Ethics
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Ethical Non-Naturalism – Part II

We have talked about, Realism. And now, let us briefly take a look at, what all Metaethics Theories, that we have talked about.

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Now, if we look at the screen, I have made three classifications of Metaethics, which I have managed to scribble in, in the little space, that I have left myself, in red. So, these are basically, three kinds of Metaethical foundations. Now, the first one is, we have talked about Definist Theories. They are naturalistic, or metaphysical. What are their criteria. Well. OUGHT can be explained, or can be understood, in terms of, IS. Values, may be inferred from facts. And, ethical terms can be understood, in terms of, non-ethical terms.

So briefly, Definist Theories are, naturalistic and metaphysical. The OUGHT can be understood, in terms of, IS. Values, may be inferred from, facts. Ethical terms can be understood, in terms of, non-ethical terms. Now, let us simplistically try to understand, what do we mean by this. Well. When I say Definist Theories, this is a whole school of theories, belonging to Metaethics. And,

which talks about, what is the foundation of the ethical quest. Now, Definist Theories, by the term used, refers to definitions.

So, to explain, or to define a value term, we can take the help of a factual term. Put even more simplistically. When we talked about Hedonism, or Utilitarianism, to define Good, or to understand Good, or Right, or any such ethical term, we refer to a non-ethical, factual empirically available concept, like pleasure, like happiness. So, these are psychological facts. These are psychological states.

So, whenever we are trying to understand the ethical domain, in terms of factual domain, we are having an implicit assumption of Definist Metaethics. It is Naturalistic, or also known as Metaethics. Now, Metaphysical. Because, even say, suppose, concurrence to a religious word, or a religious book, or a religious claim, or a religious leader, can also be understood, in terms of Definist Theory. Because, there the religious book is defining, that this is the Right thing to do, because it is the word of god, or it is the word of their leader.

So, the justification is again, coming from something factual, or empirical. Now, what further does this Theory assume. This assumes that, values may be inferred from, facts. Remember, we sensitised ourselves. We explored, the domain of values and facts. And, how are they connected with each other. Now, the Naturalistic Theories, that we earlier talked about, claim that they can understand values, in terms of facts.

That, they can understand Right action, in terms of, what brings about the greatest happiness, of the greatest number. This is an example of a Naturalistic Ethics. But, it is not confined to Naturalistic Ethics. Utilitarianism or Hedonism, is a kind of Naturalistic Ethics. But, there are, other kinds of it also. So, to understand, or to define value terms, we need factual terms. But, let us look at an example, perhaps why many places, where the Naturalistic ethicist is critiqued.

Now, let us assume that, well, you are standing on a road. And, a car is, or a vehicle is, speedily coming on to you. Now, these are the facts of the case. That, you are standing on a road. A vehicle is speedily coming on to you. And, if you do not do anything, it is most likely that, it will

hit you. These are facts. But, from where in these facts, do we get the claim, that well, I should move out of. I should. Pay attention, on the word. I should, move out of the path, of the vehicle. I should. I ought to, give way. Or, I ought to, jump out of the way, of the vehicle.

Now, this is where, various critics are pretty Naturalism. That well, Naturalism understandably gives a, domain of facts. But, from the facts, how is a prescription, or how is a value, or how is a motivation, arrived at. Now, given that, this is the state of affairs. That well, a vehicle is rushing onto you. I ought to jump out of its way. So, this ought, this motivational should claim, is a claim, that comes from the agent. It is not a part of the description of the scene.

That, once the agent, or the person, has jumped out of the path of the vehicle, that becomes a part of the description of the agent. So, what is prescription, if followed, becomes description. But, prescription, is not a part of description. A prescription executed, becomes a part of description. But, a prescription by itself, is not a part of description. So, this is where, the critics of Naturalism argue, that well, Naturalism as a Metaethical foundation, does not actually give us any norms, what to do?

It only describes, the way things are. And, that is insufficient, to arrive at norm. Now, if you look at the screen. What we basically talked out is, summed up over here. That well, values may be inferred from facts, now. Non-Naturalistic Theories would critique that. And, that ethical terms can be understood, in terms of non-ethical terms. Now, this is what the Naturalistic ethicist would have asked us to believe. But, as we see, there are many gaping loopholes, in this Theory of Naturalism.

But of course, the truth to be arrived at, is a vigorous churning between theories, and their claims and counter claims, and their synthesis. So, this is definitely, that there is no one theory, that is completely immune to, any criticism. But, to be aware of criticism, is to refine the theories. So, we leave Naturalism, at the moment, Right here. And then, we will move on to, what is the second classification. The second kind of Metaethics, which is, as we see, Intuitionism, or Non-Naturalistic Theories. Let me number them.

Now, the Intuitionism or Non-Naturalistic Theories can be, they give up on natural theories, and psychological arguments. Their basic principles, and value judgements are, intuitive or self-evident. So, well, where they differ from the Definist Theories is that, values cannot be inferred from facts. Ethical terms, cannot be understood, in terms of non-ethical terms. So, what they are crucially saying is that, well, ethical properties stand for the properties of things.

So, in a sense, there claim comes out to be, that well, ethical notions, or self-evident notions, just as yellowness, pleasantness, or any other fundamental question. Okay. Now, let us explore, what do we mean by these, Non-Naturalistic Theories. Intuitionism is one of them. Intuitionism, or Non-Naturalistic Theories. Now, well, Non-Naturalistic Theories, they are different from Definist Theories. Because, they are not proposing to define ethical terms, in terms of non-ethical terms.

In fact, on the other hand, they are contrary to Definist Theories, by claiming that, ethical terms cannot be understood, in terms of non-ethical terms. So, Good is something fundamental. In the history of Western Philosophy, there was a Philosopher called, G E Moore, whom we have talked about, in a brief manner. And, the open question argument, in which, the Philosopher try to show, that well, the term Good, or the concept Good is, in principle indefinable, but yet nevertheless, it is not meaningless.

Now, to define something is to, reduce it into simpler parts, to more fundamental blocks. So, when I tried to define, any complex notion, or any notion, I have tried to explain it, in terms of simpler parts. Now, there is a problem with definition. Because, definition assumes that, there are simpler blogs to it. There are simpler components to the term, which is in intended to be defined.

So, definition is assuming, that well, what is wanted, or what is going to be defined, is a complex object, and can be reduced to smaller or more fundamental blocks. Now, the second Metaethics school, are not school exactly, but the bunch of theories, that we talk about. Intuitionism, or Non-Naturalistic Theories, do not subscribe to this. They have a claim, that ethical terms, are fundamental, they are self-evident. Now, what does this mean? Let us slow down.

Let us say, if you want to define something as colour, or something as say, five fundamental sense perceptions that we have, taste, smell, touch. Now, these are fundamental to us, and cannot be further simplified for us. We might be able to tell, the biochemistry, the physics, behind the sensory process, that takes place. But, for one to perceive a colour, there can be perhaps, nothing more fundamental or defining, than the very fact, that one perceives colour. And, that is the understanding of colour. It cannot be defined into, more-simpler terms.

Now, these Non-Naturalistic Philosophers, Intuitionist, claim to give this kind of a position, to the ethical terms. That, ethical terms, cannot be defined, in terms of non-ethical terms. Because, they are by themselves, unanalysably simple. So, what they are basically is, unanalysable and simple. So, this is what is meant by, self-evident. Now, when some terms are simple and unanalysable, they cannot be further explained, defined, or understood, in terms of other notions. And therefore, they are final.

So, many of us might have a feeling, that well, all this talk of understanding Ethics, what is it to understanding thing. It is to break it into, simpler notions or parts, that we are familiar with. So, if we are familiar with, say we talk about, say, a triangle. A triangle, we try to understand it, in terms of lines and angles, which is presumably, more fundamental to triangle. Because, lines and angles come together, dots and points come together, to form a triangle.

But, this assumes that well, triangle is a complex entity, and can be defined in terms of a, simpler entity. So, there are simpler entities, in terms of which, it can be defined. But now, when I say define the colour yellow, what would you define it as. Well, many of us would perhaps say, that well, it is defined by the wavelength, or the frequency of the light, that reduces the sensation of yellowness in us. But, the sensation of yellowness, is it the same thing, as the frequency, or the wavelength, which is a measure, but it is not the notion of yellowness.

The notion of yellowness, or the notion of taste, is something that we fundamentally have. It is a part of, how we encounter, approach the world. That is our framework, if making sense of the world. Same thing like, sweetness. Things may be, more sweet, less sweet. But, what is it to be sweet, depends on the agent. Right. That, I know, what a sweet, and cannot be further broken

down, into any simplers. It is a simple notion. Or, it is a simple, as one would say.

Now, ethical terms, the Intuitionist, and the Non-Naturalists claim that, have this kind of a self-evidence. That is, they are no more reducible, unanalysable, understandable, in terms of non-ethical terms. They are simples. So, the Right action, and the Good action, or the Good of an agent, is a simple. It is to be known, by the agent itself. We will talk about this, next. When we finish the classification of these three theories, we will talk about Intuitionism.

Now, if you come to the slide, the third theory that we talk about is the, Non-descriptivist Theory. So, this claims that well, ethical judgements are not assertions or statements, ascribing or denying properties, to actions, persons, or things. So, in a way, these are the Non-descriptivist claim, that these are non-justifiable opinions, if we may say. Example would be, emotivism, that we have talked about. So, now what do the Non-descriptivist, on the other hand say. Well, the Non-descriptivist are of the opinion, that well, as a Metaethical foundation that, ethical terms, do not describe anything.

They are perhaps, exhortations to action. They are expressions of feelings. But, they are not statements. That is, they are not in the domain of truth and falsity. In philosophy, particularly in logic, when we talk about statements or propositions, more accurately, propositions is a claim made in a sentence, and which can have the value of, either true or false. So, a question, is not a propositions. Many sentences, can contain the same proposition. So, Non-Descriptivist are of the opinion, that well, ethical claims are not propositions.

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Now, we will talk about Non-descriptivist, in a few moments to come. But, before that, let us talk about the topic, which used to talk about today is, Intuitionism. Before, we talk about Intuitionism, let us remind ourselves, of the fundamental classification between, Consequentialism and Deontology. So, the classifications were, well, Consequentialism, it depends on the Right action, is determined by the Good consequences, to be brought about.

Deontology, on the other hand, claims that well, the Right action, is independent of the consequences, that it brings about. So basically, the question that they are asking is that, these two theories are answers to the same question, only difference answers to the same question. The question being that, how is the Right, related to the Good. Now, if Consequentialist would answer, that well, the Right is wholly determined by the Good. R is wholly determined by the Good.

Whereas, the Deontology would say that well, the Right is independent of the Good. Now, this is basically, we worked out, or brought back, the classification between, Consequentialism and Deontology. Now, Intuitionism is a form of Deontological Ethics. Now, let us just explore, that well, we have talked about Deontological Ethics, before. And, what does an Intuitionism say about that, well.

Intuitionism, naturally, evidently, comes from the word, intuition. Which perhaps, most of us

would understand as, almost some mysterious way of knowing, of intuiting our some. Even, if we not, do not mysterious, but as something, which is scientifically un-demonstrable way of knowing, what is Intuitionism, or what is the solution to it. Now, unfortunately, there are a lot of misconceptions about Intuitionism, that make it seem to be, much more mysterious than, what it actually is.

So, let us have a brief talk about, Intuitionism. What is meant by Intuitionism? Now, the Intuitionists are a part of the Non-Naturalistic claim, which Non-Naturalistic Metaethics, which claimed that well, moral terms or ethical terms are self-evident. Now, what do they mean, when they say that, it is self-evident. Is it that, by some mysterious way, we come to know, whether this is the Right thing to do, or that is not the Right thing to do. Or, how do you decide on an action.

We come to know by intuition. And, in a way, then there is no theorising at all. It is just a matter of their intuition, what perhaps, the Emotivists called feeling, Intuitionists call intuition. This is incorrect. Intuitionists deserve a little more attention, that perhaps, the history of philosophy has given to them. Now, the Intuitionists make a claim that, moral facts are self-evident. They are self-evident, in a way, that we do not arrive at it, from an algorithm. So, let us, put it down.

Let us say, ethical terms, cannot be understood, in terms of non-ethical terms. Ethical terms or ethical notions, are self-evident. Now, this is a portion, that we would require, certain clarification, before we can truly evaluate or assess, the meaning of self-evidence, in terms of ethical notions. So, ethical terms cannot be understood, in terms of non-ethical terms. Ethical notions are self-evident. And, what we would like to say is that, well, it is still a matter of theorising. Now, preliminary instance. Let me say, why do I make this claim. That, is Intuitionism, a matter of moral theorising.

Now, let us imagine, if Intuitionism is claiming that well, moral truths are self-evident, that they are not algorithmic. That, if you take a look at this slide, that well, moral reasoning is not blind dead algorithms. Now, when I say that well, moral notions are not blind dead algorithms. Perhaps, I can best explain it first, as an example in terms of, two very notions essential to law.

Well. Let us postulate. Let me, put forth a question to you.

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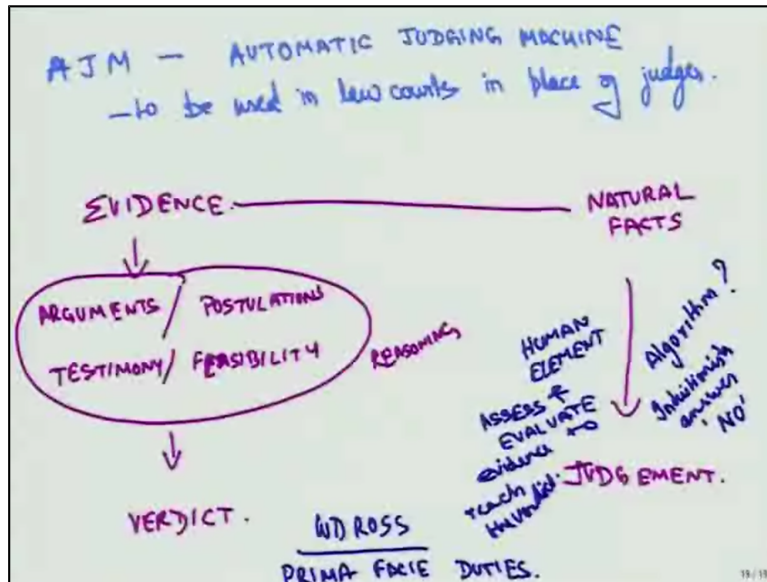
Can we imagine, something called, let us term it, an AJM. Right. On the lines of ATM, which is an Automatic Judging Machine, to be used in law courts, in place of judges. Now, this is the thought experiment, that I would like you to focus on. That, let us look at the screen, and say that well, the Automatic Judging Machine, or AJM, is to be used, in law courts, in place of judges. Now, is that feasible. Now, think over it. Now, would you find this, to be feasible.

Let us say, India has a whole battery of law cases, pending. And, there is, tremendous of pressure on the legal system. There is insufficient manpower. And, it takes a lot of time. And, court cases prolong. So, we would like it to be shorten. We would like to be, more efficient. Let us design. Let us ask the engineers, to design this AJM, an Automatic Judging Machine. Now, this Automatic Judging Machine will be, of course a very powerful computer, which will know, all the law cases, that have taken place.

Will be familiar with, all the relevant codes, of the constitution, of the legal acts, to be abided by. Will have, an excellent memory of presidencies. And, all such claims. Now, can we ask, can the law minister, or the law ministry ask, the engineers to build such a machine. Or, would he be, well, making a fool of himself. Or, would you not even, dare to ask such a question. Or, is this a wrong question.

That is what, most of us would think that well, of course it is a wrong question. How can you have an Automatic Judging Machine, at an Automatic Telling Machine. We can understand, some machine that dispenses money, some machine that does a lot of calculations, some machine that even human beings cannot do, and so on and so forth. But, having an Automatic Judging Machine, what does that mean.

Well. Let me explain. As we keep talking, we will come to know, the perspective of the Intuitionists. Well. Why do we think, there cannot be an Automatic Judging Machine? If at all, we think so. And, probably, many of you would be thinking, that well, there cannot be an Automatic Judging Machine, to replace the wise old judge, with the wig on. That, there is something about a judge's job, that cannot be seen in terms of algorithms.

Because, when we are proposing an Automatic Judging Machine, what are we saying. We are trying to understand, that well, what does a bank teller do. A bank teller does something, to put simplistically, which can be made algorithmic, or mechanical. That well, you present a cheque. She sees, what is the balance in your account. Verifies, whether this account is yours, by tallying the signature, makes a deduction in the account, gives you that relevant money.

Now, this was what, the teller did. One of the many things, that the teller did. Now, engineers could design a machine, that could do the same thing. Now, it identifies you, with your ATM card, and the pin, that you enter. It has direct access to your bank balance. So, it verifies, that you have the same bank balance. And accordingly, it error proofly counts the notes, and dispatches it, or releases it, in the ATM counter. Now, this is what happened, when the teller became automated.

So, there was no more a person, to do that job. Now, can the judge's job, we automated in such a manner. It would be countless benefits, for it to happen. If many of you, or if you are one of them, who are not comfortable with such an idea. Or, who would further say that, such a thing is not possible. Well. Then, you are coming close to the Intuitionist claim. Now, let us imagine, take a look at, what does happen in a court case. Well, the first thing, we start with is, evidence. Then,

there is arguments, postulations, testimonies, feasibility.

Let us subsume this, all against reasoning or argumentation, to finally have the verdict. Now, simplistically put, this is the basic format of, what happens in a court case. Right. How does one arrive from the evidence, to the verdict? Now, evidence is something, which we can perhaps equalled with natural facts. They are empirical. They ought to be demonstrable. Or, they ought to be provable. And, it is something, that perhaps, even a machine, or an algorithm, can detect.

Now, from these facts, how do you make a judgement. Now, if we can arrive from natural, is this an algorithm. The Intuitionists answer, no. That, this is not an algorithm. And because, it is not an algorithm, so we always need the, human element here. So, how to assess and evaluate the evidence, to reach the verdict. Now, this is a Philosopher called, Philip Stratton Lake, is credited with giving this analogy of, between evidence and verdict.

Now, having known the evidence, can we reach a verdict. We do reach a verdict. But, can a machine reach a verdict. So, when the Intuitionists say that well, certain moral claims, or moral concepts, are self-evident, and cannot be explained, in terms of non-ethical terms, or factual terms, or empirical terms, or what surrounds us all. Then, we are making a case of self-evident, or a case of judgement from self-evidence.

Now, how does the judge, make the case at all? How does the judge, bring forth a verdict at all? Is it out of concoction? How does the judge, concoct a verdict, if it all, he does it, or she does it? Now, this is where the, Intuitionists come in. Their claim, is that well, a verdict cannot be, algorithmically related to the evidence. And, there is where the human element, what critics have criticised as mysterious element, in arriving at the assessment. The weightage given to, which evidence is required to, arrive at adjustments.

So, it is perhaps, to put it in a jocular vein, the final human bastion, that resists mechanisation. Of course, that would be a clichéd way of putting a notion. But well, in a sense, the Intuitionists are of this claim, that well. When we talk about self-evidence, it is not about any magical mysterious self-evidence, because moral terms are so simple, and unanalysably, and thereof human. That

well, we require a human being to judge, not possibly a machine. Because, a machine represents algorithm.

And, if this cannot be put, in the terms of an algorithm, we cannot judge the same. So, when Intuitionists are making a claim, that it is a self-evidence. What they mean is that, well, no matter, how the evidence is presented. To assess the evidence, we have the human agencies intervention to arrive at, what is self-evidence, notion of truth, moral truth, and thereof make an adjustment. So, this is simplistically put, what is meant by self-evidence, term used by Intuitionists.

Now, we have earlier talked about, a Philosopher called, W D Ross. Now, W D Ross was an example of an Intuitionist. Well. Ross put forth, in our earlier talks, when we talked about moral theories. Not Metaethics, we talked about, Ross philosophy. And, we can go back to the earlier lectures, to talk about this. This was the Philosopher, that we talk about. And, he talked about something called as, Prima Facie Duties.

So, let me just briefly tell you, in two sentences about, what Ross claim was that. Ross is a Non-Naturalistic Intuitionist Philosopher. So, Ross claim is that well, there are certain set of any situation, presents a certain set of Prima Facie Duties. Duties of Non-Malevolence. Duties of Reparations. So, he puts out a list of six to seven duties, which are Prima Facie Duties. But, what makes these Prima Facie Duties, Actual Duties, is the human element.

Now, that there are various kinds of duties, which are fundamental. But well, sometimes say, where is the moral dilemma. The moral dilemma comes, when there is a conflict between two duties, or two or more duties. So, when I say that, well, I would like to be non-violent, and I would like to be truthful. But, I see that well, there are numerous imaginable cases, where I would have to sacrifice one, to hold on the other.

So, in which situation, can I sacrifice one, and hold onto the other. So, Ross puts forth the sets of duties. But again, puts the final ball, in the human agents court. That, depending on the circumstances, the agent and concern has to make a question, and evaluate and assess the various

factors, around the decision, around the moral dilemma, to take a final call. So sometimes, I would say, the conflict that we talked about between, being honest, and being a non-violent.

Now, let us imagine, the classic platonic case, that well. A friend has loaned you a firearm. And, has gone on a voyage, comes back insane. But because, you are an honest person, you would like to return. Work was given to you, for safekeeping. But, you are also a Non-violent person, or you want to propagate non-violent. So, you know, that this friend of yours, went for the voyage, is now insane. And, would perhaps, take the weapon, and cause harm to others, or to himself.

Now here, you clearly have a contradiction between, two duties. So, you would have to decide. So, that is why, Ross leaves that decision. That well, the standard Deontologist tries to work out a dead blind algorithm, to give a solution, to every moral dilemma. The Intuitionist, on the other hand, leaves that much of space. Because, of the claim of the Intuitionist, that well, this final space cannot be algorithmize.

And, it needs a human agent, to observe the evidence, what the situation, that the moral dilemma presents. And then, take the decision. There cannot be a moral calculator, or a moral positioning system, in lines of the global positioning system, to give a mechanical answer, to the question. So, that is a question, that the agent has to think over, assess for himself or herself, and decide. And, that is perhaps the case, how most of us go through in life.

So, that makes a case for self-evidence of, the final step of moral decision-making. Simplistically put, Intuitionism is not as mysterious, as we believe it to be, or as it is reputed to be. So, we try to bring about a balance between, an algorithmic assessment of the situation, and a final moral claim, that is to come from the human agent, from assessing the weightages. That is the self-evident, or the irreducible part of the, decision-making procedure.