of view. So, let us start with, what is Consequentialist and Non-Consequentialist theories. The fundamental question, that we have here is, how do you determine, whether an action is morally worthwhile or not. That is the basic question, that we are looking at.

How do we assess the moral component, or the moral denominator of any act, either in retrospective effect, or in prospective effect. Right. Retrospective means, we are casting a judgement on an act, that has already taken place.

Right. Past. And, prospective is, when we are on the crossroads of a decision, and we need to take a decision. So, when we look at the future. So, the basic question is, how can one assess the moral weight of the various available choices of action, in the case of prospective decision making. Right. Now, the most common answer, I would think, and I have seen most of us coming up with, perhaps it comes to us intuitively, is, what does it lead to.

Right. How do you decide an action. I mean, is not it a trivial truth, that what you do, is decided by, what you want, or what you hope to get by that action. You are doing this course. Say, if you are a college student, doing this course, to clear this course, you are doing it to get a degree. You are doing it to learn something.

So, your actions are governed, towards your goals. Right. That is a clear case of goal driven behaviour. But, can we think of actions, which are also not goal driven. Is there anything else, that can also be a crucial component.

Let us say, some of you, who do a course, and who are not in the need of a certificate, who would not like to take the exam. But nevertheless, are still doing a course, or watching the videos, or trying to learn something. Well. What are you driven by. If you are one of them, do comment in, what are you driven by.

Are you driven by. There is no concrete goal, or practical goal, that is in your vision. May be, just to know something more. Right. So, a fundamental curiosity, that is driven to you. Let us hold that opinion.

And, we will come across that, when we go further into this categorisation, between Consequentialism, and Non-Consequentialism. Is there something called, the inherent nature of the action. Independent of the consequences. That is the crucial word. Inherent nature of action, which is independent.

I do not understand, why this always comes up with a straight line. But anyway, independent of, independent nature of action, independent of the consequences or result. Let us keep it. Let me put this close, so that, there is no confusion at all.

Okay. So, inherent nature of action, where it is independent of the consequences. Does it seem like, contradiction in terms, that we do something for a goal. Right. But, is there something we do, or something that can be judged, morally judged, which is independent of the consequences, it brings about. So, here again, the crucial distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic values, come into being.

And, that is a hint for you to articulate this distinction. Right. So, we will talk about it. So, this typically inherent nature of action is, what is called as, Non-Consequentialism. In fact, this is both, are two characters actually, we must put them as add.

Then together, they make Non-Consequentialism. So, when we look at an action, and think that, there is something inherent in the nature of the action, independent of the consequences, then we are talking about, Non-Consequentialism. We will come to that. Before that, let us look at Consequentialism.

Right. Now, Consequences itself is a term, which is broad enough. And the school of Consequentialism, would depend on, how you articulate consequences. Now, since we are in a very introductory course, we are looking at Consequentialism, in a broad category. Right. So, a lot of thought and prodding would get you to arrive, at the position that well, consequences itself is too vague.

Right. So then, we need to know, what kind of consequences, whether it is short or long term consequences, what about intended or unintended consequences. What is the kind of consequences, that we are talking about. And yes, Philosophers have developed Consequentialism, to various strains of theories. You should have a general idea, that how our theories developed. Theories start with intuitions, they start with a fundamental position.

But then, they are thought through and developed. So, a Moral Philosopher would look in the broad ambit of Consequentialism, would think and look, further refine his or her theory. Keep on looking at, what kind of consequences, and keep on making specifications, till they make a big system, which caters all, or as many possible circumstances, to explain Consequentialism. So, the level at which we are dealing with it right now, is to understand, what is the broad direction of a theory. But, Consequentialism can also be of various kinds.

And, each kind has been developed to sufficient details. As you advance in knowledge, or if you are curious, or where policies are made, will they work it out in greater detail. So, for now, it is for you to gather the orientation, to what kind of theories are these. So, let us say, I am reminded of a small anecdotal incident, perhaps imaginary, but about this distinction, about intended and unintended consequences. It seems there was a huge crowd around a small pond of water.

And one person, who is walking by the pond, sees the crowd, and then he also wants to go and see, well what is happening in the pond. And he goes there, and then a few, a week later, he is rewarded publicly, for saving a drowning child, because a child was drowning in that particular pond, and he saved it. So, in his commemoration speech, he thanks the village folks, for giving him the award, and recognizing him. But, he ends by asking a question that, who was the one who pushed me into the pond. And meaning here is that, he did not intend to save the child, but he was pushed somehow into the pond.

Once he was into the pond, he went ahead and saved the child. Right. So, a jocular example, only to identify, or to bring out the point that, can unintended consequences also be recognized, or given the sense of responsibility.

Can it be rewarded, or recognized. Right. Can unintended consequences be recorded or recognized. And how would they compare with, intended consequences. That, if the person jumped into the pond, to intentionally save the child, rather than having been pushed into the pond, and then by the way deciding, okay, I am already into the pond, and halfway into water.

So, let me as well as save the child. Right. So, there are a lot of actions, which have intended consequences, and unintended consequences. So, what should we be valuing. A Consequentialist has to specify, whether it would value, intended consequences, or unintended consequences. A more serious example, or a more, not just serious, but a more practical and real world example, that has taken place, is when we look at, Green Revolution. The Green Revolution, at a time when, India was suffering a food crisis, and we are short of food.

So, we had a scientific way of cultivating food, cultivating crops, which greatly increase the output of land. Here, this example of Green Revolution, can be seen in this matrix. The short-term consequence of the Green Revolution was, enormous production of food, to satiate the demand of hungry citizens of the country. The long-term consequences was, a decline in fertility, and over dependence on fertiliser. And eventually, as we know, the Green Revolution has made the land, less fertile, and less capable, as we see, many decades down the Green Revolution.

intended consequences of Green Revolution, as an experiment to introduce scientific and state of the art techniques, scientific techniques for cultivation, at the cost of giving up the traditional organic techniques of cultivation. The intended consequence was, a production of extra food, that can meet the demand. Vis-a-vis, the unintended consequence, the long-term consequences, that could not be anticipated, or was perhaps not anticipated, was the long-term decline in the fertility of land. Right. So, whether Green Revolution was a successful step or not, there are strains to that particular argument.

Depending on the strain you take, you can look at it, whether it is successful. It did solve, and definitely solved a short-term problem, but it also created for certain long-term problems. Now, another question of, not just intended consequences, and unintended consequences, or short-run consequences, or long-run consequences. It is also consequences for whom. Consequences for the agent, consequences for the community, consequences for others.

And here again, we can think of many examples, that well, radioactive energy. It gives a lot of electricity, or provides a much needed electricity and energy, to the whole say, nation or collective. But, it comes at the cost of the neighbouring villages to the reactor, who have to be relocated, or who face the risk of a nuclear disaster. Right.

So, whom are the consequences, we are evaluating for. So, Consequentialism can again be of two kinds, agent-relative, or agent-neutral. Different agents can value, different

consequences. For example, Egoistic Consequentialism. So here, there is a difference across agents. So, the consequences I desire, can be different from the consequences that you desire.

So, there here we look at it as, agent-relative Consequentialism. So, each one of us is independent, in that sense. Each neutral Consequentialism, talks about, each agent has the same ultimate aims.

Right. So that, different agents aims cannot conflict. And, Utilitarianism is a classic example of, same ultimate aims. So, we may be different in some of our aims. But, some ultimate aims are common. And, when we address them, we are looking at an agent-neutral version of Consequentialism. So, making a wide generalisation, that all of us require, would like to be in a better state of health.

All of us would like to, live in a comfortable environment, would like to live in a secure environment. So, the state, again I give the example of the state or the government, which is looking at providing these ultimate aims of human beings, or its citizens. So, the ultimate aims is that, there should be safety of person in society. So, the safety in person or society, is a same ultimate aim, across citizens.

And therefore, the role of the state to enforce that. In doing that, the state is being an agent-neutral Consequentialist. Right. So, it is bringing out something, which is it considers important, and as an ultimate aim for all citizens. Then, there is Act Consequentialism, and Rule Consequentialism. Again, if you push forward, and we are just looking at the preliminary divisions of Consequentialism, for you to grasp that well, there can be so many strains and versions of Consequentialism.

Act Consequentialism, as the name implies, is the consequences of an act. So, when you judge an act, by the consequences of that act, you are an Act Consequentialist. This will make sense, when you look at its contrary, which is Rule Consequentialism. So, when we design rules, which bring about better consequences. Acts are independent particular acts, that we talk about, and look at their consequences.

But when we talk about rules, say we make a rule that, there should be the law enforcement can arrest troublemakers. Right. So, the police can arrest troublemakers. Now, this is a rule, and a rule which can be seen from a Rule Consequentialist perspective. That, as long as this rule is being followed, there is a sense of safety and security in the society, that police is arresting the troublemakers.

Right. Now, for the Act Consequentialist, it could be well, is this trouble going to create

more difficulties, or more trouble. Then, we need to arrest that person. So, that is on a case to case basis. But, as a rule, well, if you are a troublemaker, the police will arrest you. And, this is the consequence of such a rule, is that the society becomes a safer, better place to stay.

So, Rule Consequentialism is often designing rules, which bring about consequences. Let us think of a rule, which is not an example of Rule Consequentialism, or which can be seen as, not an example of Rule Consequentialism. The rights of the troublemaker. The troublemaker, who is being arrested by the police, has the ability to be tried, to get a fair trial.

Right. That is a part of the rights. The troublemaker has the right, not to be physically manhandled. Right. So, these are also rights, that are inherent, that are intrinsic to the nature of a good law. They are non-consequential. In a certain sense, you can also look at them as consequential, because they ultimately bring about the better, a sense of safety and security in the society, especially in the case of arrest of mistaken troublemaker, or unintended, or wrongfully charged troublemakers.

We will come to that, to see, how Rule Consequentialism comes close to Deontology, how a single practice can have different motivations, behind them. So, before we go to that similarity, let us take a brief look at, what is Non-Consequentialism. So, the question that we started with, if not consequences, then what, what does matter. So, the character of an act, intrinsic value independent of the consequences. And here, the first example, or the classic example, that I would like to start with, is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Now, what does the, I have picked up the 11th article, or the first part of the 11th article of the, Universal Declaration of Human Rights is, everyone charged with a penal, I quote, read from the quote, quote. Everyone charged with a penal offence, has the right to be presumed innocent, until proved guilty, according to the law, in a public trial, at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defense. And with this, let me jump to the example, that I have in mind. A few years back, a group of terrorists attacked the city of Mumbai in India. And in that attack, there was a terrorist, or there was a person called Ajmal Kasab.

Now, there was, this was an attack that took place in Mumbai. It was over 2 to 3 days, or around that. And there was enough news channels covering, there were enough people watching. So, the guilt of Mr. Kasab was established.

Because, almost the whole world knew, the whole world was watching on live TV.

There were enough evidences out there. And it seemed that, Mr. Kasab was apprehended alive, but was given a trial. A trial that lasted many many months. A trial in which, he was presumed until proven guilty, according to the law, not according to public perception.

So, we can also understand the angst of people, who said that well, this was such a clear open and shut case, what is the need for having such a lengthy trial. What is the need to establish this act, when it has been visible to everybody.

But, the law declares it so. And the Indian law required that, Mr. Kasab was tried. Ajmal Kasab was tried in a public trial, or in a private trial. But, he was tried according to the laws of the land. He was also given a defence, that he needs to present his defence. And once, his crime was legally established, he was sentenced and given to that punishment. Now, if you think that, it was a waste of time and government resources, you are probably thinking of it, in terms of Consequentialism.

But, if you were thinking that, in doing this process, the Indian state, and India as a nation, did a good thing, and established itself as a law abiding nation, then you are looking at the non-consequentialist value of such a practice. What is the non-consequentialist value. That, every accused is given a chance, to prove his or her innocence. The trial has to be a public trial, not a single person's judgement or decision, but according to the law of the land, not on the whims of a person. So, the fact that, we have this, is an example of something, which is inherently about the character of this provision, that people are given an opportunity to represent themselves, if they are charged with any crime.

So, to have this right, that one has the right to defend oneself legally, is an example of a non-consequentialist ethics. The consequences of this were, a further delay of 11 months. Imagine the anguish faced by the victims, the families of victims, and the sense of anger, and helplessness at the punishment, taking so much of time. Because law is establishing the crime. But, on a broader perspective, that this also the crime, once established the punishment will be given, and was given.

But, the establishment of the law made a difference between, the terrorists and the civilised state. The terrorists did never charge, or given opportunity to their victims, to defend themselves, to accuse them of what the terrorists think that, they were doing, or what the representative of the nation-state that they were. So, as being given a right, is an example of non-consequentialism. Now, there can be many kinds of non-consequentialist ethics. The classic, or the most often referred to ethics in Consequentialism, is the Deontological Ethics of Immanuel Kant, who talks about a

sense of duty.

Now, duty is crucial. Because, duty is non-consequentialism. Something that needs to be done, in the classic adage, when we say, what is to be done, has to be done. So, that means, the force of the duty powers the duty, not what it yields to, what it results. Say, people of the military, or people in law enforcement, people who work there, are driven by a strong sense of duty. Because, a core principle, or a core philosophy of the martial professions, is the sense of duty.

So, they do not need to judge, what is the long-term or short-term consequences of their act. But, they have been assigned a task, and it is their duty to fulfil their tasks. So, this is the duty mentality, which is thoroughly a Deontological, or a non-consequentialist thinking. In addition, you can think of religious laws, especially the intrinsic laws. Say something like, thou shall not kill. Especially laws, or religious edicts or dictats, which are there, independent of their consequences.

It is not that, if you do not kill, you will be given a place in heaven. Then, it becomes consequentialism. But, it is just simply wrong to kill, no matter what. I think, the crucial phrase, that you can use to understand, non-consequentialist, whenever you can suffix a statement with, no matter what.

So, thou shall not kill, no matter what. Or, thou shall not lie, no matter what. Whenever one adds the, no matter what, that makes it an example of non-consequentialism. Now, to the issue, that we were talking about a few minutes back. The same practice can have, either a consequential justification, or a non-consequential justification, or even a combination of both.

And, I have a simple example, listed on the screen here. For example, one should not lie. Why should one not lie? There can be, predominantly three strains of thinking. One, you should not lie, because it is intrinsically wrong. It is something wrong with it. Two, one should not lie, because if one gets caught, one gets into trouble.

Or, the whole institution of truth telling, comes into difficulties. So, promise keeping becomes difficult. Society survives on a system of contracts and promises. And, if we start breaking promises, it upsets the system as a whole. Right. Or, like for perhaps most of us, a calibrated threshold, where A may be violated, when B exceeds the threshold.

So, I mean, most of us would perhaps lie, if it saves the life of an innocent person. Some of us, who are very strongly rooted on A, or they think something non-consequential, or paleontologically essential about not lying, they would not lie,

even to save a life. And, some people who really think of consequences, would not think of lying as a moral problem at all, as long as it brings about the desirable consequences. And perhaps, for the most of us, it is a calibrated threshold. We would like not to lie, but unless until the threshold is high, or wherever we peg our threshold, we start lying there.

So, the same act can be justified, or can have different philosophies beneath it. So, as an analyst, as a Philosophical Analyst, you should be able to unearth, the philosophy behind the particular act. And, this I would argue is also the reason why, there is a human judge in the court of law. Laws seem to be given in law books. What is the role of the human judge, in the court of law. The role of the human judge in the court of law, amongst many other roles, is to unearth, what is the motivation of the person charged, right, to factor in the context.

So, to look at this threshold and calibration, and then apply the laws, to take a decision. So, with this now, you should be reasonably clear about, what are Consequentialist Theories, and what are Non-Consequentialist Theories. You should be able to identify, that Non-Consequentialist Motivation of a practice, and a Consequentialist Motivation of a practice. With this, we come to an end of our discussion of, Consequentialism and Non-Consequentialism. Thank you. .