The Impact of Ethical Turn on Objectivity and Ethics

Ashia

Research Scholar

Department of English and Cultural Studies

Panjab University

Do humans act morally because they follow socially established laws and norms because of a routine of instilled behaviours, or because they embody a fear of sanction or both? In contrast, do people behave morally because they chose to do so due to a logical judgment, a transformative endeavour, or both? In other words, do they adhere to Kantian obligation ethics or Aristotelian virtue ethics? This problem has now evolved from a philosophical to an anthropological discussion. An 'ethical dilemma' challenges both ethical theories and applied ethics. When a person has to choose between two possible outcomes, no overarching moral standard can assist him in determining which choice is to be favoured. For instance, he must perform some duty for A and is obligated to do the same for B, but he cannot do both. The ethical theory addresses how multiple; seemingly, contradictory moral standards may lead our actions by distinguishing between prima facie duties and all things being equal obligations. The advancement of new technologies and advanced procedures creates ethical dilemmas, notably in the realm of biotechnology. This paper analyses and discusses the evolutions that gave birth to the late twentieth-century critical turn – or return – to ethics in literature. After the Aesthetes and Modernists abandoned the moral rules essential in Victorian fiction, literary morals went out of fashion in the first years of the 20th century. The victorian works had reclaimed a prominent position in the literature by the late 1970s, but it wasn't until deconstruction started to fade that literary criticism and theory openly accepted the ethical, embracing a reader-centred approach. This paper highlights the early proponents of the turn, including Satya P. Mohanty, Martha Nussbaum, and Emmanuel Levinas. (Dennisoff and Schaffer 226)

There is a continual conflict in ethics among societal framed methods and approaches that adhere to principles. According to rule-based ethical theories, moral codes of conduct must be followed regardless of the consequences, such as fulfilling a commitment, upholding justice, or obeying a word of God or the authority.

Ethical philosophies based on the principles are founded on the concept of utility (utilitarianism) or benevolence, which holds that the actual moral norm is the universal satisfaction of all individuals involved or the most considerable net equilibrium of good over evil.

Situation ethics is a type of ethics that is present in a given situation. Situation ethics is an example of the morality paradigm to ethical reasoning, in which an event is evaluated to be morally fair or unfair by examining the implications of decisions. It has been often stated that anthropologists have long disregarded ethics and morality, that it has occasionally been responded that anthropologists have never failed to investigate more norms. However, this claim can no longer be required since ethnography of moralities, and the anthropology of ethics became one of the discipline's fastest-growing areas. The most intriguing recent growth of this thriving sector is known as the Ethical Turn. (Davis and Womack 5)

If whatever "good" is so free of God's will, then there must be a God-independent norm that humans can likewise reach. And if "good" is just whatever God wills, then the issue is random - whether one wishes to obey all such orders regardless of their substance is an open question. If there is no supernatural norm to which we may defer, what decides what is ethical, and how do we judge it? The systematic endeavour to comprehend moral notions and defend moral principles and theories is known as ethical theory or theoretical ethics. An ethical shift would imply that moral judgments regarding the legitimacy of their ideas and the implications of their activities are increasingly being made in politics and art nowadays. The rule of ethics is not the dominion of moral judgments over artistic or political activity. The topic of literature's ethical power initially arose during the early 20th century of a contemporary English discipline, and it is a question that is still contested whenever the aim of that discipline is appropriately addressed.

The Ethical Turn differs from previous treatments of morality in that it assumes a more nuanced view of morality. The ethical shift broadens anthropology's attention beyond a notion of morality as socially imposed external restrictions on behaviour and methodologically by going beyond more value system comparison. Ethic 1.0 differs significantly from ethic 2.0. Morality in Ethic 1.0 consists of behavioural standards that obtain authority from society, and people simply accept the laws of society as their own. Thus, morality might be studied by examining how society enforces social rules rather than examining morality as a distinct phenomenon. Ethic 2.0 contradicts this concept. The Ethical Turn does not eliminate compliance with externally sanctioned standards from moral continuity but instead investigates morality in a broader spectrum of behaviour. It provides

more nuanced insights into processes of self-formation while also discussing the relation to the careful consideration of externally sanctioned rules.

For Ethic 1.0, if we watch movies from the 1980s and 1990s, one will see that the narratives share basic structural features. Heroes were revered in those days for great or daring actions. He is someone that people look up to, who can assist others and decide between right and wrong. He must survive and be honoured for his acts, but the villain must perish in the end due to his villainous and cruel crimes. So death is the only option for the villain, and it needs to be the worst possible outcome. For Ethic 2.0, one can pick a contemporary film that represents the notion of the Ethical Turn. In the 2015 film Drishyam, the protagonist murdered a boy for his unjust conduct towards the protagonists' daughter, but for the right reason and in self-defence. That film clearly distinguishes between what is 'right' and 'bad,' and it demonstrates that for a good cause, one should be prepared to do everything and go to any extent. It vividly depicts the desperate efforts taken by a middle-class man to keep his family out of trouble with the authorities when they commit an unforeseen crime. As seen in this film, categorizing people's behaviour in terms of morality is incorrect. It is not correct to categorize everything as right or evil or as grey or white. So one can see how Ethic 2.0 gives more holistic and effective into the moral and ethical processes.

Philosophers have worked hard to develop universally persuasive justifications for being humanitarian or egocentric. So yet, none have been successful. People can distinguish between logical and irrational behaviours concerning a specific objective once humans proclaim it. The question arises whether on what basis one can argue that there are reasonable and unreasonable goals. In what ways may a goal be irrational? The problem for those who trust in universal moral truth is to describe what kind of error someone else with a non-coinciding purpose would make. The difficulty is that critics may always claim that they don't care about the argument's premise, no matter what explanation one shows up with.

Satya P. Mohanty in his study of objectivity in ethics and aesthetics promotes such study through in his essay *Can Our Values Be Objective: On Ethics, Aesthetics and Progressive Politics*. Satya P. Mohanty poses the question: "Can we human beings be objective in our views and judgements about properties as goodness, justice or beauty?"(Mohanty 803). In his most well-known book, Satya P Mohanty highlighted the objectivity of ethics and moral ideals. His work in literary criticism and theory has been impacted by his bi-cultural upbringing and his dedication to viewing culture as "a field of moral inquiry." Although Satya Mohanty is occasionally dogmatic

in his critique of postmodern epistemology in *Literary Theory and the Claims of History*, he finally dismisses absolutism and relativism in support of cultural and moral heterogeneity. He is not scared to borrow a significant insight from postmodern thinkers, but he counters the scepticism (and its corollary, relativism) that he sees at the heart of postmodern thought by suggesting an alternative epistemology "postpositivist realism." "This "softened" positivism employs concepts such as "objectivity," "universalism," "reason," and objectively verifiable "truth," but it also acknowledges knowledge's'sknowledge's's dependency on social structures and conventions, and thus provides itself as antifoundationalist, nonessentialist, and unconcerned with transcendence. (Adams 172)

> Our conceptions of objectivity and error are dialectically related. Both conceptions are the product of good inquiry, inquiry that is necessarily both theoretical and empirical. The analysis of error—of the distorting role played by pernicious social ideologies for instance, or the limitations of certain methodological approaches—is unavoidably empirical, even while it involves theoretical considerations. Similarly, the analysis of what works, what is epistemically productive and useful, is also simultaneously empirical and theoretical. (Mohanty 804)

According to Mohanty's *Literary Theory and the Claim of History*, there is a need to focus on the role of mistakes in human research. He also believes that a nuanced knowledge of mistake depends on the depth of our comprehension of its sources and causes and the variety of shapes it takes in diverse topics. He also argues that objectivity is a goal that may be achieved since values frequently refer to facts and qualities that exist irrespective of our opinions. According to him, some moral and aesthetic characteristics, such as goodness, justice, and equality, are complicated properties, and we might be correct or wrong in our attempts to identify and comprehend such properties.

> To some readers, the claim that objectivity is possible in ethical and political matters may be easy to grant, but the realm of aesthetic value would appear to be fundamentally different. In the aesthetic sphere, in our judgments about colors and flavors and landscapes and poems, it would seem, to argue for objectivity is to ignore the genuine variety there is in individual and group tastes. It might even be said that a realist who argues for the possibility of objective judgment in aesthetic matters will be blind to the role pernicious social ideologies play in shaping our notions of beauty and ugliness, what pleases and what repels. (Mohanty 820)

Mohanty uses Michel Foucault's argument with Noam Chomsky in 1971 to illustrate the postmodernist concept of mistake. All knowledge, according to Foucault, is socially placed, and it is impossible to attain the type of objectivity that is interpreted as neutrality as ideological or conceptual innocence. According to Focault, human nature might not always exist because what society follows is culture or class particular. There is no such thing as human nature in his mind. In addition, understanding of human nature, if it existed, would never have been accurate or objective since everything we say about human behaviour is ideological. (Mohanty 807). Focault also says "The proletariat does not wage war against the ruling class because it considers such a war to be just. The proletariat makes war . . . because for the first time in history it wants to take power. And because it will overthrow the power of the ruling class it considers such a war to be just. . . . One makes war to win, not because it is just" (Mohanty 808). Thus there is bourgeois justice and proletarian justice, with no objective conception of justice.
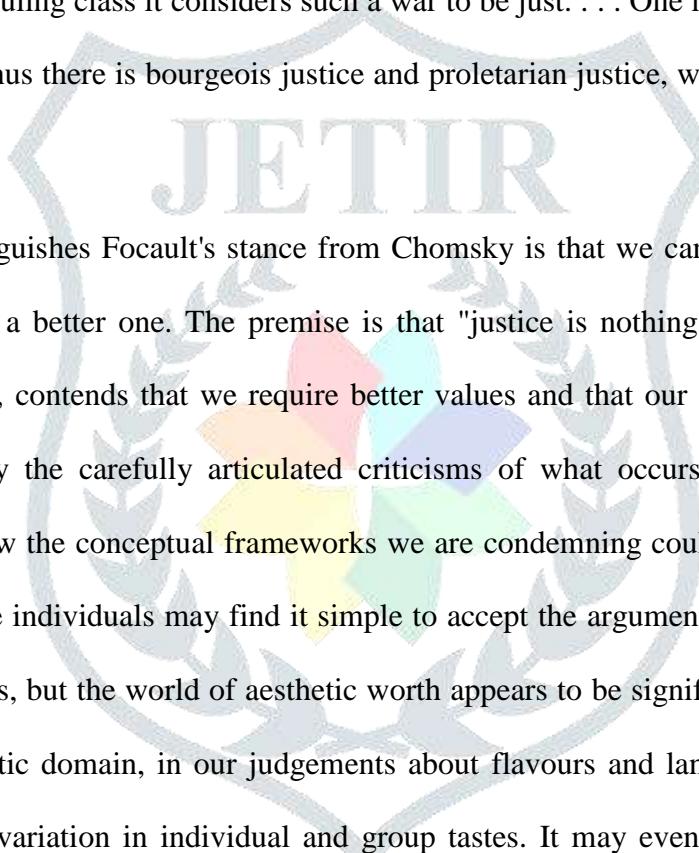
The point that distinguishes Focault's stance from Chomsky is that we cannot discriminate between the existing idea of justice and a better one. The premise is that "justice is nothing more than a tool of power." Chomsky, on the other side, contends that we require better values and that our social troubles are sometimes better achieved by not only the carefully articulated criticisms of what occurs but also through cautiously elucidated imaginings of how the conceptual frameworks we are condemning could be different or better, more compassionate or just. Some individuals may find it simple to accept the argument that objectivity is feasible in ethical and political concerns, but the world of aesthetic worth appears to be significantly different. To advocate for objectivity in the aesthetic domain, in our judgements about flavours and landscapes and poetry, it would appear, is to deny the true variation in individual and group tastes. It may even be argued that a realist who advocates for the feasibility of objective judgment in aesthetic issues is oblivious to the influence that harmful societal beliefs play in moulding our perceptions of beauty and ugliness, what pleases and what repels.

This debate of "objectivity" is not in the correct terms to be beneficial because the underlying presupposition is that perfectly provable moral value may exist outside of philosophical context. This is just not right. Some philosophers rightly conclude that the world is unknowable if only complete and certain information is considered. However, some frequently conclude that a lack of clarity indicates a lack of understanding. This is false because knowledge never provides perfect assurance if it is awareness of tautology. "Objective moral values" are a logical absurdity since the value is never objective: when will intellectuals catch up to

mathematicians? As it is already stated at the outset of this debate, value is inherently subjective. Value can never be stated in a meaningless vacuum, as axioms may. The value must be subjective - it must be personal!

Similarly, Martha Craven Nussbaum is labelled as a "philosopher of emotions," She has talked about humiliation, revulsion, passion, sex, love, compassion, and rage, among other topics. According to her, emotions have ethical significance, and we are incorrect to exclude them from the realm of philosophical relevance. She readjusted the meaning of love, friendship, and human existence. She discusses the moral problems that everyone faces on a lesser or larger scale. To comprehend sufferings and those sentiments and emotions that inevitably lead to compassionate action, Nussbaum was heavily affected by Greek and Classical writings, particularly Greek tragedies. She also discussed Aristotle, Antigone, Creon, and Sophocle. Aristotle, according to Nussbaum, describes compassion as a painful feeling that necessitates evaluative judgment. Nussbaum also disagrees with Stoics and Immanuel Kant, who argue that there is no place for emotion in ethics. They believe that ethics is about controlling what we can control. (Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 27)

Nussbaum is deeply concerned with moral education; hence, a conceptual space, recognising that culture may affect our feelings without being the primary shaping power, is crucial to her theory of emotions. Nussbaum hopes that the notion of social construction would lead to a greater appreciation for space and freedom. And, certainly, individuals demonstrate values and attitudes regularly that emotions are not simply illogical impulses. However, they also contain cognitive content - moulding their emotional content, which is especially obvious when adults seek to control their children's growing emotions. (197)

Martha Nussbaum replies to Richard A. Posner's attack on the interpretive validity and intellectual integrity of ethical criticism in her book *Exactly and Responsibly*. Relying on Henry James' view that the writer is always an ethical and political being in the process of "placing" things "exactly and responsibly," According to Nussbaum, the attraction of aesthetic detachment, which Posner displays as a monarch of redeeming grace, is not free of political motive. Richard Posner appears to criticize Henry Jame's notion in his article " "Against Ethical Criticism." Like Oscar Wilde, he believes that literary works of art are neither "moral or immoral" but rather "good or poorly written." However, Martha contends that James believes that literary art may be ethical and that literary artworks can legitimately evoke ethical concepts. (Davis and Womack 74)

Nussbaum reflects on the fact that there is a great space for transcendence in our ordinary humanity, but this transcendence is of a human sort and it can be reached by cultivating human intellectual and emotive capacities by aid of the humanities:

> For I believe it is no accident at all that both James and Proust, apparently independently, compare excellent literary works to angels that soar above dullness and obtuseness of the everyday, offering their readers a glimpse of a more compassionate, subtler, more responsive, more richly human world. That is a view about transcendence. And I believe that it is extremely important to make the aspiration to that sort of transcendence central to a picture of the complete human good. There is so much to do in this area of human transcending (which I imagine also as a transcending by a descent, delving more deeply into oneself and one's humanity, and becoming deeper and more spacious as a result) that if one really pursued that aim well and fully I suspect that there would be little time left to look about for any other sort. (Nussbaum, *In love's Knowledge,* 379)

Her work is fully focused on ethical and political issues, but she emphasizes over and again that this is not the only valid method to approach literature. She does not think that ethical and political concerns are non-negotiable, in the sense that every human being should consider them in some way. She asserts that to investigate Aristotelian ethical views, one must turn to texts in which the situation for that kind of rational thought is created out strongly and compellingly, which cannot be done if we are misled by works written in the abstract style typical of most contemporary moral theory. Here she embodies the protagonist Maggie Verver, whose persona Nussbaum depicted to express ideas on particularity, emotions, and sensitivity. Posner believes that this story and the protagonist Maggie Nussbaum provided some basic lessons on how to keep a marriage together. Nussbaum, on the other hand, clarified that she meant that good choice is so specific that it is impossible to predict which choice is perfect in advance. (78)

Nussbaum also proposed that people should turn to literature for illumination. In this scene, she exemplifies Charles Dickens' classic *Hard Times*. Hard Times is a good novel for Posner because of its funny character Mr Bounderby. However, for Nussbaum, the struggle of the poor and the middle class is central. Dickens' books, according to Nussbaum, arouse compassion for the plight of the impoverished. According to Posner, moral categories should not be applied to artworks, and only aesthetic criteria are important. However,

according to Nussbaum, aesthetic items should be assessed entirely or mostly based on moral norms or ideals. Realist literature, according to her, may play a role in moral teaching. (81)

> Take the case of pornography. There may occasionally be a pornographic novel that has aesthetic interest: this may be true, for example, of Sade. But I think this is so, insofar as it is, only because the novels of Sade challenge and. rebut our usual expectations about compassion in a highly disturbing way: they do not just fail to exhibit compassion; they carry on an argument with the reader that this is a world in which compassion cannot be found. (86)

Therefore, to make her point strong Nussbaum take an example of Pornography. For her Pornographic novel can give an aesthetic interest to some but they do fail to exhibit compassion. She implies that if the novels are ethically sound, they will have a positive impact. Moreover, she adds out that she does not intend to spend far more time reading books, but she merely says that reading can have beneficial effects if one reads with total engagement and not just as a painful chore. So, according to Nussbaum, only works that regard humans as persons, rather than mere animals or things, are aesthetically attractive, and thus this quality is moral. She also adds that she is not disputing that specific works may have aesthetic characteristics and no ethical significance. She further adds that she is not attacking or supporting anybody here but merely wishes to point out that her works should be interpreted with moral qualities as one of their salient properties in mind.

The last philosopher is Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas' point of view is distinct in that he does not provide a set of ethical rules. Levinas has started a massive endeavour to demonstrate how all Western philosophy has converged on certain common elements that have major implications for ethical regulation. The whole Western philosophy has been attempting to totalize the dilemma of self and others. According to Levinas, totalization refers to the disappearance, elimination, or subsumption of the self. In other words, Western philosophy centralizes and totalizes itself in the relationship between self and other.

> 'We are all responsible for everyone else - but I am more responsible than
>
> all the others.' This remark, spoken by Alyosha Karamazov in The Brothers
>
> Karamazov, is one Levinas is fond of quoting. It is a neat indication of the
>
> nature of a thought that, in the words of Jacques Derrida, 'can make us
>
> tremble' . Its challenge is an excessive one: a mode of being and saying

where I am endlessly obligated to the Other, a multiplicity in being which

refuses totalization and takes form instead as fraternity and discourse, an

ethical relation which forever precedes and exceeds the egoism and tyranny

of ontology. (Levinas 8)

The main threads of Emmanuel Levinas' ethical theory, developed in his philosophical works *Totality and Infinity* (1969) and *Otherwise than Being* or *Beyond Essence* (1998), inform that ethics necessitate enlightenment of being natural, which he defines in terms of transcendence of animality to the human. This seeming devaluing of the nonhuman appears to rule out the formation of Levinasian environmental ethics. A deconstructive reading of Levinas, on the other hand, reveals a subtext that disrupts the major threads of his argument against the inclusion of nonhuman beings in ethics. The Other/other is central to Emmanuel Levinas' ethics. He contends that we're in an asymmetrical connection with our neighbours, which predisposes us to moral behaviour even until we have awareness or choice. In face-to-face contact, our neighbour's infinite and alterity are exposed, which is resistant to the ontological grasp and requires response. Humanity is also freed through this relationship, as our solipsistic all-for-myself has become a being-for-the-other. Moreover, the I is irreplaceable, making each of us morally accountable for our neighbour, even to the extent of being responsible for his monetary sorrow. (Davy 39)

Levinas, well known as a philosopher of radical alterity, famously contends that Heidegger erroneously prioritizes ontology above ethics and provides a stifling explanation of being that leaves no possibility for what is different. His critique of Heidegger may also be characterized in his opposition to the latter's view of Dasein as first and primarily a member of a certain socio-historical society. This not only provides a fresh take on Levinas' well-known—and maybe even worn—arguments against Heidegger, but it also tackles what can be described as a crucial concept underlying the latter's problematic politics. Heidegger argues against the concept of a solitary subject for whom the existence of other human beings is unimportant. In terms of *Being and Time*, Dasein is always already Mitsein: the human being is born into an essentially social world. (Bax 381)

This 'first philosophy,' which gives credence to the revelation of the Infinite, has significant implications for the character of philosophical discourse. Philosophical discourse is no longer concerned with knowledge management is the process of thematization, which culminates in self-presence. Speech is called into question because it is the site of a face-to-face encounter wherein the Infinite manifests itself in its absolute difference.

The priority of the other's command implies that language is not merely performed inside consciousness, as Levinas believes it eventually stays in both Husserl and Heidegger, where it is still tied to the process of understanding. Language, according to Levinas, conditions rational cognition, and the fundamental face-to-face of language creates reason itself. Since the initial connotation is the infinity of the intellect that reveals itself in the face, the reason exists in language. Society and signification, according to Levinas, come before the impersonal frameworks of knowledge and reason. (Levinas 12)

The problem of the subject-Object link, which occurs in current debates of knowledge theory, is an extension of antiquity's obsession with the issue of truth. However, it is no longer accepted that the agent of knowledge holds a specific place in the hierarchy of entities that comprise the cosmos. The individual existent who seeks the truth is opposed to being as such. Following that, the individual is associated with the topic of knowledge or awareness. Ontology and subject-object relation theory share a concept of truth as expressible content, independent of the specific structure disclosed by that content. As a result, the truth can be expressed in words; yet, the fundamental purpose of truth, on which such representation is based, is to symbolize an interior meaning of a solitary mind that appeals to no interlocutor. (66)

> To be or not to be - is that the question? Is it the first and final question?
>
> Does being human consist in forcing oneself to be and does the under-
>
> standing of the meaning of being - the semantics of the verb to be -
>
> represent the first philosophy required by a consciousness which from the
>
> first would be knowledge and representation conserving its assurance in
>
> being-for-death, asserting itself as the lucidity of a thought thinking itself
>
> right through, even unto death and which, even in its finitude - already or
>
> still an unquestioned mauvaise conscience as regards its right to be - is either
>
> anguished or heroic in the precariousness of its finitude? (86)

Responsibility for one neighbour dates back before our independence in an immeasurable history, an unrepresentable past that was never present and is older than a sense of self. Duty for the neighbour, the other man, the stranger or sojourner, nothing in the strictly ontological order ties us - nothing in the sequence of the thing, the something, number, or causation. It is a hostage's duty, which may be taken to the point of being

replaced for the other person, and it necessitates an endless submission of subjectivity. "Fear for the Other, fear

for the other man's death, is my fear, but is in no way an individual's taking fright." (90)

Works Cited

Chantal Bax1 "Otherwise than Being-with: Levinas on Heidegger and Community", June 2017, pp 381-400, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/s10746-017-9432-x.pdf

Davis, Todd F and Womack Kenneth. *Mapping The Ethical Turn : A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*. The University Press of Virginia, 2001.

David, Adams.'' Review of Literary Theory and the claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics, by Satya P. Mohanty'' vol. 31, 1997,. pp 260 , https://muse.jhu.edu/article/29477

Davy, Jnae " An Other Face Of Ethics In Levinas Barbara Jane " vol 12, Issue 1, 2007 , pp 39-66, http://gunkelweb.com/environment-ethics/texts/other_face_ethics.pdf

Denisoff, Dennis and Schaffer, Talia, editors. *The Routledge Companion To Victorian Literature.* Routledge, 2020.

Levinas, Emmanuel. *The Levinas Reader. Basil Blackwell, 1989.*

Mohanty, Satya P "Can Our Values Be Objective? On Ethics, Aesthetics, and Progressive Politics" vol. 32, Number 4, Autumn 2001, pp. 803-833, http://fmsproject.cornell.edu/Mohanty_Can_Our_Values.pdf

Nussbaum, Martha.*Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

---. *In Love's Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.