

## *Chapter Seven*

*Moral standard and criterion of good living:*

*A New Approach*

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### **Moral standard and criterion of good living: A New Approach**

The main objective of any ethical system is to set up at the very outset the criterion or standard of moral living. That is ethicists are keen to reply the question: how should one live? Even Socrates in his own time said that our primary question in moral philosophy is "How should one live?" In Kantian ethics, it is said that the moral standard of one's living should be judged in terms of his moral actions and every moral action as done by a moral agent should be evaluated in terms of moral principles which are absolute in the sense that there is no exception as far as the applicability of the moral principles is concerned. Kantian principle of morality is absolute and rigorous as it runs with the moral command: 'duty for duty sake'. The problem with Kantianism is that it ignores non-moral qualities, moral lucks on which the moral agent has no control at all. It also ignores many other things a moral agent cannot ignore in maintaining good life. Therefore, the new approach tries to set up a moral standard of living which somehow or other deviates from the philosophical framework of modernity associated with the Kantian ideal of the Rational Person. The concept of free will or the concept of the autonomy of the will rules out any external authority and therefore the self which enjoys free will is alienated from the world.

The new approach therefore seeks a new kind of self which is not alienated from the external authority. The new approach claims that the concepts central to ethics can best be understood if they are first considered in non-ethical contexts. Ethical sphere by no means is separated from the rest of life and it is certainly wrong to conceive morality in terms of rigidity, autonomy and with the set of contractual arrangements. Ethical sphere is a matter of our whole mode of life and in this regard the practice of learning a language and many other human practices require the

exercise of virtues. The language learner, it is said, must exemplify the honesty and the virtue of humility. The new approach holds that the Kantian ideal of the Rational Person fails to incorporate our whole mode of life in the sphere of morality. Therefore, it lacks moral relevance in the context of human life in general. This new approach also tells us that human life has no purpose or telos as many modern moral systems have anticipated. The new approach not only denies Kantian form of modality, it equally tries to make a bridge between ancient virtue ethics and the contemporary works on the virtues. It tries to revive the ancient form of virtue ethics with some modifications which are imminent in the context of life.

It is important to point out here that the outlook of moral value has taken a decisive move in the post Kantian moral philosophy. Before Kantianism values were inscribed in the heavens and guaranteed by God. However, in the post Kantian moral philosophy the notion of will, more succinctly the autonomy of the free will, is established as the creator of value. Here the sovereign moral concept is freedom or possibly courage in a sense which identifies it with freedom, will, and power. Act, choice, decision, responsibility, independence are emphasized in this philosophy of puritanical origin and apparent austerity. This image of human nature has been the inspiration of political liberalism. However, Hume tells us that a good political philosophy may not be a good moral philosophy. Whatever the case may be, emotion plays an important part in human life. Kant unlike Aristotle rules out the relevance of emotion in moral life. Aristotle as we saw gives sufficient reasons for admitting emotion in the case of morality. Unlike Aristotle, Kant holds an interesting theory about the relation of the emotions to the reason. Kant, we think, did not officially admit emotion in morality, but when he distinguishes between practical love and pathological love, he thereby shows the relevance of emotion. He says that in the case of practical love, there is no scope of emotion as practical love is the outcome of rational actions, but in the case of pathological love, there is the

relevance of emotion as pathological love is a mere matter of feeling. This again reflects that Kant makes a clear distinction between empirical psyches from the clean operations of the reason. Moreover, in a footnote in the *Grundlegung* Kant admits a subordinate place to a particular emotion which may accompany the recognition of duty, but in no way motivates duty for the moral law. It is an actual experience of freedom, the realization that although swayed by passions we are also capable of rational conduct- a conduct which is closely related with the Kantian conception of the Sublime.

Human's empirical psyche is selfish and Kant wanted to find something clean and pure outside the mess of the selfish empirical psyche. In fact his enquiry led him back again into the self. Now, depending on the self-defensive psyche, how can we make ourselves better? One may suggest that religion can help us as ordinary man with the simple religious conceptions has usually held a more just view of the matter than the voluntaristic philosopher. Religion normally emphasizes states of mind as well as actions and regards states of mind as the generic background of action, such as, pureness of heart, meekness of spirit. More importantly, religion gives rise to devices for the purification of states of mind. For example, prayer can actually induce a better quality of consciousness and provide energy for good action which would not otherwise be available. In fact by opening our eyes we do not necessarily see what confronts us. We are anxiety-ridden animals. Our minds are constantly active, fabricating an anxious, often falsifying veil which partially conceals the world. Our states of consciousness differ in quality and if quality of consciousness matters, then anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness, objectivity and realism is to be connected with virtue.

Good life is not exclusively the outcome of reason. Rather it would be the outcome of both experience and reason. Recent moral philosophy denies experience in the case good life; they prefer reason for maintaining a good moral life. However, the new

approach thinks the other way round as it holds that experience with beauty plays an important role in maintaining good moral life. Beauty in the convenient and traditional name of something which art and nature share and which gives a fairly clear sense to the idea of quality of experience and change of consciousness. According to Plato beauty is the only spiritual thing which we love by instinct and when we move from beauty in nature to beauty in art we are already in a more difficult region. In fact the experience of art is more easily degraded than the experience of nature. A great deal of art actually is self-consoling fantasy and even great art cannot guarantee the quality of its consumer's consciousness. However, great art exists and is sometimes properly experienced and even a shallow experience of what is great can give its effect. In fact great art invigorates our best faculties or more specifically in Platonic language, it inspires love in the highest part of the soul. Since art is a human product, virtues and talents are required of the artist. A good artist in terms of his art is brave, truthful, patient and humble. The enjoyment of art is a training in the love of virtue. Art transcends selfish and obsessive limitations of personality and the true genesis or realism of a great artist is not a photographic realism, rather it is essentially both pity and justice.

According to the new approach the only thing which is of real importance is the ability on the part of moral agent to foresee it all clearly and respond to it justly which is inseparable from virtue. Perhaps one of the greatest achievements of all is to join this sense of absolute morality not the tragic, but to the cosmic. Art therefore stands not as a diversion, rather it is the most educational of all human activities and intuitively a place in which the nature of morality can be seen. Art pierces the veil and gives sense to the notion of a reality which lies beyond appearance. It exhibits virtue in its true guise in the context of death and chance. According to Plato beauty, a kind of virtue could be a starting point of good life. He, however, mistrusts art as for him all art is bad art, a mere fiction and consolation which distorts reality. As far as virtue is

concerned, it can be said that virtue is a good habit and dutiful action and the background condition of such and such action is a just mode of vision and a good quality of consciousness. It is a task to come to see the world as it is. A philosopher which leaves duty without a context and exalts the idea of freedom and power as a separate top level value ignores this task and obscures the relation between virtue and reality. However, we act rightly not out of strength of will but out of the quality of our usual attachments and with the kind of energy and discernment which we have available and to this the whole activity of our consciousness is relevant.

Good life always requires virtue and virtue can be loved for its own sake. There was no metaphysical unity of human life and all was subject to morality and chance. Knowing this fact, we continue to dream of unity. Art is our most ardent dream. A good man knows whether and when art is more important than family. Moreover, a good man sees the ways in which the virtues are related with each other. Plato never in fact anywhere expounds a systematic and unitary view of the world of the forms, though he implies that there is a hierarchy of forms. What he suggests is that we work with the idea of such a hierarchy in so far as we introduce order into our conceptions of the world through our apprehension of Good. According to Plato complete unity is not seen until one has to reach the summit, but moral advance carries it with intuitions of unity which are increasingly less misleading. As we deepen our notions of virtues, Plato opines, we introduce relationship and hierarchy. With the help of courage, a kind of virtue and a sort of specialized daring of the spirit, one can operate his own wisdom and love. However, one must distinguish between self-assertive ferocity from the kind of courage as such distinction enables one to choose coolly the labour camp rather than the easy compromise with the tyrant. Plato at times seems to imply that the journey towards the Good leads away from the world of particularity and detail. The great artists reveal the detail of the world and their greatness is not something peculiar and personal like a proper name. Rather

they are great in ways which are to some extent similar, and increased understanding of an art reveals its unity through its excellence. In fact an art reveals reality, the truth, because there is a way in which things are there is a fellowship of artists. Honesty seems much the same virtue in a chemist as in a historian and the evolution of the two could be similar. A serious scholar being a scholar is good, but a serious scholar who is also a good man is far better than a mere good scholar, because unlike a mere good scholar, a serious scholar with good or sound manhood knows not only his subject but the proper place of his subject in the whole sphere of his life. Like a serious scholar, a good artist does not confine himself at home; rather the concentration-camp guard can be a kindly father. The new approach therefore suggests that the problem with the current approaches of morality is that they fail to cover the whole of our modes of living and the quality of our relations with the world.

What is good? Everyone either being as a layman or being as a philosopher moralist would like to lead a good life. But how does one can have a good life is difficult to answer. Good has often been said to be indefinable for reasons connected with freedom. The concept of good though desirable to everyone is an empty space into which human choice may move. Iris Murdoch, however, thinks that we do really know a certain amount of good and about the ways in which it is connected with our condition. The ordinary person does not believe that he creates values by his choice. He may think so if he will be corrupted by philosophy. We are not usually in doubt about the direction in which Good lies and likewise we can recognize the real existence of evil. However, the concept of Good still remains obscure and mysterious. We see the world in the light of the Good, but what is the Good itself? We find an answer from Plato. Plato says, <sup>74</sup>“It (Good) is that which every soul pursues and for the sake of which it does all that it does, with some intuition of its

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<sup>74</sup> Plato, *Republic*, p.505.

nature, and yet also baffled." Plato further contends that Good is the source of knowledge and truth and yet is something which surpasses them in splendour.

One may attempt to give a logical answer of the term Good. For them asking what Good is, is asking what truth is or what courage is. If we define Good as X, we thereby mean of course a good X. In this regard, if we say that Good is Reason, we have to talk about good judgment and if we say that Good is Love, we have to explain that there are different kinds of Love. All things which are capable of showing degrees of excellence show it in their own way. That means to say that the idea of perfection can only be exemplified in particular cases in terms of the kind of perfection which is appropriate. However, the point is that although one can talk about good painting, but one could not say in general what perfection is. One can talk about good judgment, but the truth of judgments of value cannot be demonstrated. This actually indicates or suggests that the view of Good is empty and almost trivial. The indefinability of Good is connected with the unsystematic and inexhaustible variety of the world and the pointlessness of virtue. In this respect there is a special link between the concept of Good and the ideas of death and chance. A genuine sense of morality enables us to see virtue as the only thing of worth and it is impossible to limit and foresee the ways in which it will be required of us. Good is mysterious, because of human fatality. We behave well in areas where this can be done fairly easily and let other areas of possible virtue remain undeveloped. There are few places where virtue plainly shines and we without improving ourselves cannot see these things. It is in the context of such limitations that we should picture our freedom. Freedom is a mixed concept. It is mixed in the sense that it has true half as well as false half. Its true half is an aspect of virtue connected especially with the clarification of vision and the domination of selfish impulse and its false half known as popular half is a name for the self-assertive

movements of deluded selfish will which because of our ignorance we take to be something autonomous.

We think what has been said above is made clear with the following observation of Plato. Plato has given up the image of deluded worship in his great allegory. The prisoners in the cave at first witness the back wall and behind them a fire is burning in the light of which they see upon the wall the shadows of puppets which are carried between them and the fire. They take these shadows to be the whole of reality. When they turn around they can see the fire, which they have to pass in order to get out of the cave. Here the fire is just like the self, the old unregenerate psyche, the great source of energy and warmth. The prisoners in the second stage of enlightenment have gained the kind of self-awareness, which is nowadays a matter of so much interest to us. They can see in themselves the source of what was formally blind selfish instinct. They see the flames which threw the shadows which they used to think were real, and they can see the puppets, imitations of things in the real world, whose shadows they used to recognize. They do not yet dream that there is anything else to see. What is more likely than that they should settle down beside the fire, which though its form is flickering and unclear is quite easy to look at and cozy to sit by?

It has been said that Good is indefinable. However, philosophers have attempted to conceive Good by making a special relation with other concepts, such as, Freedom, Happiness, and Courage etc. But the problem with this conceivability is that they seem to represent in each case the philosopher's admiration for some specialized aspect of human conduct which is much less than the whole of excellence and more importantly at times dubious in itself. One may be tempted to say that what is Good is love, but the problem with this interpretation is that Good and Love should not be identified, because human love is usually self-assertive. Although Good is sovereign over Love, they still play different roles. Good is the magnetic centre towards which

loves naturally moves and accordingly true love moves to true good and false love moves to false good. Even false love embraces false death. When true good is loved, the quality of the love is automatically refined and when the soul is turned towards Good the highest part of the soul is enlivened. Love is the tension between the imperfect soul and the magnetic perfection which is conceived of as lying beyond it. In the *Symposium*, Plato pictures Love as being poor and needy. Love is the general name of the quality of attachment and it is capable of infinite degradation and is the source of our greatest errors. However, when it is even partially refined it is the energy and passion of the soul in the search for Good. Then it is a reflection of the warmth and light of the sun. Accordingly, it can be said that the good man is humble, he is very unlike the big neo-Kantian Lucifer. A good man is much more like Kierkegaard's tax collector. The humble man can see other things as they are and this is made possible because he sees himself as nothing. He sees the pointlessness of virtue and its unique value and the endless extent of its demand. Simone Weil tells us that the exposure of the soul to God condemns the selfish part of it not to suffering, but to death. Only the humble man can perceive the distance between suffering and death. He may not be a good man by definition, but he would definitely be the kind man who is most likely of all to become good. A humble man can lead a good life as he is in a position to exercise love and justice. He does not separate his own ethical life from the rest of life; rather his own ethics or morality is surrounded by our whole mode of life. A humble man therefore rejects the Kantian ideal of the Rational Person as he comes to know that human life has no purpose or telos.

Virtue, for Murdoch, therefore seems partly to consist in the movement beyond the self, not only requiring virtues such as humility and honesty, but also developing a capacity for love itself, and ultimately love of what she calls 'the Good'. The authority of morals, therefore, is the authority of truth, that is of reality and understanding such

truth or reality is not the outcome of abstract intellect modern moralists think of, but of looking and seeing around us. This view of moral perception has its root in Aristotle's account of practical wisdom of the virtuous man who sees matters as they are and responds appropriately. The Good therefore brings unity into the world of chaos and this is made possible, of course, partly through the understanding we can have of the relationship between hierarchies in the virtues. However, this understanding has to be complemented by an awareness of the richness and complexity of detail in everyday situation, an awareness itself grounded in live of the Good.

### **The malaise of Modernity:**

Many proponents of the revivalists' camp of virtue ethic seem to have conceived that contemporary ethical discussion is literally nonsense, because the ethical concepts as offered by various modern moral theories are nothing but mere fragments from past traditions and they were to be contentless when they were wrenched out of context. More succinctly, it can be said that the concept of 'ought', the genesis of modernity, is no longer well grounded in the current moral approaches. Therefore, it has been claimed by the new approach that the so-called modern moral systems are suffering from malaises. Ethical malaise are not something that can be overcome by moral laws, moral obligation or simply looking at the consequence of moral action, rather ethical malaise is something that weakens the moral agent. Ethical malaise is a disease, but it is not a particular disease that can be diagnosed, rather it is a symptomless disease which actually weakens the moral agent. There is no question of doubt that without being a virtuous, no moral agent can retain his moral obligation simply on the verdict of categorical imperatives or moral laws. Likewise the consequence of an action would invite moral futility if the moral agent who acts would not be a virtuous. Moreover, modern approaches overlook the possibility or plausibility of moral luck while doing moral actions. However, many moral

philosophers of the revival camp would like to say one should give equal importance on moral luck, moral situation while doing a moral act. A virtuous agent is wise; he has to look after the surrounding situations. The problem with Kantianism is that it overlooks moral dilemma while doing moral action. That is why many would like to say that the malaise of Kantian morality is that it does not fulfill the emotional aspect of moral agent. We think reason without emotion is moral malaise just as consequence of an action without virtuous is moral malaise.

The question then is: how can we implement a moral theory which is purely rational or which is purely consequential? There is nothing wrong to proclaim moral universalisability in morality, but moral universalisability should not be evaluated in terms of moral cannons or principles or in terms of moral obligation, rather moral universalisability should be evaluated in terms of virtuous. The problem with modern morality is that they act with the influence of science, with the outlook of anthropocentrism where moral laws count first. Where rationalism is the only course of moral action and evaluation, where external factors which lie beyond the control of moral agent are not taking into consideration, where the role of emotion is forfeited, where human love, care, compassion are completely ignored, such type of morality definitely suffers from ethical malaise. Virtue ethics of the present form actually tries to overcome the ethical malaise witnessing in the modern moral theories.

### **Modern morality is the representative of Anthropocentrism:**

It is said by many that virtue ethics of the old tradition tries to regain its foothold with the appearance of environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is a kind of ethics where all biotic as well as abiotic species are conceived equal in terms of intrinsic value or worth. There is no question of doubt that traditional ethics or more succinctly it can be said that all normative ethics by and large are anthropocentric in nature where the domination of man over other species has been recognized. The reason for this is that man occupies a distinctive property, i.e. rationality – a quality by

means of which moral action can be evaluated in terms of good or bad, in terms of right or wrong etc. Humans' by virtue of possessing rationality can judge what we ought to do or what we ought not to do. This ethical propensity is well supported by scientific and technological development where reason or rationality is all about. We think that Kantian deontology and consequentialism are indirectly influenced by science. There is no question of ethical anthropocentrism is an ethical malaise on many accounts as it will create ethical dualism and subjugation among moral agents or species. It states that one species is morally superior to other simply on the distinctive property as possessed by moral agents. However, it is claimed by saying that distinctive properties should not be the moral criterion. In this regard environmental ethics is exemplary as it tries to give equal moral value to all moral agents and thereby either tries to moderate current trend of anthropocentrism or to introduce non-anthropocentrism as an alternative way of ethical outlook where all human and non-human species share equal moral status.

We think that non-anthropocentrism can only be possible if the moral; agents are to be virtuous. Non-anthropocentrism stands against ethical dualism, consumerism, scienticism, and instead of these it proclaims ethical equality in terms of intrinsic worth, it values all natural species equally and also extends its scope even in land. The celebrated article of Andro Leopold entitled "Land Ethics" is a case of point. We have to realize that nothing in the world is redundant, every tiny species in the world contributes something for the betterment of other and this should be realized by the moral agent. So it would be the matter of realization, an internal culture which cannot be done without a virtuous being. Only a virtuous moral agent can realise that the world is an organic whole and all species are its part. Therefore, every species, whether biotic or abiotic, must contribute for the betterment of the organic whole. In this way the world peace as such can be maintained. So when we are talking of the peace in life, happiness in life, this can only be maintained through the peace of

environment and this can only be made possible with mutual trust, love, care, compassion, and understating one by another. All these things, such as, love, care, compassion etc. cannot be possible without emotion. In short love, care, compassion etc. are nothing but the emotional aspect of human life. Human life by no means is the dictation of mere reason as Kant suggests while doing morality or the consequence of an action while doing a moral act. Rather human life is an incorporation of mutual trust, compassion, love and care. Human peace or happiness is therefore is an outcome of realization- a self-realisation through which every moral agent comes to know that his own peace or happiness is the contribution of others and this can be made possible when his own self would merge with other self -i.e. with the greater self. The concept of Sarvodaya of Gandhi is a case in point. Gandhi criticizes the utilitarian principle of the "greatest number of the greatest happiness' and thereby proclaims that a virtuous being should aim to make happiness for all, but not only for the majority as suggested by the Utilitarian.

We think that the revival trend of virtue ethics suggests something common to modern environmental ethics. A man having great insight can only be realised what he is. He comes to know what his own role in society. He feels that he is there for others and his own happiness or peace actually depends on the contribution of others. The same thing happens in others as well. Therefore, one has to forget about the arrogant approach towards others. Every man should be virtuous having the qualities through which he comes to realise the situation and thereby should act according to this situation. Morality therefore is not a cannon base subject, nor a consumerist employment, rather a caring and loving and compassionate rational enterprise which can properly be judged only by a rational agent. Therefore, it should be more prudent to acclaim that virtue ethics of the present form deserves moral worth which actually tries to bring back the relevance of traditional form of virtue ethics on one hand and at the same time tries to moderate the modern form of ethics

so that an incorporation of all ethical segments can be made with the outlook of present situation. That is why it is claimed that the attempt of the revival trend of virtue ethics would be philosophically and ethically worthy.

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