

Ethics
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Module No 2
Lecture 08

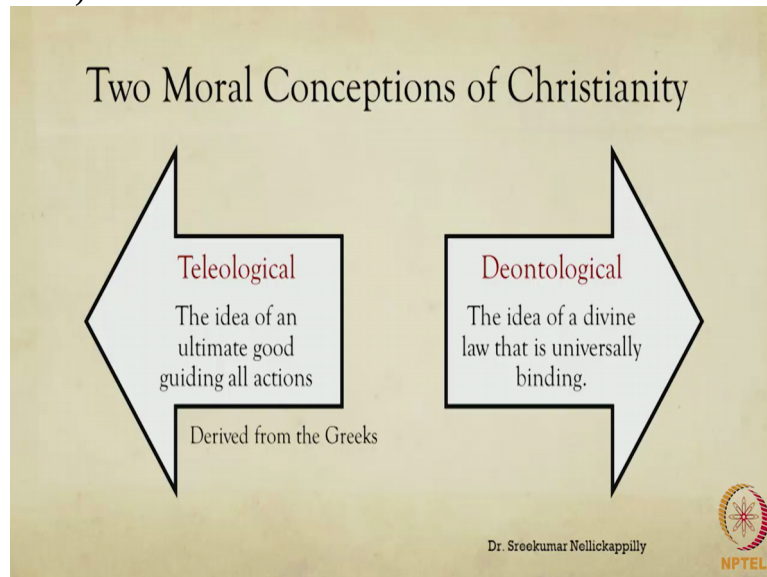
Welcome back to this lecture series on ethics, to the 8th lecture which will focus on the different types of ethical theories. Actually, we are starting our discussions on different types of ethical theories here. In the previous lecture, I was trying to narrate major challenge posed by the Euthyphro dilemma to the divine command theory and how the Christian ethics broadly leads to kind of certain questions which Western ethics has been tackling in the rest of its conceptual history.

So we could see that the 2 positions, fundamental positions in ethics we can even call them, the teleological position and also the deontological positions are connected with the evolution of Christian ethics. The teleological position I have already explained originates from the Greek tradition, the Socratic, Platonic and Aristotelian traditions where a kind of strong Eudaimonism is proposed as the ultimate goal of ethics, the purpose of ethics, that would like to be achieved.

And in one sense, this is being taken by Christian ethics and the other group is the deontological turn where duty, the command, to obey God is a duty of man is the kind of approach which is deontology and which is further developed in the European traditions by the deontologists particularly by Emanuel Kant which we will be discussing later in greater detail. This lecture is trying to address another issue.

It tries to provide a very brief understanding of the 2 types of ethical theories which emphasise on duty and value which later on divides into 2 classes, deontologism and the duty ethics and value ethics. And value ethics will find it much later that is actually evolving into a form of utilitarianism. So these things we will examine in greater detail in the coming lectures but here we will try to outline them.

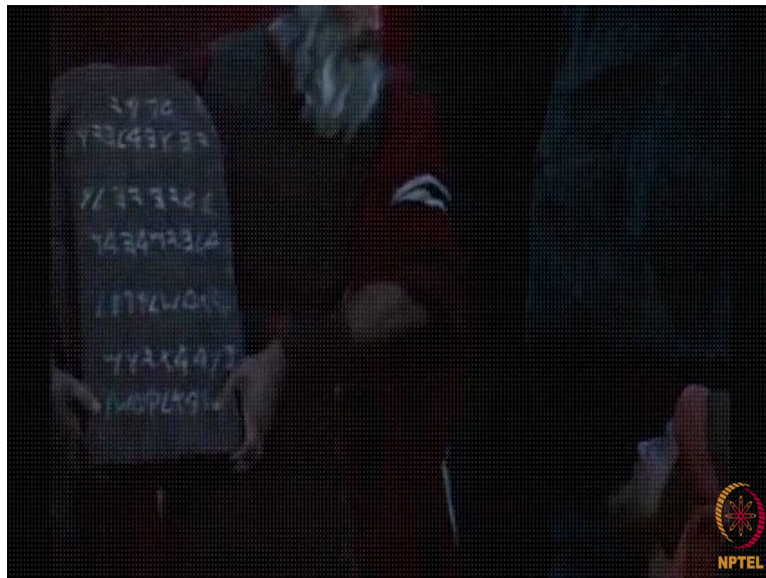
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Now to brush up, the 2 moral conceptions of morality, one is teleological the other one is deontological.

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The Idea of Law

- Central to Christianity.
- Originated in the Mosaic laws: deontology.
- St. Paul: knowledge about the law and its requirements are written in our hearts.

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The Idea of Law

- Central to Christianity.
- Originated in the Mosaic laws: deontology.
- St. Paul: knowledge about the law and its requirements are written in our hearts.
- By virtue of being humans we possess this innate knowledge.

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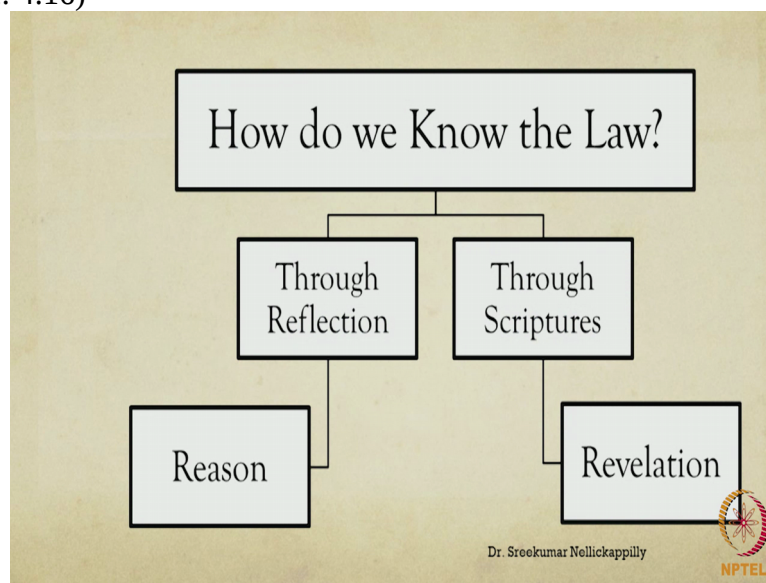
And we could see that the idea of the concept of law, the concept of law is at the centre of Christianity. Even the early Christianity, even prior to Christianity, even the Judaic tradition itself is based on a concept of law, the idea of law, the Mosaic Law of the Judaic tradition and that itself has given rise to a certain strong sense of deontology. The 10 Commandments have been followed.

They are not supposed to be questioned, challenged. Human beings are not supposed to ask why do we need to obey them? They have to just obey them, the 10 Commandments and they are unquestionably, they are the authority, foundational, fundamental authority. And St Paul says that

knowledge about the law and its requirements are written in our hearts. So in one sense, here we could see a very Christian approach there in our hearts.

They are there in our nature. Human beings, the conscience of man or the heart of man knows what is good. So the laws have to be found in the heart of man. That is repeatedly emphasised by St Paul and in a certain sense, a group of Christian theologians. By virtue of being human is the process this innate knowledge about the law, the law is the fundamental law says what is good which proclaims what is good for man.

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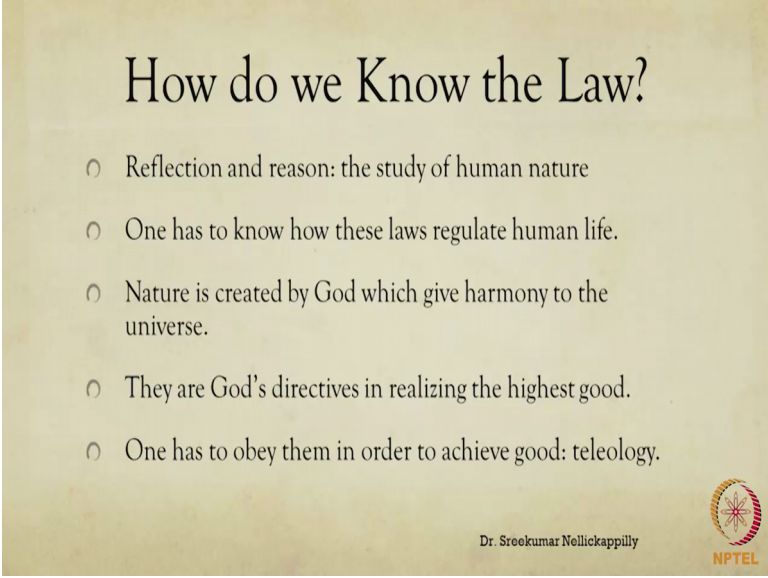
And so, now the question is again, I will just pose the question once again, how do we know the law? So there are 2 ways in which we can know the law, 2 possible ways in which we can know the law. One is through reflection and in reflection, what happens is that we use our reason. So by employing our natural faculty of reason, we contemplate about it, we reflect about it and understand what is law.

So there, it is a rational process, than other route is through Scriptures where you depend upon, completely rely upon the revealed scriptures which tell you what is right, to tell you what is the law. So that is revelation. So these are the 2 methods. But then on the one hand, very interesting aspect in the Christian tradition we have to note here is that later on we will find a very different approach to the relationship between reason and revelation.

Here, within the Christian tradition, reason and revelation are related in a very unique manner. They mutually supplement each other. Rather, reason supplements revelation in one sense or rather revelation, the revealed text, faith in the revealed text would supplement the natural faculty of reason or rational reflection. But later on, because it and now, reason has been posited as a faculty which enables men to go beyond what was revealed.

To go beyond or to even to question the very validity of revelation, the proclaim that human faculty of reason has the ability to find truth on its own. So that is a different approach which we will see later.


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How do we Know the Law?

- Reflection and reason: the study of human nature
- One has to know how these laws regulate human life.
- Nature is created by God which give harmony to the universe.
- They are God's directives in realizing the highest good.
- One has to obey them in order to achieve good: teleology.

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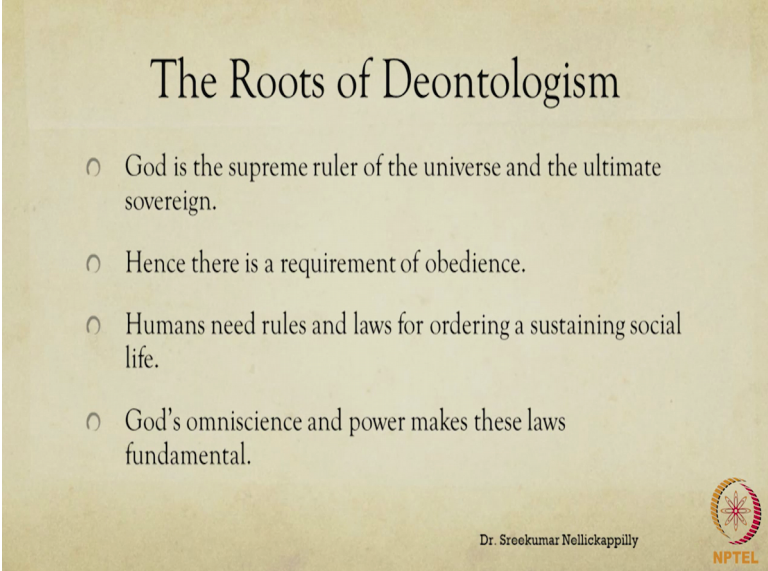
And again you know, reflection and reason to understand the nature of the these 2 aspects of human life, reflection and reason and the study of human nature is proposed for this reason. One has to know how these laws regulate human life. The laws which are moral in nature, how do they regulate human life in the sense that they prescribe what is good and if you follow that what is good, you would have certain rewards associated with that and if you had is obey them, there are certain punishments associated with that.

So in that sense, they sort of regulate human life. And to understand this, one has to know these laws. And nature is created by God which gives harmony to the universe. So these laws give harmony with the universe. And they are God's directives in realising the highest good. So what

is the purpose of this law? The purpose of this law is nothing but these laws will help you to realise the highest good and the highest good is actually good for each individual.

So each individual can attain his or her good, summum bonum by following the natural laws which are prescribed by God which can be known through both regulation and reason. One has to obey them in order to achieve good. This is the teleological aspect. So you could see that both deontological aspects and teleological aspects are implicitly present in this Christian approach.


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The Roots of Deontology

- God is the supreme ruler of the universe and the ultimate sovereign.
- Hence there is a requirement of obedience.
- Humans need rules and laws for ordering a sustaining social life.
- God's omniscience and power makes these laws fundamental.

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But what is interesting for us is that we already know that the teleological aspects have come from the Greek tradition, the Socratic tradition but the deontological aspects, though it was already in a very implicit manner present in the Greek tradition, it was not very strongly prominent. It became so prominent with the Christian assertion of deontology, the duty by underlining the fact that it is man's fundamental duty to learn and to follow, to obey God, surrender to God.

Obedience to God is a fundamental obligation. God is the supreme ruler of the universe and the ultimate sovereign. So one has to recognise that sovereignty, surrender to that sovereignty and accept the dictates of that sovereignty, that is to follow the laws of nature. Hence there is a requirement of obedience. Humans need rules and laws for ordering a successful social life. This is quite obvious because not all human beings have the same capacity to act according to reason.

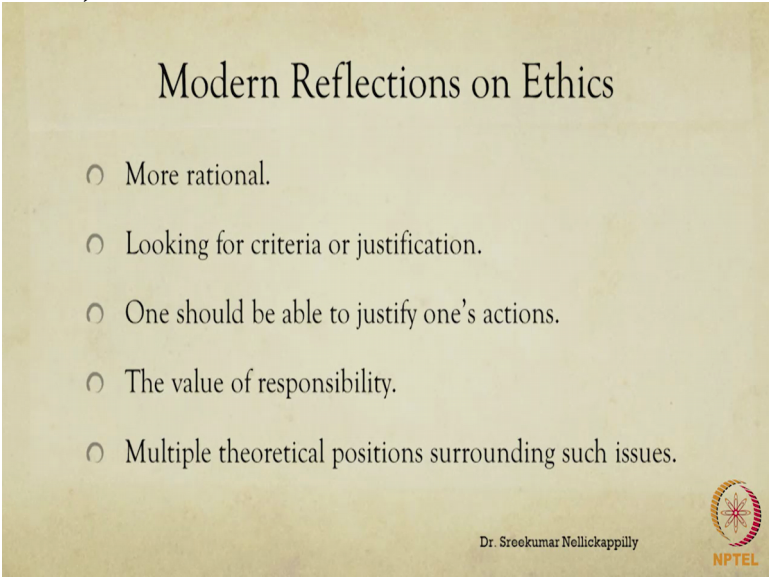
It is not that the Christian tradition would not deny the fact that every human being has the ability to know this, this law. But at the same time, everyone is not able to control one's emotions and passions and obey God rather live according to that. Okay? So it is not always possible for human beings to reflect upon one's own nature and listen to the heart, what the heart says, listen to one's conscience and behave accordingly.

So in that sense, you need something which would externally support you. So in that way, the laws will come there as support, tell you directly what is good. So you do not have to really reflect upon you, you can just go and consult the Scriptures, they will tell you what is good. God's omniscience and power makes these laws fundamental. This is where we would probably conclude our discussions on Christian ethics for the time being.

Some of these aspects related to Christian ethics might come up later also but then they we will take it up then. So here for the time being, we will wind up our discussion on christian ethics and move on with certain important topics which are of course connected with this because we have already seen certain moral approaches evolving from this tradition and keeping that continuity of the Western tradition.

The teleological approach which is so prominent in the Greek tradition is continued in a certain sense in a very strong manner by the theologians, the Christian theologians but they also subscribe to and develop a kind of deontologism which will find a continuity in future as well in the development of future ethics.


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Modern Reflections on Ethics

- More rational.
- Looking for criteria or justification.
- One should be able to justify one's actions.
- The value of responsibility.
- Multiple theoretical positions surrounding such issues.

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So the modern reflections on ethics is more rational than than revelational. So it gives importance to reason and to some extent we could see that I have already mentioned this, we could see that modern reflections posit reason in a sense as opposite to the revelation. So the independence of reason is being proclaimed. And something which you can find reason, you can find to reason alone. You cannot do that with any other source.

Only reason, it has to be understood, applied and understood by reason. And looking for criteria and justification is very important, very key aspects of modern ethics because in modern life, what happens is that we are living in a very complex world. If you try to understand our present society, the very structure of our present society, you will understand its complexity. And you compare this present society, our so-called contemporary society with our predecessors, the way they lived, you will understand the complexities.

Because we are living in a world where our lives are fashioned in a great deal by institutions. There are different institutions to which we are very constantly related. In a given family, both husband and wife would be working into different organisations. So their work and life in one sense is directly influenced directly impacted by the business institutions that function in that particular society, the financial institutions come into picture.

For instance, today now we are the banking sector for example, when the banking sector takes a very important decision about interest, about the rising of interest or decreasing the interest, whatever, this is going to have a significant impact on the life of all of us. Many of us are not the customers of banks. Even then, directly or indirectly, these are all going to have an impact on people's lives. Then, education is another institution, religion is another institution, all these institutions play very key roles in individuals lives and each individual in one sense is related to multiple institutions.

So our life is extremely complex. And when we take a decisions many of our decisions will have implications in the lives of other people sometimes. Now for example, a manager of an organisation, when he takes a decision, his decision might have certain very significant consequences on the life of other people or on the society. So when he takes a decision, he has to consider several aspects, he have to think very carefully and take his decisions.

So the complexity of modern life demands that we are to be very conscious, cautious and careful and take into account all aspects of that we would be able to justify why did we take this decision? Why did we opt this choice instead of that? So choice number 1 and 2. Why 1 instead of 2? Because I thought that or because this would lead to this. So that is a rational criteria or justification provided and one should be able to justify one's actions and this underlines the value of responsibility because in one sense we can say that morality or rather ethics today deals with responsibility in a very significant way.

Every time ethics was concerned about responsibility but today responsibility has multiple dimensions. As I mentioned you know, we seems we are living in a complex society, we have to consider the concept of responsibility from multiple angles. So, this makes our situation extremely complex. Multiple theoretical positions surrounding such issues. So each issue can be understood from different angles and different perspectives. So there are multiple theoretical positions available to understand them and this makes our life not very simple.

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Principal Types of Ethical Theories


ETHICS OF DUTY

- There are certain kinds of acts which we ought to do always and certain other kinds which we ought to avoid doing.

ETHICS OF VALUE

- Right actions are those which will bring the greatest possible balance of good.

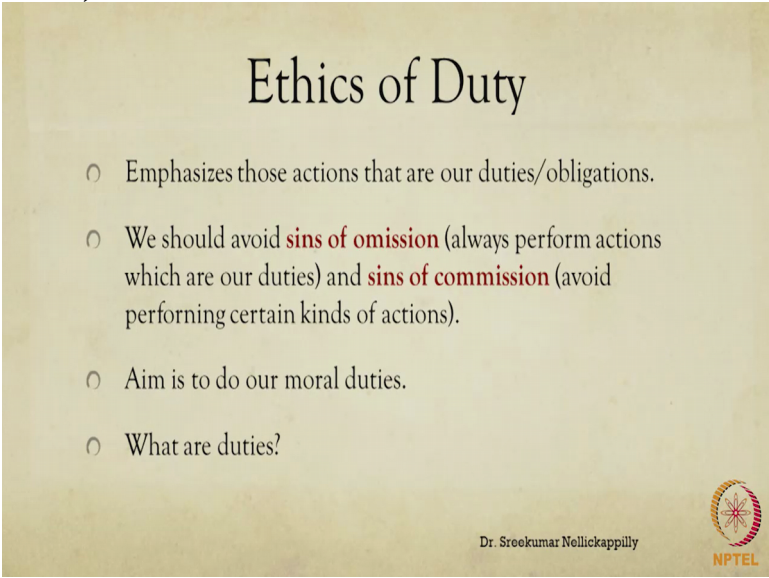
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But from a very simplistic manner, we can say that there are 2 principle ethical theories. One is, one set of theory is, it is not just one theory, there are many theories. It is actually, it represents a group. When I say ethics of duty, it contains within itself, various different approaches which we will try to see. The ethics of duty which broadly says that there are certain kinds of acts which we ought to do always and certain other kinds of act which we ought to avoid doing always.

So this is what the ethics of duty broadly implies, which is nothing but what we have mentioned earlier as deontologism. And ethics of value we could see that it says that right actions are those which will bring the greatest possible balance of good. Again what is good differs from framework to framework. So there are different again different theoretical approaches even to understand the concept of value or the ethics of value which is a utilitarianism comes under this.

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Ethics of Duty

- Emphasizes those actions that are our duties/obligations.
- We should avoid **sins of omission** (always perform actions which are our duties) and **sins of commission** (avoid performing certain kinds of actions).
- Aim is to do our moral duties.
- What are duties?

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So we will 1st concentrate on the 1st one, ethics of duty because it emphasises on those actions that are our duties or obligations. Ethics of duty broadly tells you that you have to do this or you ought to perform a particular action because that is your duty. So what is a right action is a dutiful action. And there are again different ways in which one can understand duty. Say for example, some people are dutiful by nature.

There is a kind of inflation, they are naturally inclined to perform their duties. So you do not have to teach them and they do not have to contemplate about what is that, they what they naturally do what is dutiful. And interestingly in the Indian context, we will find there is a debate between the great King Yudhishtira and Draupadi. They were sent to the forest because Yudhishtira lost everything, his kingdom, his fortunes, everything and they are living in the forest.

Naturally, his other brothers and wife, Draupadi was not quite happy with this decision. They were all very unpleasant and Draupadi to openly criticise Yudhishtira for taking such a decision and on one such occasion, she got irritated and she asked Yudhishtira and all, King you are always talking about dharma, you say that everything is done for dharma and you say that all your sufferings are due to dharma.

When you try to perform dharma, it leads to that. So I have to suffer them. But what did this dharma give you a return to you? It has not so far given back we do anything. Then why do you follow that? And to this Yudhishtira replies, I do follow dharma not for the sake of gaining anything but that is my swabhava, that is my nature.

In a sense, we can say that he was hinting that he is inclinationally dharmic. By inclination, he has a tendency to be dharmic to follow his duty. But again you know, a Kantian would disagree with this. Kantians would argue that a person who is by inclination dutiful is not actually dutiful. And in that case, that person cannot be called ethical or moral. In order to qualify to be a moralist, one has to be following one's duties with conscious awareness and rational reflection.

So actions done for the sake of duty alone are moral actions according to Kantians. So these distinctions, we will consider when we discuss deontology later. We should avoid sins of omission and sins of commission. What is sins of omission? Always perform actions which are our duties and sins of commissions are not avoiding or rather performing certain kinds of actions which are forbidden. So that is committing a sin.

And sins of omission is that where we have to perform certain action, we should not fail in performing certain actions which are for obligations. And aim is to do our moral duties. And now the question is what are the duties? How do we understand the duty? This is a very complex question and a very challenging problem in ethics. And there are different ways in which this can be answered. The one common way in which this concept is understood is something which we have already seen in the christian tradition.

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What are Duties?

1. What is commanded by God: **Divine Command theory.**
2. What is customary: approved by social group.
3. What is accorded by our nature: **ethics of nature.**
4. What our conscience tells us

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What is commanded by God? So this is largely propagated by the divine command theorists. They would all say that what constitutes duty are the commandments of God. The another prominent answer is, what is customary, what is approved by a social group? Every society will have certain practices, certain customs the members of that society might be very involuntarily accepting as right. You can cite many such examples.

Every society will have such examples, such customs and such practices. Of course, the person who belongs to another society, makes space, a visit to the society might find such practices even very unusual, very old but for the members of that particular society internally, they are perfect. And there is nothing unnatural about it. So they involuntarily practice it. So the validity of such customs are not questioned internally and they are approved largely by the social group.

So that is something which becomes your duty and you consider as your duty. And one example is that you know, a person belonging to a particular varna in the ancient Indian tradition, there is a significant difference between varna and jati, caste and varna are different. I am understanding these concepts in different ways. I do not understand varna as caste. They are different.

So varna is based on your abilities, your natural abilities and talents and your inclinations and all that. Every person will have certain abilities and accordingly, his social position, his role in the society has to be decided. So in that sense, you know the ancient Indians would say that varna is

a universal law which is actually correct. But Jati is different, jati is based on parental calling, based on to which family and community you are born to, which is a very questionable kind of and social arrangement particularly in today's world.

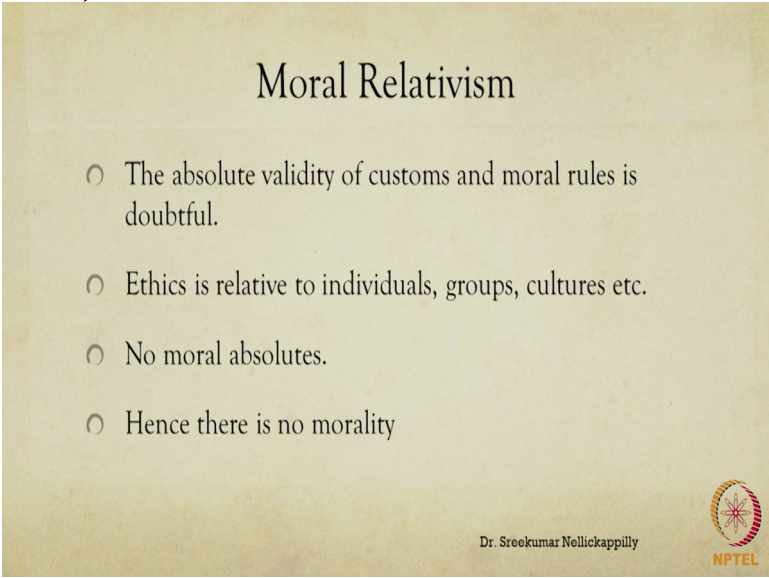
It is highly objectionable and no doubt that ethically that is not approved in today's world. A modern world cannot approve a caste-based society because there are certain fundamental logical flaws in it. It does not consider certain concepts which modern society consider as very important like equality and all that. Anyway, that is a different issue which we will again discussed in future lectures. So what is customary is approved by social group.

The 3rd one is what is accorded by our nature, so this can be termed as ethics of nature. There is something in human nature which suggests what is right. So one has to just follow that and that would be good, that would be ethical. And the last one is, whatever conscience tells us, which is a very commonsensical approach to morality. What is, I mean if you ask a common man, what does he understand by morality, he would sometimes refer to his conscience.

So whatever conscience tells you is right, as right is right. And this is not always wrong. Sometimes, that is true also. Every human being will have some sort of a conscience which tells him or her what is right or what is good. But one cannot develop a theory on the basis of that because theoretically this can be challenged. Now, in this context, it would be very interesting to analyse a very important challenge, moral theory as such is encountering, moral relativism.

So I am taking at this problem here because this is where you know before I start discussing major theoretical frameworks like deontologim and utilitarianism which constitute the next half of this lecture series, I would like to focus more on certain problems which moral theory as such is encountering. So moral relativism is potentially one such problem which moral theory in general might encounter which we will very briefly examine in this lecture.

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The slide is titled "Moral Relativism" in a large, black, serif font. Below the title, there are four bullet points, each preceded by a small circle. The text of the bullet points is in a smaller, black, serif font. In the bottom right corner, there is a circular logo with a stylized sun or flower design, and the text "NPTEL" below it. In the bottom center, there is a line of small text that reads "Dr. Srookumar Nellickappilly".

Moral Relativism

- The absolute validity of customs and moral rules is doubtful.
- Ethics is relative to individuals, groups, cultures etc.
- No moral absolutes.
- Hence there is no morality

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The moral relativist would claim that the absolute validity of customs and moral rules is doubtful. The customs of a particular society are not absolutely valid. Their validity is confined to that particular society and probably even within that society, during a particular time. And the timeframe is also very important. Something which was valid several years ago will become totally obsolete and invalid now.

So, time and place and various other factors are important there. Ethics is relative to individuals, groups, cultures, et cetera. So this is another important aspect. There is relativism based on culture, groups, individuals. That is a very extreme form of relativism. That can be even termed as subjectivism, which we will discuss separately. Basically what the relativists would argue is that there are no moral absolutes.

One cannot locate a single point and say that this is absolutely the criteria, the point to which everything can fundamentally refer to and say that this is something that makes things absolutely good. Say for example, God. And hence there is no morality. This is one of the consequences of moral relativism or a group of moral relativists would argue in this way.


Since there are no moral absolutes, every society has its own morality, every group has its own morality, every individual can potentially have his own morality or her own morality which leads to the conclusion that there is no morality. The very idea behind a quick concept of

morality is that there is something which is universally acceptable, agreeable to everyone and something which can be justifiable to everyone.

So in the modern language of American philosopher, Richard Rorty, he says the similar thing about the when he was discussed in the concept of truth, he was saying that the very concept of truth has become so doubtful in today's world, now instead of truth, we should use the word justification because truth is something which can be testified in front of all audiences while justification is a much moderate term.

It only suggests that I have to justify my claim to my immediate audience which means that my own community, my own group I need to convince them. If I do that, that is enough. So its validity is confined to a particular group, a particular community which is fundamentally limited. But a stronger relativist would even say that if that is the case, then why do you talk about morality? There is no morality at all because there are no moral absolutes.

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The slide is titled "Problems of Relativism" in a serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of five points, each preceded by a small circle. The points are: "If all moral codes are at the same level, then there is no moral progress.", "We are no better than savages.", "Moral effort is meaningless.", "No man is better than another; Jesus is no better than Hitler!", and "It is self-defeating: leads to nihilism". In the bottom right corner, there is a small circular logo with a stylized flower or star inside, and the text "NPTEL" below it. In the bottom center, the name "Dr. Sreokumar Nellickappilly" is written in a small font.

Problems of Relativism

- If all moral codes are at the same level, then there is no moral progress.
- We are no better than savages.
- Moral effort is meaningless.
- No man is better than another; Jesus is no better than Hitler!
- It is self-defeating: leads to nihilism

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Another problem relativism can potentially pose and which is a very serious problem, is that if all moral codes are at the same level because movable relative was and is true then different societies can have moral codes or there exist different moral codes in the same society and there is no way we can compare one code with another or one set of codes with another set and say that this is superior than the other.

If we say that, in order to say that this moral code is superior than this, A is superior than B, we need a C which is superior to A and B to which both A and B, can be compared and evaluated. We will see that whether A complies to C or B complies to C in a better way and if B does not do that, then we would say that A is probably more superior. So there is no C, then C again becomes questionable, what is this C? What is that absolute point to which you refer to?

So such questions can be raised, hence we can conclude that all moral codes are the same level. Both A and B or C or D, whatever moral positions and codes and norms you have in the society, they are all at the same level. We cannot say that one is superior to other. Then, the very idea of moral progress becomes questionable because we believe that human beings have made in the process of revolution, significant progress not only in terms of what you call science and technology and other things, but also we have made some moral progress. But if this is acceptable, then will be can say that we are better than savages? We are better than our predecessors were apes were living in the forest?

So moral effort also becomes meaningless or the very idea of moral effort becomes meaningless and no man is better than another. We would probably reached to this kind of a disastrous conclusion that Jesus is not better than Hitler ok? Because how can you say that Jesus is better than Hitler? The moral position adopted by Jesus and the moral position adopted by Hitler, if both are at the same level, how can you compare them?

They cannot be compared. It is self-defeating. In that sense, you know moral relativism though it is a moral theory, it defeats the very purpose of moral theory and it leads to a kind of extreme nihilism which can be questioned. So we are trying to do that. We will stop here, discussions on this here, the problems posed by moral relativism and in the next lecture, we will again try to see some aspects related to that but we will do that some different approaches that are impossible to understand the very concept of relativism.

This we will do in the next lecture. For the time being, we will wind up, thank you.