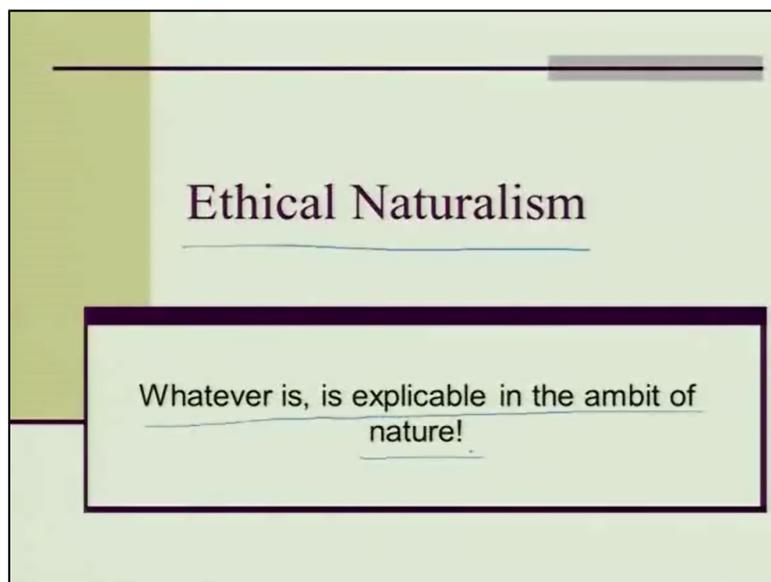


**Ethics**  
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**Module No. #01**  
**Lecture No. #14**  
**Ethical Naturalism**

Hello, everyone. Today, we are going to talk about, Ethical Naturalism. It says, whatever is explicable, is in the ambit of nature.

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Now, this is a Metaethical Theory, which talks about the role of nature, in understanding the moral domain. Now, let us take a moment to reflect on, our understanding of the world. Now, Ethical Naturalism, as you could surmise, the origin of the word Naturalism, is coming from the word, Nature. Now, what is Naturalism? And, what is Ethical Naturalism? And, what is it, as a Metaethical Theory? Now, you would recollect that earlier, we have talked about, various Ethical Theories. Now, we are dealing with Metaethics, which is the foundation of Ethical Theories.

The very possibility of morality, the very justification of the ethical domain. Now, today we are going to talk about something called, Ethical Naturalism. If you look at the slide, it reads that well, whatever is, is explicable in the ambit of nature. Now, I stay with this, for a while. And, let us not confuse us, that well. What is there in the ambit of nature, is enough, or the domain of nature, is enough, to explain, analyse, or understand, everything in the cosmos.

Now, let us go ahead to see, what do we exactly mean by this.

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The slide is titled "Naturalism?". It contains three bullet points:

- Naturalism is a metaphysical/philosophical theory that claims that the universe is totally explicable in the parlance of nature. ||
- That is, we do not need to postulate any supernatural notion to complete our understanding of the universe.
- What is a natural entity? Is it the same thing as empirical?

Handwritten notes in blue ink on the right side of the slide read: "Mystery/Super natural" and "DO NOT NATURAL".

At the bottom of the slide, there is a small "vs" on the left, "§ 6 Meta Ethics: Ethical Naturalism" in the center, and a small "2" on the right.

Well, First. What is Naturalism. Naturalism is a Metaphysical or Philosophical Theory, that claims that the universe is totally explicable, in the parlance of nature. That is, we do not need to postulate, any supernatural notion, to complete our understanding of the universe. Well. What is a natural entity? Is it the same thing, as an empirical entity? Well, okay. Now, let us take a moment to reflect on, what is Naturalism? Now, Naturalism is a Philosophical Metaphysical Theory of which, Ethical Naturalism is a derivative or a component.

Now, Naturalism, as the very name suggests, gives foundational importance, to nature. Now, by nature, we do not necessarily confine ourselves to, trees, plants, and wildlife, as one interpretation of it could have. But well, when we talk in Philosophy about nature, we mean, everything that is empirically perceivable, that is comprises of the cosmos. Perhaps, this is one concept, that can easily be understood, if we give examples of, what is not nature.

Well. Things, that are postulations or entities, that are supernatural, starting from the postulation of god, as a supernatural entity, of mystery, of un-explicable intuitive power. Now, these are examples of, supernatural notions. And, this is clearly out of the ambit of nature. So, clearly nature is not, as the philosophical understanding of Naturalism, would go ahead. It is not confined to just, what many Botanist, or Biologist, or People would believe to be, only plants, trees, animals, and life on Earth.

But, it comprises of everything, that is almost empirical. That, we can know and perceive,

that is not strange, that is explicable. So, Naturalism opines that, currency is a very powerful, or all-encompassing theory. When we seek an explanation, for a behaviour. When we seek, that well, Venus is passing over the Sun, to the other side. Now, we seek a natural explanation to this. Which is, that well, the satellites or planets, revolve in their orbits. And, their orbits, sometimes overlap each other. And therefore, there is an overlap in their paths.

Now, this is a purely naturalistic explanation, in the ambit of nature. But, if I say, if I postulate that, well, one planet is a life form, which is visiting another plane. Or, that god is arranging the motions of the satellites. Well, these are supernatural explanations. So, now as you would see, most of the disciplines that we study, most of our knowledge in the world, is quite naturalistic. We know that well, examples of Naturalism would be that well, if I take this kind of a drug, I have seen that drug X, empirically correlates with the phenomenon Y.

So, doctors prescribe the drug X, to treat the phenomena Y, or likewise. Now, this is a very naturalistic explanation. But, what if the doctor tells you that, why do not you go and pray, for the healing of your condition. Now, that is a supernatural claim. That well, praying as a form of treatment, is not naturalistic. It is not governed by natural laws, as we know them. It is a part of a supernatural domain.

Now, well, having known this explanation, perhaps you would think that well, most of the way the world works is naturalistic. And, most of the studies that we do, and knowledge that we have, is naturalistic. And, that is all, why this talk of Supernaturalism. Well, okay. Now, so having add a little clarity about, what is Naturalism, let us proceed to see, what is Ethical Naturalism. And then, try to analyse it as a theory.

So, I repeat, what Naturalism would mean? That, it is a Metaphysical and Philosophical Theory that claims, that the universe is totally explicable, in the parlance of nature. We do not need to postulate, any supernatural notion, to complete our understanding of the universe. What is a natural entity? Is it the same thing as, empirical? Yes. Mostly, when we are understanding natural entity, or we are naturalistic in our understanding, we would comprise almost everything empirical.

However, rational truths, or self-evident truths, can also be subsumed, under the domain of Naturalism. So, what cannot be subsumed, under the domain of Naturalism, is what we would

generally understand as, mystery, or something which is supernatural. So, as we see, mystery, supernatural, as something which is, as not natural. Now, coming on to the next slide. Let us take a look at, what is Ethical Naturalism.

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## Ethical Naturalism ?

- Ethical naturalism, a variant of metaphysical naturalism claims that Ethical claims can be analyzed into natural facts and properties.
- The domain of ethics can be understood without any assumption of the supernatural or mysterious, it is complete within the natural order.
- That there is no mystery or explanatory gap in the understanding of the ethical domain

VS

B. D. Metaphysics: Ethical Naturalism

NO supernatural participation

Now, Ethical Naturalism is a variant of Metaphysical Naturalism. And, it claims that, ethical claims can be analysed into, natural facts and properties. The domain of ethics can be understood, without any assumption of the supernatural or mysterious. It is complete, within the natural order. That, there is no mystery or explanatory gap, in the understanding of the ethical domain. Now, let us proceed step-by-step, into understanding, what exactly, do we mean by Ethical Naturalism.

Ethical Naturalism is a variant, of Metaphysical Naturalism. So, Naturalism is the broader theory, which talks about, explanation of any domain, in the natural parlance. Ethical Naturalism specifically confines itself to, the domain of ethics, which can be understood in terms of, natural facts and properties. The domain of ethics can be understood, without any assumption of the supernatural or mysterious, it is complete within the natural order.

Now, let us take a look. If, we are Ethical Naturalists, what are we saying. We are saying that well, what is it for an action to be, right or wrong, or good or bad. These classifications can be, analysed and explained, in terms of natural facts and properties. Now, does it appear very obvious, or a little problematic. Let us take a look. What would an ethicist mean? Or, what would this Metaethical claim mean of claiming that, all ethical claims can be reduced, or can be understood, in terms of natural claims.

That means, ethical claims can be, for example, be psychologically felt, not intuitively felt. Say, when I can feel something as right or wrong, which is clearly, what ethicist would not like to mean, similar to intuition. Because, that would be a part of supernatural domain. So, I will give you an example, perhaps to make things clearer. We will talk about it in detail. When I say, what gives me happiness, is the right thing to do. Now, we have talked about moral theory, which has this as its premises.

So, what gives me happiness, is the right thing to do. If that is the case, then I am equating what is right with, what is with happiness, which is a very natural phenomenon, that I feel. Now, in this case, so looking at the slide presentation slide, we see that, and the third bullet would be saying, there is no mystery or explanatory gap, in the understanding of the ethical domain. So, we need not postulate anything supernatural, to explain the ethical domain. Now, coming to the next slide.

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The slide is titled "An example of Ethical Naturalism" and contains the following text:

- For example, action X brings along suffering (a natural property, can be felt by the agent) whereas action Y brings about no suffering in anybody.
- Thus, one ought to choose X over Y — VALUE CLAIM (assuming one values the absence of suffering over its presence) — Assumption
- Now this 'ought' claim (a value claim) can be understood in terms of natural property (suffering) ←

Handwritten annotations include: "VALUE CLAIM" next to the second bullet, "Assumption" next to the phrase "assuming one values...", and "X - suffering" and "Y - NO - suffering" at the bottom right. There is also a small "22" in the bottom left corner.

Well. What is an example of Ethical Naturalism? Perhaps, one would be clearer about Ethical Naturalism, when we see an example of Ethical Naturalism. Say, for example, an action X, brings a long-suffering, which is a natural property, because it can be felt by the agent. Whereas, action Y, brings about no suffering in anybody. Thus, one ought to choose, X over Y. This is the moral claim, assuming, one values the absence of suffering, over its presence.

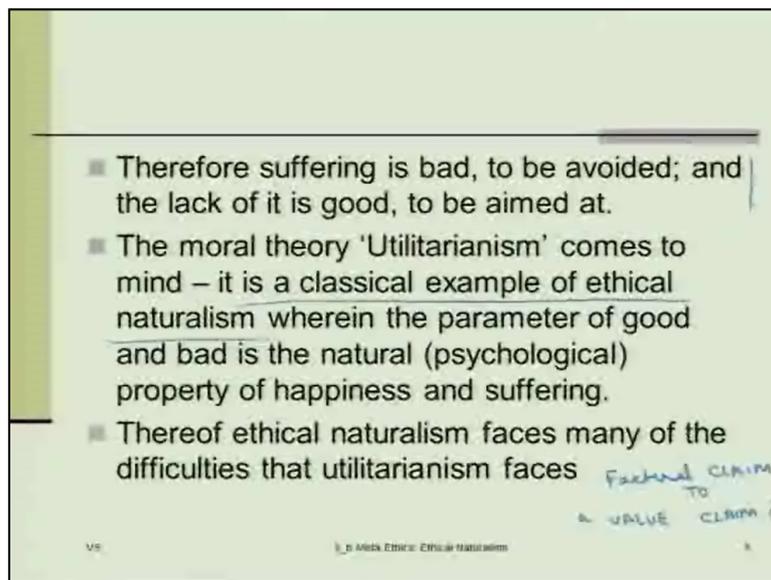
This is our assumption. Now, this ought claim, or a value claim, can be understood in terms of, natural property. And, what is that natural property. That natural property is suffering.

Now, let us look at this claim. It appears quite simple, and perhaps, most of us would agree with it. That, if an action X brings a long-suffering, whereas action Y brings about no suffering. Action X gets, suffering. Action Y gets, no suffering.

So, most of us would perhaps choose X, over Y. Well. If, that is the case, and we go ahead and make a prescription, make a moral claim that, X is the right thing to do, over Y. Or, X is right, and Y is wrong. Or, X is good, and Y is evil. Or, that one ought to choose, X over Y. We are making this as a, value claim. Now, if this is a value claim, what is the basis of the value claim. The basis of the value claim is, suffering.

And, what gives it objectivity, is that well, of the two choices X and Y, one gets more suffering, than the other. Suffering is a natural phenomenon, which can be experienced and felt psychologically, not intuitively. It can be felt and experienced, psychologically. And, this ought claim therefore, can be understood, in terms of a natural property and suffering. So, this is an example of Ethical Naturalism. Now, let us go ahead, to the next slide.

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Now, what does it mean? That, therefore suffering is bad. It is to be avoided. And, the lack of it is good, and is to be aimed at. Well. The Moral Theory, Utilitarianism, comes to mind. This is the moral theory, that I was referring to. It is a classical example of Ethical Naturalism. Utilitarianism is a classical example of Ethical Naturalism, wherein the parameter of good and bad, is the natural or psychological property of, happiness and suffering.

Thereof, Ethical Naturalism faces many of the difficulties, that Utilitarianism faces. Now, let

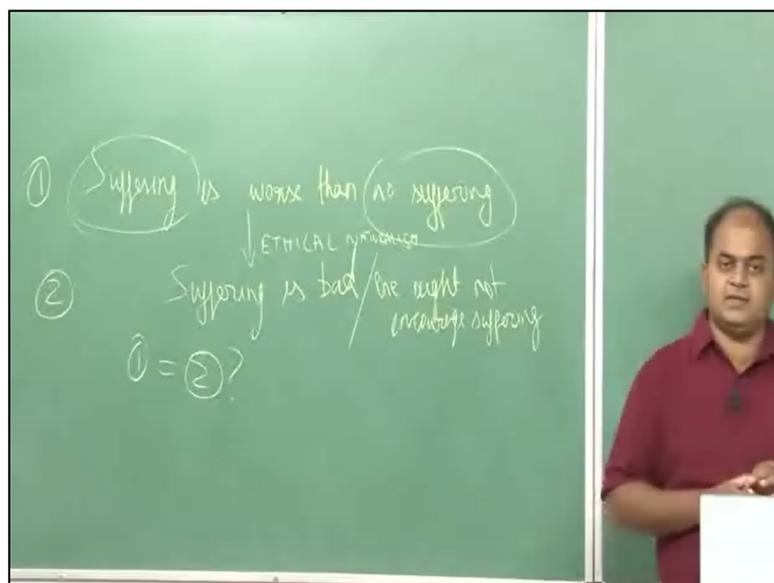
us take a look at the assumptions, that we have come across. That, suffering is bad, and the lack of suffering is good. That, to put it more simplistically, happiness is desired over suffering. And, this is how, the case ought to be, is what Ethical Naturalists say. Now, if you would recollect from, our earlier claims and discussion on, Utilitarianism.

What we meant was, well, Utilitarianism is a moral theory, that promotes the greatest good of the greatest number. That, one's judges right and wrong, by the psychological feeling of happiness and sorrow. Which seemed, quite obvious. But, the Metaethical assumption for Utilitarianism was, Ethical Naturalism. Now, we did not talk about Metaethical assumption, because these are perhaps sometimes so implicit that, we take it for granted.

But, when we explore, the foundations of any moral theory, we are bound to arrive at deeper philosophical claims. And, Naturalism here is, one such of an example. Because, this is such a philosophical claim, would colour the moral theory, that is based on such a claim. Now, for Utilitarianism, Ethical Naturalism is the foundational Metaethical claim. And, what is the Metaethical claim.

That well, suffering. It is true, as an empirical fact that, human beings, or living entities, prefer the lack of suffering, over suffering. But that, this is what ought to be, the moral parameter, or the ethical parameter, is the claim of Naturalism. That, when I can make a judgement, that well, one ought to. Now, let us let us take a look at the board.

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A simple claim like, suffering is worse than, no suffering. Suffering is worse than, no

suffering. Or, no suffering is better than, suffering. Now, if we make a second claim, suffering is bad, are these two claims, one and two, the same thing. That is the question. That, this is the division, that would bring about the presence of the Metaethical claim, in this moral theory. Now, if you agree that, suffering is worse than no suffering, well, I understand that, these are very generic statements.

And well, one could argue for various gradations of suffering. What exactly do we mean by suffering? But, let us take it in the most generic sense, that you would like to understand. In, whichever sense, you would like to understand suffering, or in whichever degree or magnitude, you would like to understand suffering, hold on to that magnitude. And, if you agree that, suffering is worse than no suffering, say, studying overnight in the lack of sleep, for an examination, is also suffering.

Now, if that suffering is worse than no suffering, you would rather sleep peacefully, or watch a movie and sleep peacefully, rather than study. So, you are suffering, when you are preparing for your examinations. Hence, suffering is bad. Would you say that. Well, it seems a very intuitive jump, from one is to two. That well, suffering is worse than no suffering. Well, suffering is bad. Well, this jump is only possible, if you are holding an Ethical Naturalism, as a Metaethical claim.

Therefore, if you believe that well, suffering is something, that you do not desire, you desire to stay away from. Then, that makes it bad. So, you are therefore making a naturalistic claim. So, suffering is bad, or the equivalent of it. That, one ought not to encourage suffering. Now, such claims, that suffering is bad, and one ought not to encourage suffering, assumes that, this is a value claim, this is a psychological fact, or a natural fact.

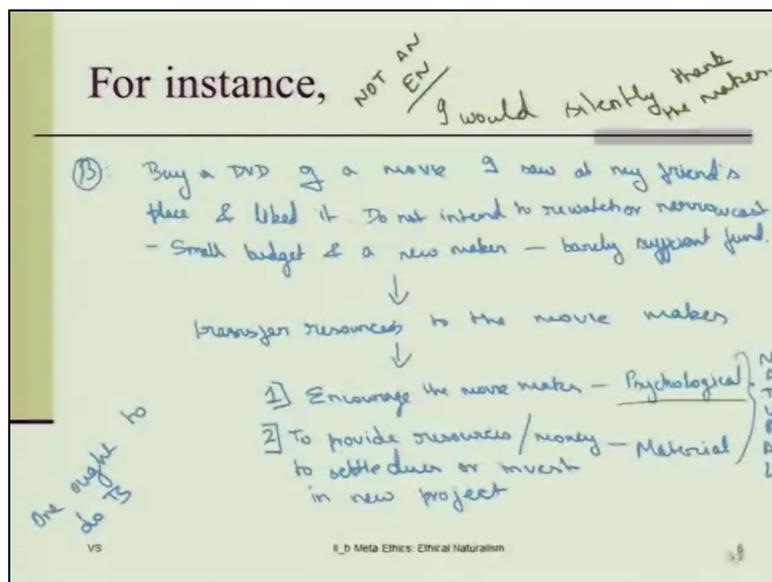
Now, this value claim can be derived, from this factual or psychological fact, only if we have this middle assumption of Ethical Naturalism. Now, most of our Metaethical assumptions are almost implicit, and very subtly implanted, in the way we think. And therefore, it is sometimes too obvious, or too trivial for us, to be true. Because, consider this, when we have a difference of opinion, it could mostly be a difference, in the theory of the Metaethical claim, that we have.

Now, somebody, who is not an Ethical Naturalist, would be of the opinion that well, yes

psychologically, I would prefer no suffering over suffering. But, that does not make suffering, anything evil or wrong. Because, suffering could be on its way, to a greater goal, or suffering could be a way, that human beings, there are various explanations given. Suffering could be a means, to get the best out of human beings. And, various other claim. So, thereby making a claim, that well, suffering is bad, and suffering is not bad.

In fact, the two cannot be arrived, from one. So, that is an example of a non-naturalist claim. Now, this is one of the difficulty. As, we look in the slides, this is one of the difficulty, that the Ethical Naturalist faces. Because, this is a difficulty, also which is faced by the Utilitarianism. How can one move from, a factual claim, to a value claim? This is a question, which we will tackle later, in context of a particular philosopher called, David Hume. That, how do we move from a factual claim, to a value claim.

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For instance, now, let us take an example. Suppose, I do an action B, which is, buy a DVD of a movie. I saw at my friend's place, and liked it. It has a small budget, and a new maker, implying that, insufficient, or just barely sufficient funds. Now, if I do this act B, what could be the reason. Now, I have already watched a movie. I do not intend to watch it again. Let me mention that too. Do not intend to re-watch, or narrowcast, or share it with anybody else. Or, I do not have any value for, keeping it as a collector's item.

I purely buy a DVD of this movie, which I have seen as, a vote to the moviemaker. Now, why do, I do this B. I do this B, probably. I do this B, not probably, but definitely, to transfer resources to the moviemaker. Now, why would I would like to transfer resources, to the

moviemaker. Well. First, to encourage the moviemaker, to provide resources, say money, to settle dues, or invest in new project. Now, if this is basically the reasoning, that I go through, that I buy a DVD of a movie, which I saw it my friend's place.

I like the movie, but I do not intend to re-watch the movie, or to narrowcast it to anybody, or to have it as a collector's item. I see, that the movie is a small budget movie, by a new moviemaker. So barely, the moviemaker would be having sufficient funds. So, I decide to buy a DVD, or a set of DVD's of the same. My aim is to, transfer resources to the moviemaker. I also recommend others, as I make a moral claim that, one ought to buy, one ought to do B, if one has like the movie, and shares the same conditions.

Now, what is it that makes an action B, morally valuable. Well, the reason for it, can be two. The first is to encourage the moviemaker, which is psychological, and to provide resources of money, to settle dues for the old movies made, or to invest in a new movie, that the director is making. So, material, nevertheless, both of these are natural facts. So, that is an example of Ethical Naturalism foundation.

That well, if I am an Ethical Naturalist, I would like to wish, I would like to buy a DVD, or a set of DVD's, even though I do not have any use for it, as a matter of psychologically encouraging the moviemaker, and providing him resources, to settle his or her dues, or to invest in a new project. Now, what if, I was not an Ethical Naturalist. Now, if I were not an Ethical Naturalist, I would silently say, I would silently thank the maker. Now, that does not have any natural ramifications.

So, other ways of looking at an Ethical Naturalist domain would be, that well, to play the devil's advocate to argue that, who is not an Ethical Naturalist, could argue that well, my silently thanking the maker could, turn the attention of cosmos, towards the maker. So, something as unusual, or which in today's parlance, is as unbelievable as a good wish, which does not even serve as a psychological encouragement. That, for an Ethical Naturalist, that has no value, and that cannot be incorporated into an ethical domain. Now, let us look at a few more clarifications.

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## Ethical Naturalism & Moral Realism

- Now moral realism claims that ethical claims can be classified as true or false.
- Thus for the moral realist there is an objective criteria of determining the truth value of moral judgements.
- The ethical naturalist is a moral realist as for the ethical naturalist there are criteria (within natural facts & properties) to serve as the criteria for validating ethical judgements.

*Handwritten notes: "Natural facts & properties" with arrows pointing to the third bullet point.*

*Handwritten notes: "M.R." and "How?" with arrows pointing to the title and the second bullet point.*

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Well. Ethical Naturalism, and Moral Realism. Now, what is Realism? We have talked about this term Realism, quite often. Realism in Philosophy would mean that, an object or an entity is real, if it exists independent of the perceiver. A very bare simple, but rigid definition of, what is it for something, to be real. So, Realism is opposed to, being the mere figment of imagination, or creation of the mind. So, Moral Realism would mean that well, there are moral facts, which are independent of the perceiver.

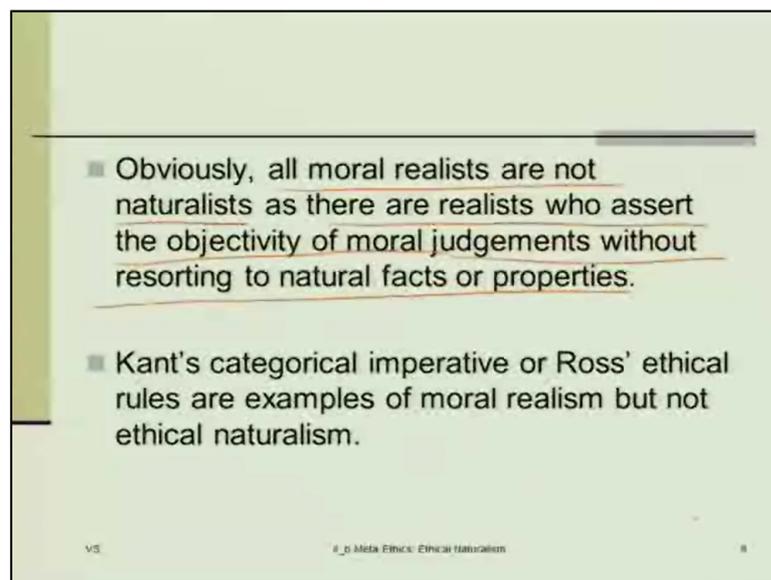
That, moral facts do not adopt, figments of imagination, or creations of a mind. And thereof, differ from person to person. But, there is something, real about it. Let us take a look at, what the slide reads. Now, Moral Realism claims that, ethical claims can be classified as, true or false. Now, when anything is real, or claimed to be under the purview of Realism, that claim can be judged as, true or false. Thus, for the Moral Realist, there is an objective criterion of determining, the truth value of moral judgements.

The Ethical Naturalist, is a Moral Realist, as for as the Ethical Naturalist. As, for the Ethical Naturalist, there are criteria, to serve as the criteria, for validating ethical judgements. Now, take a moment, to read these bullets, by yourself. Okay. Now, let us try to understand, what do we mean by Ethical Naturalism, and its relation to Moral Realism. So, what are Moral Realist. Moral Realist claimed that, there is an objective criterion for determining, truth value of moral judgements. How are these to be determined? Well, that depends on the parameter, that you take.

So, Moral Realist is not claiming, how? It is only explaining that, it should be determinable.

Now, one of the answer to this, how is, Ethical Naturalism. Well. Because, the Ethical Naturalist is a Moral Realist. As for the Ethical Naturalist. There are criteria, to serve as the criteria, for validating ethical judgements. What are these criteria? These criteria are, natural facts and properties. But, there can be other answers, to the same question. So, there can be Moral Realists, who are not Ethical Naturalists.

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Now, let us take a look at them. Obviously, all Moral Realists are not Naturalists, as there are Realists, who assert the objectivity of moral judgements, without resorting to natural facts or properties. Kant's Categorical Imperative, or Ross Ethical Rules, are examples of Moral Realism, but not Ethical Naturalism. Now, let us take a look at, what do we mean by, Moral Realism. Well. Realism first meant that well, entities exist, independent of the perceiver. Moral Realism meant that, well, moral claims can be true or false.

Why can they be, true or false? Because, there is an objective criterion, in determining their truth or falsity. Hence, the word Realism, applied to the term, moral. So, Moral Realism is saying that, there can be objective, right and wrong. How can there be objective, right and wrong? Because, there is a parameter, there is an answer book, there is a manual, or a code, or something out there, with which, we need to verify. What is this something, with which, we can verify. Here is where, Ethical Naturalism is an answer, to the index, opposed by Moral Realism.

It is like this, that Moral Realism claims, that there is an answer to moral question. How do you find out the answer, is what Ethical Naturalists do? That, they find out the answer by,

going back to, or analysing it, in the terms of natural facts or properties. Are there other answers possible? Yes. There are other answers possible. One can be a Deontologist, or Kantian Deontologist claiming that well, the categorical imperative determines, right and wrong.

One can be a rule follower, as Ross. That well, these are the set of rules. And, as long as you conform with these, it is right. As long as, you do not concur with these, then it is wrong. So, there also Moral Realists. So, Naturalism is a part, is a kind of Moral Realism. But of course, all Moral Realist, do not have to be Ethical Naturalist. Because, there can be other parameters for, assessing moral judgements. So, as we see, that well, Ethical Naturalism is a part of Moral Realism, but does not occupy, the whole of the space of Ethical Naturalism.