

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

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**Week - 02**

**Lecture - 09**

**Explaining Moral Terms - 1**

Okay. So, now we get into the detailed discussion, of the concepts, that we have in Module 2. We will talk about, Good Rights Duty, Justice Equality, Love Purusharthas, and about Egoism, and Altruism, Ethical Relativism, Universalism. We have had, I will choose a text, that we need to study, and understand, Altruism and Egoism, in respect to that particular text. But then, before that, let us come to this very basic question, that why do we need these concepts, right. As a student of Philosophy, you always have this question to answer to yourself.

And, this is not necessarily just being a student of philosophy. But, this is for being a student, in general. That, why are you doing, what you are doing. And, for that, the answer need not be, or should not always be, pragmatic, or for the reason of logistics, that you need to earn a degree.

But, the very rational of the enterprise, that you are engaging in. So, why are we exploring these concepts. Why do we need these concepts. Well, I would hold, and in no particular order, but these few reasons, that explain, why you require to understand, or engage with these concepts. The first is, individual clarity.

To understand oneself, to understand one's own positions, to understand why one takes a certain stand, why one is sympathetic to a certain stand, and while one is not sympathetic to another stand. So, to understand one's own position, is one of the reasons to engage with these concepts, to understand these concepts, right. The second one is, collective discussion and decision-making. So, this is a more frequent part of it. So, perhaps the ones of you, who are less introspective, or more outgoing, would value this particular option more.

Because, whenever you engage in a discussion with others, whenever you debate, or discuss, or you want to arrive at a decision, we need to start with a common point. The

very fundamental structure of an argument, and an argument is different from a quarrel. That one should always be mindful. An argument is, when one engages with contrary or contradictory views, to refine one's own views. A quarrel is, when one digs, heels, for one particular point of view.

Anyway, that apart. So, to reach a collective decision, or in the process of decision-making, one requires to understand the very fundamental concepts, from which the discussion is starting. So, let me give a small example, that makes sense, right. So now, say somebody is arguing for organ transplant, right. That organ transplant should take place, on commercial basis, right.

And the other one is claiming that, no commerce in this, right. So now, here, to understand the notion of commerce, or commodification, is crucial to understand the opposition between, these two groups. Let us call them, Group A, and Group B. Now, Group A, both of them, mostly have the good of the people, or the patient in mind. But, Option A, thinks of commerce as a championing individual.

I am just constructing an argument, that could probably be the argument of this Team A, which looks at commerce as something, as an essential or epitome of democracy, where every individual a law has the right, to take a decision about his or her own body. And, if it benefits somebody else, then if there is mutual consensus, there is no need for the state to intervene. That could be the rationale of A. So, A is looking at commerce or commodification, or the whole financial transaction, as a case of epitome of democracy. Now, the one who is looking at, or who is denying commerce, in the case of organ transplantation, right.

And, OT is organ transplantation, is having a different view of commerce. Probably, Team B looks at commerce, or Agent B looks at commerce, as something which is exploitative, that which creates circumstances of exploitation, and rips out decision making. So, that is a very simplistic way of constructing a preliminary debate about organ transplantation, trying to highlight the need, that how commerce itself as a concept, is being understood by the two differing parties, in different concepts. Now, apart from this, the third reason, why I would think, you would require to engage with these concepts, is to understand the trajectory, understanding the trajectory of thoughts. Now, if we look at a certain kind of policy, that has come into being, whether at an individual level, or at a collective level, one can observe or read the policy carefully, and then read the subtext, or the history, or the trajectory, that could have led to the foundation of this kind of a policy.

Let me take an example. Very often, Indian laws and bureaucracy is criticised as being,

as functioning with distrust as the default. Right. That, most of our laws or our bureaucracy is trained, or has the character of proceeding with distrust, as the default method of operation. Now, to look at this, if one looks at the trajectory, and how this default method comes into being.

Assuming that, this allegation is true, the extrapolation that takes place here, is when we look at the genealogy, and the legacy of the policies, and the way of administration, that has evolved, which is in continuation with our colonisers. So, because of the apparatus of the colonisers, the methods, mechanisms, and the character of the colonisers, they would naturally be distrusting the colonised, and they would want to go on a distrust, as a standard method. So, to understand to this trajectory, that how this particular kind of policies come into being, how this character of decision-making, of policies come into being, of bureaucracy comes into being, of a particular institution comes into being. One can also understand these concepts, that well, what the notion of justice here, was tilted towards distrust. And these are assumptions, I am making, for you to understand the example clearly.

Now, let us go to the first point, that we come across, the notion of good, the concept of good. Now, good is something, that we have heard in so many contexts, that we can find a huge number of meanings here. Now, here I would like to just put a caveat here, or a tool to help you understand, that these may be seen as empty concepts, or formal concepts, that need to be fleshed out, or given content. Right. Now, why do I say this.

Now, if you look at all these preliminary concepts, that you must be aware of, because these are terms of speech in general. So, when we look at happiness, pleasant, or wherever we use the term good, we have difficulty in defining it, as we discussed in the introductory lecture. So, I am proposing that, you look at these concepts as, empty concepts, or formal concepts. So, the nature of good, or what is good, will be defined by the existing paradigm, will be defined by the individual, will be defined by the institution, will be defined by the country, by the nation, by the constitution, by the government. So, to look at good, as something fixed and uniform, is probably making a miss.

So, the most abstract terms, that we come across, freedom, liberty, equality, justice, good, are all terms, which are abstract. Abstract, so they have the scope to be fleshed out, to be defined, to be given content, depending on the paradigm, that they belong to. What does this mean, that the good of a nation, or the good of a policy, the good of an individual, is defined by the individual. So, a community defines its own good, and that becomes a good, in that particular paradigm. And this is where, you see the ambiguity, or the differences, that come across, when we define this particular concept.

We look at, a good can mean happiness, that well, anything that promotes happiness is good. But, does anything that promote happiness, make it good. That is a question, we will not tackle now. But, if you are interested, this is a hint to look at G.

E. Moore's essay, on the Naturalistic Fallacy. just look up these terms, if this interests you, then you can go further on the analysis of the notion of good. But, for the moment, that is not required. Anything that is pleasant, is good. But, anything that is good, does it have to be pleasant.

Not necessarily, right. So, pleasure in a certain paradigm, that typically the Hedonist paradigm, defined pleasure as the good. That is something desirable, that is something to which, one should be heading to. So, if we look at the Hedonist paradigm, pleasure is good. Then there is something, that are morally good, right. So, here comes the notions of morality, that good as something, which is substantive, or good in itself.

Then there is functionally good. We talked about, the good knife, the good instrument. So, something that is good in its function. Then there is something aesthetically good. That means, typically what we understand as beauty.

When we look at the notion of beauty, so that is a good painting, would mean that, it is aesthetically pleasing. Of course, it means, the terms can be used as superlative. Anything that is excellent, or that exceeds average, becomes good. Anything that is useful, excellence. So, this can be the various renditions of the notion of good.

Then there is the Adjective Good, and the Substantive Good. So, good as an adjective, where you can qualify something as good. Say, the good knife, or the good person, or substantive good, is something that is good in itself. Which itself, is a very difficult thing to define. Philosophers have gone ahead and claim that, it is indescribable.

And, a little bit of thinking. And, that is where, critical thinking on your part, and will help you see the difficulty with these concepts, that they are so difficult to define. And finally, the Common Good. What is the Common Good. Well, the Common Good, as we talked about earlier, is the good life, or the world view that we, or the society, or the country, comes out to argue for. So, when we look at the good life, what is the common good, that an institute, or that an entity defines.

So, just as say, a society may define, or marriage as a common good, family as a common good. That means, that well, we should look at something, that is to be encouraged by the society. So, governments or nations, give tax breaks for marriages.

So, there can be many things. So, maybe having children, can be seen as something as a common good.

Having infrastructure, having parks, is something as a common good. But, what does that also underlie, that it wants people to interact, to have a social life. So, the social life is to be, as seen as the common good. Now, we come to the question of the next concept, which is the concept of rights.

What are rights. Rights are, by its very definition, they are an entitlement, that one has a right over something. It is an entitlement, by the very nature of being. That means, here again, this can be understood in two parts, that by rights, it is an entitlement, that by the very nature of one's being, one is entitled to. And, rights especially stand on their own. So, they are very frequently regarded as, Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson regarded as, self-evident.

Right. That rights are self-evident. They are often regarded as, also natural rights. Let us take an example of a natural right. Or, right is something, that one is entitled to. So, and entitled to, not because of human rights, or natural rights typically are entitled, by the nature of our being. So, being a human person, we are entitled to certain things.

We are entitled to, let us say, if we take the universal declaration of human rights, UDHR, we are entitled to a defence, and a trial, before we are convicted. Or, a judgement is passed upon us, or a judgement is passed upon a allegation, a criminal allegation. So, one has the right to defend oneself, in a court of law, before a punishment is announced, or a judgement call is taken. Right.

So, what is it, that gives us these rights. Now, what is the source of these rights. We have human rights, we have right to, now as Indian citizens, you have rights to, children have the right to education, the right to information. So, that we are entitled to know, say the right to information, or which is popularly has been known as RTI. It is something, that by virtue of being the citizen of India, you are entitled to know about the processes of the government, and the executive in particular. So, that right to information, does not require any other qualification, apart from the fact that, you are a citizen of India.

So, where are these sources of rights. Now, we are looking at the modern world order, where very often rights are grounded in, as natural rights, where rights are also seen as something self-evident. But often, rights have throughout the history of humanity, have been grounded on religiosity, on Gods. But, rights are something, which have always been grounded on something, not caused by something, but grounded or sourced in either religion, God, or self-evident, or nature. But, they are seen as inalienable. So, that

is also something, which irrespective, as long as you are a being, that qualifies you for that right, it is inalienable to you.

Now, rights can again be of different kinds. There can be negative, or non-interference rights. And then, there are positive or claim rights. So, negative rights are say, something like the, I have thought over two of these. Negative rights, yes. Then, or non-interference, negative right can be seen as the right to free speech.

So, when we look at the right to free speech, here, there is a non-interference. It is a call of non-interference by others, by the government, by other agents, that one is free to express one's own view. So, there is a right to free speech. This is called a negative right, or there is a call for non-interference. In contrast, positive rights are something called claim rights.

So, if you look at the right to education for children, is something that is a claim, that needs to be provided by the state, in the Indian milieu, as a right to education. So, the idea of introducing you to this little schema of understanding rights, is only for you to understand that, how rights can also be a deep concept, which though colloquially very frequently used, is not necessarily as simple as we colloquially understand it. As we understand it, in a day-to-day use fashion. So, when we look at rights, we look at them, when we look deeper, we can find many more nuances to it.

And, that is true of as many concepts. So, the Universality, or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. So, UDHR is, or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, has been often given as a textbook example, of the Universality of Rights. Right. These were rights. And, I recommend you to go and check up the site, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and read the rights that are listed there.

This is typically a post Second World War phenomena. And, where several rights were formulated as something, which is to be part of every individual being, ever without being inalienable. The critics of UDHR, and we must pay a quick visit, to that particular point of view, that UDHR critics have thought, or have proposed that, the UDHR is mostly a Western notion of rights, which is being imposed on the rest of the world. Whereas, UDHR is thoroughly Western in its origin. And, whereas these do not find eco, in the culture or civilisation of the other non-Western civilisations.

I leave you to think over this debate. Although, this debate has been explored threadbare, and it still holds as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Now, let me come to the next notion, that we talk about, is the notion of duty. Now, duty is something, well, it follows rights. Rights entail duties. Rights right to X, holds only

when it is someone else's duty to provide X.

That is a simple logic to rights and duties. Because, rights do not exist in vacuum. Rights exist, and thereby entail duties. And, because there are duties, therefore rights remain. So, rights entail duties. Now, duty or obligation, is the primary concept of Deontological Approaches to Ethics.

This is a definition, taken from the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy. Any edition would do. Perhaps, it is there in the Bibliography list. But, even if it is not there, you must take a look at the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, that gives you a lot of knowledge about, defining these particular terms.

So, Deontological Approaches to Ethics. We talked a little bit about Kant, about duty ethics, about ethics not being powered by emotion, but by a sense of obligation or duty. So, whenever we have a sense of obligation, right, it is obligatory for the doctor, to provide nursing or healing, to someone who is immediately suffering. It is obligatory, or it is the duty of the soldier, to protect the nation's boundary. It is the duty of the policeman, to maintain law and order.

So, these duties are something again, intrinsically powered. So, these are not on the basis of reciprocity. So, there is no reciprocity here. There is no consequentiality here. Right. So, to understand a notion, to concept, you should must also place it, to what it is not.

And, that will give you a better understanding, of what the concept is. So, duties are from the heart of Deontological Ethics. And, Deontological Ethics is typically contrasts with, Consequential Ethics. So, Deontological Ethics talks about, duty for duty sake, that does not require any further motivation, that is intrinsically powered. That means, it is to be done, for its own sake. The policeman has to maintain law and order, even sometimes to the peril of his or her life, only for the sake of duty.

Not because, they will get an award, not because they will get reciprocity from the people, or they will get respect. These all may be, the side effects of it. But, these are not the reasons, for the policeman to do his or her duty. So, duty-bound professions are almost, almost always intrinsically powered.

And, the job needs to be done, for its own sake, not for anything else. Now, let us come to the notion of justice. Now, justice is a notion, which well, it is more noticeable and highlighted, in its absence than presence. Right. Because, most of the protests, that you may have seen, or you may have been a part of, or you may have seen on TV, all claim

that, there we want justice.

Right. That is the call, that almost every protesting institution talks about. But well, this is a notion of justice again, which we understand less, but we feel more strongly about. Right. So, we understand less, I say this with most humility. Because, we need to spend time to understand, to flesh out the notion of justice.

Justice again varies. The paradigm of justice varies. But, in each paradigm, justice is a constant. Right. That is to be understood, that in different paradigms, justice has varied. And, the paradigms have been revised.

And, the notion of justice has been revised. But, within the paradigm, there has been a dominant notion of justice. So, let us say, Plato's play, in which Thrasymachus is a character, simply as a sceptic or critic of justice, puts out, just is what the powerful call just. That means, the elite of the society, the elite of the community, or the nation, or the government, or the collective, decide what is just. And, what they call just, becomes just for the society. So, this is a critical, or a sceptical view of justice, that justice is merely a power play.

Right. But, justice is something, and this has been frequently debated. We have looked at various paradigms of justice. And, John Rawls is the most recent figure. So, there is a debate between Rawls versus Nozick, about the notion of justice. Now, this is a debate that, if you are curious about the notion of justice, and how philosophically it is analysed, you might like to go ahead and explore this debate.

But, otherwise, it is not necessary, at the moment. So, the example of say, Retributive Justice, and Distributive Justice. Distributive Justice is, when there is demand, how do we ration limited benefits, amongst a much higher demand. So, what is the basis of distribution, of any limited resource, across different institutions, or individuals. So, Distributive Justice is about distribution.

Retributive Justice is about, Retribution as you know, would mean revenge. Retributive Justice talks about, how revenge can become a form of justice. If X harms Y, allowing Y to harm X, becomes a Retributive form of justice. Justice and punishment are deeply linked notions. So, Justice and Punishment.

Now, that is a close connection, that punishment is powered by justice. So, well, the judge say, in a court of law, the judge pronounces, or listens to the arguments of the two parties, and announces a judgement. Right. Now, the judge does this, on the basis of the law books, or the law of the land. The judge announces the punishment, or the acquittal.

And let us say, it is a case of punishment. The punishment is powered, or given in the name of the state. The state in India, which is represented by the symbol of the, say Ashoka Chakra. But, it is not the government. The government and the state are different entities, as just a passing clarification, in case.

The state is something, that has continued. The Indian state has been in continuous existence, say for the past seventy years, or since we became a republic. The Indian governments have been kept on changing. So, to look at it this way, the state is a vehicle, which is driven by different drivers, which are governments. So, as the elections throw up a new winner, that government drives the state.

So, the state has certain defining characters, which cannot be changed by the government. But anyway, that is a little bit of political philosophy. But, justice, equality, these are notions, where the notion of Ethics, fuse into the notion of political philosophy, and political ideology. Right. Okay. Perhaps, this is also an apt moment for me to make a clarification, that what is the difference between a philosophy, and ideology.

Now, philosophy is well, eternally revisable. Right. So, if there is a better option, on the basis of rationality, that claim can be revised. Philosophy is almost a commitment, that now it is no more open to revision. So, when we look at justice, and the nature of revisability of justice, it is as a philosophy, as political philosophy, as moral philosophy, fusing into political philosophy.

Okay. Now, say look at justice and punishment. And passing notions around justice, that what should be the rationale of punishment. The rationale of punishment should be, deterrence, retribution, or reform, or a combination of these three. Now, this is a classic case of, how does justice matter, how does our understanding of justice, make a difference. It makes a difference to, how we conceptualise the notion of punishment, of legal punishment.

Deterrence is when, punishment is given with the aim of deterring future offenders. Right. So, it scares away people, and it sets an example. When we talk about a punishment, to set an example. That is typically the, deterrence model of punishment. Suction model of punishment, is the concept, that looks at revenge. That well, a certain loss has been inflicted, may be equivalent, or a little more, has to be inflicted on the person, who has inflicted the punishment.

Right. Reform is looking at, erroneous or criminal behaviour, as something which needs attention and treatment. So, when we look at, justice or punishment as reform, we

are looking at, the philosophy of giving a punishment, to reform people. So now, if you see, juvenile prisons, reform centres. So, prisons are now, slowly being formed into, reformation centres, that to change the way, we are looking at the criminals, not as somebody, who deserves punishment as retribution, or deterrence for others.

But, rather somebody, who can be reformed and reintegrated into the society. Now, the next notion, that we talk about is, Equality. Now, Equality is again, similar to Justice, in use. It is more vociferously argued for, than defined.

Right. So, we think, the call for equality is tremendous. But then, if we dig a little deeper, and these are all fused concepts, between moral philosophy and political philosophy. So, when we look at formal equality. Formal equality says, treat like cases alike.

That seems to be most commonsensical. If two people are alike, in all aspects, they should be treated alike. Of course, two people are never alike. And this principle is only formal. So, are two people alike, all aspects. That is the key word, that we look into.

Well, things would have been equal, if well, two people were alike in all aspects. But, they are not. They come from different histories, they come from different ideologies, they come from different advantages, experiences. Therefore, to temper it, is a human phenomena. The judge in a courtroom, cannot look at, well, in such and such case, so and so precedence matters. In such and such case, so and so, a decision was taken.

But, in this case, we just cannot replicate that decision taken, even if the situations are similar. Because, situations can never be identical. So, formal equality is easy, but it rarely occurs in the world out there. Moral equality is a rejection of natural hierarchy, equality in terms of dignity.

Now, dignity is a very crucial phase here. That what is it, to give human dignity. When we look at individuals, as human beings, by the very birth, or by their very being, they have rights. And, that is always connected to human dignity. Because, the dominant conceptualisation is that, dignity is something that comes to our being.

And therefore, dignity is automatically allotted to a fellow human being. Right. But then, what are the other forms of equality, that can be. There can be equality of opportunity. There can be equality of outcome. When we look at opportunity versus outcome, it makes a whole lot of difference.

Equality of opportunity is investing in education. So, if you look at a classical example

of Navodaya schools, as they are run in India, for the underprivileged class, thoroughly subsidised, and best quality of education supported by the state. So, this is pushing up, making the differences in childhood, balancing the differences in childhood. Equality of outcome, the typical example you could see is the, notion of taxation. Well, if the rich are taxed very high, and the poor are given that as subsidy, this is actually making an equality of outcome.

So, that means, no matter how, what effort is done, and where wealth is redistributed to equal levels. Right. So, these are again kinds of equality. So, somebody may be fighting for equality of opportunity, somebody may be fighting for equality of outcome. And therefore, they are both fighting for equality, but are on the opposite sides.

So, because their definition of equality is different. Yes. Okay. So with this, these notions of justice equality, are thoroughly political notions. So, as we can see that, now that when you look at these terms, or where you come across these terms in literature, you should be able to identify, in what sense, these are used. Right. Next we come to the, notion of Love and Purusharthas. .