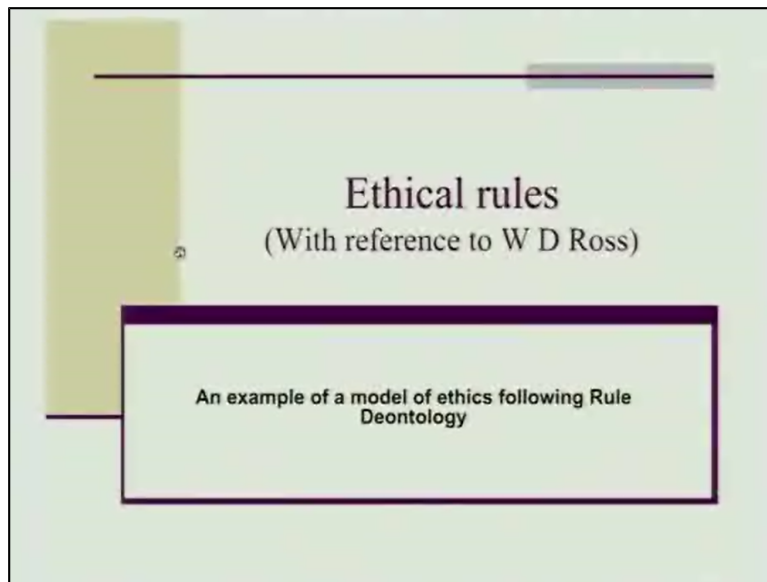


**Ethics**  
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**Module No. #01**  
**Lecture No. #09**  
**Ethical Rules (with reference to W D Ross)**

Hello, everyone. Today, we are going to talk about, Ethical Rules, with reference to, W D Ross.

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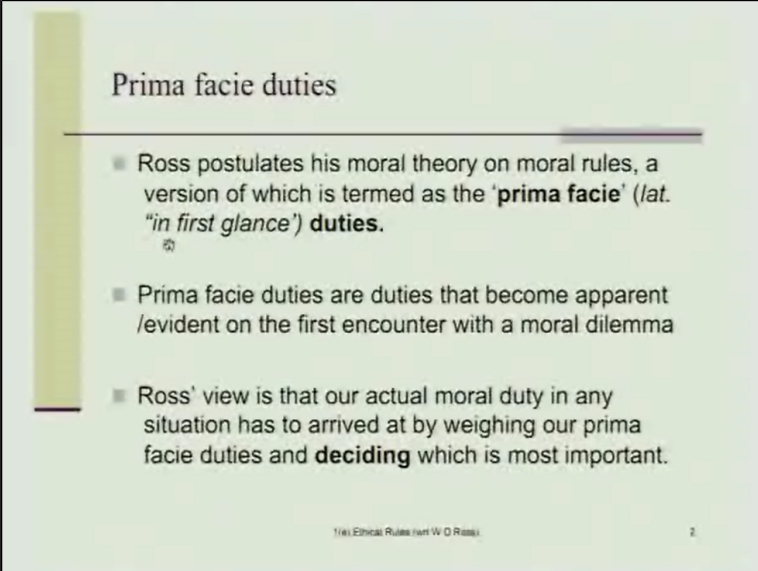
We have been talking about, Rule Deontology. Deontology in general, and Rule Deontology in particular. We have talked about, Immanuel Kant, who provided us with, Deontological system, which was without content. Now, let us just before we start talking on Ross, let us quickly recapitulate, what Kant said, as a Deontologist. What Deontology was? And, what Kant as a Deontologist said? And, as to what, Ross as a Deontologist, is different.

Now, Deontology as we remember, was that a version of a Moral Theory, which did not subscribe to nonmoral goods, as being the final or ultimate judgement criteria, for making a moral judgement. So, there was something, atomic or fundamental, about moral values. Most of them, based it on moral rules. Kant started the earliest example. Before we talk about Kant, we talked about Kant, the earliest example of Deontological rules was, that of the rules of religion.

Now, religion has certain do's and don'ts, which were atomic in nature, and which did not depend on any consequences, for its justification. Now, comes Kant. Kant also stuck to Deontology, but in a different sense. In fact, Immanuel Kant's Deontology, was not about rules, as much as about, it was meta rules, or it was what he would recollect called, the Categorical Imperative. That, there is no content, in his Deontological Ethics.

But, there is a formula, a rule, or a meta rule, to be more precise, which determines, what rule is a moral rule, and what rule is not a moral rule. That was universalizability. The universalizability criteria was the meta rule, to decide the morally right from the wrong. Now, we come to another example of Rule Deontology, that is W D Ross. Now, taking a look at the slide.

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The slide is titled "Prima facie duties" and contains three bullet points. The first bullet point states that Ross postulates his moral theory on moral rules, a version of which is termed as the 'prima facie' (lat. "in first glance") duties. The second bullet point states that prima facie duties are duties that become apparent/evident on the first encounter with a moral dilemma. The third bullet point states that Ross' view is that our actual moral duty in any situation has to be arrived at by weighing our prima facie duties and **deciding** which is most important. At the bottom of the slide, there is a small footer that reads "1(a). Ethical Rules (part W D Ross)" and a page number "2".

You will find, well, first of all, W D Ross was a philosopher, who try to work out, a Deontological Ethics with content. That is, he gave certain duties. Ross postulates, his Moral Theory, on moral rules. A version of which, is termed as the, prima facie. In Latin, which means, in first glance. Prima facie duties. Prima facie duties are duties, that become apparent or evident, on the first encounter with the moral dilemma.

Ross view is that, our actual moral duty, in any situation, has to be arrived at, by weighing our prima facie duties, and deciding, which is most important. Now, let us understand, what Ross is trying to say. Well, Ross postulates, this thing called, prima facie duties. Prima facie is a phrase,

that you would have perhaps come across, in a legal terminology, as a prima facie evidence. So, he uses the same phrase, in the same ethos, that there are certain prima facie duties, just as prima facie evidence.

In legal terminology would mean, that evidence as it is found, at the scene of the incident. Now, prima facie duties, are also duties, which Ross prescribes, which are at the moment, or at the moment of interface, or at the preliminaries interaction with the circumstance. Now, just as prima facie evidence, does not make an indictment. It is absorbed, assimilated, and a judgement, or a case is filed. It is examined in detail. And, a final judgement is arrived at.

Similarly, Ross claim is that well, prima facie duties are not some things, that are immediately your duties. But, which are duties, that crop up in any circumstance. And then, looking at the slide again. Ross view is that, our actual moral duty in any situation, has to be arrived at, by weighing our prima facie duties, and deciding, which is most important. So, Ross here makes a distinction, between actual duties, and prima facie duties. Let us go to the next slide to see, what further she talks about.

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What about the decision?

- The 'decision' is to be taken by the agent in due cognizance of the particular situation.
- There can be a hierarchy amongst duties, when other components are equal.
- There can be no absolute hierarchy amongst the duties.

1(g) Ethical Rules (part W O Ross) 3

Now, what about the decision. Now, as we saw in the earlier slide, Ross talks about the decision, is to be taken by the agent, in due cognizance of the particular situation, to arrive from the prima facie duties, to the actual duties. So, there can be a hierarchy amongst duties, when other

components are equal. There can be no absolute hierarchy amongst the duties. Now, this is a crucial thing, that we need to pay attention to.

Now, when confronted, Ross gives a set of duties, which is called, the prima facie duties. But, these prima facie duties are a few duties, or seven duties, which do not apply in every circumstances, in a fixed hierarchy. The agent, or who is in the centre of the action, has to decide, taking in cognizance the situation, the circumstances, what is the hierarchy of the implication of the duties. So, the prima facie duties, gives the background, and the agent, evaluates the circumstances, and arrives at the actual sense of duties.

Ross also mentions that, well, there is a hierarchy amongst the duties. As you would see the second bullet, that there is a hierarchy amongst duties, when other components are equal. But, if he also in the same breadth mentioned, that there can be no absolute hierarchy, amongst duties. So, what Ross is in effect doing. He is actually allowing, there to be a fixed set of duties, but yet giving freedom to the agent, should decide on the hierarchy amongst duties. We will talk about it, in a few slides from now.

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The duties according to Ross

- 1 Duties from the previous acts of the agent:
  - (a) Duties of fidelity: keeping one's commitment (implicit or explicit)
  - (b) Duties of reparation: Making good a wrongful act
- 2 Duties of gratitude: repay obligations
- 3 Duties of justice: preventing inequitable distribution

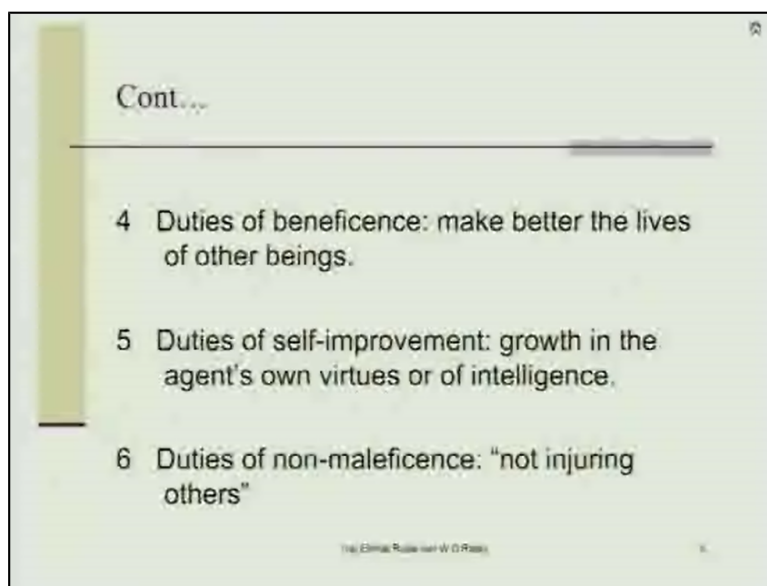
1) (a) Ethical Rules (w/ W O Ross)

Let us now look at the duties, what the prima facie duties, which Ross puts forth. Well, he says, the first duty, he mentions is, duties from the previous acts of the agent. He talks about, duties of fidelity. That, keeping one's commitment, implicit or explicit. Be duties of reparation. Making

good, a wrongful act. So, Ross claim is that, duties of fidelity is, well, whatever commitment one makes, the first duty is to fulfil one's commitment, be it made implicitly or explicitly.

Likewise, puts a second addendum, to the duty, by calling the duties of reparation, that is making good a wrongful act. Now, both of these are under, arise from the duties, from the previous acts of the agent. The second duty, that Ross talks about, are duties of gratitude. These are duties, to repay obligations. The third, he talks about, his duties of justice. That is, it is about preventing, inequitable distribution.

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The fourth duty, that he talks about is, duties of beneficence, or making better, the lives of other beings. The fifth duty, he talks about, is duties of self-improvement, growth in the agent's own virtues, or of intelligence. Sixth duty is of, non-maleficence, that is not injuring others. So, as we might see, that these are perhaps, some of the most fundamental human rights, that we have. Duties of beneficence, is about making a better, the lives of other beings. So, it is our duty to be, as to make the other's lives better, as much as we can. Duties of self-improvement. Duties of non- maleficence. Fairly, self-explanatory.

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Upshot: The middle path ?

- Ross' theory remains absolutistic yet attempts to cater to the particularities of varied moral dilemmas
- The rules are absolute, but the hierarchy depends on the particular situation.
- The hierarchy amongst rules is decided by what ?

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Now, what is the upshot of Ross Theory. Now, he puts forth a theory of prima facie duties, and then, the actual duties are to be determined by himself. Well, Ross Theories remain absolutistic, yet attempts to cater the particularities of varied moral dilemmas. The rules are absolute, but the hierarchy depends on the particular situation. The hierarchy amongst rules, is decided by what. Well, that is the question. Now, we have just talked about the various rules, that Ross has put forth.

But, Ross does overcome, the problems with Deontological Theories. The problems with Deontological Theories, is they are, they tend to be too rigid. They do not have a flexibility. They do not take into account, the circumstances, the situations of the agent, and in general. So here, we see that well, Ross is trying to find out, perhaps find out a midway, between the rigid claims of Deontology, and the real-life human situation, that we generally come across.

How does he find that? Well, he finds that way by, making the prima facie duties, fixed. So, that is why, they are absolute. But, when he talks about the particularities of the varied moral dilemmas, he says that well, the hierarchy determined from these, as you would see in the second bullet, rules are absolute, but the hierarchy depends on the particular situation. So, in this second bullet, Ross introduces, the discretion of the agent. Now, how is the discretion of the agent to be decided.

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Moral intuition!

- Do we have a moral sense?
- Moral qualities supervene on sensible qualities?
- Essentially moral judgements?
- Can there ever be a uniformity in judgements?

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Well, one most obvious answer could be, that we have a moral sense. Could we have a moral sense? Is it intuition? Moral qualities, supervene on sensible qualities. We are essentially making moral judgements. Because, no matter, that the prima facie duties are provided, but the way to arrive at the actual duties, or making a hierarchy amongst the duties, that where a duty of reparation, shall supersede the duty of beneficence, or the other way round.

So, there can be never a uniformity, in judgements, across difference circumstances. But, can there be a uniformity in judgements, in the same circumstances, across agents. Now, let us see, how Ross answers that.

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Finally:

- A uniformity in judgements requires a uniformity in human nature
- Our moral ideas and moral judgements are based on certain common facts about human nature
- Within our enormous variety lie some essential similarities and that is the source of our morality!

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A uniformity in judgements, requires a uniformity in human nature. Our moral ideas and moral judgements, are based on certain common facts, about human nature. Within our enormous variety, lies some essential similarities. And, that is the source of our morality. Now, this is what is the crux of Ross claim, which we have briefly covered, to find out. That well, Ross is a Deontologist, Rule Deontologist. He puts forth his rules, which he calls prima facie duties.

Nevertheless, he respects, the uniqueness of each human predicament or situation, and the decision making power lies with the agent himself or herself. Ross Deontological rules are absolutist, ethic, in the sense that, they have a finite set of prima facie duties. They are flexible in the sense, because they have the agent to decide on the, hierarchy between the prima facie duties. So, this is almost like a middle path, between the rigid absolutist deontological rules.

And yet, these absolute rules, which are indifferent, to particular human situations. Yet, it does not embrace the other corner, which is moral particularism. That, every situation is unique, and therefore, there can be no theorising on this. You would note, that the prima facie duties, that Ross has enumerated, can generally be understood, as the drive of goodness in human beings, that is fundamental to human nature.

Because, now for these prima facie duties, Ross requires a grounding. That, where is the grounding, for these prima facie duties. Where is the locus, or what is the ontology, for these



duties? Now, Ross claim is that, these duties are grounded, in the way we are as human beings. He grounds these fundamental duties, or impulses, as a part of human nature. It is not acquired, it is not learnt, it is not religious, but it is uniform across nature.

Now, notice the enormous depth in grounding, these fundamental human impulses, in to prima facie duties. He is actually making, these prima facie duties, absolute. He is laying a ground, for a set of duties, which are valid across civilisations and cultures. Yet, it respects, the differences among civilisations, cultures, and agents, by saying that, well, the actual hierarchy in putting forth the duties, are to be determined only by, the agent themselves.

So, as I read from the last bullet, within our enormous variety, lie some essential similarities, and that is the source of her morality. Now, this is what, Ross would like us to believe that, there are enormous differences in human nature. But, there are essential similarities, and that is the source of our morality. So, we have a deontological system of rules, wherein the source, or the grounding of the rules, is in the commonality of the human nature, and nothing else.

The Divine Command Theory, again, had Rule Deontology. But, it grounded its rules, on the word of god, or on the laws made by on divine laws. But, Ross makes some much more, perhaps, believable account of Rule Deontology, by grounding the rules on the essential similarities of human nature. Ok.