Concepts Of Social And Moral Values

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Introduction

In the present study an attempt has been made to explain concepts of social and moral values. z values are said to be the basis of human beings for leading a better life. It is believed that all holy books of all religions contain the values of good life. In today's human society we almost see only the demoralizing values. What could be the genuine cause of the degradation of these values? is an important question to be asked.

Value is generally known to be a moral standard of human behaviour. It is related to a standard in order to appreciate some human actions. It is a kind of quality of humans which is applied to some human activities. Value is transmitted to a circumstantial factor which depends upon the judgement of the fact.

The Latin word 'valeo' originally meant strength and also health, and then by natural transition, it came to mean being effective and adequate. In French the term 'valeur' means excellence. Value is a mixture of three concepts such as Idea, Quality and Supervention. Is value subjective or objective? The subjectivist theory holds that values are entirely relative to human circumstances and hence are subjectively real. A fact may remain independently of mind but the value of a fact depends on its relation to mind. The subjectivist Lotze says, "What we mean by value in the world lies wholly in the feeling of satisfaction or pleasure being a state of mind, value is entirely subjective." The value of a particular object depends on the necessity of it at a particular time and situation. Thus, the value of the particular object depends on the quality to satisfy the needs of the particular person.

Value is something that is worth, it is the importance or usefulness of something, a standard of behaviour and it is considered to be important or beneficial. Conventionally speaking, the term 'value', itself came to ethics by way of economics. In economics it is used for (i) Value in use that is the capacity of an object to satisfy a human need or desire, and (ii) Value in exchange or the amount of one commodity that came to be obtained in exchange for another. Besides, values may be broadly categorized into two – (i) Intrinsic value and (ii) Extrinsic value. Intrinsic values are those values which are associated with certain objects appearing to have such value that they would retain it even if they were to exist completely alone, whereas extrinsic values are those values where certain objects have value as parts of other objects of value, or as means to ends of value. Values may be regarded as positive and negative. Anything that has positive value is considered to be good, whereas anything that has negative value is said to be evil.

According to philology, the word ethics is derived from the Latin 'Ethos', which means character. In this way, ethics is the science of character, habits of activity or behaviour of human beings. Ethics is also called Moral Philosophy. The word 'moral' is a derivative for the Latin word 'mores' meaning conventions or practice. In this way ethics literally means the science of convention or practice. Ethics is the science of human conduct. Habits and behaviour are related to the permanent peculiarities of human character. Conduct is the mirror of character. Thus ethics

is the science of character or habit. It evaluates human habits, character and voluntary determinations and discusses their propriety or otherwise.

One of the most general philosophical issues in the study of value (axiology) is whether values arise from objective or subjective features of experience. Non-cognitivists defend a strict distinction between fact and value and many contemporary thinkers challenge the presumption that human knowledge can ever be genuinely free of value judgments.[1] To acknowledge same feature of things as a value is to take it into account in decision making or in other words to be inclined to advance it as a consideration in influencing choice and guiding oneself and others. Those who see values as 'subjective' think of this in terms of a personal stance, occupied as a kind of choice and immune to rational argument (although often and curiously, deserving some kind of reverence and respect). Those who think of values as 'objective' suppose that for same reason – requirements of rationality human nature, God or other authority – choice can be guided and correct from same independent stand point.[2]

Value is a theory about "what things in the world are good, desirable, and important."[3] Philosophers have discerned these main forms of value - intrinsic, instrumental, inherent and relational value. Intrinsic value may be taken as basic and many of the others defined in terms of it. Among the many attempts to explicate the concept of intrinsic value, some deal primarily with the source of value, while others employ the concept of the "fittingness" or "appropriateness" to it of certain kinds of emotions and desires. The first is favoured by G.E. Moore and the second by Brentano. Proponents of the first view hold that the intrinsic value of X is the value that X has solely in virtue of its intrinsic nature. Thus, the state of affairs of Smith's experiencing pleasure has intrinsic value provided it has value solely in virtue of its intrinsic nature. Followers of the second approach explicate intrinsic value in terms of the sorts of emotions and desires appropriate to a thing "in and for itself" (or "for its own sake"). Thus, one might say X has intrinsic value (or is intrinsically good) if and only if X is worthy of desire in and for itself, or, alternatively, it is fitting or appropriate for any one to favour X in and for itself. Thus, the state of affairs of Smith's experiencing pleasure is intrinsically valuable provided that state of affairs is worthy of desire for its own sake, or it is fitting for any one to favour that state of affairs in and for itself.[4]

It is to be mentioned here that social and moral values are essential elements of the collective lives of any community. Moral values are one basis on which we make decisions–right or wrong and good or evil. Every community develops and possesses some social and moral values of its own. There cannot be any value or standard of a community without a social and cultural group. A social group is a collection of people who share a common identity and regularly interact with one another on the basis of some shared expectations concerning behaviour. People who belong to the same social and cultural group identify with each other, expect each other to conform to certain ways of thinking and acting and recognize the ethnic, cultural, social and moral boundaries that separate them from other groups of people. "In our need to congregate and belong, we have created a rich and varied group life that gives us our norms, practices, and values – our whole way of life.**"[5]** Thus, society may be regarded as the basis of the social and moral life of a human group.

Moreover, social values are certain qualities and beliefs that are shared within a specific culture or group of people. These traits can be religious, economic, political, educational, historical etc. Indeed, social and moral values are essential elements of the collective life of any community. Social values are that which an individual considers to be of value in their social existence. These are the standards by

which one operates or understands as an everyday function.

There are individual morality and social morality. Individual morality provides the basis of decisions of and judgments by the individual: honesty, loyalty, good faith, being responsible. Social morality means fairness, which is one basis of law, which helps to govern society and to control individual behavior. Social morality considers whether an action threatens society's well-being.

It follows from the above that value of a particular object may differ from person to person and from situation to situation. To elaborate this point it may be mentioned that one thing may be valuable to a person at a particular time, but the same thing may not be so to another person at the same time. On the other hand, the same thing may not be valuable to the same person at other point of time. Here a glass of water at the time of a person feeling thirsty may be taken as instance. When a person feels thirsty, the glass of water is needed by the person. Because that glass of water contains much value for the person at that point of time. But it is not that necessary to the same person at other time and it is not needed to other person at the same time. Because the other person is not feeling thirsty at that point of time.

Moreover, the supervenian quality of a particular thing can be stated with the help of an instance of a knife. A valuable knife must be sharp. Sharpless knife can never be valuable in that sense. Therefore, it can be said that a thing is subjective as well as objective in terms of its quality. Besides, the value of the knife depends on the sharpness. It is a fact. So it shows that value depends on fact. The distinction between fact and value has a great bearing upon our explanation of life and the universe. Psychologically, value means that it is a quality of anything that satisfies a human need or evokes a feeling of pleasure and uses it as a synonym for empirical good. Though there is an important element of truth in the contention of the subjectivists. But the subjectivist theory is not entirely correct.

G.E. Moore, in his famous book, 'Principia Ethica', said that values are objective in the sense that they are 'objects' like tree and mountains independent of human perception. Value or values are, according to Moore, objects in the sense that they inhere in things and facts as properties, independent of human appreciation. Such valuational properties of things and situations are, of course, not natural or empirical, but they are non-natural properties.

Here one question may be raised. Are values subjective or objective? There are some philosophers who opine that values are both subjective and objective. We cannot deny the fact that values are dependent of human taste. Individual taste can be improved through the medium of education. It is true that value depends on the taste of individuals but on the other hand, quality of the object compels us to give value. Good pieces of literatures or paintings or sculptures have always been valued differently from country to country, space to space. According to John Keats, "A thing of beauty is joy forever". For all times and spaces, cuckoos have enjoyed a great value. Value of objects may be of two kinds, viz. intrinsic and extrinsic. For example, money has extrinsic value whereas knowledge has intrinsic value.

It is a known fact that man, member of a society, is a rational animal. This simple truth provides a sort of foundation for ethics, and much of the history of moral philosophy involves attempts to do justice to both aspects of the human: rationality on the one hand, animal nature on the other.[6] So, humans are animals first and rational beings second. The area of philosophy traditionally known as 'ethics' or 'moral philosophy' is the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the nature of human values, of how we ought to live, and of what constitutes right conduct[7] in the society.

There are many issues that are typically studied according to the separation of ethics into three sub-branches of ethics – metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics. Metaethics is the study of where ethical notions come from and what they mean; in particular, whether there is an ethical system independent of our own opinions that could be applied to any situation at any time or place. Normative ethics is the search for a principle (principles) that guide or regulate human conduct – that tell us what is right or wrong. A norm is just another way of saying "standard", so normative ethics is the attempt to find a single test or criterion for what constitutes moral behaviour – and what does not. Applied ethics is the study of specific problems or issues with the use or application of moral ideas investigated in normative ethics and based on the lessons of metaethics. Applied ethics may sometimes coincide with political or social questions but always involves a moral dimension.[8]

Generally, a group of people who share a common culture, occupy a particular territorial area, and feel themselves to constitute a unified and distinct entity - but there are many different sociological conceptions. Sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim, treat society as a reality in its own right. Anthony Giddens, arguing against the identification of society with the nation-state, prefers to talk about social systems and institutions which may or may not be limited by national boundaries.

It may be stated that social philosophy is the philosophical study of questions about social behaviour (typically, of humans). Social philosophy, broadly the philosophy of society, includes the philosophy of social science, political philosophy, most what we now think of as ethics, and philosophy of law. But we may distinguish two narrower senses. In one, it is the conceptual theory of society, including the theory of the study of society – the common part of all the philosophical studies mentioned. In the other, it is a normative study, the part of moral philosophy that concerns social action

and individual involvement with society in general.[9]

It is to be pointed out here that the field of ethics (or moral philosophy) involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behaviour. As it has been already mentioned earlier that philosophers today usually divide ethical theories into three general subject areas: metaethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. Metaethics investigates where our ethical principles come from, and what they mean. Are they merely social inventions? Do they involve more than expressions of our individual emotions? Metaethical answers to these questions focus on the issues of universal truths, the will of God, the role of reason in ethical judgments, and the meaning of ethical terms themselves. Normative ethics takes on a more practical task, which is to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct. This may involve articulating the good habits that we should acquire, the duties that we should follow, or the consequences of our behaviour on others. Finally, applied ethics involves examining specific controversial issues, such as abortion, infanticide, animal rights, environmental concerns, homosexuality, capital punishment, or nuclear war.[10]

It may be appropriate to state here that many conceptions of ethics in the ancient world were based on or influenced by the Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle. The former thought that people were inclined to be good and desired happiness; the problem was to know what would bring about that good in the first place. If they acted wrongly, it was due to not understanding how they should go about achieving happiness in the best way – not because they wanted to act wrongly or badly. In that case, ethical difficulties were epistemological ones; wrong came from error, not intent.[11]

Plato suggested four cardinal virtues: wisdom, courage, justice and temperance; Aristotle agreed but added others, like generosity, truthfulness, friendliness and prudence.

However, Aristotle went further than his former tutor and said in his Nicomachean Ethics that goodness is in the actor, not in the action; that is, an act is virtuous because of the manner in which a person has chosen it – having done so through sound knowledge and by holding oneself in a kind of equilibrium, making the decision for specific reasons and not at a whim – and thus not because the act is good in itself. This is an important distinction to grasp: the idea was that something we do is virtuous because we choose it when calm and collected, aiming for the best, as opposed to anything specific about the deed. That would mean that one answer to the question "how shall we live?" could be "by being good", instead of "by doing good."[12]

Another point of note is that neither Plato nor Aristotle specified what we would now call a normative ethic; it is one thing to say "acting in such and such manner, you will choose the good", but quite another to be able to say exactly what that good consists in. Nevertheless, this was a common trait in the ancient world: in the Homeric epics and the stories and plays thereafter, the virtues were displayed practically.[13]

According to Mackenzie, ethics can be defined as "the study of what is right or good in conduct". In this definition ethics has been accepted as the study of both right and good. But there is difference between right and good. 'Rectus' the Latin word from which right has been derived, means straight or according to law. Thus good behaviour will correspond to law. Good comes from the German 'gut', meaning that which is useful for the supreme good. In this instance, good is that which leads to supreme good. Mostly, good is taken to mean an end, not a means to an end

The moral theory of Socrates is pragmatic. According to him, good acts are more important than good principles. The moral principles must be such as are practicable. A moral principle like 'treat everybody as an end in himself', is very lofty but in spite its loftiness it is of little worth because it is impracticable. Again, the injunction that taking interest on loans is sinful is very high-minded but if it were to be put in actual practice our modern society would collapse. Socrates made great effort to define virtue but his real intent was not definition of virtue but to make men virtuous.

There are the two extremes about moral matters. Socrates was opposed to both extreme sceptics and orthodox in matters of moral. According to sceptics there was no objective morality and that all actions were equally worthwhile from one or the other's viewpoint. There was a popular saying among Greeks which reflects this attitude. "You are being punished not because of the theft you have committed but because you have been caught." This means that thieving is not blameworthy; and the same is true with other social vices. On the other hand, the orthodox view was that the moral rules had been laid by our fore-fathers and that the change in time and social context did not affect them in any manner. Therefore, morality was a code of fixed and unwavering rules which required no use of reason to be followed, in fact, an attempt to use reason in moral was tantamount to tempering with the rules with an intent to violate them.

Socrates tried to steer on a middle course betwixt the above two extremes. He agreed with sceptics that social and personal context played a role in determining the moral conduct and that there was apparent diversity of opinion regarding what is right. But he pointed out that behind the veil of diversity, there was some fundamental unity provided by rational thought. For example, it is unjust to return a fire arm to a person who is drunk or otherwise mentally disturbed, but it would be quite just to return the fire arm if the loaner is normal. The apparent contradictions in two acts cease to look so if we consider the matter rationally. Both actions are fundamentally rational, and, therefore, in accordance with the same principle. Regarding the views of orthodoxy Socrates shares their respect and reference that normal rules can be blindly followed. As a matter of fact, rationality is, according to Socrates, the very essence of morality and uncritical and blind faith, the breeding grounds of vice. For Socrates a moral man is a virtuous man. The virtue is, the summun bonum of morality: and virtue is nothing but knowledge.[14]

In conclusion it can be said that the upholders of the philosophical or metaphysical method include Plato, Aristotle, Hegel, etc. the idealist philosophers. According to this school, ethical ideals can be deduced from the ultimate truth or reality. In this way, ethics depends upon metaphysics. According to this opinion, the ultimate aim of man is to achieve Eternal truth by rising above his limits because eternal truth is his real nature and internal truth. Thus perfection can be attained only by achieving it. The ultimate reality is manifested in nature and the individual. The soul is a part of that ultimate element. It is the spiritual part of man. God is a treasure house of values and ethical values are only a part of it. In this way, ethics is based upon metaphysics.

The philosophical school forgets that ethics is a normative science. Its method cannot be exclusively philosophical, although it is closely related to philosophy. Philosophy is concerned with facts and ideals while ethics is limited to ideals. Its problem is the interpretation and explanation of our judgements of ethical value, as the problems of aesthetics and logic are respectively the interpretation and explanation of our judgement of aesthetics and of logical or intellectual values. The philosophical school bases the knowable ethical ideals upon an unknown foundation. This renders the ethical ideals difficult when they are to be understood. Ethics is concerned with practical life. Thus, it is not feasible to base it upon a philosophy which advocates duality between the worldly and transcendental life. Value is a theory about "what things in the world are good, desirable, and important. Value is generally known to be a moral standard of human behaviour. Social and moral values are essential elements of the collective lives of any community without which the present modern human society may not be able to continue to sustain. Therefore, social and moral values should be preserved and protected.

Notes and Reference:

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