

Ethics
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Module No 4
Lecture 20
Concluding Remarks

Welcome to this lecture series on ethics. This is the last lecture in this lecture series. So we are going to conclude our discussions for the time being. And this lecture is not going to focus on any particular theme but rather I am trying to summarise the certain issues and also highlight some of the important aspects which is relevant for understanding ethics in today's life, contemporary age.

And this we will do in continuation with what we have done in the previous lecture where I have discussed existentialism and ethics. That is actually a very important stage because though existentialism is a philosophical thought, is not as popular as it used to be today. In 20th-century, it was very popular, particularly the 1st half of 20th century, it was very popular. Till the death of Sartre during 80s, it was very popular.

But then after that, its popularity dwindled, came down considerably and now in philosophy and the post modern tendencies are dominating particularly in reconstruction and Foucault's thought and many other things. And there are many heated debate going on between many approaches to philosophy. I do not want to call it schools of thought but many approaches to philosophy. There are debates between Derrida and Habermas, then Habermas and Foucault and all kinds of debates are going on.

And on many occasions, ethics also acquires a major importance. And another important aspect of today's ethics or rather discussions on ethics is that there is a focused on practical ethics or rather applied ethics as we have seen in the beginning like when I discussed the 1st lecture I have discussed the different divisions which we make in ethics, the normative ethics and metaethics, then applied ethics and then the moral psychology.

Out of which, the applied ethics gives a lot of importance today. There is a reason for that. The reason is that today our society is becoming more and more complex. Different functions ((
(2:23) society is acquiring a lot of importance today. So naturally, their ethical function is also a

concern for society as a whole and philosophers and ethicists are debating about it a lot and several other areas like business ethics, journalism ethics, bioethics, all these are areas of practical ethics which is gaining importance today and several other issues like capital punishment, a question of justice, population ethics and then again you have problems about the refugees.

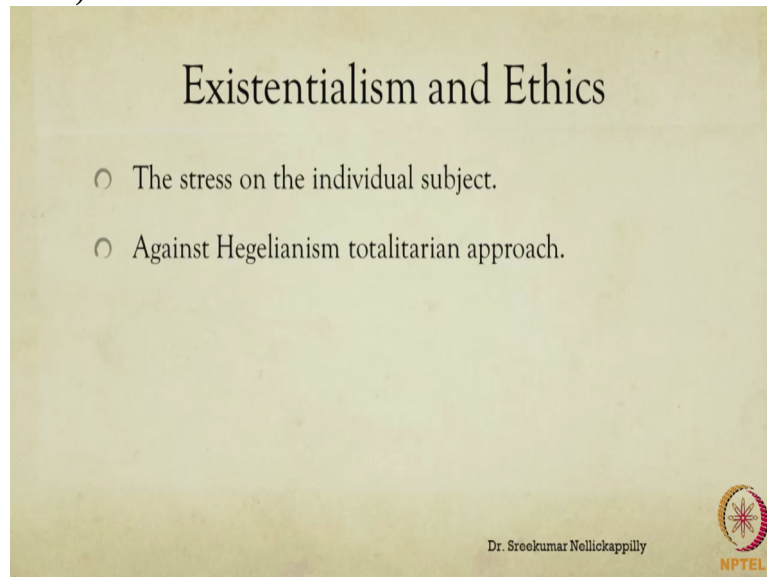
So ethical issues connected with that, environmental ethics. There are a lot of issues which we face today as far as ethics is concerned or a student of ethics is concerned, there are lot of things to be interested in. So we will just try to conclude that but before that lets try to see in continuation with what we have been doing in the previous lecture. We have been discussing existential ethics and particularly the contributions of Sartre, John Paul Sartre, the French philosopher.

And one important aspect of existential ethics is the stress on the individual subject which is not just existentialism but the contemporary philosophy, contemporary ethics by and large emphasises on this aspect, the individual because one thing is evident that traditional ethical frameworks like Kantianism, utilitarianism and many other frameworks, we could see that the emphasis was on collectivity. The whole is always emphasised.

And when they discuss ethical frameworks, the concern is for the entire humanity and often, what happens is the basic concerns, the fundamental concerns of the individual man, the subject is often completely neglected. So existentialism can be understood as a protest against this tendency in philosophy as well as in ethics. So the stress on individualism or stress on the individual subject is one of the characteristic aspects of existential ethics.

Then again, when we talk about individualism or subjectivism, we have to actually see what existentialists have done.

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In one sense we could see that you know many existentialists even from the beginning itself, Floren Kirkgard himself was criticising the Hegelian approaches in philosophy, Hegelian totalitarian approach or rather the idealistic, absoluticst approach in philosophy where in hegel's philosophy we know that the concept of absolute dominates, the guist, the universal spirit or the universal mind. And everything is seen as a manifestation of this universal spirit, the individuality of things are neglected. So there is a tendency to unify everything and bring everything under one particular concept one particular theoretical framework or even a kind of a pattern, a common pattern.

To identify the common pattern has become a concern for philosophers and ethicists, the traditional philosophical frameworks. So this kind of an approach is opposed, criticised by existential philosophers and again to save the lost individual is a concern here. The individual is somewhere, somewhat lost in this collectivity, in this emphasis on hold and absolute.

So there is a concern for saving the individual. And again the world that has lost any higher meaning. So there is a concern for this world. See, what we could see is that particularly in the light of the criticism which is raised by Nietzsche and many other philosophers by towards the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century and even up to the 1st half of 20th century, there is a sense of loss of meaning, any higher meaning to human life and human reality in general.

This was one of the most turbulent periods in recent history. This period was marked with 2 world wars, immense poverty, exploitation, totalitarian regimes, particularly in Europe and many other places and the rise of communism, the war between different ideologies. So it was an age of crisis, it was an age of confusion, it was an age of conflict. So in this context what happens is that often there is a total neglect happens as far as the individual is concerned.

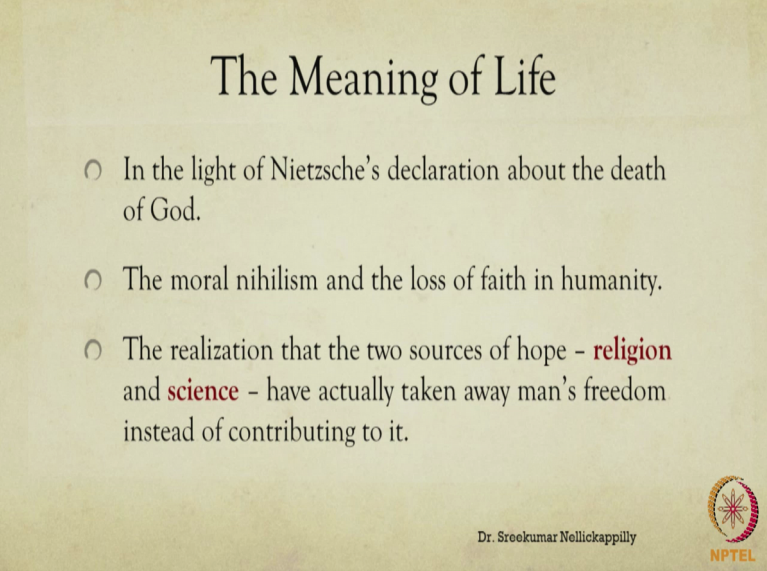
The individual, who is bothered about the individual? We have more important issues to resolve. But the individual subject has his or her own problems. He or she lives in a society among other people and faces certain issues which needs to be addressed and find solutions for. So these issues are also being discussed by the existentialists. And in this context, they raised the meaning of life in a big way.

Particularly the existential philosophers like Sartre and even many others and through their normals and short stories and other things. See for instance, Albert Camus, one of the prominent French philosopher and writer, he is a nobel laureate in literature. So one of the central issues of Camus's writings is absurdity, that life is fundamentally absurd. So there is a kind of meaninglessness about life which dominates life.

And one of his books itself is the myth of Sisyphus. The title of the book itself is quite suggestive because it talks about the myth of Sisyphus, the Greek character, Sisyphus who rolls a stone towards the mountain top every day and before he reaches the top, the stone slips down and goes away. And you would find agonised Sisyphus. So through this myth, Camus was trying to picturise the human destiny, the human predicament ultimately, the meaninglessness of human life.

Man does everything, human beings do everything to have a happy life, to have a meaningful life, to have a fruitful life but ultimately everything gets shattered. So this is what the myth suggests. So the meaning of life has been raised for the 1st time probably in a concrete manner by problematising, by seeing that this is a problem for the individual, not in general for all human beings but for each individual, this is a problem and it has to be solved.


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The Meaning of Life

- In the light of Nietzsche's declaration about the death of God.
- The moral nihilism and the loss of faith in humanity.
- The realization that the two sources of hope - **religion** and **science** - have actually taken away man's freedom instead of contributing to it.

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Particularly this problem becomes very important in the light of Nietzsche's philosophy and in the light of his declaration about the death of god because as I mentioned in the previous lecture, the death of god Nietzsche saw it, it has nothing to do with the religious faith in God in a direct manner. Rather, it represents a situation, a whole situation where morality becomes meaningless in a society. The wholeness is lost. That power which used to unite society and human kind as one is lost now.

So this situation, this whole situation which is called the death of god introduces several issues both for the society and for the individual and the moral nihilism and the loss of faith in humanity is something which is a consequence of this death of god. And here, the realisation that the 2 source of hope which modernity had, we have seen this, in the previous lecture I mentioned this that modernity always highlighted to important contributions of humankind, religion and science.

And modernity had lot of hope on these 2. One is a spiritual one, the other one is a material one. Both of them would take us to progress, spiritual progress through religion and material progress through modern science. And ultimately human beings can enjoy the kind of progress which is promised by science through various achievements that scientists are going to find out. But what happens is that by around the middle of 20th-century or rather even before that, there is a

realisation that these 2 sources of hope have actually taken away man's freedom instead of contributing to it.

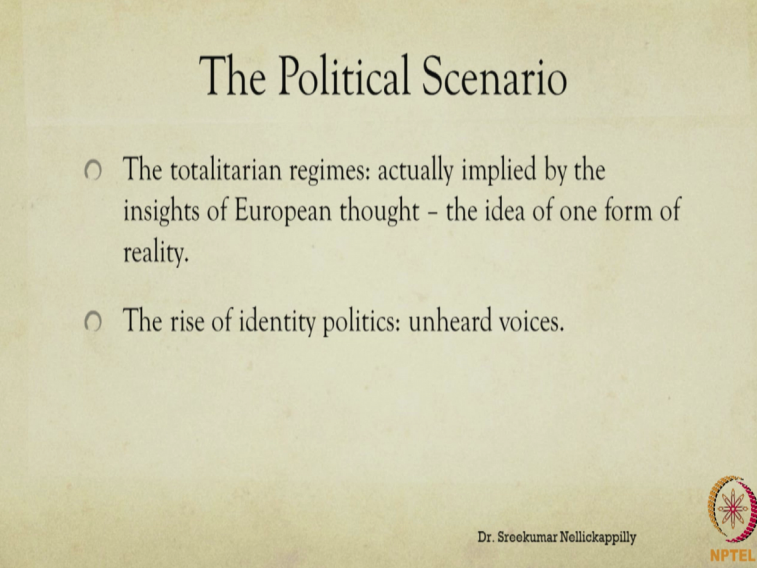
We could see that religions have been doing it systematically that it is always trying to make man a part of a whole, never recognising his or her individuality. Then again, when it comes to science, instead of contributing, instead of making man's life happier and also freer, what science has actually done is that it created bombs and made human life more miserable. So all these ironies which is part of human experience, human history which the 20th-century Europeans have directly encountered, have generated raising of several important questions in philosophy.

And it would be interesting in this context to examine the political scenario as well. We could see that the several totalitarian regimes in Europe, particularly in Germany and in Italy and to some extent in Russia. So these totalitarian regimes under the leaderships of Nazri, the Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, they have actually taken away the human freedom from individual subjects.

The basic freedom from individual subjects was taken away and one important point to be kept in mind is that these totalitarian approaches in politics, they have their roots in the intellectual tradition of the West, the philosophical tradition of the west. The very idea of one reality, one form and one reality as I mentioned sometime back, the single pattern to identify and locate the single pattern in humanity and human reality or human history.

So somewhere you could see that these factors, these political factors which ultimately took away human freedom have their intellectual roots in the philosophical tradition of the West. So they have completely lost faith in the philosophical tradition.


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The Political Scenario

- The totalitarian regimes: actually implied by the insights of European thought - the idea of one form of reality.
- The rise of identity politics: unheard voices.

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And again the rise of identity politics is something which is quite significant in 20th-century Europe. For instance, several groups arguing for their rights all over Europe and also in United States. The Blacks started protesting against the white supremacy at several levels. We know the struggle under the leadership of Martin Luther King and many others in the United States.

And all the colonies of Europe, the colonies of Europe in Asia and Africa and Latin America, many of these places have started protesting against the European Masters. They want freedom, they demanded freedom and all these have made the whole of 20th-century very chaotic. So the political scenario itself was emphasising not on totalising everything but rather particularising.

Each group seems to be arguing for its individual freedom. This ultimately could be emphasis on particularity manifested in 2 ways. On the one hand, several countries, several nations and several communities started arguing for it. On the other hand, individuals also demanded more freedom.

Another way in which this is manifested is through identity politics, several forms of identity politics, several groups for example the disadvantaged groups in many communities, in many societies, the Blacks in US is an example. If you come to the Indian context, we could see that many groups like the Dalits and other groups have protesting for their rights.

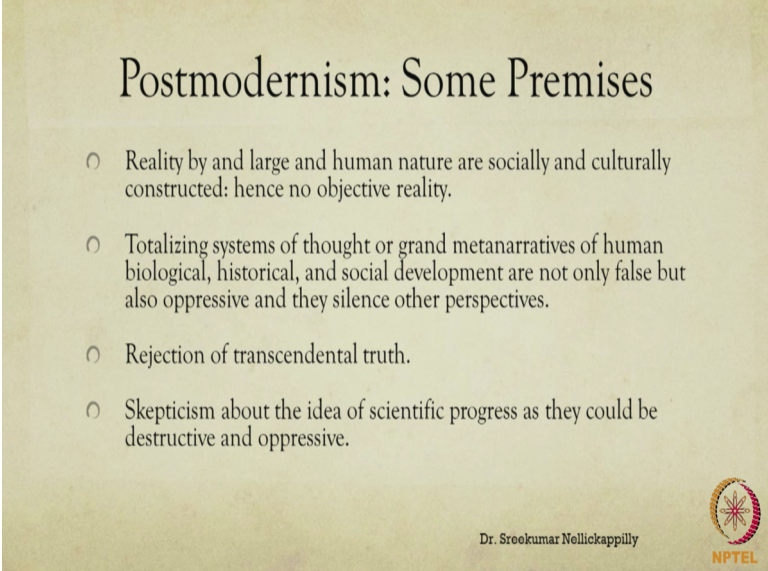
Then the men are protesting. So there are several pieces we could see that the feminist protests were emerging. So all these things or all this phenomena make the political and social scenario of 20th-century extremely chaotic and confusing. Then the disadvantaged groups and their problems were highlighted by the identity politics proponents. Now post-modernism becomes relevant in this context because post-modernism in one sense gives a lot of importance to these particularities, to this pluralities.

And it is if there is one thing which post-modernism opposes with all rigour, that is the idea of universal rationality, one reason, one singular pattern or the totalising approaches in philosophy and human thinking and in politics is something which post-modernism seems to be posing. The very post-modernism itself suggests that it is post modernism.

And modernity as a whole stresses a lot on this totalising picture. There is this grand concepts like humanity, humankind as a whole. One single purpose for humankind, progress of humankind is defined in terms of certain principles which they believe is very important for them and there was an attempt to come up with a universal epic for all human beings.

But all these tendencies were abused with a lot of scepticism in different parts of the world. And all these things could together have given rise to what we today understand as post-modernism.

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The slide is titled "Postmodernism: Some Premises" and lists four key points:

- Reality by and large and human nature are socially and culturally constructed: hence no objective reality.
- Totalizing systems of thought or grand metanarratives of human biological, historical, and social development are not only false but also oppressive and they silence other perspectives.
- Rejection of transcendental truth.
- Skepticism about the idea of scientific progress as they could be destructive and oppressive.

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Reality by and large and human nature are socially and culturally constructed. Hence there is no objective reality or objective world as we understand it. See, everything is culturally constructed, everything is socially constructed. There is nothing which is given, there is nothing which can be treated as the sacred given by some external rule or external principle. So everything might change.

You know if something is socially constructed means what? It might undergo further modifications. The possibility of undergoing frequent modifications cannot be ruled out. So in this context again, you know the particularities are emphasised. Again, totalising systems of thought or grand metanarratives of human biological, historical and social development are not only false but are also oppressive and the silence other perspectives.

So this is very important to understand post-modernism. 1st of all, post-modernism as a whole opposes all metanarratives. A metanarrative is something which you know a narrative which includes all other narratives to put it linguistically. But what does it mean? See for instance, I will give an example. God is a metanarrative or anything that unites, that seems to be comprehensively containing everything, is a metanarrative.

So even modern science's conception of progress itself was a metanarrative. So there was growing suspicion against all such metanarratives and there is a blatant denial of such metanarrative by post-modernists. Say for instance let us take the example of progress or development. These terms, progress and development thereafter cannot be defined in terms of certain single variable.

Instead, progress and development need to be understood as concepts. Their meanings need to be understood in the context of the society or the community or the group to which we apply it. So what a particular society considers to be development and progress need not be what another community or society treats as development. For example, a modern European society will consider freedom, the more free, the freer community is, they would probably consider the progressive that community is.

But many societies or many nations in Africa and Latin America and even in Asia, would argue that they cannot afford freedom to that level. Even human rights, though we talk about universal

human rights, the way in which we understand human rights in different places are different, not just because the value systems are different but because our priorities are different. Many countries in Africa and Asia believe that their priorities lie in poverty alleviation, corruption and many other things.

But in Europe, and many other doors, the concerns are not poverty they can afford to think about more development in the areas of human freedom and equality and all that. But at the same time, the argument which I raised just now is also problematic. How can you say that freedom is not important, equality is not important? So progress needs to be understood equally in terms of freedom and also equality.

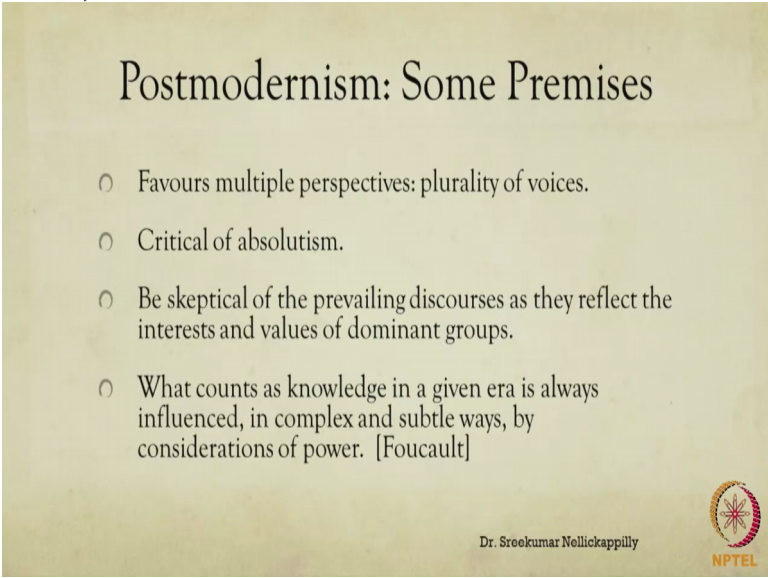
You cannot deny the importance of these concepts just because it is a Third World country or a developing country or an underdeveloped society. Even in those societies also, this is very important. So as a whole, we could see that the situation is extremely chaotic or confusing and we have to negotiate this confusion.

Another problem with this metanarrative is that these such metanarratives could be often oppressive and they silence other perspectives because they seem to be arguing that there was only one way in which we can think about development and progress. There are other perspectives, other concerns. So in its emphasis on this totality, in its emphasis on one singular pattern, it seems to be denying or rather neglecting the availability or rather the relevance of other perspectives in understanding it.

So all these aspects have to be taken into account one we try to understand the emergence of post-modernism. Then again, the rejection of transcendental truth. The concept of transcendental truth was very important for both pre-modern age as well as modern age. But post-modernity categorically rejects this concept of transcendental truth.

There is nothing which is transcendental. Everything is situated. And scepticism about the idea of scientific progress as they could be destructive and oppressive which I have already pointed out. Science was otherwise thought to be very going to help humanity to rise to progress, more progress and more development. It is ultimately proving to be more destructive. So this irony is also a mark of the post-modern age.


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Postmodernism: Some Premises

- Favours multiple perspectives: plurality of voices.
- Critical of absolutism.
- Be skeptical of the prevailing discourses as they reflect the interests and values of dominant groups.
- What counts as knowledge in a given era is always influenced, in complex and subtle ways, by considerations of power. [Foucault]

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Again, when you try to understand some of the important premises of post-modernism, we could see that it favours multiple perspectives, the plurality of voices. It is not just one voice but the plurality of voices and often conflicting each other. So we have to live with these conflicts, we have to live with these, we have to accept that there could be differences of opinions and we have to negotiate such differences.

So our present predicament is to accept such differences and negotiate them and then again it is critical of all forms of absolutism at all realms of life. Not just in politics but in society and in culture and in literature and in various other forms of life, everywhere, wherever that the possibility of absolutism, that has to be opposed or rather post-modernism opposes it. Be skeptical of the prevailing discourses as they reflect the interests and values of dominant groups.

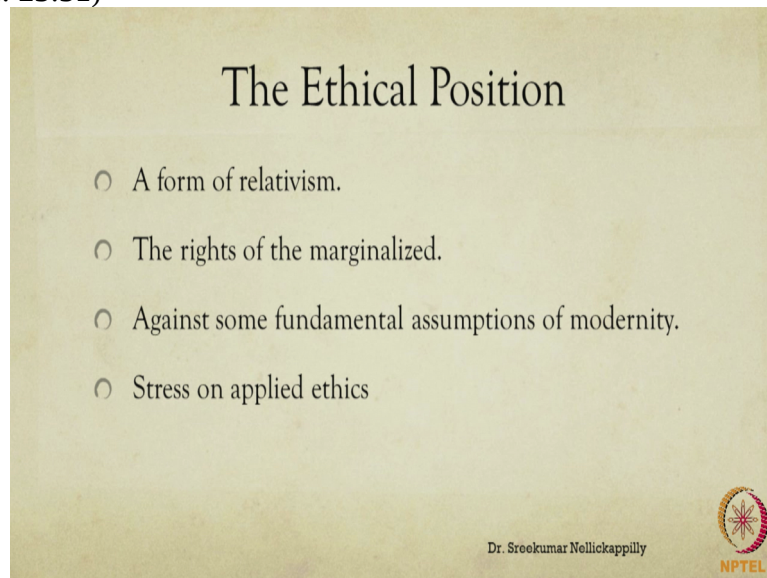
So this is another thing. Anything that prevails today seems to be dominating, needs to be understood or needs to be approached with a lot of suspicion. We have to critically evaluate them because they could be preserved and in that way, they can neglect some very important concerns of certain groups of people. What counts as knowledge again as Foucault says: this is a very interesting observation by Foucault.

What he says is that what counts as knowledge in a given era is always influenced in subtle ways by considerations of power. So Foucault is one philosopher who has pointed out

that there is an important connection between knowledge and power. There is no knowledge without power. So this is another realisation of the post-modern era.

And the ethical position of post-modernism is also can be understood as a form of lativism, the rights of the marginalised is always emphasised because often this is neglected.

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The rights of the marginalised is often neglected but the post-modern temperament emphasises that this needs to be taken into account and considered. And again, it is against some fundamental assumptions of modernity. This I have already mentioned, certain of themselves like faith in science and religion, faith in modern science particularly that science will take us to progress, all these things are questioned and viewed with a lot of suspicion and stress on applied ethics.

This is also I pointed out. In the beginning pointed out that you know there is a lot of stress on applied ethics because this functional spheres with which we live in today's complex society, each needed to be addressed separately, you cannot have one single ethical framework which would take care of all the problems that might be arising from all the spheres of life which constitute modern society or modern life or contemporary age.

So you need to have separate ethical considerations to be given to problems that arise from these distinct frameworks or these distinct spheres of life. Now we will try to wind up our discussion

on this course, the course on ethics. Before I conclude, let me also point out the emerging realm of applied ethics. Of course we all know that this is not something which is very new to ethical deliberations. The applied part of ethics was always there.

Even in the premodern era, this was there. Say for example if we examine the textbooks of ayurveda which was composed some 2000 years ago or even bigger than that, we could see that there are strong ethical prescriptions mentioned in these texts by Charaga and Shudshruta and even Wakpadha. The same is the case with European medical tradition as well, hypocritic oath.

But at the same time, the increasing emphasis on the applied part of ethics is a recent phenomenon. And as I mentioned, the unique concerns of each realm is getting special attention in today's world.

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The Realm of Applied Ethics

- The different functional spheres of modern society raise several ethical challenges.
- Each needs to be addressed taking into account certain peculiarities.
- New developments in science, politics, and new trends in global trade like liberalization.
- Different realms like bioethics, business ethics, information technology, environmental ethics, new media etc.

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So the different functional spheres of modern society raise several ethical challenges and each needs to be addressed taking into account certain peculiarities or peculiar features of that particular realm. See for example, medicine. The practice of medicine demands that you know it needs to be addressed in a very different way than when we try to understand what happens in business or what happens in journalism or what happens in certain other domains.

But at the same time they they are also interconnected. So we cannot any more go with a single ethical framework to find a solution for problems that may arise from different realms. We need

to have specific separate frameworks. New development in science, politics and new trends in global trade like liberalise. Liberalisation has completely revolutionised our ways of thinking and ways of living.

So these aspects need to be taken into account and again, different realms like bioethics, business ethics, information technology, and environmental ethics, new media et cetera are generating, or actually giving rise to lot of issues which modern day, contemporary man has to negotiate with, has to tackle with. For example as I mentioned bioethics.

Often you know, towards the middle of 20th-century, after the Second World War, we realise that the practice of medicine can no longer be allowed without stressing upon the ethical factors or rather without stressing the ethical factors. So several committees were formed at the global level, say for example, several incidents happened, several unfortunate incidents happened in the history and these incidents actually opened our eye and reminded us that there is a need to arrive at regulations, there is a need to arrive at guidelines, global guidelines for the practice of medicine.

As a result, philosophers and ethicists have come up, come together, they have come together and deliberated about it and finally, nowadays what happens is in practice of medicine, certain principles are followed globally in many places of the world like say for example the principle of autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, these are the 4 principal approach which was developed by Bosham Thomas Chaldress.

So the principlist approach actually takes a lot of insights from the traditional, ethical frameworks like deontologism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics and various other framework. They have not entirely different, they are not presenting something entirely different from the already existent and familiar frameworks. They are only trying to isolate certain principles and find an application for these principles in certain concrete context.

And then in other areas like for example business ethics, business ethics particularly after liberalisation has acquired totally different dimensions. So naturally, it needs to be addressed in a different way, in a more rigourous manner. Then again information technology is raising several

very serious concerns like for example privacy has become an important concern in the modern day.

Because you know, privacy is under threat. At any moment, anyone can be hacked, anyone's private information can be hacked. So all these things create a world which actually make many new important ethical issues relevant which otherwise we were not familiar with. And environmental ethics, new media, et cetera.

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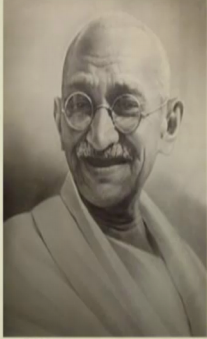


And this man, his name is Arnenes. He is proposing a new framework in which is called deep ecology, to address certain issues that might arise in the domain of an environmental ethics.


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The Realm of Practical Ethics

- Several complex issues in human life like: suicide, euthanasia, infanticide, capital punishment, population, animal ethics etc.
- The new perspectives of deep ecology, non-violence etc.



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And here he takes a lot of insights from Mahatma Gandhi. He was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. In the realm of practical ethics we could see that several complex issues in human life like suicide, euthanasia, infanticide, capital punishment, population, problems associated with migration, animal ethics, there are many such issues which today ethicists are interested in and debating.

Because they are all pressing issues of humanity and again as I mentioned, the new perspective of deep ecology and nonviolence. Deep ecology actually takes a lot from Gandhian perspective, the perspective of nonviolence, satyagraha and all which Gandhi developed. We are living in a world where we have lot of issues to debate, to understand but at the same time, we also have a lot of new perspectives.

Lot of ethicists and lot of social reformers are coming up with new perspectives. Application of certain traditional perspectives in new contexts like what Mahatma Gandhi did. The traditional Indian insights about ahimsa, he practised it in the modern world, the 20th-century mechanised, industrialised, modern world. And again, these Gandhian insights were practised by or rather adapted by Arnesen handle his own deep ecology perspective.

Gandhiji also influenced people like Martin Luther King in your advocates who fought against the white supremacy. Then Nelson Mandela who fought against the racist government in roughly.

There are many such issues humanity faced in the 20th-century and we have also seen that people are tackling them, people are grappling with them and tackling them with novel perspectives they develop or they take from traditional insights.

So we will conclude this lecture series by examining how ethics appears or rather what issues are levelled in the present age. One good thing about the present age is that there is a lot of awareness among people. Different groups of people are about their rights and also there are different groups who argue for the rights of other groups, other, disadvantaged groups all that.

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There is a call for a multi-perspectival approach today because we have increasingly realised that we cannot solve complex human problems which we find today, the complex ethical issues which we encounter in today's world with one single perspective. We need to really adopt multi-perspectival approach. Then again, identity politics is also actually raising a lot of issues but at the same time they also the significant concerns which otherwise get neglected.

So that is also very important, the concerns or the problems faced by women. Then, disadvantaged groups, everything is raised in the name of identity politics in today's world. So there is a lot of emphasis on rights of different groups. Rather than addressing all problems with a blanket term, human rights, we have now rights of X, rights of Y, rights of Z, rights of different groups, concrete groups have been addressed.

See for example, the right of the marginalised and the disadvantaged like homosexuals all these issues come up today. They go to the court and they also approach various other forums asserting their rights and there is a awareness among the general public that there is a need to recognise their rights and to arrive at broader frameworks where we can be more and more inclusive and accommodating.

It all calls for a new politics. This optimistic note that you know we might avoid a better political framework to accommodate all these concerns and arrive at a broader ethical framework. So we are living in such a world where we have lot of options but at the same time, we have more problems than what we can solve. So it is an extremely difficult phase in life, no doubt about it, even then let us conclude our mischief is lecture series with a positive note, with a very optimistic note that many of these issues are created by us.

So we can definitely find solution to many of them and definitely the search for better solutions will continue. I will wind up this lecture series here, thank you.