

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

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**Week - 01**

**Lecture -03**

**Philosophy, Ethics and Moral Thinking**

Hello everyone. Welcome to this part of the course on, Moral Thinking- Introduction to Values and Ethics. In this lecture, we lay the foundation, we understood, what Philosophy is, in our last lecture. And in this lecture, we will try to locate Ethics, Values, Moral Philosophy, within the domain of Philosophy. So, where does that locate. And then, introduce you, or to introduce the notion of, Moral Thinking, Ethics and Values, what are the similarities, what are the differences, and how it goes about.

So now, Philosophy itself, can broadly be divided into three categories. So, one is Metaphysics. The second is Epistemology. And the third is, Axiology.

And within Axiology, again there are two divisions. One is Ethics, and one is Aesthetics. Now, let us briefly know, what are the various parts of Philosophy. So, to start with Metaphysics. Metaphysics is, as the name implies, it is Meta-Physics, going beyond the Physics.

Physics meaning the physical. So when we look at Metaphysics, we are talking about the problems of substance, the problem of the foundations of the physical world, to look at, what is the basic structure of the world, the physical world, and questions that are not answered by Physics, or that are not tackled by the physical realm. So, we look at the metaphysical assumptions. So what is, let me give you some examples, so that it makes sense to you. Problems in Metaphysics include, problems of Monism, Dualism.

So say, the mind-body dichotomy. Now, there is one school of philosophy, that will argue for mind and body, as two separate entities, two separate kinds of fundamental entities, and they interact. Now, this is called, Dualism. Monism on the other hand, as an Ontology, which is a part of Metaphysics. Ontology would be, minimum set of existence.

Right. So, let me just put that down here. Ontology, as a part of Metaphysics is, talks

about the existence. That means, what are the minimum sets of existence, independent existence, for a system to proceed. So, Monism, Dualism are examples of Metaphysics.

Monism argues that, there is only one fundamental entity in the world. Monism argues that, there are two fundamental entities in the world, mind and matter. Pluralism can argue that, there are multiple entities in the world, foundational entities of the world. Right. And depending on one's metaphysical assumption and situation, one makes sense of the broader picture of the world.

So, if you would remember from the last lecture, when we talked about philosophy questioning foundations and to understand why foundations are important is, depending on the foundational position we have, we look at and interpret the world around us. So, for instance, let me think of an example, which can help you see the distinction. And very often, one's own metaphysical position can be thought through, can be unthought through, can be implicit. But one has to have a metaphysical position, either implicitly or explicitly, either thought through or just arrived at from the embedding one, depending on the society or the civilisation one is embedded into. So, when one looks at, suppose I am a Monist and I think I am a physicalist, in that sense, my metaphysical assumption is that, everything in the world can be reduced to matter or matter and energy, physical entities.

Then I would look at mind and consciousness as, some things that are derived from physical entities. And let me proceed with a rather simplistic example. But perhaps, that will make you comprehend the difference between Monism and Dualism. And how does that make a difference in the world, that we inhabit. Let us look at medical sciences.

Now see, a typical Allopathic Medical Sciences would have a, in a preliminary sense, a very physicalistic assumption. So, it would believe in the ontology or of Physicalism. That means, the metaphysical position is that of Physicalism. That means, if the matter determines everything else. So, if one takes physical medicines or alters the physical realm of the human body, the body can be recovered from ill health to health.

Right. Now, if you look at other contrary or other different medical systems, say Ayurveda or Homeopathy. Now, they have a different assumption. Ayurveda in particular, has an assumption of, definitely not a Monistic assumption. It is a, at least a dualist, if not more. That if one treats one's behaviour, if one treats one's spirit, how mentality or the mental life is crucial to physical health.

That prescriptions can also involve in alternative medical systems, which have a different metaphysics as compared to the classical Allopathy. The prescriptions can be

looking at, or recommending one to hold certain mental attitudes, moods, emotions, that will either help healing, or harm healing. So, at a much higher level, they look at a different metaphysics. So, those of you who have encountered different medical systems, and probably most of us had, there is a mainstream medical system, but there is also, there are competing medical systems, and they have been working. So, how do we distinguish between these medical systems, instead of rubbishing one as trash.

One can look at, what are the metaphysical assumptions, where to understand the difference. Because when you look at the world from one set of metaphysical assumption, the other world system looks as meaningless. As a simple analogy, if I can say, your metaphysical system is a language dictionary, that you carry. And when you use that dictionary, suppose you carry a dictionary of English, you can make sense of the English language. But when you look, carry a dictionary of Sanskrit, can you make sense of the English language.

And contrary, if you are bound to a dictionary of English, can you make sense of Sanskrit, or any other language, German, French, Malayalam, Oria, any language that you come across. So your metaphysical position is crucial to determine, what you discern as meaningful and meaningless in the world. So that is basically metaphysics. Epistemology is about the theory of knowledge, that what we can count as knowledge, what is the proofs of knowledge, what is empiricism. Now these are terms that you would come around in the, in many philosophical literature, but it is something that you should be aware of.

So empiricism means, something to do with experience. And this we are talking, under the ages of Epistemology. So one of the system of Epistemology could be Empiricism, where it looks at truth, can be ascertained only by empirical experience, or empirical reality. That means, experiential reality. So realities that are not experienced, or claims that cannot be experienced, can be held as false.

This is one Epistemological position. If you find the terms a little too overwhelming, it would do good to get yourself a dictionary of philosophy, so that you are constantly aware of the exact meaning of the words, that we come across. There is Oxford, Cambridge, Penguin, all of them have very good dictionaries of philosophy, that will help you. And, I will recommend you, if you are serious about thinking sharper, and thinking harder, to do going for one of these dictionaries. Because the words, or the concepts used in philosophy, are also very often concepts used in day-to-day language.

But the accuracy of meaning understood from the usage of these terms. We, Empiricism is a term, that we use in our day-to-day world, or at least in classes and theories. We talk

about lab theory. So to understand the very foundational, and clear distinct meaning of such notions, which are both day-to-day usage terms, and also profoundly philosophical terms. Truth, Logic, Experience, Empiricism, Rationality, these are all terms, which are both terms that we use in the world, out there, and also philosophical terms.

So, if you have a good grip on the meanings of these terms, that will always help you to think clearer, harder, and better. So epistemology, we talked about as the theory of knowledge. Now, Axiology talks about values. So, Axiology is when we, and that will be the thrust of the course, that we are doing now.

Axiology is about values. And values are again split into, Ethics as moral values, and Aesthetics as values of beauty. Truth, as the value in Logic, Truth, Beauty, Good, are three fundamental values classically regarded in Philosophy. So, Beauty is an Aesthetic value, Truth is a Logical value, and Good is a Moral value. So these are values, that we come across here. Let me proceed now, to this word that we will now, is crucial to us, Values.

That's a word that we have used in every day-to-day language. And I want to spend some time, delving on this concept called Values. Now, Values are something which are a part of the world, that we inhabit. We make sense of the world by valuing. And for a moment, I am pausing, and not looking at values just as moral values.

But values can be in various domains, that we come across. So, when we look at, say you go ahead, start your day. Now, whether you decide to wake up as your alarm goes off, or snooze it, is a value decision that you are making. A decision to allow yourself to pamper yourself a little more, or to be rigid about the time that you decided to wake up. When you make choices about what to eat, you are making a value decision.

So when you make a choice of where to invest, that's a value choice. So values are something that is prevalent in all disciplines. We are making those choices. Values are foundational.

So when you look at, you are a... Okay, let me talk about say investments. You are a growth investor, or a value investor. I think that's how it is classically regarded in finance. In economics, you are regarded as whether you are free market economist, or you are a welfare economist. So that means, what are the values that you hold as foundational.

So the value that you hold as foundational is axiomatic. It is the values are the axioms we start with. Then we devise the best ways or processes, by which these values can be

attained. So policies or processes, as to how these values can be achieved.

So, now you have a set of values. And I will invite you to think of various ways, in which you can find value assumptions in an enterprise. And let me think of an example. When we look at, okay, let us say governments. Governments have certain values, right. There is a welfare government, or there is a free market government, or economic systems have certain fundamental values.

And how one best attains those values. So what are the policies that are to be designed, to get those values. Will determine, what kind of policies are framed. But ultimately, the values that are held, are something that are held by the, held as foundational, which show the direction. So this is a moral compass, or a value compass, that what kind of a government one wants to be. Let us, if governments and politics sounds too distant, let us look at the individual, you yourself.

You have certain values of life. And you would like to, you make decisions, so as to be governed and advocate, or achieve those values, right. So suppose you believe in freedom over equality. That is a value choice you are making. That means, if somebody, and this is typically of course used in the political philosophical framework, a classical debate between freedom and equality. The more of freedom means, there will be inequality.

And the more we target equality, crushing inequality, that means some people have their freedom compromised, right. So say taxation, taxation is a classic example that, when we tax more to attain equality, we are being unfair to the people, or we are curtailing the freedom of people who are earning more, to subsidise the people who are earning less. That is an equality driven approach. A freedom driven approach would be that well, that anyone who earns, how much ever they earn, is earning on their own ability. And therefore, that should not be curtailed, and we should champion freedom over equality.

Now, this again is further based on a metaphysical assumption, that well, equality has an assumption that nobody, and I am doing these analysis for you to get a knack of how this can be done, how philosophical analysis is done. So equality tends to have a metaphysical assumption that human beings do not operate in isolation. And somebody who is having an advantage today, is having an advantage, because something accrued to that person, which was not his or her own creation. And therefore, that person owes something to the society to bring an equality. So, some advocates are likely to have a metaphysics of individuals as relatively much more isolated and self-created, than being a result of the environment, or the advantages or disadvantages that have accrued to them.

The debate can be put out that well, everybody goes to school. So there is an equality of opportunity. But, not everybody gets the same environment at home. Not everybody is born with the same intellectual abilities. So, freedom advocates would say that well, that is a coincidence.

And therefore, those who are doing well, deserve to get better in life. And the equality advocates would say that, no, the starting line is never equal. And therefore, we need to subsidise this difference in performance. The point here being is, value debates or moral debates are rarely between right and wrong.

Those are clear-cut cases. The real debate is between two competing rights. So, the debate is generally between two competing rights. So, both freedom is desirable, equality is desirable. But which one shall we prefer, over the other.

That is what is a value debate, that comes about. That articulates the philosophy of that company, organisation, institution, family, individual, government, or whatever collective we talk about, our individual. So, the point now, what you would like to take away from this brief discussion, is that values pervade our world. And we make value choices, in every discipline. Say as a scientist, when you are looking for a process, or as a product, or an entity, as fundamental, you already are making a value position. That you are looking at processes as fundamental, or you are looking as products or entities as fundamental.

So, you are making this as fundamental value position, that you are taking. Now, I invite you to think over various fields, and where you can find, what are the value assumptions or value to analyse, in terms of values of various companies, policies, organisations, institutions, or everything that you come around. In the last lecture, we talked about, even the user interface of a mobile phone, is also a value preference implemented. Whether one wants a simpler, neater looking interface, or one wants a comprehensive interface, with as many options as possible, at the first page.

There is no need to negotiate to the second page. So, this is also a value decision, being taken up by the designer over there. Okay. Now, with this idea of values, let me go ahead and talk about, Moral Thinking and Moral Values. So, when values are in the domain of the moral world, we call them as Ethics.

Right. So, values in the domain of the moral world, are called Ethics. Okay. I lost the screen there then. So, when we look at ethical values, we are actually debating, what kind of moral values, interpersonal values, which are related to the moral world, that we

inhabit. So, when we do a course called, Moral Thinking, is trying to look at, how values exist.

That is Metaethics, of course. That, what are the value assumptions of different policies, different institutions. How do we at all, get into this moral debate notions. And before that, let me also clarify that, what is it that we do. Three terms, that I would like you to focus on.

There is Moral Philosophy. There is Moral Science. And, of course, Moral Thinking, which I will equate as, Moral Philosophy. Right. And then, of course, there is this domain called Ethics, which very often, for the purpose of the course, you can take it as the same thing as, Moral Philosophy or Moral Thinking. Ethics, if you want to be very exact, it would mean as a code of conduct.

Right. So, when you have a business ethics situation, it is all about designing the code of conduct. It is not about, going to the fundamental questions. Whereas, Moral Philosophy is going into the fundamental questions. But now, we need to know, what is the difference between these two terms, Moral Philosophy, Moral Science. And, you should know, what is the objective of the course that we are entering.

Is this course in Moral Philosophy, going to make you a moral person? Well, that is a question, I am sure it has occurred to many of you. Do you think, doing a course in Moral Philosophy, makes you a better person? Right now, as an academic Philosopher, I am also advocating the debate to you. And, I also have a position on this. So, I will try to keep them separate. But, very often, when I am expressing my position, I will let you know that.

So, the assumption of this course is very Socratic. Okay. Now, for those of you, who may have not heard, Socrates was almost the first Greek Philosopher, in the ancient tradition, which was the teacher of Plato, then Aristotle. So, that is the lineage that comes on. Okay. Many of you must have done a course in Moral Science. So, one, doing a course in Moral Philosophy, will not immediately make you a better person.

And neither is it, designed in that sense. Because, it is not going to tell you, what to do, what not to do. For that, you need to look at the rule book of the institution, the government, or that you are a part of, or at an individual level, at your conscience. So, whether it makes you a better person, or what is the right thing to do. Well, if you want edits or codes, this is the wrong place to look for it. No Moral Philosopher, no Philosopher will tell you that, this is the right thing to do, period.

What a Moral Philosopher will help you, or what Moral Philosophy will help you to do, is to understand the debate threadbare, so that a position can be taken. Right. Moral Science, on the other hand, science as we saw, was something that depended a lot on techniques. So, if it depends a lot on techniques, then it will give you a set of desirable values. So, most of us, who have read Moral Science in school, would see that, these were probably studies, or fables, small tales, something, to inculcate certain values in us.

So, the set of values was given, and how best it could be inculcated in children. Moral Philosophy is on the contrary, not giving you a set of values, but asking you, helping you, and provoking you, to interrogate the set of values, that you come across. So, Moral Philosophy, Moral thinking is about interrogating values. It is about, doing a Philosophical Analysis about values, and trying to find out, which values are worthwhile. So, if you look at that well, what does Ethics say about, say Euthanasia. Well, the question is, one kind of Ethics would say something, another kind of Ethics would say something.

So, then what is the point. If there is a difference, is it that, to each his own, and therefore there is no universal view possible. No, there is. Look at, let me place it in the level of the Parliament of a country. That the Parliament needs to decide, whether Euthanasia would be legal or illegal.

The Parliament is the representation of the general will of the people. So, it debates, whether what are the values, that are to be held sacred, and what are not to be held sacred, depending on the context of the time. So, the Parliament debates, whether we need to have values as sacred, life as sacred, or we need to have dignity as sacred. Putting the debate of Euthanasia, as a choice between longevity, and living with dignity. So, cultures that will argue for living with dignity, will probably be lenient to Euthanasia, and cultures that see life intrinsically valuable, will see Euthanasia as tampering with something, which is sacred and not human formed.

So, these are some of the strands of the debate. So, as a moral Philosopher, you will be able to do a Philosophical Analysis, and try to see, why who holds which position. So, a Parliament is a location for a Philosophical debate, to arrive at the policies that we go for. Once those policies or the values are concrete, embedded, enshrined, we would like the nation to follow that particular policy. It is same with communities, with families, with cultures, organisations.

However, to think of the values as rigid, absolute, and eternal, would again be a folly. Because the same Parliament, the same families, or the thinking communities, and thinking families, are always open to revision. So, look at Homosexuality.



Homosexuality was illegal, at a few decades down the line in India.

Now, it has become legal. Then, it again becomes illegal. So, this is the notion of change, that is embedded in all knowledge systems, not just a moral philosophy. So, there is a revision in various values, that we come across. Okay. Now, the reason I mentioned Socrates, and Socratic way of thinking is, then what is the point of doing moral philosophy. Socrates was a Greek philosopher, who did not write anything much, but was out there on the streets, provoking, sparking debates with the young people, and asking definitions and knowledge, questions that made the people, especially the younger ones, think for themselves.

So, and Socrates again was seen as a threat to the nation at that time, and was even sentenced to death, for this particular act of inciting young people, for questioning established beliefs. But, and as a part of this course, when I say we use the Socratic method, it is a method of questioning and debating. So, generally in a class, I would be debating, or opening up the questions from various views from students. But today, we are in this particular mode, we do not have that luxury.

So, I will have to go extempo. But I am sure, we will be able to have some meeting sessions, where you can raise these questions. So, Philosophical classes generally do progress, as a debate, as a monthan, as they would say, where contrary opinions come together, and we learn and inform from each other. I will try my best to incorporate views, and counter views, so that you can get a perspective of the debate. So, I may miss out some things.

Please do, voice them over, or write them in comments, or make it available. Because, the point of it is also, it informs others, about perspectives that I may have missed, and that helps us to think better on that. So, Moral Thinking is a continuous process. And, we start with it, we look at analyse debates, we analyse policies, we look at fundamental concepts used, and go ahead with forming a understanding of the moral world, that we inhabit. Right. Thank you. .