

Block-2

Western Ethical Theories

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 2 “Western Ethical Theories” discusses some of the major ethical theories developed in the Greek and western philosophical arena. It has four units in which the learners will understand Aristotle’s virtue ethics, Deontological ethics of Immanuel Kant, Consequentialist ethics of John Stuart Mill. The last unit of this block is a critical exposition on these three ethical theories.

Unit 6 “Virtue Ethics: Aristotle” discusses mainly Aristotle’s idea about morality. Learners will see how Plato, Aristotle and Anscombe understand ethics as virtue. What is virtue?, What is middle golden path?, How does Aristotle define virtue in the terms of middle path, and how much Aristotle succeeded in defining virtue in the terms of middle path are the basic concerns of this unit.

Unit 7 “Deontological Ethics: Immanuel Kant” discusses German Philosopher Immanuel Kant’s understanding of Morality. We will understand why this moral philosophy is deontological in nature. Learners will understand the idea of practical reason, idea of good-will, moral maxims and moral postulations as discussed in Kant’s moral philosophy. The basic line of this thought is that the good or righteousness is inherited in an action. The action is right in the virtue of being right and an action is wrong in the virtue of being wrong.

Unit 8 “Consequentialist Ethics: J. S. Mill” deals with the moral philosophy of British Philosopher John Stuart Mill. J. S. Mill is in the tradition of Utilitarian Philosopher Jeremy Bentham. We can take J S Mill’s consequentialist as a developed or a corrected version of Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism. In this unit, learners will understand qualitative and quantitative measures to measure end result of an action. The basic line of this thought is that we can say an action good or right, if and only if it gives maximum qualitative happiness to maximum people.

Unit 9 “Critical Appraisal of Ethical Theories” is an attempt to critically examine all three ethical theories discussed in this block. Learners will enable to not only understand the objections against these ethical theories but also will see the responses of these ethical theories to defend their positions.

UNIT 6 VIRTUE ETHICS: ARISTOTLE*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 How One Can Lead/Live One's Life
- 6.3 Plato and Virtue Ethics
 - 6.3.1 Virtue Ethics
- 6.4 Aristotle and Virtue Ethics
 - 6.4.1 Ethics
 - 6.4.2 Eudaimonia
- 6.5 G.E.M. Anscombe and Virtue Ethics
 - 6.5.1 Virtue Ethics
- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.7 Key Words
- 6.8 Further Readings and References
- 6.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

6.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present chapter include:

- Understanding the importance of virtues in Human conduct.
- Re - looking on Human values.
- Understanding the difference between 'just', 'unjust', 'moral' and 'immoral', 'virtuous' and 'non-virtuous' behavior.
- Virtue leading to Eudaimonia.
- Justice, Temperance, Courage and its essentialities to human existence.
- Virtue Ethics developed mainly by Aristotle.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Ethics can also be understood as a 'study of conduct' of human beings. It can also be understood as one that studies virtue or moral character. So someone (if need arises) should be helped because it is kind and generous to help people. This is what 'Virtue Ethics' aims to do. In the present world, there is a necessity to understand and analyze human conduct/ behavior. This is a philosophical branch developed by Aristotle and Other Ancient Greeks. This philosophy looks for a 'Virtue based Ethics', i.e., we acquire virtue through practice. Largely this unit will try to look into what is Virtue Ethics, how can we understand the historicity behind it? Here, we will first begin with Aristotle (to know the beginning of

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Virtue Ethics) and in order to understand Virtue Ethics in relation to changes in Modern Philosophy; we will later refer to G.E.M. Anscombe.

The purpose of this unit is to make us re-think how essential and important are virtues like Justice, Courage, and Temperance, as said by Plato. It is important to re-visit and re-think along with these concepts in the contemporary world. These still act as one of the founding stones in any society, and democracy. Comparing them and seeing them in the light of virtue is something which Plato did as it was his way in which he wanted the mass to understand the importance of these qualities as virtues. It was his appeal to make people understand that how important it is to know yourself as well as act after contemplating. Virtue Ethics acts as a 'tool' in the contemporary world which can be used to understand the 'wrongness' in human conduct/ behavior.

It would be wrong (misleading) to say that Plato and Aristotle are the only thinkers/ philosophers to read and engage with, while understanding Virtue Ethics. If Aristotle is important to read in the realm of Virtue Ethics in the West, so is Confucius (Chinese Philosopher) in the East. Virtue stands for a perfect trait or character which one possesses. Most of the philosophers of Virtue Ethics agree in perceiving 'virtue' as the highest and practical wisdom essential in order to obtain it, though they do differ in how they do conjunction (combination) of them. There are different ways of doing it. The first could be called that Virtue Ethics based on Eudaimonism. They understand and define virtues in relation to Eudaimonia. The term Eudaimonia flourishes in Greek Philosophy where it stands for Well-being and happiness. So according to them virtues enable a human being to lead a eudemonia life.

6.2 HOW CAN ONE LEAD/ LIVE ONE'S LIFE?

How do we differentiate between 'Right' and 'wrong'? How do we differentiate between rightful and wrongful behavior? For a detailed understanding of questions and dilemmas like these, one looks up to Ethical Theories. Virtue Ethics makes us contemplate on questions like 'What makes an action as Right'? 'Am I a Right Person'? Virtue Ethics deals not only with moments, events, and stages, but whole life, i.e. throughout my life what should I do to do Right and to look Right? So here actions aren't judged because of one abstract moral theory but rather how they portray virtue. The larger question is how should one lead his/ her life? The answer which virtue ethicists give lies in living with virtues, a society becomes a good society when you have people living a virtuous life.

For instance, a woman is broke (she doesn't have money) to pay her debts. She visits her friend's place and she sees lots of cash in the wardrobe, knowing the fact that her friend comes from a very rich family. She knows that even if she takes some cash it would hardly make a difference in her friend's life. Virtue Ethics works in moments like these, where she is in the dilemma to what to do? How she should live her life? From beginning we have been told that stealing is bad but here stealing would help her in paying off her debts. So what does she do here? How does she know that living a life like this would be better? In instances like these we look up to Virtue Ethics. As it talks about how life should be lived. They say that the purpose of life is Eudemonia and virtue acts as a medium to attain it. Here Virtue stands for those qualities which can help an individual attain Eudemonia or fulfillment or well-being.

What is trait of a character? While we admire someone why do we admire them? Virtues reveal what a person is like which we admire. Virtue is something which we admire, we look up to. There is also a possibility that we might admire something which isn't good. We admire honesty, beauty, intellect, courage and many others. If someone has courage we admire her, if they don't we might look down to them. Virtue, therefore, also stands for excellence and perfection. It can stand for excellent and perfect behavior. For instance people admire Mother Teresa, Mahatama Gandhi because of certain behavioral traits they have, which we also like to have. Whether it is compassion, love, care or servitude we like to have them in our behavior that is why when we see these qualities in other person's behavior we admire them, like them. So these can be treated as virtues according to Greek Philosophers which help us in achieving Eudeamonia which is the ultimate happiness, well-being or fulfillment.

Check your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. What is virtue Ethics?

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2. Is there a difference between de-ontological ethics and Virtue Ethics? Explain.

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3. Does Virtue Ethics believe in living a virtuous life? Explain.

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4. What is the relevance of virtues in the contemporary world? Explain.

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6.3 PLATO AND VIRTUE ETHICS

Plato (428- 437) was one of the finest philosopher of the Greek tradition. He was also the teacher of Aristotle and the founder of the academy in Athens. His notable works include *Apology*, *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *The laws*, *The Meno* and *The Symposium*. One of the important ways of philosophizing for Plato was dialogue. Dialogue acts as an important method for philosophizing. Even one of his most important works called *Republic* has all the discussions happening in the form of dialogue. Republic contains very important dialogues on Virtue Ethics.

6.3.1 Virtue Ethics

Plato advocated a ‘virtue based’ ethics based on Eudaimonia. If happiness is the highest attainment of moral conduct then virtue acts as a key/ mode to achieve Eudaimonia. In *Republic* Plato has mentioned ethics which is based on Eudaimonia. The four virtues are:

- Wisdom
- Temperance
- Courage
- Justice

The purpose of his ethics was to help people achieve Eudaemonia which is also known as fulfillment or well-being. Plato argued for “Knowing yourself”. Socrates said “An unexamined life is not worth living”. Both of them were dwelling and contemplating on ‘How life should be lived’? While many understand Republic as a political text which deals with state and justice alone while it has a lot to offer to Virtue Ethics. Precisely that’s the reason that Plato has considered Justice as the last and the most important virtue which a human being should possess.

In a dialogue on virtue, Plato says that state, community and philosophy can play an important role in helping the person to live a ‘virtuous life’. It has many dialogues which he had with his students on Virtue. A just person is someone who is in control of himself and he doesn’t get driven by his desires.

Table I: Tripartite nature of soul, state and virtue

Soul	State	Virtue
Reason (Rational)	Ruler	Wisdom/ Knowledge
Spirit	Guardians (Soldiers)	Bravery/ Courage/ Loyalty
Appetite	Citizens	Temperance

The three parts of the soul and state has a counterpart of virtues. Reason has the wisdom of knowledge as their virtues. The Rulers/ Warrior/ Soldiers who protect the State, they accord the Spirit and share the virtue of Bravery and Loyalty

together. Here both of these virtues shouldn't be seen as equivalent rather they stand in relation to each other. Soldiers who have also been seen as the guardians of the state should be brave enough to be called fearless and they should be loyal to the state, its society. The Citizens have Appetite and they have Temperance as their virtue, they should have Self Control.

These would be the root/ core virtues which a human being should have in his life. All other virtues stem from it. The first virtue is Courage; it's the most important virtue, Patience, Generosity is rooted in Courage. Temperance stands for balance, it stands for maintaining a balance, equilibrium. The Soul should know how to balance. Chastity, contentment, trustworthiness comes from this virtue. From Wisdom comes understanding. The last virtue is called Justice which stands for fairness and justice. Justice comes with mercy; there is more to virtue than these qualities alone.

The idea of justice in Republic begins with a dialogue with an old man where he says, 'justice means no harm'. It discusses goodness, morality. Justice is good because it has good consequences. Justice is good because it prevents us from harming each other. Republic consists of 'lived dialogues' and conversations (Which the Indian Philosopher Daya Krishna calls as *Samvad.*). He asks one of the fundamental questions, 'Why should we be good'? Justice is a virtue that concerns everybody, it concerns the society. A society remains incomplete as long as it cannot promise justice to its people and countrymen. Justice stands for harmony, it's one of the most fundamental, ethical and social necessity of any society.

6.4 ARISTOTLE AND VIRTUE ETHICS

Aristotle (384- 322 B.C.E.) can be called one of the pioneering figures in Greek Philosophy. He philosophized on Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Ethics and Theology. He was one of the students of Plato. He critiqued Plato's Theory of forms. He is also called as 'Father in the field of Logic'. He was the first to develop systematic way of arguing which includes arguments and propositions. Most of his works are written in the form of lectures and notes.

6.4.1 Ethics

How can we best live our lives? Aristotle said that we should keep on asking ourselves this question more often. In order to answer this question he propounded the branch of philosophy called Virtue Ethics. In *Nichomachean Ethics*, one of the biggest questions for Aristotle stands as 'What is Good'? The good for humanity is to attain virtue, to become a virtuous person. In pursue of this question he dwelled into the realm of virtue and practical wisdom. Practical wisdom (phronesis) is an intellectual virtue, a virtue necessary and important for the acquirement of moral virtues. There is also one more kind of wisdom, i.e. Theoretical Wisdom (Sophia) which can be called as a *summum bonum* of all the eternal truths. There are different kinds of virtues like Courage, Loyalty, Honesty, Temperament and Integrity. Aristotle talked about *Moral Virtues* which are as follows:

Courage

Temperance

Liberality
 Magnificence
 Magnanimity
 Ambition
 Truthfulness
 Wittiness
 Righteous
 Modesty
 Friendliness

He divided Plato's Cardinal Virtues into the above written Moral virtues. He also added the concept to Intellectual Virtues which includes:

Intelligence
 Theoretical Wisdom

Aristotle said 'you become what you repeatedly do', so in order to lead a happy life a person should lead as well as live her life with virtue. For instance, Aristotle says that you don't become a liar because you just lied once; you became a liar because you repeatedly started lying. Hence it became a habit for you. Therefore virtue can be practiced by repeatedly doing it.

6.4.2 Eudaimonia

This Greek term can be translated as happiness, well-being or human flourishing. Virtue leads to happiness or a good life. The opposite of virtue is vice. One can have two extremes in this, for instance one can have the vice of deficiency on the one hand and vice of excess on the other. For instance seeing someone getting mugged, if you run away in order to save yourself that would be the deficiency of your virtue of courage. Or if a person has gun and you are trying to stop him unarmed would be excess of vice or courage (in this case). The best thing to do here would be to get the help of the local police authorities so that you can save him as well as yourself. Virtue also acts as a golden mean between two extremes.

The biggest happiness (Eudaimonia) one can have or possess is by developing intellectual virtues. The virtue of courage occupies the middle path between being coward on the one hand and being overly rash on the other. Acquiring intellectual virtues as well as virtue of character makes the *highest good* according to Aristotle which also stands for Eudaimonia.

6.5 G. E. M. ANSCOMBE AND VIRTUE ETHICS

Elizabeth Anscombe or Miss Anscombe as she was popularly known was one of the important women philosophers of the twentieth century. She was a religious believer and a virtue ethicist. She is known for her works on ethics and philosophy of action. Her one of the important works includes her papers titled '*Modern Moral Philosophy*' and '*Intentions*'. She is also known for translating some of important works of Ludwig Wittgenstein.

6.5.1 Virtue Ethics

Anscombe in her paper titled, ‘*Modern Moral Philosophy*’ critiqued the way in which English moral philosophers were propounding theories which till that time had resulted in the culmination of a law concept of ethics. She critiqued philosophers like J.S. Mill and Immanuel Kant because of their reliance on ‘universal principles’ which ends up giving a universal moral code of conduct. English moral philosophers did not differ with each other in any manner. ‘Obligation’ has become the central concept in their ethics. Her submission was to re-assess and re-understand how we have been dealing with ethics and virtue. According to her, our own will is incapable in itself to support moral obligation.

She critiqued Kant’s account as well as Utilitarian’s. The response which she gave to English Moral Philosophers was that they accept that there is a God who sees morality and is the source of our moral obligations. Moral obligation only makes sense in relation to divine authority. If not this, then they should give up the concept of obligation as an important element of their ethical theories. Moral philosophers needs to re-assess the concepts of Intention, Desire, Pleasure, Motive, Action and Emotion which they have ignored so far. She rejected de-ontological ethical theories as well as consequentialist theories.

Check your Progress II

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Does Virtue Ethics tells us what to do?

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2. What are different types of Virtues according to Aristotle?

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3. Is there a difference between Aristotelian account and Anscombe’s account of Virtue Ethics? Explain.

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4. Can justice be seen as one of the important virtues? If yes, Explain.

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6.6 LET US SUM UP

So far there have been broadly two to three different ways in which one can understand/ theorize Ethics. Eudaimonism being one of the important ones and on the other hand there is Anscombe’s version of reviving Virtue Ethics. In the contemporary world, one can see lots of violations in relation to speech/ acts/ morality. Few believe that we live in a post-modernist world and therefore value no longer holds any significance. But in whatever world we live, would a life be significant enough if we live value less and virtue less. Seeing the discourses in philosophy/ of philosophy which has been male centered to a great extent. It was a women philosopher who revived Virtue Ethics in late Modern Philosophy. There are many contemporary philosophers who have been working on Ethical theories. Few among them are Alasdair Macintyre, J. Cottingham and J. Driver.

6.7 KEY WORDS

Eudaimonia: This Greek term can be translated to happiness, well-being or human flourishing.

Phronesis: (Greek Term) Intellectual Wisdom.

6.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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Pod casts/ Web sources

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<https://thevirtueblog.com/virtue-talk-2/>

<https://philosophybites.com/2014/12/julia-annas-on-what-is-virtue-ethics-for.html>

6.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Virtue Ethics is a branch in philosophy which deals with virtue as a central concept while trying to understand how a life should be lived. It is not concerned with duties or obligations but traits or virtues which one should possess in order to live a good life. It doesn't try to understand human life from the dialectic between deontology and consequentialism. The highest happiness is eudaimonia. Practical wisdom is necessary in order to achieve eudaimonia.
2. Yes, there is a difference between deontological ethics and virtue ethics. The term deontology is derived from the Greek word 'deon' and 'logos', While the former are ethical theories which lays emphasis on duties and morality as central to human life. According to it, few acts need to be performed as they fall under the realm of obligation, for instance 'duty for duty's sake'. One of the important philosophers of deontology ethics is Immanuel Kant.
3. Yes, virtue ethics believes in living a virtuous life. Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle tried to define 'Good', and 'Supreme Good', they started philosophizing on a life which will be governed by virtues. All these philosophers made different distinctions between virtues. Few include courage, temperance, generosity, friendship, patience etc.
4. Yes, virtues do help us in the contemporary world. Whether it's about our conduct, behavior or the way we want to live our life virtues cat as an indicator for these. It has a lot of relevance in the present world as there is injustice, cowardliness, selfishness and crudeness in the present world. In order to contemplate on ourselves, on our conduct, we need to go back to Virtue Ethics. The basis of it is to know ourselves, examine our actions, and contemplate on our mistakes and not vice versa. Contemplations and examining is missing when it comes to analyzing our acts, and behavior in the present world and that's why Virtue Ethics are important as well as relevant.

Answers to check your progress II

1. No, virtue ethics is all about an ethical theory which focuses on an individual's character and conduct rather than centering itself on a set of rules. You become a virtuous person because of Eudemonia. According to Aristotle, nature has built in us the idea of virtue, the nature of being virtuous. Virtue would lead to good behavior in a human being.
2. According to Aristotle, courage is the golden mean between cowardice and recklessness. While cowardice is a deficiency of courage, and recklessness is an excess of courage, both are extremes and both are bad. In the words of Aristotle, "courage is finding the right way to act". A 'Right Action' is always a mid-point between two extremes. Like, honesty is the mean between brutal honesty and incapable of saying things which should be said. The same goes for generosity as well. One becomes virtuous while learning it, acting on it.

3. Theoretically both the theories belong to the realm of virtue ethics. Anscombe begins to theorize as a religious believer and as a virtue ethicist. She brought a re-assessment to the field of virtue ethics. She argued that either we get back to Virtue Ethics or define and understand the existence of God which was absent in the moral philosophy.
4. Yes, Justice has been perceived and conceptualized as one of the important virtues by Plato. The best aspect of this virtue is that it affects from the individual to the collective. Plato was wise enough to treat it as an end in itself and not as a means to achieve anything. Yes he did hold the position that for any society to be harmonious and virtuous these virtues are very important. And in them the most important is Justice. He perceives it as something which is so essential to a democracy as well as to any society. It clearly shows how Plato was a head of his times and that's why he philosophized so much on justice and tried to make it as adaptable as he can.



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UNIT 7 DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS: IMMANUEL KANT

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Consequentialism vs Deontology
- 7.3 Normative Ethics and Deontology
- 7.4 Deontological Theories
- 7.5 Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)
- 7.6 Kant's Deontological Ethics
- 7.7 Hypothetical Imperative
- 7.8 Categorical Imperative
- 7.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.10 Key Words
- 7.11 Further Readings and references
- 7.12 Answers to check your progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this unit are as follows,

- To understand the difference between consequentialism and deontology.
- To know what deontological theory is and its types.
- To understand the meaning and importance of Imperatives
- To understand Kant's Moral Philosophy

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The term 'deontology' came into origin from the Greek term 'deon' which stands for duty and 'logos' which stands for science. Deontological theories are concerned with what people do, and not concerned about what consequences the action can have. That is why it is also called Non-Consequentialist theory. This school of thought in moral philosophy places high importance on the relationship between duty and morality of human conduct/ actions. An action is morally good because it is good in itself; it has certain aspects of goodness. That is why some acts are obligatory in nature. Terms like 'duty for duty's sake', 'honesty is good within itself' are few expressions, which can describe deontology. So, what sets aside an action as right or wrong? According to deontology (which is an ethical theory), rules or principles distinguish between right and wrong action. Expressions like 'don't lie', 'don't steal', 'don't cheat' etc. are part of it. These rules can be categorized into three types: 1) Rules that tell what we should do (obligatory), 2). Rules that tell what we should not do (forbidden), 3). Rules that tell what we

can do (permissible but neither obligatory nor forbidden). Deontological ethics posits that is our duty to refrain from certain actions without any consideration of its consequence. If the moral principle is “do not tell lies”, it’s our duty not to lie in any condition. Deontology and Consequentialism stands in opposition to each other when it comes to analyzing human conduct/ behavior.

7.2 CONSEQUENTIALISM VS. DEONTOLOGY

As the name suggests ‘consequentialism’ measures the worth of any action after seeing its ‘consequences’. Now many who criticized consequentialism and advocated deontological Ethics, do it on the ground of subjectivity and rule of law or conduct. Few critics say that consequentialism gives a lot of room to subjectivity when they say that an action should be judged as right or wrong keeping in mind the consequences, which they produce. On the contrary, in ‘Deontological Ethics’ there is no scope of subjectivity, you do what your duties and responsibilities are, you act according to rule of law. For instance, if you have been committing infidelity on your partner and the moment he/she gets suspicious you lie about it, because you did not want to hurt him/her. From Consequentialist point, this can be termed good as the consequence of telling the lie is that the partner is not hurt by the act of infidelity. Consequentialists thus determine the worth of any action by seeing its consequences. The larger good of any act is analyzed keeping in mind the consequences or the result of that action. While in deontology it is concerned with the moral duty and moral laws, acts should be performed in accordance to moral laws. In case of the above example, the ‘Deontologists’ would call it wrong because at the end of the day you are not only cheating but you are also violating the principle of not lying. So according to Deontological Ethics, you should confess in front of him/her even though chances are bleak that he/she will forgive you. In short, your marriage may be jeopardized.

In ‘Deontological Theory’ consequences do not matter, the intention does. What is wrong would be wrong irrespective of what we do and how we do. Morally wrong action is unacceptable. You are a cheater if you are cheating on your partner irrespective of the fact that you can save your marriage, if you lie. You are a cheater as well as a liar.

These theories are also very popular along with consequentialism and Virtue Ethics, deontological ethics constitute as one of the important components of Normative Ethics. What matters most is whether you are acting according to law or not, whether you are following the rules or not. Your action would only be right when it aligns with the moral theory (moral norms). For instance, you are broke and you are starving. You cannot buy lunch for yourself. But on the road you see a man who is pretty reckless about his money. You know that if you steal money from him you can buy yourself lunch and you won’t be starving anymore. Deontological Ethics would say that because it’s wrong to steal you should not steal, even if you die because of hunger.

This theory is also critiqued for being very strict and restrictive. You cannot lie, steel or cheat because it is against the rules of morality. Deontology does what is right, even if your potential lie can benefit someone still you cannot lie because it’s morally wrong. The morality of an action is based on rules which are also called ‘Duty’. Let’s take one more instance, you are working on a project with

your office mates and you know that you haven't contributed much to the report. The day arrives and the boss chooses you to present the report. You know that no one of your group mates would be there while you make the presentation. So you decided to give most of the credits to yourself as you are in need of promotion. Here deontologists would say that what you did was wrong. Lying is wrong irrespective of whatever the situation is. By lying you violated the moral law, therefore this action is wrong.

There are obligations and duties which you need to perform irrespective of everything. Let's take one more example to understand this, you are a judge and a matter comes in your court where you have to give a judgment on a man (who used to be your friend but betrayed you badly) Now you have an opportunity of giving it back to him by declaring him guilty. But you shouldn't do this irrespective of your past problems with him. As a judge you have a professional obligation that you deliver the truth, not guilty. So your duties as a judge would be betrayed if you will use your power to make your friend suffer.

Check your progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is Deontological Ethics? Explain.

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2. Is there any difference between Consequentialism and Deontology? Elaborate.

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3. Does deontology have any relation with duties, obligations? If yes, explain.

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7.3 NORMATIVE ETHICS AND DEONTOLOGY

Normative Ethics is that part of moral philosophy which deals with what is a right or wrong action. The larger division in Normative Ethics falls into *Deontological* and *Teleological* theories. While the former doesn't go for value

to undermine the action the latter does. While trying to understand Normative Ethics many philosophers make a distinction between *MetaEthics* and *Applied Ethics*. While Meta Ethics is the study of meaning and definition of moral language and moral facts while Applied Ethics deals with the study of use of ethical theories in the realm of our everyday problems.

7.4 DEONTOLOGICAL THEORIES

It should be clear till now that Deontology stands in opposition to Consequentialism and its theories. For Deontologists, whatever is morally forbidden cannot be accepted/ acted upon, irrespective of however good or useful their consequences would be. An action should be in alliance with a moral norm and not in contradiction to it. All deontologists contend that ‘goodness’ is an ‘objective’ feature of the world and a moral agent must have the capacity to recognize it and obey the moral principles without thinking about consequences.

The Deontological theories can be broadly categorized into two types: Act Deontological Ethics and Rule-Deontological Ethics. Act-Deontology applies the deontological norms by considering the individual action and its circumstances. Rule-Deontological ethics universally applies ethical norms without consideration individual action or its circumstances. For example, Act-Deontology would consider whether John’s killing of Smith was wrong or not, Rule-Deontology would simply say that killing is wrong.

The most celebrated advocate of Deontological Ethics is Immanuel Kant. His ethical theory had a deep impact on modern moral philosophy.

7.5 IMMANUEL KANT (1724- 1804)

Immanuel Kant would be one of the important philosophers in the history of western philosophy. His ideas on epistemology, metaphysics, Moral philosophy, aesthetics has been widely celebrated and discussed. His important works include *The Critique of Pure Reason*, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of the Morals*.

7.6 KANT’S DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS

According to Kant, your actions are of moral worth only if it coincides with your duties and duties should be performed for its own sake. Kant believed that ethical actions should be the result of following universal moral laws such as doesn’t lie, don’t cheat etc. People should follow these rules and do their duty. Many also consider it intuitive in nature, as deep down we all know what is ethical or unethical. We know that we shouldn’t lie or cheat or for that matter kill someone. But Kant says, the matter doesn’t stop here, it begins here as we shouldn’t make an exception for ourselves.

You only have to follow a certain set of rules in order to be morally good. Deontology advises not to violate the universal moral rules, Kant said that religion and morality aren’t compatible with each other, and in order to differentiate between the right and the wrong we should use ‘Reason’ or human intellect. Kant took morality on a serious note. Morality is constant according to Kant. He made a distinction between two kinds of acts:

The things we ought to do morally

The acts we do without any moral reason, law.

7.7 HYPOTHETICAL IMPERATIVE

Let's take one example to understand this; if you desire to pass an examination, you 'ought' to study. If you desire to be wealthy, you should start working hard. Kant calls them *Hypothetical Imperatives*. These are certain commands which you ought to follow if you want something. For instance, if you are hungry and want to avoid or get rid of your hunger you need to work hard.

Imperatives in commonsensical language stand for instructions, they tell us how to do, how to act. Kant distinguishes between Hypothetical and Categorical Imperative. While *hypothetical imperatives* stand for a set of rules/ commands/ instructions which tells us what to do if we want to achieve something. For instance, if one wants to get rich, the hypothetical imperative would tell her to get a job or work hard. If you want to get good marks, you have to study. Here hypothetical imperative would tell you/ instruct you to do that. Therefore it also applies to people who are interested in achieving any goal, if you aren't interested in getting good marks or getting rich you don't have to follow these hypothetical imperatives at all. That's why as the name suggests these are hypothetical in nature. Morality comes under the realm of *Categorical Imperatives*, not Hypothetical Imperatives. Modern deontological theory was introduced by Kant through his account on categorical imperative.

7.8 CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

For Kant, Categorical Imperatives are those commands which you must 'follow' irrespective of what your desires are. It is so because moral obligations are derived from human intellect or practical reason. Categorical Imperatives are our moral obligations and they need to be followed irrespective of whatever the situation is. According to Kant, it doesn't matter whether you want to be moral or not, you have to follow the commands of Categorical Imperatives. They are independent of your wishes and desires.

According to him, you don't always need religion to inform you on what is right and wrong, when you can perform this task by using your 'reason' alone. He gave three maxims of this imperative, the first one says:

“Act only according to that maxim which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction.”

The first principle here stands for *universalizability*, your acts and the nature of your acts should be universally applied. Here the term Maxim stands for rule or principle (how you need to act) whereas the term universal moral law stands for acts which must always be done in similar situations. So, before acting, you should ask yourself what's the maxim of my action? In other words, is there any general rule which stands behind while I am acting in a particular manner.

Let's take an example to understand it more clearly. Suppose, you have scored really low marks in your examination, and your mother asked you about how you performed during exams? You lie to her by telling her that you did well. Now,

comes one more hurdle that you need to get your mother's signature on your mark sheet. You being who you are know that your mother would be signing many cheques and sheets before leaving for her office. You keep your mark sheet in between those sheets and cheques. This was off course to avoid the confrontation as you have earlier lied to your mom about your marks. Surprisingly when you came back your mark sheet was signed.

Your mother was in a hurry and couldn't check that the pile of sheets had your mark sheets as well. Now what you did was lying as well as you cheated your mom. Now this action was morally wrong and by acting (lying and cheating) on it, what you did was you universalized lying and cheating. And you are also setting the precedence that everyone should always cheat and lie. If you should be able to do it, then everybody should be able to do it. Now just imagine what would happen to the world if everyone starts acting like you. That's what Kant says you cannot make an exception for your own act.

Moral Rules apply to anybody and everybody. Let's take one more example to understand it. Your brother has been bankrupted and he is hiding at your place. You are aware of the seriousness of the situation and therefore you tell your brother to feel safe at your place. In between you come to know that police have been looking for him, they have begun their search operations for him. After some time, you see that there was a bell on your door, as expected it was police. Knowing that you are his sister they decided to contact you as well. Now you lied to the police by telling them your brother isn't here, inferring that the police have arrived, your brother panicked and decided to run away from your place and he did that. After a while on the road the police caught him.

Now according to Kant, you are responsible for your brother's misery. Because to begin with your lie is the origin of it, it happened because of your lie. If you could have told the truth to the police, then your brother would have been solely responsible for his acts. What you could have done is you could have refused to answer when the police asked you about him; you could have changed the topic etc. Here by lying you violated the universal moral law.

The second maxim of Kant focuses on how human beings should be treated. In his words,

“Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a mere means.”

For Kant, we use objects and things as mere means all the time. I might use this pen to write; therefore, pen becomes a mere means to write something. Pen becomes the mere means to achieve the end of writing. Once the ink of your pen is finished you would throw your pen, as no longer it would serve any purpose to you. Kant says it's alright to use things and objects like this but not human beings. Human beings are 'End-in -themselves'. No human being can be treated as an object for some use. On the contrary, human beings are an end in themselves. Humans exist for themselves and 'in- themselves'.

Kant never said that we don't use each other as means. We all are human beings and we are dependent on each other, we rely on each other. For example, you might use your mother's skill of 'cooking' while having food, as she is cooking food for you. You might use your father's money to pay your tuition fee. But we

shouldn't be using each other as mere means. We are human beings, rational enough. We shouldn't see others according to our own benefit. When we treat a human being as a means to achieve an end we end up surpassing her will, autonomy and intellect and reason. If you do this, you are violating the second imperative of Kant. Moral truths are universal and you don't need a God to govern it.

The final and third maxim of categorical Imperative says,

“Act as though your maxims you should become a legislator of universal laws.”

Here Kant asks us to remember that every time we act, we are contributing to the idea and nature of act and acting. We are making it normal and we always have the choice to act according to universal moral laws. Kant's moral philosophy rests on 'free Will'. Your actions should have Universality, they should be end in themselves and autonomous. According to Kant, if you are committing an emotional, physical, mental infidelity to your partner and very conveniently you are hiding it from her. Then you are universalizing the act of 'lying' and 'cheating'. You should be comfortable if everybody does it.

Kant was astonished to see how and to what extent at that time people were blinded by religion. He thought that it's high time that people shun their religious beliefs, stop seeing God as the highest guardian of goodness. Therefore, the sovereignty of religion should be replaced by reason. He said that inherently every religion talks about how one should lead/ live an ethical life? Therefore, he came up with the concept of *Categorical Imperative*. This concept was first approved and discussed in his text *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. According to Categorical imperatives, a person should act according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. This is something which most of the religions advocate. No religion would teach you to use a human being as mere means.

These imperatives show you 'mirror' it tells you how you should Act. This is your rational self. The will to do the good thing is called 'Good Will'. Let's take one example to understand the concept of Good will. You are waiting for your bus at the bus stop and you saw a woman's wallet was lying down on the road. You can see it clearly because she was taking out her mobile phone from her bag that is when her wallet fell down. Now the larger point is what would you do in a situation like this? So you decided to pick her wallet and give it to her. Why would you help a stranger? You did this because you wanted to be in the good books of those women, you did it because you could see that few people in the line are observing all this.

According to Kant, acts like these aren't driven by goodwill. The acts performed under Goodwill are good in themselves and they aren't performed for some other sake or expecting something in return. Good will is something which we do in accordance with moral reasons. We shouldn't act in accordance to what others are saying, what God and religion tell us. We should act in accordance with moral rules. The moral rules come from own intellect and reasoning.

7.9 LET US SUM UP

In the present unit we tried to look into the larger sphere of Normative Ethics, here we tried to understand how deontological ethics is being placed in the larger realm of Normative Ethics. We tried to understand what imperatives are and

what the difference between hypothetical and categorical imperatives are. All these were to understand that how can we be Good? How can we lead an ethical life?

Check your progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Who was Immanuel Kant? Was he a Moral Philosopher?

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2. Is there a difference between Categorical and Hypothetical Imperatives?

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3. Why do we need to act in accordance with Moral law?

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7.10 KEY WORDS

Deontology : The term ‘deontology’ came into origin from the Greek term ‘deon’ which stands for duty and ‘logos’ which stands for science. Deontological theories are concerned with what people do, and not concerned about what consequences the action can have.

Categorical Imperatives : Categorical Imperatives are our moral obligations and they need to be followed irrespective of whatever the situation is.

Hypothetical Imperatives : *hypothetical imperatives* stands for a set of rules/ commands/ instructions which tells us what to do if we want to achieve something.

Good Will : The will to do the good thing is called ‘Good Will’.

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Podcast/ Online links

https://philosophynow.org/podcasts/The_hidden_world_of_Immanuel_Kant

7.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check your Progress I

1. The term Deontological comes from the Greek words, *Deon* and *Logic*, it stands for duty and science. This school of thought in philosophy places high importance on the relationship between duty and the morality of the human conduct/ actions. An action is morally good because it is good in itself, it has been acted in accordance with Moral law.
2. Consequentialism and Deontology are two different sets of ethical theories under Normative Ethics. Whereas the former says that the acts would be understood after seeing their consequences and the latter talks about moral laws, duties and responsibilities while analyzing human conduct.
3. Yes, Deontology has a relationship between duties and obligations as it believes that if a human being would act according to her duties and obligations in short if she would follow the moral law that act would be good in nature.

Answers to Check your Progress II

1. Immanuel Kant was a German Philosopher. Yes, he is known as a Moral Philosopher. Apart from Epistemology, Metaphysics, he has written extensively on Moral Philosophy. In fact, deontology is widely accepted because of him.
2. Yes, there is a difference between categorical and hypothetical imperatives. While the former deals with universalizable unconditional actions the latter talks about certain goals which you need to set for yourself, if you want to accomplish them, you need to follow these instructions.
3. Well, we all need to act in accordance with Moral Law because it is universal in nature, it has goodness beneath it and it talks about rightful actions.

UNIT 8 CONSEQUENTIALIST ETHICS: J. S. MILL *

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Consequentialism
- 8.3 Types of Consequentialism
- 8.4 J.S. Mill's Utilitarianism
- 8.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.6 Key Words
- 8.7 Further Readings and References
- 8.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we will discuss these following issues,

- The arguments offered by the consequentialists on how one ought to act and what makes an action moral or immoral.
- Explanation of what is consequentialism, what are the different types of consequentialism.
- A detailed account of the classical consequentialism or Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill.

8.1. INTRODUCTION

The central question of moral philosophy is how one ought to act. At every point in our life we face such situations which make us think about how we should act in this situation morally. It is the normative ethics which seeks to set norms or standards for the moral conduct. We often make normative judgments like what is good or bad and what kind of way of life is morally good or morally bad. There are varieties of different types of theories that have been developed to understand moral practice. Different theories provide different set of rules or parameters for moral action. Normative theories can be categorized in to two broad categories—deontological and teleological. Deontological theories primarily focus on arriving at principles which will guide human conduct while teleological theories try to determine the value of certain kinds of action and posit them as an end to be achieved. Deontological approach defines duty by following the principles whereas teleological approach tries to do it on the basis of the consequences of actions. It is for this reason that Teleological approach is also called as Consequentialism.

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Let us take an example of passive euthanasia, to understand the difference between different normative theories. There are different set of arguments provided by different theories to the question, “Can passive euthanasia be morally permissible?” Suppose both deontological theorists and consequentialists argue that it is morally impermissible, this doesn’t mean that they are giving same rules to argue for the same thing, rather, they would argue on different grounds. As deontologists would maintain that it is intrinsically wrong to put an end to someone’s life, they would argue that passive euthanasia is wrong even if a person is suffering. Putting end to someone’s life or one’s own life is intrinsically wrong for them, hence it is morally impermissible. While consequentialists, would provide totally different sets of rules to prove the same conclusion. According to them passive euthanasia would be morally impermissible because there are cases of abuses of its permissibility or it does not promote the best outcome/consequence. Thus, different theories provide different sets of rules or norms to act morally.

This unit will focus on the consequentialist ethics. Consequentialism holds that whether an action is morally right or wrong depends only on the consequences of that action. All Consequentialists are united by the central idea that the moral assessment of action depends on how much good such things provide and how much bad do they avoid. Thus, from a consequentialist standpoint, a morally right act is one that will produce a good outcome, or consequence.

The unit will start by explaining consequentialism and different types of consequentialism in order to create a background for discussing Mill’s Utilitarianism.

8.2 CONSEQUENTIALISM

Consequentialism is a type of normative ethical theory which maintains that what morally matters about an action is the kind of consequences it produces. What is of primary moral importance about an action is what it brings about or the consequences it produces. The Consequentialists maintains that what morally matters about an action is what causal difference it makes, or what it can be expected to bring about. Though, sometimes we are not certain about the consequences that an action will produce, still, we can anticipate its overall consequences based on our previous experiences or from the experiences of others. When we morally evaluate an action or when we think about what to do, what we look for is the overall difference that an action makes or that it is likely to make.

Consequentialism holds that the aim of morality is to guide us doing actions which will bring overall good consequences. There might be difference in identifying specific actions which brings overall consequences. But there is an agreement that we can morally evaluate any action i.e., whether the action is morally good or bad, on the basis of what kind consequence an action is producing. If an action fails to produce the overall good/welfare it will be considered a bad action otherwise it will be considered a good action. William Shaw describes that “what distinguishes consequentialist from non-consequentialist ethical theories is the insistence that when it comes to rightness or wrongness, nothing matters but the results of our actions” (Shaw 2006; p. 5).

We can think of some of the examples that consequentialist would evoke. Like, acts of honesty are more likely to bring better consequences than dishonesty. Acts of charity would always produce consequences which are good. Not harming others (innocent people) tend to achieve overall better consequences than doing it. From these examples it can be understood that the overall consequences of an action determines whether that action is right or wrong.

Our actions or our decisions for doing moral actions are always influenced by consequential thinking. One should not harm an innocent because it will deprive the person state of being from what he/she was earlier without being harmed. We should help people in need because it would bring welfare and happiness in their life. It can be argued that if we analyze from consequentialist approach then we can see that wrong/bad actions have necessarily bad consequences. We do not necessarily need to focus on the action itself in order to morally evaluate an action. We can determine whether the action is good or bad from its consequences.

Let us consider a specific issue of assisted suicide and see how the consequentialists would argue in favor of and against it. Let us suppose that needless suffering is to be minimized. On this basis, the case for assisted suicide looks quite strong from consequentialist framework. Many people maintain that assisted suicide is intrinsically wrong; it is wrong even if it would prevent suffering and even the person wishes to die. Even consequentialist could agree that assisted suicide is wrong, but would arrive at the conclusion on different grounds. For example, it might be on the basis of concerns about abuses of its permissibility, or because it might encourage those who are ill or disabled to think of themselves as selfish burdens to others, and the like. It would be because there are reasons to think that it does not promote the best outcome.

Most of the consequentialists argue that we ought to maximize the good effects. The idea is that producing more good is better than producing less. This 'good' is not restricted only to actions rather it is also applied to rules, policies, motives and dispositions. Usually, the effect, that is, the good to be brought about, is understood in terms of happiness or well-being. Following upon this, some have argued that Epicurus was an early consequentialist due to his development of hedonism. Epicurus limits the scope of the relevant consequences to the self, hence, he was considered as articulating the brand of consequentialism which is known as Egoism. Egoism is that one should promote the good, but this is understood as what is good for the self and not the overall good. This kind of consequentialism known as 'Egoism' or 'Particularistic Consequentialism' which holds that one only takes into consideration how the consequences of an act will affect oneself or a given group like one's family or friends. Here, moral rightness depends on the consequences for an individual agent or a limited group. On the contrary, Universal Consequentialism holds that one takes into account how the consequences of an act will affect all the parties involved. Moral rightness depends on the consequences for all affected people. Everyone is equally important, and one should give equal weight to each person's good or utility/welfare (all who count equally). Since Utilitarianism assumes that all who count should count equally, it is important to consider the question of who should count or who should be ascribed moral status. It is interesting to note that prominent utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer hold that all sentient beings should be

ascribed moral status, in the sense that moral agents have duties towards all beings who can experience pleasure and pain.

The first systematic account of utilitarianism has been offered by Jeremy Bentham. Classical consequentialism (utilitarianism) holds that morally appropriate behaviour will not harm others it will rather increase happiness or ‘utility’. Hence, the fundamental principle of utilitarianism is the principle of utility, i.e., the morally right action is the one that produces the best overall consequences with regard to the utility or welfare of all the affected parties. According to Jeremy Bentham, the right act or policy is the one that causes ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’, which means, maximizing the total utility or welfare of the majority of all the affected parties. The question arises that how do we know which states of affairs are valuable and which states of affairs are not? Utilitarianism tells us that it is the happiness or well-being of sentient beings that is the valuable thing. Jeremy Bentham holds that good is the experience or sensation of pleasure and absence of pain. While, according to the other classical utilitarian, J.S. Mill, good is that which promotes entire range of valuable mental states, and mental states can be valuable without being pleasurable. He even talks about higher and lower pleasures. (J.S. Mill’s account of utilitarianism will be discussed at length in the further sections).

Check Your Progress I

- Note:** a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is Consequentialism?

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2. Define Utilitarianism. Give example.

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8.3 TYPES OF CONSEQUENTIALISM

There are many types of Consequentialism which are connected with the focal thesis i.e., consequences of action is what matters most for the assessment of

whether an action is good or bad. There is a standard division within consequentialist views between Act and Rule consequentialism.

ACT CONSEQUENTIALISM focuses on the action which brings in overall good consequences or bad consequences to determine the moral status of the action.

RULE CONSEQUENTIALISM focuses or tries to come up with some rules or principles if applied would produce overall better consequences.

Act utilitarianism believes that we should assess whether an act is right or wrong by evaluating the utility of the action. This means that we should consider the act as a good act which produces overall consequences for the affected parties. When we face a choice between alternative courses of action, we should choose the course of action that has the best expected consequences for all (or the majority of) the affected parties. Thus, act consequentialism prescribes the following decision procedure for assessment and choice of alternative courses of action on the basis of the principle of utility: Identify alternative courses of actions like X1, X2, and X3 and so on. Identify the expected consequences of these alternative courses of action, like X1's consequences, X2's consequences and so on. Here the assessment and choice of action is on the basis of the principle of utility. In order to decide what is right and wrong to do, we need to have knowledge of several things, like we should know all available courses of actions and their consequences. We must put a value on each of the available courses of action. We must compare these different courses of action in order to decide which action has the best expected consequences. This seems almost impossible to look for all possible alternatives; here we can apply our previous experience to look for best alternative.

While Act consequentialism sounds appealing at the outset, it has some troubling implications. If you've ever said, "The ends do not justify the means," you were expressing a non-consequentialist sentiment. There are many actions that consequentialism entails are perfectly fine, or even obligatory, that many people think are very wrong. Suppose a doctor is monitoring five patients who are in urgent need of some vital organs in order to survive. In that moment a person with sound health and good physique is visiting the doctor for his routine checkup. Suddenly, the doctor thought that if I operate this person with good health and provide organs to the five patients, these five people will be able to attain good health. In that process one person (with good health) will die. An act-consequentialist would not hesitate to justify the doctor's decision. But people in general would not be able to justify it.

The problem faced by rule-consequentialism might be resolved by the rule-consequentialism. Rule consequentialism does not focus on individual actions rather it tries to formulate rules or principles which are more likely to bring overall good consequences in the society for the majority of people.

Rule Consequentialism holds, that we need to determine whether an act is good or bad on the basis of the rule or principles that we have arrived through the principle of utility. So, if we have framed a rule that "Lying is bad and we should not lie" then moral agents should do not lie not because it is his/her individual preference but it is rule that needs to be followed if we want have overall good of

the society. Here, it is not about the individual action but it is about the rule or norm following which overall welfare can be achieved. Rule consequentialism talks about two ways of following it.

- 1) Moral agents needs to assess different rules in a particular situation and apply the rule or norm which is likely to achieve overall best consequences.
- 2) The rule or norm a person gets from the first step for a particular situation he/she should follow it irrespective of the thought that an alternative action might achieve better consequences than this. For example, if not lying is the rule then one should not lie even if lying would bring overall better consequences.

Thus, according to rule consequentialism, we should not simply perform the individual action that will produce good consequences. Instead, we should follow rules that, when followed, lead to good consequences.

Check Your Progress II

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the two types of consequentialism?

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2. Define Act Consequentialism in detail.

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3. Define Rule Consequentialism. Give two-steps involved in rule consequentialism.

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8.4. J. S. MILL'S UTILITARIANISM

John Stuart Mill was a follower of Bentham, he greatly admired Bentham's work even though he disagreed with some of Bentham's claims particularly on the nature of 'happiness'. As Bentham held that there were no qualitative differences between pleasures, only quantitative ones. While for Mill there is a qualitative difference between pleasures. The ethical theory of John Stuart Mill is most extensively articulated in his classical text *Utilitarianism* (1861). Its goal is to justify the utilitarian principle as the foundation of morals. This principle says actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote overall human happiness. So, Mill focuses on consequences of actions and not on rights or ethical sentiments.

Mill has tried to define the purpose of morality as to bring a particular state of existence. Mill tries to argue that characterizing action simply as good and bad is not enough but we need to find out what is/are the things which makes the actions a moral nature i.e., good or bad. People might not agree with Mill as to what is or should be the thing on the basis of which moral actions should be assessed. Mill asserts that this essential feature as the utility of actions which is necessary for human existence and makes an action worthy of moral assessment.

Against the misconception that utility is opposed to pleasure Mill has tried to define utility as pleasure and absence of pain. In that way the principle of utility is also termed as Greatest Happiness Principle. This principle holds that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure" (Mill 1969: p. 210). From this perspective avoidance of pain and seeking pleasure is end-in-themselves and they are desirable for their own sake. Therefore, any other action, event, principle etc is desirable because they are means to achieve the end.

A general criticism that has been put forth against Mill is that considering pleasure as the only motto of life means that one is reducing the meaning of life to pleasure. Mill has responded to it by distinguishing the quality of human pleasure from that of animals. He has emphasized the point that human kind gets pleasure from exercising their higher faculties and they will always be unpleasant if they would not cultivate them. So, happiness for human kind is the signifier of functioning of their higher faculties. Thus, Mill in formulating his utilitarian stand focuses on the quality of pleasure.

He states,

What I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account (Mill 2015: p.122).

In addition to that Mill believed that the standard criterion to evaluate a moral act is by considering pleasure of all the people involved/affected by the act and not the agent's own happiness alone. So, one should not consider his/her own pleasure as superior than the pleasure of others. Mill advocates equal treatment of all human beings, whether rich or poor, black or white, in terms of recognizing the value of their pleasure.

Mill also talks about motivations for doing moral acts. He mentioned about two kinds of motivations – external and internal. External motivations are common in nature which can be associated with any other moral framework. For example, pressure from closed ones, divine sanctions might motivate or societal disapproval etc. On the other hand internal motivations come from one's conscience and the inner feelings when a person faces certain situation. For Mill internal motivations are stronger than the external motivations as internal features are ingrained within the being. From internal motivations natural moral outlook grows and people naturally realize the moral obligations. And, Mill has tried to show that how utility in association with happiness creates a strong moral foundation within human beings (Mill 2015: pp. 140-147).

Thus, Mill argues that the moral foundation of utilitarianism is embedded within the nature of human beings, more specifically in their social nature. Mill has opined that society should inculcate and promote this moral orientation through different means such as education.

In this way Mill argued for utilitarian moral theory in his book *Utilitarianism*. In an effort to respond to criticisms of the doctrine, Mill, not only argued in favor of the basic principles of Jeremy Bentham but also offered several significant improvements to its structure, meaning, and application. Although the progress of moral philosophy has been limited by its endless disputes over the reality and nature of the highest good, Mill assumed from the outset, everyone can agree that the consequences of human actions contribute importantly to their moral value.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What does Mill understand from the concept of 'First principle'?

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8.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit tried to give an account of consequentialist ethics in moral philosophy. Consequentialism is a type of normative ethical theory which maintains that what morally matters about an action is the kind of consequences it produces. It is of two types, Act and Rule Consequentialism: Act Consequentialism refers to a

family of Consequentialist theories according to which a moral act is one that maximizes (total or average) utility. Whereas, Rule Consequentialism refers to a family of Consequentialist theories according to which a moral act is one that is prescribed by the rule (or set of rules) that, if generally applied, would maximize (total or average) utility. This Unit moves further to a more specific theory of Utilitarianism put forward by John Stuart Mill. Mill describes Utilitarian theory as Greatest Happiness theory according to which, “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.” Mill talks about qualitative pleasure hence his theory is known as qualitative utilitarianism in contrast to Bentham’s quantitative utilitarianism.

8.6 KEY WORDS

Consequences: Results brought about, here it is meant the ultimate result that is brought about by an action.

Utility Principle: It holds that the morally right action is the one that produces the best overall consequences with regard to the utility or welfare of all the affected parties.

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8.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Consequentialism is a type of normative ethical theory which maintains that what morally matters about an action is the kind of consequences it produces. Whether an action or practice is morally right or permissible depends upon its consequences. Most of the consequentialists argue that we ought to

maximize the good effects. The simplest form of consequentialism is classical (hedonistic) utilitarianism, which asserts that an action is right or wrong according to whether it maximizes the net balance of pleasure over pain in the universe.

2. Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism which holds the principle of utility, i.e., the morally right action is the one that produces the best overall consequences with regard to the utility or welfare of all the affected parties.

The famous example of Utilitarianism is the Trolley example. Imagine there is a trolley heading toward a group of 5 workers on the tracks. You are sitting in a control center several miles away, and you have a button that can switch the trolley onto another track where there's only 1 worker. If you flip the switch, one person will die. If you do nothing, 5 people will die. Should you flip the switch? 1 death is better than 5 deaths, so if you have to choose, you should try to minimize the loss of life by flipping the switch. This is an example of utilitarian reasoning.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. The two types of consequentialism are Act consequentialism and Rule Consequentialism.
2. Act utilitarianism implies that one should assess whether an act is right or wrong directly in view of the principle of utility. This means that the morally right action is the one that has the best overall consequences for the welfare or utility of the majority of the affected parties. When we face a choice between alternative courses of action, we should choose the course of action that has the best expected consequences for all (or the majority of) the affected parties. Thus, act utilitarianism prescribes the following decision procedure for assessment and choice of alternative courses of action on the basis of the principle of utility: Identify alternative courses of actions like X1, X2, and X3 and so on. Identify the expected consequences of these alternative courses of action, like X1's consequences, X2's consequences and so on. Here the assessment and choice of action is on the basis of the principle of utility. In order to decide what is right and wrong to do, we need to have knowledge of several things, like we should know all available courses of actions and their consequences. We must put a value on each of the available courses of action. We must compare these different courses of action in order to decide which action has the best expected consequences. This seems almost impossible to look for all possible alternatives, here we can apply our previous experience to look for best alternative.
3. Rule Consequentialism holds that the morally right action must be in accordance with moral rules or norms that can be justified on the basis of the principle of utility. Agents should decide what to do in concrete situations by applying rules whose acceptance will produce the best consequences. The question is not which action will produce the greatest utility, but which moral norm or rule will produce the greatest utility or welfare. The two-step procedure involved in rule consequentialism are:
 - 1) An assessment of moral norms (or rules) on the basis of the principle of utility: One should assess which moral norms that will produce the best overall consequences for all the affected parties.

- 2) An assessment of the rightness and wrongness of actions in concrete situations in view of the moral norms that are justified in the first step: One should determine how to act in a concrete situation on the basis of the moral norms justified in step one – even if an alternative course of action will have better consequences for all the affected parties in a given situation.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Mill uses the concept of “first principles” and foundations of morality throughout his text *Utilitarianism*. With this notion, Mill asserts that it is not enough simply to characterize actions as good or evil; rather, there must be something about these actions that gives them a moral nature, and a reason why terms like “good” and “evil” have such resonance in the first place. People have not been able to agree about what this essential principle of morality is, or why it is so special. Thus, he, in his text has attempted to identify this foundation once and for all—namely, to identify it as the concept of utility— and then to demonstrate why this moral foundation is so extraordinary, so central to our existence as human beings.



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UNIT 9 CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF ETHICAL THEORIES*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Major Ethical Theories: An Overview
- 9.3 Critical Appraisal of Utilitarianism
- 9.4 Critical Appraisal of Deontological Ethics
- 9.5 Critical Appraisal of Virtue Ethics
- 9.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.7 Key Words
- 9.8 Further Readings and References
- 9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.0 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Unit are as follows:

- To understand the basic themes and presuppositions of major ethical (normative) theories; Utilitarianism, deontology, and virtue ethics,
- To analyze these ethical theories,
- To critically examine these ethical theories.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will primarily focus on critically analyzing the theories of normative ethics discussed so far, namely, Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism, and Kant's deontological ethics. These theories are the major theories of ethics that have dominated the human psyche by providing reasons for their actions for ages. The action-guiding principle for our actions provided by these theories is assisting us in understanding questions such as what is right and what is wrong? How to decide what is good or bad in a particular situation? And, related to it, the overarching question of how to live peacefully in a society. Living in peace is directly connected with how to be good as an individual and as a society.

Critical reflections of these theories will help us to reformulate and reorganize our action-guiding principles for a better living.

9.2 MAJOR ETHICAL THEORIES: AN OVERVIEW

All the theories of ethics intend to provide the answer to the question – how one ought to act in a situation involving others. Actions of a free agent are always

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subject to moral evaluation of whether an action is right or wrong/good or bad. Ethical theories help us determine our actions by providing some action-guiding principles. For example, we ought to act in ways that will maximize the overall utility (Utilitarianism in a general sense). Moral assessment of our actions is necessary for building a peaceful society. People in societies full of immoral or ethically bad people will not lead their lives peacefully as forgery, corruption, stealing, murder, etc. will be rampant. As individuals, we need to understand principles that help us to be good individuals. Thus we need to define and understand the ethical principles through which people's conduct would largely be assessed and judged.

As a theory of ethics, Utilitarianism provides the perspective that the utility of an action/policy/law/rule should be the basis of determining whether an action is ethically good or bad. The nature of utility an action or a policy produces ought to be considered for its moral evaluation. The moral judgment of an action is not dependent upon the action in-itself but the good or bad it brings. This theory opines that we should assess the overall outcomes of an action or what an action produces or the overall consequences it has to pass a value judgment about the action. This approach does not take into consideration the value of an action in itself. Speaking the truth itself might have intrinsic value apart from what good it might bring. Understanding good and bad within the utilitarian framework has been understood, associating it with pleasure and pain. An action is right or wrong is dependent on how much overall happiness or unhappiness it produces. Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick are the three major proponents of this theory.

Deontological theories of ethics provide the understanding that ethical norms or principles are of prime importance. Moral norms and laws are required to define the duties of a moral agent. Immanuel Kant, the major advocate of this theory, provides the understanding that we ought to morally assess the action or a policy in-itself through the prism of already defined rules and laws and not its consequences for the value judgment of an action. Apart from that, this theory holds that it is not rational to discharge one's duty for the sake of any other element/motivation than to fulfill one's duty. "Duty for the sake of Duty" is one of the central tenets of this theory. Breaking the ethical law e.g., it is wrong to lie, is wrong in any circumstances even if that saves a person's life. Circumstantial or consequential benefits are not significant for making a moral judgment on an action. People's intention for doing an action holds an essential factor for this theory for judging an action.

In contrast to both the theories mentioned above where actions or policies proposed to assess for making a moral judgment, Virtue ethics holds that it is crucial to evaluate a person's character and following that the action s/he is doing. Being just, honest, truthful, courageous and kind to others are the character traits that individuals should develop to be a good person and do good. Lying, deceiving, and betrayal are the traits discouraged from being cultivated in one's character. This ethical approach explains that if individual beings of society are good, society will eventually become a good society. Virtue ethicists find it more appropriate to focus on the internal aspect of individual beings than on the external for proper assessment of their moral character.

All the normative principles provided aim to achieve a good society by guiding people's actions and their character. But these theories also face some criticism.

In the following sections, we will critically evaluate the principles of all the above-mentioned theories of ethics.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What is the principle that Utilitarianism provides for ethical assessment of an action?

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2. Discuss in brief the major difference between Utilitarianism and Deontology.

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9.3 CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF UTILITARIANISM

James Rachel (2012) points out that Utilitarianism, as a theory of ethics, can be understood by understanding three of its locus points. First, the consequence of an action is the only thing that matters for assessing any action morally. Second, we should measure the consequences of action based on how much pleasure and pain it produces in terms of its quantity and quality. Third, in assessing consequences, each individual's pleasure and pain should get an equal amount of consideration (Rachel, 2012: p. 110). There should not be any discrimination in appraising pleasure and pain based on an individual's position in society, class, caste, religion, sex, etc.

Bentham argues that the central aim of morality is to make the world happy as much as possible. This principle requires individuals to produce maximum happiness in any situation if s/he is to be a morally good person. Maximum happiness means it should make people happier, as many as possible. In addition to that, to be morally good, a particular action must produce happiness over sorrow; otherwise, we should consider it as bad.

For Mill, happiness is the end, which is desirable, and every other thing is desirable to reach that end. For example, my desire for food will surely fill my empty stomach, but ultimately feeding myself will make me happy. Otherwise, starvation would lead to a painful situation, and we should avoid it.

Following Rachel, the first criticism that comes into our mind is that is pleasure all that matters for morality? Adding to that, can we morally judge our actions/policies/principles solely based on how much pain and pleasure produces? For

example, is it right on the part of a group of students to rag/torture the new student in class just because it is pleasurable for them? Is it a good or right thing to lie before the court of law as it would make the maximum number of people happy? We can also understand the magnitude of these questions by turning them around. Is everything that produces maximum happiness or pleasure morally right or good? In that regard, killing an innocent person would also amount to a good act if it produces happiness among the maximum number of people. We can cite another often-used example against Utilitarianism here. Suppose a person used to peep into a family's bathroom, but none of the family members is aware of it. Whatever kind of pleasure that person is getting from peeping, is without harming anybody, and not in the victim's knowledge. Pain or sorrow is not exceeding pleasure as the victims are unaware of it. So, the action produces maximum happiness, at least to the extent the person is not getting caught. Now, the question is, can we consider the act as a good act? Utilitarians would answer this question positively. Even if we do not bring in the concerns of justice and violations of people's right to privacy, our general understanding of good and bad would consider the act as a bad one.

Related to the point mentioned above, we can argue against Utilitarianism that the life of a human being is constituted and guided by many factors, and one among them is happiness/pleasure. Considering happiness as the only guiding factor for various human actions is giving excessive prominence to it. Other elements of human life like justice, truth, rights are seemingly secondary to happiness in the Utilitarian framework. One may object that justice or rights are values if established, ultimately leading to a happy society. It might be the case. But justice should prevail in society irrespective of whether its consequences would make the majority of people happy or not. For example, a vicious criminal should get harsh punishment even if that event might make maximum people sad.

We can substantiate the accusation against Utilitarianism that it advocates the majority's rule by raising the issues of violation of rights and justice. For example, if there is a gross human rights violation in a country and that too gives pleasure to the majority of the people, Utilitarians would face difficulty in condemning it as wrong. This kind of situation becomes complex when the headcount of people for proving the majority (as pleasure of the maximum number of people does matter in Utilitarianism) and minority is like 60 and 40. The moral decision about good and bad would favor the majority as they have the maximum numbers. The pertinent question that arises here is whether morality, i.e., whether an action or event or policy is good or bad, depends on just numbers? Any hostile action that affects adversely to the 40 people is still wrong. Utilitarianism seems not to accommodate these kinds of concerns in the theory.

We generally understand the utilitarian approach as consequentialist. That means what matters for the ethical assessment of action is the result/consequences of the action. If the output failed to produce pleasure over pain, we should consider it as a bad action. If the results make maximum people happy, then the action is good. However, philosophers like Amartya Sen have defended this kind of an approach where we need to assess an action's results before doing it. He argues that to avoid negative consequences of a particular action we need to foresee (which we can do easily) the relevant consequences that action might bring and then decide whether we ought to do it or not. What action is producing is important

to consider in passing a moral judgment about the action in-itself. But the objection against this approach is that consequences are not the only thing based on which we should give a value judgment. In many cases, the action in-itself might be right or wrong. For example, torturing a child is wrong in-itself irrespective of the consequences it might bring.

The approach of maximizing utility in terms of pleasure gives Utilitarianism a relativistic framework. No right act or good act can be considered as right or good universally in all circumstances. Suppose action 'A' is a good act because, in specific cases, it produces maximum overall pleasure rather than pain. The same action 'A' might not produce maximum overall pleasure in a different circumstance. Accordingly, we would not consider it as a good act. So, a particular action might get different value judgments depending upon the context and situation. Murder, treason, corruption, cheating, lying cannot be outrightly discredited as wrong or something bad. They might produce maximum pleasure among the maximum number of people.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Why do philosophers criticize Utilitarianism over its consequential nature?

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2. Why is Utilitarianism considered as relativistic?

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9.4 CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS

Deontological ethics, unlike Utilitarianism, primarily emphasizes moral duties guided by pure reason. Utilitarianism, as we have seen above, tries to define that through the calculation of overall utility measured in terms of pleasure and pain. Immanuel Kant, the foremost advocate of deontological ethics, argues that moral rules or principles are ends-in-themselves. Performing duties according to those rules should not be for the sake of any other objectives, in other words, “duty for the sake of duty” and nothing else. Kant has explained this with the help of the distinction between “Hypothetical Imperatives” and “Categorical Imperatives”. Hypothetical imperatives are those “oughts” that an individual performs for the sake of achieving something s/he desires. For example, if I want to pass the exam

with good marks, I ought to study hard. Or, if I wish not to be affected by the Corona Virus, I ought to maintain social distancing. The should-ness or oughtness of these actions depends upon the desires one has to achieve some or other goals. For Kant, the should-ness or oughtness used to define moral obligations cannot be subjective and vary with the change of an individual's desires in life. They should be '*categorical*' in nature; one must follow them irrespective of his/her desires. Categorical Imperatives or Practical Law should be unconditional, and they should not be followed because of reaching any other end, but because they themselves set ends. For example, no one should lie. In this example, lying is prohibited, not because it will harm others or break their trust, etc. but, in the context of Kantian categorical imperative, lying is not permitted because it is bad in itself. The rule is no rational being should lie in any circumstance.

Maxims play a vital role in Kantian philosophy (Philosophy of Kant) in deciding the moral law. Kant's first maxim is to provide objectivity in an ethical rule as it is already being considered that subjective rules cannot be a moral law. The first maxim demands an individual to act on rules, which s/he can adhere to as a universal law. For example, you made a promise to your friend without any intention to keep it, and eventually, you broke the promise. The question here is, can you adhere to the idea that every friend/person in the world ought to break promises? If you cannot adhere to it, then you cannot consider it a maxim for the moral law. Thus you ought not to do it.

Similarly, people should not lie; they ought to speak the truth; people should not cheat, kill an innocent, etc. can be considered moral law and should be followed universally without breaking it. In addition to that, the will to fulfill these duties should not to achieve any other end but only to perform these duties and nothing else. One should not help a person because s/he needs some favour from that person or s/he loves helping people. In both cases helping is motivated by the subjective will. What if someone has no such intention to get a favour or someone does not love helping? Will helping be as obligatory on them as on persons with some subjective will? Kant opines that it will not. Thus, if help is considered a moral duty, people need to discharge it irrespective of whether they have any subjective element or not. They should fulfill their duties with the spirit of doing "duty for the sake of duty" and nothing else.

In this context, the primary question against Kant is that what if speaking truth, which everyone ought to adhere universally as a moral duty, will lead to the murder of an innocent person? Which one, telling the truth or saving an innocent human's life, may be considered as primary duty? Kantian ethics, in general, is not consequential. So, people might opine that one should not lie in any circumstance even if that leads to an innocent being's death. By discharging one's duty of not lying, one may uphold the moral law, but can we say that the person is not guilty of the murder? At least, s/he has participated in the event in such a way that it leads to the murder of an innocent person. So, it seems that Kantian deontology has not adequately addressed the problem when a person faces a moral dilemma.

Not considering the consequences of an action in formulating a moral law might be seen as a problem for this approach of ethics. We can understand the issue through the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. Krishna was trying to convince Arjuna that it is his duty as a Kshatriya or member of the warrior caste to fight for a just cause even if that is against his own people.

He should not worry about the consequences. On the other hand, Arjuna hesitated to wage war because he was foreseeing that war would result in huge loss of innocent human lives. He was foreseeing the consequences of war and considering it unjustified to act in a way that would lead to a massive loss of innocent lives.. The above example shows that there are occasions where we need to consider the relevant consequences an action might bring before making a judgment about whether to act that way or not. As human beings, we are limited and confined within many boundaries, and our 'situatedness' is one among them. We cannot objectively apply a moral principle to make a moral judgment or act in all life's different situations. Assessment of the situation and considering the relevant factors and relevant consequences of our actions are important for making a moral value judgment. Complete neutrality towards the consequences of actions might sometimes make our actions unethical.

Another point of criticism against Kantian deontology is the issue of motivation for doing an ethical act. People ought to discharge their duties only for the sake of fulfilling their obligations and nothing else. Kant has tried to prevent any element which will make an ethical act subjective. People might have different motivations for fulfilling their duties. Someone might love humanity thus, he helps people in need; someone might get some benefit by telling the truth; otherwise, he wouldn't have. Kant opines that we cannot consider these actions as ethical. It is because ethical principles cannot be subjective and depend on individual preferences. A person loves humanity; thus, he is fulfilling his duty of helping others in need. What about those who do not love humanity or act in that way? What about those people who are not getting any benefit from discharging their duty? Then, principally, they cannot be held responsible for not fulfilling their duties. Thus, to bring in a universal framework of ethics for all rational beings, Kant has tried to block these individual preferences for fulfilling one's duty. He argues that it is reasonable to do our duties only for the sake of duty and without any other motivation. Reason should be our primary motivational basis to act ethically. Kant finds love, sympathy, and relational acts as contingent, and we cannot consider actions inspired by these feelings as acts of goodwill. The question that remains here is that can human beings be so unaffected/neutral in different situations of their lives to make moral decisions only inspired by reason? How can a person consider his mother and a stranger as having the same value for him when both are drowning, and he is the only person who can save only one of them? Most Kantians would argue that the person can save his mother, but he should not make the decision based on the affiliations he has with his mother. The worth of two human lives should be seen on equal terms. By being rational, each and every human being is end-in-themselves, which comes from Kant's second maxim. But the problem remains the same – how far we, human beings, are competent to disregard our affiliations, relations, emotional attachments, sympathy, a contextual environment which, apart from reason, contributes to a large extent in our moral decision making.

Kant's second maxim has contributed a lot in shaping modern human rights discourse. It demands every individual to treat every other person, whether his/her own person or not, always as an end and never only as a mere means. This maxim secures the intrinsic worth of a person as the person has personhood. It will not be wrong to state that this 'personhood' in Kantian philosophy has mostly been defined based on a person's rationality. This maxim secures individuals from any exploitation and promotes treating with the will to do welfare for them,

respect their rights, and avoid harming. Treating people always as an end will lead to the “Kingdom of Ends” which is the goal of Kant’s third maxim.

Though this maxim talks about people’s overall welfare in society, some unease is there regarding treating everyone as a mere end. We should not give punishment for the sake of society. Kant has rejected the Utilitarian argument for punishment as that would lead to treating criminals merely as an end for others’ happiness. Kant argues that punishment is a concern of justice, and we should decide punishment, which is fitting for the crimes. So “eye for an eye” might be the suitable theory for the Kantian understanding of punishment. The question arises here is that what if the criminal is a victim of his or her situation? What if someone mistakenly murdered an innocent? Can we judge those situations through any other principle? Or, are we to punish them only based on the crime, they have done irrespective of their situation or context in which somebody had done the crime? These are the questions which lead us to consider that Kantian theory of ethics has not accommodated all the ethical issues.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Define Categorical Imperatives.

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2. Discuss in brief the major criticisms against Kantian deontology.

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9.5 CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Utilitarianism and Kantian deontology revolve around the question - how to act morally or what makes an action good or bad? Virtue ethics advocates ask the question from ancient times, as Rachel puts it, “*what traits of character make someone a good person*” (Rachel 2012, p.157). Instead of finding out action-guiding principles, they delved into finding virtues that make a person good. Plato has identified virtues as something internal to human beings rather than something external of them. Human virtues reside in human beings. Utilitarianism and deontological ethics are trying to find out good and bad in actions in the form of moral obligations and in consequences of the action. Plato argues in *The Republic* that if individual beings are virtuous only, they will act in good ways.

Both Plato and Aristotle have opined that the goodness of a human being cannot be determined by analyzing instances of actions. If it is a virtue, it should be habitual and constant in every action. We cannot consider a serial killer as a good person by observing one single act of goodness done by him. Other ethics theories are not so concerned about making a person good or cultivating virtues in individual beings. They seem to revolve around what considerations we should keep in our mind in making a moral decision, how we ought to act, and how to assess an act on and pass a moral judgment about whether the action is good or bad. Virtue ethics talks about different virtues that should be cultivated in human beings so that acting in good ways should be their habit and not ephemeral. Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) has argued that the concerns of virtue ethics have been disregarded in contemporary times, and those trying to advocate it seem to be misguided. We should again return to the approach that Greek philosophers have developed, especially Aristotle.

Plato has responded to how to be virtuous by saying that there should be harmony/balance between different parts of the soul (Reason, Courage, and Temperance). Aristotle has tried to define harmony by stating that virtues are the midpoint of two vices – one is extreme, and the other is insufficient. He termed this midpoint as the “Golden Rule.” So, saying that being courageous is a virtue means, in Aristotlean framework, to say that one should not be over-courageous, which will lead to recklessness, and one should not be coward as well. This understanding applies in all the list of virtues concerning human beings. Plato has tried to delve deep into this issue. For him to be virtuous the human soul needs to maintain a harmonious state where Reason, Courage, and Temperance are in concomitance. Plato would place this harmony as a condition to maintain the Aristotlean “Golden Rule”. Plato would say that once the psychic harmony is in place, people would act in ways that are good on a continuous basis.

The major criticism that comes up against this theory is its inability to explain why something should be considered a virtue. Why should we consider truthfulness as a virtue? Why are any of the virtues considered a virtue? In the case of Utilitarianism, they would readily point out why they would consider any action as good or bad. Advocates of Kantian deontology would also rely on their principles to pass a moral value judgment. But in the case of Virtue ethics, that explanation is imprecise. Thus, there is no substantial ground provided by this ethics approach on why we should consider kindness/courageous/truthfulness as a virtue. In addition to that, many people have argued that the virtues are not in-itself valuable, but they are valuable because either they help us in generating overall welfare in society (Utilitarian concern) or they help us in discharging our duties (Deontological concern). Like, we consider kindness to others is a virtue because by being kind to others, we maximize welfare in society. While many people subscribe to this view, Plato in *The Republic* has firmly argued that justice as a virtue is valuable for its own sake and for the consequences it brings as well.

Another objection to Virtue ethics is that this normative ethics approach has very little to guide when a person faces an ethical dilemma. For example, a person may face a dilemma between either telling the truth, which will hurt another person’s sentiments or being kind and compassionate by being silent. How would the individual choose to prioritize one virtue over the other in cases of conflict of two virtues?

9.6 LET US SUM UP

So far, in this unit we have tried to analyze different ethical approaches critically. At this juncture, we can say that no theory is perfect and beyond criticism. Every theory has its strength and has made its mark on the history of Philosophy. Contemporary developments in the discipline of ethics might not have been possible without these approaches. Criticisms are not being made and should not be made to vilify any theory. Criticisms show the problematic aspects of a theory and attempt to fulfill the lacunae inside concepts. Despite all the criticisms, no one would deny the positive contribution these theories have made in understanding the distinction between good and bad or right and wrong.

Check Your Progress IV

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. How is the concern of Virtue Ethics different from the other approaches of ethics?

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2. Discuss in brief the major criticisms against Virtue Ethics.

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9.7 KEY WORDS

Critical Appraisal : To evaluate any concept/principle critically.

Normative Ethics : Moral philosophy about norm/rule-making in moral life. Some of the pertinent questions of this moral philosophy are; What are the moral principles? What is the basis to establish these moral principles/norms?

9.8 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Utilitarianism formulates utility as the basis for assessing an action, whether that is good or bad. Advocates of this theory have defined utility in terms of happiness. They provide the principle that if an action produces pleasure/happiness over pain/sorrow among the maximum number of people, then that action would be considered good otherwise, it would be regarded as bad.
2. The major difference between Utilitarianism and Deontology is that Utilitarianism states that we need to analyze the consequences of an action to determine whether the action is good or bad. On the other hand, deontology states that we need to examine the action in-itself in making a moral judgment about the action. Apart from that, Utilitarianism is centred around the question of utility in terms of pleasure and pain. Deontological ethics revolves around the concept of duty irrespective of whether discharging one's duty produces pain or pleasure.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Utilitarianism is consequential because it gives priority to the consequences of an action in making an ethical evaluation of it. Whether an action/policy/rule is good or bad depends on how much pain or pleasure it produces as consequences. The charge against Utilitarianism is that this principle overlooks the factor that actions might be intrinsically good or bad. Actions might have value themselves. In addition to that, consequences would not always morally justify an action. For example, people might get happiness by harming/torturing an innocent person. But torturing or harming an innocent is in-itself bad.
2. The moral principle that Utilitarianism has provided is good if it produces maximum happiness among the maximum number of people; otherwise, it will be considered bad. Scholars have raised the question that if that is so, there will be no uniformity in making a moral judgment about an action. A particular action in one situation might be good because it might produce happiness over sorrow, but the same action in a different situation might be considered bad because there it has produced suffering over pleasure. So, good and bad is entirely situational and thus relativistic.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Kant formulates Categorical Imperatives in understanding moral obligations. Categorical imperatives are not dependent upon a person's desire or fulfill

some other ends that are applicable for hypothetical imperatives. The nature of categorical imperatives is 'you ought to do it' irrespective of whether someone desires to do it or not. If moral law prescribes something as a duty, one should do it. Categorical imperatives are unconditional and without exceptions. One should not violate them in any condition.

2. One of the major criticisms against Kantian deontology is that this theory is not unambiguous in dealing with moral dilemmas. This theory is silent largely, or we can say not guiding us on questions like which duty should get priority, telling the truth or saving an innocent's life, if there is a conflict between two moral duties. Another criticism that comes up in a significant way against this theory is that Kant's categorical imperatives prevent us from considering any concerns for the consequences that my fulfillment of duty might bring. Sometimes we need to foresee the relevant implications of action; otherwise, many negative consequences might fall out from one single act of ours.

Answers to Check Your Progress IV

1. Virtue Ethics, primarily, asks a completely different question from Utilitarianism and Deontological ethics. Instead of asking what makes an action good or bad, it asks the character traits that make a person good or bad. So, the primary aim of virtue ethics is different from the other two approaches of ethics. Another important difference is that Virtue ethics does not prioritize single instances of action to make a moral value judgment like the other two theories. It considers virtues as something constant (habitual). We actually cannot judge a person by observing one instance of doing good. He might be a serial offender, and he might have done that act of goodness by chance.
2. The major criticism that comes up against Virtue ethics is in the form of the question that why should consider virtues as a virtue at all. Why we ought to consider kindness or honesty as a virtue? Virtue ethics provides no precise answer to this question.