# Institute of Distance and Open Learning

## GAUHATI UNIVERSITY

## MA in Philosophy

### (Previous Year)

### Paper- IV

# ETHICS

## Contents:

## Paper  Introduction–

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## Paper Introduction:

This paper will introduce you with ethics. Ethics is also called "Moral Philosophy" Because it deals with customs-traditions and conducts of human beings. Morsoner ethics is also concerned with rightness and wrongness. Right or wrong and good or bad actions are connected with the moral ideal or moral standard. Therefore ethics is a science in so far as it depends upon observation, classification and explanation of human conduct with reference to an ideal.

This paper contains 2 (two) half. In each half there are 4 (four) units. The first half consist of the units namely "Ethical Theories of plato", "Aristotle", "Mill" and "Kant". Again the second half contains. "Ethical Theories of Moore", "Ayer", "Stevenson" and "Hare"

After going through the First Half of this paper you will be able understand the philosophy of Aristotle and Mills on Ethics. Here you will be able to know about a Nature of various activity", "Aristotle's concepts of novel", "Moral Responsibility.", "Bentham's influence of Mill", Mill's idea on utilitarianism", Types of utilitarianism.

When you go though the Second Half of this paper. You will have a deep understanding on Moore's Ethical Theory. Again in the unit 4 in this half you will get good discussion on the philosophy of R.M. Hare on Ethics.

In this SLM we are including the following units.

**FIRST HALF:**

       **Unit2   :**       **Aristotle**
       **Unit 3  :**       **Mills**

**SECOND HALF:**

       **Unit 1  :**       **Ethical Theories of Moore**
       **Unit 4  :**       **Hare**

# First Half

<div align="center">**Unit 2**</div>

<div align="center">**Aristotle**</div>

Contents:

## 2.1 Introduction

Before we delvelop into the ethical theory of Aristotle, we presume we must have a little bit of idea about Ethics or Moral Philosophy. Ethics originally meant what relates to character as distinct from intellect. The virtues and views which are the qualities of character constituted only one element in the subject of the treatise of Aristotle which this term was used to denote. According to the Aristotelian view, which is virtually the view of Greek Philosophy, the main subject matter of ethics is all that is included under the notion of what is ultimately good or desirable for man.

Ethics, according to Aristotle, is concerned with the human coaching as we find him. We should remember always that the human being is a composite being with body, passions and parts which determine the nature of his good and underpin his moral character. It is the business of ethics, according to Aristotle, to determine on a purely scientific basis the kind of life that is best for such a being. At this juncture we find a marked difference between Plato and Aristotle.

Plato thought that ethics was not confined to the ordinary limits of human life. In Plato's thought ethics lost itself in ideal utopias. But Aristotle was away from this kind of Platonic thinking; rather he had a pragmatic view in this regard. Aristotle

<div align="center">(7)</div>

wishes to enquire what the good is, but he does not mean that the ideal good is impossible of attainment. He thinks of that good which ought to be realizable. Thus Aristotle keeps close within the bounds of actual human experience. Aristotle has discarded in ethics the transcendentalism of Plato and retained from Plato's teaching the original Socratic method of induction from and verification by common opinion. Thus Aristotle leads us to the fundamental notion of ultimate end of good for man. All men, while they act, aim at some result, either for its own sake or a means to some further end.

We find, in fact, that men commonly recognize such an end and agree to call it wellbeing. But men take very different views of its nature. How, then, shall we find to true view? We may say that man, as man, has his proper function; the "wellbeing" or "doing well" lies in fulfilling well the proper function of man. Is it the meaning of the term "wellbeing"? For Aristotle the most perfect wellbeing consists in the exercise of man's divinest part, pure speculative reason. But he keeps far from the paradox of pulling forward this. A moderate provision of material wealth is indirectly included as an indispensable pre-requisite of a due performance of man's function as Aristotle conceives it. There remain other goods, such as beauty, good birth, welfare of progeny and so on. These Aristotle neither attempts to exclude from the philosophic conception of wellbeing nor to include in his formal definition of it. This is a sort of looseness which is attached to his fundamental doctrine. This implies more or less his whole discussion of ethics. The aim of Aristotle is to give not a perfectly definite theory of human good but an adequate account of its most important constituents.

According to Aristotle the most important element of wellbeing or good life for common men consists in wellbeing as determined by the notions of the different moral excellences. Gradually we enter the ethical theory of Aristotle.

The central question for ethics is the nature of the 'Summum Bonum'. We desire one thing for the sake of a second which we desire for the sake of a third. But do the series of means and ends go on endlessly? If so, all our desires and all some one thing which we desire, not for the sake of anything else, but on its own account. What is this 'Summum Bonum'? All human activity ultimately aims at this. According to Aristotle the name of this end is happiness. All men seek happiness which is the motive of all their actions. Men desire for the sake of itself one nothing beyond. But philosophers are not unanimous in regard to the exact meaning of the word happiness. Some hold that it is a life of pleasures; others say it lies in the renunciation of pleasures. According to Plato also the 'Summum Bonum' is happiness.

## 2.2 Development of the Ethical Theory

The moment we think that Aristotle emphasizes happiness to be the summum bonum, we may labour under a wrong impression that he sides with the hedonist. But this is not the case. For Aristotle the enjoyment is the consequence of the moral value. But the utilitarian doctrine holds that the enjoyment is the ground of the moral value. It should be remember here that when Aristotle says that the highest good is happiness, he does not give us any information on its nature, but merely applies a new name to it. Everyone agrees upon the name; but the real question is what this name connotes.

How then are we do find and define human happiness? The answer is not so difficult. Just as each organ of the body has its distinctive function and uncases its wellbeing or 'happiness' by the degree of excellence or 'virtue', so man's happiness will go hand in hand with the excellent operation of his distinctive activity, which is reason.

In modern times the word happiness signifies the feeling of enjoyment. But according to the Greek line of thinking, it was the moral activity which the word signified. Aristotle thinks that an action is not good because it produces enjoyment. Aristotle has repeatedly said that the good for man will not consist in the pleasure of the senses. Sensation is not the special function of man.

According to Plato, happiness is the end at which all our activities aim and to which they strive to become the means. It is highly important for us to know in what happiness consists; but since human nature is varied and variable, its very difficult to know exactly what happiness is. In short, ethics is doomed from the start to be an inexact and approximative science; as a result it has become a less agreeable and less worthy object of intellectual study.

In Nicomachean Ethics (X,3.) Aristotle has said: "It seems clear, then, that neither is the pleasure the good nor is all pleasure desirable…………… though some pleasures are desirable in themselves, differing in kind or in their sources from the other." Pleasure really is the complition or crown of an activity—the reward bestowed by nature for proper functioning. Pleasure accompanies morally desirable and morally undesirable activities alike. Still it is itself morally neutral. Though entangled with happiness it is not itself happiness. Happiness, however, like pleasure is involved in action and bound up with it. Though the goal of activity, it does not put an end to the activity that attains it. But to feel happiness it must last more than a moment to be realized. It needs a certain length of time for its fruition. It is doubtful whether an individual can be called truly happy even at the end of a long life, if he is not honoured after his death.

For the best and most complete operation of our total human nature, certain external conditions like friends, money, children, good birth and good looks are quite necessary. It should be remembered that human happiness lies in the complete operation of our total human nature.

Again the excellent or happy functioning of the human organism presupposes on his intellectual side education and enlightment; on its ethical side the functioning of the human organism presupposes the inculcation of habits. According to Socrates and Plato, moral principles are inborn; the sophists taught that moral principles are artificial and conventional but according to Aristotle they are developed. The aim of education and of the inculcation of habits is to make virtuous functioning as spontaneously as possible.

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**Stop to Consider:**

Aristotle considered virtues and vices to be the qualities of character which is the primary subject-matter of Ethics. So far as Ethics is concerned, Aristotle has a pragmatic attitude. He is after an enquiry into the nature of the good which can be attained. He tries to give an adequate account of the important constituents of it. Aristotle, while discussing the idea of the good, comes to the 'Summum Bonum' which means happiness. By no means he sides with the hedonist. He thinks that the enjoyment is the consequence of the moral value. Further, Aristotle has not mentioned Benevolence properly in his account of virtue. He has made a passing reference to it in the imperfect form of liberality. It's different to form a clear-cut idea of it.

From moral excellences Aristotle passed to analyse the intellectual aspect. He speaks of speculative wisdom and practical wisdom. Speculative wisdom is in a sense practical because it exercises over the highest form of human activity.

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## 2.3 Nature of Virtuous Activity

What is the mark of excellent or "Virtuous" activity? How can we know that we are on the road to happiness? The test of excellence and guarantee of happiness are to be found, Aristotle holds, in the degree to which activities are exercised. Activities are virtuous when it is exercised neither insufficiently nor excessively, but in moderation. Over indulgence and over suppression of any activity are both vicious. According to Aristotle, right conduct is just enough and wrong conduct is too much or too little, of a given function. This is the famous Aristotelian doctrine of virtue as the 'golden mean' a doctrine characteristic of the Greek passion for

balance and reasonableness. This is also expressed philosophically by Plato.

This golden mean is not absolute but relative; it differs with respect to the individual and to the object, time, place and circumstances of the action. Experience and good test are important factors. Experience shows us that on the whole it is preferable to swing towards under doing rather than towards over doing. It should be noted that there is no opposition here of intrinsically higher to intrinsically lower activities. All the functions with which ethics is concerned are in themselves morally neutral. Their goodness or badness or their bearing upon human happiness is completely determined by the degree of their exercise. Precisely the same function is virtuous in moderation and is vicious in excess.

Virtue means that the appetites are to be controlled; it is not necessary that they must be eradicated. Hence, there are two extremes to be avoided. It is extreme to attempt to uproot the passions; and it is extreme, on the other side, to allow them to run riot. Virtue means, according to Aristotle, moderation. It consists in hitting the happy mean as regards the passions. Passions are to be controlled and not to be completely eradicated. The golden mean is to be pursued. Everything is all right.

Now the question is—what is the criterion here? Who is to judge? How we to know what are is the proper mean in any matter? Aristotle refuses to lay down any rule what so ever. There is no golden rule by virtue of which we can tell where the proper mean is. It all depends on circumstances and on the person involved. What is the proper mean in one case is not the proper mean in another. What is moderate for one man is immoderate for his neighbour. Hence, the matter must be left to the good judgment of individual. At last, Aristotle hints at "insight" which is required to know the mean; insight is a sort of fine tact and good sense. This insight is both the cause and the effect of virtue. It is the cause because the person who has insight knows what he ought to do. It is the effect because it is only developed by practice. Virtue renders virtue easy. A person with the help of his insight rightly decides upon the mean.

Aristotle attempts no systematic classification of the virtues as Plato has done. But this runs counter to the pragmatic attitude of Aristotle. There are as many virtues as there are circumstances in life. Aristotle's list of virtues is nearly illustrative. According to him, there are certain well-recognized kinds of good action which are virtually virtues. By way of narration of these virtues Aristotle illustrates his doctrine of the mean.

Let us try to define virtue in the narrower sense of cause after Aristotle. The term cannot imply a mere natural feeling or susceptibility to feeling. Rather, he denotes

a settled habit, formed by a course of actions under rule a discipline. Ultimately it stands thus: The virtuous man, without internal conflict, desires action which hit the happy mean in their effects. So far virtue is like technical skill which also is a result of practice. But virtue differs from skill in involving a deliberate choice of virtuous acts. The "happy mean" is not a mere arithmetical mean between the possible alternative extremes: it is determined in each case relatively to the agent and to the circumstances of the action.

Aristotle's list of particular virtues is also partly framed on the basis of Plato's. It is Plato's list enlarged by number of notions introduced from common discourse. But the two thinker's viz., Plato and Aristotle differ strikingly in their treatment of the cardinal virtues; for Plato tends in his account of each particular virtue to enlarge the notion until it might fairly stand for virtue in general. On the otherhand Aristotle's analytical intellect and inductive method lead him rather to define too narrowly the terms which he takes from common discourse. Keeping the conceptions of wisdom and justice or uprightness aside Aristotle begins with courage and temperance taking them to be excellences of the "internal element" of the soul.

Aristotle analyses courage with special care and subtlety. In the strict and proper use of the word its sphere is nearly restricted to war. Courage is manifested in the fearless facing of the chances that bring death. Further, courage proper—in the sense it is a virtue is to be distinguished from the "civic courage" of which the motive is the fear of disgrace or pain.

As courage is restricted to war, Temperance is similarly, taken as solely concerned with the pleasures of hunger, thirst and sex. The temperate man thrives in the indulgence of these appetites and does not take excessive delight.

After courage and temperance which are concerned with the regulation of the primitive aversions and appetites, Aristotle gives two paires of virtues which are the two chief objects of man's more refined desire; these are wealth and honour. Now this kind of virtue viz., wealth is shown in giving or spending ungrudgingly but without lavishness. Honour is regarded by Aristotle as the province of a special virtue. This virtue is usually exhibited by the "high-minded man".

After honour comes gentleness, the moral excellence manifested in duly limited resentment. Aristotle's general formula for virtue is this: it is a mean or middle state, to be found some where between the vices. But Aristotle's quantitative statement of the relation of virtue to vice is misleading.

The cardinal virtue of justice or uprightness omitted from the list given above was

reserved by Aristotle for separate statement. Aristotle distinguishes primarily two species—(a) Distributive Justice, exhibited in the distribution in proportion to individual contribution to the public treasury, (b) Reparative Justice, realized in the exaction from a wrongdoer for the benefit of the person wronged. The question is: is justice "natural" or "conventional"? Aristotle decides that there is properly a mixture of both elements in "civic justice" as realized in the maintenance of the rights legally allotted to the citizens of a state. Aristotle notes, however, the need of "equity" as a kind of justice superior to that which is realized by strict adhesion to the law.

We notice one defect in Aristotle's account of virtue. What is that? Benevolence is not recognized except obscurely. This deficiency, however, is to some extent supplied by the relations of kind affection which bind men together. But this kindness is not strictly a virtue; but it is an indispensable element of human wellbeing.

From moral excellences Aristotle passed to analyse the intellectual. Here Aristotle's main purpose is to determine the relation between the two kinds of wisdom which, however, Plato blended in one conception speculative wisdom and practical wisdom. Aristotle holds that speculative wisdom does not guide us in determining moral questions. It does not define human good, but it pre-eminently constitutes it. Practical wisdom, on the other hand, is really involved in normal excellence. The man we count wise must not be merely skillful in the selection of means to any ends. His ends must also be rightly chosen. Aristotle tries his level best to make clear his conception of practical wisdom which is required as the keystone of his ethical system.

Aristotle's view of the relation of intellect to moral action is found to be confusing. We get confused as to how this relation could have any bearing on the question of free will. Aristotle has every wish to resist and explode the determinism. The only states of mind which he recognizes as immediate antecedents of bad acts are (a) predominance of irrational impulse over powering rational judgements and (b) mistaken choice of evil under the appearance of good. It is the previous bad conduct of man which has caused evil to seem good to him. But this argument is not tenable ultimately. If it be said, as Aristotle probably would say that vice is merely impulsive and that it gradually becomes deliberate as bad habits are formed, it is more easy to show that Aristotle psychology provides no philosophical justification.

## 2.4 Aristotle's Conception of Novel

Aristotle's ethics was too alien from the common moral consciousness to find much acceptance. The demands of the moral consciousness of mankind demanded a more trenchant partisanship than Aristotle's. Aristotle is a pronounced supporter of the freedom of the will. He censures Socrates because the latter's theory of virtue practically amounts to a denial of freedom.

An act committed under compulsion or because of ignorance is neither praiseworthy non reprehensible. To be one or the other it must be voluntary; in other words, it must have its 'moving principle' wholly within the agent himself. Aristotle forcefully wants to say that no man can be held morally responsible for an act which he is compelled to perform by an external force and contrary to his own inclination. At the same time, no man can claim exemption from responsibility for acts committed on the spur of the moment or from considerations of pleasure and pain. The reason is this: such acts arise from within himself, and neither could be man 'voluntary" and "free" than the drive of the organism. As long as one is self-determined, one is free and responsible.

Still then, the situation is not as simple as it looks. The questions crop up one after another. Is a drunken person free? Is a man acting under terror of a threat free? Is a man free who sacrifices his own honour in order to save those who are dear to him? According to Aristotle, there is a vast area of border line cases where the voluntary and the in voluntary are hopelessly entangled according to the morality and the law.

The same is true of acts committed ignorantly. They are not voluntary, but neither are they involuntary unless afterwards we feel remorse. We must distinguish acts committed 'in ignorance' from those done 'from ignorance'. When drunk, for instance, we act in ignorance of the consequences of our behaviour. But we do not act from ignorance of them, since drunkenness, not ignorance is a reason for our behaviour. Acts done 'from' ignorance are usually involuntary and excusable, where as acts done in ignorance frequently are not. However, to act from ignorance of general moral principles does not excuse the evil-doer whose eyes are open to the consequences of his particular deed. It is only acts resulting from ignorance of particular results that can be considered 'involuntary'.

'Intention' or the self-determination of the moving principle within us to a particular course of action involves preference and results in choice. What does it mean? Where we meet with a particular set of circumstances, we are compelled to do something and that is definitely a mark of our choice resulting from preference. But these are narrower in their scope than volition or appetite, wishing and opining.

They are not at all concerned with the ends of action but rather with the means to those ends. Choice is definitely a deliberate desire of things in our power.

If this is the case, the cynic view that virtue is the good does not hold good. The exercise of virtue is concerned with means to the good. Besides, this good rests not upon a moral foundation but upon a natural one. Nature has out fitted us with the wishes, aspirations, and ideals appropriate to our particular structure. We cannot but help being human being. There is no virtue and no vice, no occasion for praising or blaming either nature or ourselves. Moral conduct beings an ends in the measures we take to realize our natural ends. These measures are virtuous or vicious, right or wrong in so far as they are calculated to ensure or to defeat the attainment of these ends. What we ought to aim at is not the question; but what we naturally do aim at determines moral standards.

At the same time, Aristotle avoids the protagorean and morally anarchistic implications that might be drawn from this position. Each man is not a law unto himself; he takes himself as he finds himself. He pursues his ends, whatever they might be. The reason is this: All men are human and actualize the same Form. In Disclosing to us the outline of this form, observation of human nature is essential. This observation discloses the proximate limits of a natural object of wish revealed to us in wishes and ends of the run of healthy individuals. But where the variation of individual wishes goes beyond the limit, we ultimately reach warped instances of the species; their ends are no longer human and therefore are not properly pursued by human beings. The wishes and ideals of every individual man seem good to him. But the question is are they really good? Their goodness depends upon their agreement with the natural object of wish of mankind in general. In reality it is not the individual but the species that determine the natural good of the individual belonging to the species.

## 1.5 Moral Responsibility

After discussing so many issues connected with ethics and, consequently, morality we came to the question of moral responsibility. Since our choices are determined in the long run by the moving principle within us, we are responsible for them and for their success or failure in hitting the golden mean. Socrates used to think that evil-doing is not involuntary. It is just as voluntary as virtue is, because we are as much the moving principle of our bad acts as we are of our good ones. If vice is involuntary, so is virtue, and deserves praise as little as vice deserves blame. We cannot plead ignorance as an excuse because for the most part it is avoidable. We are not forced by any power out side ourselves; we cannot fly into such a

passion or get so drunk that we do not know what we are doing. Definitely we do posses the power of taking care; it is our fault if, by failure to exercise that power, we allow ourselves to be blinded temporarily or permanently to the consequences of our acts.

The individual is not only the responsible for pursuing his ends. He is also responsible for having them. He can be morally censured ever for 'wishing' the things he wishes. The end appears and is fixed by nature. It is true one's nature is to some degree a matter of training and the natural object of wish can be inculcated. If we have no right to reprove a vicious man for his law ideals, the virtuous man would deserve no credit for his high ideals. A man could be held to account for acting or not acting in accordance with his propensities because that power would be his.

We have already spoken of the golden mean in discussing virtue. This golden mean involves deliberation, and deliberation, in its turn, brings intelligence into play. Thus we come across intellectual virtues which are intellectual excellences. Thus we pass from moral virtue or excellence of conduct to intellectual virtue or correctness of understanding from which alone right behaviour can come out. Now a question arises what is the role of reason in the moral life? The function of reason is two fold. First of all reason enables us to discover the natural aims of the human organism and then to devise the best means for realizing them. Intellect so to say meditates upon human nature and penetrates deeply and discovers wonderfully 'what' will make us happy. In the sphere of ethics it is exercising its essential 'philosophizing', scientific, 'contemplative' activity of grasping the truth. When reason calculates what will make us happy, it displays it self as practical reason which is the basis and guide of distinctively moral action.

In fact, morality in the long run is nothing but intelligent conduct; it is a conduct that flows logically and permits us to make with respect to the nature of the human good. Rightly directed, desire must pursue just what reasoning asserts. III-chosen means lead to the false understanding in which intellectual vice consists. The virtue and vice are identical. Morally virtuous behaviour, according to Aristotle, is reasonable conduct; morally vicious behaviour is a symptom of irrationality.

Aristotle feels Socrates was both right and wrong in his assertion that the virtues are one and that the virtue is knowledge. There are as many different virtues as there are human activities. None of them excepting reason can pretend to have knowledge of itself. But the moral attitude is the same towards every activity and does consist in knowing the golden mean in each.

Again, Socrates is wrong in asserting that right action must necessarily follow

from correct knowledge of the end to be pursued and of the means to its attainment. Aristotle takes note of 'incontinence' which is the habitual and deliberate flouting by desire of the knowledge of good and evil. This kind of flouting is not a mere triumph of passion over clear knowledge. This is even not a triumph of sheer irrationality over the moral logic of practical reason.

The out and out vicious man, however, differs from the merely incontinent individual in feeling no hesitation. He feels with equal certainty both that he wants to commit the evil deed and that it is to his advantage to do so. Such a man is incurable. Both the incontinent person may be cured of hesitancy and may be established in the habit of refusing on rational grounds to give way to wants whose morality is questionable. Unless this hesitancy is overcome, according to Aristotle the incontinent attitude becomes habitual and hardens into criminality.

## 2.6 Conclusion

In the light of the above discussion, we feel that Aristotle has studied morality as it is concerned with man or in other words with the individual. But at the same time Aristotle insists that individual is by nature a 'political animal' to whom social and political life are essential. Thus Aristotle arrives at the social aspect of morality. Its basis and developments are discussed by Aristotle in the Nicomachean Ethics which deals with friendship. Friendly association, Aristotle points out, is necessary to the welfare of the individual and indispensable to the development of many of his virtues.

According to Aristotle, there are three types of friendly association. These three types exist for the purpose of pleasure, utility or the permanent enrichment of the individual's character and life. The first two types are selfish, treat other people as means to enjoyment and profit, and establish only passing relationship. But the people belonging to the third type viz., "the friendship of the good" in the language of Aristotle, treat one another as ends and seek to give as much as they receive. Their friendship for one another is disinterested and is aroused by intrinsic excellence.

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**Stop to consider :**

In the sequel of analysis of his moral thinking Aristotle has spoken much about virtue. Aristotle has distinguished between two classes of virtue- intellectual and moral. In seeking the mean between two extremes virtue is a kind of moderation or a middle way

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which aims at the mean. For example, the mean between excess and deficiency is a mean between full heartedness and cowardice. But an action cannot be virtuous because it is in conformity with reason. Consequently, it will in fact involve means which he describes as golden mean.

According to Aristotle the individual must sacrifice his interests to the interest of the community because the individual good is included in the social good. Aristotle's conception of "the friendship of the good is noteworthy in this connection.

The above friendship referred to by Aristotle is a kind of self-love. The reason is this : men love what is good for themselves; the good man in becoming a friend becomes a good to his friend. Each of them loves what is good for himself. The friendship of the good seems to lie in loving rather than in being loved. Aristotle holds that the opposition between egoism and altruism disappears the moment self-love as understood by Aristotle is realized. The self which a man loves is the wider, social self. It is only when the self is identified with 'wealth', 'honour' and bodily pleasures rather than with our friends, that self-love becomes a term of reproach. The good man is willing to lay down wealth, honour, position for the sake of his friends and his country. The man who is imbued with the friendship of the good should not meet with the question whether a man should love himself or someone else.

**SAQ :**

Do you think that Aristotle has made a sharp departure from the traditional conception of Ethics? Give reasons for your answer. (80 words)

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**Check your progress:**

1.  What does Aristotle mean by v irtue?
2.  How do we find and define human happiness?
3.  What is the Golden Mean according to Aristotle?
4.  What is moral freedom according to Aristotle?
5.  Explain Aristotle's view on concept of morality.
6.  Critically discuss Aristotle's moral standard.

**2.7    Summing Up:**

We have discussed in detail the philosophical thought of Aristotle. He holds that morality means the concept of doing good. Aristotle's ethics is too alien from the common moral consciousness. Aristotle is a supporter of the freedom of the will. He holds that the opposition between egoism and altruism disappears the moment self-love is realized.

**References and Suggested Reading:**

Sidgwich, Henry        :        History of Ethics, More Millan London, 1967

Stace, W.T             :        A critical History of Greek Philosophy, Mac Millan

* * *

# Unit: 3

# Mill

Contents

## 3.1     Introduction

We all have a belief that speaking truth is good. But, did we ever question as what makes speaking truth as good? Or did we question whether speaking truth is good in all circumstances? Suppose if I can able to lie and save a person, then in that situation, should I be speaking the truth or telling a lie? Which is a good action from my part? These and similar questions that discuss about the rightness and wrongness of the actions are the issues of discussions in moral philosophy, i.e, ethics. Broadly defined moral philosophy talks about the goodness of action. The study of ethics or moral theory is one, which tells us whether the action that we perform is good or bad, right or wrong on the basis of certain fundamental principles. Thinkers belonging to different ideologies and school of thought have come up with their own conception of understanding and explaining the principles on the basis of which they can categorize certain actions as right and certain others as wrong. In this chapter, we will be discussing about the views of one such  thinker, John Stuart Mill (hereafter Mill). John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was a British philosopher, economist, administrator and political theorist. He was one of the most influential English-speaking philosophers of the nineteenth century. Mill's contribution to philosophy ranges from mathematics, logic, and scientific method to religion, psychology, and ethics. This unit essentially focuses on his ethical views. Mill belongs to a school of thought in ethical theory called as

Utilitarianism. This chapter highlights his philosophical thought and his views on moral and social philosophy.

## 3.2 Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify what moral philosophy is and issues pertaining to it.

- Discuss Mill's moral philosophy and the basis of his Utilitarianism concept.

- Explain Utilitarianism of Mill as foundation for his social and political philosophy.

- Evaluate Mill's moral philosophy critically.


## 3.3    Bentham's influence on Mill

Let us go back to the questions that we raised in the introduction part. How are we to say that speaking truth is good? There are so many theories that try to come up with their own perspectives with respect to this and similar questions. You will also have some justification or defense for considering why speaking truth is good (or bad!) The moment you engage in justifying your beliefs, you engage in pursuing the subject of ethics. It is not only to justify one single question of speaking truth, but similar questions like abstaining from violence, or any such action that can be categorized as either good or bad, right or wrong can become the subject matter of ethics. Now, what is the justification will I be giving to accept that speaking truth is good. Broadly, what is the justification I can give either to do an action or to not do an action? If an action is good, then do and if it is bad, then do not do. It takes us to the other question, how do I know that an action is good or bad? Understanding of this issue falls within the domain of normative ethics, which tells us whether engaging in a particular action is good or bad. Two prominent normative theories in ethics are deontological and utilitarianism. Deontological theory as championed by Kant stresses on the universalizability of the actions performed for that action to be right, utilitarianism as proposed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill stresses on the consequences of that action for that action to be right.  In this unit, we will try to discuss the ethical theory of utilitarianism with emphasis on the ideas of Mill. Before doing that, we shall have to discuss Bentham's understanding of utilitarianism as Mill was not only influenced by Bentham's thought, but also continued and refined Bentham's ideas on utilitarianism.

Jeremy Bentham (1778 – 1832) considered that the moral actions were to be justified on the basis of utilitarian principle. So, what then is the utilitarian principle? Simply put, it means usefulness, coming from the latin word *utilis* meaning useful. So, what does 'usefulness' in the context of moral philosophy mean? According to Bentham, the moral worthiness of an act depends upon the consequences it gives, in turn suggests the usefulness of the action. Bentham identifies the usefulness in terms of the 'greatest happiness for the greatest number of people'. The underlying notion of utilitarianism is that the end of human conduct is happiness. This forms the criterion for the usefulness of an action, in turn, for the rightness of the action. Utilitarianism as a moral school of thought rationalizes the moral rightness of an action on the basis of the happiness it results in. Thus, Utilitarianism is a type of moral theory whereby it says that an action is maintained as good/bad on the basis of the consequences it will lead to. It is the idea that the worthiness of an action is based upon the consequences of that action. If the action contributes to the maxim of maximizing happiness, then it is a right action. It is thus a form of consequentialism, meaning that the moral worth of an action is determined by its outcome.

Utilitarianism has its origins in the Greek philosopher Epicurus, but it is Jeremy Bentham who made it as a specific school of ethical thought. On what does the principle of utilitarianism stand? Unlike other ethical philosophers like Kant, who stipulated that morality is by itself intrinsic and imperative (categorical imperative), Bentham observed that there is no intrinsic morality. He viewed that pain and pleasure to be the only intrinsic values in the world. From this he derived the rule of utility, that the good is whatever brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number of people. His most important theoretical work is the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1789)*. In this work, much of his moral philosophy is explained, essentially the "the greatest happiness principle" or "the principle of utility". According to Bentham, what becomes morally bounding is the attempt to ensure greatest happiness for greatest number and happiness for him means avoidance of pain and presence of pleasure as that is the psychological inclination of all human beings.

Bentham believed that human behaviour could be explained by two primary and basic motives, that is pleasure and pain. In the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, he writes, "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but

to demonstrate and confirm it." Hence for Bentham, it is the pleasure and pain that describes and defines the motives of the action. His philosophy reflects his psychological view that the primary motivators in human beings are pleasure and pain. For Bentham, like science, which gives causal explanations for the events that occur in the world, similarly, human behavior can be explained by reference to the two primary motives of pleasure and pain; this is the theory of psychological hedonism.

Just as his moral thought, he understood the legal system in the same way. Any action or law could be considered as good if it can produce "The greatest happiness for the greatest number". In this fashion, he developed a "happiness/hedonistic calculus" that takes into account the intensity, duration, etc of pleasure and pain. On that basis, he calculated for any action or law as to what the consequences are in terms of pleasure or pain outcomes. One big advantage of Bentham's theory is that it can be quantified. And perhaps one major drawback is that in Bentham's theory there is not a qualitative difference from enjoying a jolly ride in Giant Wheel or Merry-go-round and enjoying a fine piece of poetry or music. This led to a strong criticism of utilitarianism as it is "a doctrine worthy only of swine".

### 3.4    Mill's idea of utilitarianism

Belonging to the utilitarian tradition, Mill was aiming to strengthen utilitarianism. He has to show that utilitarianism is a better alternative to competing theories and he also has to take care some of the strong criticisms from the opponents against utilitarianism, particularly of the criticisms like utilitarianism is a 'doctrine worthy only of swine'. Mill himself was not satisfied with Bentham's idea of equating different sorts of pleasures at the same level. As an attempt to address these issues, Mill published a book 'Utilitarianism' in 1863, though the chapters of the book came out as essays in Fraser's magazine in 1861. In this work, Mill offers a philosophical defense of his utilitarian principle in ethics. It consists of five chapters and in this work, he makes an attempt to defend utilitarian position against its opponents – intuitionists, also makes an attempt to refine utilitarianism as held by Bentham to account for higher pleasures and in the last chapter tries to take utilitarianism as the principle of justice. I shall try to give a very brief view of Mill's argument against intuitionists and then, I shall try to focus on Mill's refinement of Bentham's views on utilitarianism.
Let us go back to the question that was raised in the introductory section. Why is it considered that speaking truth is good? Still further, what makes an action to be good? The answer from the proponents of utilitarianism is that, speaking truth

or any such action results in better consequences and therefore, they are considered as good actions. Are you satisfied with such an answer? There are some thinkers (for example, Kant) who felt that rightness of the action (for example, speaking truth) does not have anything to do with experience of having better consequences or not. Moral principles are universally valid, irrespective of the situations and they are prior to any sort of experience. Though the intuitionists and the utilitarians may come up with same set of moral laws, they differ in the way they arrived at those moral laws. For example, speaking truth is good, killing is bad, and other such norms are accepted by both intuitionists and the utilitarians, but the principle by which they come to these moral principles vary. Mill as being utilitarian argues against the intuitionists' principles of morality claiming that the intuitionists principles are abstract, and there are no external standards to pass judgement in case of different moral claims. Mill claims that by the utility principle, we can evaluate different moral claims on the basis of an external standard of pain and pleasure, which we will discuss in the subsequent passages.

Having gone against the intuitionists in his first chapter of the Utilitarianism, Mill tries to explain what utilitarianism is in his second chapter. The concern for him in this and subsequent chapters is to fine-tune the concept of utilitarianism as developed by Bentham and others. As a matter of fact, Mill to a certain extent shared the Utilitarianism of Bentham and James Mill in its most general sense, that is, one should act in accordance with the promotion of human happiness and one should assess persons, actions, and institutions by how well they promote human happiness. But, Mill had different conception about human motivation, nature of happiness and even the justification of utilitarianism. Bentham and James Mill understood happiness in terms of pleasure and they believed that the aim of each person is mainly the promotion of agent's own happiness, which is pleasure. Mill altered their hedonistic assumptions by introducing his idea of higher pleasures, thereby changing the notion of happiness. Let us see in detail in the following passages, how Mill tried to address the issues of Bentham.

As we have seen above, how Bentham by belonging to psychological egoist school, treated the interests of one's own happiness as the ultimate object of one's desires. Thus, Bentham as well as James Mill was upholding the philosophical radicalism by proclaiming that persons act only to satisfy his/her own self-interests (pleasures). This type of an ideology gave certain problematic positions. First of all, Bentham could not justify how and why one should concern with the happiness of others? Secondly, this theory doesn't take into consideration some of the finer aspects of life, which were often considered to be the higher pursuits like appreciating a good poetry or piece of art. Don't we often appreciate art, poetry, good film and like though it may not necessarily give us pleasure. Thirdly, one

really can make a serious question whether all human acts are directed towards satisfying one's own pleasures. Cannot somebody sacrifice his/her interests for the sake of other? Have we not seen people like that? These and similar questions need to be addressed in order to make utilitarianism a viable social and moral theory. So it seems clear that Mill rejects the traditional substantive doctrines of psychological egoism and hedonism that Bentham and Mill's father sometimes defended or suggested. Mill was against this idea and he elaborates his criticism against Bentham in his essays "On Bentham" and "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy". Mill thought that because of Bentham's narrow concept of his philosophy, he could not accommodate many of the things within his domain of philosophy and hence the problem.

This does not suggest that Mill denied utilitarianism. Mill was as much committed to utilitarianism as the other thinkers of the school like Bentham. In chapter II of his work Utilitarianism, Mill claims, "The creed which accepts as the foundations of morals "utility" or the "greatest happiness principle" holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure". This principle of utility is the core of Mill's principle. According to Mill, it is a psychological truism that all ends are either pleasure or parts of pleasure. Mill says, "to desire anything, except in proportion as the idea of it is pleasure, is a physical and metaphysical impossibility". This implies that pleasure is the end of morality. And this stand of Mill is quite similar to Bentham. But the difference lies in Mill's conception of pleasures. Hedonism of Bentham implies that mental state of pleasure has intrinsic good and similarly, the mental state of pain has intrinsic evil. All other things have extrinsic value. This means, all other things have value (either good or bad) in as far as they bring pleasure or pain. Mill, to a great extent, accepted this principle. **** (1)

Bentham claimed that push-pin game is better than poetry as everyone can play that game, and education to appreciate music and poetry is costly and that too there are not many people to do it. Mill, in order to address the issue of maintaining the extrinsic superiority of certain pleasures, say like poetry, was trying to project the idea that poetry and similar arts produce more intense pleasures than other trivial games like push-pin, or jolly ride. Mill opined that arts broaden one's imaginations and even it is sometimes impure and costly, still arts and poetry give intense and durable pleasures. Perhaps, here, we can see the influence of Wordsworth's poetry in Mill's understanding of poetry giving better pleasure than other exciting games stuff.

Even though in the above-mentioned way, Mill was trying to show the superiority

of pleasure of poetry and arts, it is done only in an extrinsic value manner. That means, poetry gives more mental state of pleasure than the push-pin game. But, again this may not be in a strong position as people like Bentham can argue that it is the push-pin that gives more pleasure than poetry. So, Mill should, if he wants to put poetry better than push-pin, say that poetry is qualitatively better than push-pin game. In fact, Mill was trying to do that. He explains that there are higher pleasures and it is determined by persons who are worthy and competent to judge it. Mill suggests that competent authority judges which values is better.**** (2)

Thus, Mill claims that higher pleasures like poetry are qualitatively better than the push-pin as the competent people prefer it that way. The problem for him is, if he does show the qualitatively superiority of poetry over push-pin, he will be not fitting in the tradition of hedonism as traditionally formulated, that is, pleasure and pain alone are intrinsic. If he doesn't show the superiority of poetry over push-pin, then it is very difficult to digest such a utilitarian theory, which was one criticism against Bentham. Mill is also accused of not being a hedonist, if he accepts quality of pleasures. F.H. Bradley raises this objection against Mill. He says, "If you are to prefer a higher pleasure to a lower pleasure without reference to quantity – then there is an end altogether of the principle". But, this criticism can be countered by saying that hedonism is actually bothered about pleasure and holds that pleasure is good. But, there can be a difference like Mill postulated over considering which dimensions or properties of pleasure need to be considered to measure its overall value. Is it only the quantity or can it also be the quality? Both the discussions can very well be accommodated within the domain of hedonism and hence one can be a hedonist and still can talk about quality of pleasures. Similarly, there are lot many criticisms with respect to Mill's concept of quality of pleasures.

Mill tries to address the issue of psychological hedonism in many different ways. He accepts that the psychological account of human being of liking pleasure and detesting pain are the prime motivators in any course of action. Other things are sought, at least initially, as means to pleasure or the avoidance of pain. But by the process of associative mechanisms, things that are initially taken as means over a period of time can be transformed and be associated with the ends for which they were means at an earlier point of time. These things later on be sought after as ends in themselves. He says through the process of association, it is possible that extrinsic values can over a period of time be treated as intrinsic value. Thus, though according to psychological hedonists, only pleasure alone could be treated as intrinsic value and all others as extrinsic values, that is, ways of attaining pleasure, but, Mill argues, that over a period of time that which was extrinsic value can be taking the place of intrinsic value. For example, just as a miser's desire for money,

though initially has extrinsic value, over a period of time change into intrinsic value. His concern for money, through habitual association, gains a psychological autonomy. No more he is bothered about saving the money (extrinsic value) because that gives him pleasure (intrinsic), but because of constant association, he starts saving money for money's sake. Here, one can see that money ceases to be extrinsic value, but it has taken an intrinsic value for the miser.

So, keeping the strict psychological hedonism of Bentham, we cannot accommodate Mill. Mill's theory in that sense goes beyond Bentham's conception of utlitarianism. Though like Bentham, Mill too claims that maximization of pleasure and happiness as the moral end, but he was quick to realize and point out that his idea of pleasure and happiness does not have the same meaning as Bentham had. By having higher and lower pleasures Mill was able to give a substantive position to poetry and other arts as compared to a game of cards. Thus, Mill often preferred a life as a human-being dissatisfied against the life of a pig that is satisfied. Also, often it is said that it is better to be like Socrates dissatisfied rather than living as a fool satisfied. Thus, Mill addresses the criticisms that utilitarianism is worthy only for the swine to a respectable theory which takes care of the superior pursuits of humans. Mill often talks about development of humans in their tastes and pursuits. In that sense, he proposes a qualitative hedonism.

## 3.5 Act and Rule utilitarianism

We have discussed so far Mill's understanding of good. In ethics generally and in utilitarianism particularly, the notion of good is prior to the notion of right. As I mentioned earlier, an action is said to be right, if it is deemed good. As far as utilitarians are concerned, an action is good if it comes with better consequences. So, an important question arises here – when we talk of better consequences, are we talking of better consequences of that particular act or are we talking of better consequences of similar acts which has been formed as a rule. This gives raise to seemingly two different types of utilitarianism, which talks of the rightness of the actions. They are:

1. Act Utilitarianism – The rightness of the act depends upon the consequences of that single act

2. Rule Utilitarianism – The rightness of the act depends upon its conformity to a rule. The rule by itself is in a sense derived from the consequences of the act repeated over and over again and thus to be followed as a rule for similar circumstances. Whenever we have alternatives for to do a particular action, we calculate the utility of our actions by adopting to a course of action, which is the rule, that would produce the greatest utility

in the long run and it is to be followed every time when a similar situation arises.

Both act and rule utilitarianism treats rightness in terms of the consequences of the actions and thus, they are utilitarianism theories. Mill cannot be taken as 'act utilitarian' as he may not be subscribing to judging the rightness or wrongness of every act on the basis of utility. Rather, he may try to judge the act on the basis of rule. But, for utilitarians, rules by themselves are not something indispensable, because rules did come into existence on the basis of the principle of utility, that which can promote greatest amount of happiness. But, Mill also subscribes when individual actions can be judged on the basis of their utility over and beyond the rules, when exceptions to ordinary rules occur or when a situation arises when two rules come into conflict. Let me finish with the same example with which I started. If I can save a person by telling a lie, then, on the basis of better consequences of the given situation, I may be morally permitted to tell a lie, though telling the truth maybe a rule.

### 3.6    Summing up

In this chapter we discussed the ethical philosophy of John Stuart Mill. We discussed the need and necessity of making ethical judgements and we discussed competing theories with respect to what makes an action ethical. We focused on utilitarianism with initial discussions on Bentham's utilitarianism. We then, discussed on Mill's understanding of utilitarianism. We have seen that Mill in his work Utilitarianism was defending a position of inductive moral theory as against an intuitive moral theory. We have seen why Mill rejected the intuitionists understanding of ethical principles. We have seen how he tried to argue for a utilitarian standpoint in ethics. It is to be noted here that though he belonged to the school of utilitarianism, yet he differed on some key issues with respect to Bentham's utilitarianism. We also discussed how he came up with idea of different kinds of pleasures to fine-tune Bentham's concept of gross pleasures. We have also discussed the distinction between act and rule utilitarianism and how it affects in finding out the rightness or wrongness of actions. To sum up, as a thinker, Mill has used this utility principle to come up with the principle of justice in social and political realms. Mill may have drawbacks in his arguments. We may agree or not with respect to his principles, but one thing for sure, his utilitarian principles gives impetus in exploring the study of ethics.

**SAQ:**

1. Do you think that all humans consider pleasure and pain alone as the intrinsic values? Justify your answer (100 words)

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2. Can you think of any other moral theories apart from deontological and utilitarianism. Explain the characteristic of such theory. If it is different from the above two, explain how it is different? (100 words)

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3. Can you bring out two arguments for or against Mill's position that is not discussed in this unit (150 words)

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**Check Your Progress:**

1. What do you understand by ethics?
2. What is Bentham's idea of good? Explain
3. Do you think there are difference kinds of pleasures? Justify your position
4. What do you understand by intrinsic value and extrinsic value?
5. Why Mill thought that Bentham's understanding of pleasure is wrong?
6. What is meant by act and rule utilitarianism?
7. Can an extrinsic value change into an intrinsic value? Explain
8. What is naturalistic fallacy? Explain

**Stop to Consider:**

Mill is often criticized for making a naturalistic fallacy. Mill in his Utilitarianism remarks, "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually

see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable [ = worthy of desire], is that people do actually desire it.". The argument of this passage suggests that because people desire something, it becomes worthy of desire. G.E.Moore made such a criticism claiming that such type of an argument is claimed to possess a fallacy (mistake in reasoning) and the type of fallacy is called as naturalistic fallacy. Mill's argument claims that because people desire something, that something becomes worthy of desire. Now, in this argument, if you see, people desire something (say X ) suggests that it is a fact that people want X, whereas it (X) becomes worthy of desire implies that people ought to desire X. There is a shift from what people desire to what people should desire. That is, there is a shift from what is to what ought to be. This shift from is to ought is called as naturalistic fallacy as there is a mistake in reasoning. The mistake is how we can move from a factual statement to an ethical statement. The issue of whether Mill committed the fallacy is dealt in detail by thinkers arguing for and against his position.

Mill's idea of difference in quality of pleasures though novel does have its own problems. Mill to some extent tried to address these issues and quite a good amount of literature did come up with respect to his idea of quality of pleasures. Mill himself has expanded his notion of quality of pleasures to such an extent that he had moved far beyond the Bentham's conception of utilitarianism. It becomes all the more difficult for Mill to accommodate quality of pleasures and external evaluation and in cases he leaves it to the judgement of the competent persons. He says in his utilitarianism, " If I am asked, what I mean by difference in quality of pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. … On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgement of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final". While for Bentham there is a calculus to judge which one is better in terms of giving pleasures, for Mill, that may not be the case as the pleasures for Mill do not differ in degree, rather they differ in kind.

## 3.7    References and Suggested Readings

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# Second Half

# Unit – 1
# ETHICAL THEORIES OF MOORE

Unit Structure

## 1.1    Introduction:

G.E. Moore (1873-1958) was an important British philosopher of the first half of the twentieth century. He was one of the trinity of philosophers at Trinity College, Cambridge (the others were Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein) who made Cambridge one of centres of what is called 'analytic philosophy'. The impact of 'G.E. Moore's thought on twentieth century moral philosophy has been very powerful.

In the preface of his famous book 'Principia Ethica', - Moore says that all philosophical difficulties and disagreements are mainly due to "the attempt to answer – questions, without first discovering, precisely what question it is which you desire to answer." It has been often noticed that philosophical disputes about a particular issue result from the fact that the disputants actually address themselves to different questions without realizing that the questions are, in fact, different.

Like any other branch of philosophy, Ethics, has its own questions which it attempts to answer in its own way. As such it is necessary to have a clear idea of the questions which are tried to give answer by ethics. At the very outset of 'Principia Ethica', Moore says that there are two specific ethical questions which

moral philosophers have always attempted to answer but have "almost always confused both with one another and with other questions". These two questions are – (1) What kind of things ought to exist for their own sakes? or what kind of things are intrinsically good? (2) What kind of actions ought we to perform? or, what kind of action is a right action, or is a duty?

Moore takes these two questions to be the most fundamental questions of ethics. But in the ensuring discussion entitled 'The subject-matter of Ethics', he asserts that the primary and the most fundamental question of ethics as a scientific study is – what is 'good'? By this question he does not mean to ask what particular things or classes of things are good, but how 'good' is to be defined, or, what is meant by 'good'. Thus Moore has discussed the central ethical problems and related issues under the heading of three basic questions of ethics, viz., (1) what is meant by 'good'? (2) what kind of things ought to exist for their own sake? and (3) what kind of actions ought we to perform?

## 1.2 Objectives:

After going through this unit you will be able to:-

● Know G.E. Moore's ethical theory.

● Understand Moore's concept of 'good'.

## 1.3 Moore's Ethical Theory:

The impact of G.E. Moore's thought on $20^{th}$ century moral philosophy has been very powerful. The concept of good is the centrally important concept in moral philosophy. In his book, 'Principia Ethica', Moore sharply distinguishes between two questions of ethics –

1. What is good? In the sense of 'that which is good'.

2. What is good? In the sense of 'goodness'.

Moore explicitly says that his sole business is not with an account of how people as a matter of fact generally use the term 'good'. He is more concerned with the 'object or idea' that is designated by the term. By meaning of 'good', Moore means definition of 'good'. What he aims at is to discover the exact nature of the object, or the idea, denoted by the word 'good'. And he concludes that in this sense of 'definition', 'good' is indefinable. He writes–

"If I am asked 'what is good? My answer is that good is good, and that is the end of the matter. Or if I am asked 'How is good to be defined? My answer is that it cannot be defined and that is all I have to say about it."

According to Moore a definition is that which 'states what are the parts which invariably compose a certain whole'. In this sense, 'defining' means analyzing or breaking down a certain complex whole into its simplest constituents. In Moore this kind of definition describes the real nature of an object or notion denoted by a word and which 'does not merely tell us what the word is used to mean', and in this sense 'good' cannot be defined 'because it is simple and has no parts'. It is evident that the object of definition in Moore's analysis is not the word 'good' but the extra linguistic entity 'goodness'. The word 'good' is indefinable because the quality goodness is simple.

## What is meant by 'Good':

According to Moore any scientific enquiry into ethical problems must commence with a discussion of the question, 'what is good'? He thinks that there are two important reasons why it is necessary to discuss this question. The first reason is that 'good' is the notion upon which all ethics depend. We cannot hope to understand what we mean, when we say that this is good or that is good, until we understand quite clearly what is meant by calling them good. The second reason is a reason of method. It is this that we can never know on which evidence an ethical proposition rests, until we know the nature of the notion which makes the proposition ethical.

The question 'what is good' may be interpreted in three different senses - namely, 'what particular objects are 'good'? "What kinds or classes of objects are 'good'?" and, finally, "What is meant by 'good'? or "How is 'good' to be defined?" Ethics as a scientific study is not interested in the first and the second sense of the question. It is only the third sense of the question which becomes the primary and the basic concern of moral philosophy. This is due to the fact that ethics owes its characteristic nature to only that idea or object of thought, which the word 'good' is used to stand for. By the meaning of 'good' – Moore means the definition of good. The object of definition in Moore's analysis is not the word 'good' but the extra linguistic entity 'goodness'. 'Goodness' is the simple and unique quality which is referred by the use of the word 'good'. 'Goodness' is a simple, non-natural, quality. Thus 'good' is indefinable.

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**Check your progress**

1. What are the fundamental questions of ethics according to Moore?
2. What is the cause of philosophical difficulties and disagreements, according to Moore?
3. What is the meaning of 'Good'?

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## 1.4 Moore's concept of good

Moore's first positive assertion about 'good' is that 'good' is a simple notion, just as yellow is a simple notion. By a "simple notion or object", Moore means a notion or an object which cannot be analyzed into any further constituents. A notion or an object can be broken into simpler parts only when it is a complex whole consisting of parts which are arranged in definite relations to one another. But that which is simple has no parts and as such, cannot be analyzed into simpler components. Such notions are the ultimate terms by reference to which all definable notions are defined, and "with which the power of further defining ceases."

According to Moore, just as we cannot explain to any one who does not already know it what 'yellow' is, so we cannot explain by any manner of means what good is. Moore compares 'goodness' with yellowness. Just as yellow cannot be defined but can be indicated, similarly even though we cannot define goodness we can indicate it. It cannot be said that because yellowness is indefinable therefore nobody can know which things are yellow. Similarly it cannot be said that because goodness is indefinable, therefore nobody knows which things are good. Thus 'good' is a simple and indefinable property.

## 1.5 Open Question Argument:

Moore employs the famous open question argument to establish his assertion that 'good' is indefinable. A question is "open" if it is possible for us to understand its meaning fully without knowing the correct answer. The open question argument consists in showing that whatever definition is given of good a further question remains – 'Is it good?' Thus any attempted definition of 'good' seems to be erroneous due to the fact that it is always possible to ask with significance whether the object so defined is itself good. For instance, if 'good' is taken to mean 'being pleasant' or 'being conducive to self – realization', it can always be asked – Is that which is pleasant good? or, Is that which is conducive to self-realization good? The question can be asked meaningfully simply because the two terms, viz., 'good' and 'being pleasant' (or, 'being conducive to self-realization') do not mean the same thing, although as a matter of fact, that which is pleasant, may also be good. The possibility of asking the further question will always remain open in any attempt to define good. Thus one comes to see that good is ultimately indefinable.

After asserting that good is a simple indefinable property. Moore states that 'goodness' is a non-natural property. In 'Principia Ethica' Moore says that a value property like goodness is a non-natural quality which belongs to certain natural objects. By 'natural object' he means any object of which it may be said

that it does, did or will exist. Thus natural things are those which may be said to exist in time and anything of which it is not true is not a natural object. By 'a natural property' Moore means any such property of a natural object, which may be said to exist in time by itself. The existence of such a property is independent of the existence of the object of which it is a property. In Moore's view these properties are parts of the object they belong to, and not 'mere predicates which are attached to it, they are in themselves substantial. But this is not so with good. According to Moore, 'good' is a non-natural property which cannot be imagined as existing by itself in time. It can be thought of 'merely as a property of some natural objects'.

## 1.6    Naturalistic Fallacy:

Moore holds that although 'good' does denote a simple, indefinable unique property of things, a large number of ethical thinkers have not been able to recognize this fact. They have often assimilated this unique property with some other property like pleasure or the property of being an object of desire. It is true that things which are good usually possess some other qualities as well; e.g., the thing which is good may also be pleasant, or be an object of desire. But what these thinkers have overlooked is the fact that such qualities are other than the quality of goodness. They have held that "these properties, in fact, were simply not 'other', but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness." And hence, they have attempted to define goodness in terms of some such quality. Moore points out that any such attempt to identify goodness with some other quality is fallacious. He proposes to call this fallacy, "the naturalistic fallacy".

The theories which have tried to define 'good' by identifying it with some other property, and thereby have committed the naturalistic fallacy, have been classified by Moore into two main divisions – Naturalistic Ethics and Metaphysical Ethics. The theories which define goodness in terms of some natural object or quality, something which is an object of experience are the naturalistic ethical theories. For example – Hedonism, which defines goodness in terms of pleasure or that which is pleasant.

Again the theories which define goodness in terms of some object which is "only inferred to exist in a supersensible real world" – something supernatural or supersensible which is not an object of experience are the metaphysical theories. For example – the theories which define 'good' in terms of something which is conducive to self-realization, or to a Pure Will.

Thus on the basis of many considerations Moore concludes 'goodness' as a simple, non-natural and indefinable property. Moore's central concern is that since 'goodness' is a simple property, it is known by intuition. Being a non-natural property and un-analyzable notion, it cannot be an object of sensible experience. It is known only in some kind of non-sensuous intuition. Moore seems to suggest this when he speaks of 'good' as being "actually before our minds."

According to Moore there is nothing to which 'good' refers, because when we look into our own minds we know that 'good' denotes 'a unique object' logically different from anything which is denoted by any naturalistic description. When Moore says that 'goodness' can be known by intuition, he has used the word in the sense in which it means 'incapable of proof'. Moore is not an intuitionist in the ordinary sense of the term.

## 1.7 'Good' and 'The Good':

In the context of indefinability of 'good', - Moore makes a distinction between 'good' and 'The Good'. 'God' is an adjective which is attached to, or predicated of a substantive which has the quality of goodness. For instance, "This is a good book" or "This book is good". The adjective 'good' is attached to, or predicated of a substantive, viz., the book. 'The good' on the other hand, refers to that which is good, i.e., the object which has the quality of goodness.

According to Moore, 'the good' is a complex whole, since it has the quality of goodness and being different from goodness. Thus, 'the good' being something complex, is analyzable, and, as such, it is capable of definition, whereas 'good' (or goodness) itself being simple, is indefinable.

## 1.8 'Good as End' and 'Good' as Means:

For Moore, 'good' – a simple, indefinable, unique property of objects constitutes the subject-matter of ethics. This notion is referred by all the ethical words and judgment in two different ways -

a) 'Good' may be referred as the simple, unique property which intrinsically

belongs to certain objects. 'Good' when referred to this way, is alternatively called 'good in itself', 'intrinsic good', or 'good as end'.

b) 'Good' may also be referred as a cause of or means to, something which is good in itself or intrinsically good. In this sense 'good' is synonymous with 'good as means', 'extrinsic good' or 'value as means'.

Moore's ethical writings clearly show that he has been mainly concerned with the notion of 'good' in the sense of intrinsic goodness. He has always used the two expressions, 'good' and 'intrinsic goodness', interchangeably. When he has to talk about 'good' in the other sense, he has used the expressions, 'good as means', 'extrinsic good', or 'value as means'.

Evaluation:

According to Moore, goodness is a simple, unanalysable, non-natural property which is known in some kind of non-sensuous intuition. But the difficulty is that if anybody says that he does not have any such unique and simple object before his mind when he thinks of good, then we cannot refute him. Strawson remarks that the problem with the intuitionist theory is that "if true, it should be a truism". Generally there should be no doubt the experience of intuiting goodness. But since Moore thinks that an intuition may be true or false, a claim to know something by intuition is not more than the claim to believe it. Moreover intuition itself provides no way of deciding which of two conflicting intuitions is correct.

Moore's open question argument is also criticized. It cannot fulfill the purpose for which it is meant. It does not show that 'good' is simple but only points to the difference between good and any naturalistic description R.B. Perry points out that the open question argument against the definability of good involves a confusion between the sense of definition and the sense of inquiry or question. He argues that if good is defined in terms of pleasure, it becomes irrelevant from the point of view of definition, to ask the question whether pleasure is good. But from the ethical point of the question 'Is pleasure good'? can be asked. This ethical sense of the question is different from the definitional sense of the question.

Professor Frankena argues that Moore's formulation of the naturalistic fallacy is not acceptable. Frankena considers three possible versions of naturalistic fallacy – (i) the fallacy consists in defining a non-natural property such as goodness in terms of a natural one (ii) that it is fallacious to define one property in terms of another; (iii) the fallacy consists in the attempt to define something which is indefinable. Moore's formulation of naturalistic fallacy can be objected in all these three versions. In order to establish his point – Moore must prove that 'goodness' is some other thing from the property with which it is identified. But Moore has not done this.

The naturalistic fallacy brings into focus the logical gap between descriptive and evaluative terms. Logically, evaluation and description are different types of activity. Moore fails to realize that the uniqueness of good is not due to its non-natural character but due to its evaluative significance.

In his later writings, Moore expresses his doubt that ethical predicates describe objects to which they are applied. He has realized that if 'good' is the name of a property, its sense is different from the sense of natural intrinsic properties. But he is unable to specify the 'special' sense of 'describe' when a non-natural quality 'good' is ascribed to an object. Moore's difficulties arise because he has accepted uncritically the traditional view that all adjectives designate properties and that language consists essentially of descriptive statements. Moore may be wrong about what 'good' means but he has rightly recognized that the conceptual framework of ethics has to be recast so as to give a greater prominence to the distinctive functions of ethical judgment. Moore insists that goodness is indefinable and un-analyzable, and thus ethics is an autonomous science, irreducible to natural science or indeed to metaphysics.

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**SAQ**

Write on Moore's concept of 'good'? (within 100 words)

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**Unit-4**

**Hare**


Contents

## 4.1     Introduction

We all speak and communicate through language. When I utter a sentence how do you know the meaning of the sentence? Or more still, how do you judge if what I speak have any meaning at all? Let us try to take some example and pursue further. Suppose I say, 'Horse is black', is this a meaningful sentence? Yes. It derives the meaning by referring to the facts of a horse being black in colour. Is this sentence a true sentence? How do we understand the truthfulness of this sentence? Let me try making another statement. Suppose I say another sentence, 'Lying is wrong'. Does it have a meaning? On what basis does it derive its meaning? Extending this question to a larger context, we can ask a question - how do we arrive at the meaning of moral sentences? What is the nature of moral sentences? What purpose does it have? In this chapter, we are going to discuss the views of one philosopher by name R M Hare, who tried to answer the questions that we raised earlier. Richard Mervyn Hare (1919 – 2002) was a British moral philosopher and he has contributed in the field of ethics and political philosophy. In this chapter, we shall discuss his views on ethics.

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**4.2    Objectives**

After going through this unit, you will be able to:
- Identify what Meta ethics is and issues pertaining to it.
- Understand the cognitivists and the non-cognitivists position in moral philosophy.
- Discuss Hare's notion of prescriptivism.
- Evaluate Hare's moral philosophy critically.

**4.3    Cognitivism and Non-cognitivism**

Let us go back to the questions that we raised in the introduction part. How do we understand the meaning for moral sentences like 'lying is wrong'? As mentioned earlier, the issue is not just to understand one sentence like 'lying is wrong', rather, the issue extends to understanding the nature of all moral sentences. Put generally, the question is how do we understand moral sentences? Discussions on such types of questions fall under the category of meta-ethics. Generally, in the field of ethics, three sub divisions are made, namely meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Normative ethics is concerned with the principles that make an action right or wrong, good or bad. Applied ethics is concerned with ethical discussions pertaining to specific domains like bio-ethics, business ethics, etc. Meta-ethics discusses issues like what is the meaning of goodness; what is the nature of moral sentences; and other similar questions. So, here our discussion is primarily focused on the meta-ethical question.

If you were to make a judgement related to the following sentences – 'horse is black' and 'lying is bad', do you think that both these two sentences are of the same type; or they are different? If they are different, why they are different? If we go through the philosophical literature to see how philosophers have tried to answer this question, essentially, they fall under two broad schools of thought called cognitivism and non-cognitivism.

Leaving aside different shades of Cognitivism, we can say that Cognitivism is that school of thought in moral philosophy which tries to understand moral sentences as that which has a cognitive value. Thus it holds that moral statements do express beliefs and that they are truth-apt. Let me elaborate on this point further. Suppose I say the following sentences. You are to see whether these sentences are true or false.

1. Grass is green
2. Pigs are red
3. God is kind
4. Lying is wrong

If we analyze the above sentences, as far our experience goes, we can say that sentence-1, 'grass is green' is True; sentence-2, 'pigs are red' is False. But, what can we say for sentence-3, 'God is kind' and sentence-4 'lying is wrong'. The first two sentences can be said to be truth-apt, that is, they can be either true or false. As they can come under the purview of truth or falsity, they can be termed as truth-apt. If you feel that sentence-4 'lying is wrong' can also come under the category of being either true or false, then those sentences can also be called as truth-apt. Then, you belong to cognitivists school and you assert that there are moral facts. So, according to this school of thought, we can ascribe truth or falsity to moral statements as well.

Non-cognitivism on the other hand is a school of thought that tries to reject any truth-aptness for moral statements. For them, moral statements cannot be categorized as true or false. And there are no moral facts on the basis of which we say that sentences can be true or false. So, according to non-cognitivists, moral statements do not have truth- conditions. While, this can be taken as a broad framework for moral non-cognitivists, there are different streams of thought within this school. There are many different varieties of moral non-cognitivism - Emotivism, prescriptivism, quassi-realism, etc. We shall be discussing more about prescriptivism which has been expounded by R M Hare. So, we will be discussing Hare's moral thought which belongs to non-cognitivism and within that maybe prescriptivism.

## 4.4    Hare's prescriptivism

Let us go back to the earlier examples we had. If, 'lying is wrong' does not have a truth condition, then what is the nature of such types of sentences? How do we understand such types of sentences? Or what does the moral sentences supposed to do? R M Hare tries to answer these issues from a non-cognitivist standpoint. He believes that moral sentences are non – cognitive in nature, and they are supposed to prescribe what we ought to do. According to this school of thought, moral statements are more like commands and imperative sentences. Hare in his work The Language of Morals (1952) talks of moral statements as prescriptions or imperatives that do not by itself carry a truth-value. If we say a sentence, 'open the window'; is that true or false? It is neither true nor false as these types of sentences cannot be credited with truth or falsity. Similarly, for Hare, though moral sentences are written in the form of descriptive sentences, still, they do not perform the function of the role of descriptive sentences. Those sentences mean a moral command or a moral imperative. For example, if we have two statements, 'chalk is white' and 'lying is wrong', though the structures

of the sentence seem to be same as both seem to be assertions, still, according to Hare, they are different. The first one is a descriptive statement with an assertion; the second one is a normative one. The meaning of 'lying is wrong' is 'one ought not to lie'. The idea of 'ought' and 'should' is what we derive when we come across moral statements, and 'ought' and 'should' prescribe us to act in a specific manner.

If moral statements do not have anything to do with truth – aptness, does it mean that they are just individual's subjective expressions and approvals and nothing more than that? One school of non-cognitivism accepts that position, which is called as emotivism popularized by Stevenson, Ayer and others. But, Hare do not want a non-cognitivist position similar to that of emotivism. He believed that moral statements carry more value than just being an individual's approval. So, to substantiate his position, Hare talks of three important components of normative sentences, namely, prescriptiviy, universalizability, and supervenience. In his books The Language of Morals (1952), Freedom and Reason (1963), Moral Thinking (1982), Hare elaborates on his ethical position called prescriptivism. Let us see, what these concepts mean according to Hare.

 Prescriptivity – According to Hare, moral sentences are prescriptions that are sentences used for guiding an action or to reply at the question: "What shall I do?" (Hare, 1952). According to Hare, moral sentences are prescriptive. This means, these sentences do not just describe a state of affairs, rather, it dictates what should be the state of affairs. Again, let us go back to two sentences for our study –

1. Deka is lying
2. Lying is wrong

In the above two statements, statement 1 describes a state of affairs, that is, makes an assertion that a person by name Deka is uttering a lie. The statement 2 though seemingly in the descriptive statement form, according to Hare is not so. It doesn't describe any state of affairs. It doesn't describe any facts. Rather, it gives a norm as to what one should do or what one should not do. In the above example, if we relate 1 and 2 and see, what it commands is that Deka should not lie. Statement 2 commands for a change in state of affairs or facts. It prescribes for a change in the state of affairs. Thus, normative sentences carry a persuasive process. If I utter a statement to you that 'lying is wrong', I am not telling anything that explains a fact, rather, I am prescribing you to act in a particular way, that is, don't tell lies. I am persuading you to act in a particular way. This is the prescriptive component of moral sentences according to Hare.

**Universalizability :**

The second feature which Hare talks about in his ethical theory is the idea of universalizability. The normative verbs like 'ought' and 'should' and 'must' should be interpreted as similar to words like 'all', 'everyone' and other universal referring terms. The universalizability aspect of the normative sentences makes those sentences to be axiomatic in a sense. In fact, we can take that to be an extension of the Golden rule that maintains that 'do unto others as you want them to do to you'. In this way, if I say to you 'lying is wrong', that prescription that you 'should' not lie is not directed to you alone, but, rather the entire class of human beings as such. It means, everyone is not supposed to lie. So, the moral words like 'ought' and 'should' are similar to words like all and everyone. This is his idea of universalizability.

## Supervenience :

This is the other aspect according to Hare that is to be found in normative sentences. Supervenience is a feature moral sentences share with descriptions. In moral philosophy, the issue of supervenience concerns the relationship which is said to hold between moral properties and natural or non-moral properties. Suppose we say, 'speaking truth is good'. The question arises what makes speaking truth is good. If it is only a case of approval, that is, I approve that speaking truth is good, then it means, speaking truth is good not because there is any property in truth which makes it to be good, rather it is just my approval of it. This theory makes the truth to be devoid of any non-moral attributes that make it to be good. On the other hand, if you believe that there is 'something' in truth, which makes that speaking truth is good, then you hold to the belief that truth has its own underlying property by virtue of which it is treated as good. Thus, here, good, which is a moral property has a relationship with non-moral properties by virtue of which truth is attributed of that goodness. Thus, according to Hare, these three components form the characteristic of normative sentences.

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**Stop to Consider**

In the philosophical literature, particularly in the moral philosophy, there are opposing views held by the cognitivists and the non-cognitivists. The mutual criticisms led every theory to refine and redefine their theories on the basis of criticisms leveled against those schools. The non-cognitivists school of thought rose in to prominence during the time of logical positivists. From that time onwards, different versions of non-cognitivism emerged. Alfred J.Ayer in his Language, Truth and Logic characterizes a type of non-cognitivism, that is expressivism, thus: "If I say to someone, "you acted wrongly in stealing that

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money," I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, "you stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply expressing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money," in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some exclamation marks. The tone, or the exclamation marks, adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker". These and similar ideas of non-cognitivism, particularly expressivism was severely criticized by many scholars. One of the prominent criticisms leveled against non-cognitivists is the Frege-Geach problem. The problem was posed by Geach in his article 'Assertion' in 1964, which tries to argue that expressivism in moral statements cannot lead us to valid conclusions in embedded contexts.

## 4.5     Preference utilitarianism

As far as Hare's normative ethics is concerned, he belongs to a school of thought called utilitarianism. And in fact, we can say that he was one of the forerunners in bringing a remarkable change in utilitarian school of thought, which can be termed as 'preference utilitarianism'. Let us see what this preference utilitarianism is all about.

Hare maintained that a combination of prescriptivity and universalizability shall result in preference utilitarianism. Preference utilitarianism is one of the popular consequentialist theories in contemporary ethics. It differs from the traditional or classical utilitarian theory. In the classical utilitarian theory as propounded by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, the moral worthiness of an action depends upon the maximum pleasure or minimum pain it generates. One big problem with respect to classical utilitarian thinking is that how to measure the pleasure or pain. Bentham came up with a calculus to measure but it has its own problems. To address this, Hare comes up with the idea of preference utilitarianism. According to this, the right actions are those that fulfill the interests of the persons involved. According to this, the preferences of the persons determine whether the actions are right or wrong.

## 4.6     Two-level utilitarianism

Hare also tried to reconcile the difference between rule and act utilitarianism in a specific context and in a more general context between the Kantian and Utilitarian framework in moral philosophy. Let us relook at the problem to see how Hare attempts to reconcile this. According to Act utilitarianism the rightness of

the act depends upon the consequences of that single act. That means, if you are to engage in an act which needs to be considered as right or wrong, the judgment for the act to be right depends upon the consequences that act might produce. But, do we have time to think of all possible consequences of that act? We have taken few consequences into consideration by which we are convinced that act will produce better results, but due to lack of time we have not taken certain other consequences, which may produce worse results. Moreover, we may not have all the information related to that situation, which dictates what action we need to take. These are all typical constraints when we think of act utilitarianism. So, with respect to act utilitarianism as J.L.Mackie points out there will be time and energy constraints, lack of information, the agent may not be well equipped to make rigorous analysis to take a morally appropriate decisions and other similar problems. Hence, not all actions are to be judged on the basis of just that action's consequences. On the other hand is the rule utilitarianism. According to rule utilitarianism, the rightness of the act depends upon the act's conformity to a rule. If we think of rule utilitarianism, we may have some moral prescriptions, which need to be overruled at certain situations. For example, the moral prescriptions like 'don't lie' or don't harm' and similar rules are sometimes need to be over ridden when we can save a person's life by lying, or when we can save ourselves or others by harming some other person. In these cases, the acts determine the moral rightness of the action and not just mere rules. Thus, there is a problem related to the act and rule utilitarianism. This gives rise to two different types of utilitarianism. Which one is better – the act or rule utilitarianism? Hare tried to resolve this by trying to bring in the notion of two- level utilitarianism.

According to Hare, there are two levels of normative ethical thought. One is the 'intuitive' level and the other is the 'critical' level. The 'intuitive' level is our every-day moral sense where we adhere to some general moral principles and can be associated with common preferences of humanity. For example, like 'don't lie' don't steal', etc. This is almost similar to rule utilitarianism. The other one is the 'critical' level. The 'critical' level comes at the point when we face moral dilemmas. When we find that the 'intuitive' level moral rules contradicting each other, or not sufficient for us to take a morally right decision, then we reflect upon our intuitive-level principles. In these situations, we engage in 'critical' level of normative ethics. This is similar to act utilitarianism. Let us take an example - there is a general rule that we should not lie. This rule can be at the 'intuitive' level and often we practice this rule as our moral routine. Now, assume a situation when two persons are about to kill a third person and the third person had asked your help to save him and he hides in a place that is known to you. If the two persons come and ask you, "Do you know where the third person is"? Will you be revealing the person's hideout or you will tell a lie that you don't know or do you

take any other action that you feel morally appropriate? In these and similar cases, we can see that following the 'intuitive' level moral principles are not sufficient enough to take a morally right action. Hence, according to Hare, we may take a 'critical' level moral approach here.

Hare characterizes those who use 'critical' level as 'archangel' and those who use 'intuitive' as 'prole'. According to Hare, 'archangels' are those who think critically and who have "superhuman powers of thought, superhuman knowledge, and no human weaknesses". 'Proles' are those who act 'intuitively' and according to the disposition of rules and are 'incapable of critical thinking'. But, Hare doesn't want to categorize some people as 'archangels' and some as 'prole'. Rather, he thinks that we humans do possess both the two-levels of moral thinking the 'intuitive' and the 'critical'.

This is what according to Hare constitutes the two-level utilitarian approach. When we base the moral rightness of the action at the 'intuitive' level we are not directly bothered about the consequences of that act but at the overall conformity of the act with the rule. In this way, Hare tries to bring in the non-utilitarian moral rightness of the action (that is rightness based on rule). And in situations where we engage in 'critical' level to see the correct course of moral action, there we are bothered about the consequences of our specific action at that point of time. In this way, Hare brings in the utilitarian perspective on the moral rightness of the action (that is rightness is based on the consequences). Thus, Hare tries to reconcile between the rule and act utilitarianisms.

**Stop to Consider**

Hare's idea of prescriptivism, preference utilitarianism and even his two-level utilitarianism has been criticized by number of philosophers. Hare tried to refine his later works building on the core principles he came out with in his earlier works. While taking the issue of two-level utilitarianism, there were criticisms from the anti-utilitarian's camp to show the limitations of utilitarian theory. Hare tries to answer this point and set out a position regarding such situations. He says, "To directly employ act-utilitarian reasoning is, as we have seen, a dangerous procedure; but sometimes we may be driven to it [e.g. if our prima facie principles conflict]. Anti-utilitarians make it their business to produce examples in which this is the only recourse, and then charge utilitarians with taking it (which is unavoidable)... The good utilitarian will reach such decisions, but reach them with great reluctance because of his ingrained good principles; and he may agonize, and will certainly reflect, about

them till he has sorted out by critical thinking, not only what he ought to have done in the particular case, but what his prima facie principles ought to be." Thus, Hare points out that in almost all the cases of everyday moral routines, a utilitarian should take the decision following the 'intiutive' level of thinking and only at some serious moral dilemmas should the utilitarian think about the consequences of the actions and come out with a decision. This is at the 'critical' level of moral thinking.

## 4.7    Summing up

Thus we see Hare's contribution to moral philosophy is quite significant. He came up with the idea of moral prescriptivism taking a non-cognitivist standpoint in moral theory. By developing the moral prescriptivism, Hare at the normative ethical realm talks about prescriptive utilitarianism, which is remarkably different from classical utilitarianism. And he tried to overcome the limitations in rule and act utilitarianism by proposing the two-level utilitarian principles. There are quite good number of criticisms of Hare's philosophy. The criticisms include Hare's non-cognitivist position, his preference utilitarianism and his two-level utilitarianism as well. But, there is no denying of the fact that he has influenced moral philosophy to a great extent and some of the contemporary literature in ethics owes its due to Hare's contribution to moral philosophy.

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