

# Practical Ethics: Its Origins and Historical Development

Sabana Biswas

*Research Scholar , TMBU, Bhagalpur, Bihar*

**Abstract :** Philosophy permeates every aspect of human life. Politics, religion, social policy, mind-body relationship, ethics etc. are free roaming of philosophy in every field. That every subject of human endeavor (such as natural science, sociology, art, theology, etc.) is bound to reach the philosophical level at some point through the continuum. But nevertheless a charge is leveled against philosophy that philosophy is only preoccupied with theorizing and does not look into the practical life of man. People often face various problems. If philosophy does not come forward to solve the problems of practical life, then philosophizing seems futile. But if you think about it a little, it will be seen that philosophy has a direct or indirect effect on the practical life of people.

If so, then philosophers cannot remain indifferent to the problems that people face as family, social, religious and political life changes through the ages. Due to the unbridled expansion of science and technology in the present era, people are facing various problems and, in the urge, to survive, they seek solutions to these problems. Science and technology are a part of human life today and it is undeniable that human life has become much easier and smoother with the blessings of science. But there is also the curse of science and technology, with the impact of which people face much more serious problems. Some issues are old but traditional, such as the intimate relationships of family life, issues of war and peace, which are human consciousness.

**Keywords:** Practical Ethics, ethical principles, Normative Ethics, human life, various incidental reasons

## INTRODUCTION

Philosophy permeates every aspect of human life. Politics, religion, social policy, mind-body relationship, ethics etc. are free roaming of philosophy in every field. That every subject of human endeavor (such as natural science, sociology, art, theology, etc.) is bound to reach the philosophical level at some point through the continuum. But nevertheless a charge is leveled against philosophy that philosophy is only preoccupied with theorizing and does not look into the practical life of man. People often face various

problems. If philosophy does not come forward to solve the problems of practical life, then philosophizing seems futile. But if you think about it a little, it will be seen that philosophy has a direct or indirect effect on the practical life of people. Philosophy is the ultimate abstraction of all human inquiry and the essence of philosophy is mindfulness. Philosophy practices and evaluates all matters related to human life in the light of logic or reasoning. Relying on abstract thinking and mindfulness, philosophy tries to explain from a holistic perspective how human beings should live their family, social, religious and political life and thereby gradually expands the horizon of knowledge about human life. So it is undeniable that abstract philosophy is closely related to human life and has potential cash value.

If so, then philosophers cannot remain indifferent to the problems that people face as family, social, religious and political life changes through the ages. Due to the unbridled expansion of science and technology in the present era, people are facing various problems and, in the urge, to survive, they seek solutions to these problems. Science and technology are a part of human life today and it is undeniable that human life has become much easier and smoother with the blessings of science. But there is also the curse of science and technology, with the impact of which people face much more serious problems. Some issues are old but traditional, such as the intimate relationships of family life, issues of war and peace, which are human consciousness.

Never stayed away from Needless to say, these have taken on new forms in the age of science and technology. Divorce, parent-child relationship on the one hand, technology expansion on the other hand, modern weapons have put humanity on the brink of destruction today. Some problems are completely new, such as degradation of the natural environment, suicidal tendencies, voluntary death, human rights, gender relations, caste-discrimination, gender-discrimination, suicide, killing of disabled children,

etc. All these practical and complex problems that have arisen in recent times have appeared to the philosopher as questions of ethics. And this idea is the origin of practical or practical ethics.

In recent times this branch of ethics has been trying to find ways to solve the problems of people's practical life without limiting the discussion of ethics only to theory. Because due to the unbridled expansion of science and technology and various incidental reasons, on the one hand, many old problems have taken on a new form in daily life, on the other hand, new and newer problems have arisen, and the solution of these problems is possible only from a moral point of view. These problems include war, terrorism, famine, suicide, discrimination, voluntary death, degradation of natural environment etc. Ethical ideals should not be confined to theory and should be applied in practice and the philosopher should take responsibility for the practical solution of these problems. Because if an ideal has no real utility, it has no value. Indeed, theory and practice cannot be separated in ethics; Rather, the relationship between theoretical and practical ethics is the relation of continuity from the general to the particular, from the abstract to the concrete.

Idealistic science basically tries to answer one question and that is: "What ought we to do" (What ought we to do)? But this ethics tries to answer this question from a general perspective. On the other hand, practical ethics is a It tries to answer this question in terms of the particular and the concrete. That is, the focus of practical ethics is the particular and the concrete facts on the basis of which it helps to determine the duty. In other words, this ethics deals with the particular context of the event and its context. Focusing more on the broader context from which ethical issues arise.

Here the main question of practical ethics is what is right or wrong to do in this situation? However, the research of practical ethics gradually exceeds the speed of particularity and reaches the level of rules, principles and ideals where the question of practical ethics becomes which principle we ought to adopt in this situation (which principle we ought to adopt in this situation)? For example, the question may arise: What is right or wrong about the degradation of the natural environment or in the light of what principles should we seek solutions to this problem? Here the question of right and wrong or policy is being raised in a particular situation like environmental conservation.

The approach of practical ethics is holistic and humanistic. Much of the 20th century was spent with an emphasis on scientism, experimentation, and attempts to make the world more human. Practical ethics does not emphasize only scientific thinking, but openly incorporates insights from other relevant disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, professional disciplines, to enrich the discussion of its content, and takes a liberal approach and is eager to work with professionals from various professions. These individuals may contribute relevant information and insights to help solve problems in practical ethics. Such a holistic and liberal approach helps practical ethics to solve various important and complex practical problems. Indeed, ethics cannot be practical. On the one hand, theoretical concepts, such as justice, utility, virtue, etc., are the fertile soil of rich and abstract awareness, and on the other hand, their practical application is Problems of practical life of people. Practical ethics is a field of philosophical inquiry that aims to provide clear concepts of right and wrong, good and evil in the context of real situations and the attempt to understand how these concepts can be realized in the behavior of individuals and various social institutions. Research and practice on the content of practical ethics as people on the one hand. The main objective is to preserve what is good and good in the moral knowledge of the past and on the other hand to solve real problems for the betterment of people by adding new scientific knowledge to this preserved knowledge. The work of a designer can be compared to the approach of a practical ethicist. Just as a designer first prepares a blueprint (blue print) and then adapts it to the materials and circumstances at hand, so does a practical ethicist. He kept the ideal of good in front and tried to solve it by applying it to the problems of people's practical life. This is what many philosophers call "reflective equilibrium". Practical ethics attempts to solve real problems by measuring common people's intuitions about morality against the criteria of moral ideals.

## 1.2 Practical Ethics: Its Origins and Historical Development

It can generally be said that practical ethics originated in the 1960s in English-speaking countries. But if we look at the history of Western philosophy, it will be seen that the footprints of practical ethics can be seen

in modern Western philosophy starting from ancient Greek philosophy.

*Thales is said to be the first philosopher of ancient Greece (Thales : 585 BC).*

*He combined legal and political reform with his interest in economics.*

*and thereby tried to show that abstract philosophical thought is practical*

*There is also a price. Other philosophical sects of ancient Greece, such as the Pythagoreans*

*(Pythagoreans). The Epicureans and the Stoics belong to them*

*Advised the followers on the ideals of life and its application.*

*Even, Socrates avoids preaching any dogma*

He has set an example of leading an exemplary and exemplary philosophical life. In his Republic dialogue, Plato not only discussed the principles of state formation, but also expressed his views on the practical issues of living in society, education, sexual relations, censorship, reproduction, art, literature, etc. Aristotle (Aristotle) in his works of the individual Emphasized on moral excellence and good social formation for a happy life. Thus in ancient Western philosophy considerable importance was attached to practical matters such as moral and social issues.

Some philosophers in the medieval and modern period shed light on practical issues. In the Middle Ages, St. Thomas Aquinas (St Thomas Aquinas) in his Summa Theologiae discussed various practical issues such as marriage, family etc. In the modern era, John Locke (1632-1704) wrote essays on tolerance and education, which were of considerable social importance at that time. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) wrote about suicide and whether lying about intentions to benevolent should be done, which is an important discussion point in modern medical ethics. In his book Metaphysics of Morals, he discusses human dignity, which is an important ancillary principle of modern human rights. Also, Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) wrote about punishment and a new type of prison (which he called

the Panopticon). He has extensively discussed the techniques of applying his utilitarianism to specific cases for the purposes of legal and political reform. Hegel (1770-1831) wrote on family and punishment. The essay 'On Liberty' by John Stuart Mill (1806-73) is considered to be a masterpiece of liberal thought, where he discusses the nature of a liberal and pluralistic society. Moreover, his writings on practical issues such as tolerance, paternalism, feminism etc. demand considerable importance nowadays. John Dewey's (John Dewey : 1859-1952) writings on education had an immense influence on the education system of America and England. The considerable practical value of these two books, Democracy and Education and Experience and Education, cannot be denied. Although the above footprints of practical ethics can be seen on the pages of history, the predominance of normative ethics and meta-ethics has been maintained till now. Traditionally, common people especially students had a misconception that ethics is in our daily life

What we ought to do is helpful even if we don't decide. A famous philosopher. J. A. J. Ayer, correcting his above statement, says, "It is more a reflection of a national philosophical integrity. And this is one of the reasons why many find ethics an unsatisfactory subject. Because they look to the philosophers for guidance." Looking. ("It is silly, as well as presumptuous, for any one type of philosopher to pose as the champion of virtue. And it is also one reason why many people find moral philosophy an unsatisfactory subject. For they mistakenly look to the moral philosopher for guidance". Peter Singer (ed.) Applied Ethics, p. 2). Professor C. D. C. D. Brood argues that it is not the profession of ethicists to tell people what we should or should not do. Moral philosophers in general do not have special knowledge about what is right and what is wrong that is unknown to ordinary people ("It is no part of the professional business of moral philosophers to tell people what they ought or ought not to do... Moral philosophers, as such, have no special information not available to the general public about what is right and what is wrong : Ibid.).

It is clear from the above discussion that practical ethics is not a new subject but a revival of a neglected subject. Some problems of practical life create the field of discussion and debate on this topic and gradually this topic emerges. Due to the continued

influence of materialist scientism in the nineteenth century and throughout most of the twentieth century, the agenda of practical ethics was neglected in Western philosophy. The new medical technology of the 1960s, especially the new scientific method of reproduction, the American Civil Rights Movement, the American entry into the Vietnam War, and the rise of the student movement made philosophers think about moral issues. These issues included limitations on civil disobedience and protest, arguments about the justification of war, the justification of violence for political ends, racism, equality, etc. Moreover, with the publication of Peter Singer's book *Animal Liberation*, the rights of non-human beings Criticism begins. Again, philosophers began to think about environmental ethics with the aim of raising the awareness of the common man about the natural environment. In recent times, due to the expansion of trade at the national and international level, a new topic called trade ethics has been added as a topic of discussion in practical ethics. Thus practical ethics today has entered a new and more self-conscious phase.

Articles on the above topics soon began to appear in various institutional journals. *Moral Problems* edited by James Rachels was published in 1971. Apart from this, the *Journal of Philosophy* and *Philosophy and Public Affairs* published articles on practical ethics. *Applied Ethics* (1985) edited by Peter Singer and *Practical Ethics* (1979) written by him are notable in this regard.

Increasingly, the relevance and value of philosophers' contributions to practical matters in the wider society is being recognised. Dissatisfied with the practical ideas and performance of potential priests and political leaders, people trusted the judgment of philosophers. New discoveries in medicine and biology in particular led to entirely new ethical questions raised by philosophers. An urgent solution is needed. It is not surprising that the British government appointed a philosopher named Mary Warnock as the chairman of the "Inquiry into Human Fertilization and Embryology" committee. Then philosophers are appointed to "Ethics Committee" in universities and some hospitals in different countries. The Australian state of Victoria has legal resources to have a philosopher on the Committee on Human Embryo Research. As a result of the widening of the discussion area of practical ethics, this topic has been included in

the curriculum of universities in different countries of the world.

#### WHAT ETHICS IS NOT

Here we follow Peter Singer and try to dispel some misconceptions about practical ethics.

First, in the past moral restrictions were very strict on people's family and social life. But religious bigotry and superstition played a major role behind the restrictions. Because the relationship between religion and morality is very close. But nowadays the spread of scientific knowledge has loosened religious and moral restrictions on our family and social life due to religious bigotry and superstition and other ancillary reasons. As a result, some people think that morality is an old-fashioned thing and they see it as a set of obnoxious puritanical restrictions, which hinder a life of fun and excitement. From a traditional point of view, a religious leader or community leader is generally considered to be the guardian of morality. Taking morality as a very narrow field, they issued fatwas to strictly follow some moral rules about free sex, homosexuality, pornography, etc. Issues of more recent times, such as degradation of the natural environment, suicide, euthanasia, which demand moral consideration, are of no importance to them. Because, they keep the word "moral" within the narrow boundaries of "puritanical" and "non-puritanical". Consequently the larger and more important field of ethics or moral judgment remains unexplored to us. According to Singer, ethics is not actually a set of puritanical prohibitions about purity or impurity specifically related to sex. This is because sexual matters, such as pre-marital intercourse, adultery, obscene literature, homosexuality, etc., require restrictions to maintain social order, but from the point of view of practical considerations, sex does not demand any particularity. Both sex and driving can cause moral problems. But from a practical perspective, driving raises more important moral questions than sex. Because there are environmental and safety moral issues involved in driving, which take precedence over sex.

Ethics is not a science whose greatness is expressed only in ideological discourse but which has no practical utility. Indeed, discussion of theory that has no application seems worthless and futile, especially in ethics. Because the aim of ethics is not only to

evaluate human behavior but also to guide people in the field of action or behavior in practical life.

#### REFERENCE

- [1] Singer, P. Practical Ethics. 1<sup>st</sup> Indian edition Cambridge .Cambridge University Press. 2000
- [2] Singer, P. Applied Ethics. Oxford University Press, Oxford , 1986
- [3] Prasad R. Applied Ethics. Journal of Indian Council of Philosophical Research.1997
- [4] Pal. K.S :Folito Nitishastra. Levents Books , India, 2021
- [5] Roy. K. P :Byaboharik Nitibidya. Bngla Academy Dhaka, 2004