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## **Moral Philosophy and Crisis in Our Real Life: A Study**

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### **Abstract**

*The basic or ultimate questions of morality are what occupy us when we do moral philosophy. It gives us a deeper understanding of the ultimate questions of life. This is one kind of intrinsic value apart from its practical use. It is part of a good education to learn how to struggle with some of life deeper questions. The result of such struggle is better for moral thinking. An approach to morality or several approaches fused together under lie our moral judgments, thereby giving us a perspective, acceptable or otherwise, for thinking and acting. Moral philosophy can enrich our perspective with greater clarity and more rigorous reflection. So moral philosophy is important because our choices are important. In every society certain values are inculcated implicitly in the children, as they grow up, by epic stories, folklore, and by the way the elders act, and expressly by what the parents, teachers, or elders tell us about what we ought or ought not to do, what is right or wrong and so on. Eventually, we have to find our way through these values to acquire and form our own moral beliefs. But how can we do this in the wisest and best way? That is one of the central issues in moral philosophy. When we do philosophy, we learn important intellectual skills. We learn to think rigorously about fundamental questions, to understand and evaluate conflicting points of view, to express ideas clearly, and to reason in a careful way. These skills are valuable in real life, and philosophy can help to develop them like nothing else can. When we do moral philosophy these skills also come into play and help us in real life when moral questions face us.*

*In this paper we wish to emphasize how moral philosophy can help us in dealing with grave problems or crises in real life. As human beings living in a society we cannot overlook the moral questions when we act.*

**Key Words:** *morals, manners, consequentialism, non-consequentialism, enlightened-self-interest, customary or traditional and reflective morality etc.*

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Morality is not a subject; it is a life put to the test in dozens of moments. -Paul Tillich<sup>1</sup>

We find in our society that even highly educated persons doing wrong things, indulging in criminal acts, becoming very greedy and so on. Today's news media are flooded with the news of anti-social activities like corruption, cyber-crime, murder, rape, bank robberies, ATM scribing etc., these are effects of value degradation and it led society gradually to

face serious problems. There are many factors responsible for this value degradation or value crisis in one's life. So first we have to build a better man to make a better society. Just in case you believe that great social problems are beyond your scope, consider this story: "God said to me: Your task is to build a better world. I answered: How can I do that? The world is such a large, vast place, so complicated now, and I am so small and useless. There's nothing I can do. But God in his great wisdom said: Just build a better you".<sup>2</sup> As we all know that human life is the continuous process of self-sustaining and self-generating actions. Life always requires action based on the principles and action requires common values. If one can live life successfully and happily, one must learn which values to hold and how to achieve them in life. One's life should be shaped according to the values or moral standards one chooses to flow in one's life. We live in a society and interact with each other's. How our act affects others and we are also affected by the way how others act. Moral questions are important, because they relate to our deliberate actions performed by humans, living in a society in particular and in the world at large.<sup>3</sup>

We frequently use in our daily language the word 'ethical' and 'moral' (and 'unethical' and 'immoral') synonymously or interchangeably, but sometimes they can be used in different senses. The word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word *ethos*, which means 'custom', or 'character', it is used to refer to a set of moral principles and rules held by that individual or social group. Whereas the word 'moral' is derived from the Latin word *mores*, which means 'convention' or 'practice'. It refers to the customs and practices of an individual or a social group. Another thing is that morality is used in the relative sense of one's own culture, religious or ethnicity, whereas ethics cuts across and transcends such considerations and refers to universal principles. Many people think that morality as something that's personal and normative, whereas ethics is the standards of 'good' and 'bad' distinguished by a certain community or social setting. However, to avoid complications of specifying different senses, we will use these two expressions 'ethics' and 'moral philosophy' interchangeably.<sup>4</sup> So we can say that to do moral philosophy (or ethics) is to reason about the final questions of morality.<sup>5</sup> Morality is generally considered to be a principles or standards which may be based a code of conduct embedded in a particular system of philosophy, religion, culture, or accepted as universal because enjoined by moral reason as so. Morality may also be thought to be synonymous with, or related to goodness or rightness. Thus we find that as codes of conduct or maxims followed by different people are derived from different sources, they may differ here and there. Sometimes we use the terms 'morals' and 'manners' synonymously or interchangeably, but these words have different meaning. Manners as deal with human behavior that is social; such behavior although not a matter for morality, is closely allied to it. A distinction is usually made between moral and non-moral behavior. Moral behavior is behavior which is subject to moral appraisal either as morally good or morally bad, morally right or morally wrong. Moral behavior is the behavior of the person who can be held responsible for his/her actions, is free to act and is in a full possession of his/her mental faculty. By contrast, the behavior of a toddler or that of an insane person, for example is regarded as non-moral. Manner is concern with social behavior and is thus related to manner, test, appropriateness,

and so on. For example, invite some friends to your home for dinner and you greet them on arrival. Your failure to greet your guests is not immoral but relates to manner or standard of social behavior. Swearing at someone or uttering rude words in social situation also fall in this category. It may so happen that manner on some occasion shades into the sphere of morality and create moral problems. Suppose a man confides in his lawyer about his plan to do something. A person's confiding in another has to do it, is manner and is part of social behavior. But now suppose that the man's plan is to get a forgotten document and he asked the lawyer to prepare it or to get it done. We have now stepped into the sphere of morality the man's trying to get a forgotten document is immoral, and if the lawyer agrees to the man's proposal that would also be immoral.

Sometimes we distinguish reflective morality and traditional morality. We are all born in different society and as we grow up, we are taught some do's and don'ts. This is our first contact with traditional or customary morality, which has been formed over the years and has crystallized in to the form of custom or tradition of the society in question. Different cultures have different customs and traditions and therefore morality based on them may vary from society to society. Since such morality has arisen out of human needs and social interaction and formed into customs and traditions of a particular culture, it is generally helpful in creating a moral society. Conventional or traditional morality is often taught to the young without critical appraisal or reflection. But moral philosophers cannot rest satisfied with customary or traditional morality. As philosophers they seek a critical examination of any moral teaching, idea, belief, and proposition to find out its foundation or basis that they think should be universal in the sense that it cuts across different cultures or social convention. In other words, if moral teaching or ideas imbedded in social conventions or traditions stand the scrutiny of such critical examination they can be retained. Critical examination of moral beliefs is essential to human life. The great Greek philosopher Socrates said, "The unexamined life is not worth living."<sup>6</sup> We can extend the Socratic teaching to morality and demand critical examination of every moral belief, custom or tradition to find out whether they have any logical or cogent arguments or proof in their favour, and consequently, whether we can live by them.<sup>7</sup> Thus critical examination or evaluation of moral belief, customs, moral rules, traditions, and ethical theories is essential before we accept them and begin to live by them. Again, we should not reject them out of hand, but neither should we endorse them generously unless we have subjected them to careful, logical examination.<sup>8</sup>

In discussion of moral discourse, it is necessary to draw a distinction between second order ethical and first order ethical issues. Second order ethical issues are about morality and it concerned with developing any particular moral theory, while the first order issues within morality and it typically takes the form of epistemological, metaphysical or conceptual issues about morality and our moral claim. One of the main questions that the moral philosopher has to deal with is: What is it that constitutes goodness or rightness? Alternatively, what sort of actions must a person perform in order to be a good person or for his/her actions to be right? Different moral theories answer this question differently.

There are different ethical theories which try to establish principles on the basis of which we can distinguish what is morally good and what is morally bad between what is right and what is wrong. It may turn out that what is morally good in terms of one theory may not be so in another.

Several philosophers have propounded different types of ethical theories. But there are two important kinds of ethical theories consequentialist and non-consequentialist. The Consequentialists hold that we should choose an action considering the best possible overall consequences.<sup>9</sup> This theory says that the basic criterion of what is morally obligatory, right or wrong, etc., is the non-moral value that is brought into being. “The final appeal, directly or indirectly, must be to the comparative amount of good produced, or rather to the comparative balance of good over evil produced.”<sup>10</sup> An act ought to be done, for the Consequentialists, “...if and only if it or the rule under which it falls produces, will probably produce, or is intended to produce a greater balance of good over evil than any available alternative.”<sup>11</sup> That means we are obligated to act in such ways that produce the best consequences.<sup>12</sup> Utilitarianism is a well-known form of consequentialism because it rests on the idea that it is the consequences of actions, policies, laws, etc. that determine whether they are good or bad, right or wrong. It is also the moral theory, for which the fundamental principle of moral judgment is ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number.’ There are several varieties of utilitarianism. But basically, a utilitarian approach to morality implies that no moral act or rule is intrinsically right or wrong. Rather, the rightness or wrongness of an act or rule is solely a matter of the overall non-moral good, such as pleasure, happiness, health, knowledge, or satisfaction of individual desire, produced in the consequences of doing that act or following that rule.<sup>13</sup>

But non-consequentialist theories, on the other hand, assert that there are some considerations besides the goodness or badness of the consequences of an action that may make an action or rule right or obligatory “...certain features of the act itself other than the *value* it brings into existence, for example, the fact that it keeps a promise, is just, or is commanded by God or by the state.”<sup>14</sup> The Deontologists maintain that the principle of maximizing the balance of good over evil, right over wrong, no matter for whom, is either not a moral criterion or standard at all, or, at least, it is not the only basic or ultimate one.<sup>15</sup> According to this ethical theory, in nutshell, the rightness or wrongness of an act depends on something other than the goodness or badness of the consequences. There are several varieties of Deontology. But basically, the Deontologists approach to morality implies that a moral act or rule is intrinsically or essentially right or wrong. Deontological ethics is in keeping with scriptures, natural moral laws, and intuitions from common sense. The rightness or wrongness of an act or rule is, at least in part, a matter of the intrinsic moral features of that kind of act or rule. According to this theory duty should be done for duty’s sake.<sup>16</sup>

Now in this discussion, it is necessary to carefully consider the importance of values and morals in our real life. We need values and morals in our real life for the several reasons. Some of these reasons are: Values and morals can play a vital role in person’s life by

guiding him/her to live for noble goals and not for a purely selfish of conventional or a life controlled by erratic emotions or accidental occurrences. Apart from guiding a person, values and morals can motivate a person and inspire to live a certain kind of meaningful life and with zest or great enthusiasm and energy. If a person is sensitive enough to values and morals, and fails to live up to them, he would be spurred to improve himself. We should be emphasized that values and morals one adopts must leave one room for moral improvement. Self-serving ends are not good in this respect.<sup>17</sup>

Why human beings do morally good acts rather than bad or immoral acts? Or ‘why should human being be moral?’ This is a very important question on the basis or foundation of morality. Though, this is not the only question concerning morality. ‘Why should I be moral?’ it is also an important question too. But these two questions are quite different in meaning. Notice that second one is a question about why I as an individual ought to be moral; this is not the same as asking why human being should be moral. As Kai Nielsen points out in his essay “Why Should I Be Moral?” that the second one is very difficult to answer by the help of clear logic or conclusive evidence. But various attempts have been made to answer the first question about the foundation of morality.<sup>18</sup> According to some moral philosophers, it is religion which provides the foundation for morality; if there is no God there is no morality. It may be psychologically true for some people that they perform good acts because of their belief in God and afterlife. But it is highly debatable whether people with no religious belief fall outside the preview of morality when they act with what they consider to be good reason and a sense of responsibility. There are many moral theories offering answer independently of any reference to religion, such as ones which use a concept of enlightened self-interest, argument from tradition and law, or refer to common human needs and so on. The argument on the basis of enlightened-self-interest is an argument to the effect that if everyone does good act rather than bad one it would be in best interest of all it would create a better society for everyone to live in. This theory should not be confused with what is known as at the egoistic theory which emphasizes one’s individual self-interest only. Let us consider an example to make the point clear: consider a group of people none of them killed, stole, lied or cheated. It is obvious that each member of the group would benefit in such a situation and would realize it is in his/her interest to good rather than bad. J. P. Thiroux find the argument from enlightened self-interest somewhat compelling, although not tight enough.<sup>19</sup> The argument from tradition and law goes like this. Traditions and laws, enduring over a long period of time, are found to govern the behavior of human beings. And since traditions and laws aim at persuading moral rather than immoral, it seems reasonable to say that human beings are morals by obeying traditions and laws. But uncritical obedience to traditions and laws, it is argues, is unacceptable to creative moral reason.<sup>20</sup> Enlightened self-interest may have other conflicting interests leading to immoral acts and overwhelming the former. Respect for traditions and laws encourage blind obedience to practices which may be immoral. So we now turn to the argument from human needs. It has been argued that an empirical and rational examination of human nature reveals that human beings have many common needs, desires, goals, and objectives etc. It can be said, for example, in a general way that people

want friendship, love happiness, freedom, peace, creativity, and stability in their lives. They also want the same things for others too, for if others around us are unhappy or unstable, that would also affect us adversely. Hence people would want to build their lives of moral principles that make for cooperation and freedom from the fear of beings the victims of immoral acts committed by others. It is clear therefore that, according to this line of argument, if we should live a moral life, for living such a life would give them satisfying happy and meaning full existence.<sup>21</sup>

Another important question some time arises that is if you try to convince a person why he/she should be moral, than someone may ask how would you do it? You might say the argument of fear of reprisal to him/her that if he/she do not follow moral rules than he/she will be punished. For examples; if he/she is not honest, then he/she will not be trusted, if he/she steals, he/she may in risk for being punished etc. There are some self-interested reasons you might offer someone to convince him/her that he/she ought to be moral. You might tell him/her that being a virtuous person can benefit someone's own interest. Philippa Foot, a contemporary moral philosopher, believes that most of the traditional virtues are made in favour of our best self-interest. You might go even further in reasoning or thinking about reasons to be moral. You may make the point that being moral is elevating.<sup>22</sup> Even we can say following Kant's moral theory that you may get a certain dignity, integrity, and self-respect by sacrificing yourself for the greater interest. For Kant, "human dignity and worth is wholly bound up with being able to act for moral reasons."<sup>23</sup>

**Concluding Remarks:** We know that only humans are capable of being moral and human beings cannot flourish without being moral. The consequentialists and non-consequentialists may also claim in their different way living a life of human according to the norms or rules laid down by them, would result in a happy, meaningful and good life in a society. Now the question is whatever the moral standers or rules are, the real problem is: how do we convince an individual human being to act morally? Our present world is a trouble torn world. The twentieth century saw two great World Wars which caused unspeakable sufferings. These kinds of suffering have been continuing, on a smaller scale, with almost the same kind of consequences. But we have not learnt to eschew violence or others immoral acts. The question naturally arises as to whether philosophy in general, and moral philosophy in particular, has any relevant to the world torn by strife and other horrendous atrocities committed on women, the disadvantage, the weak or ordinary human beings. What moral philosophy does is to bring clarity into our moral thinking, to help us distinguished between what is good and what is bad, what is right and what is wrong or what is justice and what is not. But convincing a person to do the right thing or to shun bad ways is a different kind of job. There is a gap between what people know to be right and what they actually do. We all know that murdering a person is bad but murders are committed, telling a lie is bad but lies are told, terrorism, robbery, not to help poor, these entire acts are bad but these acts are committed. How do we close this gap? The Indian sages have spoken of six enemies or vows within us namely, lust (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), delusory emotional attachment (*moha*), pride (*mada* or *ahaṁkāra*) and envy

(*mātsarya*). Human beings are swayed by these internal urges to commit immoral acts in spite of their knowing what they are doing is wrong. The problem then is to control these six enemies or sigma within us. We need real spiritual training to be able to keep these enemies under control. Noble philosophy have been propounded, great religious teachers have appear in our midst preaching love, forgiveness, nonviolence, tolerance and other noble virtues for us to cultivate, but all this has not stop human beings from fighting among themselves. In my opinion this cannot be done without some kind of spiritual awakening. On this ground the real religious teachers, but not fake Godmen, have real role to play and they must step in.

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