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SECULAR AND THEOLOGICAL ETHICS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Ethics is a study which deals fundamentally with the rules of conduct from moral point of view. The main characteristic of ethics is to judge the value of moral act or moral conduct. Therefore, ethics means a code of conduct. The history of the development of morality grew through a long process of evolution of certain morality like ‘taboos’, habits and customs in the primitive society. There are two broad divisions of ethics i. e., secular ethics and theological ethics. The history of the development of secular ethics flourished through four periods i. e., the Greek ethics, the Medieval ethics, the Modern ethics and the Contemporary ethics. Each period has its own prominent characteristics. Moreover, the history of theological ethics grew with the rise of different religions like Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Morality has been developed during the period

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of more than two thousand years. Within this long span of time, many doctrines, ideas and values are included in it. Hence, morality takes different shapes in different periods and ethical views also develop accordingly. In this article, an attempt has been made to show a gradual development of morality- secular and theological. Again, the similarities and the dissimilarities between secular and theological ethics are the additional concerns of this paper.

1. Introduction

Ethics is a philosophical thinking about morality and moral problems.¹ The word ‘ethics’ is derived from the Greek adjective ‘ethica’ which comes from the substantive ‘ethos’ meaning customs, usage or habit.² Furthermore, the word ‘moral’ is derived from the Latin substantive ‘mores’ which also means customs or habits.³ Therefore, Ethics literally means the science of customs or habits of men. It is a normative science of the conduct of human beings living in societies; i.e., it is a science which judges this conduct to be right or wrong, to be good or bad.⁴ It helps us to distinguish between ‘what is good and what is bad’? It tells us to do good things and avoid doing bad things. Ethics separates good from bad, right from wrong, fair from unfair, moral from immoral and proper from improper human actions. In short, Ethics means a code of conduct. Its basic nature is to judge the value of moral act or moral conduct. It is noted here that there are two broad divisions of ethics i. e., secular ethics and religious or theological ethics. Both types of ethics discuss some basic questions regarding human life. To discuss the development of morality, it is needed to sketch a brief outline of these two broad divisions of ethics which are as follows:

2. Secular Ethics

Secular ethics is a branch of moral philosophy in which ethics is based solely on human faculties such as logic, reason or moral intuition. It is not derived from purported supernatural revelation or guidance which is the source of theological ethics. The history of the development of secular ethics can be conveniently divided into four periods such as, the Greek ethics, the medieval ethics, the modern ethics and the contemporary ethics.

2.1. Greek Ethics

The Greek period of ethics continued from 500 B. C. to A. D. 300. The Greek ethics began with some Greek philosophers like Heracleitus and Democritus, but it took a proper shape by the Sophists, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. The Sophists raised morality by saying that ‘man is the measure of all things’⁵. According to them, there is no established criterion in regard to morality. Man himself can differentiate between good and bad actions. Thus morality, according to the Sophists, is subjective. Later on, the development of morality is extended through Socrates said “Virtue is knowledge.”⁶ According to him, knowledge is a necessary condition for living a thoroughly good life. Therefore, the source of goodness is knowledge. There is a famous phrase in this connection i.e., ‘Know thyself’ which suggests that knowledge of human nature is important for the good life.⁷ Subsequently, this saying of Socrates gives rise to a positive idea of morality in Plato and Aristotle, his two great followers. For Plato, the ideal world is the real world and this world is the copy of the ideal world. According to him, the most fundamental of these realities is ‘the idea of the good’.⁸ Aristotle accepted the ethical position of Socrates and Plato in general,

but he was more interested in the concrete details of moral life than in the abstract underlying principles.⁹ There are two other groups with the Cyrenaics and the Cynics of the Greek period. In later age, the Cyrenaics and the Cynics were followed by the Epicureans and the Stoics respectively. According to the Cyrenaics and the Epicureans, a good action is one which gives pleasure and this view is called hedonism — a doctrine regarded as one of the greatest ethical theories in the development of morality. On the contrary, the Cynics and the Stoics think that the good life consists of being independent of human desires and that goodness has no connection with pleasure.¹⁰ In modern time, the Epicureans are led by the Utilitarians and the Stoics are followed by Kant. These are the major gradual stages in the development of Greek ethics.

2.2. Medieval Ethics

The medieval period of ethics lasted approximately from the 5th to the late 15th centuries. The main characteristic of medieval ethics is the influence of religion, particularly Christianity. In this age, the standard of right and wrong had been set finally and beyond dispute in the revelation of God's law in the Bible as it was interpreted by the Church. Moreover, to raise doubts or to ask questions against the Church authorities was very dangerous, because the Church had the power to punish. This helped to change the Greek outlook which had identified the good man with the good citizen and had regarded ethics as a part of politics.¹¹ The problems discussed throughout the medieval period are the relation of faith to reasons, the existence and simplicity of God, the purpose of theology and metaphysics and the problems of knowledge. Some renowned thinkers of this era are St. Thomas

Aquinas, St. Anselm, St. Thomas Augustine, Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. St. Thomas Augustine regards ethics as an enquiry into the *Summum Bonum*. He stated that he would never allow his philosophical investigation to go beyond the authority of God. According to them, happiness consists in the enjoyment of God, a reward granted in the afterlife for virtue in this life. Although medieval ethics lasted relatively ever a long period in history, it is not at all significant as an ethical outlook for its dependence on church authority.

2.3. Modern Ethics

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Church lost the authority. The main reasons behind this were an outburst of individualism, development of human understanding, emphasizing on human freedom and human accomplishment.¹² The modern period of ethics which originated from this stream of individualism, may be lasted from the end of the middle ages to the middle of the nineteenth century. Various views which were found in this period are discussed under the following heads:

- i. Some thinkers like Thomas Hobbes held that the difference between right and wrong was merely subjective, depending upon the attitude of the individual making the moral judgement.¹³
- ii. Some thinkers conceived that the difference between right and wrong was known by direct insight or intuition. An influential kind of intuitionism which was known as rational intuitionism was affirmed by S. Clarke (1675-1729), Henry More (1614-1687) and R. Cudworth (1617-

1688). Another form of intuitionism was advocated in the seventeenth century by Shaftesbury (1671-1713) and Hutcheson (1694-1747) and was named as moral sense theory. Bishop Butler (1692-1752) made a juncture between these two theories. Another metaphysical influence played a vital role in the development of modern ethics. The advocate of this theory was Benedict Spinoza (1632-1677). Subsequently, the moral sense theory of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson influenced Hume (1711-1776) very much. Hume introduced first the doctrine of 'Is-Ought Gap' which is the main topic of contemporary ethics. According to him, morality depends on the individual and therefore, it is subjective. However, Thomas Reid (1710-1796) and Richard Price (1723-1791) opposed Hume's view. According to them, morality depends on the object and so, it is objective. In addition to this, another school emphasized the view that moral law is a law of reason. This view is adopted by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and is called Ethical Rationalism.

- iii. Some thinkers alleged that the difference between right and wrong depends on the result of our actions and particularly on their powers of satisfying our desires as well as causing pleasure to ourselves and others.¹⁴ This view has been found in the Greek school of the Cyrenaics as well as the Epicurians, and in the modern period, it has been supported by the great school of English Utilitarians, including Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), J. S. Mill (1806-1873) and H. Sidgwick (1838-1900). Utilitarianism is a moral theory that is associated

with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, two late 18th and 19th century British philosophers, economists and political thinkers. Utilitarianism is a theory of morality that advocates actions that foster happiness or pleasure and oppose actions that cause unhappiness or harm. According to utilitarianism, an action is right if it results in the happiness of the greatest number of people in a society or a group. The ethical maxim of utilitarianism is ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people’. According to Mill and Bentham, the ultimate aim of a human being is to desire happiness and to refrain from sadness. Nevertheless, as a social being a man has to obey some external sanctions and internal sanctions. For example, if a man wants to fulfill his desire by not obeying the state’s law, he should be punished. It is external sanction introduced by Bentham. Furthermore, a man feels unhappy for his bad behaviour. It is called internal sanction proposed by J. S. Mill. According to Mill, a man has to desire altruistic tendencies instead of egoistic tendencies through the external sanctions and internal sanctions. Besides, Bentham emphasized on quantity of pleasure and Mill strengthen on quality of it. This is why, Mill’s utilitarianism is called refined hedonism and Bentham’s utilitarianism is known as gross hedonism. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the theory of naturalism has spread a lot through the moral theory of Mill-Bentham called utilitarianism. The theory of pleasure as the moral standard was developed on evolutionary lines by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).

- iv. At the end of nineteenth century, the theory of idealism was developed again on evolutionary lines by Hegel (1770-1831), T. H. Green (1836-1882), F. H. Bradley (1846-1924) and so on. These are the major gradual developments of morality in modern ethics.

2.4. Contemporary Ethics

The contemporary period of ethics began in the twentieth century and it has been continuing till onwards. G. E. Moore (1873-1958) was the foremost advocate of this ethics. Moore established his theory of non-naturalism by criticizing or refuting the moral theory of naturalism. Moore established his theory of non-naturalism by criticizing or refuting the moral theory of naturalism. He observed that there was no consensus among the ethicists of modern period in regard to determining the goodness and badness. Even the moral thinkers of that period did not advocate any particular standard of morality by which we can follow our lives.¹⁴ Moreover Moore also noticed that analytic attitude was seen in different branches of philosophy like epistemology. Perhaps he wanted to apply this attitude in his moral thinking i.e., moral philosophy. In this circumstance, G. E. Moore said that the function of ethics is not to evaluate our moral actions, but to analyze the ethical words and to show the relation between ethical words as well as moral judgements. This theory is known as non-naturalism and from this theory other moral theories such as emotivism, prescriptivism, multi-functionalism and descriptivism originate. Emotivism, defended by A. J. Ayer and C. L. Stevenson, holds that ethical sentences serve merely to express emotions. According to them, 'Killing is wrong' means something like 'Boo on killing!' Prescriptivism, as put forward

by R. M. Hare, holds that moral statements act like universalized imperative sentences. According to him, 'Killing is wrong' means something like 'Don't kill!' Another contemporary ethical theory is multi-functionalism. Nowell Smith, the chief advocate of this theory holds that multi-functionalism is a theory about the uses of 'good' in different contexts.¹⁶ He holds that sometimes we use good in the context of choice, sometimes in the context of verdicts and appraisals, sometimes in the context of efficiency and skill and sometimes in the context of descriptive use. The next contemporary ethical theory is descriptivism, defended by J. R. Searly, G. J. Warnock, Phillippa Foot and so on. Naturalism as the theory of modern ethics, thinks that it is possible to derive 'ought' from 'is'. However, the contemporary ethicist G. E. Moore does not think so. Nevertheless, a group of contemporary ethicists, known as descriptivist, hold that we can deduce 'ought' from 'is'. For this reason, they are called neo-naturalists. On the basis of descriptivism, another ethical branch is originated and discussed as bellow:

2.5. Applied Ethics

The most recent development of ethics is related to our daily problems and is trying to solve many modes of ethical issues by applying to our practical needs. It is a branch of ethics devoted to the treatment of moral problems, policies in personal life, professions, technology and government.¹⁷ Applied ethics is a combination of ethical principles with other principles e.g., ecological, social, political, medical and so forth. It is distinguished from normative ethics which concerns standard for right and wrong behavior and also from meta-ethics which concerns the nature of ethical properties, statements, attitudes

and judgements. A variety of moral issues is related to practical ethics i.e., journalistic ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, professional ethics, labor ethics, administrative ethics, judicial ethics, parliamentary ethics, government ethics, medical ethics etc.¹⁸ Among them medical ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics and journalistic ethics are discussed below:

2.5.1. Bio-Engineering Medical Ethics

Medical ethics is an important branch of applied ethics which evolves at the intersection of medicinal treatment based on scientific and rational judgements. It is a system of moral principles that apply values to the practice of clinical medicine and to scientific research. The term ‘medical ethics’ was first introduced in 1803, when English author and physician Thomas Percival published a document describing the requirements and expectations of medical professionals within medical facilities. Medical ethics deals with a broad range of problems and covers such fields like moral and ethical problems involved in genetic engineering and genetic therapy, i.e., the moral aspects of the transplantations of organs. It also discusses moral problems associated with the spread of new childbirth techniques, artificial insemination, maternity ‘on hire’ etc. Moreover, various problems like abortion, suicide, euthanasia, birth control, duties of doctors, doctors-patients relation, private practice, qualities of the drug production companies, education of medical discipline etc. are also the subject matter of medical ethics.

2.5.2. Environmental ethics

Environmental ethics is a branch of applied ethics. “It is a combination of ethical principles with other principles e.g.

ecological, economic, legal or political and social principles with factual information, to develop practical principles for some specific situation or kinds of situation, (e.g. hospital treatment of premature babies, logging right vis-a- vis forest conservation).”¹⁹ It is the only ethics that evolves out of needs for environmental discipline. There are some differences between environmental science and environmental ethics. The subject matter of environmental ethics exceeds the realms of environmental sciences. The environmental science describes what environment is; on the contrary, environmental ethics prescribes what environment ought to be.²⁰ Des Jardins defines environmental ethics as “a systematic account of the moral relations between human beings and their natural environment. Environmental ethics assumes that moral norms can and do govern human behavior towards the natural world.”²¹ Aldo Leopold who is known as the father of Environmental Ethics, defines a land ethics or, as we now call it ‘To Environmental Ethics’ terms it as “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”²² Therefore, it can be said that the environmental ethics deals with the behavior of human beings towards nature and it can play a vital role to protect the environment.

2.5.3. Business ethics

Business ethics is a form of applied ethics or professional ethics that examines ethical principles and moral or ethical problems that arise in a business environment. It applies to all aspects of business conduct and is relevant to the conduct of individuals and entire organizations.²³ Business ethics is also known as a

corporate ethics. Andrew Crane defines Business ethics as “the study of business situation, activities, and decisions where issues of right and wrong are addressed.”²⁴ Business ethics is related to the study of the ethical dimensions of productive organizations and commercial activities. This includes ethical analysis of the production, distribution, marketing sale and consumption of goods as well as rendering services. We can then conclusively say that this is how the contemporary ethics marks a gradual process of developments.

2.5.4. Media ethics

Media ethics is the subdivision of applied ethics dealing with the specific ethical principles and standards of media, including broadcast media, film, theatre, the arts, print media and the internet. Media ethics deals with ethical questions about how media should use texts and pictures provided by the citizens. Journalistic ethics, a form of media ethics evaluates journalists’ day-to-day professional activities. Although the ancient journalism started in 50 BC during the reign of Julius Caesar, Journalism in true sense started in the 17th century. Then it has become a major enterprise by the 21st century. The word ‘journalism’ has come from two terms ‘journal’ and ‘ism’. ‘Journal’ means well-arranged and well controlled presentation of day to day incidents through compose. Again, ‘ism’ means ideas regarding habit, behaviour or beliefs. Like business ethics, medical ethics and other professional ethics, journalistic ethics formulates some principles through which it evaluates journalists’ professional actions. Journalists are considered to be the members of a noble profession who perform their duty like a watchdog to protect public interest. They investigate the allegation of wrong-doing that appear

against the interest of people. They are expected to play their role on the activities of government honestly and sincerely so that the rights of people are protected. They are also expected to tell the truth and to disseminate the information truly. Media especially newspaper is called the court of the poor people and the reporters or the journalists are considered as the lawyers of the court. This is because the poor people do not have enough money in their hands to fight legally to achieve their rights. So, they do not go to the court for their problems and rights. Journalists or reporters of the television or newspapers play a vital role in this regard. They express the problems and human rights of the poor people in front of the government through media. Then the government aware of that problem and try to solve this problem as early as possible. In this way the journalists try to solve the poor peoples' problems and human rights and are regarded the lawyers of the poor people. The five core principles of ethical journalism are truth and accuracy, independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity and accountability. These principles are universal and help us to protect democracy and human rights.

3. Religious or Theological Ethics

Another development of moral teachings is theological ethics which is related to our personal, social, political and medical issues and is trying to solve these in the light of religions. According to religious or theological ethics, an action is regarded as morally good, because God commands it, but it is considered morally evil, because God prohibits it. It also holds that moral status of an action depends on the commandment and will of God or divine revelation. Whatever He commands or desires will be regarded as morally good or right and whatever He does

not command or desire will be considered as wrong. It is noted here that sometimes God's command perceptibly seems immoral in ordinary human consideration. For example, God's command to Abraham to sacrifice his innocent son²⁵ is not consistent with our ordinary moral knowledge or common sense. This is because according to morality, it is a great sin to kill an innocent. However, in the eyes of religious ethics, it is considered a great merit, because God commanded it to Abraham directly and he latter advanced to carry out God's command unquestionably.²⁶

Nowadays there are many religions which may be divided mainly into two major groups. They are revealed and non-revealed religions. Religions which are associated with a definite Personality claimed to be its first originator or founder who conveys message from the Almighty to mankind and has a definite religious Text are called revealed religions. Among the revealed religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are foremost. Among these revealed religions, Judaism is the oldest and Islam is the latest. On the other hand, religions which do not have a definite founder or if they have any founder, they do not claim themselves as the Messengers of any 'Supreme Divine Being' or do not have any definite religious Text, fall under the category of non-revealed religions. Among the non-revealed religions, Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism are very important. Every religion has some ethical codes. There are some theological or religious ethics which may be named as Christian ethics, Islamic ethics, Hindu ethics, Buddhist ethics, Judaism, Sikhism, and so on. Some of them are discussed below:

3.1. Christian Ethics

Christian ethics is a branch of theological ethics that explains the ethical norms and values concerning with the human life in the light of Christianity. The Bible and the teachings of the Jesus Christ are the main sources of Christian ethics. It is a guideline for the Christian as to how a good Christian lives in right path. According to the Christian theology, moral values depend solely upon Gods command or divine revelation or divine will. It advocates that in determining rightness or wrongness, good or evilness, praiseworthiness or blameworthiness of an action, divine command or divine revelation will be the conclusive factor rather than common sense or secular moral thinking of the worldly people. Moreover, Christian ethics is very much practical rather than theoretical. Denise Landner Carmody wrote in this context: “Christian ethics is not an academic treatise but a communication about how to live well, according to Christian light, we shall denature what we are studying”.²⁷ In addition to this, Christian ethics encourages mankind to maintain a high moral character by achieving moral virtues like faith, love and hope, forgiveness, kindness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, responsibility, integrity, moderation, honesty, humility, mercy, justice and fairness, patience and fortitude, temperance, modesty and gentleness, peacefulness, helpfulness, hospitality, generosity, prudence, courage, compassion, self-sacrifice, self-respect, cleanliness, sincerity and keeping the commitment etc. At the same time, Christian ethics discourages its adherents to refrain from vices like hypocrisy, lying, pride, boasting, blasphemy, unkindness, greed, anger, slander, ungratefulness, impatience, cowardliness, quarrelsomeness, wickedness, despair, ignorance, immodesty, conceit, rancor, cheating, stealing, robbing, oppression, adultery

and fornication, killing unjustly etc.²⁸ Therefore, by following the above virtues and by avoiding the vices a Christian will be considered truly religious as well as he will be rewarded by the people in this world and by the God in the hereafter.

3.2. Islamic Ethics

Islam is a religion which means complete surrender to Allah and to obey the Traditions of Prophet Muhammad (sm.). Islam is a religion of love, mercy and tolerance. Islam prescribes us some ethical responsibilities or duties. Responsibilities or duties are generally expressed in terms of duties to Allah as well as duties to society which include a harmonious interaction between Allah and human beings resulting in righteousness. When an individual has a developed sense of such responsibilities, he is a moral being and considered to be a provider of greater service to society. This is the concept of morality in Islam. Thus, Islamic ethics is the law of duties or responsibilities rather than of rights. The sense of duty reminds us of our responsibilities towards our fellow-beings. The sense of duty to Allah and to our fellow-men keeps us away from evil-doing and directs us to the right path—the path of eternal peace and prosperity.²⁹

Islamic ethics is very much associated with the Arabic word ‘*Akhlaq*’.³⁰ Islamic ethics embraces all aspects of human life. It includes its own personal, social, ethical, criminal, mercantile, constitutional and international aspects. Shah Abdul Hannan spells out it as follows: “Islamic ethics has been defined as the body of rules of conduct revealed by Allah to His Prophet Muhammad (sm.) whereby the people are directed to lead their life in this world.”³¹ The inner meaning of the word ‘*Akhlaq*’ is the path which leads to Allah as well as to His laws and guides

Muslims to run their spiritual, moral, social and physical lives in accordance with Islamic principles.³² Thus, Islamic ethics is the way or path guiding the Muslims. It also binds Muslims into a single community. A Muslim is expected to live according to the Islamic principles both in the private and public life.

Islamic ethics is very much practical. It has no interest in the theoretical discourse i.e., to set up some moral principles and values, rather it attempts to establish these principles and values in the life of human beings.³³ Islamic ethics exhorts mankind to accept its beliefs and code of laws regardless of race, colour, sex, rank or any other differences. According to Islamic ethics, all people are equal before Allah and must bear their own responsibilities to accept the revelations of the Qur'an. The Qur'an states in this connection: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that ye may know each other. (Not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you..."³⁴ Islamic ethics invites men of all levels to live up to the highest point of ethical and spiritual progress.³⁵ The Qur'an also describes: "Nor can Goodness and Evil be equal. Repel (Evil) with what is better:..."³⁶ The Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Hazrat Mohammad (sm.) encouraged people of all levels to accept and practise the Islamic norms and values, i.e., Islamic ethics. According to Islamic morality, virtues like sincerity, responsibility, integrity, forgiveness, peacefulness, moderation, honesty, humility, kindness, truthfulness, trustworthiness, patience, mercy, modesty and gentleness, self-sacrifice, uprightness, fulfillment of engagements and treaties even with enemies, justice, giving just measure and weight, goodness, beauty, repentance, self-

respect, discipline, cleanliness, hospitality, helpfulness, love and hope, keeping the commitment etc. are considered as the moral virtues. The teachings of Islamic morality also exhort mankind to avoid vices like *Shirk* (to ascribe partnership to Allah and disbelieve), *Kufr* (disbelief in *iman*), boasting, jealousy, greed, injustice, impatience, ungratefulness, misery, cowardliness, quarrelsomeness etc. Islamic ethics encourages mankind to maintain high moral character by achieving moral virtues and avoiding vices.

From the above discussions, it can be noted here that like all other religious ethics, Islamic ethics guides man or woman as to how he/she should conduct his/her life, deal with his/her neighbors, how he/she should eat and sleep, buy and sell and how he/she should pray and perform other acts of worship. It also insists on human beings by saying that they should be moderate in all things, sparing themselves from misery and not lowering their status in life. Moreover, Islamic ethics warns us against cowardice and extravagance. Further, it condemns spendthrift and miserly economy, but it praises hospitality. In addition, it constantly urges: “Those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not niggardly, but hold a just (balance) between those (extremes);”³⁷ Therefore, Islamic ethics invites the people to guide their lives by these ethical principles. It helps mankind to distinguish between the straight road and that which will lead them astray. It also provides human beings with the knowledge of right and wrong as well as endows us with freewill which helps us to decide which path should be followed.

3.3. Hindu Ethics

Hinduism is the oldest of all the living religions. There is no

definite date of its origin and no specific founder of Hinduism. Hindu religion does not claim a particular belief or conviction as its sole faith. It is an amalgam of various kinds of beliefs and practices. Hinduism is known as *Sanatana Dharma*. Hindu religion has no book as its own exclusive Text. Nevertheless, the Vedas, the Upanisads, the Purans, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita and the Hindu Law books such as Manu Samhita etc. are some of the important religious Texts of Hinduism. All these books explain the service to humanity, perfect purity and brotherhood of man. Hindu religion is not simply a faith; rather it is mixed with philosophy in which Hindu morality depends on. In Hinduism, there are six systems of philosophy. These six principal systems are *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya*, *Vaisesika*, *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. In the opinion of Pritibhushan Chatterji, monism, dualism, pantheism and even agnosticism are noticed in these philosophical doctrines.³⁸

Nevertheless, moral teachings are also presented in these philosophical schools. According to *Vaisheshik*, peace is the foremost aim of human beings and there should be pleasure of all on equality basis. The *Vaisheshik* takes peace as the basis of religion. Moreover, the *Yoga* is a branch of *Samkhya*. It is said in the Gita that *Samkhya* and *Yoga* are one. Whatever may be the meaning of the terms *Samkhya* and *Yoga*, intended in the Bhagavad Gita, it holds good to stand for the two disciplines.³⁹ In the philosophy of *Yoga* various courses of meditation are prescribed for the realization of the nature of the pure self.⁴⁰ There are various intellectual, moral and quasi-physical disciplines in this philosophy. According to the philosophy of *Yoga*, virtues like love and friendly attitude should be cultivated towards those who are in happiness. Compassion for the distressed,

feeling of happiness at the spiritual exaltation of the pious men and indifference towards sinners are also some principal virtues. Apart from these, virtues like non-injury, truthfulness, non-stealing, sexual continence and non-appropriation etc. are very much emphasized in this philosophy.⁴¹ Among these, non-injury is the most important and essential. All these disciplines are prescribed for the achievement of the control of the mind and the body. Furthermore, the *Mimamsa* is a philosophical justification of the *karmakanda* of the Vedas, i.e., of Vedic rituals and sacrifices but it is atheistic.⁴² It is rightly called *dharmamimamsa*. It gives importance on moral duties of man that he owes to himself, to his family and relatives as well as to his community and nation. It is a system of philosophy investigating into the nature of dharma by enunciating several rules of interpretation of Vedic passages of doubt or ambiguity. In addition to this, according to the philosophy of *Vedanta*, human beings have to suppress their egotistic tendencies and perform their duties in a disciplined and disinterested way in order to gain enlightenment. This philosophy also gives emphasis on the moral virtues like attainment of calmness, temperance, renunciation, fortitude, the power of concentration of mind and faith etc.⁴³ According to *Samkhya*, ethical activity does not directly contribute to spiritual freedom. It creates in us the desire to know. It is the indirect preparation for *moksha* i.e., liberation. Thus Hindu religion also helps us the right way of living and it also helps us to make our lives peaceful.

3.4. Buddhist Ethics

Buddhist ethics, as an important part of religious ethics, explains ethical norms and values concerning with the human

life in the light of Buddhism. The Pali scriptures of Buddhism consist of three *pitakes* which are known as *tripitaka*.⁴⁴ They are the *Vinaya*, the dharma or the *Sutta* and the *Abhidhamma*. Buddhism emphasizes on purity of inner life. According to the Buddhist morality, the mind should be freed from greed, hatred and delusion. Anger, envy, jealousy etc. should be extirpated. Buddhist morality is altruistic. Universal good will and love are indispensable for the attainment of *Nirvana*. Self-perfection can be attained by self-abnegation. Narrow selfish love should be consumed by universal selfless love. *Ahimsa* is the key note of the ethics of Buddhism. Buddhist morality has its roots in the lists of virtues like non-injury in thought, word and deed, love, good-will, patience, generosity, kindness, wisdom, endurance, forgiveness, compassion and self-purification. According to Buddha, 'Let no one deceive another, let him not despise another in any place, let him not out of anger or resentment wish harm to another.'⁴⁵ He further holds that 'Let a man overcome anger by love; let him conquer evil by good for hatred ceases by love.' 'Returning good for good is very noble, but returning good for evil is nobler still.'⁴⁶ Buddha taught his followers the four noble truths. These are the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), the truth of the cause of suffering, the truth of the end of suffering and the truth of the path that frees us from suffering. Buddha also taught his followers that the end of suffering, as described in the fourth noble truths, could be achieved by following an eightfold path. These are right belief, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. This eight-fold path is considered the way to the attainment of nirvana.

After Buddha's death, his followers are divided into the two principal sects i.e., the *Hinayana* and the *Mahayana*. In the

eyes of the *Hinayana*, every one's *nirvana* is possible by his own individual effort and none else can be of any real help to him in this regard. The *Mahayana* sect, on the other hand, holds that no one's salvation is perfect unless he helps others in their efforts to attain salvation. The followers of Buddhism believe that there is no supreme god or deity. They considered Buddha as an extraordinary man, but not a god. The word Buddha means 'enlightened'. The path to enlightenment is attained by utilizing morality, meditation and wisdom.

3.5. Sikhism

Sikhism is one of the latest religions of the world which originated in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent around the end of the 5th century CE. The word 'Sikh' in the Punjabi language means 'disciple' or 'learner'. Sikhs are the disciples of God who follow the writings and teachings of the ten Sikh gurus. Guru Nanak is regarded as the founder of Sikh religion. He was followed by nine gurus, the last of whom was Guru Govind Singh. Sikhism as a religion took a definite shape under the influence and teachings of all these ten gurus. Besides Guru Nanak, the other two gurus named Guru Arjun and Guru Govind Singh played epoch making roles in shaping Sikhism in its present form. The principle Sikh scripture or the basic sacred book of Sikhism is *Adi Granth* or *Guru Granth Sahib* which was compiled by the fifth guru, Guru Arjan (1564-1606). Another important scripture of the Sikh is the *khalsa* written by the tenth Sikh guru, Guru Govind Singh. The *Adi Granth* or *Guru Granth Sahib* contains the actual words spoken by the ten gurus of Sikhism and the words of various saints from other religions including Islam and Hinduism.

Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. This means that the Sikh believes in one God. They believe in one omnipresent, formless God. They refer to God as Waheguru. Its monotheistic faith might have been strengthened by the Islamic influence upon it, but it is first and foremost a product of Nanak's own personal experience. The one and only one supreme God is regarded as creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. There are five main beliefs of Sikhism i.e., God is one and without form or gender, everyone has direct access to God, everyone is equal before God, a good life is lived as part of a community, by living honestly and caring for others and empty religious rituals as well as superstitions have no value. According to Sikhism, Waheguru created the universe, the world and every life form with it. The Sikh believes that before the universe existed, there was only Waheguru and it was because of 'the will of God' or *Hukam* that the universe was created. The world is the expression of God. Therefore, God and His creation are both real. Sikhism holds that it is in place where one should actively engage in righteous actions. Sikhism criticizes asceticism and ordains its followers to live pure and disciplined worldly lives as according to Sikhism, the only worldly live gives us an opportunity to perform righteous actions. Another important belief of Sikh religion is *karma* and transmigration. *Karma* refers to one's actions in life. According to Sikhism, those who perform bad actions have to undergo a fresh birth after the end of the present life, but those who perform good actions and are engaged in sincere devotion to God become free from the chain of birth, death and rebirth. Freedom from this cycle of rebirths is a type of emancipations called *mukti* i.e., salvation. Moreover, performance of religious actions, *Nama Simaran* (repeating the name of God), *Bhajan* and *Kirtan* (corporate singing of the praise of God) etc. are considered as means to liberation.

As a religious discipline, moral teachings are also presented in Sikhism. It emphasizes the inner purity of mind and heart. External ritualism i.e., pilgrimage, sacred bath, idolatry, asceticism are opposed by Sikhism, Hypocrisy is also denounced by Sikh moral teachings and only those practices are treated as religious which have their root in heart. For example, *Nama Simaran* is of value only when person repeats God's name with full love and devotion. In this connection, Kedar Nath Tiwari says that "There is no use of visiting places of pilgrimage. The true tirath (place of pilgrimage) is within. True religion is inward and finds shape in loving devotion. All else is mere hypocrisy which has no place in religion."⁴⁷ Moreover, Sikhism also emphasizes a dedicated moral and virtuous life, a life of the selfless service of the people, company of God-centred men etc. In addition to this, Sikhism encourages mankind to maintain a high moral character by achieving moral virtues like humility and love, contentment, truthfulness, righteousness, mercy, compassion, purity, honesty, generosity, integrity, loyalty and service etc. At the same time, Sikhism discourages its adherents to refrain from vices like hypocrisy, lying, greed, anger, stealing, delusion, egoism and self-centeredness etc. According to Sikhism, the pure *atman* has become impure by the attachment of five evil passions like *Kama* (lust), *Krodha* (anger), *Lobha* (covetousness), *Moha* (attachment in the worldly objects) and *Ahankara* (pride). Due to these evil acts, man has become degenerate and lost his true nature. Therefore, by following the above virtues and by avoiding the vices a Sikh will be considered truly religious and he or she will lead a happy life not only in this world but also in the hereafter. Sikhism is also opposed to casteism and believes in equality amongst all human beings regardless of race, caste or creed. Besides, Sikh morality also depends on the custom of wearing

or carrying the five distinguishing marks of every Sikh known as the five Ks. These are *Kesh* (long uncut hair), *Kangha* (a comb), *Kara* (iron bracelet), *Kirpan* (sword) and *Kuchch* (soldier-shorts) initiated by Guru Govind Singh. Apart from these, daily rituals like early rising, taking bath in cold water, recitation of certain prayers morning and evening, meditation on God's name etc. are considered as the moral teachings in Sikhism. Therefore, it can be said that Sikh religion preaches a message of devotion and remembrance of God at all times, truthful living, equality of mankind and social justice. It denounces superstitions and blind rituals.

4. Comparison

In estimation of the above discussion it is remarked that there are a lot of similarities as well as dissimilarities between secular ethics and theological ethics. Now an attempt has been made below to find out these similarities and dissimilarities between these two ethics.

4.1. Similarities between Secular and Theological Ethics

It is very difficult to show all the similarities in a single section. Hence, an attempt has been made to mention some major areas of similarities between these two branches of ethics. These are as follows:

- (i) One of the foremost points of similarities between secular ethics and theological ethics is that both types of ethics are practical. Of secular ethics, applied ethics deals with practical issues related to human lives and to their needs. It discusses the environmental, ecological, social, political and medical issues related to human needs in

practical life. Among the branches of theological ethics, Islamic ethics for example is also very practical. It has no interest in the theoretical discourse; rather it attempts to establish those principles and values in human life. Islamic ethics is not a mere creed. It is a life to be lived.

- (ii) Both secular and theological ethics are concerned with some basic questions related to human life. They discuss about what is the ultimate goal of human life, what type of action will be called a right action, and how people ought to live and so on.⁴⁸ Both types of ethics are involved to search a satisfactory answer to these types of ethical questions. This shared purpose creates a common language for discussing ethics, regardless of whether it is grounded in religious beliefs or secular reasoning.
- (iii) Despite differing origins, both secular and theological ethics often relies on fundamental principles such as justice, fairness, honesty, compassion, respect and so on. Both branches of ethics think that these principles are the basis for laws, societal norms and personal behaviour.
- (iv) Both secular and theological ethics stress the importance of social responsibility. This involves caring for others, fighting against injustice, promoting social justice and protecting the environment. Theological ethics often frames these responsibilities in terms of religious duty or divine commandment, while secular ethics may view it as a moral obligation arising from shared humanity and reasoned compassion.

- (v) There is another point of similarity between secular ethics and theological ethics. In the philosophy of *Yoga* in Hindu ethics, various courses of meditation are prescribed for the realisation of the nature of pure self. It is to be noted here that this *Yoga* view has a resemblance to some extent to perfectionism in normative ethics, i.e., in secular ethics. Perfectionism, as a moral theory, also advocates for the self realisation in the self as a criteria of determining moral truth. Again *Vaisesika*, one of six principal systems of Hinduism, advocates for peace as the foremost aim of human beings and holds that these should be pleasure of all on equality basis. It needs not saying that these views in Hinduism resemble to hedonism or utilitarianism of modern ethics in western philosophy.

4.2. Dissimilarities between Secular and Theological Ethics

It is to be noted here that the points of similarities between secular ethics and theological ethics discerned above do not highlight the view that there is no dissimilarities between these two ethics. The major dissimilarities between secular ethics and theological ethics are discussed below:

- i) One of the foremost differences between secular ethics and theological ethics lies in their sources of morality. In secular ethics, the sources of morality are human reasoning, empirical evidence, philosophical arguments and societal norms. It depends on logical analysis, scientific understanding and consensus among people to establish moral principles. By contrast, the sources of morality in theological ethics come from religious

doctrine, sacred texts and spiritual teachings or divine revelation. It is based on the belief that moral principles are given by a higher power or divine source and are often interpreted through religious leaders, doctrines or prophetic teachings.

- ii) Another dissimilarity between them is that secular ethics tries to solve our ethical problems by reason, experience and intuition. Secular ethics uses rational arguments, philosophical analysis and empirical evidence to resolve ethical dilemmas. In a secular context, a moral dilemma might be resolved by evaluating the greatest good for the greatest number of people or considering the right and autonomy of individuals. Theological or religious ethics, on the other hand, attempts to give a solution regarding our ethical problems in the light of religious beliefs and traditions.⁴⁹ It solves ethical dilemmas by referring to religious texts, tradition, consulting religious authorities or seeking spiritual guidance.
- iii) Another dissimilarities between theological and secular ethics is that theological ethics indicates a wide range of duties than secular ethics.⁵⁰ Religious or theological ethics gives immense concern with religious duties. The most important religious duties of theological ethics are prayer, worship, the observance of rites and sacraments etc. According to theological ethics, it is obligatory for a human being to observe these religious duties in order to achieve the gratification of God. Secular ethics, however, is very much related to the behavior of human lives. It has an indirect moral concern with these duties.

- iv) There is another point of dissimilarity in which theological ethics does not appear to be involved in secular ethics. Emotional experience is very much associated with theological ethics rather than secular ethics. For theological ethics, the emotion may be described as an intense feeling of personal loyalty to God. Secular ethics, on the contrary, does not think so. It is noted here that sometimes God's command considered as emotional expression or experience. For example, one day Prophet Abraham dreamed that God ordered him to sacrifice his only son Ismail. In his devotion to God, Abraham agreed to follow his dream and perform the sacrifice. But God intervened and sent a ram to be sacrificed in Ismail's place. This story proved that sometimes God's command is considered as an act of piety, as a reminder of Abraham's obedience to God as well as an emotional expression to God.
- v) Regarding the nature of moral knowledge or ethical activities, most of the secular ethicists think that morality can stand independently. They hold that there are many people who have a strong morality but have no religious belief. On the other hand, theological or religious ethicists give a complete different opinion. According to them, moral values depend solely upon God's command or divine revelation.⁵¹ Whatever He commands or desires will be regarded as morally good or right and whatever He does not command or desire will be regarded as morally wrong. Sometimes, the commandment of God perceptibly may seem immoral in the ordinary human consideration. We find some

examples in the New Testament which are very difficult to understand in our ordinary moral standard. For example, ‘love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’⁵² ‘Do not resist an evildoer.’⁵³ ‘If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also.’⁵⁴ From the above verses of the Bible, it can be said that morally good is good only because God commanded it and it is immoral, on the contrary, because God forbade it.⁵⁵

- vi) Religious or theological ethics holds that knowledge is very important and action is for the sake of knowledge. According to theological ethics, religious life means the knowledge of God i.e., obedience to God. In order to get the satisfaction of God, some practical religious duties or actions such as prayer, worship, and sacrament are very essential. Secular ethics, on the other hand, holds the opposite view i. e., knowledge is merely a means to better action.
- vii) Another dissimilarity between them is that secular ethics has its center in man, whereas theological ethics has its center in God. Secular ethics is based solely on human faculties. The overarching purpose of secular ethics is to promote human well-being, social harmony and progress. It focuses on creating a better and more equitable society based on human needs and rational discourse. That is why, it is said that secular ethics is very much human-centered. Theological or religious ethics, however, centers on achieving spiritual goals, fulfilling religious obligation, obeying divine commandments and attaining salvation. It also includes the concepts

of afterlife and transcendent rewards or punishments. Moreover, religious ethics prescribe its adherence to pursue a life in accordance with divine principles in order to be a good human being and to get the gratification of God. Therefore, it is said that theological ethics is very much related to God.

viii) Regarding the adapting to new information and social changes, secular ethics is very much open for accepting any kind of new information and social changes. This is because, secular ethics operates independently of religious belief. It wants to re-evaluate ethical principles as cultures evolve and knowledge expands. Theological ethics, on the contrary, is very much rigid due to its reliance on religious doctrine and tradition. Changes in theological ethics might require reinterpretation of sacred texts or religious teachings, which can be a slower and more complex process.

5. Conclusion

By summarizing the above discussion, it is said that there are some similarities as well as dissimilarities between secular ethics and theological ethics. However, similarities are more strong, touching and impressive compared to the dissimilarities. This is because, ethics deals with the moral concepts like honesty, truthfulness, kindness, purity of love, charity etc. The ethical maxims are ‘truthfulness is a virtue’, ‘Be kind to all beings’, ‘Charity is good’. It is to be noted here that all these concepts and ethical maxims are equally advocated and vouchsafed by all religions as well as by all ethical theories whether secular ethics or theological ethics. Both types of ethics want to make a bridge of peace among human

beings by preaching their moral precepts. By following the moral teachings of secular and theological ethics a person can lead a stable life i.e., morally, socially, culturally, spiritually, economically, biologically and so on. It helps us to spread peace among mankind, to establish world peace, and to remove ethnic clashes in the name of religion. Thus people from all over the world will lead a happy, peaceful, harmonious, delightful, prosperous and successful life by following the moral precepts of these two types of ethics i.e., secular ethics and theological ethics.

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