

UNIT 5 ETHICS IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

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5.0. OBJECTIVES

An overview of history of western ethics (which is a branch of philosophy), called “Moral Philosophy” as well, gives us an idea that there are at least five important epochs in the philosophical enterprise regarding moral matters. “Contemporary Western Ethics” is the fifth epoch; the objective of this paper is:

- to bring out the characteristic features of contemporary ethics

5.1. INTRODUCTION

First, there is early and rich *Greek Ethics* marked by Pre- Socratic, Socratic, Platonic, Aristotelian and Sophistic original thinking and writings. Furthered by some equally influential writings of some Hellenistic and Roman ethicists, the Cynic and the Cyrenaics and the Stoics in the main. And then after Epicurus’ Cyrenaicism, Plotinus was responsible for what we now call, “Neo-Platonism.” Contemporary ethics owes much to these early and rich ethical reflections, about which we shall come to know later on in the discussion.

Nothings less do we owe to the *Medical Moral* philosophy, especially to the ethical thinking and writings of some remarkably eloquent Christian ethicists like Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. This paved way to what we may call, the third epoch, the Early Modern ethical epoch, growing particularly during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries influenced by religious Reformation, and the scientific revolution of Copernicus and Galileo, Francis Bacon, Erasmus, Luther and Calvin, However the real modern turn came with the radical writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588 – 1679) and the Cambridge Platonists like, Cudworth, Cumberland, Malebranche. No less forceful were the views of Spinoza (1632 – 1677), Locke (1632 – 1704). Huge impact was made by the moral sense theories of Shaftesbury (1671 – 1713), Hume (1711 – 1776), Reid (1710 – 1796) and Richard Price (1723 – 1791). Then we reach the *Enlightenment* era in ethical thought, with the French and the German enlightenment, contributed tremendously

by Voltaire, Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. It was with Kant (1724 – 1804) that the signs of a *Modern Ethics* were visible, which is more or less the fourth epoch. The Nineteenth century ethics grew mainly owing to the works of the utilitarian, Bentham and Mill. Though another idealistic turn was marked by the writings of Fichte, Hegel and the radical ethicists like, Marx, and Nietzsche. However, idealists Schopenhauer and theistic existentialist Kierkegaard were no less souls. Gradually as times' tide progressed closer to the twentieth century with a new idealist and intuitionist call of some British ethicists like T.H. Green, Bernard Bosanquet, F. H. Bradley and Henry Sidgwick, do we really come to what we call The basic question is then, what are the distinctive features that mark "Contemporary Western Ethics"? We can enlist the following problems which were raised particularly after Sidgwick, i.e. after 1900:

What exactly should be done in moral philosophy?

What if any is the need for ethical monolithic norms?

Why should logico – linguistic concerns take precedence in moral philosophy?

Why should we not revive Aristotelian tradition of virtues and values?

Why should we show any practical interest in ethics?

5.2. DEFINITION

Contemporary ethical enterprise is an attempt to justify *de novo* that ethics as a branch of philosophy should have at least four important tasks, namely, the normative, the meta-ethical, the virtue ethical and the practical tasks.

5.3. NORMATIVE ETHICS: A NEW LOOK

Contemporary western ethics takes a fresh look at normative ethics because at the outset, a number of challenges in our times in ethics are against the old and repetitive normative ethics. It is old in the sense of its much abused style of inquiries and repetitive in the sense of moving in a circle of monolithic thinking, not really giving us anything new. For instance, the entire story of moral philosophy from the Greek to the modern times, has been the story of either teleological or deontological norms, each trying its best to show that one norm is *necessary and sufficient* basis for moral evaluation of human and institutional decisions and actions that are voluntary. Either we need to abide by a definite "purpose" or "teleos" while deciding and acting, that is, taking it as the one end of life or the only moral ideal; or, we need to abide by what is stated to be our "duty", and not purpose, which is merely accidental and external to what we decide and do. In this sense, the calls are: either our actions have external worth or they have an intrinsic worth. If our actions were extrinsically valuable, the deontologists (the latter view), argues that they are bereft of moral worth because only worthwhile thing is what is our "purpose". On the other hand, we need to respect what we do for its own sake or for its intrinsic worth. The teleologists (the former view), argues that bereft of purpose, all our intended actions are morally lackadaisical because doing our drab duties for their sake is to forget that calling 'duty' its own purpose is circular and vague. It is in these ways we moved through the ages, sometime inventing one norm as superior to other, for instance, we were either stuck to egoism, egotism, altruism, consequentialism, welfarism eudemonism, and later to pragmatism, existentialism, and so on. Or we were stuck to Kantian deontology or later to its various revisions, the act and the rule forms of deontology proposed by Carritt, Ross and others. Hence, the era preceding contemporary

normative ethics, is monolithic, the main line of justification being, and there is one norm or a *summum bonum* of our moral life.

There were immediate sceptical questions in contemporary ethics (as expressed above), because we gradually came to know that though teleological and deontological norms have half-truths, they were not needed as monolithic life goals or as exclusive standards for a wide range moral evaluations. The scepticism followed two ways: One way was more radical than the other. Some sceptics called for *normative relativism* and rejected any practical application of a norm or more norms in our real life. The other milder sceptics called for the same 'relativism' though not rejecting normative application if it followed an acceptable methodology for application. The first view was a contemporary attempt at establishing "normative ethical relativism", the main tone of which is to do away with "one norm" theories of the old ethics, though obliquely recognized the fragmented values of normative theories provided one keeps in mind that relative worth of these norms depend on several factors, social, economic, cultural, political and so on, and if one does not forget the truism that with time, our mindset changes. Interestingly, a number of contemporary ethicists of the Vienna Circle, such as R Carnap, A. J. Ayer, M. Schlik and Wittgenstein, called for "normative neutralism" and "pluralism" was unanimous about rejecting "normative application". These sceptical thinkers of the *logical positivist gharana*, toeing the positivist line of the sciences thought that philosophers *qua* philosophers should remain "normatively neutral" in so far as their task to the heart is language clarification of ethics, for the same reason philosophers should not apply ethical norms.

With this extreme non-normative stance in contemporary ethics, some other contributors in this field felt that though relativity of norms is a proven thesis, it is too hard to accept that philosophers as philosophers we need only to take logico-linguistic interest, and that normative interest along its application are non-philosophical. A numbers of contemporary writers taking logico-linguistic concern in ethics seriously thought that it is meaningful to inquire into the relative value of norms because it needed logic for their relative worth. Ethicist like W. K. Frankena and R. B. Brandt, for instance, despite deep logico-linguistic interests, inquired respectively into the possibility of a fresh set of norms is like *Beneficence* and *Political and Institutional norms*, which was reminder to a fresh look at breaking the barrier of thought raised owing to fact-value dichotomy. With this, in contemporary ethics, a number of norms, social, political, metaphysical were advocated, and their relative values assessed given the logic that were available to their supporters. This is also a reminder of breaking of ice that crystallized owing to our fateful fact-value debate. Needless to say that despite such interest meta-ethical interest of justification of norms was not sacrificed. Another interesting, turn to be noticed is that ethical application was not an unphilosophical affair for most of these thinkers. They were not neutral to application possibilities of norms in question in our real life. This brings ethics closer to life or a serious inquiry into the ways in which what should be done in life. Many conscious thinkers revived a type of "casuistic" method made famous in medieval Christian ethics. We shall come to it later on.

Check Your Progress I

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

1. What is the contemporary approach to normative monism?

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2. What is normative scepticism?

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3. What is contemporary normative relativism?

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5.4. META-ETHICS OR SECOND ORDER ETHICS

We have noticed that despite a long history of normative or first order ethics, contemporary ethics felt an urgency to lay more stress on meta-ethics or second order ethics. The “first order ethics” is so called for it was not only historically prior inquiry, rather it inquired into what was thought primary in ethics, that is, assessment of moral worth of our intended actions. The second order ethics is then, not secondary, rather, considered what lay beyond the first order of inquiry. And what lay beyond the first order inquiry is the whole gamut of “ethical language”, most evidently normative or evaluative in character, though, language containing elements of values, virtues and institutional decisions and actions were equally important. However, in contemporary ethics there have been animated debates whether a number of utterances to be found in the ethical parlance are truly "ethical" in nature. "Good", for instance, is an umbrella term, covering descriptive (factual) as well as evaluative (moral) functions and meanings, which needs to be clearly demarcated. "My car is good" and "Honesty is good" do not bear the same evaluative tone because the former is evaluation of an object based on its descriptions of mechanical properties, which could be observed and experimented, whereas the latter evaluates a virtue of humans, which cannot be observed and experimentally proved or disproved, and for that matter, does not need such justification at all. So the justification in favour of calling “car” a “good” is different from calling “honesty” a “good”. Hence, moral utterances need to be differentiated for a proper logico-linguistic analysis of truth and meaning from factual utterances, which is expected of meta-ethics.” However, as said before, there is a lot of debate regarding this is/ought question. One conclusion with which it is not difficult to agree is that *logically speaking*, that is, based on strict logical or formal rules; it is difficult to derive a fact from a value statement without an intervening factual statement, as well as to derive a value statement from a factual statement without an intervening value statement. Moreover, it is difficult to derive a fact from value or vice versa based on an assumed truth or predilection or blank presupposition.

But the stiffer debate is how to identify “a factual statement purely so called” and “a value statement purely so called”. There are evidences of statements appearing to be purely factual but

in essence, 'value-laden'. Hence, a number of so called facts related assertions are found to blur the boundary of fact value. This is why socio-political and legal assertions are value-laden, and many positivistic assertions are carriers of value. This is why there is little hesitation in imagining political ideals and ideologies as bases for moral judgments. And this is why normative pluralism transcends the old theories. Interestingly, contemporary ethics does not hesitate to evaluate the moral worth of the corporate and the government decisions and functions though they are not an individual's intention and action. We have moved from the thought that moral judgment is true of a human being on earth. Group morality is equally important. Hence, the private and the public, the individual and the collective intentions, decisions and actions are our objects of moral judgement.

However, the Is/Ought duality debate appears at another point for meta-ethical inquiry, again related to normative inquiry. As was said before, norms beg justification for they are not our predilections. However, we justify a moral norm logically based on facts; there is a fallacy of deducing a value from a fact. In the similar fashion, meta-ethicists of contemporary times like G.E. Moore, argued that if clarification of meaning of moral language is so important, one cannot without a blatant "naturalistic fallacy" *logically define* moral terms like "good", "bad", "right", "wrong" and many more. The reason is that any logical definition falls back on defining by equivalent natural or factual or metaphysical terms, which cannot be the case. How can an ethical term which is a simple, non-natural, undefinable concept be equivalent in import to complex, natural, definable concept? Any confusion like this is again confusing a value for a fact. This, Moore learnt from Plato (also Socrates), that "justice" is naturalistically undefinable (cf. *The Republic*). Hence, neither can we logically define moral terms, nor can we logically justify moral premise based on factual premise.

Although contemporary ethicists started a logical inquiry into ethical language and justification in this way, they were quickly challenged. This is the liberal spirit of contemporary ethics, which moved miles away from the feudal, obstinate and orthodox linear thinking of the old medieval and even modern ethics. Thinkers like W. K. Frankena, R. C. Cross and A. D. Woozley argued that "naturalistic fallacy" as a *definist fallacy* if a moral term has been "logically defined". However, in a number of normative and value related discussions, moral terms are not logically defined at all because no one has ruled out the possibility of their *non-logical definitions* or *explanations* for clarification of meaning. Hence, there are hardly noticeable naturalistic fallacies in ethics; the fallacy is nevertheless, a reminder to minds tending to move to this fallacy. Similarly, proving and justifications are different. If we cannot logically prove several ethical conclusions or a majority of moral theories, no one has really prevented us from justifying them *non-logically*, such as "persuasively" and "heuristically".

Further, meta-ethicists consider moral language as such for their truth and meaning. In contemporary ethics we care for clear criteria for truth and meaning of moral assertions. This was by far not systematically dealt in earlier ethics, though no way it has suddenly popped up owing to fertile imagination of some contemporary genius like Ayer or Moore or Wittgenstein. Contemporary ethicists followed two major lines with regards to justification and meaning of ethical language, where 'ethical language' has been more or less taken as the language pertaining to ethics or the one that clearly deals with moral values and value judgments. The cognitivists including the *naturalists*, *non – naturalists* and *metaphysical moralists* justify the

truth of moral assertions based on the “cognition” of what has been asserted by means of either sense experience (*naturalists*) or intuitive experience (*non-naturalists*) or by means of spiritual/metaphysical experience (*metaphysical moralists*). The cognitivists are divided partly because they debated over the basis of justification. The naturalists for justification translate all ethical assertions to factual assertions without any distortion in meaning, and hold that like all factual assertions, ethical statements are to be justified based on observation and experiment of facts. Hence, “X is good” is true because “good” is translatable to what one ‘desires’, “wishes”, “likes”, “approves” and so on, thus *describing* the speaker’s psychological state of affairs or *describing* one’s feeling and emotions about “X”, which is evidently true as a matter of fact. This theory is a “descriptive theory of meaning” supported by Hume, Westermarck, utilitarians, Russell, Perry and other naturalists in contemporary ethics.

We can now consider the ‘metaphysical’ position. The only difference with the naturalists is that unlike naturalists, metaphysical moralists translate moral assertions to “metaphysical/spiritual assertions” for justification and meaning. This is another “descriptive” theory, though the description offered is not in nature, and therefore, not sense experienced. Nevertheless, the justification owes to our queer spiritual disposition to know distinctly and clearly the truth of moral assertions as we know all religious assertion to be true. In this sense, “X is good” amounts to “X is what is loved by God”, which is true in so far as we have this unique experience not really intuitively but through our “spiritual experiential disposition”. In our times Barth, Brunner, Muirhead are among important ethicists who take this line.

G. E. Moore on the other hand criticizes both views in *Principia Ethica* because the naturalistic theory confuses ethical statements as descriptive statements. On the other hand, the ethical statements are *non-natural* statements because they do not describe any object or state of affairs whether natural or metaphysical. Hence, ethical assertions can be justified for truth and meaning based on direct cognition enabled by our intuitive disposition. They are thus “intuitive assertions”, not really describing anything. Rather, they reveal what comes to us as distinct ideas. But what this queer “faculty” really is, one is not sure. Is it a rational faculty or a non-rational faculty? And what is the source for the universality of the established truth?

Looking at the several problems that both the naturalists and the intuitionists face, the *non-cognitivists* in the contemporary times pointed out a major truth which we were unaware of. The point is when we find ethical assertions, they are not combination of letters, and they are spoken and/or written words used meaningfully by a speaker to a hearer. If we miss this speaker– hearer situation in moral language, we miss the functional aspect of the said language and any language for that matter is not inert, it is dynamic, it serves human purpose. If this be true, it is useless to harp on what language describes or how we can intuit truth. It is more important to know what purpose moral or any language serves. Coming to this, contemporary emotivists like A.J. Ayer said that moral assertions do not have a truth value as factual statements have because they are pseudo-statement or rather, pseudo – factual assertions. Moral statements are neither about the world nor about describing our feelings and emotions, nor are they intuitive non-natural truths. Moral assertions are “expressive”, that is, they *express our emotions*. Moral statements are thus emotively meaningful, and that truth is a plain matter of finding display of our emotions in real life moral discourses. However, Ayer said that such emotive statements are not about real moral agreements or disagreements because emotions do not beg for logical or rational justifications.

This was opposed by C. L. Stevenson, a later emotivist, who thought that moral assertions are real life agreements and disagreements about matters pertaining to moral intentions and actions, and we can, and should provide some justifications or arguments at least in the favour of what is expressed. Though, emotive expressions are not subject of rational arguments. But we can provide *psychological arguments* or *persuasive arguments* to justify what has been asserted. This is so because moral assertions are in the main *emotive* exhortations, and *descriptive* of the properties of something about which emotions are expressed. Moreover, we need to persuade the disagreeing person to see the truth that for the evident properties or worth, such and such thing is of moral worth.

This was further rejected by R. M. Hare on three major counts: First, he said that moral assertions far from being emotive exhortations and non-rational, are *prescriptive assertions* for they “prescribe” what we “ought” to do or what should be a moral course in life. Hence, “X is good” is not a mere emotive outburst; it is prescription to someone to follow a moral course in life. Second, Hare is of the opinion that moral assertions are *universalizable*, and therefore, not isolated relative truths depending on one’s state of mind or what one expresses. Finally, such moral assertions demand *rational justification* and not persuasion or any psychological justification. Nevertheless, in contemporary times meta-ethics progressed further with a number of thinkers like P. H. Nowell- Smith and the adherents of Ryle – Wittgenstein – Austin tradition in linguistic philosophy. Hare was particularly charged for coming so close and forget what the “use theory” and the other “functionalist” theories advocated about meaning and justification of moral language. In fact, the use of moral words in moral contexts that gives us a gamut of moral statement is not one, there is no fixity as the theory goes – it is rather multifunctional or “janus headed” (Nowell- Smith). This rules out any monistic tendency, whether emotivist or prescriptivist in finding out its meaning. Though this approach finds a number of supporters in metaethics, we have in contemporary times *the good- reasons approach* of S. Toulmin, Kurt Baier, Kai Nielson and many others, who thought that the best representation of the later Wittgenstein theory was to find out “good reasons” in favour of ethical assertions, and to do so is to be reminded of the description, connotative, performative, and other uses of ethical utterances. Without trying to bridge the gap of the moral and the non-moral assertions (because they are so evidently distinct), these thinkers banked on the several performances moral language is capable of to unravel its meaning. But the point is, whether normative and/or meta-ethical inquiries were sufficient for a moral philosophy. This takes us to questions regarding ethical values and virtues, and practical application of ethics.

Check Your Progress II

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

1. What is the position of the ethical naturalists?

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2. What do the emotivists argue?

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3. What are contemporary post- emotivist positions in meta- ethics?

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5.5. VIRTUE ETHICS: THE ARISTOTELIAN REVIVAL

In a seminal essay Ms. G. E. M. Anscombe inquired whether modern moral philosophy needs a shake up for being too overloaded with theoretical churning. Put in another way, some contemporary thinkers worried of theory-ladenness of ethics and wanted to get rid of it to inquire whether ethics was all good to read and no good to live a virtuous life. Is it not out of way to imagine that moral philosophy, if it pertains to moral matters, be engrossed in language analysis and not in the values and virtues that humans should possess so that a good life is lived on earth? This is exactly the most troubling question for an ethicist called Aristotle, whose revival was badly needed in moral philosophy, thought Anscombe. Thus the Aristotelian revival came with “virtue or value based ethics”, or simply, “virtue ethics”. This was looked upon by many as “anti-theoreticism” and “anti-normativism” or moving away from theory to consider, “being good”. What exactly are the dispositions cultivating which amounts to “being good”? There may be many, most importantly, the *traits of character* and the *traits of duty*. “Deontic traits” and “aretaic traits or virtues” are most important for “being good”. Such moral men if infested our world will cause moral cleansing of the already burdened world of vices due to human follies. Hence, it is needless asking what ideals or rules should we follow. It is more important to find out what values should we cultivate. In contemporary ethics, there are other classifications of virtue ethics, the most important ones are: *Agent focussed*, *Agent based*, *Agent prior* virtue ethics. The first concentrates on a moral agent and asks for the inculcation of *virtues most needed*, whether deontic or aretaic or both (cf. Swanton). The second concentrates more on *human beings as such* and inquires about the core of life which demands inculcation of virtues that are essential to it (cf. James Martineau). Whereas the last one concentrates more on the inculcation of such virtues which are most needed for humans for their holistic well being (cf. Rosalind Hursthouse). However in our times there is a debate whether virtue ethics can be sensible without theoretical concerns (both normative and meta-ethical). First, we must know the meaning of “virtue” and “value” and their types. Second, anti-theoretic stance itself needs a logical justification (which is a meta-ethical problem). Then we need to know that calling virtue by a name, demands on what basis we call it by that name. If I call “honesty” a virtue, we need to ask: On what basis is “honesty” a virtue? Thus we speak of a norm for calling “honesty” a virtue. Now, if we say that “self-fulfilment” is basic to call “honesty” a virtue, and then we need to ask, without being honest first of all, how self-fulfilment is realizable? This takes us to the

contemporary debate to conceive of a virtue ethics with normative and meta-ethical theoreticism — it is thus “return to theory”.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

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

1. Why is virtue ethics referred to Aristotelian revival?

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2. What are the contemporary classifications of virtue?

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3. What is contemporary reply to anti-theoreticism?

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5.6. PRACTICAL ETHICS: FORGOTTEN PAST UNEARTHED

It is strange thinks many contemporary ethicists to try and discover what is right below our nose. If it is true that virtues are extremely important in ethical discussion, can application of ethics be far behind? The point has been already raised by us when Anscombe asked obliquely whether ethics is so glorious without doing something worthwhile. The simple answer should be in the negative, think many ethicists, who do not support application of ethics or practice of ethics. The problems are, what should be applied in ethics and how? The remarkable feature of contemporary ethics is not that it stresses on ethical application but answers what is applied and how. Again this is a revival of Greek ethics of the Aristotelian trend in particular but much different from the methodology of “golden mean” or Socratic dialogue or the sophist mechanics. It is different from the casuistry of the medieval Christian fathers. The first point is that either standard *ethical theories* (deontology and teleology) should be *applied by ethicists*, or, *ethical experience and knowledge* of sane, grown up individuals need to be applied wherein professional philosophers take a lead or any other competent party, does so in a *theory neutral* way. The first model for ethical application, a mistaken one, it is relatively older among contemporary application models. It is nothing but relic of old mechanics, sophistry and casuistry. We can call it a ‘theory guided’ and ‘Chauvinistic’ model for ethical application, which has to give up its cause for a number of mistakes noted by Caplan, James Brown, David Callahan and others. They call it “Sophistic”, “artificial”, “casuistic and chauvinist” because ethicists assume the role of all powerful ethical angels by virtue of ethical wisdom that they have (much like Plato’s Philosopher Kings), to consider value-laden practical problems of urgency and work in isolation as experts pulling out right tools for mending mechanical defects, and then prescribing moral

dictates or do's and don'ts, which problem ridden ethics-less ordinary people should follow. This is what Sophists did (sophistry) or what casuists did (Casuistry) in isolation, and what in our times Bradley, Sidgwick, and many others nourished. Even anti-practical ethicists like the positivists and later Wittgenstein thought that practical ethics is an ethical abuse just because it is sophistry and/or casuistry.

Contemporary ethicists, a number of them, argue against such “mechanics of duty” of artificiality in ethical application, which is “chauvinistic” because ethics bosses apply norms from the top. Rather, there is a “bottom down” approach or a model for application that rightly answers what needs to be applied, and how. It is argued that for ethical application we need moral debates amounting to a moral closure leading to formulation of relatively valuable set of decision making cues regarding value-laden practical problems of social urgency. The moral debates should be initiated and moderated by any interested party who is well versed in the practical problem in consideration and its aspects of value. Ethicists, whether professional philosophers or others who are trained in this field, are a better choice for some reasons: First, they can select moral debates fairly well; second, they can construct people friendly non-structuralist questions for debate; third, they can remain theoretically non-bossing while debates go on, and finally, they are best placed to analyse moral debates, find out the closure points and contribute academically to let us know which moral theory of theories were in interplay in debates and which gained prominence in a closure. This is a non-theory laden approach, which nevertheless, is not blind to academic interest of post-corroboration analysis of moral debates. The model is best referred to as “intersubjective corroboration”. The theory/anti-theory debate is taken care of as practical ethics is not application of moral theories, rather application of “common moral experience and knowledge” for moral resolutions. Nevertheless, post-corroboration analysis of dialogues reveals normative dynamics, which is a return to theory.

In contemporary western ethics application of the moral experiences of professionals of different fields for moral crises resolution has gained prominence, which is called “professional ethics”. It covers a broad field, ecological, biological, medical, educational, economic, business, management, administration, as well as social, political and legal fields. It covers mass media, communication and many other fields like sports. The reason is that in different professional fields, with the passage of time, a number of value-crises crops up. The professionals are worried to settle them following a moral methodology. We thus have environmental ethics, bioethics and much such ethical discussion in our times.

Check Your Progress IV

- Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answer with those provided at the end of the unit:
1. What practical ethics is not?

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2. What is intersubjective corroboration?

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3. What is professional ethics?

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5.7. LET US SUM UP

It is encouraging to note that contemporary ethics possesses dynamicity, it does not cling any more to one or two standard functions. Since 1900 ethics has been changing. We now discuss about the use of “empirical ethics” as well, which is partly empirical field work based study of moral opinions followed up by empirical data, which are further analysed for several moral conclusions. Further, there is a feminist turn in ethics and ethics of care. Ethics in contemporary epoch is thus coming closer to social scientific vocation and is set to be the most rapidly growing interdisciplinary aspect of philosophy. Ethics is no more the same cafeteria philosophy of norms and the language churning by intellectual.

5.8. KEY WORDS

Normative or First order ethics: Deals with one or more standard or standards for the evaluation of the moral worth of intended human as well as institutional actions. Also evaluates individual and collective dispositions, virtues and values. First order is indicative of both historical priority of the discourse as well as the primacy of the same.

Meta-ethics or second order ethics: Deals with one or more justification or justifications which might be strictly logical as well as non- logical in nature in favour of normative theories. It also deals the truth and meaning of ethical terms such as good, right, just and many more. It is second order with regard to the follow up analysis of first order inquiry though completely transcending it in terms of linguistic and logical inquiries.

Virtue ethics: The ancient Greek and particularly Aristotle’s interest in basic human virtues that is expected of man qua man or by virtue of being a human. In contemporary ethics, its revival is a thorough analysis of meaning, nature, kinds and importance of virtues in humans, and ways they might be inculcated.

Practical ethics: The nature of practical ethics depends on what is practiced in ethics and how. In contemporary ethics it is a bottom down method to resolve value-laden practical problems in the world we live in. The method is intersubjective corroboration in which problems are resolved through collective moral debates followed by moral consensus, decision making rules and post-corroboration analysis of moral debates to unravel the role and relative value of normative theories.

5.9. FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES

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5.10. ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check Your Progress I

1. Normative ethical monism support verity of a particular ethical norm like deontology or teleology while rejecting the usefulness of a number of norms.
2. Normative ethical scepticism does not support the verity of any absolute ethical norm either because normative standards are never eternal, they depend on many changing circumstance or because ethicist have nothing to do with norms, they should take analytic task more seriously.
3. Normative ethical relativism justifies that any ethical norm is not sacred as the value of each of these norm are dependent on several circumstances such as social, economic, political and so on. Hence, there is no objectively valuable standard of morality; morality is relative in our societies.

Answers to Check Your Progress II

1. Ethical naturalism holds that ethical assertions for their meaning and truth should be translated to natural assertions such as the psychological description of our feelings, emotions because only in that way we come to know empirically what has been really meant by the asserter.
2. Ethical emotivism argues that ethical assertions do not describe anything, and are meaningful; they are rather, expressions of the favourable and unfavourable emotions of the asserter.
3. Ethical prescriptivism and the good reasons approach are the major post- emotive theories. Prescriptivists argue that ethical assertions are prescriptions about a way of moral life. The good reasons approach argues that for understanding the meaning and truth of moral assertions, we should look at the several good reasons that we have for their meaningful use in moral contexts. Hence, the multiple performatives of ethical assertions clarify their meaning.

Answers to Check Your Progress III

1. Virtue ethics is referred to as "Aristotelian revival" because this ethical trend made a strong come back after it was discovered that basic human virtues were essential for following a moral goal, which was stressed by Aristotle and his predecessors. However, it was Aristotle who considered at length a number of cardinal and other virtues for inculcation in humans.

2. Contemporary ethicists classify virtue ethics in terms of primacy of virtues, whether that is aretaic or deontic. Further, keeping moral agents in mind, we have agent focussed, agent based and agent prior virtue ethics.

3. Some contemporary critics of virtue ethics hold that it is illogical to call virtue ethics anti-normative or anti- theoretic because without reference to a particular norm it is impossible to call something a virtue. Similarly, it is useless to have norms without having a basic virtue to pursue them.

Answers to Check Your Progress IV

1. Practical ethics is not artificial application of one or more normative theories as absolutely true by the ethicists, and others are merely left to follow them. It is also not casuistic application of theistic ethics by the moralists. Hence, it is not “from the up” or chauvinism of ethicists and moralists.

2. Inter-subjective corroboration is a ‘bottom down’ model for the application of ethics which speaks of resolution of ethical problems by collective application of our moral experience and moral knowledge through moral dialogues and subsequent corroboration of our views.

3. Professional ethics is consideration of several theoretical problems of justification, conceptual analysis and methodological issues in the resolution of a number of value- laden moral problems that professionals face in social life.

