
UNIT 1 INTRODUCTION TO APPLIED ETHICS*

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Applied Ethics or practical ethics is a field which is encountered by us in each and every sphere of our lives. The objective of the present unit is:

- Contextualise Applied Ethics as a discipline under the broad field of Ethics.
- Establish the distinctive nature of ethical inquiry as a normative study
- Define the key terms used in the field of ethics
- Discuss the three approaches to the study of ethics

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- Analyse the approaches to understand moral content
- Discuss the problem of method and justification

1.1 INTRODUCTION

It is believed that applied ethics has the goal of resolving practical problems by implementing general moral theories. However, it is observed that it is not possible to have a straightforward movement towards practical judgements by appealing either to moral theories or any general moral principles (such as “one ought not to inflict harm or risk of harm”; “one ought to treat people fairly and with equal respect”; etc.). That is why there appears to be a gap between “theory and practice”. Theory and principles should always be supplemented by human experiences, right action, motivation, and the like. Peter Singer argues that ethics should not be viewed as an ideal system that is only noble in theory but not in practice. The meaningfulness of ethical judgements lies in the fact that they guide our practice. However, in situations involving dilemmas, moral rules may conflict. Let us define a few key concepts, which are related to the field and are frequently used in any discussion on ethics.

1.2 BASIC CONCEPTS

1.2.1 Morality

Morality comes from the Latin word *moralis*. It signifies a body of standards or principles derived from a code of conduct of a particular philosophy, religion or culture, or from a standard that someone believes should be universal. It is also referred to as the empirical knowledge of moral phenomena in the life of an individual and in the structure and functioning of a society. Moreover, another way of understanding morality is to see it as synonymous with ‘goodness’ or ‘rightness.’ Morality is the differentiation of decisions, actions, and intentions between the ones that are ‘right’ or ‘good’ and the ones that are ‘wrong’ or ‘bad.’ Morality in a descriptive sense incorporates the social mores, codes of conduct, and cultural or personal values. Simply put, morality refers to Rules and Duties that govern our behaviour, such as: “Do not hurt people”, “Be fair”, “Respect others”, “Always tell the truth”, and several others.

1.2.2 Values

Values are our judgements about what is important in terms of the end and goal of human life. Values can be understood as those states of affairs which are desired by and for people. At the level of individual as well as the society we work towards increasing them. Examples include Health, Wealth, Happiness, Freedom, Equality, Welfare, Justice, Democracy, Rule of Law and others.

1.2.3 Virtues

These are the required characteristic traits which are desirable for both the individual as well as for the good functioning of the society. Examples include Courage, Self-control, Justice, Temperance, Wisdom and others.

1.2.4 Ethics

Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos*, meaning character. As a science of character ethics systematises and recommends concepts of right and wrong behaviour. It seeks to resolve questions of human morality by defining concepts, like 'right', 'wrong', 'good', 'bad', 'vice' and 'virtue' and several others. In this sense Ethics is also defined as "the philosophy of morality" or a "philosophical study of morality" i.e. an academic study of morals, duties, values, and virtues with an aim to find their theoretical relationships. The discipline raises and answers several questions, like, What is right or wrong in human conduct?, What allows us to judge any person or action as good, bad, right, or wrong? How do we make moral decisions and judgements? Which theories of conduct are valid or invalid, and why? Are there universally applicable principles or laws, or should each situation be decided on its own? Are our actions like, helping, stealing, killing, compassion, lying, donating, cheating, and others right or wrong, and why or why not? Ethics guides us about the right ways to live our everyday life by delineating rules, principles and values. In this sense it also investigates whether morals, duties, values and virtues work in practice or not. In ordinary language the words ethics and morality are also used in an interchangeable manner.

1.2.5 Ethical Laws/Principles

These are the general concepts used to sum up a range of morals, values and virtues, in order to derive moral imperatives. All our actions are tested against Ethical Principles.

There are primarily three approaches, which can be adopted to study ethics:

1.2.5.1 Descriptive Ethics: Descriptive ethics is the study of morality from a scientific point of view. Here, the description and explanation of the moral life focusses on the way it is manifested in one's moral experience and society's moral code. Descriptive ethics is the scientific study or the empirical knowledge of moral phenomena in the life of an individual and in the structure and functioning of the society. This branch of ethics takes into account the beliefs people hold about morality and conceptual models in order to gain insight into the moral phenomena, behaviour, and thinking. This type of ethics looks into the decision-making process of people based on which actions are categorized as right or wrong, and the characteristics of moral agents are judged as virtuous/vicious.

1.2.5.2 Normative Ethics: Normative ethics studies the systematic construction of a valid ethical system (a set of moral standards of evaluation and moral rules of conduct applicable to all mankind). Here the task is to evaluate what is right or wrong and lay out moral rules for actions, behaviour, and ways of life. The purpose of normative ethics is to discover or construct a consistent system of moral norms that stands valid for everyone. The objective of ethical theories is to guide us to know and perform what is morally right and to avoid what is wrong. Some significant normative ethical theories are;

- **Deontology:** Deontology is a duty-based ethics. We have a moral duty to do things which are right and to not do things which are wrong. According to Immanuel Kant moral principles and laws guide the individual's choices of what they ought to do. Kantian reasoning is called non-consequentialist or deontological since it does not look at the consequence but rather considers the law or duty which governs our actions. In *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) Kant grounds our duty and morality in rationality itself. He postulates the first formulation of the Categorical Imperative, which argues that one must act in such a manner that one can simultaneously will that the maxim of one's action (the reasoning which guides our intention) should become universal law.
- **Consequentialism:** According to this view, the consequences or results of one's actions are regarded as being the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that particular action. According to classical Utilitarianism, given by Bentham (1823) and Mill (1863), happiness is the

only consequences which matters. That action is said to be right which brings about more happiness in comparison to any other action in the given situation. The good entails in the greatest good of the greatest number by minimizing pain and maximizing happiness.

- **Virtue Ethics:** Morality is not just about the consequences or abiding by moral laws and duties, instead it is about the virtuous character. Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle emphasises a study of human nature i.e. certain characteristic virtues that we value in ourselves and others. He focuses on what and how to be a good person and explains that to live a meaningful life people should develop good virtues of character, like, honesty, integrity and courage and the like.

1.2.5.3 Meta-ethics or Analytic ethics: Meta-ethics or analytic ethics is considered to be logically prior to normative ethics since its subject matter of inquiry are the very presuppositions of normative ethics. It does a two-fold inquiry; the first task is a semantical and conceptual analysis, to be undertaken in order to analyse the meaning of the terms, i.e., words and sentences, used in moral discourse. The second task is a *Meta* inquiry into the nature of ethics itself, to be undertaken in order to analyse the logic of moral reasoning.

1.2.6 Is-Ought Gap

Unlike the descriptive statements which are assertions about the physical world of senses (consisting of space, objects, time and causation) and laws governing it, the normative statements are assertions about what is good, right, wrong, and what should be done. Descriptive statements are verifiable by observation through listening, touching, looking, smelling or tasting by the help of our five sense organs. It is evident that the criterion of truth, which applies to factual statements, does not apply to normative statements since they include value judgments, prescriptions and commands. This gap is also known as the “is-ought gap” i.e. it is not possible to derive an “ought” from an “is.” It tells us that normative statements cannot be derived from any collection of facts without a previously accepted normative statement as premise (Newton, 2013, 5).

1.3 INTRODUCTION TO APPLIED ETHICS*

Applied ethics is a branch of philosophy whose subject matter is the application of moral rules, principles, or concepts to real life issues like, Euthanasia, abortion, surrogacy, and several others. The term “applied ethics” or “practical ethics” has recent origins as it gained prominence during the 1970s when philosophers, theorists, and academicians started using ethical theories and moral philosophy to address persistent problems of society. It was in the 1960s and 1970s that the discipline of philosophy came into contact with professionals in various other fields, like, medicine, law, business, engineering, scientists, designers and others. This interaction led to the generation of interest in professional ethics and related issues, leading to the development of fields such as medical ethics and business ethics.

Applied ethics derives its intellectual stimulus from moral philosophy and aims to provide solutions to emerging moral problems in society. For instance, there has been a history of civil rights, human rights and social rights movements. Many individuals in the fields of law, theology, political theory and professionals working in the fields of media, business, and engineering have addressed issues in applied ethics from time to time.

There is a wide array of topics that form the subject matter of Applied Ethics and these topics can be traced to ancient times; in every society individuals are affected with a wide range of concerns about individual liberty, social equality, injustice, abuse of the marginalised groups and other interrelated matters of justice, equality and parity. Philosophers have not only developed moral theories about right, good, virtue and other interrelated concepts, but they have simultaneously discussed moral problems as well. However, it should be noted that no major philosopher throughout the history of moral philosophy has developed a method of applied ethics. The concern of applied ethics is practical in nature rather than being merely theoretical. There has been a persistent gap in the theoretical and practical spheres as one fails to understand the application of the theory to generate public policy and resolve moral problems. Applied ethics deals with the real-world actions and their moral considerations in the areas of public and private life and others, like, health, relationships, law and more. It discusses issues such as abortion, protection of human and animal subjects in research, affirmative action, moral issues in the workplace, privacy, freedom of information, obligation

* For the purpose of definition, problem of moral content and methods of justification this unit has primarily referred to Tom L. Beauchamp’s article “The Nature of Applied Ethics.” It is advisable to refer to this article for a detailed exposition.

to future generations, intellectual property right, discrimination based on race and sex, environmental concerns, animal rights and others. Rajendra Prasad's paper "Applying Ethics: Modes, Motives and Levels of Commitment" discusses about logistics of applying ethical principles, the motivation their application requires as well as the levels of commitments involved in their application.

1.4 APPLIED ETHICS: DEFINITION

According to Gert applied ethics is defined as the systematic application of general ethical theories to particular moral problems (Gert, 1982, pp. 51-52). Whenever one is in the situation of a moral dilemma, application of ethical theories can pave the way for action. Moral Dilemmas are situations where an individual is faced with crucial questions, like, What ought I to do? What is the morally right thing to do? etc. Moral Dilemmas involve conflict in decision making in real (past and present) events or future possibilities, moral outcomes of drawing a certain legal document and other such situations. For example, in the issue of Euthanasia or mercy killing the pertinent dilemma faced by policy makers, medical practitioners, legal experts are, Whether one has the right to die with dignity? Whether the doctor has the moral obligation to respect patient's right to life? If the patient lacks the capacity to make a decision about their own life then who should be allowed to take a decision on their behalf? Whether there can be a duty to die? And such questions. Similarly, in Business Ethics there can be possible conflicts between the rights and the obligations of the consumer and the producer of goods, the conflicts related to the rights of the employer and employees also take various forms. In media ethics there is a conflict between the individual's right to privacy and the public right to get information; the consumer's right to information and provider's obligation to exercise restraint in the distribution of information. Other areas where similar conflicts appear are environmental ethics, legal ethics, computer ethics and several other spheres related to personal, professional, social, political, and economic lives of individuals. Eventually substantive, normative and metaethical considerations also tend to enter the domain of Applied Ethics.

The supporters of the definition presented by Gert believe that applied ethics implements either general moral norms or theories to resolve practical problems. Argument and analysis are considered the primary tools for examining moral problems. However, on close observation we gather that it is not possible to make practical judgments by appealing either to moral theories or principles. Instead, moral theories and moral principles must be

supplemented in some way by particular cases, like, right action, empirical data, organizational experience, and others. Traditionally, it is observed that general theories address speculative and conceptual philosophical problems which are disengaged from practice. The job of an ethical theorist therefore, has been to explain and justify morality in order to clarify moral concepts, examine moral judgements and arguments and to array basic principles of morals. Traditionally, their job is not to use normative theories in order to solve practical moral problems. As already discussed above there is always an implicit/explicit gap between theory and practice because it is always questionable how theory can be supplemented by practice. Therefore, it is argued that applied ethics “as the application of general ethical theories to particular moral problems” is a narrow definition which neither defines the appropriate method nor the content of applied ethics.

However, “a weaker and more defensible view is that “applied ethics” refers to any use of philosophical methods to treat moral problems, practices and policies in the government, professions, technology and the like” (Beauchamp, 2008, p. 3). But the limitation of this definition is that this use of philosophical methods neither commits one towards the role played by general theories nor to ‘problem solving’ as a goal. Few academicians even equate “applied ethics” with “professional ethics.” Professional Ethics comprises of rules followed by members of a profession to govern their own practice. Yet, there are many problems which extend beyond professional conduct but turn out to be potent issues of applied ethics, like, abortion, allocation of scarce medical resources, pornography, hate crimes, intergenerational justice, domestic abuse, child sex abuse and others; and this seriously limits the scope of this proposed definition.

These conceptual questions with regard to the nature of “applied ethics” show us that applied ethics is a difficult notion to define and therefore we should delve into a detailed understanding of both the content and the methods of applied ethics to get a fuller view of its domain of inquiry.

Check Your Progress I

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Write short notes on the following topics:

- A. Morality
- B. Normative Ethics

2. Define Applied Ethics.

1.5 APPROACHES TO UNDERSTAND MORAL CONTENT

As far as the appropriate sources of content in applied ethics are concerned, there are three influential answers quoted in the literature: an internal account, an external account and a mixed internal-external account. These are as follows:-

1.5.1 Internalism

The question which often comes to our mind is, Are there internal standards for professional and institutional morality? Internalism argues that ethics ought to be derived from professional-institutional and group ethos. Alasdair MacIntyre holds that in a “practice”, “goods internal to a practice” are achieved by engaging in the practice with a cooperative arrangement and conforming to its standards. Each and every profession traditionally has a set of standards which are internal to it. They determine what it means to be a good practitioner in that particular domain. However, traditional as well as professional standards do not guarantee that internal morality would be coherent and acceptable. On several occasions it is observed that internal standards are indefensibly rigid and authoritarian and therefore it is imperative that an internal morality should evolve with social changes. Beauchamp has agreed to Brody and Miller’s suggestion that there is an utmost need of reevaluation and reconstruction from time to time (Beauchamp, 2008, p. 4).

1.5.2 Externalism

Another question which often comes to our mind is, Are there external standards for professional and institutional morality? External morality incorporates norms that sustain and supplement norms of an internal morality. This concept maintains that precepts in settings of applied ethics rely upon and require justification by external standards such as those of public opinion, law, the common morality, religious ethics and philosophical ethics. Ethical theories provide the adequate basis for applied ethics. Over the years, law, religion and philosophical theories have served as sources of external morality. The benefit of a single ethical theory is that it provides a background and a framework which can help mitigate the dispute among conflicting parties. However, there are several questions that can be raised on Externalist account, viz. Which moral theory is morally authoritative over others? How a particular philosophical theory is used to criticise internal standards or address a difficult moral problem? Can informed individuals reject an authoritative theory? After developing a consensus that a particular ethical theory is appropriate for this task we should work constructively in the domain of practical and policy questions by progressively making the norms in the theory more specific (Beauchamp, 2008, p. 5). However, at present no such theory or a general consensus has emerged.

1.5.3 Mixed Internalism and Externalism

This approach incorporates the elements of both Internalism and Externalism. Different cultures and groups have different sets of moral commitments. On the one hand internal morality fixes moral standards by membership within a profession or group on the other hand external morality fixes moral standards owing to the external broader cultural community. If necessary, professions and institutions are expected to reform their practices so that the prevailing moral rules of the larger society will be honored in practice. These social standards will vary from society to society.

Although this account shows us the relation between external and internal moralities, it also has many weaknesses. When we emphasise diversity we overlook basic similarities and neglect the common moral goals that exist among people i.e. many professions share the same moral perspective and shared norms of professional practice. Also, the theory overstates the degree of shared agreement which makes a community cohesive as they are composed of subgroups with different moral points of view. Furthermore, the mixed internist-externalism

account precludes all kinds of cross-cultural and cross community judgements. This account is unable to explain, justify and criticize public policy and hence unable to apply ethics to our deepest social problems.

1.6 PROBLEMS OF METHOD AND JUSTIFICATION

There are several methods or models of justification in applied ethics. Let us discuss following three methods:

1.6.1 Top-down models

These models apply the pre-existing norms to new particular events/situations available in front of us. This model confirms the way in which virtually all persons learn to think morally: its method involves applying a general rule or principle to a case that falls under the rule. These models follow a deductive form in “applying” the rule. They take the following deductive form:

- (1) Every act of description A is obligatory;
- (2) Act B is of description A. Therefore;
- (3) Act B is obligatory.

This model/approach considers that a single principle can be used to decide the rightness/wrongness of actions. There are several problems with moral priority given to pre-existing moral laws. Many times, it is required that the application of the moral norms has to be preceded by making the norms themselves more specific. This should be done before a particular instance is brought under an all-encompassing principle. We should check previous precedents in order to give weight to rules, theories and principles. The important theories of normative ethics have already been discussed above; Utilitarianism believes an action is right if it maximises overall goodness, Kantian ethics accepts it to be right if it does not violate imperatives of rationality or respecting persons, Virtue theory adheres with what would be done by an ideal virtuous person in a morally dilemmatic situation.

Furthermore, these theories might not hold consistently for various reasons. No general norms might clearly be applicable in any particular circumstance as every situation is unique in itself. Therefore, moral norms applied on a particular event/situation may give inconclusive results. For example, if we look at Utilitarian justification we would realise that

many a times it might take certain things to be morally justified despite of the fact that maximum number of people might be wrong about what their happiness consists in. In the Top-Down model not only it is difficult to prove that some norms are self-justifying but there is also a possibility of infinite regress in the process of reasoning. Another variation in the top-down model is the pluralistic kind of ethical theories comprising of various moral principles on the lines of three already mentioned above. There are multiple principles on the basis of which rightness/wrongness of any given action, among the array of applied ethics issues, can be determined.

1.6.2 Bottom-up models

These models focus on the process of ‘how’ we make practical decisions rather than mere application of general principles and theories. The method emphasizes that our moral beliefs are structured and moral decisions are made on the one hand by using existing social agreements and practices, on the other hand by a thorough analysis of new, exemplary, comparative cases. Also, structuring of moral beliefs is done by drawing analogies from prior practice and several other learnings from the domain of experiences. This system focuses on the use of existing social agreements and practices, insight-producing, novel cases, and comparative case analysis as the starting-points for moral decision making. Bottom-up accounts navigate an array of methodologies, like, pluralism, casuistry, pragmatism, particularism among others. Many possible situations arise with conflicting interpretations, analogies and judgments. It is possible that a particular feature of a moral principle proves the rightness of an action in one case but may be counted against the rightness of the same action in another case. This opens up the possibility of moral particularism.

However, there are possibilities which indicate that the bottom-up models are prejudiced, biased, based on irrelevant analogies, hasty generalizations, popular opinions and other factors. Analogies and comparisons as method do not provide us any claim to objectivity. Another important challenge is that although these methods provide us with a tool of thought but these accounts present us a method without content as they lack in initial moral premises.

1.6.3 Coherentism

Instead of a top-down model or a bottom-up model, which are now regarded as insufficient, there is another version of models, known as “reflective equilibrium” or “coherence theory.” John Rawls has given an account of “reflective equilibrium” in his book *A Theory of Justice* (1971). When a system of ethics is developed, we should start with considering the broadest

possible set of moral judgements and make a provisional set of principles by reflecting upon them. “Reflective equilibrium views investigation in ethics (and theory construction) as a reflective testing of moral principles, theoretical postulates, and other relevant moral beliefs to make them as coherent as possible.” (Beauchamp, 2008, p. 11).

When we make considered judgements, we present moral beliefs without a bias and they are always ‘liable to revision.’ “Reflective equilibrium” aims to match and adjust considered judgements to maintain coherence with the premises of our most general moral commitments. We begin with an account of sound judgments of moral rightness and wrongness and then go on to construct a general account and a specific account that is consistent with paradigm judgements to render them coherent. After this we test the resultant actions to see if they offer us any incoherent results. Any incoherent results call for either readjustments, or giving them up, or renewing the process. This adjustment and pruning is a continuous process for a completely stable equilibrium is never possible (Rawls, 1971).

Let us take examples of two issues to understand the complexities, which are involved.

Case 1: If we look up the discourse on justification of universal human rights, we observe that foundationalists believe that human nature is homogenous. On the other hand, anti-foundationalists and relativists argue that the nature of human being entails humanness but this humanness takes different forms in different societies as cultural beliefs and practices vary accordingly. To consider only the homogeneous nature of human beings by ignoring the plurality in human society would render the argument incomplete. Looking from the perspective of coherentism neither a top-down model nor a bottom-up model can work to provide reasonable justification for the concept of universal human rights. Instead, we are required to develop an objective view and reconcile the differences between moral relativism and moral universalism.

Case 2: Surrogate motherhood is a result of relatively new technological advancements in the field of reproductive medicine that presents many personal, social, ethical, legal, and medical challenges. This is a complex practice with its risks and benefits. Even if it does not become commercially successful it has definitely given rise to multifaceted questions, like, what is our understanding of family? What is parenthood? Is parenthood determined by gestational connection or genetic connection? Is the rearing role of a mother more important than the gestational or genetic role? Moral arguments against surrogate motherhood include risking harm to the resulting children, risk to intended parents and surrogate mother and her family.

There are several arguments put forward for surrogate motherhood that reject all the arguments against surrogacy. They argue that there is no harm to the child, surrogate's family, labour disparity involved in legal agreements on surrogacy. The legalization of surrogacy would require consideration of a balanced point of view which would certainly depend on developing a coherent perspective. A balanced perspective should neither be dominated by the critics nor the supporters but it should reject their respective biases and develop a balanced perspective.

The process of achieving moral coherence does not come to an end or perfection. Any moral framework which is deemed adequate for applied ethics should not be seen as a finished product. Any applied ethical issue is always in need of continual adjustment by reflective equilibrium. The open-endedness of this model is visible in its never-ending search for coherence and for novel situations that challenge our current moral frameworks. One problem with Coherentism, however, is that achieving a coherence of norms can never provide a ground for justification because the body of substantive judgments and principles which cohere might not be absolutely satisfactory. We start with considered judgements which are morally justified. However, at times even the considered judgements might not turn out to be reliable themselves. The reason is that the persons, codes or institutions on the basis of which these considered judgments have been made might not themselves be very reliable. Also, there is no clarity as to what is the precise nature and scope of the method, because a philosopher who seeks coherence might be pursuing one or more of several different interests, like, evaluating public policy, improving his or her personal set of beliefs etc. It would be apt for reasons mentioned above that although applied ethics stimulates moral imagination but applied-theoretical distinction needs to be viewed with caution (Beauchamp, 1984 and Gert, 1984).

1.7 ANALYSIS

In order to understand the ethical theories and their implications in a better way it is useful to consider theories in relation to practical issues. Each and every issue can be addressed from the point of view of different ethical theories. General theories should definitely be contextualised in the given situation, or else moral guidelines would be empty and ineffective. At times there might be a need to specify what is meant by a broader/ vague definition of a term for a context. At the same time narrowing the scope of general norms can

also lead to moral disagreements. Disagreements can be about the scope, concepts, facts, genuine moral dilemma, or even about which norms and circumstances are relevant. Parties may disagree on several dilemmatic situations like whether euthanasia is acceptable, whether affirmative action is appropriate, whether capital punishment is morally tenable and other such contentious decisions. The changing circumstances of urbanisation, education, industrialisation, etc. in the global world order show a continuous need to reassess our moral position (Beauchamp, 2008, 12-13).

A foundational question can be raised with regard to whether applied ethics has a special moral content and distinct method of justification. Applied ethicists analyze concepts, examine the hidden presuppositions of moral opinions and theories, offer criticism and constructive accounts of the moral phenomena. They try to stimulate the moral imagination, promote analytical skills, and weed out prejudice, emotion, misappropriated data, hegemony of ideas, authoritativeness, and the like. Differences between ethical theory and applied ethics are as apparent over content as over method. Instead of analyzing moral theories and general terms such as "good", "rationality", "ideals", and "virtues", applied ethicists analyse confidentiality, environmental responsibility, rights, various issues in medical ethics, like, euthanasia, abortion, organ transplantation, surrogacy, confidentiality between doctor-patient, among others. Moreover, applied ethics studies a variety of content, and the working knowledge of the field requires considerable empirical knowledge related to historical context, economical situation, policies and others.

Principles in ethical theory are typically general guidelines that leave considerable room for judgment in specific cases, but applied ethics should advance concrete action guidelines that instruct human beings to act in ways that allow for less interpretation and discretion. Many scholars are suspicious about the fact that whether ethical theory can play any role in case analysis or policy? Do philosophical theories have any practical use? While no one might doubt the importance of the subject, many people do not understand the nature of the subject. However, before moving on to applied ethics it is always advisable to attain conceptual clarity in and through understanding the relations in a contextual setting. It serves the purpose of providing direction, guidance to human action. In the process of fulfilling this purpose, we test moral principles in the context of real life. In the process of applying ethical principles, we open the sphere to question, deliberate, criticize and revise these questions.

However, many times, there is a considered worry about the status of applied ethics as it is quite unclear which method or methodology can be used for justifying any given practice.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have discussed the relevance of applied ethics as a discipline. Applied ethics deals with practical normative challenges faced in our everyday interactions. In this sense it can also be referred to as ‘do-it-yourself’ exercise. Unlike traditional ethical theories which are concerned with purely theoretical problems, like, criteria of rightness, concept of right and wrong etc applied ethics is devoted to the treatment of moral problems, practices and policies in personal and professional life in the fields as diverse as technology, reproduction, governance etc. In the contemporary world various fields of applied ethics are studied as independent spheres; Business ethics, Bioethics, Professional Ethics, Social Ethics, Environmental Ethics, Distributive Justice and Human Rights among others. To sum it up, it is important to deliberate on theoretical approaches to strike a balanced viewpoint with respect to justification of their position. The unit discusses and presents an analysis of issues of moral content, method, and justification in the domain of applied ethics.

Check Your Progress II

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer.

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit.

1. Discuss the problem of moral content with reference to three models discussed by Tom L. Beauchamp in “The Nature of Applied Ethics.”

2. Elucidate Coherentism as a method of justification.

1.9 KEY WORDS

Applied Ethics: Applied ethics is referred to as a component study of a wider sub-discipline of ethics. As a subfield of ethics, it focuses on issues of practical concern. It is concerned with ethical issues in various fields of human life, encompassing personal and professional space –including social, economical, political, and other domains.

Coherentism: There are several methods and models of justification in applied ethics. Unlike top-down model and bottoms-up models as methods of justification, coherentism provides a balanced approach to understand the multi-faceted field of applied ethics.

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1.11 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check your Progress I

1. **A. Morality:** Morality derives its origin in the Latin word *moralis*. Stands for standards or principles derived from a code of conduct of a particular philosophy, religion or culture, or from a standard that someone believes should be universal. Morality is also seen as synonymous with "goodness" or "rightness". Morality in a descriptive sense incorporates the ‘social mores’, ‘codes of conduct’, and ‘cultural or personal values’.

B. Normative Ethics: Normative ethics studies the systematic construction of a valid ethical system. The purpose of normative ethics is to discover or construct a consistent system of moral norms that stands valid for everyone. Three main kinds of normative ethical theories are Immanuel Kant’s Deontology, J.S. Mill’s Consequentialism, which is Utilitarianism and Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics.

2. Applied ethics is a branch of philosophy whose subject matter is the application of moral rules, principles, or concepts to real life issues like, Euthanasia, abortion, surrogacy, and several others. The term “applied ethics” or “practical ethics” has recent origins as it gained prominence during the 1970s when philosophers, theorists, and academicians started using ethical theories and moral philosophy to address persistent problems of society. The emergence of professional ethics, medical ethics, bio ethics and business ethics is attributed to this interaction. According to Gert applied ethics is defined as the systematic application of

general ethical theories to particular moral problems. Whenever one is in a moral dilemma we require to apply ethical theories. Conflicts appear in the areas of Business Ethics, Euthanasia, environmental ethics, legal ethics, computer ethics and several other spheres related to personal, professional, social, political, and economic lives of individuals. Moral theories and moral principles must be supplemented in some way by particular cases, like, right action, empirical data, organizational experience, and others. An implicit/explicit gap has been observed between theory and practice. Applied ethicists try to mitigate this gap.

Check your Progress II

1. As far as the appropriate sources of content in applied ethics are concerned, there are three influential answers quoted in the literature: an internal account, an external account and a mixed internal-external account. Let us discuss them:

- A. **Internalism:** Internalism argues that ethics ought to be derived from professional or institutional or group ethos. Each and every profession traditionally has a set of standards which are internally determined.
- B. **Externalism:** External morality incorporates norms that sustain and supplement norms of an internal morality. This concept maintains that precepts in settings of applied ethics rely upon and require justification by external standards such as those of public opinion, law, the common morality, religious ethics and philosophical ethics.
- C. **Mixed Internalism and Externalism:** This approach incorporates the elements of both Internalism and Externalism. On the one hand internal morality fixes moral standards by membership within a profession or group on the other hand external morality fixes moral standards owing to the external broader cultural community. In focusing on diversity we overlook basic similarities and neglect the common moral goals that exist among people.

2. There are several methods or models of justification in applied ethics. Instead of top-down models or bottom-up models, which are now regarded as insufficient, there is another version of models, known as “reflective equilibrium” or “coherence theory.” John Rawls has given an account of “reflective equilibrium.” When a system of ethics is developed, we should start with considering the broadest possible set of moral judgements and make a provisional set of principles by reflecting upon them. The process of achieving moral coherence does not come to an end or perfection. Any moral framework which is deemed adequate for applied ethics

should not be seen as a finished product. They are always in need of continual adjustment by reflective equilibrium.

We take examples of two relevant issues. Let us discuss the moral issue of obligation towards respecting the environment including animals. The treatment of non-human animals hinges on the question, what is the moral status of animals? Should animals be granted rights? Do human beings have obligations towards animals? On the same lines there are specific questions with relation to environment, like, What is the status of environment independent of human existence? Whether the environment has any value in case human beings do not exist? Does environment matter without any sentient beings? Can nature be used as a means or should it be treated as an end-in-itself? Coherentialism as a method helps us to articulate a balanced view point regarding our obligations towards environment and animals.



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