CHAPTER – 3

THE CONCEPT OF ETHICS

3.1 Defining Ethics and Morality

The word “ethics” comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which according to R.C. Sproul is derived from the root word meaning “stall,” a reference to a place for horses.\(^1\) The word in Greek conveyed a sense of a dwelling place and its surrounding. Ethics is a “disciplined reflection concerning moral conduct and character.”\(^2\) As the origin of the word ethics suggests, it is the “network of values and assumptions which characterizes the spirit of a culture and which informs the beliefs, customs, structures and practices of a society.”\(^3\) Morality is derived from the word “mores.” It describes the behavior and conduct of a particular society.

A.J. Ayer sees ethics as a level of analysis and that it being an “attempt to show what people are doing when they make moral judgments; it is not a set of suggestions as to what moral what moral judgments they are to make. And this is true of all moral philosophy as I understand it. All moral theories…in so far as they are philosophical theories, are neutral as regards actual conduct.”\(^4\)

However, the definition and the understanding of ethics and morals in their purpose and history will not be easy. When other sees ethics and morals to be evolved without a principal driving force, others see it relative to each culture and time in history. The distinction between ethics and morals itself is as vague as the theories

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\(^3\) Hunter P. Marby, *Christian Ethics – An Introductory Reader* (ISPCK, Delhi, 1987), 28
themselves. Philosophers and ethicists do not agree on what constitute what, but often choose to discuss about the behaviour, principles and philosophical theories rather than the definition of it. In his book “Ethics and the Christian,” R.C. Sproul distinguishes ethics from morals as follows:

“Ethics is a normative science, searching for the principal foundation that prescribe obligations or “oughtness.” It is concerned primarily with the imperative and with the philosophical premises upon which imperatives are based. Morality is a descriptive science, concerned with “isness” and the indicative. Morals describe what people do; ethics define what people ought to do. The difference between them is the normal and the normative.”

Sproul elucidate the difference between ethics and morals as such:

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<th>ETHICS</th>
<th>MORALS</th>
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<td>1. Normative</td>
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<td>2. Imperative</td>
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<td>3. Oughtness</td>
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Sproul further expound that when morality is identified with ethics, there is a danger that “the normal becomes the normative and the imperative is swallowed up by the status quo.” The result of this is what he called “statistical morality.” First, statistical polls and analysis determine and exhibit the morality of the masses through their behavior and lifestyle. Then, these reports will often defined what a normal human behaviour is, thus making the behavior with the highest result normal, and is therefore “good.” This immediately declares those who are not part of this behavior abnormal.

An example Sproul demonstrate is the statistical behaviour patterns that was brought about by the Kinsey Report of 1947 and 1953, and the Chapman Report. The

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5 Sproul, Ethics and the Christian, 9 &10
6 Ibid. 10
two reports in brief discover that a majority of people are participating in premarital sexual intercourse. This report may lead to the declaration that such activity to be “normal.” As human, it become easy to assert that this “normal” behaviour is what makes us “human,” thus making the behaviour to define what humanness is all about. For one who engages in premarital sexual intercourse, it may thus be concluded that such activity is “normal” and is therefore “good.” If such behaviour is now defined as “normal” and “good,” then the opposite of such behaviour becomes “abnormal” and “bad.” In this “statistical morality” chastity becomes a form of abnormality as it deviates from the sexual behaviour thus advocate. The normal is defined and determined by the statistics; the normal is human and good, while the abnormal is inhuman and bad.7

This is a humanistic approach to ethics and morality. Here, the highest good or the *summum bonum* is determined by activities that are seen as normal and human. Such approach on ethics and morality may find great popularity, but it immediately fall apart when applied to other issues.

### 3.2 Pre-Philosophical Ethics

Pre-philosophical ethics may be used as a reference to the system of ethics prior to the arrival of the formal ethical theory during 500 B.C. Modern understanding and formalized theory of ethics had sprung from the philosophical systems of the early Greek thinkers, thus a period before their time may be called so. The pre-philosophical era may be said to be devoid of structured moral theory with little developed discussions as it does not give attention to those fundamental questions that concerned the later thinkers. However, this does not mean that the period before the Greek thinkers was devoid of ethical codes and principles. There had been ethical structure or

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systems that governed the society, but they were in the forms of laws and codes rather than the philosophical discourse that we see in the later philosophical schools. Laws such as those found in the Jewish Torah, the code of Hammurabi and other law codes of Egypt and Mesopotamia may served as an example of those pre-philosophical ethics. They served as laws to the people and through these laws scholars can have an insight of the ethical in the understanding of the ancient world.

Ancient pre-philosophical ethical codes in the forms of laws were considered to be of divine origin and thus did not contain justification or explanations for the laws. They contained moral codes marking distinction between right and wrong; rewards for the right and punishment for the wrongs.

A man of ultimate integrity and ethics in the biblical understanding was probably Job. Though the book of Job is assumed to be compiled during the seventh and the second centuries B.C., the characters and his stories are believed to have been adapted from a story as old as the patriarchs of the Old Testament. Thus, the story of Job’s integrity and his ethical standards may actually be as old as the patriarchs even though it was only compiled as book in the post-Exilic movement. Rae suggested that the character of Job could be as old as 2000 B.C. and even precedes the Old Testament laws. In the poetic narrative of the book of Job, Job is devastated by the things that befall him and questions why the righteous suffer. He is accused by his friends of sinning and that he deserved the calamities that came upon him. Job distinguished himself as a man of integrity and defended himself as a righteous man. His description of himself as righteous man may be asserted as the moral and ethical standards of his

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10 Scott B. Rae, *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, 1995), 47
days, which exhibit high moral grounds for a pre-philosophical understanding. Job abhors falsehood or deceit and praises verbal integrity, opposed covetousness and promotes generosity, opposed adultery and exhorts marital fidelity, denounced exploitation of servants and addresses the importance of treating them justly, rejected greediness towards the poor, disliked wealth-driven arrogance and favours humility, rejected idolatry and exhorts true worship of God, denounced vengeance and encourages forgiveness, condemned hypocrisy and uphold truthfulness, criticized theft and supports honestly earning one’s living, and encourages hospitality. Here, Job displays characters that should be uphold and that should be rejected; he gave traits and virtues that should be endorsed in a society.

In the pre-philosophical period of biblical ethics, morality revolves around the development and building of character rather than attempting to solve moral dilemmas. It promotes and cultivates virtue rather than analyzing what moral decision one ought to make in a difficult situation to support right moral standards. In a sense, biblical ethics such as that from the book of Job suggests universal moral standards, and abiding in these standards would result in a harmonious personal and public life.

Other religions and traditions from across the world also bears significant laws and tradition of ethics and morals in their own times. The law of Manu in Hindu mythology and the teachings of Buddha and all other major religions may have their mention. In ancient Babylon, there are handfuls of collections of laws. The Code of Ur-Nammu and the law of the city of Eshnunna are believed to have been promulgated long before the time of Hammurabi. The Code of Hammurabi is believed to be the first to be discovered and is mostly complete.

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11 Cf. Rae, *Moral Choices*, 48
12 Cf. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 145
These Codes are not bodies of law by which a judge is obliged to refer in passing judgment. It was a legal tradition of the people as it would be in Egypt and Assyria. The Collection of the Assyrian Laws, the Hittites law and those of ancient civilizations had similar and standards by which the morals and ethics of the people was understood. Nonetheless, these laws depicted justice as morally good and obedience of the people ethically right. Kings and monarchs were to be respected and often elevated to the position of a god. They are confined to the cultural and traditions of their days and interpretation to the laws especially of their ethics and morals should always be done in the light of their current times.

In understanding pre-philosophical ethics, it is clear that there is a close relationship between the ethics and the ethnic. This is largely due to the fact that these ethical systems were often built, constructed or interpreted in relation to their land and community. Laws were interpreted and understood in the light of the community, its need and its survival. Though most moral standards in the pre-philosophical world shared similarities, their background and their specifics differ greatly. This diversity in the laws of the pre-philosophical world is due to the differences in their religious practices, culture and understanding of the community.

“The pre-philosophical and the classical Greek approach differs greatly from the approach of today’s university and secular culture. The emphasis today is on determining what is the right thing to do, and justifying the way in which that determination is made. It is act-oriented. In the pre-philosophical and classical periods, morality was bound up with the kind of person one is becoming. The approach of these periods asked what does being a good person involve. Ethics was primarily character-oriented.”13

13 Rae, Moral Choices, 48
3.3 Classical Greek Ethics

Greek thinkers with their expanding empire came in contact with other cultures and traditions making them aware of the differences and diversity in their understanding of morals and ethics. With their differences in their conceptions of right and wrong, they began to question their thought of ethics, its constituents and judgments. Their attempt to answer these questions gave rise to further questions that leads them to be founders of philosophy. They discussed their ideas and share their thought which became the ultimate mode of understanding and learning the Greek philosophical schools of thought. These classical Greek philosophies became the traditions by which later theologians of the Christian, Islamic and Jewish faith attempted to understand their theology, effecting the interpretation of their theology and their theology in turn affecting the interpretation of these philosophies.

3.3.1 Pre-Socratics

Pre-Socratic thinkers are western philosophers before the time of Socrates but may as well include others who are roughly contemporary with Socrates, such as Pythagoras. They were interested in a variety of topics, from the subject on how to think to natural science. Their attempt to answer the ultimate constituent of life and all matters of the world is central to each schools of the Pre-Socratic world.

Philosophers from Miletus often regarded as the Milesian school saw Thales who believed water to be the basis for all things. Anaximenes however believed air to be the basis of all things which he asserted when modified by thickening and thinning could be fire, wind, clouds water and even earth.

Pythagoras sees the practical side of philosophy regarding the world in perfect harmony and dependent on numbers. Heraclitus from Ephesus believed that fire to the element that forms all things. He assumed that all things originated from fire and return
to it again in the eternal cycle of process. The Eleatic School emphasized on the One who is the eternal unity that govern all thoughts. Xenophanes, Zeno and Melissus belong to the same school.

The Atomists form a materialistic system of thought wherein they believed atoms, small primary bodies infinite in number but can be distinguished by their shapes are the building basis of things. They varied in number and shapes, in their arrangement and compositions. On the ethical system, they believed reason takes joy in itself and excess of food, drink or sex are only but brief and short-lived. Intellectual pleasure is the most and truly beneficial and provided the best life. Goodness is not only avoiding wrongdoing but is also the avoidance of the desire to do the wrongdoing itself.

3.3.2 Socrates

Socrates emphasized on self-examination and the excellence of the character. The concept of knowing oneself is the key tenant of his moral philosophy. For Socrates, virtue is knowledge, and justice and all other virtues are wisdom. He advocated that one should do no harm to others, obey the rules of the state, obey the teachers and parents as all are part of the state or the society. Nevertheless, Socrates questioned the unjust laws that prevailed during his times.

3.3.3 Plato

Plato was a close associate of Socrates and this background likely contributed to his negative comments about democracy. Socrates played an important role in Plato’s writings, especially in his writings about ethics. Among Plato’s work, his *The Republic* presented his ethical theory in details and the implications of those ethics.

Plato’s thought on ethics begun with his question of the soul. He spent much of his writings on understanding the concept of soul, rather than focusing on rights, morals and consequences. His philosophy does not concerned with the right action nor does it
emphasize on the character of a good person. However, Plato and his contemporary Greek moralists believed that they can identify the right way to live one’s life in general, and were this concerned with character and virtue, rather than an ethics of right action. Plato’s right way of living runs parallel with the right way of performance, of craft or skill. One must have the right training and focus in order to know how he or she should live.

The presence of soul, according to Plato, is the essence of human beings that made him unique. In *The Republic*, Plato draws a parallel between the soul and the city; and this analogy between the soul and the city implies that “morality is not an individual enterprise, but is dependent on a person being in the right kind of society. There is a strong connection between producing a good society and producing good people.”\(^{14}\) Justice is the theme greatly emphasized in *The Republic*, which he asserted to be a state of well-being in one’s soul, rather than portraying it as a moral principle. His concept of justice is an exhibition of one’s well-being experienced personally and internally; and this justice in the soul leads to justice in the city.

To Plato, the soul is the source of change and emotions. He contemplated the soul to be of three parts, the vegetative, the passionate and the rational. From the vegetative comes the appetites and the desires, from the passionate comes the emotions or what Plato called the spirited part, and from the rational part comes knowledge and the thought processes. Thus, the well-being of the soul, to Plato, would depend on the working of these parts harmoniously. Justice, according to Plato, would then be one of the primary virtues when the parts of the soul work harmoniously thus fulfilling its obligations in life.

\(^{14}\) Ibid. 50
“Justice is found not in external acts but in internal harmony, with all the parts functioning in proper balance. Similarly, the just society is the one in which each person performed his or her function with excellence. The just act is the act that produces or maintains justice in the soul. Justice is produces by training that gets one in the habit of doing them, or those things that a person would characteristically do.”

Plato believed that justice could be achieved with the right training and skills. What one sees on earth were a mere manifestations or shadows of the form of the good to Plato, and thus defining the concept of good was almost impossible. What one conceived as good was just a resemblance of the ideal model of good. Unlike later thinkers of the classical Greek philosophers, Plato presented a more holistic view of good and virtue rather than an action-oriented ethics.

**3.3.4 Aristotle**

In the traditions of Plato, Aristotle continued to define a virtue and goodness, but gave specific virtues and behaviours in details. Aristotle was closely associated with Plato and was the mentor of Alexander the Great. His writings include subjects of wide variety ranging from logic, physics, psychology, natural history and philosophy. His philosophical thoughts contemplated on the metaphysics, politics and ethics. His work *Nicomachean Ethics* is considered to be the well-developed ethical exposition with his thorough and systematic treatment of ethics. He considered ethics and politics to be inseparable in its philosophy.

Aristotle provided the relationship between the knowledge of the form of the good and the production of that good. He believed that one need to know what human goodness is apart from knowing the form of the good from Plato’s philosophy. Plato only understood the parts of the soul, but Aristotle devised the function of a human

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15 Ibid. 50, 51
being as a whole. Aristotle advocated that one’s action should be guided by reason. His philosophy of ethics is a human construct and was built on the demands and ends of human nature. He developed the understanding of behaviour and reason in regard to how reason worked in the controlling of feelings and actions. Though Plato suggested that having justice in one’s soul to be the ultimate cause of happiness, Aristotle differed that virtue alone cannot constitute happiness but require sufficient material goods. The accumulation of sufficient material goods promotes happiness and lead to a virtuous life. To Aristotle, happiness is the end means of life and virtue revolves around the functions of man, whose actions and feelings are guided by reason.

“…his moral theory moves from the concept of well-being (the end, or happiness) to being a good person (the function, or virtue). He assumed that virtue is the means to happiness, yet he never logically brought the two primary lines (the end and the function of a human being) of his thought together. He maintained that one could be virtuous and not be happy, because it takes adequate external goods to insure happiness. This means that something else must help him define the good life. The good life involves the combination of virtue and sufficient external goods so that one had the “luxury” of being virtuous. Happiness is not totally dependent on virtue (function) but a significant part of it involves virtue, since goodness is defined in terms of function. Virtuous acts are not measured by their consequences, but by their intrinsic value.”

Intellectual virtue which is obtained by speculative reasoning controls the thought and the speculative, while moral virtue controls the character and is obtained by the exercise of practical reason. In order to be morally virtuous, one must undergo rigorous training and learn proper habits. Aristotle believed in the relationship between virtue and happiness, to which he asserts that even if one is in pain, he can still be happy if he responds to that pain in a virtuous manner. From this, he derived his concept of the “mean”, commonly known as “the golden mean.” To Aristotle, virtue is the mean between two extremes, presumably of behaviours or emotions. This mean is

16 Ibid. 52
usually understood as the mean between the extremes of excess and deficiency. Courage is the mean between rashness and cowardice, with the former a form of excess and the latter deficiency. Thus, Aristotle concept of the “mean” is an ethic of moderation which resulted in happiness. The “mean” does not necessarily mean the middle of the given nature but is considered to be relative to the person’s circumstances.

Aristotle ethics is the interactions of feelings and actions guided by reason. He does not equate pleasure with happiness, but sees it as a by-product of a given activity which completes the activity. It is not an inherent part of it and does not have any inherent value to happiness. He believed it to be a means by which one could be trained in the presence of others. Ethics should be practiced in the community, as a community, and not in isolation. With proper use of reason and correct training, man could live well and be a good community.

3.3.5 The Epicureans

Later school of thought believed that the well-being of a person depend on the inner state of mind rather that the circumstances. They attempted to change themselves and comfort their thoughts in the changing world around them. It was an ethic of withdrawal.

The Epicureans derives their name from Epicurus (341 – 270 B.C.). They are famous for their maxim “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” The second part of this maxim is the fundamental part of the philosophy. They defined pleasure as the absence of pain. The Epicureans assumed that a simple life outside the city with friends in small community was the way to live a life. It was a pessimistic ethics based on ascetic and self-denial. They withdraw themselves from the world and believed that in order to survive, one should not demand more out of life that what it could give.
Goodness and virtue centers on the end of pleasure which is simple a freedom from pain in body and mind. It is the avoidance of pain and trouble in the body and the mind and pleasure is inseparable from virtue. They believed in living within the limits of what pleasure can provide with reason playing an important role because unreasoned judgments would resulted in trouble.

3.3.6 The Stoics

Founded by Zeno (ca. 336 – 264 B.C.), the Stoics were very prominent among the Romans and included some notable figures of the empire. The Stoics system of ethics even proved to be more ascetic than the Epicureans as they discouraged the expression of desire. They believed that one’s desire should be brought under control and that it should be in order according to nature. Like the Epicureans, they do not expect anything from the world other than that the world gives them. The underlying principle of their philosophy is that only some things can be controlled while other are not; and one should simply accept this fact.

The Stoics believed in living according to nature in accordance to those things that are within his or her power. Thus, for them, the virtuous man is not one who is well-being, but rather the one whose desire and feelings are destroyed and suppressed. Reason, however, is used to determine what is according to nature and enables one to alter his state of mind accordingly. They believed that things that are not within our power are all morally neutral. Happiness for the Stoics is all about living according to nature, controlling the desire and the feelings that may disrupt his life. Contentment is therefore the highest virtue in Stoic philosophy.

Morality is a private matter for them, and ethics is sole personal. The connection between the individual and the society made by their preceding
philosophers is almost devoid in the philosophies of the Epicureans and the Stoics. The role of a virtuous man and a just society was minimal in their philosophy.

3.4 Church Fathers

3.4.1 St. Augustine

Augustine’s contribution to the philosophical world and Christian theology is of immense importance when understanding ethics. He was motivated to formulate an explicitly Christian ethic for the newly developed religion of Christianity. Augustine’s philosophy is based on his contempt for the world and his strong views of sin. This pessimistic approach was perhaps influenced by his personal experience of guilt and worthlessness prior to him becoming a Christian.

Unlike the classical Greek philosophers, Augustine perceived that the well-being of a person was under the care of the sovereign God, rather than a philosophical approach to attain such virtue. He emphasized on well doing conforming to God’s will, which according to him was embodied in the person of Jesus Christ. Augustine’s philosophy shared similarities with the Epicureans and the Stoics in the sense that it was an ethic of withdrawal, however, the development of it differ greatly from them. For Augustine, “right action and virtue were understood in terms of relationship to others and to God, not in retreat from the world.”

Plato and Aristotle assumed that virtue was acquired through education and correct training, the Stoics and the Epicureans believed that it was obtained by reason and contemplation, Augustine on the other hand believed that it was obtained by the grace of God. As a theologian and a religious leader, Augustine purports that virtue

\[\text{Ibid. 57}\]
“was acquired by means of God’s grace through the gospel, the sacraments, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit within the soul of the believer.”

Augustine accepted that creation is a good thing and that all being is good, simply because it was created by a good God, who is the author of all creations. “There can be no better author than God,” said Augustine, “no more effective skill than his word, no better cause than that a good product should be created by God, who is good.” Thus, for Augustine, evil does not exist as an independent entity. His philosophy asserted that nature has an embedded purpose within itself and that creation reflects actions of a good God. Evil, therefore, is simply the absence of good. In Augustinian thought, the evil will within an individual is not a positive reality but rather the absence or the diminishment of good, which is a perversion of nature. Goodness is upheld by the grace of God, and any attempt to develop the virtues apart from grace is but a futile attempt. Happiness is only meaningful and can only be found in the community and fellowship in the kingdom of God. Augustine believed that the ultimate end and the supreme good of man is eternal life, which for him is the enjoyment of God forever. In contrast, supreme evil is eternal death. Augustine concept of the ultimate virtue is not to be accomplished in this lifetime, but continue in the realm of the spiritual. The realization of the supreme good depends on right living which is empowered by the grace of God. In light of the clear theological connotations of his philosophy, for Augustine, righteousness or virtue is dependent on one’s relationship with God. Submission to God is the ultimate happiness, or in Augustine’s word, “blessedness.” Thus, anything apart from this would be unrighteous.

In his social ethics, Augustine suggested two cities with two distinct ideologies of what is good. The city of God is the residence of believers while the city of man is

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18 Ibid.
the habitation of those who are away from the grace of God. The role of the state is minimal in Augustinian philosophy. Its duty was to maintain order keeping men from hurting and murdering each other. Since the leaders and the citizens are both depraved by nature, the development of public virtue which was of immense importance in the classical Greek thought does not seemed to be encouraged by Augustine. His idea of a society was highly individualistic because he viewed society through the eyes of conflicting pursuits of each one’s self interest. In accordance to his interpretation of the fall of man, Augustine believed that sin has corrupted the cosmos and the world, including the social world is disordered and the society is full of selfish self-interest. In the midst of all these, God in his sovereignty saved some from the corruption of sin by his grace. God allowed the establishment of governments and laws to maintain minimal peace and harmony, because such preservation of peace is necessary even among robbers. Peace is necessary to execute any form of work because “even robbers, to ensure greater efficiency and security in their assaults on the peace of the rest of mankind, desire to preserve peace with their associates.” For Augustine, laws can only restraint evil among men and maintain harmony in a society. Mankind, even in his worst state of mind, has some ability to cooperate with other men because he still possessed the image of God somehow. In his understanding of social ethics, Augustine believed that ethics is not about social progress but about the balancing of power and the attempt of achieving a rough justice. One should do his best to maintain order in the society and rescue those from the city of man. Thus, to Augustinian philosophy, the city of God coexists with the city of man, and the church is not the agent of social change. Furthermore, in his belief of the sovereignty of God and the church, Augustine

20 Ibid. 866
advocated that the state should protect the church, and the church could legitimately use
the state to advance its interests.

3.4.2 St. Thomas Aquinas

Born and raised in Italy, Thomas Aquinas (1224 – 1274) studies under the
Benedictine monks and later joined the Dominicans. At the University of Paris, he
advanced in his philosophical and theological work, where he received his doctorate.
His work *Summa Theologica* is believed to be the omnibus of his philosophy.

Aquinas sees the need for a good law that is grounded in theology to govern the
people. This was central to his ethical writings. He was the doctor of the Catholic
Church and in order to portray the universality of the church, Aquinas surrounded
himself with the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, commenting on their works and
gave the message to the world that was relevant to the perspective of their period. He
commented on the philosophies of the Greeks in the light of Augustinian philosophy.

The synthesis of the older philosophical thoughts and the Augustinian thought is
very common in Aquinas philosophy. One of Aquinas fundamental concept of ethics
revolves around the notion of the public good under the law. Ethics, to Aquinas, was
more than the inner attitude, it was the well-being and well-doing in relation to the law
and the common good. Unlike Augustine, Aquinas believed in the strong relation of
ethics and politics like the Greek thinkers. Ethics provided the ground work for
political concepts and Christian ethics was the foundation of moral law and
jurisprudence, and Aquinas synthesized this from the Aristotelian philosophy and
Augustinian theology. The purpose of the laws was therefore to mould the good
people, as opposed to Augustine’s belief that the law was necessary only as a restraint
against evil people. Furthermore, Aquinas argued that God’s grace was one of the
means for attaining virtue, as opposed to Augustine who believed it to be the only
means. Like Aristotle, Aquinas emphasized on the development of virtue by training and education. For Aquinas, the good is closely linked with the natural law because the natural law is ordained by the Creator God. The good promotes the natural while the evil disrupts the natural; and it is this good that propels man toward his God-ordained end, which to him like other philosophers, is happiness. Thus, happiness is the knowledge of God and the love of good.

Aquinas taught four types of laws – the eternal law, the natural law, the human law, and the divine law. The eternal law is the mind of God which plans how things should be; all other laws are under this mind of God. The natural law is the most developed and most common form of law which is based on the natural tendencies of things. It is the general moral principles of life, such as justice, respect, etc. Man can deviate from this natural law and can be known by reason, and everyone is accountable to this law. Such laws are associated with God’s wisdom with moral implications for each person’s life. The third law, the human law is made by man and includes civil and criminal laws. To Aquinas, such laws are necessary for social order that do not directly correlate with the natural law, and for the enforcement of the natural law. The divine law is the canon law revealed in the Scripture and goes beyond the natural law. The divine law is sometimes not evident in nature, and for that the divine law is necessary. It includes the morality in relation to God and the justification of such moral precepts.

Aquinas believed that man is a social being, and asserted that government and the state would still have place in a society even without the fall of man. He is optimistic about the structure and purpose of a society as he sees them through the lens of harmony, unlike Augustine who saw it through the lens of conflicts. Humans are part of nature and the human society is seen as an organism closely related to each other in harmony. Man is ever the social being and this inclination to live in a community is a
manifestation of goodness in creation. Therefore, for Aquinas, the social life is a construct out of the goodness of man who is made in the image of God, rather than the corrupt nature of man which needs a society to restrain each other as Augustine taught. The institutions of the governance and the law encourage the development of good people, which was prevalent in the Greek understanding of ethics and politics. Values are objective in Aquinas’ understanding, and are derived from the law of God.

3.5 Reformation & Renaissance Period

3.5.1 Martin Luther & John Calvin

Protestant reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin had molded and provided the platform for later philosophers and thinkers to express their thoughts. With them, the face of modern Europe may not be as advanced as it is today. Much is owed to these two church reformers for the development of administration and expression of freedom in many countries. They mark the transition from the Middle Ages to a modern world where the hierarchical society is dismantled. Unlike Plato and Aristotle, little of the individual is part of their ethical understanding.

The community for Luther is a setting of the eternal drama of salvation. Luther gives great importance to the authority. Princes and magistrates rule over the secular affairs of the community, and obedience to these authorities is a must in Luther’s ethics. However, salvation of the individual has nothing to do with these secular affairs as it totally depends on God alone and no other authority; not even the church. In Luther’s ethics, the only true and right morals are that of God’s commandments. They need not be rationally explained but that the laws are of divine origin is in itself adequate to be obeyed.
Core to Luther’s belief was the corrupt nature of man. Obedience to the moral laws cannot satisfy the desire because of our corrupt nature. Since desire is part of man’s corrupt nature, man has no satisfaction in the obedience of the law; and God’s command and man’s desire are always in conflict with each other. Since man is enslaved by sin, God’s commandments could not be kept by mere human reason and will power. For this reason, in order to be righteous with God, man must act against his reason and the natural will. For Luther, this is possible only through grace. We are saved by the grace of God and not by works. All works are product of sinful desires and is therefore not worthy to save any.

Luther strongly believed in the authority of the government and to rebel against it was ethically wrong. He condemned the peasant insurrection and even advocated the crushing of the rebels under lawful authority. He however demands the freedom to preach the gospel, which to him was the freedom that no authority should dissolve. Good and wrong are principles directive from God’s laws. The laws of God are therefore standards by which one should judge himself; and the laws of God judges us that we are guilty and requires redemption. The importance to the law be it of God for the soul, or the princes for community, has their importance in the functioning of a society.

Luther and Calvin understood their role in their society as how the biblical characters would respond in the ancient times. Their understanding of their place in their community had brought about much freedom and development to the civilized world. This expression of freedom and balance over church and secular authority brought about changes for the betterment of the society. MacIntyre, thus explained,

“Luther took St. Paul’s attitude to the bureaucrats of the Roman empire as the model for his own attitude to the Elector of Saxony; Calvin took the attitude of the prophets to the kings of Israel and Judah as his model in dealing with the magistrates of Geneva. But although Calvin’s
theocracy makes clergy sovereign over princes, it sanctions the autonomy of secular activity at every level where morals and religious practice do not directly conflict with such activity. Provided that sex is restrained within the bounds of marriage and that churchgoing is enforced on Sundays, political and economic activity can proceed effectively unchecked by any sanctions whatsoever. Only the most obviously outrageous are ever condemned, and the history of Calvinism is the history of progressive realization of the autonomy of the economic.\(^\text{21}\)

Luther and Calvin hold firm to the authority of Scripture alone, grace alone and faith alone concept of spiritual affairs. Luther’s ethics is based on his understanding of God as a gracious and holy God. To him, there is the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world. He proposes the separation of church and state in authority and power. They should not interfere with each other. However, one is to execute his secular duties as a businessman, magistrate, as a family man and so forth. The church is to preach the gospel of salvation obtained through Christ, the justification by faith and the gift of salvation by grace.

To Luther, suffering of violence and injustice is a possibility because it is not a perfect world as God originally created. However, one can appeal to the law for justice, and the closest and possible justice may be executed; but that too would not be proper justice. Toleration, forgiveness and the like are far richer and better virtues than what human justice may offer. Luther keeps the secular life of a person and the religious or Christian life of a person separate. One works in the field, sits on a judge’s bench, conduct business as a secular person and not as a Christian. He emphasized on the nature of the citizens to be ethically and morally upright because of the good works that is produced from his salvation.

\(^{21}\) Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A history of moral philosophy from the Homeric Age to the twentieth century* (Routledge Classics, Oxon, 2002), 119 - 120
Understanding the effect the reformers had on the life of the community – the church, socio-economic, secular and political structure of their times, MacIntyre points out the three main concept of moral during the reformation period as follows,

1. “that of moral rules as being at once unconditional in their demands but lacking any rational justification;
2. that of moral agent as sovereign in his choices; and
3. that of the realm of secular power as having its own norms and justifications.”

John Calvin had his understanding of ethics based on his theology of grace as a free gift from God. Calvin was interested in the law and even drafted the constitution and law for Geneva. He believed that the natural law was the basis of morality and asserted that the Ten Commandments supplemented the natural law. There are three uses of the law according to Calvin. First, it functions as a mirror to reveal man’s inability to fulfill God’s demand. It displays God’s righteousness and man’s sinful nature, and condemns man of unrighteousness. Secondly, the law is of civic significance. Judicial institutions are essential in regulating and restraining evil doers. It creates fear of punishment to the offenders. Third, Calvin believes the law to be a guide towards holiness though teachings and exhortations.

Calvin believed that the state should not interfere in the matters of the church, but believed that church has the authority on matters of the state. Central to Calvin’s theology is the sovereignty of God, which he established even in his concept towards the role of secular governments. The church has obligation to pray for the political authorities and must deliver the right message to them. Defending the poor and urging the political authorities to help promote true religion are understood by Calvin as the responsibility of the church. He even believed that political authorities must be admonished by the church if they go wrong.

22 Ibid. 122
3.5.2 Machiavelli

Niccoló Machiavelli was a Florentine-born philosopher of the Italian renaissance. He was a diplomat, dramatist and best remembered for his political theory encapsulated in his work *The Prince*. His political theory had been a subject of students of both political and philosophical schools. He considered how a leader could achieve his ends only if he determines that the ends are worthwhile. For Machiavelli, the ends justify the means, which became the slogan of Machiavellian philosophy. Nevertheless, political ends are also good for him. He believes that there are “three primary ‘goods’: national security, national independence and a strong constitution.”

Despite being portrayed as a bad man by the Elizabethan dramatists, his personality may not necessarily be so. Machiavelli believed that the ends of social and political power are attained. They are attained when the ruler holds the power, maintain the political order and established a community that prospers. Contrary to this would result in the lost of the power. He assumed that all men are corrupt and therefore self reliance in of significant importance. Men are not to act in some abstract manner but so act as other men act. For Machiavelli, virtues such as goodness, generosity, clemency and the like has their place in the world; but they can only have their place in the well designed means to the ends of power, which to him is the ultimate control of order.

In Machiavellian philosophy, ethics are judged not on their immediate actions but rather on their consequences. He therefore believed that all actions have consequences, and these consequences should be and must be calculable. Human behaviours are governed by laws even though the law itself has no consciousness. For him, laws can be effective and simple because human nature, human motives and aspirations are unchanging and timeless; history had shown that the behaviour of man

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had not changed in centuries and will continue to do so in its behaviour, aspiration and motives. Society is therefore not a stage of performers but a raw material that could be harnessed. It can be reshaped for the individual’s own ends. Though the society is governed by the laws it is malleable. Social bonds do not necessarily constrain the individual, according to Machiavelli.

Machiavelli distinguished between the rulers or potential rulers and the ruled. Although he sees the distinction between politics and ethics, drawing distinction sharply between the two would not be wise. Like Plato, he sees that politics and ethics often merged on many occasions.

The political and ethical views of Machiavelli are best understood with the events of his time. As he was living in a time of political and religious flux, he understood the shifting and flexibility of power and the political orders. His political treaty of power consists of manipulation of others for power. Such manipulation, if need be, should even be done to the masses, that is the citizens themselves. He does not teach goodness as a virtue that is good in itself, but believed that it often served one’s political ends to appear to be virtuous. Though his theory on politics and ethics may be considered outrageous, Machiavelli himself is unconcerned about it. He finds such outrage to be weak and hypocritical. To him, the ends are the ultimate aim because if the ends are good, it does not matter what the process is in between. In order to achieve the desired ends, Machiavelli believed that one must possess more power than opponents.

However, the desire for the right political order and good governance is evident in his other work Discourses where he provided more details on what he believes makes a good community and a successful constitution. His political order is managed
and governed by princes, rulers of government and principalities which are in turn held in check by noble men and the citizens themselves.

Works of Renaissance philosophers and church reformers such as Luther and Calvin had set the stage for political, religious and social transformation. And as MacIntyre right said, “we should expect the rise of a kind of moral – cum – political theory in which the individual is the ultimate social unit, power the ultimate concern, God an increasingly irrelevant but still inexpungeable being, and a prepolitical, presocial timeless human nature the background of changing social forms.”

3.6 Modern Philosophers

3.6.1 Seventeenth Century Ethics

3.6.1.1 Spinoza

Jewish Dutch philosopher Benedict de Spinoza had been one of the most compelling and difficult philosophers amongst the rationalists. He takes rationalism to its logical extremes with the determination to set out the principles of an ethical system in axioms. In his work posthumously published, *Ethica ordine geometrica* he sets outs “the axioms which he takes to be self evident and the proceeds, step by step, to deduce ethical conclusions.” His conclusion is therefore founded on number of ontological, metaphysical and epistemic beliefs.

Spinoza believed the love of truth to be one of the highest human value to which he unifies philosophy and practice. For him, the state existed to promote human goods in a positive manner not merely as a prevention of disaster and disorder. He believed that religion is a matter of truth and laws and order comes only comes secondary to it. In the pursuit of moral judgments, Spinoza sees errors within it, “that

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24 MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 125
25 Stokes, *Philosophy 100 Essential Thinker*, 135
our standard of judgment is arbitrary and capricious. When we criticize a man as defective in some way, as being or doing what he ought not to be or do, we judge him, so Spinoza argues against some picture we have formed of a proper or ideal man. But this picture is inevitably an arbitrary construction, put together of our own limited and chance experiences.”

To Spinoza, thought becomes rational as it continued and approaches it as geometry. This is because geometry is understood and conceived to the embodiment of the only possible approach to rigor and clarity. Though this system, Spinoza believed we could come to an understanding. MacIntyre explained,

“If we try to envisage anything apart from this system, we are trying to envisage something whose occurrence could not be made intelligible, since to be intelligible is to be exhibited as part of the system. The name of this single system is “Deus, sive Natura” (God or Nature).”

Thus, to Spinoza, the attributes of God belongs to the single substance which is at once nature and God. He believed in a single order of nature and miraculous intervention is ruled out. For this reason, natural scientist need not consider supernatural disturbances. The state of Spinoza’s philosophical view had questioned his intent of defining God. Should God be conceived as the Judeo-Christian God as a personal God or is Spinoza a mere atheist retaining the name “God” to mean something else. Or is Spinoza pantheist? Spinoza explained his stand on God and Nature as follows:

“I take a totally different view of God and Nature from that which the later Christians usually entertain, for I hold that God is the immanent, and not the extraneous, cause of all things. I say, All is in God; all lives and moves in God. And this I maintain with the Apostle Paul, and perhaps with every one of the philosophers of

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26 MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, 135
27 Ibid. 136
antiquity, although in a way other than theirs. I might even venture to say that my view is the same as that entertained by the Hebrews of old, if so much may be inferred from certain traditions, greatly altered or falsified though they be. It is however a complete mistake on the part of those who say that my purpose...is to show that God and Nature, under which last term they understand a certain mass of corporeal matter, are one and the same. I have no such intention.”

Spinoza did not dismiss the theological usage but treated it as an ordinary language, as a set of expressions which needs reinterpretation towards the rational. Spinoza’s concept could be interpreted as religion not simply being false but expressing truths in a misleading manner. “Religion needs not so much to be refuted as to be decoded.” The Jewish and Christian belief in a God as one apart from the universe that gives commands which man ought to obey is valued by Spinoza to a certain degree as requirements for uncritical people. However, understanding God as identical with Nature in Spinoza’s understanding is necessary as it reveals the divine percepts not as external laws but of our own nature. Amongst human nature is our self-maintaining and self-preserving system which is vitally affected our thought processes. He claimed that all men pursue their own interests, and that all events have causes. He claimed that his assertions are true because of his deductive method, and that they are axioms which no one could deny.

Others had contended that Spinoza’s ethics should be understood without his geometric mode as far as possible because his contentions may have been a mixture of factual claim and conceptual analysis. Man driven by passion is also the understanding of man to Spinoza. However, the man is a man in his ordinary, unenlightened state. He

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28 Epistle 21, as quoted in Will Durant, The Story of Philosophy (Pocket Books, New York, 2006), 221
29 MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, 136
sees emotions and desires as simply not give but also that it is transformable, of which the largest transformation is the transformation from being patients to being agents, the transformation from whose lives are determined by factors which they are unaware of to the being who is molded by himself. The end of political and moral life is thus the development of the human power.

Obedience to the sovereign is essential and justified by Spinoza as civil order enables men to pursue knowledge and self-liberation. Spinoza’s enlightened man is cooperative with other in pursuit of knowledge. The cooperation is not based on fear but on the common interest. His philosophy sets the grounds for modern society based on the principles of reason and freedom.

Spinoza’s philosophy are mystical, rational and yet theistic. Though his work does not receive much regard amongst the rationalist philosophers his works undoubtedly inspired later philosophers to a great extend. Excommunicated by the Jewish communities for his views and deemed as atheist for his views Spinoza’s view on nature and God continues to influence the thinking of many even though he is often not acknowledged.

3.6.1.2 Thomas Hobbes

The philosophy of Thomas Hobbes marks the break in the history of ethics that it departs from the traditional understanding of ethics. The nature, law and reason of ethics were freed from influence of the transcendental or divine source, namely God. To Hobbes, laws were functional for a purpose and do not necessarily have a divine connection for its source and its imparting. He is said to marked “the beginning of secular optimism in ethics, which believed that one can derive a plan for well-being from an analysis of human nature.”30 His philosophy saw the system of personal ethics

30 Rae, *Moral Choices*, 63
which he called egoism, and viewed civil society in the eye of a contract. He showed interest in geometry and mechanistic psychology, and they played a central role in his formation of his ethics. Hobbes is best known for his work *Leviathan*, in which he presented a great deal of his ethical and political theories. His philosophy breaks from the traditional medieval worldview with uncertain sociological context within and outside the community.

Hobbes based his understanding of ethics on the nature and constitution of the human being; and this anthropological concept is based on empirical observations. With the development in science in his days, Hobbes also take a scientific approach in his understanding of the ethical nature of man in which he sees man as a small isolated, individual machine in a greater world. His anthropological analysis primarily consists of the man’s internal and external motion. The internal motion produces endeavour, aversion and appetite, or desire. For Hobbes, the object of the appetite is the good, and the object of aversion being evil. Pleasure, to him, is the feeling associated with good but does not constitute the good itself.

Hobbes egoistic definition of the good is in terms of the individual’s self interest, but does not suggest that the good is relative. The good is relational that it is defined in relation to the desire, but is still not relative. He assumed that aversions and appetites are constant, and that desire such as peace is in agreement with the principle law of nature. In Hobbes’ philosophy, since all mankind share desire such as the fear of death and the bliss of prosperity, universal good must therefore exist. Based on this observation of the human nature, Hobbes then built his theory of ethics that could as well be universal in its implications. Reason, for Hobbes, gives the ability to see the best ways to satisfy one’s desire; thus it does not discern the ends as it is already clear from the observation of the human nature.
Happiness is not the response of a satisfied mind from all the things the person may achieved. Hobbes observed that human beings are always in the pursuit of happiness but can never attain it fully. Happiness, therefore, is not the attainment but the pursuit of it. “Felicity [happiness] is a continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter.” He believed that one can never get enough of the things he had, and contentment seems impossible, and the lust for power is the inclination of every man’s heart. There is no greatest good because man has an endless and restless desire for power which only cease at death. This observation of human nature shaped Hobbes’ ethics on the society.

Since the lust for power and the satisfaction of one’s desire could be interacted only with other, we exist in a state of war which he called as the state of nature. From this concept came the notion of a right of nature which is the right of self-preservation—the fundamental right of every human being. Since the desire to live is the primary desire of all men, liberty is related to the right of nature because liberty is freedom from obstruction that prevents people from using their power in the maintenance of their lives. For Hobbes, the laws of nature are discovered by reason and not by observation because reason helps in the determination of the best way to fulfill one’s desire. Furthermore, Hobbes asserted that one should desire peace so that all other desires may be met accordingly.

Hobbes’ first law of nature seeks peace as reason would dictate; however, when one cannot obtain peace one could resort to the use of all advantages of war, which as mentioned is the right of self-preservation. His second law asserts that people must “lay down their rights to all things as others are willing to do so, and be content with as

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31 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, as quoted in Rae, *Moral Choices*, 64
much liberty as they would allow against themselves.”32 He used the biblical concept of
the Golden Rule33 to support this claim. The third law of nature is the keeping of
promises or covenants, by which he would define justice and injustice. The law refers
to the keeping and the breaking of covenants or contracts, and justice is simply the
acting in conjunction with the covenant or promise that had been made. Reason,
however, is not sufficient in the keeping of the covenant primarily because the breaking
of a covenant would be in one’s self-interest. Covenant would thus be enforced by the
sovereign and the people must voluntarily enter into that covenant in order to achieve
the self-preservation that is necessary for their satisfaction and survival.

All other laws are for the furthering of one’s self-preservation and these laws
established justice, gratitude, equity, mercy, etc. as the principle virtues of life. To
Hobbes, these laws are immutable and eternal, and were necessary to avoid the
inevitable decay of the human society. Laws are grounded in human desires and
inclinations and are therefore observable. Hobbes’ philosophy on ethics and politics
presented a realistic social ethical approach and is in the tradition of Augustinian social
construct. Society is a voluntary association where free and equal individuals meet
together to maximize self-interests providing minimal order to safeguard one’s pursuit
of self-interest. Hobbes admitted that a totalitarian ruler was needed to enforce the laws
of nature because man in his self-interest finds it difficult to keep their covenants.

32 Rae, Moral Choices, 65
33 Matthew 7:12, “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them...” (ESV)
is generally accepted as the Golden Rule or the Law of Reciprocity in Christian Ethics,
popularized by Anglican theologians and preachers during the 17th century. Similar sayings and
proverbs can also found in different cultures, traditions and religions all around the world.
3.6.2 Eighteenth Century Ethics

3.6.2.1 David Hume

David Hume believed that the moral sense of a person is the determination of right and wrong, rather than the conscience just being the instrument to measure what is right and wrong. Moral distinctions are independent of reason and reason for Hume is the slave of passion.

As an empiricist, Hume asserted that moral facts and moral sense do not exist as a perceivable object, and reason is inert when it comes to determining the morality of an action. Like sound, colour, heat and cold, virtues and vice are not qualities in object but perceptions in the mind of the person. And these moral perceptions are necessary for the regulation of moral behaviour.

“Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these be favourable to virtue and unfavourable to vice, no more can be requisite to the regulation of our conduct and behaviour.”

For Hume, morals have to do with sense and emotions, and not reason. Reason may be used only to determine the means of accomplishing the ends; reason therefore serves passion and is powerless to incite action to actually do the good. Hume’s moral sense identifies virtue by its usefulness or immediate agreeableness, which he called personal merit. In a way, morality is reduced to taste of individuals; but for Hume’s philosophy, virtue is measured only from the point of its usefulness and agreeableness. He borrowed the idea of utility in order to maintain social order which uses reason for the determination of morality. Hume’s philosophy of morality based on feelings and sentiments were later adopted by John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham in some form or the other.

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The reduction of morality to the opinion, emotions, feelings, or even taste was the central theme of Hume’s philosophy. The subjectivity of morality often has its roots from Hume, and is of a popular philosophy of life amongst many in the contemporary world.

### 3.6.2.1 Immanuel Kant

Kant is regarded as one of the greatest philosophical minds and contributor to ethics from the Enlightenment period. He received his education at the University of Königsberg, where he later spent his teaching career for many years. His writings included subjects such as metaphysics, logic, epistemology, philosophy of religion and ethics. He never married and spent most of his time in the academic.

Kant believed that ethical principles should be based on reason and not on religious beliefs. Religion and ethics does not seem compatible in Kant’s thought as it is not academically acceptable. Kant’s ethics is a principle-based ethics founded on the use of reason alone, and not on any religious system. His thought on ethics represents the epitome of the Enlightenment ethical philosophies. Probably in response to his contemporary Hume, Kant asserted that moral system should be independent of empirical observations.

For a valid moral system, reason should have the power to motivate action. The constraint of people without being deterministic is a necessity, but it must allow them to also not perform the duty. Reason governs the passion and not the other way as Hume might have suggested. Kant further insisted that moral obligations should not vary from the circumstances, which he called the categorical imperative. It was on this principle of fairness that his ethical system is built on. People cannot and should not change their moral duties merely on their changing desire, if that moral duty is a categorical imperative. Under his hypothetical imperative, one has the freedom to
choose as he desires on actions or circumstances such as whether he wants to be rich or poor, healthy or sick.

The notion of the good will is the concept which underlines the Kantian system of the categorical imperative. As oppose to the classical Greek thought of virtue leading to well-being, Kant asserted happiness would simply follow if one is morally worthy of possessing it. By his proposition on the nature of morality, good will recognized that one’s duty is good despite the consequences it may produce because one cannot control all the consequences that may fall upon him. In citing an example, Kant explained that a bad will can produce good results and a good will can also produce a bad result. One should act for the sake of duty, and being moral is more than acting in accordance to one’s inclinations.

Kant’s philosophical treatise on the categorical imperative is based on what he called maxim, which is the act or inclination that determines the outcome. The good will in Kant’s understating is the unconditional good, acts from duty and its value is not in the consequences but on the duty itself.

“The good maxim must be able to motivate every rational being in the specified circumstances. Thus, it must have something that is the “same for all.” This is the form of the law, or its ability to be universalized. In other words, all beings can act on the maxim without making it impossible for any to act on it. Thus, what Kant called the categorical imperative is not based on circumstances…Duty and inclination are not necessarily opposed, but moral act is one done out of duty, not simply because one wants to do it. Moral maxims, or plans of action, must be categorical, that is, they must be binding and independent of one’s desires.”

Kant’s philosophy of universal moral consciousness is intuitive, a priori and not empirical. The moral law is categorical or unconditional, free from empirical factors and is not circumstantial. It is also imperative and is not an assertion of facts. Categorical imperative, for Kant, never seeks another end and demands unconditional

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35 Rae, Moral Choices, 69
obedience and is applicable to all people. Kantian ethics on the categorical imperative are formulated as follows:\textsuperscript{36}

1. Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.
2. Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.
3. Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.
4. Do no action according to any maxim which would be inconsistent with its being a universal and thus..., act only so that the will through its maxim could regard itself as the same time as universally law-giving.

“...no will is morally good because it does what it wants to do. A motive other than the passion must exist. It is the feeling of respect for law. Free from determination, the rational will acts on the basis of respect for law. But since not all are purely rational beings, human beings ought to act under the constraint of the categorical imperative. The moral purpose of reason is to illuminate us to our “ought,” independent of sensation. The highest good for Kant is both happiness and being worthy of it. This is achieved by adherence to duty.”\textsuperscript{37}

3.6.3 Nineteenth Century Ethics

3.6.3.1 Hegel & Marx

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the German idealist philosopher asserted that the “ultimate truth is slowly uncovered through the unfolding evolution of the history of ideas,”\textsuperscript{38} which he claims is the absolute truth. He saw the end of the history of philosophy with himself because he assumes his concept takes to another level in history itself. He believed that there is not a single permanent moral question to answer,

\textsuperscript{36} Rae, Moral Choices, 69
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid. 70
\textsuperscript{38} Stokes, Philosophy 100 Essential Thinker, 183
and attempt to show that the history of philosophy is itself the core of philosophy. Hegel purported that philosophy should also be part of the discipline of history as it has history of its own. He treated concepts as though they were timeless entities independent of the norms and influence of the changing world.

Hegel sees proper concept deriving from the history and morality of the past. However, the accounts he presented of morals and history in his *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right* are by no means identical.⁴⁹ To him, individuals are absorbed in a closed society and he act accordingly to the customary role he may have. Hegel envisioned developed society in terms of a “succession of forms of life, each of which, by a natural transition, is transformed into its successor.”⁴⁰

According to Hegel, fundamental to the process of the mind is the commitment to falsehood. New stage of thought should develop when contradictions are found in an idea. He called this process “dialectic.” It begins with a thesis which is assumed to be true. Upon reflection and analysis, it is revealed that there are contradictory points in the thesis, which Hegel termed as “antithesis.” The third position that would developed thus to Hegel would be “synthesis” from the thesis and antithesis. This progression of thought according to Hegel is the progression towards the absolute truth, or towards the absolute universal mind or spirit. However, truth for Hegel is propositional For Hegel, “truth does not belong to assertions that say the world, or reality, is of such and such a nature. Rather, attainment of truth in Hegelian philosophy is the attainment of completeness, or the transcendence of all limitations. Ideas, or to use Hegel’s terminology, concepts, are that which are capable of being false rather than assertions

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⁴⁹ MacIntyre, A Short History of Ethics, 193
⁴⁰ Ibid. 194
or propositions. Falsehood is merely limitation, the incomplete understanding of the absolute."\(^41\) Certain theories are false because they do not tell the whole story as yet.

Hegel concept of freedom is that once it is presented it cannot be denied. No one can deny the claims of freedom because everyone seeks it for himself. One seeks such concept for his own good and it is thus good. It is good because the merits of freedom are good for everyone and not just the individual. The connection between freedom and other virtues are also greatly emphasized by Hegel.

Later development of Hegel’s concept may even be considered egoistic by many. Explaining the Hegelian concept of reason and freedom, MacIntyre said,

“They Hegelian notions of reason and freedom are essentially critical; their use is to point to the inadequacy of any given social and conceptual order. But Hegel in the culmination of his systems speaks as if they represent ideals that can in fact be achieved, as if they are specifications of an ideal, and finally true and rational, philosophy and of an ideal, and finally satisfactory, social order. With them the Absolute will have come upon the scene. The final reconciliation of God and man symbolized in the Christian doctrine of the Last Things will have been achieved. And this Hegel after the *Phenomenology* seems to believe. In the *Logic* he can write that the thoughts he is uttering are the thoughts of God. Indeed, his mature philosophy entails that he and King Frederick William are parts of the contemporary incarnation of the Absolute.”\(^42\)

Marx first starting as an adherent to Hegel’s concepts found himself contrast to it. Marx envisioned freedom as the overcoming of the constraints and limitations of the social order. This to Marx is achieved by ushering in another better social order.

Karl Marx famous for his work *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto* argues about history social development and the significance of religion and its consciousness. He structured a materialistic basis of history in the interaction between nature and man. Marx believed that society should not be formed or conceived as mere

\(^{41}\) Stokes, *Philosophy 100 Essential Thinker*, 184

\(^{42}\) MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 202
abstraction because society is an organic nature and dialectic relationships are essential in a society.

For Hegel, the eschatological dimensions of society are important in his concept, whereas for Marx, it is about the present. When the conceptual framework and its aims are important for Hegel, the praxis is of the greatest importance in Marx.

Marx sees exploitation and feudalism to be the basis of capitalism and the evil thereof. Capitalism manipulates the majority and demanded a classless society wherein a minority would no longer control the masses. He based his principle of the fact that the labourers are being the creator of the life of the society. He rejected selfish individualism and demand a revolution for a new social order.

“Marx sees change as an ongoing process. He did not see politics, economics and morality in isolation but in constant interaction. He found liberty as a right of everyone not founded upon the separation of individual from individual. Marx challenged the evils of bourgeois society. He foresaw a society where the individual is dissolved in the collective freedom. The collective aspect is emphasized by Marx. Marxism is connected with the dignity, freedom and the emancipation of people. It stood against the oppressive structures.”

On the purpose of morals, Marx asserts that the application of moral judgments in matters of conflict between social classes to be pointless and even positively misleading. Marx ethics focuses on the praxis of Hegel’s concept, but with its own interpretations and view of the social order.

3.6.3.2 Kierkegaard & Nietzsche

Søren Kierkegaard was a Protestant philosopher from Copenhagen who rejected Hegel’s concepts. Fundamental to Kierkegaard’s doctrine was that there can be no genuine objective tests in morality, but “that doctrines which assert that there are functions as devices to disguise the fact that our moral standards are, and can only be,

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43 M. Stephen, *Introducing Christian Ethics* (ISPCK, New Delhi, 2001), 16
chosen. He asserted that the choice of the individual must be sovereign as rational arguments would prove.

Kierkegaard contrasted two ways of life. The first being “the ethical” and the second he called as “the aesthetic.” The aesthetic to him is one that is permanent and can never come to satisfaction. On the other hand, the ethical is in the realm of satisfaction when the obligation is fulfilled.

“The aesthetic life is that the man whose only goal is own satisfaction. What he must avoid are pain and boredom. Romantic love, which exists only to satisfy the passion of the moment and is ever flying to new satisfactions, is his characteristic sexual relationship. Marriage, with its lifelong and inescapable duties, is characteristic of the ethical, which is the sphere of obligations, of rules which admit of no exception.”

Kierkegaard found Hegel at fault as he tried presenting the religious in rational terms. For Kierkegaard, the religious is the necessary offensive to human reason because he sees Christianity as the one that brought the truth to human reason which initially does not possess it. For him, prior to the Christian revelation the mind is alien to the truth. Faith for him depends not on arguments but on choice. For his views on faith and the choice of the individual, Kierkegaard stands “at the extreme points in the development of Christianity and in the development of individualism.”

Nietzsche’s philosophy and ethic was based on the ‘will to power’. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche in the past had wrongly gained the reputation of supporting Nazism due to his critical thoughts against Judaism; which was partly true because he was critical to the Christian dogma and traditions as much as he was with any religion and order of the German Empire. He was hostile to the faith of the Jews and Christians alike. He greatly disliked the imperialistic powers of the German Empire and hated

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44 MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 208
45 Ibid. 209
46 Ibid. 211
Pan-Germanism. He also hated the socialism which he saw as an incarnation of Christian policies, which he strongly despised. He assumed faith to be a mere pretext and tool for which man’s selfish agendas. “Faith” he said, “was at all times, for example in Luther only a cloak, a pretext, a screen behind which the instincts played their game – a shrewed blindness about the dominance of certain instincts.”

He saw that the fundamental driving force of the individual was expressed in the need to dominate. According to his writings, Superman is the ultimate goal, who is a morally unambiguous and praiseworthy character. His ethical view of will to power is said to have evolved from the Charles Darwin’s biological law of natural selection and the survival of the fittest. He highly regarded the ethics of power and self-assertion. Domination is the primary end of things.

Nietzsche perceived that evil weakens power and good strengthened the will to power. Life for him has no moral values. He asserted “God is dead” and goes on to expound that it is us who have murdered him. Though he despised religion and Christianity in particular, he sees that contemporary attempt to replace these religions to be nothing more than mere self-deception.

3.6.4 Twentieth Century Ethics

Twentieth century philosophers often stand along with scholars of other fields to discuss scientific and philosophical topics. Ethics had often been the subject of debate in the twentieth century discourse on philosophy. This had been brought about by the scientific and technological advancements and discoveries.

The debate on the meta-ethics on the nature of ethics had been a subject of investigation in the twentieth century. Moral realists find ethics and moral to be a

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47 The Antichrist, as quoted in MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 216
reality that is independent of the mind, while evolutionary ethicists believed that morals and ethics evolved with the practices and behaviour of the people. In contrast, other such as Mackie believe morals and its entire obligation to be a mistake altogether.

The events and the surroundings of World War, the Holocaust and many horrendous events in history had been a subject and influence on the renewed thought of ethics in the later twentieth century. Human rights and animals are also the matter of debate and advocacy. Bioethics, business ethics, environmental ethics, work ethics and the like had been developed and their importance had been stressed and advocated time and again in the past few years.

The ethics developed by the past continues to have their influence on the thinking of twentieth century ethics and those that follows. Even twenty-first century ethics continues to pick up these issues and tackle them head on with all available resources. Though most discourse on ethics revolves around the scientific community and the discoveries and inventions, the evolution of ethics and its history cannot be disregarded in spite of the new developments. The traditional moral and ethical voices of the past still ring out and continue to show up in modern day application and interpretations of ethics.