

# **Moral Thinking: An Introduction To Values And Ethics**

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## **Situation Ethics and Virtue Ethics**

Hello everyone. The agenda for today's meeting, our today's lecture is, Situation Ethics and Virtue Ethics. What we have been doing so far, has been looking at the various domains of ethics. We have looked at, Consequentialism and Non-consequentialism, which is also known as, Teleological Ethics, and Deontological Ethics, respectively. Within Deontological Ethics, we looked at, W.D.

Ross theory of Ethical Rules, or Prima Facie duties, as an example of Deontological Ethics. Now, we will look at, two other kinds of Ethical Systems, or Ethical Proponents. One is, Situation Ethics, which looks at situations, as the name implies. And a more dominant third category of Ethical theories, apart from Consequential and Non-consequentialism, is Virtue Ethics.

It also talks about, there is also Virtue Epistemology. There is Virtue, as another kind of theorising, which is based on character, rather than on actions. We will come to that, after we go through a small section on, Situation Ethics. Now, the reason why we have Situation Ethics, is to contrast Ethical thinking, which is neither Deontological, nor Consequential. Another frame of thinking, that how we come about to it.

Now, Situation Ethics talks about, love as being the way. It was pioneered by Joseph Fletcher, in the Western tradition. And, if I may suggest that, you can think of it as, in the Indian tradition, as the Bhakti Marga. The Marga, where Prema or Sneha, is what determines right and wrong. That it is love, out of which, the moral domain emerges.

We have seen that, neither rules, laws, nor rigid theories, can form the basis of the Ethical domain. It is only love, and acts emerging from the spirit of love, that lay the foundation of Ethics. Right. So, many of you might already be sceptical, or even cynical, that well, what do we do, when we actually take a moral decision. Do we actually go through so many theories, do we think about so many things.

Probably not. We are just functioning out of our intuition. To this, I have two responses. One can take decisions, out of intuition. One can take decisions, without thinking too much out of it.

Nevertheless, it may be stemmed from a deep understanding, or a cosmology, that you yourself have not articulated, to your own self. Let me slow down and repeat. You may be a Consequentialist, without knowing that, you are a Consequentialist, without articulating it in words, that you are a Consequentialist. Because, the intuitive decision making, that we take, comes from somewhere. Generally, it comes from something called, Cosmology.

Cosmology is something like a, pre-theoretical worldview, that we have, which comes from our society, family, culture, that we are a part of. And, from that, we pick up our cosmology. That means, cosmology not in the sense of astronomy, but cosmology in the human world. That means, it gives us a system of philosophy, of taking decisions. So, one might be a Consequentialist.

Say, if you are of the religious kind, you would prone to be more deontological. You would see something. Let us say, let me split the question of food, Vegetarianism versus Non-Vegetarianism. Now, you could be a vegetarian, out of habit. You could be a vegetarian, out of choice.

When you are a vegetarian, out of choice, you could be a vegetarian, because you love animals. You could be a vegetarian, because you think that, it is wrong, that your religion has prohibited you from eating animals. So, if you can yourself look at your way of looking at the world, and understand that, what kind of theory that you hold. So, this is the first reason, that we can take decisions, without articulating, or without consciously knowing, what kind of deep theory that we hold. We hold it for sure.

It may come from our cosmology. Because, that is how we take decisions. Right. Otherwise, it would be just pure random. The second is, when you encounter theories, then you can think better.

You can think better, whether you would like to be this way, or whether you would like to be some other way. So, when you think through these, then you come out to be a better, sought after, thoughtful person. But, given these two points, the further addition that I would like to make here is that, you are also not just looking at a level of an individual, your own decisions. Those are important. And, you are making them, and seeing how theory plays a role there.

When you take decisions at a collective level, may be as a committee, may be as friends, may be as a company, may be as a founding entrepreneurs, may be as political participants, may be as political leaders. Whenever, we take decisions and argue with each other, or to arrive at a conclusion, I specifically emphasise, to argue with each other, and not quarrel with each other. Because, arguing is, when we reason with each other, to come out with the best reason. We are not doggedly stuck, to our point of view. So, as philosophers, as young philosophers, as philosophers who have gone through these ideas, I hope that you are able to distinguish between arguments and quarrels.

And, do not abandon arguments, as quarrels. And rather, see the power of arguments, because knowledge advances through arguments. So, arguments colloquially, have a bad connotation. They seem to be like fights and quarrels. But, arguments are not quarrels.

And that is something, I hope you come through to, in this particular course, as one of its side effects. So, coming back now to Situation Ethics. Now here, Fletcher talks about love. And, love is understood as a gape, or a guape, as it may be called, if I remember correctly, or selfless love. Selfless love is not the notion of romantic love, but love where one is selfless about something.

This is a term generally coined in the Christian tradition, but can be applicable to many traditions. We have talked, there are many traditions. And, as I suggested, you can think of it, analogically as the Bhakti Marg in the Indian tradition, where it talks about love. So, I am sure, there are equivalents in various religions, where love powers decisions. Now, Ethical Theories are rigid, and often present, counterintuitive output.

Laws are clearly blind to the situation, one and two. Ethical Theories are rigid, and often present, counterintuitive output. So, if we are, as a Deontologist, I have a set of rules, that I think are inviolable, intrinsically valuable. And I apply them, to a particular circumstance, it is going to be very rigid. And, sometimes will also present, very counterintuitive output.

So, let us say, I think that, one should always, thou shall not lie. And then, I find that, I stick to this principle. But, I see that, my sticking to this principle, sometimes hurts other people. So, that makes me now think that, whether my duties of beneficence is conflicting with my duties of telling the truth. So, there seems to be a clash of rules there.

And, I am sure, you can think of many other examples. This is an example, that just occurred to me. The second is, laws are clearly blind to the situation. That means, laws are very often termed in formal context. If we look at the example of, students who are late to the class, will not be marked present.

That is a law, that is blind to the situation. Why the student is late, whether the class started early or late. These all are something, that the law does not take into account. Perhaps a vital component of Ethical Domain, is neutralised out by Ethical Theories. What is that vital component of Ethical Domain, that is neutralised by Ethical Theories.

That is the uniqueness of the situation, and the perspective of the agent. Again here, two crucial points. What is it, that the Ethical Theories miss out. They miss out two things. The uniqueness of the agent, and the perspectives.

So, agent, something about the agent, they miss out. They miss out the uniqueness. That means, every individual being is unique, and therefore will have a different way of thinking. And, the perspective of the agent.

These are two things. Uniqueness causes the perspective of the agent. If I miss put it in philosophical terms, in a little bit of jargon, the uniqueness of the agent is metaphysical. The perspective is epistemological. That is how, we come to know it. But, you need not worry about it, if it sounds complicated.

Now, these two parameters, which are these two parameters. Here, 1 and 2. Let me call them, P1 and P2. P1 and P2, along with the spirit of love, lay the Situation Ethics view of the Ethical domain.

So here, what is Situation Ethics. Situation Ethics talks about situation, yes. So, the uniqueness of the situation. And, I think I have made a slight confusion here. But here, what they talk about is, uniqueness of situation, not the uniqueness of the agent. So, you can just ignore the past few seconds of the conversation, that the uniqueness of the situation.

And, here is the perspective of the agent. So, yes, it still holds that, if it were looking at the uniqueness of agent and perspective, as epistemological metaphysical, that holds. But, here, what particularly the distinction is, the uniqueness of the situation, and the perspective of the agent. Together with this, with the spirit of love, lays the foundation of Situation Ethics, view of the Ethical domain. It is not laws that are applied, but the spirit in which a value decision is made, is that matter.

So, not the laws, but the spirit. What is the spirit, that has been used. When confronted with a value dilemma, the agent assesses the situations, its particularities. This is crucial. And, a resolution is arrived, which seems to be the most compassionate, or out of love. So, how does a Situation Ethicists make a decision.

A Situation Ethicists makes a decision. Well, is confronted with a value dilemma. The agent assesses the situation. What does he do, by meaning of assessing the situation. He takes the uniqueness of the situation, into account. She or he takes the uniqueness of the situation, into account.

Its particularities. That means, there is something particular about a situation. And a resolution is arrived at, which is the most compassionate, or out of love. Let us say, the role of a judge, in a court of law, is also a testimony to Situation Ethics. Because, there are the law books, but the judge takes into account, the situation of the alleged crime, to see both its feasibility, and more importantly, in the situation ethics component, to determine, what is the amount of sentence to be given, for this particular violation of the law, if the violation has been established.

Right. So, to calibrate the amount of punishment, to an established violation of the law, is a role of the Situation Ethicists, by the judge. Let us take a little bit of an example, to make sense of this. Two people have stolen, say, 1000 rupees, or 10,000 rupees, from an ATM.

Right. From, two independent ATMs. Now, one has stolen, for is a first time, who has stolen. One who has stolen, for some dire need at home. The other one is a habitual offender, and is

getting his livelihood out of that.

Now, both these acts are the same. Right. These are acts of stealing, even the same amount, the same method, the same source. Yet, they are different in their situations. One is a first time offender, one is a repeat offender. One has stolen, to meet some dire need at home, whereas the other has stolen, as a matter of income, and as a matter of habit. So, this is when the same act, like using the theories of Situation Ethics, the judge varies the sentence, to each of these two cases.

So, this is a typical example of, Situation Ethics in action. Now, we come to the domain of Virtue Ethics.

Let us start with a. Okay. Sorry. There is just one more page to, Situation Ethics. A clarity that, we want to talk about is that, are Situation Ethicists, Relativists. Well, clearly the answer is no. It might appear to be so. But, it is no, because it might appear that, each agent is entitled to arrive at his or her own decision.

Thereby, there being no absolute decision, and it is all perspectival. This is the allegation, the allegation made here. Right. It might appear that, each agent is entitled to virtue, at his or her own decision.

Not virtue. I read it wrong. It might appear that, each agent is entitled to arrive at his or her own decision. Thereby, there being no absolute decision, it is all perspectival. This is incorrect. This is the retort. According to Situation Ethicists, love is the single guiding principle.

And, if not intentionally made ambiguous in application, there would be no variation in decisions, in identical situation. So, the catch is that, very often, when love is taken as a motivation for action, it can be intentionally made ambiguous. And that is, what causes the difference. So, in genuine application of love, or agape as a spirit of application, there will be no distinctions, or there will be very little distinctions, in decision making.

Here is a quote from Fletcher, that love relativises the absolute. It does not absolutise the relative. How does it relativise the absolute. By incorporating the situation. And that is why, it is called Situation Ethics.

With this, we come to the end of Situation Ethics. And now, I can start with Virtue Ethics, which I am quite excited to share with you. Because, this is another way of looking at Ethics altogether. This is an Ethical Domain, that starts from the time of Aristotle. A lot of Indian moral thinking also can be classified as Virtue Ethics.

And, it starts with a very fundamental question. What is the right thing to do, versus what sort of a person, should I be. Let me start with a few examples, that I have thought of. And that will help you understand, or that will help you figure out, what Virtue Ethics is talking about. Let us look at video games, online games, video games, virtual world.

Now, if we have two people, say P1 and P2. If P1 continuously plays violent video games, and enjoys the process of causing death, destruction, and violence. Whereas, P2 is playing video games, but does not enjoy these things, or does not get into gory, or these kinds of games. And, as we know that, a lot of games have, a lot of gore packed into it, and a blood, and a lot of violence packed into it. So, somebody who is enjoying violence, P1, and someone who does not enjoy violence, P2.

Both of them, playing video game, may be the same game. But, is there a difference between the two. One enjoys, one does not enjoy. That is the difference, of course. But, on the moral component, is there a difference between the two. Both of them are not causing, any violence or destruction, in the real world out there.

Right. Both of them, turn off their consoles, and they are done with the day, and then they go back to leading their lives. So whether, one has enjoyed violence, been sick about it, or in a sick fashion. Whereas, the other person, who has played it as a game, and not enjoyed the gore, and the violence in it. They both have not caused a difference, in the world out there. Yet, can we make a moral assessment of the two, and compare them with each other, on the basis of their acts.

Think over it. Let me put a further example. Pornography. Pornography has often been termed as a victimless crime. Right. That, when pornography is where, people are role playing, intimate sessions, sexual sessions. Yet, it is a role playing, that is happening.

It is not something, that is happening in real. So, in that sense, someone is being exploited, or pretends to play along to being exploited. Whereas, the other is exploiting, and or is pretending to exploit. Nevertheless, this is a victimless crime, because there is not a real act of crime happening.

It is a pretense act. It is a play. It is a pretend. It is a session of acting. Now, when somebody takes joy in such acts, can we assess them morally. Is there something wrong with it. Is there something right with it. Now, let me present the third example. Let us imagine, two patients, who are lying in coma, in two hospital beds, in the same room, beside each other.

And, the same healthcare provider comes to clean and nourish these people. Imagine, these people are in coma. So, in that sense, they are paralysed. Let me be more, Podraplegic said, they cannot communicate, but they have a active conscious life.

They are not able to move their limbs. But, they have an active conscious thinking life. Yet, they are not able to move their bodies at all. They are able to see, have opinions, have judgements, but not able to express the same. Now, these two, let us call them, paralysed patients are being treated by a caregiver. A caregiver, who has to clean them, and give them their medicines.

And, one of them is very grateful to the caregiver. Is not able to express it. But, is very grateful, because the caregiver is taking care of this person. The other is quite angry, bitter, and vengeful. That well, why did this happen to me. I just hope that, this caregiver goes and trips on these tubes, falls down, and lands up in a bed beside me. So, that caregiver is also unwell, and experiences the kind of suffering and trauma, that I am having.

Now, notice both the patients, are not making a difference in the world out there. But, they have a difference in their characters. They have a difference in the way, what they wish for the world, what they wish for the caregiver, in this instance. Would we be able to make a difference between these two. Now, in all these three cases, if your answer has been yes, there is a moral difference between the two agents. May be, in the case of the video games, in the case of pornography, in the case of the two paralysed patients.

Then, you are accepting virtue, ethics or virtue, as a component of moral decision making. So here, they talk about character or motive, more important, or at least equally important, than rules, principles, and consequences of an action. The key word here is, character and motive. We move from act based, to agent based. The difference between an act and an agent. Take some time, I think this should be thought provoking, when you try to look at this distinction between the act and the agent.

How are they different. The act is, what takes place. The agent is the person, from which the act flows. So what should be the basis for making a moral judgement. It should be the act, or the agent, or both, or in what combination. A malicious person may still have it within his power, to perform actions, that do not reflect that malice.

But, that malice exists. How would you assess this. When we look at malice. Malice is something, which has not found expression in the world, because it is not been able to cause any harm. But, the very fact that, one wishes ill to a person, and another person who wishes well to another person. If both of them, who are ineffective in the world out there, but yet have a feeling of their own, can they be judged on that kind of motivation or intention, that they hold.

Virtue Ethics would answer, yes. There is a clear distinction between these kinds. Because, our motivation and character, is crucial to our moral thinking. The question to ask is, what sort of a person, ought we to be, rather than, how to decide on, which act is to be chosen. Virtue Ethicists claim, the former is more basic than the later.

So, what sort of a person, should I be, rather than, what should I do. This is a crucial. So, what sort of a person should I be, to what act should I do. We, as moral agents, do not need a theory to give us the right course of action, or a subset of principles, formulate to arrive at the right action. What we need, is to know about, what kind of a person, we ought to be. And the answer to this question, will also determine, the actions we do, the choices we make.

Character of the agent, is prior to the actions of the agent. That is crucial. Character of the agent, is prior to the actions of the agent. Actions flow from the character. Thus, character is the

cornerstone of moral theorising. So, this sums up, what very basically, what Virtue Ethics is talking about. Virtue Ethics is talking about, character, about intentions, about a whole domain of moral, of human character, that may not be adequately represented by, looking at the moral domain, only in terms of consequences or acts.

The Virtue Ethicists, brings a narrative, to the moral discourse. What does it mean. Like the judge, we talked about in the last session, that a judge in the court of law, is trying to look at the character of the person, to temper the judgement. It looks at the situation. So, in that sense, is also valuing the character of the two, allegedly two charged people, who have charged for the same crime, and it is been established. Right.

So, they are looking at the character of the two people, and thereby making a difference between the two. So here, perhaps an important domain of Ethics, lies in looking at, Virtue, Character, and Values, as an addition, if not of more importance, to just consequences and intrinsically valuable laws. Because, Virtue Ethics is putting the human being, back at the centre of the moral world. Right. Because, character is essentially being human.

Laws, consequences, or abstractions, are events in the world out there. So, with this I hope, we have had a brief introduction of, what different kinds of Ethical Theories can be. We have looked at, Consequential Theories, Non-Consequential Theories, and Virtue Ethics. We have also looked at, an example of Deontological Ethics, as Ethical Rules by Ross, Prime of A.

C. duties, of Consequentialism, as an example of Consequentialism, as Utilitarianism. And of course, then Virtue Ethics as an evolving independent way of thinking about laws, which has been evolving not in the sense that, it is new. It is been around from the times of Aristotle. And, Aristotle in the Western tradition, has been associated with Virtue Ethics. In the Indian tradition, a lot of moral thinking has been, Virtue Centric.

So, what kind of a person, should one be. I hope these questions, and these videos, have stimulated you to think about these issues. And, we invite you to read about it, think about it, and formulate your own opinions on this. we come to an end of the fourth module, which talks about Ethical Theories. And, in the next module, we will talk about, Moral Thinking in the Indian tradition, and some applied ethics cases. Thank you. .