



Ethics and Religion: A Philosophical Study

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Received: 10.09.2026; Accepted: 29.09.2026; Available online: 30.09.2026

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Abstract

Ethics and religion together form the base of human behaviour and profoundly affect moral consciousness and the social structures as well. While ethics defines right, wrong and justice through rational philosophy, religion supplies the metaphysical framework in which human purpose is defined in terms of spirituality. One of the questions that have preoccupied philosophical thought is the independence of morality - whether morality depends on divine will as proposed by divine command theory or not, whether other ethical theories such as deontology, consequentialism, and virtue ethics are independent of it and rational. This research paper aims at studying the interplay of faith and reason and studies how their harmony or conflict affects the global problems faced today. This research paper aims at finding out how faith and reason interact and influence the systemic injustices, violence, intolerance, materialism of the consumer world and ethical issues related to technology. The current research paper sheds light on the dialogue between spiritual doctrines and rational philosophies in their search for the meaning of life and in building of a just society. Ethics takes the place of study of 'morality'. Issues of moral nature arise only in the context of humanity. Moral value doesn't arise in the domain of no-human creatures.

Keywords: Ethics, Religion, Moral Values, Moral Philosophy, Spirituality, Religious Ethics, Human Conduct, Moral Responsibility.

Introduction:

Ethics and religion represent the basic framework for humanity in terms of guiding human behaviour and understanding of the existence. While religion obtains its moral values from sacredness, belief and traditions, ethics represents the philosophical discourse which analyses the reasonability, universality and implications of these values. While conceptually distinct from each other, these areas work together in order to find the answer to the basic existential problem: how to live and how to be a human. Thus, ethics and religion are closely associated but not identical. Religion offers moral values through faith and tradition, while ethics critically examines their rationality, universality, and moral consequences.¹

This intersection results in different cultural paradigms. Western philosophy always distinguishes between these areas or even opposes them. Starting from Plato's Euthyphro paradox to Kantian autonomy and Nietzschean criticism, Western philosophers argue whether moral value always requires divine commands or could be considered separately as objective reason. In contrast to Western world, Indian philosophy combines these areas

naturally. Such thinkers as Radhakrishnan consider ethical lifestyle as the ultimate goal of spiritual enlightenment. Thanks to some structural concepts as *dharma* (cosmic duty), *karma* (action) and *ahimsa* (non-violence), the moral discipline becomes necessary condition for the purification of one's mind and the ultimate salvation (*moksha*).

Ultimately, religion serves as the narrative motivation of the moral life, whereas ethics is the tool with which it can be analyzed. For pluralistic, secular societies, the combination of the two implies a serious philosophical transformation that involves the assessment of whether secular ethics can be autonomously established and whether the rational criticism of dogmatic religious practice can maintain social harmony. Ethics is philosophically connected with religion due to its discussion of moral values, duties, virtues, human actions and ultimate moral principles. Moral conduct purifies the individual and supports spiritual realization and social harmony.²

It may be appropriate to mention here that Kant argues that morality is fundamentally rational and autonomous, while religion gives moral duties a divine framework, linking ethical conduct with humanity's pursuit of the highest good.³ Indeed, it is necessary to note that, in his works, Kant distinguishes rational autonomy of morality and religion as its divine foundation that combines ethical action with humanity's striving for the highest good.

This research aims at examining the above-mentioned intersections. The paper claims that, while religion provides moral motivation, community structure and spiritual ideals, morality is not about doing everything that the institution or a sacred book order. Morality is about choosing what is good or bad and right or wrong oneself independently, instead of being simply obedient to religious prescriptions. As human interpretations of sacred traditions are constantly changing, a philosophical reflection is always needed. Ultimately, ethics and religion play an intersecting role as pillars that guide morality, social cohesion, and responsible human behavior. To balance faith with reason, one needs a rigid philosophy that can navigate both the spiritual and the rational aspects of ethics and criticism. Ethics and religion are closely related because religion provides moral principles, while ethics evaluates and guides human conduct according to reason and values.⁴ This research explores the intersecting elements of religion and morality. While religious beliefs provide moral motivations and spiritual values, true morality needs independent reasoning, and not blind adherence to the dictates of institutions. Since man-made interpretations of the sacred continuously change, it becomes necessary for philosophy to be ever-present. Ultimately, religion and ethics play an intersecting role as pillars that guide human behavior and create social cohesion. To balance the two, one needs a rigid philosophy that can navigate spirituality and ethical analysis.

Meaning and Nature of Ethics:

The word 'ethics' is derived from the Greek word, 'ethos' meaning character or custom. Essentially, it is the philosophical study of morality, focusing on the principles guiding right and wrong conduct. It looks at the essential dichotomies of moral reality, the good versus the bad, right versus wrong, and justice versus injustice, while analyzing virtues, vices, duty, and responsibility.

Moral beliefs among people may be developed through the influence of family, custom, law or religion. The question in philosophy is whether these beliefs can be justified rationally. Ethics is concerned with studying the system of moral values, duty and

ontological good by which people know what is good, right, wrong and obligatory regarding human behavior. Ethics is essentially normative, rational, critical and practical in nature. Normative ethics prescribes the standards of behaviour, rational ethics is based on reason and critical analysis and not assumptions while critical ethics is concerned with challenging existing values and beliefs in ethics. Practical ethics is used to guide human behaviour.

Scope of Ethics:

Ethics studies systematically the subject of morality, right behavior and human values. On the basis of the evaluation of action, motive and free will, it tells how people ought to behave. Traditionally, this subject is broadly classified into three main branches, namely, metaethics, normative ethics and applied ethics.

1. **Metaethics:** The field of metaethics investigates the objectivity of moral facts, moral knowledge and moral language. Metaethics concerns itself with the nature and status of moral judgments: (i) What does "good" mean? (ii) Are moral values objective or subjective? (iii) Is morality universal? (iv) Are moral statements true or false? (v) Are there rational justifications for moral obligations?

2. **Normative Ethics:** In this realm, the principles governing the difference between good and bad behavior are defined. Normative ethics aims at finding the principles for guiding human action, such as duty-based deontology, consequence-based consequentialism, character-based virtue ethics. The major theories of normative ethics include: (i) Deontology – morality is founded on duties and principles. (ii) Consequentialism– an action is judged by its results. (iii) Virtue ethics – morality is related to human flourishing and character. (iv) Care ethics– morality is connected with relationships, empathy and care.

3. **Applied Ethics:** Applied ethics deals with specific moral problems like abortion, euthanasia, war, capital punishment, environmental issues, animal rights, economic justice and technology. Religion affects all the three realms of ethics but cannot substitute philosophy in any way.

Nature and Definition of Religion:

It is difficult to define religion, since different religions are different. Generally speaking, religion might involve faith in the transcendent or the sacred, ritual observance, morals, spirituality, institutional organization, and ideas of ultimate meaning. But religion is not just a set of beliefs about the supernatural. It can also be seen as a way of life that shapes man's attitude towards himself, society, nature and ultimate reality.

Religion is a total system of beliefs, experiences, values and rituals related to the sacred or ultimate reality. The nature of religion is communitarian, transformational and moral. Religion guides man towards reverence, spirituality, morality and communion with ultimate reality. Philosophically, religion involves at least three aspects: (i) cognitive: beliefs about God, reality, soul and ultimate being, (ii) practical: ritual, duties and morality and (iii) experiential: transcendental experience, devotion, conversion or spirituality.

Religion is a comprehensive system of beliefs, experiences, values and practices concerning the sacred or ultimate reality. Its nature is communal, transformative and ethical, guiding human beings toward reverence, spiritual fulfilment, moral conduct and a meaningful relationship with ultimate reality.⁵

Ethics and Religion in the Indian Perspective:

In the Indian perspective, ethics and religion are very closely related concepts of dharma, which includes both religious duty and morality. Ethical living comprises truth, non-violence, compassion, self-control, and righteousness. The *Bhagavad Gita* particularly presents duty as both a moral obligation and a spiritual path toward liberation.⁶ Indian philosophies elaborate this topic by discussing the connection between ethics and spirituality. Thus, Hindu philosophy focuses on dharma, karma, truth, and self-discipline; Buddhist philosophy focuses on compassion, moral behavior, and wisdom; Jain philosophy elaborates an extremely strict concept of non-violence; and Gandhi makes religious concepts social and political through truth and *ahimsa*.

Ethics and Religion in the Western Perspective:

In the West, ethics and religion have always been closely connected through Greek philosophy, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Socrates shows the necessity of criticism of religious ideas; Plato establishes a relationship between knowledge and goodness; Aristotle elaborates concepts of virtue and practical wisdom; Kant establishes the basis of morality in rational freedom; utilitarianism pays attention to consequences; and modern theories discuss justice, rights, and human flourishing. The famous Émile Durkheim emphasizes the social nature of religion, whereby he defines religion as a set of beliefs and activities regarding sacred objects that create a community of believers based on morality. William James takes a different angle whereby he looks at religion in relation to individual experiences that stress the importance of religious experiences in individuals.

Relation between Ethics and Religion:

In Indian Philosophy, ethics and religion are inseparable. *Dharma, karma, ahimsa*, self-discipline and liberation show how religious beliefs provide foundations and purposes for moral conduct and spiritual development.⁷ Ethics relates most to the practical side of religion. The relation between ethics and religion is possible to examine through four key positions.

Position (i): God's Will Determines the Ethics: The idea behind divine command theories is that it is due to God's will that all human actions acquire their moral duty and wrongness since they are prohibited by God. It is a source of considerable authority and motivation. It means that the rules of morality are not human preferences, but the will of God. But it poses a philosophical challenge. According to the Divine Command theory, the obligations of morality come from the will of God. On Divine Command theory, moral obligations arise from God's authoritative will.⁸

Position (ii): Morality is Not Related to Religion: There exists another tradition of philosophy which claims that the rules of morality can be justified by reason, human interests, cooperation in society, and consequences without referring to God. One example is Kant, who makes rational autonomy and not the will of God the basis of morality. Categorical imperative obliges everyone to act only according to such maxims that can be universalized without manipulating people and giving them unconditional respect. In essence, ethics operates independently of religion since its principles originate from human reason, conscience, empathy, and the common good of human beings. An individual can know about his obligations of honesty, justice, and sympathy without making any reference to religious commandments or doctrines. A person can recognize duties such as

honesty, justice, and compassion without appealing to religious commandments or beliefs.⁹

Position (iii): Religion and Ethics Are Synergistic: The third view holds that religion and reason are complementary in terms of ethics. Religion brings spirituality, ethic profundity, and purpose to morals, and reason provides logic and rationalization of them.

This synthesis is the very essence of Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy, according to which religion devoid of morality has no meaning, and morality deprived of religion lack's purpose. Reason makes sure that religion will not descend to the level of mere superstition. On the other hand, spiritual faith gives an impetus for one's lifelong moral action. In the end, reason defines morality, and religion endows it with its essential purpose, proving that intellect and spirituality should go hand in hand in guiding human actions. Both ethics and religion together shape truthful, disciplined, and morally responsible life.¹⁰

Position (iv): The religious imperatives are not inherently moral, implying that the teachings of religion need to be evaluated independently from an ethical perspective. While religions advocate for compassion and justice, they can also propagate prejudice, discrimination and inflict psychological and physical damages. For pluralistic societies, such philosophical analysis is important, since the critical analysis of different beliefs is necessary to create commonly accepted ethical standards. In the end, such analysis guarantees that the religious activities are in harmony with universal morality and well-being of human beings, but not automatically accepted on the basis of pure belief. Therefore, religion should remain open to rational moral criticism and ethical assessment.¹¹ Religion needs to undergo the process of ethical evaluation due to the reasons that its beliefs, practices and institutions can serve both justice and well-being of human beings or bring discrimination and damages.

The Socratic Challenge:

Derived from Plato's Euthyphro, the Euthyphro dilemma poses a question relating to morality and religion in which it questions whether a certain thing is good because God commands it or vice versa. This results in a classical philosophical issue where if the morality depends on God's command alone, then the right and wrong appear to be arbitrary. On the other hand, if God himself follows some independent standard, then there would be a query regarding the absolute authority of God. Socratic challenge challenges the question whether the morality depends on divine command or not. The Socratic challenge questions whether morality depends on divine command or whether moral truths exist independently. It exposes tensions between God's authority, goodness, and objective moral standards.¹²

Divine Command Theory:

The Divine Command theory argues that the moral obligation demands that moral obligation depends only on the God's command. That is, the actions that are morally right become obligatory and those actions which are morally wrong become forbidden. Action is said to be morally correct if done according to God's command and morally wrong if forbidden by God. An action is morally right when commanded by God and wrong when forbidden by God.¹³ The appeal of Divine Command theory is evident. First, it offers: (i) an objective foundation for moral authority; (ii) a foundation for moral obligation; (iii) the relationship between morality and ultimate reality; (iv) the motivation for moral actions.

Morality, Religion and Reason in Kant:

Kant is perhaps one of the greatest efforts made towards combining the ideas of ethics and religion without taking away the independence of morality. According to Kant, morality is based on practical reason. The moral law cannot be said to be imposed externally on anyone by any authority. Moral obligations can be recognized by a reasonable individual in the categorical imperative, which creates a sense of dignity as the first and foremost moral rule. Morality, according to Kant, is based on reason, whereas religion sees morality in the form of divine commands. Reason controls faith, and ethical behavior, rather than religious behavior, is thus the basis of true religion. Reason therefore guides faith, making ethical conduct - not religious observance - the foundation of genuine religion.¹⁴

Utilitarianism and Religious Ethics:

Bentham judged religion on the basis of the principle of utility. The moral value of the practices and beliefs of religions is based on promoting human happiness and decreasing suffering. Utilitarianism is a theory formulated by Bentham and Mill that judges an action as moral based on its outcome and specifically happiness or well-being. Utilitarianism is a philosophy without any religious component.

Virtue Ethics and Religion:

The ethical perspective of virtue espoused by Aristotle emphasizes character rather than rule-based approach or consequences and asks "what sort of person should I become?" Moral character development through virtues such as courage, justice and practical wisdom results in eudaimonia or true happiness. Such an approach combines philosophical and religious ethics by putting emphasis on character building rather than belief system. Additionally, Aristotle looked at the traditional religion from sociological viewpoint while thinking about the nature of God philosophically as "Unmoved Mover" and final cause of the universe. In other words, living a good or flourishing life depends on the moral action and practical wisdom.

The idea of moral character is very common across different philosophical theories and most of the religious traditions. In the case of Christian religion, virtue ethics revolves around the cultivation of virtues such as love, faith, humility, courage, justice and compassion which help in building moral character through Christ-centered discipleship and grace. On the other hand, Buddhists work hard towards reducing delusion and developing wisdom through mindfulness and non-attachment. Virtues in Buddhism include compassion, loving-kindness, non-attachment, generosity, non-violence, mindfulness and wisdom. Virtue development in Buddhism takes place through wholesome.

Virtue ethics in Hinduism is focused on dharma, self-control, truth, non-violence, compassion, purity, and generosity. This means that these religions consider character as the deliberate and disciplined harmony with absolute truth and universal compassion. *Bhagavad Gita* presents these divine qualities as virtues aimed to achieve spiritual liberation. Thus, these religious traditions regard character as an intentional, disciplined alignment with ultimate truth and universal compassion. The *Bhagavad Gita* presents these divine qualities as virtues leading toward spiritual liberation.¹⁵ Jainism puts great stress on *ahimsa* (non-violence), as well as truth and self-restraint. Jainism considers ethics as the formation of virtuous character through non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession for the sake of spiritual liberation. Jainism places extraordinary emphasis

on *ahimsa*, non-violence, as well as truthfulness and self-restraint. Jainism presents ethics as cultivation of virtuous character through non-violence, truth, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession, leading toward spiritual liberation.¹⁶

Ethics and Religion in Indian Philosophy:

The relationship between spirituality and morality in Indian philosophy is very deep. S. Ranganathan denies the assumption that the Indian philosophy is unconcerned about ethics and claims that *dharma* is essentially moral obligation at the heart of this philosophy. Ranganathan considers ethical thought in Buddhism, Jainism, Sāṃkhya-Yoga, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta and Cārvāka traditions.¹⁷ Indeed, Indian philosophy is strongly related to religion, *dharma*, *karma*, and *mokṣa*. Moral behavior is not only social responsibility; it is also the means for spiritual growth. Indian ethical systems thus embrace moral action, self-restraint, religion, and *moksha* as an end-goal. Moral conduct is not merely social duty but a means of spiritual development. Indian ethical traditions therefore integrate right action, self-discipline, religious practice, and the ultimate goal of *mokṣa*.¹⁸

1. Ethical Ideas in Hinduism: The many different philosophies provide the pluralistic moral system rather than one moral system. Rooted in the concepts of *dharma* (moral obligation) and *karma* (action and its effects), moral living includes such virtues as *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satya* (truthfulness). With self-restraint, renunciation of selfish desires, and proper performance of *dharma*, man reaches liberation (*moksha*).

It goes without saying that ethical living involves doing one's duties properly, restraining desires and working for the benefit of all. *Dharma* connects ethical conduct with spiritual progress and *moksha*.¹⁹ The concept of *dharma* links up ethical behavior with spiritual development and *moksha*. *Dharma* refers to moral order, righteousness and contextual duty. In the philosophical context of the *Bhagavad Gita*, *dharma* represents an exploration of action, knowledge and devotion. In this context, the three principals have been reconciled by the concept of *nishkama karma* involving performing one's duties beyond the prescribed ones without expecting any returns. This approach defines ethical behavior as an absolute moral obligation and removes spiritual enlightenment from the rewards in the material world.

2. Buddhism: In the context of Buddhist ethics, morality does not arise out of divine will but out of psychological and causal awareness. It has been said that Buddhist ethics provides some essential philosophical foundations. They are (i) consciousness and intent, (ii) causality and (iii) Five precepts. (i) Consciousness and Intent: Ethical development is based on purification of intents which would change the mental states from greedy and deluded to compassionate and wise. (ii) Cause and Effect (*Karma*): Actions and their effects follow natural laws. Ethical decisions help minimize suffering (*dukkha*) without any need for a divine ruler. (iii) The Five Precepts: When followed voluntarily as opposed to being commanded, refraining from harming others, stealing, misbehavior, lying, and taking intoxicants helps retain mental clarity. Combining moral practice (*sila*), mindfulness, and wisdom leads to an independent practice of self-mastery and liberation.

In this way, Buddhism offers a significant example of a religion-based ethical system which does not need divine command. Buddhist ethics focuses on morality, compassion, non-violence, self-control, and cultivation of good mind. Through *sila*, right action, and the

Noble Eightfold Path, Buddhism connects ethical living with liberation from suffering and the attainment of Nirvana.²⁰

3. Jainism: The philosophy of Jainism places supreme emphasis on *ahimsa* (non-violence), along with its other ethical principles that include truth, non-stealing, sexual restraint, and non-possession. This ethical system perfectly illustrates how metaphysical beliefs lead to daily practices. In this case, the metaphysical belief of a universe filled with different living souls, and its connection to the laws of karma leads to Jainists' exceptionally strong commitment to not causing harm. Philosophically, the idea is more than just religious in nature, because it addresses basic issues about the moral status of living things and the limits of human consumption. Its philosophical importance extends beyond religion because it raises fundamental questions about the moral status of living beings and the limits of human consumption. Jain ethics integrates religion and morality through the Five Vows- *ahimsā, satya, asteya, brahmacharya* and *aparigraha* - which cultivate self-control, compassion, purity and liberation from karma.²¹

Ethics as a Way of Life in Gandhi:

According to Gandhi, ethics should be considered as a way of life based on truth, non-violence, love, self-restraint, and service. For him, morality must be translated into conduct. Ethical living therefore requires individuals to control desires, respect others, serve humanity and continually pursue Truth.²² Gandhi believed that morality should be practiced as conduct. Thus, ethical living involves controlling one's desires, respecting other people, serving humanity, and pursuing the Truth. Gandhi provides a modern example of one of the most successful efforts to relate religion, ethics, and social action. Gandhi's contribution to the topic of ethics and religion is very important since he did not limit his interpretation of religion to just one institutional religion. Gandhi's religious view was characterized by respect for all religions along with commitment to morality. The concept of satyagraha was based on the transformation of morality into practice.

Religion as the Source of Moral Motivation:

One of the most convincing arguments in favor of the ethical importance of religion is that of moral motivation. Even though people know what is right, it does not necessarily mean that they will do the right thing. People often act contrary to their moral judgments due to greed, fear, etc. Religion may enhance moral motivation by: belief in divine scrutiny; spiritual training; prayer and meditation; religious community; moral models; notions of *karma* and reincarnation; ideas of salvation or liberation; compassion and self-sacrifice. Thus, religions not only supply moral laws but also techniques to change moral characters. Religion motivates the practice of morals in Indian philosophy because *dharma* is a holy responsibility. Notions of *karma*, rebirth, and spiritual emancipation lead people to practice righteousness, restraint of passions, discharge of responsibilities, and acquisition of virtues. Belief in *karma*, rebirth, and spiritual liberation encourages individuals to act righteously, control desires, fulfil duties, and cultivate virtues.²³

Religion as a Motivation for Moral Community:

Religion may also help form a moral community. Similar beliefs and practices can foster: solidarity; mutual aid; charity; social responsibility; and protection of the weak. Durkheim's theory of religion precisely focuses on this aspect. Institutions of religion have founded schools, hospitals, charitable organizations, and welfare agencies. However, there is an ambivalent quality in relation to the communal aspect of religion as well. In the same

way that religion unites individuals, religion can also serve to separate people into different religious groups. Therefore, a philosophy of religion needs to differentiate between religion as a factor that binds and the use of religion for exclusion purposes. Religion in Indian philosophy helps in the creation of moral community through the promotion of dharma, compassion, non-violence, equality, self-restraint and social responsibility. A critical philosophy of religion must therefore distinguish between religion as a source of solidarity and religious identity used as a basis for exclusion. Religion in Indian philosophy creates moral community by promoting dharma, compassion, non-violence, equality, self-discipline and social responsibility, thereby connecting individual ethical conduct with collective welfare and harmony.²⁴ Ambedkar presents religion as an ethical and social force aimed at creating a moral order grounded in liberty, equality and fraternity.

Religious Intolerance:

The problem of religious intolerance in Indian philosophy is about how one should be tolerant of other religions while being loyal to one's own. Indian philosophers have emphasized on acceptance, dialogic approach, plurality and spiritual unity. However, tensions arise when religious identity, social discrimination and competing truth claims undermine genuine tolerance and peaceful coexistence.²⁵ Radhakrishnan's Vedantic philosophy provides a metaphysical basis for religious tolerance. One of the biggest problems associated with the relation of religion and ethics is intolerance. When people are sure that their religious beliefs are entirely correct, they come to the conclusion that any other beliefs are either incorrect or immoral. In some cases, this leads to discrimination, persecution, and violence. However, it is important to mention that this is not an inherent trait of religion. All religions have many teachings on compassion, tolerance and respect. The philosophical solution lies in the distinction between: certainty of personal beliefs and coercion of others.

One of the greatest challenges to the relationship between religion and ethics is intolerance. If individuals believe that their religious beliefs are absolutely true, they may conclude that alternative beliefs are false or morally inferior. In extreme cases, this can produce discrimination, persecution and violence. However, this is not an inevitable consequence of religion. Many religious traditions contain strong teachings concerning compassion, tolerance and respect. The philosophical solution lies in distinguishing: certainty of personal faith from coercion of others. A pluralistic society requires freedom of belief while also maintaining ethical and constitutional principles protecting the dignity and rights of all persons. However, tensions arise when religious identity, social discrimination and competing truth claims undermine genuine tolerance and peaceful coexistence.²⁶

Yet, there is an ambivalent quality in relation to the communal aspect of religion as well. In the same way that religion unites individuals, religion can also serve to separate people into different religious groups. Therefore, a philosophy of religion needs to differentiate between religion as a factor that binds and the use of religion for exclusion purposes. Religion in Indian philosophy helps in the creation of moral community through the promotion of dharma, compassion, non-violence, equality, self-restraint and social responsibility.

Is Religion Moral or Immoral?

It is claimed to be one of the most difficult philosophical questions. Assume that there exists a practice within a religious tradition that contradicts the principles of human dignity. Should this practice be respected simply because it is religious? A philosophical attitude means that we should say 'no' to moral immunity of religion. Religion is an excellent moral source, but the beliefs of religion are taught and practiced by humans. That is why they are subject to moral criticism. Instead, it acknowledges the necessity of self-criticism in religious living. Perhaps the best possible relationship between religion and ethics is a dialogue and not a hierarchical one. In this scenario, religion would provide ethical insights and motivations, while philosophy provides criticism. Gandhi strongly maintained that genuine religion cannot override morality; if a religious practice conflicts with truth, non-violence and justice, it must be rejected.²⁷ Religion can be immoral, if religious beliefs, practices, or institutions lead to violence, discrimination, injustice or cruelty. Traditionally, religions in India have been subordinated to dharma and ethical conduct. Gandhi was firm that religion could never supersede ethics; any practice of religion that goes against the virtues of truthfulness, nonviolence and justice must be shunned.

Secular Ethics and the Problem of God:

Secular ethics constructs morality based on human reasoning and empathy and concern for human good, and not from divine commandments. Is there an objective morality without a God?

The presence of secular ethical theories – such as Kantianism, utilitarianism, existentialism, and humanism– demonstrates that religion is not the only source of ethics. These philosophies offer solid grounds for conducting moral reasoning without appealing to theological postulates. This underlines the major difference between philosophy and religion: religion usually offers explanations of why one feels morally obliged, while philosophy tries to see whether the obligation is rational. Thus, for example, one may help poor people because he/she is commanded by God to do so. In contrast, a secular philosopher will do so because all people are equal and suffering is unacceptable. Nevertheless, in spite of different backgrounds, the results are often the same. One will perform his/her ethical duty in both cases.

Ethics, Religion and Human Rights:

Human rights' philosophy constitutes another sphere of interaction of ethics and religion. Modern religious movements have made significant contributions to the development of ideas of human dignity, charity, justice and equality. At the same time, modern human rights' philosophy demands that rights be universal and not based on religion. This fact is especially relevant for countries with many religions such as India and many others.

A democratic ethical order will have to ensure freedom from discrimination on religious grounds, equality under the law, the dignity of the person, and freedom of criticism of religious beliefs within legal limits. Consequently, religion can be an aid to public morality, but it cannot be made a sole source of public ethical norms in a diverse society.

The Indian philosophical tradition associate's religion with dignity of man, moral obligation, sympathy, non-violence, and social obligation. The concepts of dharma, ahimsa, and human dignity are ethically grounded and correspond to the human rights idea. On the other hand, some aspects of religious practice may come into conflict with modern concepts of equality and freedom. Concepts such as *dharma*, *ahimsa* and universal human worth provide ethical foundations that resonate with modern human-rights principles. However, traditional religious practices may also conflict with contemporary ideals of equality, freedom, and individual rights.²⁸

Ethics, Religion and Science:

The comprehension of nature by the human mind has been revolutionized by modern science, revealing the empirical structure of the mechanism of the universe, and this fact is beyond question. But the enterprise of science has a limit of its own; it is a tool of description, and not one of prescription. Actually, scientific inquiry does not speak of anything that ought to be. In order to overcome the gap between capability and responsibility, human beings need to move from the empirical realm to the conceptual realms of philosophy and theology. Scientific knowledge provides us with information regarding what is possible in a technological sense, ethics asks whether it is also permissible in a moral sense, religion may raise other questions, such as dignity, responsibility, stewardship and the meaning of life. Thus, it is said that science, religion and ethics meet in Western philosophy in the form of the question of how scientific knowledge should be used for human conduct without the reduction of moral values into empirical facts. Russell argues that science explains facts, while ethics concerns values; therefore, rational ethical reflection remains necessary for responsible scientific progress.²⁹

Ethics and Religion in the Contemporary World:

The current human world is marked by religious diversity, secularization, technological changes and globalization. All these circumstances make philosophical dialogue between ethics and religion quite extraordinary. It is often stated that three problems have to be avoided in the contemporary world- religious absolutism, ethical relativism and reductionism. Religious absolutism claims that belief in absolute superiority of one's religious interpretation leads to intolerance. Ethical relativism means that belief that all moral judgments are subjective weakens dedication to justice and dignity of humans. Reductionism holds that considering religion as superstition or ethics as obedience to religion ignores the complexity of human moral sphere. Philosophical approach must value moral religious traditions, but not at the expense of independent ethical reasoning.

It could be argued that religious traditions continue to provide humans with moral values like responsibility, compassion and justice, while secular ethics is based on reason, autonomy and universal moral principles. Gensler examines the relationship between morality and religion, including whether morality depends upon God and how ethics can be understood in religious and non-religious contexts.

Towards an Integrated Philosophy of Ethics and Religion:

A desegregated philosophy of ethics and religion views morality, human values, and spiritual beliefs as intensely interrelated. Rather than demanding blind obedience or dismissing faith, this framework bridges both fields through the following four different keys pillars – Human Dignity, Compassion, Freedom of Conscience and Responsible Action. (i) Human Dignity: It believes that ethical evaluation must respect the intrinsic

value of all people. (ii) Compassion: It maintains that moral principles must directly address and alleviate the suffering of others. (iii) Freedom of Conscience: It asserts that individuals must remain free to accept, reject, or reinterpret religious doctrines. (iv) Responsible Action: It affirms that both ethics and religion must prioritize real-world conduct over theoretical belief. In due course, however, the two combine into a blend of moral development with spirituality. Ethical transformation shapes a person's character, but the latter gives a deeper incentive to do that. Hence, by combining the two, morality is transformed into a practice of spiritual insight and unity of humankind.

Conclusion:

The connection between ethics, religion, spirituality, and moral philosophy is an essential question regarding human actions, character, and morally meaningful living in general. Religion and spirituality underlie ethics by grounding their moral beliefs on sacred stories, spiritual ideals, and ultimate existential problems. By doing so, they enable a person's inner transformation for a compassionate and just way of being and treating the Other. Through religious practices and virtues, it gives him/her the psychological motivation and social context to pursue the good life. On the other hand, moral philosophy brings critical thinking to the problem and assesses all moral concepts through rigorous argument and justification. The most well-founded philosophical perspective rejects the two extremes – belief in the necessity of divine commands for a good moral life and irrelevance of religion to it.

There is an extremely strong link between ethics and religion as philosophical disciplines focusing on human behavior, morality, obligations, virtues, and the sense of a good life. Religion provides its own moral code via notions such as God, revelations, holy scriptures, mercy, justice, love, and responsibility; meanwhile, philosophy questions and analyzes the rational aspect of those moral ideas. The philosophical examination of ethics and religion proves that morality should not be defined merely in terms of following religious commandments, since there is always a rational component in morality, and conscience, freedom, and social responsibility as well. In the end, ethics and religion can be beneficial for each other in providing a good life by promoting moral thinking, responsible behavior, mercy, justice, and virtuous life. Thus, one can say that both ethical and religious considerations go beyond theory and result in a practical philosophy focused on human happiness, dignity, and harmony. This way, humanity will build an ideal social structure based on truth and justice.

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