

**Philosophy and Critical Thinking**  
**Prof. Gyan Prakash**  
**Department of Humanities & Social Sciences**  
**IIT ISM, Dhanbad**  
**Week- 05**  
**Lecture 21: Branches of Ethics**

Welcome in lecture 21. Today, we are going to discuss the branches of ethics. Last class, we have discussed what is ethics and why this ethics is important, why we need ethics or discussion on ethics or ethical theories. So, you need to understand that we have certain values. Now, we are using these values to judge an action and saying that X action is good or Y action is not good or y action is good or in this particular situation, performing X is a good idea, not Y and so on. Now, there are also many other questions in last class I raised. Now, what today we are going to do is we will talk about the branches and see that what kind of question belongs to the what branch. So, ethics is first branch is Metaethics, second is normative ethics and third is then applied ethics. Since this course is in a very basic level, therefore, we will be discussing all the branches in very basic level just to have an idea that what is Metaethics, what is normative ethics and applied ethics. However, normative ethics is a part of this course and we will be discussing normative ethics well in detail. Metaethics and applied ethics will not be discussing, but I will be giving you an idea that in Metaethics what kind of questions you can ask and what is applied ethics is all about. So, let us understand what is a Metaethics. Meta ethics is the attempt to understand the Metaphysical, epistemological, semantic and psychological presuppositions and commitments of moral thought, talk and practices. Now, here Metaethics is going to talk about the presupposition and commitments. Any kind of moral practices, we have set of values that say that, look these are the moral things, punctuality, you have to be on time all the time, honesty is a good thing. Now, the idea is whenever we are saying that this is good or this is not good, what does it mean? Why we are using this word good at all? Now, if this is good, then what does it mean then? It is a very important to not only in ethics in any philosophical thought or let us say in our day-to-day life, whenever we are using the word, make sure that you are aware of the meaning of this word. Now, remember we have discussed from concept from the Socrates and how the Socrates has talked about the concept and said that look you have so many ideas in your mind and whenever this idea is not examined, so before using these ideas, you have to reexamine. When you have done that, again examine, check what this idea is all about. So, for example, I have been like many in day-to-day life used to say, I know what is good for me, I know what is bad for me and so on. This is X is good, Y is not good and so on. Idea is, question is, in what sense you are using the word good and what sense you are using the word bad. This thing it is very important to know. When your thoughts are clear, I mean when you are using any word and you are very much clear that what you mean by when I am using X, when you are using Y, when you are saying that courage, when you are saying that coward, so you are aware that in what sense I am saying

that. Not because I have learned things and we are using the same way. So, I have been using this word good in this particular way or particular sense, so I am using that. It is fine, but at least you know when I am saying that this action is not good for me or in this particular situation, I am not interested at least in performing X and therefore I am saying this X is not good. Now, the idea of good you have to be very clear. In coming back to the ethics, in Metaethics this is how they discuss. So, whenever we are like talking about the moral practices, we are saying no this set of things is good. Now, whenever we are saying that what are the presuppositions and commitments. So, when why we are saying that this thing is this set of actions is good and one particular religion or for example one particular community is like using this kind of practices and taking as a right. So, this kind of questions here what we are doing, we are just trying to understand the commitment and presuppositions of all the practices. Now, what kind of question we can ask in this branch of ethics. First example, are moral standards culturally relative? Now, culturally relative meant it depends like it is not on a universal. Now, what does it mean and I say it is universal. Universal means that it is not depends on person to person, culture to culture or religion to religion or place to place. So, there is no one standard is for everyone. Now, so this question is we can ask about the most standards of culturally relative or not. Are there moral facts? How is that they set an appropriate standard for our behavior? How do we learn about moral facts? So, Metaethics explores as well the connection between values, reason for action and human motivation. So, these are the important part where we can talk about in Metaethics in this branch we can raise this kind of question. Let us say that Metaethics is an attempt to understand basically about the moral practices, moral fact and so on. I mean these are there are many questions we can ask from the metaphysical point of view, from the cosmological, semantic, psychological point of view and so on. Now, let us coming back to the reason for action or the human motivation. What motivate to perform moral acts? So, there are no prescription saying that okay look does this set of action you are supposed to perform or this sort of action is performing the set of action is always good. So, whenever you are going to perform X, Y, Z is always good. Honesty is always good. When you are honest is good. This is what we have got moral practices, punctuality, moral practices and so on. Now, what is the reason? How we are going to decide that this practices is good? Let us take one more question so it will be easy to understand what is Metaethics. Now, there is a question that how and why we are accepting that commands are authoritative. Now, there is one person may ask answer this question saying that God has created this world. Therefore, God's command is authoritative. So, whatever he is saying is correct. Now, argument goes like this. One has the power to enforce one's command does not establish those commands as a legitimate nor does it ensure that one has a right to punish those who fails to confirm to one's command. However, I would like to mention here that these arguments one should not take it as an Indian scenario or Indian religion. We have a very different way to see the concept of God. We have very different argument for the God and its creation. So, the Indian religion or Indian philosophy they have a

different way to explain these ideas. This problem was raised by Plato emphasized in *Euthyphro*. One is also left with the difficulty of explaining why God's command are authoritative. So, you have to see these questions and explanation of the Western religion. Now, they are saying that maybe a God has this power or let us say authority because God is a perfect being. So, the perfection which is there and that is what he is doing that because that is the reason that he can give us command, the set of action he can do. And if you are going to argue like this then there again there are a lot of many other questions. Then the reason is that what comes first. It also means that the perfection and this is a different from the God's will and so on. However, this is just now what we are intention is to raise this question to make you understand that what kind of questions we can ask in the Metaethics. Again, there are many different kinds of theory in the Metaethics. For example, one is called moral realism or objectivism. They believe that there are moral facts that are real or objective in the sense that they exist independently of any beliefs or evidence about them. So, these moral facts are real. And it does not exist because of our beliefs or evidence. However, there are other group or theory is called subjectivist who believes that moral values are not belief independent facts at all but are instead created by individuals or cultures in some time radically different ways. So, they are saying that moral value is what is created by individual culture. For example, as we were discussing about that what particular culture and religion believes that X is the right action. Now, one may answer this question saying that this X is not right or good in this particular culture because it is in a more desired right and all of us wants this action, as a member of this culture or as a member of this community. Therefore, what we are doing, we are adding this value saying that performing this action is always good. Coming on time, if there is any class start at nine or ten, you have to be there like this. This is more desired action. That is why we are saying this performing this action is a good action, not hurting others. For example, take the Indian system where we talk a lot about non-violence. Irrespective of the school of thought, all of them, almost all of them has said that okay, *Ahimsa* is the right thing. Non-violence is the right thing. Which is that yeah, you should not hurt others. That is good action. So, this argument goes like this that these moral values which we are creating or created by one culture is because we are, this is created by us because so that we are talking about the desired action, a good action is right. And that is why we give this word good action. This action is good. And they believe that these moral values are not belief independent. So, when you are creating anything, you have a lot of belief systems working there. Because you are believing that this kind of action is good. Respecting your senior citizen or senior member family is always good. So, in Indian system what we do like when we are always in every day morning, we used to touch our parents feet and taking, seeking other blessings. So, this kind of action is desired or that therefore we are saying, recommending in our community that this set of actions is always good. Yeah. So this kind of question is one may ask this branch. Again, there is another claim that in making moral judgments for instance, which seems to be making a claim that if true and establishes

someone or other has a reason to act or be a certain way. So even you are like establishing anyone, anything, any action or moral value, it should be based on some reason. Now, again another point is one just that something is good or right, one had a reason to act or be a certain way. So even one community believes that this action is right or this action is not right, they have a proper reason to believe that. One can have a reason to do only what one might be motivated to do, has implications as well for what might count as good, if something is good only if one has a reason to act in certain way with respect to it. So now we are talking about the morals, morality, but there should be some reason. Without reason, it is difficult to talk about that.

And the final point, I mean in today's class, the freedom and responsibility also are a very important point. As we have discussed in the last class that if you do not have a freedom, will not be responsible for any action. So for becoming any kind of action, you need a freedom in the sense, you need a free will right. Free will and freedom is a very important part. So, they are these things, if you do not have these things, then you will not be responsible for an answer. I will give an example. Suppose I am like walking in a corridor, we have a conference and break, tea break and I am walking with tea or coffee right, talking to some other delegates and philosophy, let us say in Metaethics. Now someone knowingly or unknowingly, I have no idea because I am talking to the other person, pushed me right. The moment he pushed that I spilled some coffee over some other delegates. Now do you think that I am responsible for the action. So, as we have discussed in well in detail in the last class that how if you do not have choice or you are not free to do, then the responsibility, the sense of responsibility right. So therefore, these are the freedom and responsibility and reason everything is in a very important part and in Metaethics, we can discuss well in detail about this, what is the freedom, responsibility and other questions which we have discussed right.

Now, next branch is the normative ethics and this branch is very important for this class because we are going in detail in this normative ethics. Normative ethics deals with formulating and evaluating theories of right and wrong acts. Now in this branch, we are going to talk about what are the acts that is right and what are the acts that is not right. For example, you are like appearing for the final exam. Now you got a question paper right. The moment you saw a question paper, you realize that you cannot answer any of the question. Now if you are not going to answer the question, it means graduating will not be possible right. You are going to I mean again have to go for the summer or something else right. Now what to do? Copy or not copy? So, there is a normal chance that you can copy. Look here and there and then write or do not do that because doing that is all not right. What to do? If I am not going to copy, then obviously I am not going to pass. There is no possibility right. So even I do not have any idea about this question. So now what to do? What kind of action is right now? Should I go for cheating or not? You need money. You need money in the sense that because you want to support your family or you immediately

need some amount for your school fee or let us say that for any other emergency work. Now, you are going to ask borrow some money if it is a friend. You are going to ask money right. Now, you have two choices. You are aware that you cannot repay this money immediately and if you are going to say that you are not going to get it. He may not give you. So what to do? First is make some false promises. I will repay tomorrow or maybe day after tomorrow or within a week or within a month or going to say that look I do not have money and I want money but I am not sure when I am going to repay this money. But what kind of action is right? So normative ethics will talk about all the set of action theories who can formulate, who can evaluate. So, there is a lot of this and you can talk about okay this set of action is right and this set of action is not right. So, this part or this branch is important as I said that because we will be in this class onwards we will be discussing about the normative ethics and we will be trying to understand what is normative ethics is all about and what are the ethical theories in this branch. So, as I said normative ethics concern questions like what is good or bad and what we must and ought to do. So, here we are not going to discuss in detail this normative ethics because this class onwards we will be doing that.

Now, the last branch of this ethics is an applied ethics. This applied ethics when we are going to apply this all the normative theories in the practical problems. Now we have idea of this normative ethics, we have idea of this ethical theories we have discussed, we have theories what we are doing we are applying these theories where in particular area for example, engineering ethics we are going to use these environmental problems environmental ethics, the bioethics, medical ethics. So, whenever we are going to do that, we are going to deal with this problem and the medical ethical problem applying this theory and getting solution. So, there are a lot of ethical problem in this medical life or environmental world or SUSE or bio-SUSE. For example healthcare context. I can give you an example as we have been like discussing healthcare and taking always this example because in a very common and it is easy to understand because in sometime, we are facing this kind of problem. A doctor and patient relations where doctor is an obliged to think of the betterment of this patient health. Now, the question is suppose person is going through I mean he is not well and doctor ask for certain examination test and the finally the doctor realized that this person is suffering with some deadly disease or which is a disease which is in life. Now this doctor is obliged to inform the patient. He knows that if he is going to do that, he is going to inform that this information can slow down his process to I mean for the process site where he is going to cure this person or maybe he is going to give a medicine or can take for the longer period. For example, a person needs an extra equipment or medical support. Now can we ask can we leave this decision on the patient whether he wants to use extra medical equipment or not or can we like go for the confirm thing that okay whether you should go for it or not like or take an example of last class what we are discussing about the ethnicity. Person is suffering and then he is deciding that okay I do not want to leave I do not want to live, I want to die so please allow me to die. So, there

are many problems ethical issues where we can discuss I mean we can apply the ethical theories and can decide what kind of set of action is right and what sort of an action is not right. For example, in engineering ethics there is so many problem where we are facing day to day life and in this engineering world and we can solve this issues with the ethical theories. So applied ethics is another very interesting branch where we can discuss many things. For example, the environmental ethics how the natural resources we have in what level and how we should use this natural resources. How we are treating the natural resources right and what we should treat that right. I have written some few of the paper where I have argued that how we should not like you have to keep things from the even the future generation right. You have to save this environmental the natural resources for the future generation and so on. So, the idea is these ethical theories you can apply can use in both in the practical problem right. So, this is what is all about applied ethics right.

And so thank you so much the references for this you can go for the Frank Thilly and Jackson to ethics and then this Stanford Encyclopedia this is a good source right. So, thank you so much for your kind attention.