Principles of Actions in Moral Philosophy

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Abstract: *In this chapter i.e. "principles of actions" we have deliberated various principles of normative theories keeping in view of their principles of actions. We have also unraveled the modus operandi of each of these normative theories consisting of a single principle that too giving rise to individual values which entail non-moral action.*

I.   Introduction

Every system of knowledge has its own principles. It is the principles that mould the modus operandi of all   our actions. Normative Ethics, that part of moral philosophy, concerned with principles or criteria to determine the rightness or wrongness of our actions. This is how 'Principles of Actions' are pivot to Moral Philosophy consisting of various principles clout our actions in various ways. These principles of actions frame various moral standards for different moral theories with their justifications relating to individual and social point of view. In choosing, judging and reasoning morally, one is at least implicitly espousing rules or principles. Hence the ultimate concern   of every ethical theory is to guide or making the decisions and judgments relating to various actions, viz , moral, non-moral and extra-moral actions keeping in view of individual and social perspectives. In social sphere an individual performs his actions in different capacities, i.e , as a son, as a father, as a friend, as a citizen, as a philanthropist and so on. So how could he morally decide whether his actions are right or from various points of view? 'Normative ethics concerns questions about right and wrong and the criteria to distinguish them.It is not about how the world is, but about how it should be. More accurately, normative theories attempt to delineate what is correct use of action guiding or prescriptive terms as ought, value, good, should, duty, obligation, right, wrong, permissive or forbidden''.1

Ethical theories are broadly classified into (i) Teleological Theories (ii) Deontological Theories (iii) Virtue or Eudaemonist Theories. All these moral theories have presented their moral standards from different angles. Let us deliberate these theories with their respective principles of actions separately as follows.

(i)**TeleologicalTheories**: This theory envisages the right course of action or principles of actions are augmented at least as great a balance of pleasure over pain as any alternative world. In other words an action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more favorable than unfavorable. Hence, according to teleological theorists, the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right or wrong or obligatory is the non-moral value that is brought into being.2 The final appeal, directly or indirectly, must be to the comparative amount of good produced or the comparative balance of good over evil produced. An action, this is how, is right and only if it or the principle under which it prevails will probably produce as great balance of good over evil. An action is wrong if it does not do so.

Teleological theories are based on the reflective desires, viz, pleasure, happiness and good of the individual. So the reflective desires of the individual are the end that actions are to be carried on. This vindicates teleological affirmation of consequences of an action should be the prime focus of ethical deliberation.Teleologists draw from the effort of the individual agent to distinguish the real from the apparent good and to harmonize conflicting impulses by subsuming under a comprehensive conception of good. Here the rightness   and wrongness of an action is based on   the goodness and badness of their consequences.Teleological principle needs to say that we first tally both good and bad consequences. If the good consequences are greater than the bad consequences then the action is morally right.Teleological theories are classified into three heads which are elucidated separately as follows :

Ethical Egoism: Epicurus, Hobbes and Nietzsche are the advocates of this theory. This theory holds that an individual is always to do   that promotes his own greatest good- that an action or principle of an action is right if and only if it promotes as great a balance of good over evil for an individual. In other words an action is morally right if the consequences of that action more favorable than unfavorable. Here the value of an action can be reduced to the quality of pleasure and pain that it produces for an individual.

Ethical Altruism: An action is morally right If the consequences of that action are more favorable to unfavorable to everyone expect the individual. Ethical altruism inspires an individual to sacrifice personnel projects and dedicate for the cause of the others so that it will be treated as the most beneficent course of an action.

Ethical Utilitarianism: The ultimate end of this utilitarianism is the greatest general good for which an action or principle of action is right if and only if it facilitates at least as great a balance of good over evil . In this theory an action is morally right if the consequence of that action is more favorable than unfavorable. This theory consists an experience or feeling produced by an action, i.e, one's intention in performing an action could incorporate all of its foreseen consequences. So the goodness of an action perpetrates the balance of good over evil consequences. There should be no limit that could be imposed on individual by the nature of action itself . Hedonism that gives rise the feeling of pleasure of an individual augments egoism(the 17th Century British Philosopher Thomas Hobbes) or an individual's universalistic hedonism called utilitarianism propounded by Bentham and Mill enshrines the end of an action is survival or growth. But some utilitarians are not hedonists, namely, G.E. Moore and Hastings Rashdall are ideal utilitarians. These theorists develop a certain type of teleological theory of obligation which does not entail a particular theory of value. However ' ClasssicalUtilitarians' like Bentham and Mill adopt non-moral values which are directly commensurate to individual values therefore deal with non-moral actions.Someteleologis affirm that their theories oscillate between ethical egoism and utilitarianism. According to them the right action or principle is that one which is conducive to the greatest balance of good over evil in respect to one self, nation, family and the race. A pure ethical altruist might even contendthat the right action or principle is that one which ameliorates the good of other people . Teleologists howsoever generous and philanthropists may not be free from their hedonic phobia as they claim that man is by nature is selfish and a pleasure seeking animal.3 Hence the concept of social values is inconceivable by taking pleasure pain consideration. As pleasure and pain are subjective phenomena so it is very difficult on our part to measure their intensity.

II.   Deontological Theories:

Deontological Theorists hold that it is possible on the part of an action or principle of an action is ethically right or obligatory even it does not facilitate the greatest possible balance of good over evil for self , society and universe. They seek to identify a supreme principle or laws of morality independent of good and subordinate to the pursuit of the moral law.These theories tend to identify the rightness and wrongness of an action with fixed principle of conduct. Just like the ten commands of Bibel, the supreme principle of Morality, the categorical imperative act as universal law provides inherent rightness or wrongness of our actions regardless their outcomes. Again deontological theories are perspective based theories believe in moral duty, obligation, equality, impartiality, and justice. These moral duties or obligations are self-evident principles which have intrinsic values therefore need no further justification. In these theories the rightness and wrongness of an action is determined by the intuitive faculty of mind. Holmes (1973) distinguishes between strong and weak deontological theories. According to him the rightness of an action can be valued without depending on goodness of moral rightness. Hence deontologists draw from the efforts of group of people to harmonize and adjudicate the conflicting claims they make one another by means of important principles followed by internal faculty of mind. Let us elucidate these conflicting theories separately as follows .

(i)**Act-deontologicalTheories** : Act-deontological Theories offer us no criteria or principle to determine whether an action is right or wrong. According to these theories in our everyday life we confront with many situations , these situations vary from one another so also our actions. So it is difficult on our part to formulate universal principles. Hence it is through our intuition we could decide the rightness and wrongness of an action, i.e, rule of the thumb. However some act-deontologists claim that we could derive general principles by observing some particular judgments of various situations through our faculty of intuition.4 ButC.D.Broad maintains that'' the rightness of an action is vitally connected with its 'appropriately' or 'fittingly' related to the rest of the situation. But the wrongness of an action is vitally connected with its 'inappropriately' or 'unfittingly' related to the rest of the situation.''

(ii)**Rule-deontologicalTheories**: Rule-deontological Theorists holds that the standard of morality consisting specific principles , e.g, telling the truth or keeping one's agreement. Each of these principles contends that actions must be carried on in a certain way keeping in view of the prevailing situations. Hence it vindicates that each principle has its own exception. So also each principle may have conflict with some other principles. For example the case of white lie, if we affirm it, is an exception to the principle ''we ought never to lie'', but if we formulate the '' exception'' as part of the principle we ought not to lie except while lies. Keeping in view of the above it is admitted that no deontologist has presented us a conflict ridden and exception free system of concrete principles. According to them ''Every rule has its own exceptions'',i.e, every rule of actual duty has exceptions. In view of the above one might say that an exception to a principle can only occur when it has to yield the right way to another principle and that of the principle opposed may be ranked in a hierarchy so that they could never conflict or dispute right of way. But Ross suggests that one can formulate moral principles that hold without exception as prima facie, though not of actual duty. That one ought to keep one's promises is always moral as a principle of prima facie duty.. It is always an obligation one must try to fulfill.

The fact, however, is that Ross does not give any criteria that what considerations are always to be taken into account in designing what is morally wrong or right. We must try to look for such criterion. Ross simply holds that his prima facie duties are fidelity, reparation, gratitude and justice. All these duties are self-evident. However other rule-deontologists affirm that their basic principles are not self-evident but decided on arbitrarily, i.e, divinely revealed or derived from metaphysics.

(iii) **DivineCommandTheory**:This theory enshrines the rightness and wrongness of an action is based on the will of the God. The upholders of this view proclaim that rightness or wrongness of any action implicates command or forbidden by God. In other words an action is right or wrong if and only if it is either command or forbidden by God, the Almighty.

(iv)**Categorical Imperative of Kant**: The categorical Imperative of Kant emphasizes the place of rationality in moral life as it contends that it is the practical reason that mould the moral law acts as the principles of morality. It decides the rightness and wrongness of every action. Kant delineate 'conscience' as an infallible moral faculty reigns in every rational mind. Hence it is the practical reason that acts as willing and acting .Kant again insists that it is the practical reason augments the moral agent to decide the rightness and wrongness of an action. He , however, says '' An erring conscience is a chimera.'' It is obvious that categorical imperative acts as the moral principle, an absolute principle acts as an unconditional command is in inexplicable form.'' He who freely observe this moral law must realizes his true self.

(C) **Virtue/EudaimoniaEthics**: Aristotle, of the fourth century B.C.,has been the main source of inspiration of the modern virtue ethics. In his NicomacheanEthics, he urged that the best life for a human being is eudaimonia consisting of the exercises of virtues or excellences .Indeed he is perhaps one of the most radical virtue ethics ever since he could be understood to be saying that there is nothing worth having in life except the exercise of virtues. This is the concept fostered by stoics also. The Kantians prefer duty for duty's sake. The utilitarians emphasize the greatest happiness of the greatest number. But the Virtue Ethicists enumerate the actions coming out of commitment of the value of charity for its own charisma. However Mcdowell understands virtue as a sensitivity to the requirement placed on one after another on the basis of the salient features of the situations wherein one finds himself as he believes that ascription of virtue can explain behavior,i.e, the exercise of the virtue is itself a crucial component of the good life for man.6

Eudaemonists claim that ethics consists in some functions or some activities relating to man to cultivate virtue or excellence is the main objective of each human being. Classical virtues comprising courage, temperance, justice and wisdom elevate Greek 'ideal man' as rational being and the theological virtue comprising faith, hope, love reveal the Christian Ideal of man .Virtue theorists insist that it is the character rather than consequences of an action should be cultivated. Virtue theories askance at the praise or blame of people 's accord with conduct. Praise or blame are tools for enabling people to assume responsibility for their conduct. This will enable the people to regulate their conduct keeping in view of the consequences of their actions. .Praise and blame are such tools that induce people to be more conscientious to govern their conduct/actions in accordance with the responsibility ascribed to them, i.e , a sense of responsibility that carry out the actions in futurity.

The main muddle of eudaemonist theorists is to show leading a life of virtue that facilitates to attend happiness, winning of good regarded as the chief objective of every action. `` That Jacob should suffer and Socrates and Jesus die while the wicked prosper that it seems unjust''. According to eudaemonists the universe is moral . In the words of Socrates ``No evil can happen to a good man, either in life or after death''. In Jesus words ``But he who endures to the end will be saved. 'According to Franklin virtues are means to an end.7

If we go through the above theories ,namely, the teleological theories, deontological theories and eudemonia theories than we shall find that each stream of thought has its own peculiar view. The teleological theories set forth their moral standard keeping in view of the reflective desires of man, i.e , pleasure, pain, happiness and good. Each of the teleological theory is based on a single principle as it has been broached earlier. Each of these theories are based on abstract concepts which are mainly subjective by nature espousing the rightness and wrongness of an action keeping in view of pleasure pain consideration consisting of greatest balance of good over evil. As each of these principles belong to a single theory hence forth each theory could only deal with a single action,i.e, non-moral action belongs to individual values. This vindicates teleological theories do not typically differentiate among moral, non-moral, and extra-moral actions. This is how each of these theories cannot test the rightness and wrongness of all types of actions. As actions are not of the same type so it requires different principles for different types of actions. Teleologists , more precisely, do not say to which action does their principle belong to?

Again if we deliberate on different deontological theories we must observe that these theories are not successful either as principles or criteria. It is because of the fact that each of the deontological theories has been fallen apart to provide principles or criteria whether a particular action is right or wrong in accordance to individual and social perspective as most of these theories mainly emphasize on the intuitive faculty of man

and the rule of the thumb, i.e, subjective analysis of situations. Deontologists claim that each human being possesses a distinctive intuitive faculty which determines the rightness and wrongness of actions. If this is so why do untoward incidents takes place in our day to day life. However in our day to day experience such a faculty is rarely perceived. Moreover act-deontologists determine the rightness and wrongness of any action through the rule of the thumb based on the situation ethics. As situations are differ from one another, each situation is unique in its nature so it is hard to work out to evolve a common principle taking into consideration of subjective phenomena.

If we introspect on rule-deontological theories it seems to us that these theories render principles or criteria to decide whether a particular action is right or wrong . But these principles have their own exceptions as according to these principles exhort we always ought to act in a certain way in a certain type of situation. Hence it is obstinate on our part to formulate principles or criteria taking into consideration of rule-deontology. Consequently it must be affirmed that no deontologist has presented us a conflict or exception free system consisting of different principles for different types of actions. ``Every rule has its exception'' that is every rule of actual duty has its exception. Some other rule deontologists contend that their basic rules are not self-evident but they are decided arbitrarily. This visualizes deontological moral standard based on conscience or categorical imperative is not suffice to decide the rightness and wrongness of an action. Kant's conception of categorical imperative is individual centric as it emphasizes on highest individual good is the highest common good is an absurd concept and therefore untenable.

Let us evaluate the virtue theory of principles with their actions. As virtue is related to individual's external behavior of rightness of an action without which ethical hassles crop up due to non-performance of some extra-moral actions. This fact is affirmed by Louden. If I have to do in any particular case it should be decided by my own perception of virtue. This is partly or wholly refer to social value leading to extra-moral actions. The virtue theory of action does not enable us to identify the virtuous people through their actions. Now-a-days the person who we think virtuous is just pretending even if neuroscience took us to the point where we could co-relate character traits with brain states , this would be of no help. As we cannot know whose brain state co-related with virtue.

The agent-oriented virtue ethics is criticized vehemently by Louden . He exhorts owing to the concentration long term assessment of character it is likely to be futile in the cases like so called good person (e.g,Asharam) perpetrates terrible actions. But RosalindHursthous argues for virtue ethics could focus individual actions along with their rightness and wrongness . This could help us to resolve practical moral issues like whether abortion is morally justifiable ? She also explains how it is possible for a virtue theory to claim that right actions are actions of a virtuous person could be performed in certain situations. As the concept of a virtuous person can be unpacked in terms of the particular virtues. These could be understood as traits human beings need in order to live well,i.e, to achieve eudaimonia. How much pleasure does a moral agent derive by observing his pious actions, it does not matter, but the exercise of the virtue is itself a crucial component of the good life for man. Alasdair Macintyre maintains that `` A virtue is ,as with Aristotle , a quality of exercise of which leads to the achievements of the human telos.''Macintyre again holds that ``cultivation of virtues always may and often does hinder the achievements of those external goods which are the mark worldly success.''8

Keeping in view of the above deliberation it is an obvious fact that virtue is a quality coming out of a certain types of actions to pave the way to pious motive of individual leading to extra-moral actions. It is a part of social values, to some extent it is also a part of individual value has also affinity to extra-moral actions – a qualitative phenomenon meant for social good. Virtue Ethics, whatsoever, oscillate between individual and social values

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