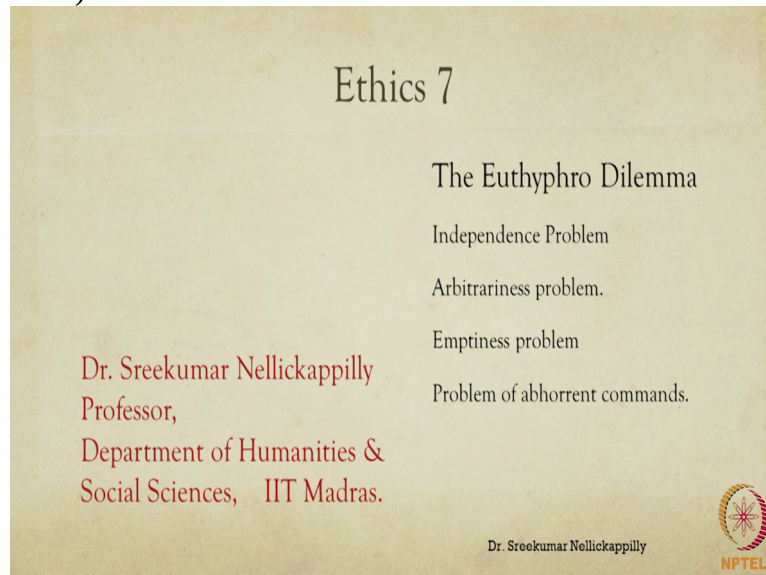


Ethics
Professor Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappily
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
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Module No 2
Lecture 07

Hi, welcome back to this lecture series on ethics. This is the 7th lecture and this lecture will focus on the following topics.

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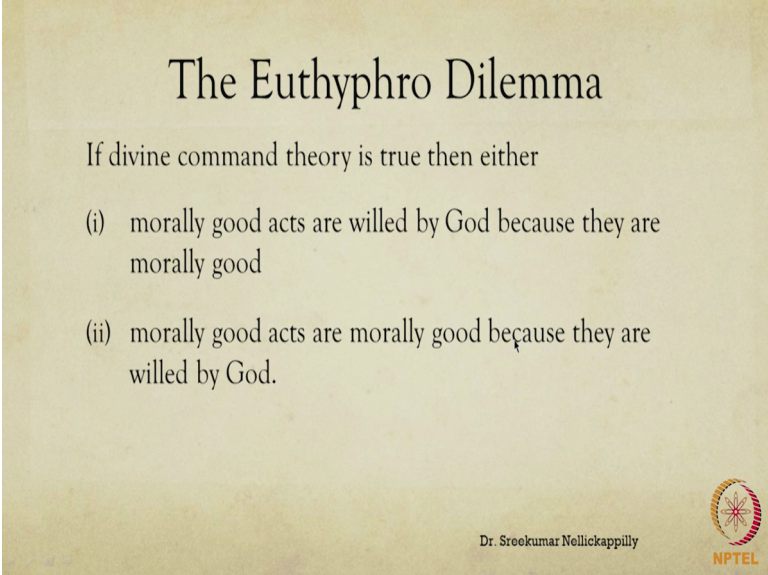


So the previous lecture we discussed the Euthyphro dilemma which basically raises certain doubts about the validity, the very validity of the divine command theory has an ethical theory, as an ethical theory, as a sound ethical theory. And this lecture will elaborate upon this, particularly the Euthyphro dilemma which is discussed in Plato's dialogue and here we are going to highlight some problems.

There is this independence problem which is the 1st issue which could arise from the kind of challenge Euthyphro's dilemma is raising, Socrates raises this problem or rather this is implicit in Socratic dialogue. Then, the arbitrariness problem, the emptiness problem and the problem of abhorrent commands. These are the topics which we are going to roughly cover in this lecture and also a little bit in the next lecture.

So we will come to the Euthyphro dilemma which I have already discussed in the previous lecture but I will just try to brush up.

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The Euthyphro Dilemma

If divine command theory is true then either

- (i) morally good acts are willed by God because they are morally good
- (ii) morally good acts are morally good because they are willed by God.

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So it says that if divine command theory is true, then either one, the 1st possibility, moral good acts are willed by God because they are morally good. As I have already discussed this in the previous lecture that they are already morally good. So their moral goodness has been recognised by God and pronounces, God pronounces it. So that is the role of God. So they are not made good by God but they are already morally good.


Now the question is then who made them good? Why are they good? That is, that is a problem here. The 2nd possibility is, morally good acts are morally good because they are willed by God. So this possibility suggests that they become good because God wills them. So it is God's will which makes them good. So that is a 2nd possibility. So the Euthyphro dilemma actually raises, puts us in the middle of these 2 kind of possibilities and tells us that these are one of these things have to be true.

There is no 3rd possibility. These 2 options are logically exhausted. If one is true, the other one cannot be true and vice versa. So this is the problem.

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The Euthyphro Dilemma

Morally good acts are willed by God because they are morally good, then they are morally good independent of God's will.


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And it says that morally good acts are willed by God because they are morally good, then they are morally independent of God's will. So this is the issue. So if you take the 1st possibility, if morally good acts are willed by God because they are already morally good then what is morally good is independent of God's will. So God has nothing to do there. God just only recognises that and pronounces it.

Then what is God's role? God seems to be nearly telling us that okay this is what is morally good. But then the question, who makes them good or why are they good? is never answered. God cannot say that I made it good because they are already morally good. Then why do we consider them as morally good? That question has never been answered if you adopt this position.

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The Euthyphro Dilemma

- **The Independence Problem:** Moral facts hold independent of God's will.
- Divine command theory denies this.
- According to it all of morality is dependent upon God.
- Therefore, the divine command theorist cannot answer the Euthyphro dilemma in this way.


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The independence problem. Moral facts are held independent of God's will and divine command theory cannot accept it because divine command theory in a very important sense asserts that what is good depends on God's will or rather God released a very important role in deciding what is good and what is right and making this distinction between good and evil and right and wrong. But if you accept this possibility then it denies any significant role to God at all.

So that is something which the divine command theory cannot accept. According to divine command theory, all of morality is dependent upon God. It should be dependent upon God. So that is the problem here. And therefore, the divine command theorists cannot answer the Parichay from dilemma in this way.

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The Euthyphro Dilemma

Morally good acts are morally good because they are willed by God, then there is no reason either to care about God's moral goodness or to worship him.

Arbitrariness problem.

Emptiness problem

Problem of abhorrent commands.


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Now let us go to the other possibilities. Morally good acts are morally good because they are willed by God, then there is no reason either to care about God's moral goodness or to worship him. So here, there are a set of problems which we could see that emanates from this possibility. The possibility merely tells us that thing becomes good because God had willed so. It is God's will that makes it good.

So there is the arbitrariness problem, there is the emptiness problem and there is problem of abhorrent commands which is a very serious problem. So we will try to see these 3 issues.

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Arbitrariness Problem

- Morally good depends on what God will.
- How does God decide what to command?
- What factors inform his decision?
- Morality depends on God's decision, which does not depend on what is moral and what is immoral.

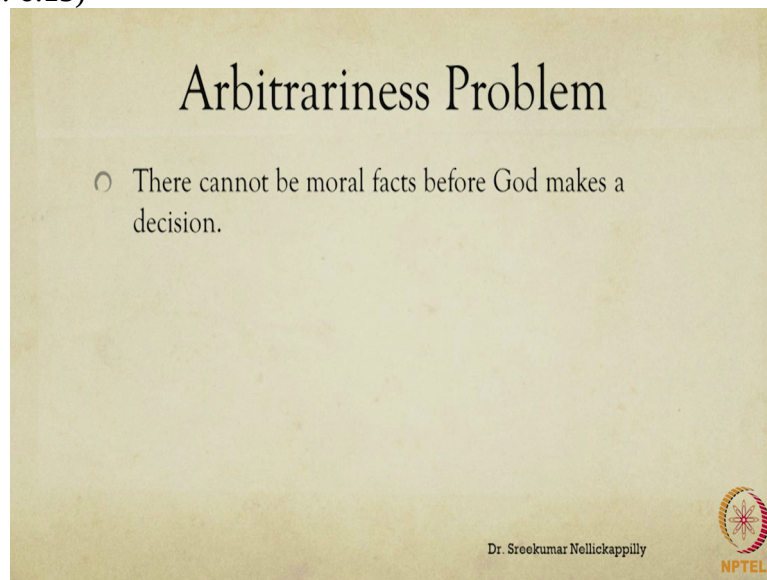

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So 1st, the arbitrariness problem. Here, morally good depends on what God Wills and then how does God decide what to command. This is a very important question for which they do not have a very clear answer. It says that what factors inform his decision to decide that certain acts say for example, charity is good or certain other acts, stealing is bad or rape is bad. How can we decide so?

If God is the one who made rape bad and charity good, what factors really made God to decide so? Or led God to decide so? So for which, for this question there is no answer. Morally depends on court's decision. So there is apparently no factor that seems to be deciding or rather leading Gods decided in a certain way which means that it is quite arbitrariness which does not depend on what is moral and what is immoral. So God's decision or God's will seems to have nothing to do with what is moral and what is immoral.

They are moral or immoral because God decided so. And so which means that morality becomes quite arbitrary to the will of God.

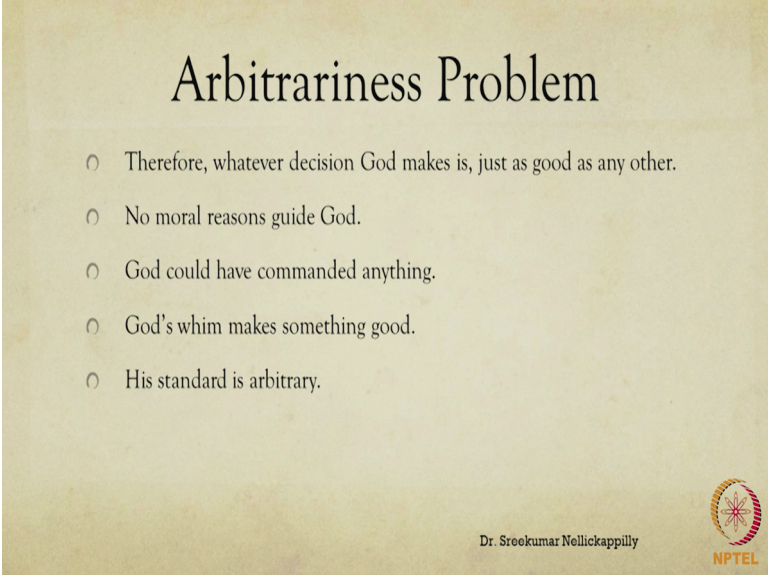
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Then again, there cannot be moral facts before God makes a decision. That is again another interesting consequence of this position. There are no moral facts before God made something good or bad and no such facts can influence God's decision because God is absolutely independent, absolute, he is an absolute. So His decision cannot be influenced by anything else.

Then His decision is morally arbitrary. So this is the conclusion one can arrive at if one follows this path.

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The slide has a light beige background. At the top center, the title "Arbitrariness Problem" is written in a large, black, serif font. Below the title, there is a list of five bullet points, each preceded by a small circle. The text of the bullet points is in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom right of the slide, there is a circular logo with a stylized sun or flower design, and the text "NPTEL" below it. To the left of the logo, the name "Dr. Sroekumar Nellickappilly" is written in a small, black, sans-serif font.

Arbitrariness Problem

- Therefore, whatever decision God makes is, just as good as any other.
- No moral reasons guide God.
- God could have commanded anything.
- God's whim makes something good.
- His standard is arbitrary.

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Again, therefore whatever decision God makes is just as good as any other. So from a moral perspective, from a purely from the perspective of morality, one can argue that whatever decision God makes just as good as any other decision because there is nothing good or bad before God really made a decision. No moral reasons seem to be guiding God and God could have commanded anything.


The entire morality which we talk about, quite arbitrary because God could have decided rape as good. He did not do that. But that is a different thing. Why he did not do that is the question. So there is no answer to that question. He just did not do that. Since he did not do that, since he made rape bad, rape is bad. But what about if he had made it good? Then it would have become good.

So it becomes quite arbitrary. God's whim makes something good. So it is mere a whim of cat that some a particular set of actions are bad and a particular set of actions are good. And His standard is quite arbitrary. We have no way to know what His standard is and this makes morality itself arbitrary. Now, let us come to the next issue, the emptiness problem. The emptiness problem is again which is related to the arbitrariness problem.

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The Emptiness Problem

- Statements such as “God is good”, “God’s commands are good” and “God’s actions are good” are trivial.
- They are true but have no content.
- God’s will is the standard of moral goodness.
- **God is good**, is to say that God is as he wills himself to be.
- To say that God’s commands are good would be to say that God commands what he wants to command.


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It says that statement such as God is good, God’s commands are good and God’s actions are good are trivial. Why are they trivial? Because it basically tells you that moral statements or morality is empty. When you really try to understand the reason behind why a certain kind of action is good or bad, you do not find anything. So there is no meaning in a. So it ultimately points to the fact that it is good because God is good.

But the very statement, God is good or God’s commands are good for God’s actions are good are trivial because they are true but have no content. God’s will is the standard of moral goodness. So there is nothing which makes a particular action of cat or a particular will of cat good. See for instance in in our case, in our ordinary human being’s case, when I do something, when I decide to do something, one can criticise me by saying that it is morally wrong to do so.

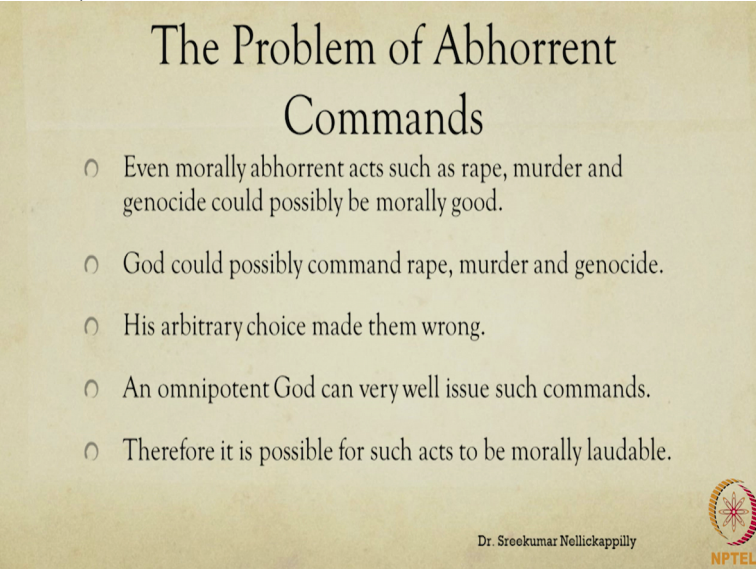
So which means that my standard is wrong, my standard does not match or rather it violates say for instance in the language of divine command theorists, it violates God’s decision, what God has prescribed. Yes so in that sense my actions would come either good or bad. But here when it comes to, when you take the question to the next level, when you try to understand God’s action for God’s decision from this perspective, what happens? It takes you to a kind of an empty vow.

They are true because they have no content. God’s will is the standard of moral goodness. God is good is to say that God is as he wills himself to be. God is good because God is as he wills

himself to be. So it is not that something makes some criteria is there to evaluate cat's characters or cat's decision as good or bad. To say that cat's commands are good would be to say that cat commands what He wants to command. The question again, why are cat's commands good is never answered, it cannot be answered.

If you ask the same question about human beings, in normal human beings action, we can always say that it complies with the standards prescribed by God or by the Scriptures. But when you ask the question to God, what makes cat's commands good, there is no answer. Just say that God commands what he wants to command and what he wants to command is good. There is no reason to raise any question about it which makes that entire statement empty. Now this is a little more serious problem. The problem of abhorrent commands.


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The Problem of Abhorrent Commands

- Even morally abhorrent acts such as rape, murder and genocide could possibly be morally good.
- God could possibly command rape, murder and genocide.
- His arbitrary choice made them wrong.
- An omnipotent God can very well issue such commands.
- Therefore it is possible for such acts to be morally laudable.

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It says that even morally abhorrent acts such as rape, murder, genocide could possibly be morally true. This is what I pointed out in the beginning of this lecture when I mentioned about the problem of abhorrent commands because it basically tells you that these actions like murder, rape, and genocide which normally be considered as wrong, morally wrong, are, why do we consider them as morally wrong?

So here, if you very strictly follow the dictates of divine command theory, we could reach to this conclusion that there is nothing but only because God wills so. So even morally abhorrent acts,

such as these acts could possibly be morally good if cat had willed them so. Cat could possibly command rape, murder, and genocide and possibly could say that they are good actions. But cat did not do that. That is a different thing but He could have done that.

Okay, there is nothing that prevents cat from doing that because there is nothing which is virtually impossible to cat. Cat can do anything. So cat can make abhorrent acts, I mean the morally objectionable and wrong actions good. So His arbitrary choice made them wrong. Nothing else, but mere arbitrary choice. And an omnipotent God can very well issue such commands which makes that these actions are also good.

Therefore it is possible for such acts be morally laudable. So this is the kind of situation which Euthyphro dilemma is trying to expose, some of the inherent difficulties which divine command theorists would encounter ultimately when he goes, when he pursues his theory. Now before we getting into the details of this because I think I am I can wind up my discussion on divine command theory here and some issues will figure in later also, some aspects of this theory might figure in later also when we take up other theoretical frameworks for discussion.

Because now what I am going to do is that I will have a very previous question of Christian ethics here in a very brief in the sense that I am not going into the details of what is Christian ethics but they will try to give a very basic understanding of what Christian ethics means based on the belief system propagated by the Bible and also how historically Christianity had evolved in Europe. So, and this is very interesting because we have just discussed divine command theory which is a very strong theory suggested by some of the Christian theorists, moralists.

It is not just Christian moralists alone who propagate divine command theory, many other religious frameworks do that. But there are a certain set of Islamic propagators who also subscribe to a form of divine command theory but then it will be very interesting for us to and relevant for us to examine evolution of ethics during a certain point in history. This is where Christianity has evolved its own unique moral perspective based on certain fundamental principles.

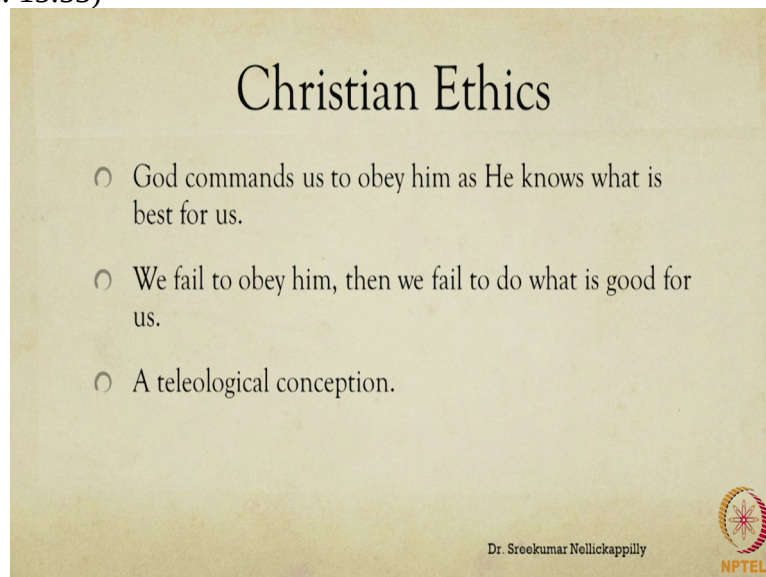
The reason is that, now the other 2 important theoretical frameworks which are to discuss, one is the deontological theorists where the chief proponent of this theory is Emanuel Kant, the

Germans lost for 2 emphasises on the aspect of duty which is again a derivative of a broad Christian worldview. We will see that. Then again, there are other sets of moral theorists which can be called as teleological theorists.

Teleological theorists suggest that there is, teleology means there is a sort of a purpose. So there is a purpose behind your actions, there is a purpose for being good. What is that purpose? The attainment of good, the achievement of good. And the concept of good can vary from perspective to perspective. Say for example, for some people, it is self-realisation, for some people, it is to go to heaven, Paradise and all that but there is a concept of good which is considered as a summum bonum some of these theoretical frameworks.

They are called as the teleological theorists. Even Aristotle's Eudaimonism is a teleological framework. So we will see all these things how they culminate and how they actually flow to the development of Christian ethics and then how certain other frameworks emanate from this broader framework. So in one sense, this is a very interesting juncture in the history of ethics. Before we get into the details we will just see the fundamental aspects of Christian ethics.


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Christian Ethics

- God commands us to obey him as He knows what is best for us.
- We fail to obey him, then we fail to do what is good for us.
- A teleological conception.

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So here, there is no doubt, God's commands are very important. So what does is God commands us to obey him as he knows what is best for us. God has commanded. There is a categorical command from God, what to do. In one sense, we can say that this is the essence of the Judaic

tradition, the Moses for example, the Mosaic Law, the very concept of law which is advocated by the Abrahamic tradition, very strongly by the Jewish tradition and also to some extent by the Christian tradition and Islamic traditions, we can see that there is concept of a very strong command by God.

And this command by God becomes law. This concept of law which the Abrahamic tradition propagates cannot be distinguished from natural law or in other words I can say the idea of law encompasses both, moral laws as well as natural laws. There is a kind of identification of these 2. We will see that. So we fail to obey God, then we fail to do what is good for us because what is good for us is known better to God than us. So this is the implicit situation.

So for our own good, we have to obey God. So it is a teleological conception because it tells you that why certain things have to be done, why God's commands have to be followed. There is a reason for that, there is an objective for that and that objective is our own good, the attainment of our own good. And then, it is a form of egocentrism. We can say that of course. In that sense, the Christian ethics is a kind of egocentric ethics.

But in that sense, Aristotelian, Socratic, Platonic ethics, they are also egocentric. Indian ethics, by and large is egocentric because they all talk about the ultimate objective of life is some sort of self-realisation which is understood in terms of moksha in the Brahminical tradition and Nirvana in again Buddhist tradition, Kaivilya in certain other traditions and all that. So most of them are egocentric.

What we need to keep in mind is that egocentric needs to be distinguished from self centric in the sense in which we understand self-centredness or selfish in today's vocabulary. Now, we have to find certain reasons for obeying God. Obedience to God and God's command as a law plays a very key role in the very idea of formulating Christian ethics. We need to really arrive at or try to find out some reasons for obeying God.

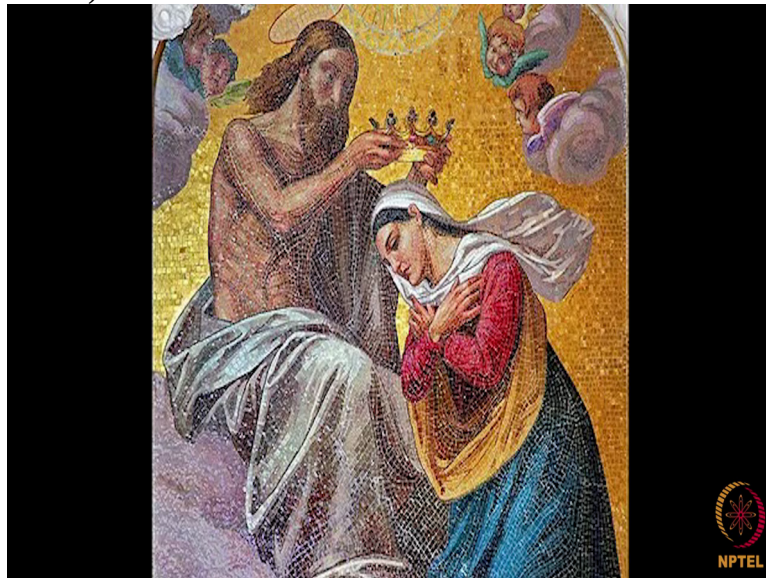
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And these 3 can be identified as some reasons, strong reasons. God is holy, God is good, God is powerful. We need to obey God because He is holy, He is pious. We need to obey God because He is good, he is the absolute good and He knows what is good and we need to obey God because He is powerful and in case if we violates His laws or His commands, it will attract punishment. So in that sense, he is quite powerful.

So these 3 actually they are, they look so interconnected. Of course they are interconnected but at the same time, emphasising on one of these over the others implies a certain other kind of a perspective. So there are certain important distinctions between these 3 perspectives.


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What is Good

- To obey God.
- Have to surrender to Him.
- Have to have total faith in Him.
- We are finite and God is non-finite.

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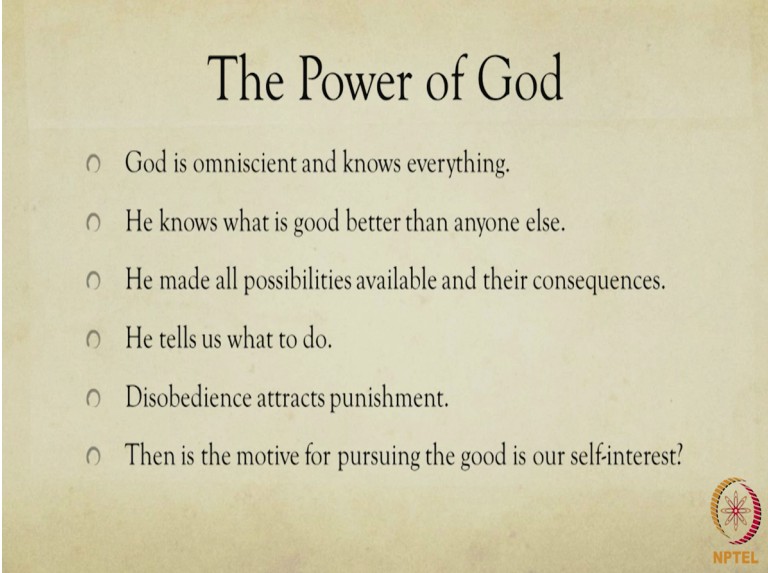


Now, to obey God, have to surrender to Him. What do you mean by obeying God? You have to be literally a slave of God, completely surrender yourself in front of Him and in a sense, you know what you need to attain, is a certain kind of identification of your will with God's will. It is a complete egolessness. One loses oneself completely and surrenders oneself to the Almighty and then does only those things which the Almighty wants to do. Not just doing, even in your thoughts, actions and deeds and words, everywhere you have to be a complete slave of God.

And the more you surrendered to God, the best kind of morally person you are. So this is the suggestion which we get from this perspective. Have to have total faith in him, absolute faith in Him. There should not be even a trace of doubt about His Holiness, about His power and about His omnipotence. We are finite and God is non-finite because everything in this world is finite. We know that every object in this world is finite.


And since there are degrees of finiteness, we could see that you know something is lesser finite than something else or rather more finite than something else. So if you extend this into a scale, then it ultimately takes us to a religion where you will find something which is not finite and that concept, that possibility of a nonfinite existence is what God represents. So we are actually the very logical possibility that is suggested by our finite nature that our reason, our rational faculty recognising ourselves as finite creatures, this recognition also points to the possibility that there is an infinite creature who is more powerful and holier than all of us.

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The Power of God

- God is omniscient and knows everything.
- He knows what is good better than anyone else.
- He made all possibilities available and their consequences.
- He tells us what to do.
- Disobedience attracts punishment.
- Then is the motive for pursuing the good is our self-interest?



And now when you come to the power of God, God is omniscient and knows everything. Something which is omniscient should be knowing everything. Then He knows what is good better than anyone else. So what is good for you is do not to what better than you yourself, know about it. Hence what is good for you, just surrender, just obey Him, do not have any. Do not have any ego or agency independent of God's will.

So, surrender yourself absolutely conditionless to God's will. He made all possibilities available and their consequences. Why certain actions have certain consequences? Because God made so. Certain actions have important consequences are decided by God. So every decision is made by God and He tells us what to do. Disobedience attracts punishment because He is absolutely powerful, He is omniscient, omnipotent and absolutely powerful.

And then is the mood before punishing the good is our self-interest? So motive for pursuing the good. Now, that is what morality is all about. Ethics is all about telling you that why one should pursue good. So here, one can critically see that the motive for pursuing the good is a kind of a self-interest because it is basically for our own interested. What is good for us is better known to God. So better obey him.


Why to obey him? Because we have to be in the path of good and we have to attain the good. It is for my good I do that. Not that I want to help someone else. See, I am doing charity not for the sake of helping that person who is in great danger or I am the person who is supporting the human beings who are suffering in this world, not because I am compassionate about them, not because I am loving them, not because I have a real concern about their sufferings but because if I help them and try to help them to come out of their sufferings, that will ultimately help me to attain in my good.

So it is not their welfare or their happiness or their well-being that matters to me. It is my well-being. So in that sense, we can argue that it is quite egocentric. Then again, these all ideas about disobedience and punishment are also there.

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Disobedience and Punishment

- The motive for pursuing the good is our self-interest?
- Then religious morality becomes self-defeating, at least insofar as it was originally designed to condemn pure self-interest. (McIntyre)
- This view of the role of the concept of the power of God may suggest that religious conceptions of morality are intelligible only insofar as they complement or otherwise elaborate upon existing secular conceptions. (McIntyre)



They are quite tricky here because it says that the motive for pursuing the good is our self-interest. It would on the one hand help us to avoid punishment and on the other hand, gain certain benefits. This is from McIntyre's history of ethics. He says that then religious morality becomes self-defeating. This is the situation which we are encountering an disobedience and punishment are attached to that and also rewards attached to that, to obedience.

Then motive for pursuing good or motive for avoiding wrong actions seem to be nothing but self-interest. But then what McIntyre argues is that this makes the whole idea of morality itself defeated. It says that then religious morality becomes self-defeating at least insofar as it was originally designed to contempt pure self-interest. The very idea behind religious morality is to contempt self-interest, to overcome it.

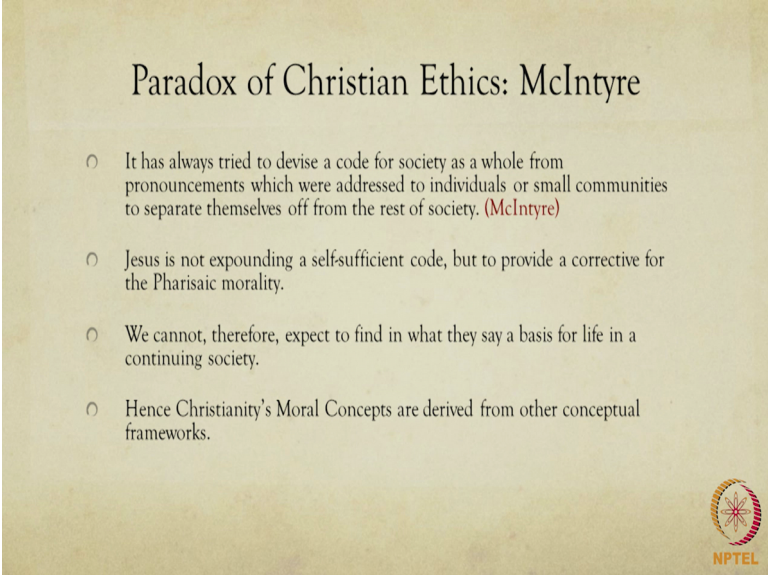
So all your attempts to overcome self interests ultimately seem to be asserting it quite strongly. This view of the role of the concept of power of God may suggest that religious conceptions of morality are intelligible only insofar as they complement or otherwise elaborate upon the existing secular consumptions. So this is a very interesting position which McIntyre takes us to consider rather invites us to consider.

He says that this view of the role of the concept of power of God may suggest that religious conceptions of morality are intelligible, they become sensible only insofar as they complement or

otherwise elaborate upon existing secular conceptions. So every society will have certain conceptions of particularly in today's world which is largely secular because most of our democracies believe in kind of a secular models of morality which is slightly independent of what we have inherited from our religious traditions.


Of course, that does not mean that the so-called morality which we practice which we consider as good and distinguish from bad is completely independent and free from religious assumptions, not in that way but there is a kind of broad, secular perspective about morality. So in one sense, the legitimacy of the religious morality depends on how they complement these secular conceptions.

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Paradox of Christian Ethics: McIntyre

- It has always tried to devise a code for society as a whole from pronouncements which were addressed to individuals or small communities to separate themselves off from the rest of society. (McIntyre)
- Jesus is not expounding a self-sufficient code, but to provide a corrective for the Pharisaic morality.
- We cannot, therefore, expect to find in what they say a basis for life in a continuing society.
- Hence Christianity's Moral Concepts are derived from other conceptual frameworks.



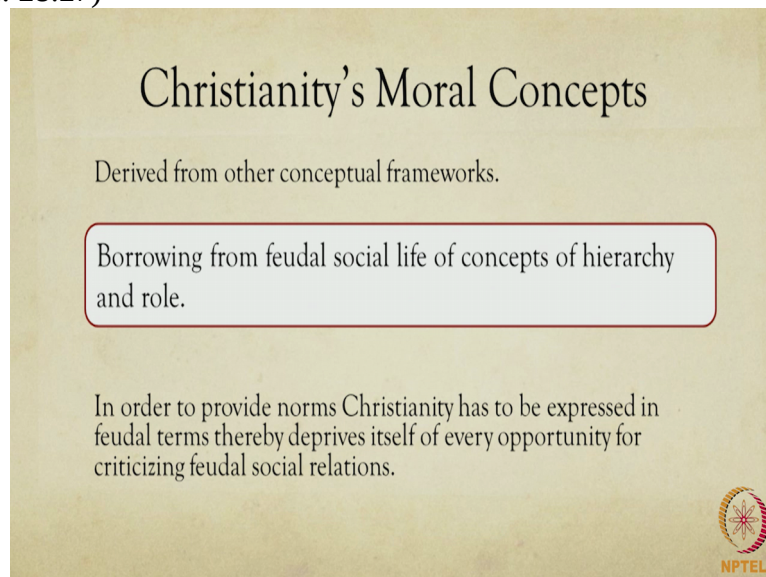
This is what McIntyre calls the paradox of Christian ethics. So he says that it has always tried to devise a code for society as a whole from pronouncements which were addressed to individuals or small communities to separate themselves off from the rest of society. So this happens. For example, the Judaic morality, it was originally designed, devised for the jews, for a particular community of people, group of people, a society of people.

And now Christianity has to really proclaim its universal validity. Christianity makes its universal validity or rather the very basis of Christian morality is that it is applicable to everyone, not just to a group of people or a community of people or so. McIntyre again says that Jesus is

not expounding a self-sufficient court but to provide a corrective for the Plarisaic morality. This is what, it is a kind of a it appears or Jesus' pronouncements appear as a kind of a correction to the existing moral framework of the (())(27:46).

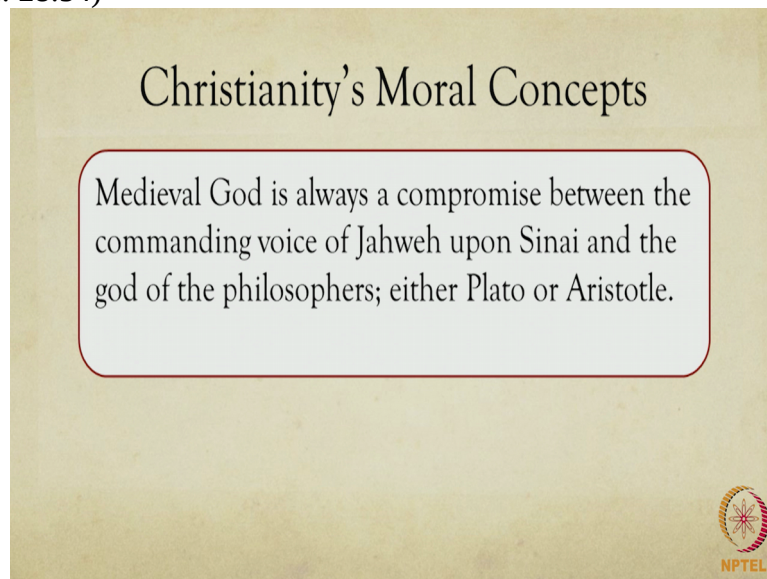
And we cannot therefore expect to find in what they say a basis for life in a continuing society in the, even in the present day. So, hence Christianity's moral concepts are derived from other conceptual frameworks. So it has to rather base itself on certain other things. The pure I mean if you really go back to Bible and the history of Christianity, you will end up with this paradox. So you have to overcome that.

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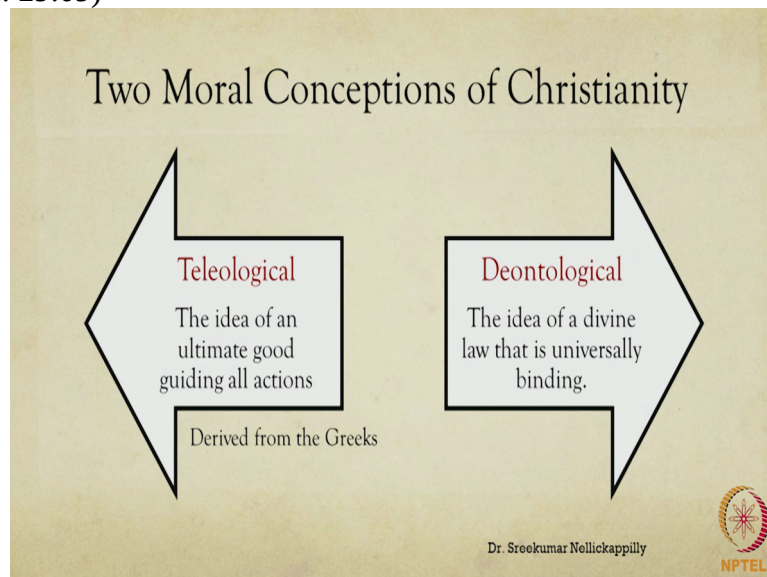
What do you do? I mean what McIntyre says is that Christianity's moral concepts are in that way derived from other conceptual frameworks and they are borrowing from feudal social life of concepts of hierarchy and role. That was the existing social system in those days. So he says that in order to provide norms, Christianity has to be expressed in feudal terms thereby it deprives itself of every opportunity for criticising feudal social relations. So this is a kind of criticism which he raises.

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And then again, Medieval God is always a compromise between the commanding voice of Jahweh upon Sinai and the god of the philosophers; either Plato or Aristotle. So that is the other stream of influence, the philosophers, Plato and Aristotle.

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So these are the 2 moral conceptions of Christianity or rather these are the 2 sources from where they develop it. The 1st one is teleological, the idea of an ultimate good guiding all actions which is derived from the Greeks and Deontological, the idea of a divine law that is universally

binding. I will elaborate upon these 2 distinctions in the next lecture. For the time being, we will wind up this lecture, thank you.