

Lesson No. 02**THE DIVISION OF THE SUBJECT**

There are at least four main divisions of the study of ethics. First, we should know that the Ethics is branch of philosophy and its (philosophy) branch that studies the nature of knowledge, its presuppositions, foundations, its extent and validity, is known as Epistemology.

Ethics is also considered the branch of Metaphysics and Logic is one of its branches which is defined as “Correctness of thought”. Ontology is also one of the branches of Metaphysics but it has different approaches from Ethics. Ethics is not like Ontology also, which is the branch of metaphysics that deals with the nature of being and discusses about the design and structure of the natural bodies.

It also not resembles to Sociology because the study of social phenomena is the theme of Sociology and Ethics discusses the right or wrong, good or evil in our conduct. It is not like Aesthetics, which is defined as “Characterized by a heightened sensitivity to beauty”.

Ethics is also different from the Philosophy of Nature that is defined as the study of particular facts that come before our consciousness has to be handed over to the particular sciences, or, so far as philosophy is able to deal with them, they form the content of what is called the Philosophy of Nature, Whereas Aesthetics considers the standards of beauty or worth of beauty.

In this chapter, it is necessary to give some attention to the psychological aspects of the subject. The consideration of the nature of feeling, desire, will, of the meaning and place of motives and intentions in individual consciousness, of the origin and nature of conscience, of the elements contained in the moral judgment and other problems of similar character, is almost indispensable preliminary to the study of the moral ideal.

Again, the treatment of these psychological questions naturally leads us on to the more sociological Aspects of the subject, it means to the study of the way in which the moral consciousness grows up in mankind in relation to the general development of civilization in its various aspects.

These genetically inquiries lead us on to the consideration of the nature and significance of the moral idea. But even the treatment of this is necessarily to some extent historical. It is hardly possible at the present stage of the development of the Ethical studies, to lay down the one view that is to be accepted aspects correct, without reference to the various more or less incorrect opinions that have been current in the course of Ethical speculation. Having considered these and formed our view as to be general nature of the doctrine that is to taken as true, we are then able, finally, to consider the application of this doctrine to the treatment of the concrete facts of the moral life.

In this way there are at least four main divisions of the study, the psychology of the moral consciousness, the sociology of moral life, the theories of the moral standards, and the application of the standard to the treatment of the moral life.

A part dealing with the metaphysics of Ethics might also be added; but this could hardly be separated from the discussion of the theories of the moral standards, which, as we shall see, inevitably leads us into metaphysical consideration. A few remarks now be made on each of these divisions of the subject, and it may be well also to refer briefly to biology.

The biological aspects of Ethics

It is possible to apply moral, or at least quasi-moral, distinctions to the lower animals, as well as to human beings. The bees and the ants have long served us models of diligence and cooperative efforts, and, in recent years, J.H. Fabre and others have extended our interest in insect life. The fidelity of the dog and the affectionateness of the dove are regarded with admiration and their qualities tend to be contrasted with those of the ape and tiger.

But it is at least doubtful whether any of these animals' beings have any definite knowledge of the distinction between right and wrong. They appear to act instinctively or at least with very little power of choice. Even in human beings aspects we shall have occasion to notice, there are instinctive or impulsive movements as well as some abnormal obsessions that can hardly be controlled. Moral distinctions can only be made when there is some possibility of deliberately adopting different modes of action.

It has to be recognized, however, that the distinctions between human beings and animal beings is not an absolutely sharp one in this respect, and it may be necessary to make some future reference to animal life in this connection at a latter stage and especially to notice certain obsessions that tend to reduce human life almost to the animal level. Recent psychological studies, especially those carried on by the behaviorists and psych-analysts, have given a good deal of prominence to these tendencies, and they cannot be altogether ignored in the study of Ethics.

The psychological aspects of Ethics

Most of the considerations that fall under this head are discussed in treatise on psychology, where they more strictly in place. But it is found convenient in Ethical works to recall some of the more important considerations on the subject of the Desire and Will, in particular, and also to deal with the nature of conscience and the moral judgment, which are apt to be passed over somewhat slightly in purely psychological discussions. The bearing of such questions on aspects that of the freedom of the Will on the moral judgment have also to be considered, and, though this is partly a metaphysical question, yet it is on the whole the psychological aspect of it that more directly concerns Ethics. It is, however, the more social aspects of psychology with which Ethics is most intimately connected, and we are thus led to the 2nd division of the subject.

The sociological aspects of Ethics

The science of sociology is of comparatively recent growth, and it is perhaps still premature to state precisely what it should be regarded as containing, but we may say of it generally that it is largely an extension of psychology to the consideration of the more social aspects of life. Such a consideration has reference too much to things that have very little bearing on Ethics. When we study the life of savage peoples, the primitive facts of language, the early religious ideas, the superstitious practices, the beginnings of law and government, our interest is directed to many points that do not much concern the rightness and wrongness of conduct.

All these things, however, are modes of conduct, or tend to affect conduct, and it is possible to study them from this point of view. Further the tendency to pass judgment upon these and other forms of activity, as being right or wrong, good or evil, begins at a very early stage in the development of the human race, and the way in which this judgment grows up in one of the most interesting points in the study of sociology. All this is hardly to be described as Ethics in the strict sense, but it is an almost indispensable preparation for the study of Ethical problems.

The theories of moral standards

The study of Ethics in the stricter sense begins with the consideration of the nature of the ideal, standard or end by reference to which conduct is pronounced to be right or wrong good or evil. Now there are several different theories on the subject and though some of these theories are now generally admitted to have been superseded, yet the leading types of theory cannot well be neglected, the more so as these leading types are seldom wholly erroneous, but nearly always bring out some important aspects of the subject.

At the same time, a student should know that the common error of supposing that these controversies about the definition of the standard, often rather futile and involving a good deal of misunderstanding on all sides, constitute the whole or even the main part of Ethical doctrine. In order to guard against such misconception, it is important to pass on to the consideration of the way in which Ethical principles may be used in the treatment of the concrete moral life, even if the discussion of this subject is inevitably of a very summary and incomplete character.

The concrete moral life

It will be found that the exact way in which the concrete moral life is to be handled by Ethical science depends to a considerable extent on the nature of the theory that is finally adopted.

If, for instance, we were to take the view that the moral standard consists in certain absolute and immutable laws, which are intuitively known to every developed consciousness, the study of the concrete moral life could have little more than a historical interest.

We should only be able to discover that at certain periods the nature of the moral laws has been obscured, for various reasons, from the consciousness of the majority of the human race, and that at other times the laws, though fully recognized, have been very commonly disobeyed.

These facts would be of sociological and psychological, rather than of strictly ethical interest. On the other hand, if we should be led to take the view that the moral standard consists in a certain end-say, happiness- which, though generally pursued by mankind, is not pursued consistently or wisely, it would then be possible to point out, at least in general terms, the ways in which improvements could be introduced into the concrete moral life of mankind. Rules could be laid down for the more complete and consistent adoption of the right means to the end that we have in view. Or, again, if we accepted the view that the standard is of the nature of an ideal that is more or less clearly present throughout the development of the human consciousness, it would then be possible for us to trace the ways in which this ideal comes into clearness, to point out how it is illustrated in the concrete growth of the moral life, and to indicate to some extent the directions in which we may hope to see it more fully realized.

According to the first of these views, the study of the concrete moral life would have hardly any ethical interest. According to the second view, the study of the ethics would lead directly to certain practical recommendations for the remodeling of the concrete moral life. According to the third view, it would be the main business of Ethics to bring out the significance of the moral life in its concrete development, rather to aim at its reform. Accordingly, it is not possible to decide on the precise way in which this department of the subject should be dealt with, until we have considered the nature of the moral standard.

This portion of the treatment of Ethics is sometimes called Applied Ethics.

Applied Ethics

Applied ethics is a discipline of philosophy that attempts to apply ethical theory to real-life situations. The discipline has many specialized fields, such as bioethics and business ethics.

The lines of distinction between meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics are often blurry. For example, the issue of abortion can be seen as an applied ethical topic since it involves a specific type of controversial behavior. But it can also depend on more general normative principles, such as possible rights of self-rule and right to life, principles which are often litmus tests for determining the morality of that procedure. The issue also rests on meta-ethical issues such as, "where do rights come from?" and "what kind of beings has rights?"

Another concept which blurs ethics is moral luck. A drunk driver may safely reach home without injuring anyone, or he might accidentally kill a child who runs out into the street while he is driving home. The action of driving while drunk is usually seen as equally wrong in each case, but its dependence on chance affects the degree to which the driver is held responsible.

Meta-Ethics

Meta-ethics is concerned primarily with the *meaning* of ethical judgments and/or prescriptions and with the notion of which properties, if any, are responsible for the truth or validity thereof. Meta-ethics as a discipline gained attention with G.E. Moore's famous work "*Principia Ethica*" from 1903 in which Moore first addressed what he referred to as *the naturalistic fallacy*. Moore's rebuttal of naturalistic ethics, his Open Question Argument sparked an interest within the analytic branch of western philosophy to concern oneself with second order questions about ethics; specifically the semantics, epistemology and ontology of ethics.

The semantics of ethics divides naturally into descriptivism and non-descriptivism. The former position advocates the idea that prescriptive language (including ethical commands and duties) is a subdivision of descriptive language and has meaning in virtue of the same kind of properties as descriptive propositions, whereas the latter contends that ethical propositions are irreducible in the sense that their meaning cannot be explicated sufficiently in terms of truth-conditions.

Correspondingly, the epistemology of ethics divides into cognitivism and non-cognitivism; a distinction that is often perceived as equivalent to that between descriptivist and non-descriptivists. Non-cognitivism may be understood as the claim that ethical claims reach beyond the scope of human cognition or as the (weaker) claim that ethics is concerned with action rather than with knowledge. Cognitivism can then be seen as the claim that ethics is essentially concerned with judgments of the same kind as knowledge judgments; namely about matters of fact.

The ontology of ethics is concerned with the idea of value-bearing properties, i.e. the kind of things or stuffs that would correspond to or be referred to by ethical propositions. Non-descriptivist and non-cognitivists will generally tend to argue that ethics do not require a specific ontology, since ethical propositions do not refer to objects in the same way that descriptive propositions do. Such a position may sometimes be called anti-realist. Realists on the other hand are left with having to explain what kind of entities, properties or states are relevant for ethics, and why they have the normative status characteristic of ethics.

Descriptive ethics

Descriptive ethics is a value-free approach to ethics which examines ethics not from a top-down *a priori* perspective but rather observations of actual choices made by moral agents in practice. Some philosophers rely on descriptive ethics and choices made and unchallenged by a society or culture to derive categories, which typically vary by context. This can lead to situational ethics and situated ethics. These philosophers often view aesthetics, etiquette, and arbitration as more fundamental, percolating "bottom up" to imply the existence of, rather than explicitly prescribe, theories of value or of conduct. The study of descriptive ethics may include examinations of the following:

- Ethical codes applied by various groups. Some consider aesthetics itself the basis of ethics – and a personal moral core developed through art and storytelling as very influential in one's later ethical choices.
- Informal theories of etiquette which tend to be less rigorous and more situational. Some consider etiquette a simple negative ethics, i.e. where can one evade an uncomfortable truth without doing wrong? One notable advocate of this view is Judith Martin ("Miss Manners"). According to this view, ethics is more a summary of common sense social decisions.
- Practices in arbitration and law, e.g. the claim that ethics itself is a matter of balancing "right versus right," i.e. putting priorities on two things that are both right, but which must be traded off carefully in each situation.
- Observed choices made by ordinary people, without expert aid or advice, who vote, buy, and decide what is worth valuing. This is a major concern of sociology, political science, and economics.

Relational ethics

Relational ethics are related to an ethics of care. They are used in qualitative research, especially ethnography and auto ethnography. Researchers who employ relational ethics value and respect the connection between themselves and the people they study, and "between researchers and the communities in which they live and work" Relational ethics also help researchers understand difficult issues such as conducting research on intimate others that have died and developing friendships with their participants.

(Source. This lesson has been summarized from a manual of Ethics by John S.Mackenzie, pages, 24-30 and from An Introduction to Ethics by William Lillie, and also from <http://amriunigha.blog.co.in/2009/03/03/what-is-ethics-by-tgk-amri-alburnuni>)