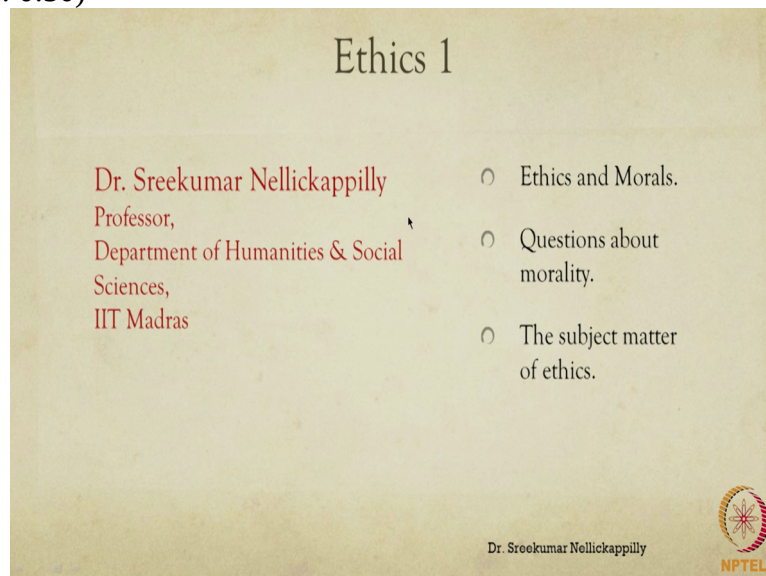


Ethics
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Module No 1
Lecture 01

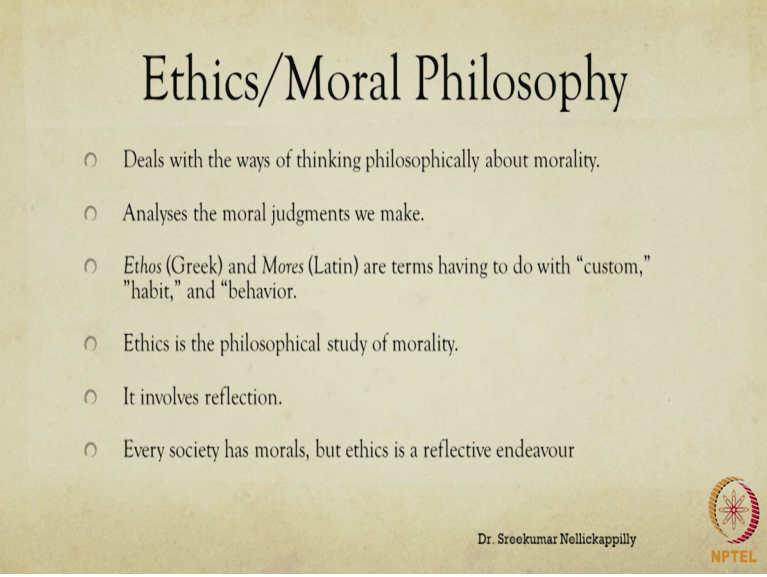
Hi welcome friends, this is a very short course on ethics. It deals with some of the important problems with which ethics is concerned as an academic discipline. It also deals with the nature of ethics, what is the subject matter of buildings, what are the different theoretical frameworks with which ethics deals. So we will start with some of the very fundamental questions about ethics or rather to put it in a different way, try understand some of the basic issues that we are trying to address new ethics.

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And in this lecture what I am going to do is that we will basically start with the idea of morality or morals and tries to understand its relationship with ethics because ethics is largely a discipline, an academic discipline or rather more rational endeavour to understand the concept that morality employs. So it is a rational endeavour in one sense. So we will try to address ethics in that way or try to understand ethics in that way. And now we will also deal with in this lecture some of the basic questions about morality and tries to find some answers to them and also the subject matter of ethics. These are roughly the topics which we are planning to cover in this lecture.

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Ethics/Moral Philosophy

- Deals with the ways of thinking philosophically about morality.
- Analyses the moral judgments we make.
- *Ethos* (Greek) and *Mores* (Latin) are terms having to do with “custom,” “habit,” and “behavior.”
- Ethics is the philosophical study of morality.
- It involves reflection.
- Every society has morals, but ethics is a reflective endeavour

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Now let us start with ethics or moral philosophy. I using in this course, moral philosophy and ethics as synonymous. There are different approaches to this. Some ethicists believe that they are different but for my concern in this course, I bring them as synonymous because for me ethics deals with the ways of thinking philosophically about morality. Because morals and morality are not necessarily philosophical, they are not necessarily the result of philosophical reflections.

Philosophical reflections as we all know involves a lot of rationalization. It demands a sense of rationalisation because we need to justify our assumptions and beliefs to other people – some level of I mean if you do not want to call it objectivity, some level of intersubjectivity is required when we talk about philosophy or philosophical reflections. But (mor) all moral assumptions of all human societies and cultures are not necessarily philosophically substantive or philosophically profound.

They have evolved over a period of time in due course as a result of several realities, several situations as society, a particularly society encounters in its social evolution, in its cultural evolution. So most of the human societies have certain cultural beliefs, certain moral beliefs, assumptions, certain conventions, certain customs and several factors of influence in the formation of these customs and conventions. We will very briefly touch upon, discuss these issues in this lecture.

And ethics as a discipline, as a reflective endeavour, I would call it a reflective endeavour because ethics involves reflection on morality. That is why it is called moral philosophy. It is a practice of philosophical reflections and it analyses the moral judgements we make. We make a lot of different kinds of moral judgements in our life when we say that it is bad or it is good, it is right to do that or it is wrong to do this.

When we do such, when we make such moral judgements, it is behind such moral judgements, behind making such moral judgements, there are several judgements about morality which are rooted in our culture, which are rooted in our education and which might undergo changes, definitely. It is not that none of our assumptions and beliefs are permanent. They might undergo changes.

We can be educated in ethics and we keep on educating ourselves through socialisation pauses. When we go to another country, when we familiarise ourselves with another society, their conventions and their customs and moral assumptions we do often change or question our own assumptions and we develop a different kind or rather our moral assumptions also undergo some substantial changes. All these are possible but ethics as a reflective endeavour involves certain, I mean it rather raises certain questions about morality.

We know that you know that the term “ethics” is derived from the Greek word, ethos and morality is derived from the Latin word, mores. They are terms having to do with custom, habit and behavior. So in a very important way we can see that historically itself, these words or rather these disciplines and these endeavours are associated with customs, habits and behaviour of human beings.

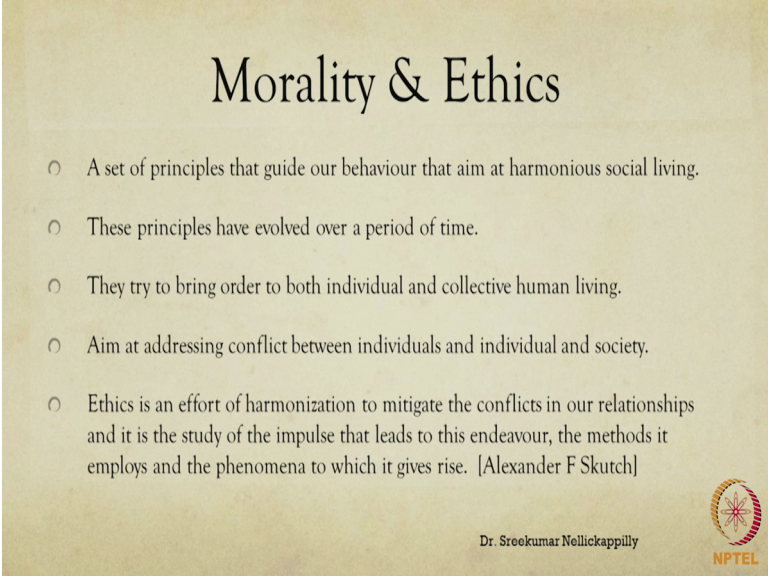
If you start with behaviour, of course the traditional discipline, the traditional definition of ethics is normative science of conduct of human beings living in society. When we talk about normative science, it deals with certain standards. Standard of what? Standard of behavior. There is a norm or there is a standard according to which you are expected to behave. So many societies have such standards of behaviour and any deviance from such standards are to be objectionable, sometimes punishable and in any case, they involve certain very serious consequences.

So it deals with behaviour, it deals with habit because you know habit formation is very important in among human beings and also societies, there are certain habits which individuals have which are good, which we term as good, we term as bad, right, wrong, etc and again customs. Many of our assumptions as I already mentioned are based on customs or rather to put it in another word, they are customary.

And as I already mentioned, ethics is a philosophical study of morality, it involves reflection. It has to think about, conceptually analyse, why certain things are right? What makes a particular action a right action or a good action? Or what other criteria when we apply in order to evaluate, in order to morally evaluate a particular behaviour or a particular action. So these that is why it involves reflection.

And every society has morals but ethics is a reflective endeavour and the kind of ethics which different societies have developed would be definitely different. It demands philosophical reflections, high-level philosophical reflections sometimes.


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Morality & Ethics

- A set of principles that guide our behaviour that aim at harmonious social living.
- These principles have evolved over a period of time.
- They try to bring order to both individual and collective human living.
- Aim at addressing conflict between individuals and individual and society.
- Ethics is an effort of harmonization to mitigate the conflicts in our relationships and it is the study of the impulse that leads to this endeavour, the methods it employs and the phenomena to which it gives rise. [Alexander F Skutch]

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Now again, morality or ethics both, they deal with a set of principles that guide behaviour, that aim at harmonious, social living. It is very important that individuals establish a harmony among themselves and also individual and society. So this is important for human progress, this is

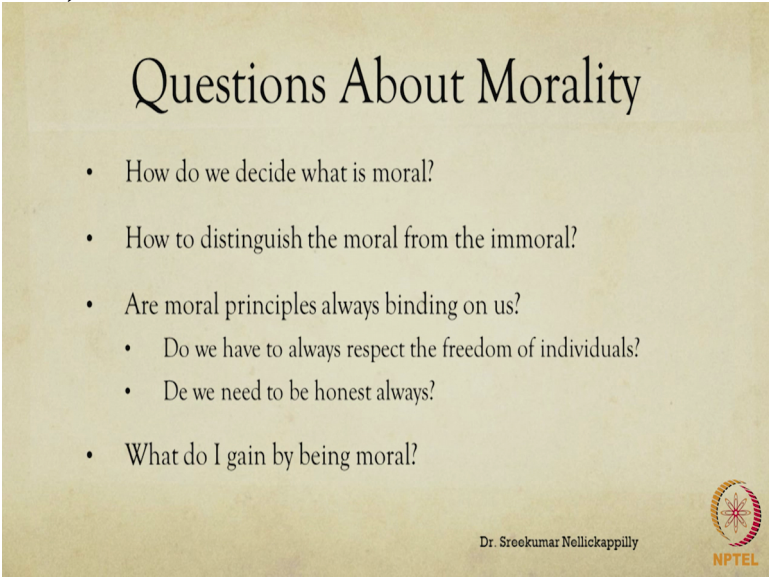
important for human living, happiness and well-being of human beings and humankind in general.

So in that sense we can say that ethics and morality deal with certain principles that guide human behaviour and these principles as I already mentioned, have evolved over a period of time and there are several factors which might have influenced their evolution. We will discuss some of these factors in later lectures. And they try to bring order to both individual and collective well-being and I have already mentioned, they aim at addressing conflicts, to resolve conflicts or to minimise the kind of conflicts that might evolve, that might emerge in human social living or social life.

This is the kind of view by Alexander Skutch. He says that ethics is an effort of harmonisation to mitigate the conflicts in our relationships and it is a study of the impulse that leads to this endeavour, the methods it employs and the phenomena to which it gives rise. So an effort to harmonisation is conscious or unconscious effort to harmonisation is there because without such process of harmonisation, no human societies can survive and to mitigate conflicts.


That is very important. For this, some sort of regulations are required, some norms or behaviour are required. And ethics deals with the principles that suggest such norms. Let us try to understand some questions about morality now.

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Questions About Morality

- How do we decide what is moral?
- How to distinguish the moral from the immoral?
- Are moral principles always binding on us?
 - Do we have to always respect the freedom of individuals?
 - Do we need to be honest always?
- What do I gain by being moral?


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How do we decide what is moral? What makes a particular action, moral? So some of these things we do quite unreflectively in day-to-day life. Everyday all of us make a lot of moral judgements and pass such judgements and also in private when we think about it. When we read the newspaper, when we hear some news about something happening in society, we all make, we all form and make moral judgements but behind these moral judge most of the times these moral judgements are passed without much of a reflection.

And if you really start reflecting upon them, we would realise that some of these assumptions are really questionable, quote unquote questionable because they involve very unreflective assumptions which might not be right if we consider them again with a reflective, with a more analytical eye. So we have to involve ourselves in a more serious conceptual, ethical and philosophical enquiry to understand their nature.

And how to distinguish the moral from the immoral? Because again if you go through the newspapers for example, let us take the example, a day-to-day example, several such disturbing news, events that come to our mind. They remind us about human actions which are objectionable, which we can term as moral or immoral. How do we distinguish them? If you try to reflect upon them, we will understand certain very disturbing facts about our moral assumptions.

Are moral principles will be binding on us? Do we have to always respect the freedom of individuals? Because normally it is stated that it is very important that we should respect freedom. Freedom is being treated in nowadays particularly as a very important virtue, a very important principle to be observed that we should consider every individual as free and we should respect their freedom.

But at the same time, on certain locations, freedom of individuals have to be limited, controlled and restricted. There are several locations. Say for example if you know that a particular individual is going to kill another individual, it is sort of a moral duty on our side to prevent this individual from performing such a crime. So we must do anything say on certain occasions, try to stop him, prevent him by blocking him inside a room or restricting his freedom of movement to stop him from performing such a heinous act.

So there, we are restricting his freedom. There we are not respecting his freedom but restricting it. But on another occasion where a particular individual has some criticism against an apparently, say a government, he should or she should be free to express it with by keeping in mind all you know responsibilities, by making his or her statements with responsibility that, with a clear awareness that there are certain reasons why he or she does it.

He or she can convince others about his or her reasons by explaining them. So there, we respect his or her freedom. On another occasion, we have to sometimes restrict the freedom of an individual. So the freedom or respect for freedom is not unconditional. So and what conditions they can be treated as principle? Do we need to be honest? Normally it is stated that honesty is the best policy and we all have to be honest.

That is true but in general though honesty is the best policy, is honestly the best policy always, in all circumstances? Not necessarily. There are certain occasions when honesty can harm people. Say, suppose a dacoit or someone who wants to be somebody else who is hiding in my office or in my home and uh this person comes in search of that person and asks me, do you know where this person has gone?

If I tell him the truth, then probably the person who is hiding in my home might lose his life. So to prevent that from happening, I can be dishonest. I can always tell him that I do not know.

Whether he believe or not is a different question, what I am saying is that in principle honesty need not be construed as the best policy always because all these concepts often appear to be having relevance or rather all these principles like honesty is the best policy, respecting freedom, all these are principles which are valuable.

But at the same time, they seem to be having some sort of their application varies from context context of place to place, (time) time to time, etc. For example, at the time, freedom of individuals is a questionable principle. Freedom cannot be sometimes you know when a war is declared with another country, you know states often restrict the freedom of its own citizen to prevent from facing problems internally.

So this might be justified. A state can justify this on the basis of a larger concern, a larger crisis needs to be addressed immediately. Now, what do I gain by being moral? This is a very interesting question which is a very perplexing question rather because the question is often you know being moral, being honest, being a person who respects the freedom and rights of other persons sometimes seems to be costly.

Sometimes you know, the person who does it might be wondering why he or she should be doing that? What do I gain by being moral? While many others are taking advantage of being immoral engaging themselves in immoral activities, I am so honest, I am so moral and I am not gaining anything, rather I am losing. So what ultimately am I gaining from this?

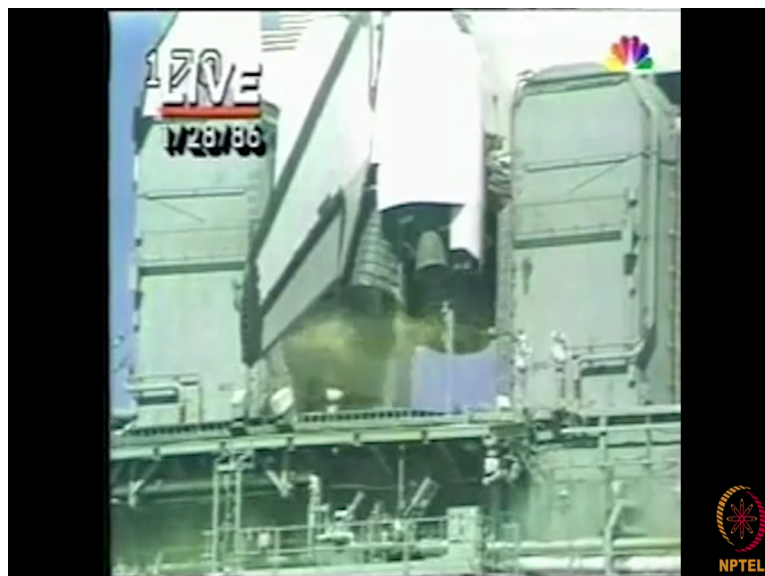
So that is a very interesting question which has several aspects which can be answered from various points of view. Say for example, Emmanuel Kant, a very important ethicist who we are going to discuss in this lecture course, a philosopher, German philosopher would have a very interesting answer to provide to that question. While utilitarians like Bentham and JS Mill will have another set of answers, Aristotle's virtue ethics framework will provide you a very different answer to this question because for a virtue ethicist being honest is a virtue, a honesty is actually a virtue.

And being a honest man is something which an Aristotelian would aspire to become. So it varies, the answer to this question might might vary from framework to framework. And again, you have various religious frameworks. Like Christianity offers you a very strong and very

interesting religious framework for morality. Then, if you come to India, Buddhism and Hinduism and other religious frameworks also offer very interesting reasons and justifications for being moral.

And they also have their own ideals, their own ideas, their own conceptions of morality. Now let us see some pictures here and try to visualise, try to remember from this image what kind of an impression these images create in your mind. And say for example, let us take this.

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This picture represents the the challenger mishap which has happened several decades ago in 1986 when the NASA had launched the challenger spaceship, within seconds of its launch, it has exploded killing the astronauts who were travelling in it which raised several ethical concerns. It is a very interesting case for ethicists to learn very important lessons from it because the previous day of the launch the engineers were not very strongly recommending the launch because there were some doubts about O rings which is used in the shuttle.

But the managers on the other hand were pressurising the engineers because they say that you know we have to launch it because there is something called business integrity. If we do not do

that then that might affect our business chances in future. We have to go for the loss. So there is a parallel conflict between engineers who are technocrats and scientists and managers who are concerned more about the investment made for the launch.

Huge investment had been made for the launch but for the engineers the major concern is the science behind it, the kind of science they use, whether it is a good science or doubtful. I mean, they want to rule out all possible doubts regarding the safety of the launch but they could not do that. So they were not ready for launch. And this conflict went on. Finally the managers won over the engineers.

There is a famous statement you know that you have to remove your engineer's cap and wear a managers. So ultimately, this is what has happened. The Challenger exploded within minutes, within seconds of its launch and killing the all the astronauts and also millions of dollars and the pride, the American pride.

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Then, this is another one, the Ford Pinto controversy. We regard this car which the famous automotive giant Ford had designed and this car was designed with a certain objective in mind, following the principle of Norm 2000 that the car should weigh less than 2000 pounds and it would cost less than 2000 dollars. And in its hurry to come up with such a design, because there

was a lot of competition from the Japanese car makers so they were in a hurry, they were frustrated to come up with a design which should attract the American buyers.

Ultimately what happened was they compromised on several important safety concerns which ultimately resulted in several issues, several safety concerns were proved to be true and many people lost their lives and many people met with accidents. Finally, the company has to, company earned a lot of bad name with this model and had to revert back the model. So this is another case, probably if there is time, we will also discuss this case in one of our later lectures.

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And this is another one. This is something which you are witnessing in the contemporary world from fundamental religious organization called ISIS and here is a scene where they are killing some of their poor victims whom they have captured. Just because they do not like them, they are trying to eliminate their enemies.

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The Vietnam War

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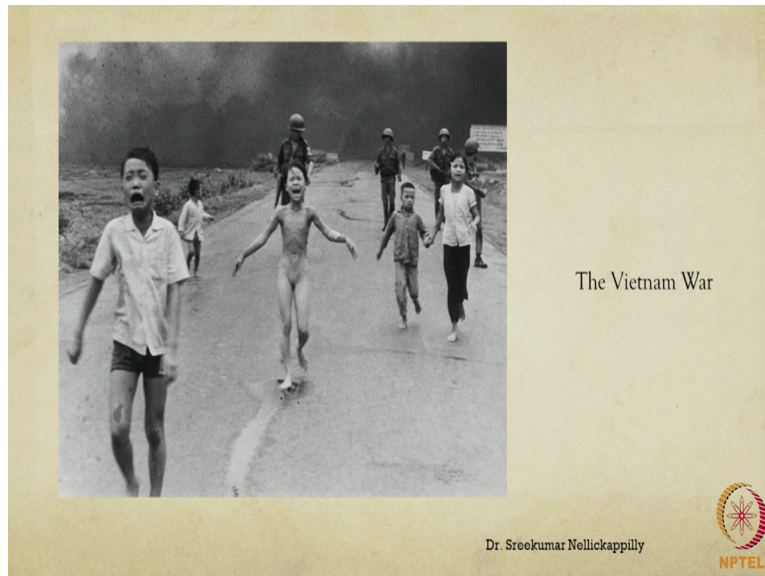


The Holocaust



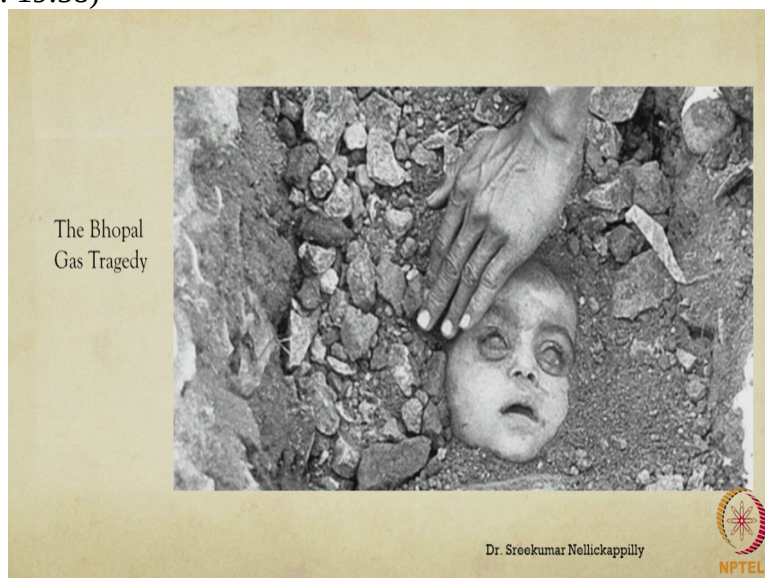
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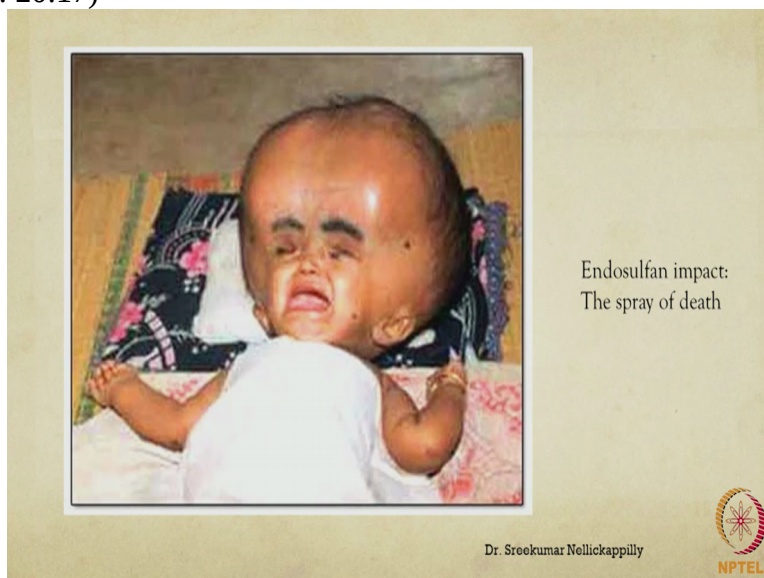
And this is a very important, that is a very famous photograph of Vietnam war. This is another one which represents the Holocaust which is again treated as one of the greatest crimes against humanity and this is another photograph from the Vietnam war which has won several awards, this photograph and this is another photograph of the atom bomb exploding in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one of those places.

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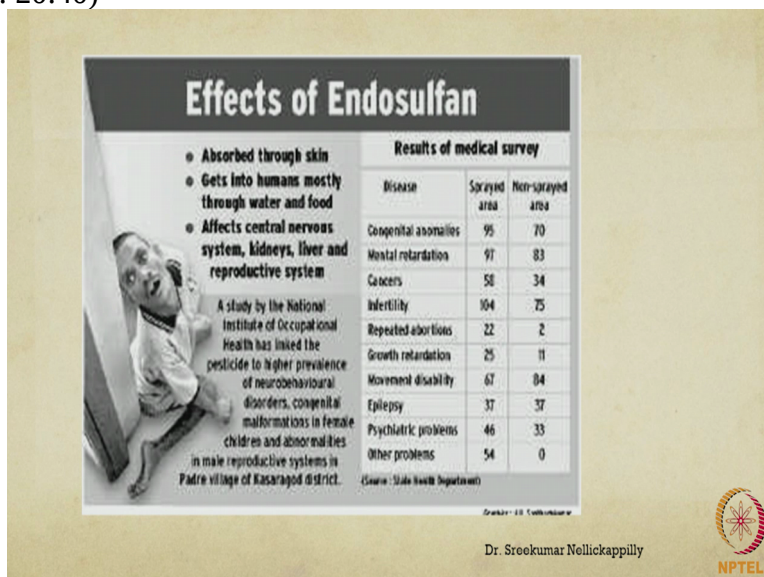
And this is a very different photograph from India, from Bhopal where a small little child is found dead, its head is being seen and it is going to be buried under the mud. So this represents one of the sad phases of the Bhopal gas tragedy.

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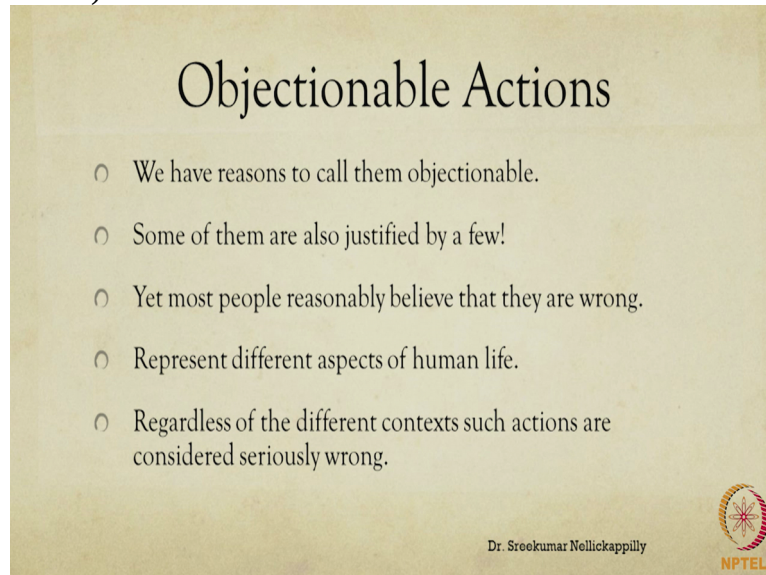
And this is the recent phenomenon, Endosulfan impact which is called as the spray of death which is used by plantations. Endosulfan is used by plantations as a pesticide which had serious consequences on the health of people who are living in the nearby areas which affected people, which caused several serious health problems.

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And this slide would give you the effects of Endosulfan and the kind of toxic chemical used in spraying.

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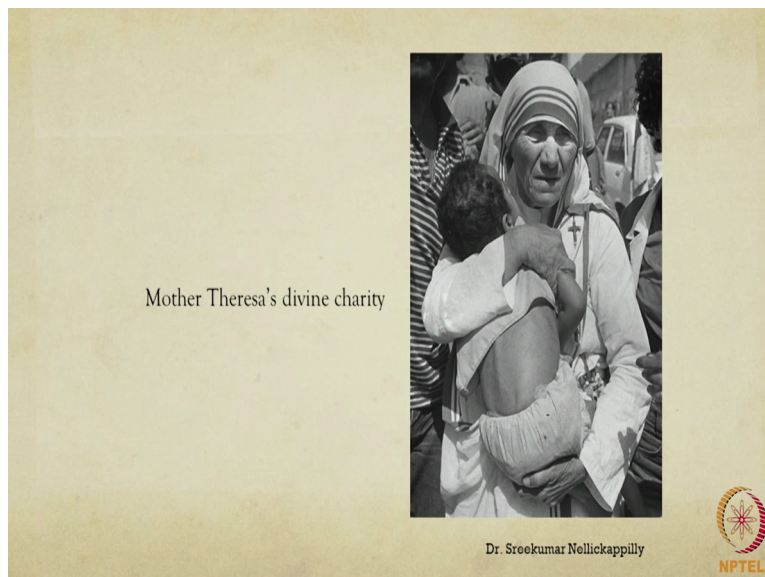
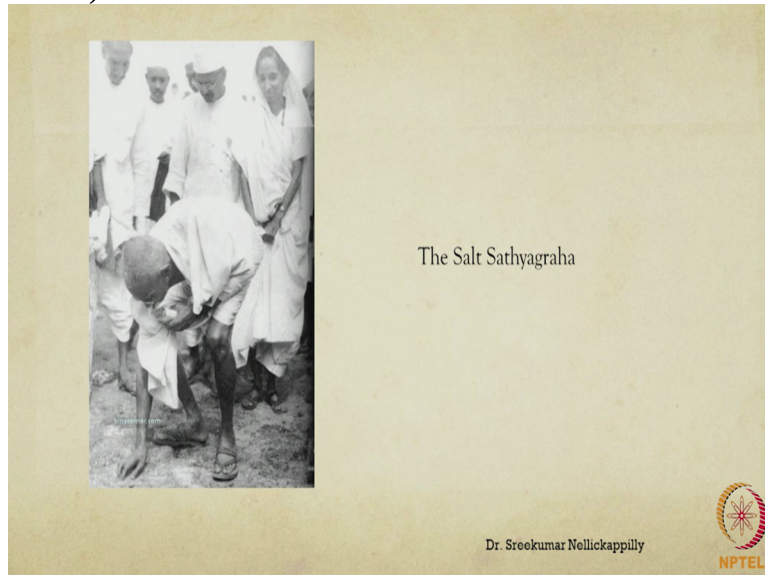
And these images which I have just shown you, they represent some sort of actions which are objectionable. We can call them as objectionable actions. We have reasons to call them objectionable and some of them are also justified by a few. Say for example, the Holocaust was justified by the Nazis when it was done. And the Vietnam war, the cruelties of the Vietnam war the US when it was involved in a war with the Vietnamese, they have done all these cruelties and they justified it.

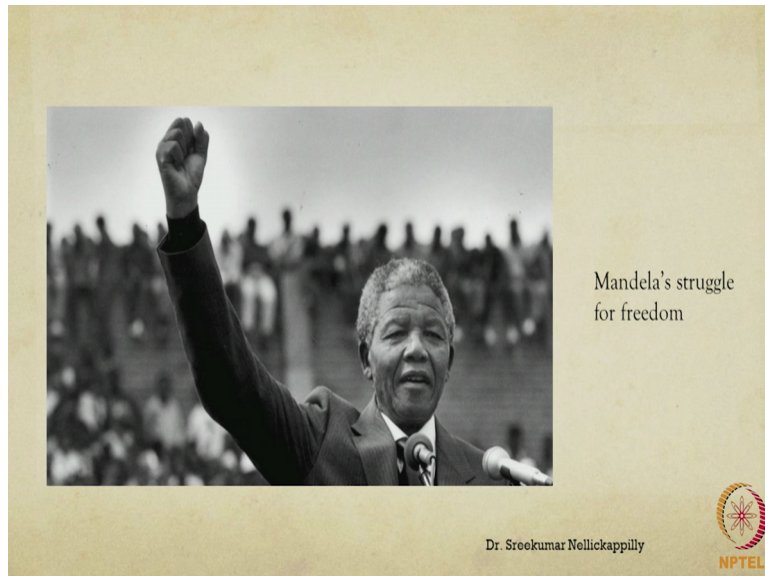
So to some extent, the they (racha) I mean some people have justified it but in general most people reasonably believe that they are wrong, these actions are wrong. And what makes them wrong is an interesting question for us, from the point of view of ethics. And they represent different aspects of human life, say for example one is the Challenger incident which is again a conflict between the engineers and managers.

Then again high-level technologies involved, Bhopal gas tragedy involves industrial disasters, Vietnam war and that is a kind of war crimes are involved. Then in the crisis of Holocaust racism is involved, several aspects of human life is involved in a but there is something common in all

of them that they all qualify to be called as objectionable actions. Regardless of their different contexts such actions are considered seriously wrong, objectionable by humanity in general.

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And let us come to some other images here. This is a very beautiful image of the salt Satyagraha which has been photographed beautifully, which represented the very concept of Satyagraha for several decades in the Indian subcontinent but also in the world, all over the world that Gandhiji and breaking the law. He breaks the law in order to and makes salt and breaks the repressive British law. So he represents freedom, the principle of freedom, the value of freedom, the virtue of freedom. And again, Mother Teresa's divine charity.

This picture is another impression, this creates another impression in our mind, the divine charity of this lady who loved unconditionally and who is treated as the mother, the Divine mother for thousands of people in all over the world and here you will see Mandela. Mandela struggles for freedom who spent most of his life, 20 years of his life in the jail and finally became victorious and President of South Africa and he represents the ceaseless craving for human freedom, courage.

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Praiseworthy Actions

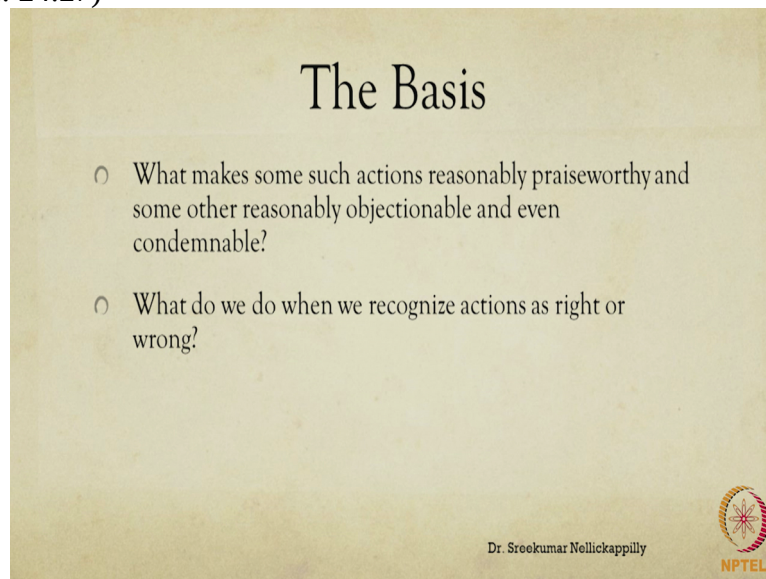
- Considered as virtuous actions by virtuous people.
- Represent courage, compassion, love, freedom, liberty etc.
- Such principles have to be emulated.
- Such people/character deserve to be respected.


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And these are all, these actions represented in these people, Gandhiji, Mother Teresa, and Mandela, we can say that they are all praiseworthy actions, something which is praiseworthy because they are considered to be virtuous actions by virtuous people. Gandhiji, Mandela or, they are all virtues people and again, they represent courage, compassion, love, freedom, liberty, etc which are principles which we value, which we consider are virtues, principles which give, add a lot of value and meaning and purpose to human life.

And we are, many of us believe that such principles have to be emulated in our life so that we can also live and lead a meaningful life, a more fruitful life. And again people and character deserve to be respected, they deserve human respect.

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And now the question is the basis. What makes such actions reasonably praiseworthy and some other actions reasonably objectionable and even condemnable? What is the criteria? On what basis can we say that these are good and those, such another actions are bad. And usually, we do that very unreflectively. As I already mentioned, I do not think anyone know most of us agree that the 2 sets of actions which I have represented through images are very different and while Gandhiji's salt Satyagraha and Mother Teresa's divine love and Mandela's struggle for freedom, these are all actions which represent human values, human virtues, the other kind of actions which I have pictured, represent something wrong, something wrong about doing them.

So most of us agree in that. But even though we agree, we agree quite unreflectively. We have to justify them on what basis we can say that this is right and that is wrong. And again, what do we do when we recognise actions as right or wrong? When we say that a particular action is right, when we say that a particular another set of actions are wrong, for example, copying in an exam is wrong. On what basis? What we do when we do that, when we recognise it?

Are there any objective basis or criteria to decide that set of actions are right set of actions are wrong? Unfortunately, often this is not the case. We often do not have an objective basis or criteria. People might disagree on these, many such actions are doubtful. Though they are many actions which are largely reasonably agreed upon by majority of human beings, there is no way

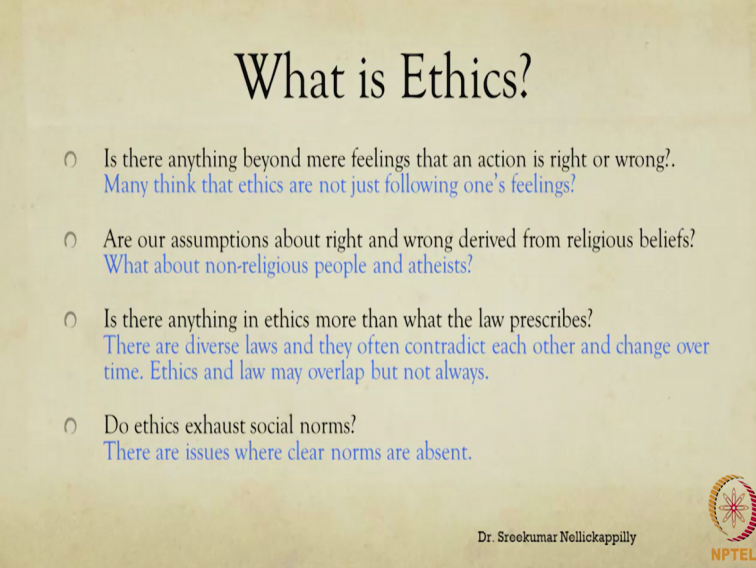
you can say that they are absolutely right or there is an absolute criteria to distinguish good actions from wrong actions.

When we talk about the criteria, how do we really try to arrive at the judgement? When we say that a particular action is right, whether the action itself or the intentions behind the actions or the consequences of the action or the characters of the people. Say for example in this case, the character of Hitler, the character of Hitler is and the character of the manager who pressurised for the launch of challenger or you know overpowering or rather bypassing the very strong opposition of the engineers, that is a quite objectionable action.

The character of Hitler can be questioned, the character of that general who shoots that young, innocent chap is questionable, is wrong. And while on the other hand, the character of people like Gandhiji and Mandela and Mother Teresa are praiseworthy. So, are we really looking at the character of these people or are we really looking at the consequences of their actions, what they gained by performing a certain kind of action? Or what was their original intentions?


And these are some of the things which we need to understand and based on the answers given, we have different theoretical frameworks. Say, a cation would probably focus on the intentions, utilitarian would possibly highlight the consequences and virtuous ethicist like Aristotle would highlight the character of the person to be emulated in your life as important when it comes to ethics. And with this we will try to understand what is ethics?

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What is Ethics?

- Is there anything beyond mere feelings that an action is right or wrong?
Many think that ethics are not just following one's feelings?
- Are our assumptions about right and wrong derived from religious beliefs?
What about non-religious people and atheists?
- Is there anything in ethics more than what the law prescribes?
There are diverse laws and they often contradict each other and change over time. Ethics and law may overlap but not always.
- Do ethics exhaust social norms?
There are issues where clear norms are absent.


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Is there anything beyond mere feelings that an action is right or wrong? So, when we talk about ethics, is there anything beyond mere feelings, just I feel that it is right or I feel that it is wrong. I mean, if you ask a common man, he or she may not be able to tell us anything more than that. He would just say that okay, I feel so, I think so. But why do you think so? And many think that ethics is not just following one's feelings. It is not just following one's feelings.

Sometimes you know, following one's feelings can be gravely mistaken. You might be gravely mistaken and it might be very seriously wrong also. So these things have to be kept in mind. So are our assumptions about right and wrong derived from religious beliefs? Of course, yes, to some extent it is true that our religions have played a very important role in the evolution of moral assumptions and customs and conventions in human societies.

But what about nonreligious people and atheists who are quite common today? There are many people who do not believe in any religion, many people who do not believe in God but they also value ethics. They also think that being ethical is important then they also have certain assumptions about ethics which largely, they agree with people who are believers and people who believe in God and religion and all that. So what is that? What about them then?

Again, is there anything in ethics more than what law prescribes? Because there is a tendency particularly in today's world, particularly in the professional context. If you go and talk to a

professional, an engineer or a manager or a businessman and tell him that you have to be ethical, he would say that okay, yes I am ethical, I am following all the laws. Whatever the laws the country has prescribed, I am following but beyond that, I am not. Why should I

For me, I mean for him, for the, for such a hard-core professional sometimes we find that ethics is synonymous with the law. He does not think that there is anything beyond law in ethics, anything beyond ethics that is to be valued by him or her. So, are they synonymous and we can say that there are diverse laws and they often contradict each other and change over time. So laws, of course ethics also change over time but ethics and law may overlap but they are not always overlapping and they are not synonymous.

There are certain actions which are ethical but illegal. For example, Gandhiji's breaking of salt law, the salt Satyagraha was illegal because it involved an explicit breaking of a law which existed in the country but he, he thought that it is ethical, it is moral to do that. Rather for Gandhiji he considered that it is his moral responsibility to break the law which is inhuman. And there are vice versa, there are certain principles which are ethical, which are illegal.

So they do not overlap always. So we have to really distinguish them, we have to understand that what ethics and law are different. Do ethics exhaust social norms? There are issues where clear norms are absent. So we cannot say that ethics is exhausted with social norms. So these are some of the basic questions which raised in this lecture. So in we will continue with this topic in the next lecture also. For the time being, let us wind up this lecture. Goodbye.