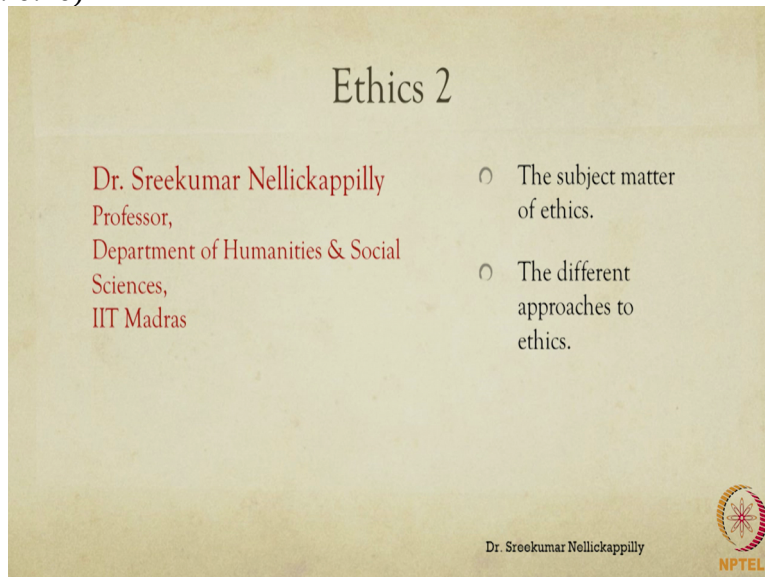


Ethics
Professor Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappily
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
Module No 1
Lecture 02

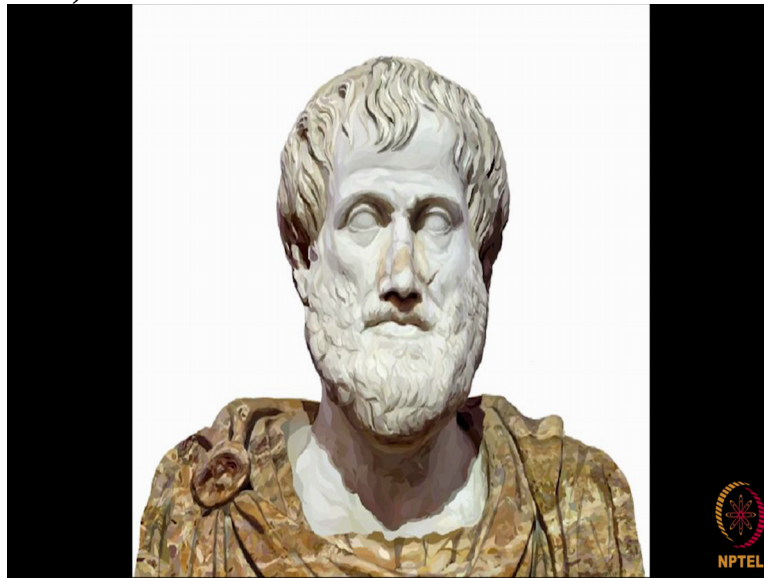
Welcome to this lecture series on ethics. This is the 2nd lecture. We will discuss the following topics.

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After a very brief examination of the subject matter of ethics, we will see the different approaches to ethics. That is going to be the focus of this lecture.


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Subject Matter of Ethics

- The standards that regulate human behaviour and conduct.
- Analyse why are we obligated to do/not do certain things.
- Studies why certain standards of behaviour are treated as virtuous.
- Why do we consider honesty, integrity, trust-worthiness and respect for freedom and fairness as important?

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And we have already seen you know some of the major issues with which ethics as a reflective discipline deals with. And here you know, we can say that the standards that regulate human behaviour and conduct is the subject matter of ethics. I mean, there are different ways in which the subject matter of ethics is approached. The ancient approach was very different from the modern approach. So what I am trying to do here is that I am trying to arrive at a very modest way of explanation to see what would be the subject matter of ethics.

Without really referring to any metaphysical or other assumptions, it deals with the standards that regulate human behaviour and conduct. Though these are terms which have rooted in several see

for example, conduct is a term which Aristotle uses a lot. For him, what is conduct is a habitual behaviour. There is a difference between behaviour and conduct.

Behaviour need not be habitual. He just behaves like that. A person just behaved in a certain way but the conduct of a person is something which is more or less static, which you arrive at an understanding of the conduct of a person by having interacted with that person for some time. And after several months or years, you know that a particular person's conduct is this. So that is definitely different from behaviour.

So, the standards that regulate human behaviour is ethics and it analyse why are we obligated to do or not to do certain things. See, we are definitely obligated not to do certain things. We all are very clear about it. Say for example stealing or copying in an exam, these are things we are obligated not to do but we have to actually reflect what is the reason? Why is it that we are obligated to do these things or not to do these things?

And again you know, helping others, helping a person who is in need and someone saving someone's life we can do that, all these are things which we have some, we feel that we are obligated to certain things like. Definitely, we all know that they are not legal obligations. For example, obligation to help another person is not always a legal obligation. But at the same time, we feel that there is an obligation.

We are responsible for doing certain things because if we do that, the life of the other person might significantly change in a positive manner. So in that way, we feel that there is an obligation. Why? What is the base of that? See, religious people might believe that they are all created by God or we are all the children of God. So in that sense there is an obligation. God has made us obligated to each other because we are siblings.

But a person who does not believe in this such an assumption such a belief that we are children of God, still there might be, he or she might be feeling that he or she is obligated to do and help others. Why? Again, there are studies why certain standards of behaviour are treated as virtuous. Say for example, respecting freedom, respecting the rights of other people. They are all virtues in nature.

And why do we consider honesty, integrity, trustworthiness and respect for freedom and fairness as important in our life? Most people do that, most of us feel that you know we consider that honesty is important, integrity, trustworthiness, fairness, respect for freedom, I mean all these are important for our life. But they, are they really important? On what basis can we say that they are important?

So a reflection means you know a philosophical reflection has to answer such questions. But before we getting into those details, before we really try to understand the 3 different ethical frameworks that discuss about such or rather try to answer these questions which we have raised at the very outset, we will try to understand the different approaches to it.

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There are basically 4 approaches we are going to discuss this. The 1st one is metaethics and metaethics is it talks about the nature of ethics and moral reasoning. Metaethics talks about the nature of ethics and moral reasoning and normative ethics talks about the attempt to determine meanings of normative terms, example- right, wrong, good, bad, or etc.

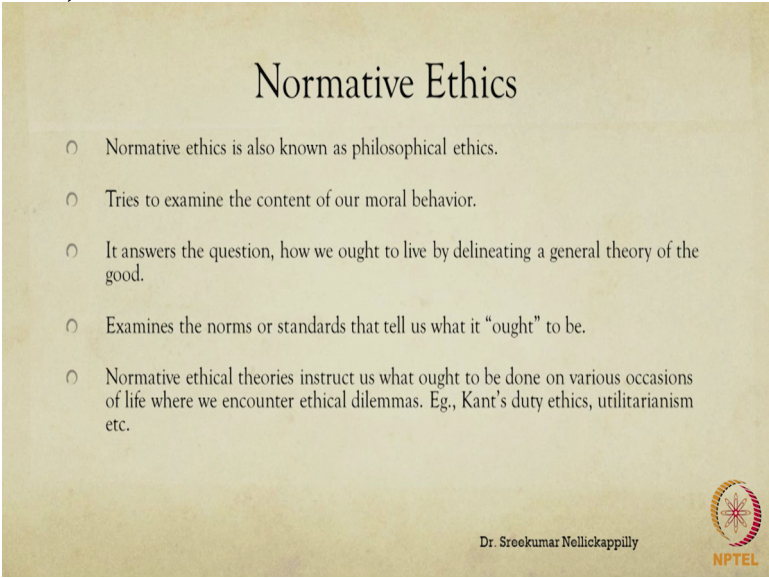
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Applied ethics tries to find out how do we apply ethics to work and lives. Say for example, it is an approach to apply, directly apply the ethical insights or ethical reflection into certain specific field of activity. Say for example, business or medicine, practice of medicine. So there are medical ethics. There is medical ethics, there is business ethics, there is engineering ethics.

These are all different domains in which ethical reflection is being applied to address and resolve certain very specific issues that might evolve in those context. And that is very ported in today's world because we are living in a world where we rely upon a lot on professional communities. Moral psychology is the 4th one. It studies the biological and psychological basis of ethics. So will not try to understand some of these things in detail.


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Normative Ethics

- Normative ethics is also known as philosophical ethics.
- Tries to examine the content of our moral behavior.
- It answers the question, how we ought to live by delineating a general theory of the good.
- Examines the norms or standards that tell us what it “ought” to be.
- Normative ethical theories instruct us what ought to be done on various occasions of life where we encounter ethical dilemmas. Eg., Kant’s duty ethics, utilitarianism etc.

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Coming to normative ethics. Normative ethics is known as philosophical ethics because it deals with norms. It deals with standards and tries to justify the very availability and the very need for such standards. It tries to examine the content of our moral behaviour. What is that makes a particular form of human action, a particular behaviour moral or distinguish it from the immoral? It answers the question as to how we ought to live by delineating a general theory of the good.

So we have a general theory, a general framework which would describe our assumptions about what is good and also try to provide a justification for those assumptions. Then again, it examines the norms of standards that tell us what it ought to be. So that oughtness aspect comes prominently here. Examines the norms or standards that tell us, these are the norms to be followed and these norms basically tell us that what ought to be the case, what ought to we be doing and to in order to do the right thing?

Normative ethical theories extract us what ought to be done on previous occasions of life where we encounter ethical dilemma. See, this is another very important aspect because several occasions, we might need the guidance of ethical theories. Why do we need to be doing a certain kind of action instead of certain other kind of actions? Or what criteria should be applied? Say for instance, as I mentioned in the previous lecture, there are different aspects, there are different criteria we normally consider.

Whether the intention of the person needs to be considered as a criteria? If the intention was good, the action is good. If the intention is bad, even though the consequences are good, even though many people benefit out of his actions, since his intention is bad, the action is not be treated as ethically valuable and ethically good. Such theories emphasise on the intentions.


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Normative Ethics

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- Examines the norms or standards that tell us what it “ought” to be.
- Normative ethical theories instruct us what ought to be done on various occasions of life where we encounter ethical dilemmas. Eg., Kant’s duty ethics, utilitarianism etc.
- In general can be divided into two categories; consequentialism and non-consequentialism.

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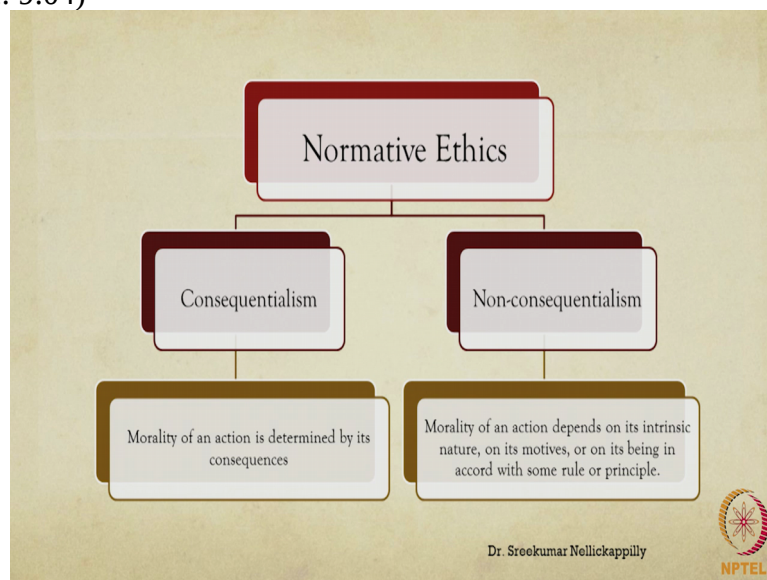


Say for example you have Kantian theory. Kantian’s duty ethics emphasises that duty is the most important thing. Duty for duty’s sake. So an action which is done for the sake of beauty is the right action. That action might lead to consequences which are really bad, which are really

horrible but regardless of that, the action needs to be treated as good because it was done with the right intention, with a conscious awareness of the fact that it is done for the sake of duty.

Now when we come to another framework called utilitarianism, utilitarian framework emphasises the consequences, the particular action leads to good consequences, happy good consequences, they are good and the utilitarians like Jemery Bentham and JS Mill emphasise on such a framework. So these are some of the normal ethical frameworks. And in general, it can be divided into 2 categories, consequentialism and non-consequentialism. So normative ethics has 2 broad categories.

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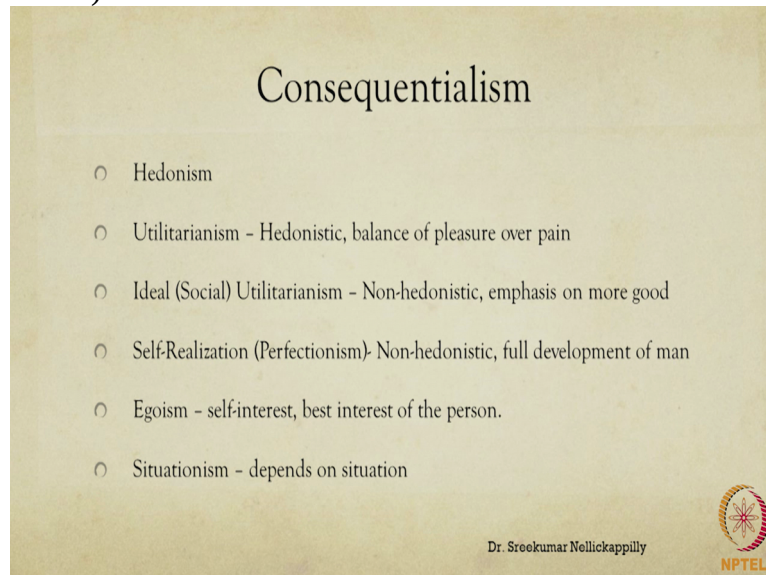


See for example consequentialism which says that morality of an action is determined by its consequences. You have taken some money from the bank. Why do you need to return it? If you do not return it, what will happen? The banking system will collapse. So you have to do that. So consequences are important. And non-consequentialist theories are not really bothered about what will happen, what is the real result or consequence of an action?

But morality of an action depends on the intrinsic nature, on its motives or on its being in accord with some rules or principles. There might be some rules. For example, God said it. Okay, a person believes that I do this because God said it. A religious person, he believes in charity because his religion insists that charity is important. Why? What is the consequence?

He is not bothered about consequences of his action. He just does that because his religion wants him to do that. Or he had a good intention, another framework, another approach. He has a good intention, he has a good motive or like Kant, he did it, he does it because he thinks that it is his duty. He knows that it is his duty. So these are the nonconsequentialist theories.

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And there are several consequentialist. Like for example the hedonistic framework which I just mentioned, the Bentham and hedonism which is called the utilitarianism and JS Mill had another dimension to this utilitarian framework. We will discuss these details in the following lectures. Then, the utilitarianism like hedonistic balance of pleasure over pain.

So the utilitarians have actually developed a utilitarian calculus, a happiness calculus, a pleasure calculus you can probably call it because for them, the utility of an action which is the consequence is very important and utility is equated largely with happiness, with pleasure. And there is something called ideal or social utilitarianism which is non-hedonistic, which emphasises on moral good. And there is another framework which believes in perfectionism which believes that the aim of human life is to attain perfection, self-realisation.

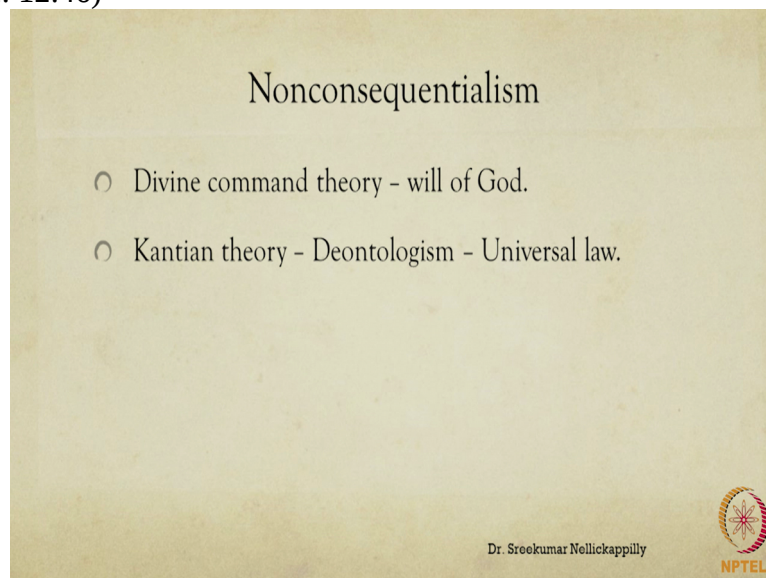
So it is a non-hedonistic approach and it emphasises on the full development of (man) man attaining all his developments or rather realising all his potentials, self-realisation is the aim. So any action that promotes human circular aviation needs to be considered as a good action and anything that prevents is to be treated as evil. So that is the perfectionist would argue for that.

And then egoism, this very commonsensical framework which says that self-interest is the most important thing and the best interest of the person is what is to be treated as good by that particular person.

This is a very ancient framework. From olden days onwards, you can find various versions of egoism. The Sophists have advocated a kind of egoism but not purely egoism in the sense in which we understand the term today. And there are different other schools of types of egoism. Then situationism which says that what makes an action good is the consequence definitely but at the same time, the situation also matters.

So these are some of the fundamental consequentialist approaches. We will be discussing some of them in detail later in the following lectures.

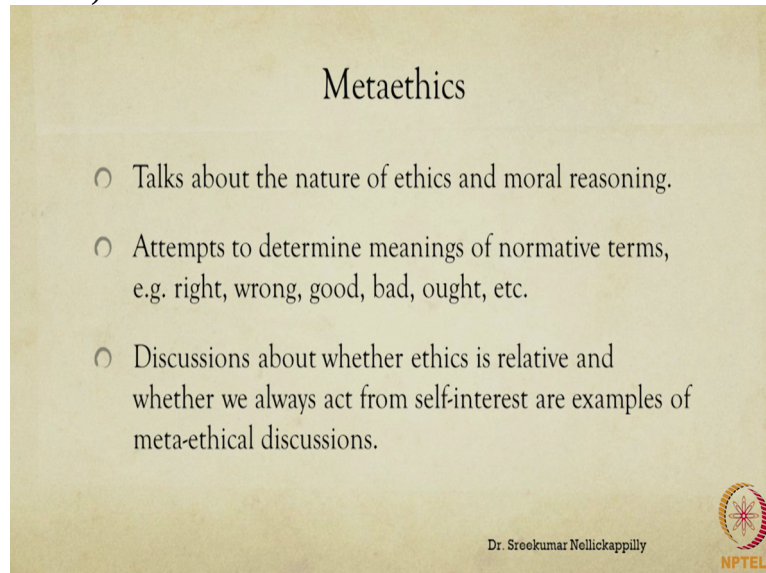
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So now the non-consequentialism are basically 2 of them we will discuss here in this lecture series, the divine command which underlines the will of God as very important. And also the Kantian theory which I have already mentioned which emphasises on a universal law which is called deontologism because it emphasises, it highlights the duty aspect. It talks about a universal law. It says that you should act according to a principle which can be treated as a universal law so that everyone else can follow it. So before performing an action, you have to think whether this action is based on a principle which can be universalised. So the principle of

universalisability is a key aspect of the Kantian framework. So that is the nonconsequentialist approach.

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Now metaethics. metaethics is a very important framework. It talks about the nature of ethics and moral reasoning. It is not actually involved in debates on ethics. It attempts to determine the meanings of normative terms which we normally use when we involve ourselves in ethical debates. We use terms like right, wrong, good, bad, ought, et cetera. That is not good, that is not bad.

That is your obligation, that is your responsibility and it is non-virtuous. You are not supposed to do that. So when we do engage in conversations about ethics or in debates on ethical issues, we are using certain terms and metaethics is trying to understand the meaning of these terms, what do they actually mean when you say that it is right or wrong or good. Do they actually stand for something which is very substantial.

Do they actually, when I say that a particular action is good, say for example, war is bad or racism is bad, does it really refer to something which is fundamentally true? Does this statement, racism is bad, does it have a true content in it? When I say that pens are used for writing, it is a statement, it is a description about pens which is a very materialistic description. Are they the same?

What about the similarities, the structural similarities between these terms? So these are some of the issues which metaethics would raise. Discussions about whether ethics is relative that is a very interesting discussion which is quite old in human history and in philosophical history, discussions about whether ethics is relative and whether we always act from self-interest are examples of metaethical descriptions.

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The Santhara Controversy

DECODING THE RITUAL

As Rajasthan HC bans the age-old Jain tradition, here's the low-down on what Santhara is all about


WHAT IS SANTHARA?

- Santhara, also called *sallekhana*, is a spiritual tradition of attaining 'samadhi' in Jainism dating back to 250 BC, in which a person gives up food and drink and starves until death. It is voluntary and is said to be performed only under the guidance of a Guru.
- According to some reports, around 250 Jains (both from Shvetambar and Digambar sects) attain Santhara in India every year, mostly from Rajasthan and Gujarat. Though it is unrecorded, printed obituaries of the deceased mention Santhara as the means of death — leading the community to arrive at an estimated figure.
- Around 5-6 such deaths happen every year in Mumbai, according to a senior community member.

THE BAN

- A public interest petition was filed in Rajasthan high court in 2006 by rights activist Nikhil Soni, which led to the ban.
- This was after two acts of Santhara in Jaipur made headlines. In the first instance, Bimla Devi Bhansali, 60, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer, fasted unto death. Allegations were that the family had forced her to practice Santhara, even as she wanted food and water.
- Another case was of Keila Devi Hirawat, 93, in 2006, who died a similar death.
- The tradition again came into limelight when Mumbai-based journalist-filmmaker Shekhar Hattangadi, who is also a teacher of constitutional law, made a film on the subject in 2015, which went on to win awards at the recent Bangalore Short Film Festival and Kolkata Short Film Festival.

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See, I will take a very concrete example which was a controversy in the recent past, the Santhara controversy. Because it, Santhara is a name of the practice which exists among the Jains where they decide to die. So, and what happens is that a Jain after attaining a certain age, decides to give up his life. That is part of their, integral part of their religious beliefs. It is not compulsory but many people do that.

What the person does is that he or she would refrain from having food slowly and then slowly from again having water and finally dies, slowly goes off, slowly signs off. So this process is Santhara which is actually spiritual. And some people feel that this can be equated with committing suicide because in committing suicide also, that is not happening naturally. In Santhara also, one can argue that that is not happening naturally because one is refraining oneself from eating and drinking and dying ok?

So similar kind of thing is happening in suicide as well. It is not a natural process in both cases. So this has been questioned in the court of law where the person who argued against it who

questioned it, challenged the practice by saying that it is suicide. So it has to be banned and the lower court banned it.

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And it has raised a huge controversy all over the country among the Jain community people and they argued product and they said that it is a right, it is a religious right and they said that it is not, it cannot be equated with suicide. So it involves a very interesting question, whether it is suicide or not?

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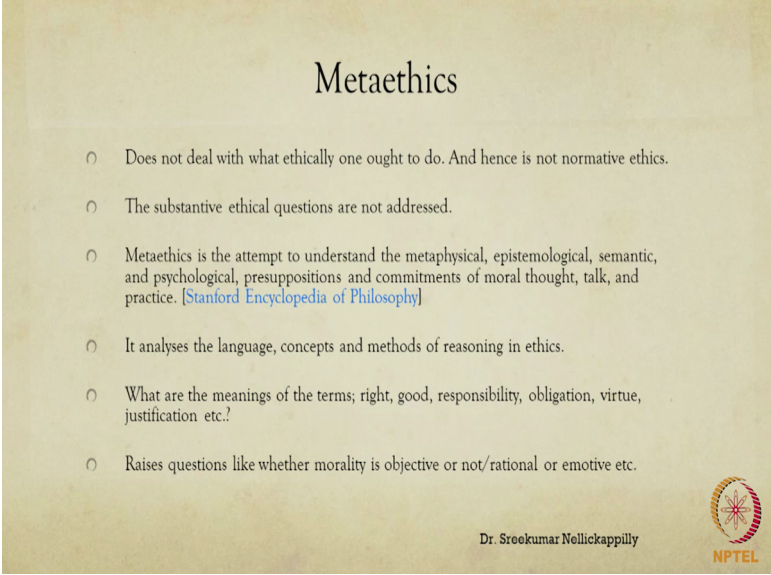


On what occasions can we treat it as suicide? When a young chap does it and an old person does it, do they have the same meaning? So all such questions can be raised in this context. For our purpose, this raises a very interesting question because Santhara is a traditional, religious practice which has been happening in our country in India for several centuries now. And suddenly a modern court comes and bans it.

Can we justify that? So there is an apparent contradiction between tradition, beliefs and modern convictions of law. And how do we really settle this controversy? There is a controversy. How do we really settle it? The argument goes on from both sides and ethical reflection needs to address

very carefully with the intricacies of the arguments made by both the parties finally before taking a decision. The legal decision is something else. That is law. But from the point of view of ethics, we must arrive at a better understanding by conceptually analysing.

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The slide is titled "Metaethics" in a large, black, serif font. Below the title is a list of six bullet points, each preceded by a small circle. The text of the bullet points is as follows:

- Does not deal with what ethically one ought to do. And hence is not normative ethics.
- The substantive ethical questions are not addressed.
- Metaethics is the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic, and psychological presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk, and practice. [\[Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\]](#)
- It analyses the language, concepts and methods of reasoning in ethics.
- What are the meanings of the terms; right, good, responsibility, obligation, virtue, justification etc.?
- Raises questions like whether morality is objective or not/rational or emotive etc.

At the bottom right of the slide, there is a logo for NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) which consists of a stylized sun or flower-like symbol. To the left of the logo, the text "Dr. Srookumar Nellickappilly" is written in a small, black, sans-serif font.

Metaethics is a very peculiar approach to ethics. It does not deal with what ethically one ought to do and hence is not normative ethics. So there is a very important distinction. In normative ethics we actually are engaged in an ethical debate. But here, it is metaethics. It does not deal with what ethically what ought to do but rather it actually analyses the talk about ethics, the terms used. The substantive ethical questions are not addressed by metaethicist but rather it is an attempt: this is what the Stanford Encyclopaedia of philosophy says.

Metaethics is the attempt to understand the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic and psychological presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk and practice. See, practice for example, Santhara is a practice. So what are the metaphysical, epistemological, semantic and psychological presuppositions and commitments behind it? So behind all the judgements we make when we say that a particular action is right, what are the presuppositions?

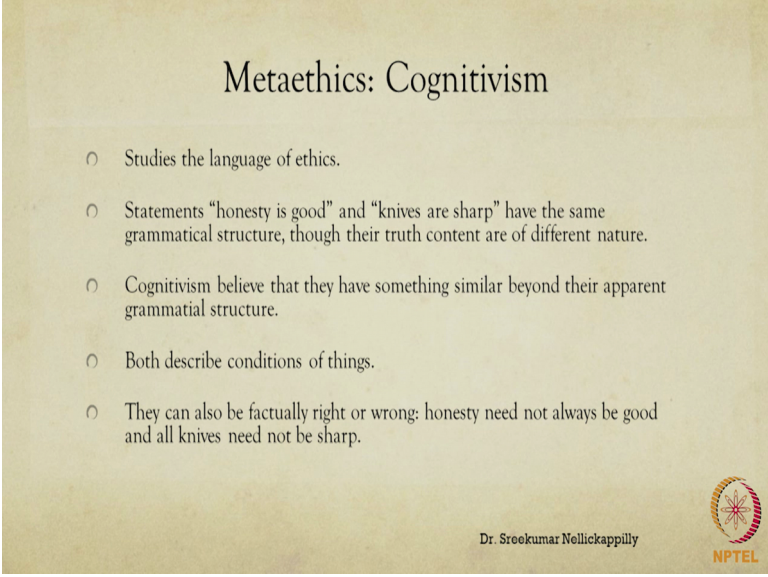
It analyses the language, concepts and methods of reasoning in ethics which I already mentioned. And what are the meanings of the terms, right, good, responsibility, obligation, virtue, justification, et cetera? So terms are analysed. Do they have any substantive meaning? Like for

example, energy which is a scientific term or colour which is again a scientific term which can be explained, temperature can be explained in terms of scientific principles.

So the meaning of such terms can be very clearly delineated. But this impossible to arrive at such clarity in ethical discourse when someone is saying that he is obligated to do? What is this meaning of the word obligation here? While the meaning of the term temperature is quite clear, the meaning of the word obligation is weak. We cannot without controversy establish the correct quote unquote the correct meaning of the word obligation or moral obligation or good or right.

Raises questions like whether morality is objective or not, rational or emotive. There are some people who argue that there is nothing beyond emotive utterances. Moral judgements are nothing but emotive utterances. You are just expressing your emotions. So that is what. So there are basically 2 types of metaethical frameworks. One is cognitivism, the other one is called noncognitivism.


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Metaethics: Cognitivism

- Studies the language of ethics.
- Statements "honesty is good" and "knives are sharp" have the same grammatical structure, though their truth content are of different nature.
- Cognitivism believe that they have something similar beyond their apparent grammatial structure.
- Both describe conditions of things.
- They can also be factually right or wrong: honesty need not always be good and all knives need not be sharp.

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The cognitivist studies the language of ethics. They say that statements, this is what I mentioned just now, honesty is good business statement which we make in ethics. Honesty is good. We believe that many of us believe that honesty is good. It is a principle and let us take another example. Knives are sharp which is a description about a certain object called knife. They have the same grammatical structure.

Though their truth content are of different nature because as I mentioned, knives are sharp is a certain description about an object called knife or objects called knives. But honesty is good. Can we say that honesty is good is a description about the object or a kind of a situation called honesty? So this is a kind of vagueness which is associated with the sentence, honesty is good though these 2 are sentences which same grammatical structure.

In cognitivism believes that they have something similar beyond their apparent grammatical structure. That is not just they are sharing common, same grammatical structure but also there are other ways in which they are similar. They both describe conditions of things, conditions of being sharp and conditions of being good. So in that way, there are similarities.

That is what cognitivism would argue. They can also be factually right or wrong. Honestly not always be good and knives need not always be sharp. So that is why, there can be right or wrong.

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Metaethics: Non-Cognitivism

- There are no moral truths and hence the language of morality does not refer to anything.
- Moral judgements are not like physical descriptions as they express the emotions and preferences of an individual.
- **Emotivism** : moral statements are emotions or preferences.
- **Prescriptivism** moral statements are subtle commands, expressing what the speaker wishes to happen.
- **Norm-expressivism** : moral statements represent the feelings of a community.

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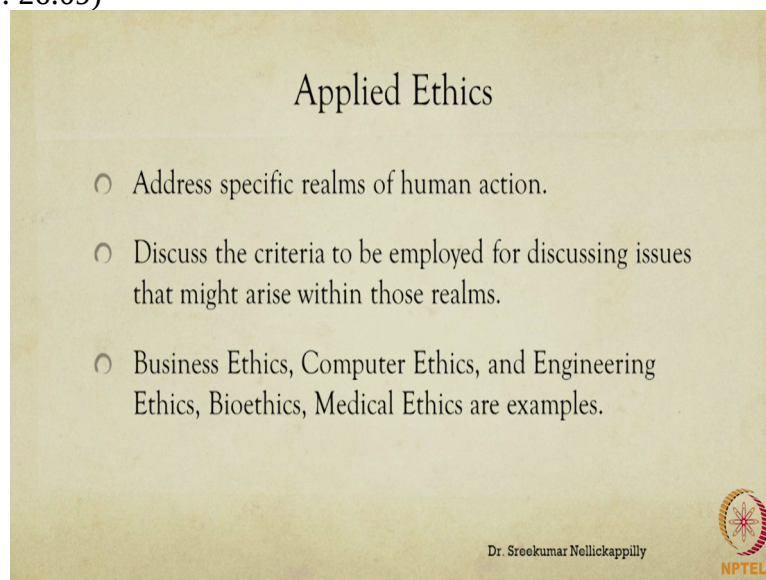


And Metaethics, the other approach in metaethics more noncognitivism believes that as I already mentioned, there are no moral truths and hence the language of morality does not refer to anything beyond just emotions, feelings, et cetera or preferences. So these are 2 major candidates, either emotions or preferences. Moral judgements are not like physical descriptions like knives are sharp. They express the emotions and preferences of an individual.

Say for example, Emotivism would say that moral statements are emotions or preferences and prescriptivism says that moral statements are subtle commands. When I say that something is good, it implies that I am making a command, that thing should happen expressing what I wish to happen. Okay? So when I say that helping others is good, it is my preference. I command, I want that people should help others.

Non-Expressivism says that moral statements represent the feeling of the community. So these are some of the metaethical approaches.

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And when we come to applied ethics, as I already discussed this when we mentioned about applied ethics in the beginning of this lecture, it addresses specific realms of human action, specific context. Say for example, medicine, the practice of medicine by physicians and other healthcare professionals, they are expected to follow certain standards of behaviour, certain norms, certain principles.

For example, the Doctors, the physician should respect the autonomy of the patient or benevolence or non-maleficence, no harm principle have to be followed. In engineering, the primary concern is safety.

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We have to ensure the safety at any cost in engineering. When a particular design is planned for when something is being Dam is constructed or a road or bridge is constructed, all these things have to be kept in mind. So these are specific realms, specific spheres of human action and there are many such specific spheres of human action in modern life.

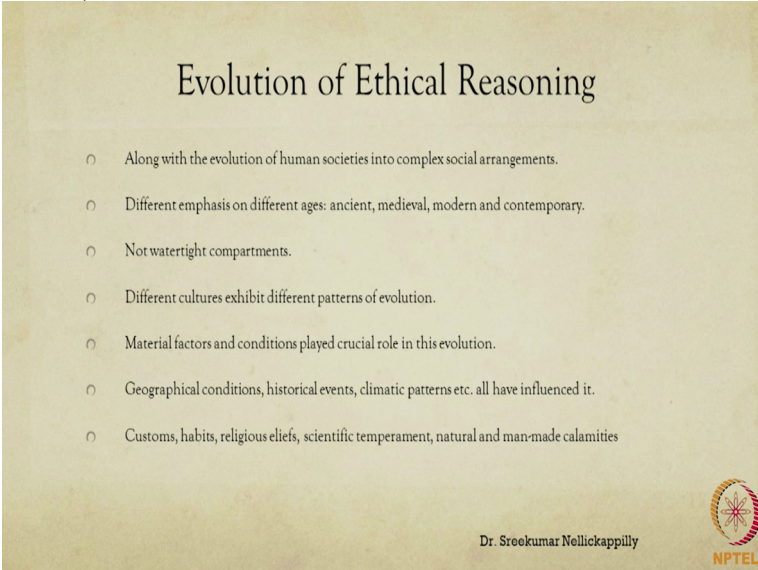
There are advocates, there are doctors, there are nurses, so there are nursing ethics, doctors ethics, then advocates ethics, engineering ethics and each engineering branch has its own very peculiar ethical dilemmas. Because one engineering branch would raise very different ethical dilemmas than the other. So, there are many such things, specific concerns, specific human

spheres where ethical insights and principles have to be applied in order to understand the situation and also resolve some of the dilemmas which we might encounter.

Discuss the criteria to be employed for discussing issues that might arise within those realms. And also these are some business ethics, computer ethics. For example, then Internet ethics, privacy for example is very important that, confidentiality is very important there. You cannot defy, you cannot really think of not respecting privacy of individuals when you use computers. So many such things have to be understood.

And then the 4th one I am not discussing. We will now directly go to the next topic, evolution of ethical reasoning. Before we really try to understand the next topic, we have to very briefly discuss the evolution of ethical reasoning.

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The slide is titled "Evolution of Ethical Reasoning" in a serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of seven points, each preceded by a small circle. The points discuss the evolution of human societies, the emphasis on different ages, the lack of watertight compartments, cultural patterns, material factors, geographical conditions, and customs. In the bottom right corner, there is a logo for NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) featuring a stylized sun or flower design, and the name "Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappilly" is printed below it.

- Along with the evolution of human societies into complex social arrangements.
- Different emphasis on different ages: ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary.
- Not watertight compartments.
- Different cultures exhibit different patterns of evolution.
- Material factors and conditions played crucial role in this evolution.
- Geographical conditions, historical events, climatic patterns etc. all have influenced it.
- Customs, habits, religious eliefs, scientific temperament, natural and man-made calamities

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NPTEL

We can see that it happened with the evolution of human societies into complex social arrangements. We know that you know human societies have evolved from very simple forms of a tribal existence to complex societies, social formations. If you take the example of India, from the small Janpadas to Mahajanpadas to Rashtras to country to nation and finally to the kind of nation which we have today as India which involves a lot of diverse cultures in it into its fold.

So this complex social organisation has demanded different ethical frameworks that what existed in ancient India. That was the real challenge before our Constitution makers. When were

Constitution was designed, the architects of the Constitution had the greater challenge to encounter. They had to negotiate between the existing traditional value system which is largely rooted in religious beliefs and conventions and also the evolving, modern assumptions about morality and ethics, rooted in the egalitarian democratic frameworks largely evolved in the West.

So on the one hand, you have this tradition and other hand, you have the modern approaches. So these 2 things have to be negotiated and this was a greater challenge they faced. But we succeeded to some extent and the discussion still goes on. Different emphasis on different ages. For example, the way in which ancient people treated morality was very different from the medieval people dealt with morality.

Say for example, if you take the example of you are up, the Greek people had developed a very peculiar moral outlook because the Greek civilisation existed, the Greek people had several city states, each citystate being autonomous from the other. There are different city states like Athens and Sparta had a very different political environment. So there are different political environments existing in different city states but at the same time, there was a kind of quality that existed in these city states and particularly in Athens where democracy existed.

And this, the moral outlook that evolved in ancient Greek, in ancient Athens was very different from the kind of moral outlook that later on was developed in medieval Europe by the scholastic philosophers. Then again, by the time of modernity and enlightenment, things have changed and the contemporary world has a very different moral outlook. So we can see that the moral outlook is also evolving over history.

But at the same time, what we have to keep in mind is that though I have mentioned ancient, medieval, modern and contemporary, they are not watertight compartments. Our contemporary modern other options owe a lot to our ancient, medieval assumptions as well. And different cultures again, you have to keep in mind that there are different cultures, they exhibit different patterns of evolution because the way in which morality has evolved in the West, is very different from the way in which it has evolved in India or China or other civilisations in the world.

Material factors and conditions played a crucial role in this evolution because if we examine India's history, we can very easily find this. Like with the evolution of emergence of larger

nation under the rule of Chandragupta Maurya, the modern India was formed and thereafter, the moral assumptions were also undergoing significant changes and by the time of Asoka, things have changed a lot.

Geographical conditions, historical events, climatic patterns, et cetera, all have influenced the evolution of ethical insights or ethical frameworks in different cultures. And customs, habits, natures, beliefs, scientific temperament, natural and man-made calamities, all are factors that have very crucial influences on the evolution of ethical framework. So with this, we will wind up this lecture and in the coming lectures in this lecture series, we will address some other important ethical concerns. For the time being, we will wind up. Thank you.