Chapter: 3

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ETHICS (Major Theories)

- *What is Ethics?*
- *Origin and Nature*
- *Major Theories:*
     (a) Utilitarianism
     (b) Kantism
     (c) Islamic approach to ethics
     (d) Social cognition and moral development.

*Every human relationship is governed by two considerations; what in fact exists, and what in fact ought to be. Every social group prescribes explicitly or implicitly, for its members, certain rules which ought to be observed by them. For instance, family prescribes that the child ought to obey his/her parents. Husbands and wives ought to be faithful to one another. School/college/university prescribes that the students should abide by the rules of the institution, and respect their teachers. The state prescribes that politicians and other officials ought to treat their positions as a public trust. These rules or codes of conduct are admitted at large by the community, and are arrived at by man in the course of living. They are concerned with right and wrong and constitute what we call ethics or morality. Academically **ethics**--- could be defined as the study of what is morally right and what is wrong. It concerns itself with discovering a system one may use to determine what and who is right and good. The source or origin of such codes of conduct or guidelines may be found in the concept of "rights and duty". Religion also helps in their evolution*

The pursuit of moral knowledge dates bake to ancient Greek philosophers, but it is mostly the influence of the enlightenment moral thought(the philosophical movement that occurred in Europe, in the 18th century, in which reason and individualism came to be emphasised at the expense of tradition), that continues to shape ethics today. There are many well-known figures in the history of ethics, including Plato and Aristotle; however some of the most important modern influence includes such names as Immanuel Kant, Jermy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, C.L Stevenson, Macintyre and J. Rawls.

There is a large family of ethical theories. However some of the most influential theories include Utilitarianism, Deontological ethics, and Modernist and Post Modernist approaches to ethics. They are discussed in detail below.

Utilitarianism:

                    "All action is for the sake of some end" John Stuart Mill

*Utilitarianism is part of a large series of ethical theories called "Consequentialism", and **consequentialism** is the view that whether an act is morally right or wrong is*

determined, directly or indirectly by the acts consequences and not by its intrinsic features, or the doing of the act.

*Utilitarianism was a social reform movement and ethical theory which held that morality of an act should be judged solely on the basis of results. According to Utilitarianism **"Utility"** is the only intrinsic good. Actions and precedents are judged morally right or wrong in proportion to their propensity to produce the most happiness or pleasure, for the greatest number.*

Jermy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are the prominent exponents of this approach. The details of their theories are given below.

Jermy Bentham (1748-1832):

Bentham believed that utility could be measured quantitatively (he called it hedonistic calculus). To him seeking happiness is an inherent part of human nature, and that happiness could be measured as a matter of quantity. Each person is his/her own judge when it comes to happiness, but when it comes to the greatest happiness (he called it felicity), a person can really only be happy if others around him/her are happy too. This is known as the greatest happiness principle. It depends upon the circumstances, upon the community in which one happens to be, upon how people seek to maximize harmony and comfort, and happiness with friends and neighbours. Bentham devise the Hedonistic Calculus, which has the following components.

- *INTENSITY: The force value of some happiness*
- *DURATION: The length of time some happiness provides*
- *CERTINITY: The chance that some action will lead to happiness*
- *PROPENQUITY: How close are the circumstances*
- *FECUNDITY: How much of a "spill over" effect some happiness has or will more of the same follow.*
- *PURITY: How less are or no negative "side effects" from some happiness or the pleasure will not be followed by pain.*
- *EXTENT: The number of people effected by the pursuit of happiness*

Bentham believed that the pursuit of pleasure could be measured in quantitative terms. He argued that it's some times best to sacrifice individuals for the good of the organization.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873):

Mill believed in qualitative approach which essentially involved checking one's perceived judgments with others for second opinion so to speak. He adjusted the hedonistic tendencies in Bentham's philosophy by emphasizing the following

- *It is not the quantity of pleasure, but the quality of happiness that is central to utilitarianism*
- *The calculus is unreasonable, because quality can not be quantified (there is distinction between higher and lower pleasure)*

- *Utilitarianism refers to the "Greatest happiness principle"--- it seeks to promote the capability of achieving happiness(higher pleasure) for the most amount of people(this is its extent)*

Mill insisted that some pleasures are more worthy than others and that a refined person would pursue more refined pleasures. For instance, in the corruptible nature of society and organization it is probably more important to look upon self-sacrifice and individual conscience as virtues in themselves.

Application:

We can apply the principle of utility to either particular actions which is called act-utilitarianism, and to general rules, which is called rule-utilitarianism.

In the act-ut the utility is applied to each alternate act in a situation of choice. The right act is then defined as the one which brings about the best results (or the least amount of bad results).
However in case of the above application, it is possible to justify immoral acts: suppose the police torture the family members of a fugitive, in order they reveal his where about.

In the case of rule-ut the principle of utility is used to determine the validity of rules of conduct. A rule like promise keeping is established by looking at the consequences of a world in which people broke promises at will, and a world in which promises were binding. Right and wrong are then defined as following or breaking those rules.
However, like the first, here also it is possible to generate "unjust rules" according to the principle of utility. For example slavery in Greece might be right if it led to an overall achievement of cultivated happiness at the expense of some mistreated individuals.

Criticism:

- *Hedonism lowers the value of human life to the extent of animals*
- *Not all pleasures are valuable , for instance there is no value in the pleasures of a sadist while whipping a victim*
- *Not only pleasures are intrinsically valuable, because other things are valuable independently of whether they lead to pleasures or avoid pain. For instance freedom seem valuable even when it creates anxiety and even when it is freedom to do something that one does not want to do (such as leave one's country) .Again , many people value knowledge regardless of whether this knowledge will create pleasures or avoid pain*
- *Hedonism over looks the vale of real friendship, knowledge, and achievement.*

Deontological ethics:

"Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law"   Immanuel Kant

Deontological philosophy holds that rules are the basis of morality. Kant rejected the consequentialist view of morality, because to him it relies too heavily on subjective

considerations. He presented the deontological moral system based on the demands of the categorical imperatives as an alternative to cosequentialism, based on hypothetical imperatives.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804):

Kant was a German philosopher. He is regarded as one of the most influential thinker of modern Europe, and the last major philosopher of the Enlightenment.
Kant introduced his moral philosophy in his 1785's work "Groundwork of metaphysics" and continued to develop his moral philosophy. It is his "Critique of practical reason", 1788, and "Metaphysics of Morals", 1797 that sum up his moral philosophy.

Before going into discussion on Kant's moral philosophy we need to understand some terminology. These are

Hypothetical Imperative: One, which tells us what we must do if we want to achieve some goal. For instance, if we want to solve differential equations we must learn calculus. (Proposition, that's conditional in nature)

Categorical Imperative: One that is binding on us absolutely, simply in virtue of the fact that we are rational creatures.

Kant's Moral Philosophy:

Kant believed that there is a single moral obligation, which he called the "categorical imperative", and is derived from the concept of duty. It is from the categorical imperative that all other moral obligations are generated and by which all moral obligations can be tested. He believed that the moral law is a principle of reason itself and is not based on contingent facts about world, such as what would make us happy, but to act upon the moral law which has no other motive than "worthiness of being happy". He believed that moral obligation applies to all and only rational agents. A categorical imperative is an unconditional obligation; that is it has the force of an obligation regardless of our will or desire.

Kant argued that the source of the good lies not in anything outside the human subject, either in nature or given by God, but rather only the good will itself. A good will is one that acts from duty in accordance with the universal moral law that the autonomous human being freely gives itself. This law obliges one to treat humanity--- understood as rational agency, and represented through oneself as well as others---as an end in itself rather than as means. Morality is rooted in human freedom and acting autonomously is to act according to rational moral principles.

Kant gave three conditions essential to his concept of morality. Theses are also known as the formulation of morality. They are

The first formulation: The first formulation declares "the maxim be chosen as though they should hold as universal laws of nature". This implies that one must

perform his actions in such a way as that could be applied universally. This formulation has its supreme law "always act according to that maxim whose universality as a law you can act the same time will" and is the only condition under which a will can never come into conflict with itself...".It is also called universality test. It has the following steps

1) *Find the agent's maxim. The maxim is an action paired with its motivation. For instance: "I'll lie for personal benefits", lying is the action, the motivation is to get what one desire. Paired together they form the maxim.*

2) *Imagine a possible world in which every one in a similar position to the real world agent follows that maxim.*

3) *Decide whether any contradictions arise in the possible world as a result of following the maxim.*

4) *If a contradiction arises, acting on that maxim is not allowed in the real world.*

5) *If there is no contradiction, then acting on that maxim is permissible, and in some instances required.*

The Second formulation: *"Every human being is an end in itself"*
The rational being as by its nature as an end, and thus as an end in itself must serve in every maxim as the condition restricting all merely relative and arbitrary ends".

The third formulation:
It is a synthesis of the first two and the basis for the complete determination of all maxims. It says that every rational being is a realm (kingdom), the legislative force, and also the subject in himself. Thus all maxims which stem from autonomous legislation ought to harmonize with a possible realm of ends as with a realm of nature. "So act as if your maxims should serve at the same time as the universal law (of all rational beings) , implies that we should so act that we may think of ourselves as " a member in the universal realm of ends".