

Moral Thinking: An Introduction To Values And Ethics

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Lecture -18

Non-Consequentialist Theories - Deontology

Hello everyone. Today, as a part of the Module 4, we look into, Non-Consequentialism, as an Ethical Theory, or an Ethical Approach. And so that, you are not confused, I will introduce two more terms, so that, whenever you come across these terms in literature, you are able to make sense of it. Consequentialism, Non-Consequentialism, are fairly day-to-day use words, which you are familiar with. Now, the word used in Philosophy, for these particular theories are, Deontology and Teleology. So, Deontology is, what is Non-Consequentialism, and Teleology is what talks about, Consequentialism.

So, we have talked about, Telos as something which gives purpose. So, and from Telos comes, Teleology. Teleology is also something, used not just in Ethical Theories, but in Metaphysics, in Epistemology. So, Telos of a system is, when what is the purpose of a system.

So, when we come to know about the Telos of a system, or we think of a system as Teleological, we think it has a purpose driven system. But then, these are the metaphysical components of Teleology. We are sticking to the moral components of, what we understand by Deontology and Teleology. So, the agenda for today's discussion is, to thoroughly understand Non-Consequentialism. As, what kind of a moral outlook is Non-Consequentialism or Deontology.

And, to look at an example of a Deontological Theory. Immanuel Kant's Deontological Theory is quite famous in Philosophical Literature. But we would be doing, W.D. Ross Ethical Rules, as an example of Deontology.

Both, because it is simpler and easier to grasp, and understand the ethos of, what Deontological Theories are. So, let us begin. Now, let me read this out, from the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, 2015 edition. Consequential Ethics are, I quote, based on the notion of a duty, or what is right, or on rights themselves, as opposed to ethical systems,

based on the idea of achieving some good state of affairs, like Consequentialism, or the qualities of character necessary to live well, like Virtue Ethics. End quote.

Now, the first word, or the first concept, that should occur to you, when you look at a Deontological approach to Ethics, is the notion of duty. Right. Duty is the crucial component, that explains Deontology. Right. Now, when we look at, why should we make, do something.

Right. Suppose, we are in a moral situation, a situation where, we have to take a value decision. And, as we have discussed earlier, most of the situations in the world, most of the decisions that we have to take, have a value component in it. And now, to understand, to elaborate, and to dissect that value component, to make a decision, we need to know, to have value thinking tools, or moral concepts, with which we can make these tools. Now, about Deontology, we did talk about the example of the dam.

Right. When you dam a river, or when you build a dam on a river, it is teleological, it is consequential, because it brings about comfort, or brings about flourishing, or convenience, to many people. But it is also a, Deontological violation, because it comes at the cost of people, living in the periphery of the dams, which will be submerged, once the dam is built, and the water spreads, on the one side of the dam. So now, let us look at things, and let us relook at the definition, part by part. Deontological Ethics are based on the notion of a duty, right, or what is right, or on rights themselves. So, this is a system, that is based on the notion of right and duty, or rights themselves, as opposed to ethical systems, based on the idea of achieving some good state of affairs.

In the dam example, what is the good state of affairs, that is being achieved by building a dam on a river. It is say, irrigation. It is say, water supply, perennial water supply, around the year water supply. So, these are the goods, that it brings about. But, whether it is right, what does it do to the people, who are staying there.

That is a question of, what is right, and what is our duty to people, whose habitation may be for decades, years, or decades, or centuries, has been beside the rivers. Now, if some of you have faced such a consequence, may be in your villages or home towns, you would be able to relate to it, in the first person. Even if you have not faced this particular situation, I urge you to think over it. And, in all our lives, we have come across places, where we have valued duty, over the consequences, that it brings about. Now, it is not that, duty is something holy and sacred, and looking at consequences as something as petty, or less moral than rights, or deontology.

But, they are two different approaches of, dissecting a value situation. Right. So, when

you have a circumstance, a situation, and you need to dissect it, using moral tools. These are two crucial moral tools. Another example, that is given in the definition, is the qualities of character necessary to live well.

This is another aspect of Ethics, called Virtue Ethics, which we will talk in subsequently, where the goodness of an action depends, not just on the consequences, or the intrinsic nature of the action, but it depends on the character of the person, performing the action. Character is, what is the central to moral decision making. But, that is just a brief introduction to, what Virtue Ethics is. We will talk about it, in the subsequent video. Now, let us think of an example of Duty Ethics.

The first thing, that you should be looking for, and to connect philosophy, to connect your knowledge systems, to the real world experience, that you have out there. This is a passing note, that I would like to share, that every no matter what subject you are studying, always look for connecting it, to the world of your lived experience. Right. That is crucial, so that, theory does not stand on its own. Theory is abstracted from reality, and then contributes to understanding reality, or shaping reality, as we want to do.

So, there is a two-way relation between, theory and practice. So, no matter how tempting, it seems to look at theory in isolation, and try to bypass it, or just be involved with practice, or just be amused, or just enjoy the stimulation of theory, or enjoy the conceptual sophistication of theory. As an intellectual, as a student, as a knowledge seeker, you should be able to connect these two often. And, that is what will make sense to, your knowledge endeavor. So, given that disclaimer, let us look at, how will Deontology connect to the world out there.

Let us think of a concrete situation. I invite you to think of a situation, perhaps comment it in, so that to the advantage of others. go through them, if there is a suggestion or a edit, that I think will make the circumstance better, example better, I would definitely go ahead and do it. But now, for the benefit of others, let me start thinking of a situation. Let us say, now it occurs to me.

Now suppose, you are taking an examination. Right. Okay. In the examination, now we find that, the question paper was leaked to, say two students.

Right. Two students knew the question paper, at least knew two or three questions. And, we pointedly found out that well, we pointedly found out that, it is only these two people, who had access to the question paper. And, the others say, out of 198, did not have an access to the question paper. The examination is conducted. Now, one way of looking at it, or perhaps given this situation, if you have to take a decision now, that well,

suppose you are the principal of the school or the college, and you need to take a decision, what do we do about this.

One way could be well, two broad ways, that we can go about it. One way is, nullify the exams of those two students, and the others can take the examination. And, their scores will be calculated and register.

Right. So, this is one way. The second way could be, to cancel the entire examination, and go through the process once again. So, cancelling the entire examination, going through the process once again. Even if, one is reasonably sure, or one is sure beyond an iota of doubt, that the question paper was leaked only to two people, and not the others. Yet, to preserve the sanctity of the examination. Because, the question paper was compromised.

So, we set another question paper, and go through the entire process once again. This is a deontological solution. The consequential solution is the, or one of the consequential solution, where convenience is valued, that well, we eliminate those two students, and the rest take the examination, and their scores are calculated. Because, notice, we are having to take this decision, after the examination is over. So, 98 students have already taken the examination.

Now, to cancel the examination is, to go through the entire process again. So, suppose it is a two hour examination. So, 98 students have already spent, two hours of their life, for this examination. So, that makes it, 196 human hours, that has already gone into this examination. By cancelling the examination, and going through it, we waste these 196 hours, and not to count the amount of time spent, to reach the examination hall, the stress, the tension, the anxiety, the question paper setting.

And repeating this whole process, is a very logistics intensive process. It costs money, time, energy, and patience. But then, to repeat the entire process is deontological, because examinations are sacred, and a compromise in the question paper, should not be tolerated. And, we need to go back again, to conduct the examination. The consequentialist would be, that well, look, so much of time and money and energy, has been invested into it.

So, why not make a specific cure, to this problem that we have, that is eliminating the two people. And, go ahead with calculating the scores of the 98 students, who have taken the examination. What kind of a solution convinces you. As I have always described, that the moral dilemma is not a dilemma, between a clear right and wrong. But, a moral dilemma is a dilemma, between two competing rights.

So, there is a competition between these two rights. So, some of you may think that, the consequentialist solution, that well, let us save the labour spent by these 98 students, vis-a-vis the others, who vote for a deontological solution, would like to say that well, the examination process is sacred, and we need to go about it, all over again. Now, given this situation, what is typical about the deontological system. deontological system always puts the load on the system, or the collective.

Right. Now, this is a characteristic of, deontological systems. Right. Because, when we are looking at something sacred, something as inviolable, to be done, no matter what. Some load has to be generated, because this is an act, which is intrinsically valuable. But, even if it is an intrinsically valuable act, its consequences are there.

And, those consequences are faced by the collective, or by the system. In the case of the examination, that we just talked about, we can see that the examination, having to conduct the whole examination again, puts a load on the system, the examination the question paper setting, the entire infrastructure, and the collective. That means, not just the teachers and the exam setters, but also the students, who have to take the examination, all over again, for no particular fault of their own. But, just to maintain the sacredness of that particular process. Now, I invite you to think of other possible measures, where you can see a clear, deontological, or a teleological approach, to solving a moral problem.

Now, Immanuel Kant is known for Deontological Ethics. His theory is thoroughly duty-based ethics, which talks about that, intrinsic power and value of duty, that needs to be followed. So, we will not be going into the details of Immanuel Kant. However, if you are interested, you are welcome to read about it. Because, that has been quite a strong moral theory, that has influenced the history of Western Philosophy, Western thinking, and the Western worldview.

And to a certain extent, to even the modern day notion of duty, that we have in, various nations of the world. So, now Deontological Theories contradict, Teleological Theories. There is a difference between, Deontological Theories, and Teleological Theories. We will come about it, in a tabular form, in the next slide.

Let us try to understand the differences. Deontological Theories of Morality, accord the moral property of an action, as many times independent of the non-moral consequence, that they bring along. So, Deontological Theories of Morality, accord the moral property of actions, as many times independent of the non-moral consequence. So, when there is an act, it has a non-moral consequence.

Right. Let us think of an example. Building a dam, and there we have irrigation, right, to either to drown, or water supply. Right. So, there is building a dam, is it a moral act. Yes, it is a moral act. Because, there is a value component to building the dam.

What is the non-moral consequences. The non-moral consequence, that comes about is the, water supply accessible to people, hitherto who did not have water. That itself, in sense is also a moral component. But, let us assume that, irrigation or water supply becomes accessible. Right. Deontological theories, that whether building a dam is a good thing or not, does not depend on the consequences.

Or, consequences are not the only thing, that one has to think of. So, there is also the process of building the dam, which say violates the rights of the people, living adjacent to the river, on the river banks. So, that is what makes it Deontological. So, simply put, Deontological theories hold that, there are fundamental moral claims, that do not gain their justification, by the non-moral consequences.

Let us take the example here. So, just because, the non-moral consequences is irrigation and water supply. Right. So, if we have irrigation and water supply, this is the non-moral consequence. Does not justify, building the dam.

There can be other factors. So, that there are fundamental moral claims. What are these fundamental moral claims, that do not important, that do not gain their justification. So, the fundamental moral claims are here, that the dam also is a violation of rights. And, this cannot be justified, by the non-moral consequences. So, just because, we have irrigation coming up, or we have electricity, we cannot justify building the dam.

That means, there is something intrinsically about the act. So, think of examples, like for instance, keeping one's commitment, or not indulging in unprovoked violence. These can be examples of deontological claims, when they are prescribed, irrespective of the non-moral consequence, that they might bring along. Prescribed irrespective of the non-moral consequences.

What does this mean. Well. Keeping one's commitment, not indulging in unprovoked violence. Let us assume that, these are two moral claims being made. As we have gone over it earlier, they can be justified from different moral approaches. If keeping one's commitment is important, irrespective of the non-moral consequences, that they bring along.

Right. Then, it is deontologically valuable. Then, the justification is deontological of

keeping one's commitment. But if, you allow that well, keeping one's commitment, till, because it makes you a credible person, or it brings about the betterness of society, then we are moving to consequential reasons, for this particular practice. Right.

Let us call this, practice 1. And let us call this as, practice 2. Now, these are two practices. What are the values beneath these practices.

That is the question we have. What are the values beneath these. Yes. What are the values beneath these practices. So, here, they can be deontological, or teleological. These are the two practices. These are the two moral approaches, beneath these practices. So, deontology clearly says that, the prescription is irrespective of the non-moral consequences.

Because, Consequentialism looks at practices, which takes into account, the non-moral consequences. Now, let us put it in a tabular form, to make sense of, what we have talked about. It is very essential, when you are getting a grasp on a concept, to be able to differentiate it from another concept, or it is competing, or it is contradictory concept. The moment, you can differentiate the concepts, you would understand that, you have a better grip over the concept. So, to understand teleological theories, or Consequentialism, one needs to be able to differentiate it from, Deontological theories, or Non-Consequentialism.

So, what is the difference between these two. Right. So, this is what we used, across sign, to distinguish between opposites. But, perhaps that may create confusion. So, let me get rid of that. So, for a Teleological Theory, a moral good is good, only because, it brings about a non-moral good.

Right. Any moral good is good, because it brings about a non-moral good. But, for Deontological theories, there can be moral goods, that are good, irrespective of the non-moral consequences, they bring about. So, some things can be good, irrespective of the non-moral consequences, that they bring about. That is one. And the second one. Teleological theories assume, that there is only one basic, or ultimate right making characteristic, namely, the comparative non-moral value.

So, Teleological theories seem to tend to assume, that there is a non-moral value. So, for Utilitarianism, as a Teleological theory, what is the ultimate non-moral value, that it brings about.

It is utility. Right. For Hedonism, it is pleasure. So, for Consequential theories, they are simpler. Right. Now, if you look at this, when arguments are made on, what is a

theory, that one should follow. The simpler theories are, Consequential theories, because they have a single denominator, a single aim. So, Consequential theories come out to be simpler, because they have a singular goal.

Right. So, when they have a singular goal to be followed, they tend out to be simpler to apply. Right. So, look at Democracy, and the casting of votes. Now, how is the reasoning then. Well, the more number of people cast a vote, that makes that political party, or leadership, or that policy, as acceptable.

But, how do people make that choices. At an individual level, again, whether an individual casting his or her vote, is on the basis of deontology, or consequences, is again an individual level decision. Right. At a cumulative level, casting a vote might be a majoritarian, or a democratic decision. But, even at an individual level, how an individual person decides to cast a vote in favour, or on against an issue, or a political party, or a leadership, is a decision, that can be both either Consequential, or Deontological. So, Deontological theories assume, that there may be many basic, or ultimate right making characteristics.

So, here, there is a many basic, or ultimate. So, there is a multiplicity. Here, you find a multiplicity of values and rights. So, just as, if you look at the declaration of human rights, when you look at, there are many human rights. There are rights of honour, there are rights of dignity, there are rights of freedom. So, each of them, tend out to be ultimate atomic values, that are intrinsically valuable. So, as a Deontologist, there you are open to have many basics, right or ultimate making characteristics.

Teleology is simpler, that anything say, that promotes happiness, is better. But there are no matter what, issues. So, Deontology is always, a no matter what. So, whatever claim you want to make, if the moment you can add a, no matter what, after it. Suppose, do X, no matter what, is a Deontological claim. X can be any practice, that you think of, say speak the truth, or help others, or any moral practice, that you can put out.

When you can suffix it, with a no matter what condition, you are making it, in the form of a Deontological condition. Because, it is duty, that you have to family first, no matter what. So, even if your family member has done something, legally incorrect, or legally wrong, illegal, you will still support your family member, because family first, as a Deontological principle. So, this is where, is an example of Deontological principle. But say, when you look at truth first, again as a Deontological principle, that even the closest member of your family, or cohort, or friend circle, when she or he has done something wrong, you would value justice or truth, over that.

So, that is again a Deontological claim. So, Deontological claims are claims, that are associated with duty. Deontological claims are claims, that can be suffixed with, no matter what. And as we have this, we can make sense of, what are Deontological claims. So, let me briefly sum up, what do we mean by Deontology. Deontological Ethics, or Non-Consequentialist Ethics, is an ethical approach, or a bunch of ethical theories, which hold something as intrinsically valuable, which appeal to a sense of duty, which do not depend on the consequences, to justify the act.

Right. So, I hope you have had a reasonable understanding of, what we mean by Deontological Theories of Ethics. Now, to go ahead, we will examine an example of Deontological Ethics, which is known as, the Ethical Rules by W.D. Ross. Thank you. .