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**The Decline of Morality in The Western World From
Pre-Enlightenment to Post-Truth Implications**

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Dedication

*I ardently devote my work to the memory of all who have
fallen victim to the collapse of Western morality.*

*Every individual, household, society, and nation now is
bearing its burdens. And particularly to Gaza and all
Palestinian people, this is for you, and what the world owes
you still.*

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Abstract

In light of moral uncertainties, this paper studies the transformation of Western morality and its social implications from perpetual certitude to post-truth ramifications. By tracing the philosophical moral thought, morality was once grounded in religious teachings. However, with the Enlightenment skepticism and rejection of religion, moral understandings were driven by individual rationalism. The moral decline occurred as a result of dismissing moral universality in favor of man, leading to moral autonomy, relativism, and pluralism. This decline is reflected in the social cultural and legal changes. While individualism has affected social bounds and asserts isolation; consumerism and technology has enforced materialistic values, loss of meaning, and uncertainties. Therefore. This work proposes a reorientation toward religious morality, asserting moral cohesion and social stability both rooted in the certainty and clarity of morality.

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General Introduction

Morality, once regarded as the highest monarchy of human behavior, no longer holds its former weight within Western societies. What used to be certain within divine truths and communal understanding has now become a confused negotiable and often distorted concept. The transformation of Western morality, from its theologically grounded beginnings to its postmodern unraveling, is not merely an intellectual progression, but a civilizational shift which shaped, and continues to shape, the very fabric of societies. This research is an attempt to trace that shift, understand its roots, and reflect on its consequences.

From the early centuries, morality in the West was preserved within a higher moral authority. It was not human-made, but divinely revealed, universal in its application, and deeply embedded in social and legal structures. This structure, held by religious foundations and natural law theory sustained the society. Within it, right and wrong were not speculative positions, but lived truths. Morality was certain, absolute, and enduring. It aligned with purpose, and meaning was drawn from its clarity.

However, this sense of moral order was gradually challenged. The Enlightenment, a period marked by human rationality and the rejection of external authorities, gave rise to an entirely different moral foundations. While the era contributed to intellectual progress, it also displaced morality from its divine origin and placed it into human rationality. Thinkers such as Kant, Hume, and Bentham sought to rebuild ethical systems based on reason, sentiment, or

utility. Morality was no longer given but it had to be constructed. In doing so, it became vulnerable to divergence, interpretation, and eventually, moral ambiguity.

What followed was not stability, but further rupture. Postmodern thought broke away even from the Enlightenment's attempt to replace God with reason. It dismissed the idea of universal morality altogether, advocating instead for moral pluralism and cultural relativism. Under this lens, morality became contextual and subjective, rooted in individual experience rather than any binding truth. The very concept of moral objectivity was cast aside in favor of multiplicity and fluidity. What one believes to be right is no longer judged by its moral content, but by the personal, emotional, or cultural lens through which it is viewed.

This transformation did not remain confined to philosophy. It spilled into the societal, legal, and cultural realms. Laws shifted to accommodate personal preference. Social bonds weakened under radical individualism. Consumerism and technology became the new centers of value. And with it, morality lost its role, not only as a guide, but as a grounded reference to moral conduct. The Western society, in particular, is living in a culture which often prioritizes feeling over fact, liberty over virtue, and self-expression over self-restraint. The outcome is not moral progress, but a deep sense of uncertainty.

Accordingly, this study addresses both the intellectual and social implications of Western morality's decline. Although no fixed definition is provided for terms like morality, ethics, and decline; this work seeks to explore how the distinction between right and wrong has blurred. From hierarchical,

absolute sources to man-made invented morality, regardless of its very definition. It follows the historical and philosophical roots of this shift across three major phases: the Pre-Enlightenment grounding of morality in religion and natural law; the Enlightenment's reliance on reason and autonomy; and the postmodern detachment from moral universality. This thread is not only mapped through thought, but through its reflections in society notably in law, culture, and everyday life.

The second chapter further reflects on the cultural, political, and legal outcomes of this philosophical transformation. It explores how moral fragmentation has produced not just relativism, but social instability, as well, where shared values collapse, and public morality becomes increasingly dictated by trends, emotions, and ideologies. Post-truth culture, in particular, marks a critical point where truth itself is contested, and morality reduced to preference or opinion.

Moreover, this research does not only trace the decline but it questions what is lost when morality becomes uncertain. At its core, it argues that a society without a coherent moral foundation is vulnerable to isolation, confusion, and collapse. The absence of shared moral truths leads not to freedom from restrictions, but to detachment. And while modernity claimed to liberate man from rigid structures, it also removed the very source of moral clarity.

Therefore, this study proposes that a return to transcendent, religious moral grounding is not only relevant, but necessary. A moral code rooted in absolute divine law and universal moral understanding offers coherence and clarity. Hence, unity and social stability will be restrained through moral responsibility

and accountability. To guide this inquiry, a set of research questions are proposed, mainly

- How did Western foundation moral philosophy shift from the certainty of religious and natural law foundations to relativistic and post-truth uncertain ethics?
- How did this philosophical transformation is reflected in social, culture, and legal spheres?
- In what ways has the absence of moral certainty affected both social and individual's moral judgement and responsibility?
- How does the return to religious morality break the restrictions of man-made morality and offer a solution to the current moral confusion?

Ultimately, this dissertation does not seek to romanticize the past, nor reject the intellectual contributions of modernity. It rather reflects on what has been lost in the process, and whether clarity can still be reclaimed in a time that seems to resist a common ground to judge morality.

Chapter One

The Western Foundations of Morality

1.1. Introduction

The opening chapter of this dissertation explores the understanding of morality in western world, within Pre-Enlightenment frameworks to the eventual postmodern fragmentation. Western morality once shifted from religious foundation to rational, autonomous and secular truths, during the age of reason. This shift, however, was marked by various philosophical debates which eventually failed to replace the previous absolutes with one universal framework. Postmodern era, on the other hand, undermines these efforts by proclaiming diverse moral truths rooted in subjective cultural multiplicity. This chapter therefore traces down the transformation of morality from certainty to uncertainty within the Western society.

1.2. Pre-Enlightenment Morality

The Pre-Enlightenment era long lasted from the middle ages to the 17th century. The Western European world was subjected to feudal order. The society was hierarchically structured and religion was central within this structure. Meanwhile, the educational and intellectual system operated mainly under Scholasticism; a medieval theological philosophy rooted in Aristotle's teachings and Catholic Christianity. Therefore, religious dogma and monarchical rule formed law, education, and social norms. The moral paradigm, however, was planted in religious doctrine and nature law theory. Through divine command and spiritual accountability, religion provided a firm basis for morality; whereas, natural law offered a logical reasoning to moral truths as inherent in the natural order. Their alignment created a coherent ethical framework. Morality was reflected as an objective and an absolute concept. Right and wrong were judged by God and nature, not by personal preference. Religious foundation and natural law functioned together to create a period of moral certainty and social stability.

1.2.1. Religious Foundation of Morality:

Throughout human history, the universal presence of religion and systems of belief has remained constant, profoundly influencing human society and ideology. Religion was not only rules and rituals rather it functioned as social practices that addressed social concerns. Karen Armstrong in *The History of God* (1993) explored the evolution of religious beliefs and how the concept of God shaped the moral system throughout different civilizations. The Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are practically notable for grounding ethics and social frameworks.

Such groundings are reflected in these religions' divine revelations. For instance, the 'Ten Commandments', in the Jewish tradition provide ethical guidelines that tackle virtue and fairness. The prohibition against stealing "you shall not steal" (Exodus 20:14) teaches honest living and respect for other people's property. The New Testament in Christianity, on the other hand, emphasizes harmony and compassion. Hence, the care for others is embodied in its teachings, such as "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22; 39). Likewise, the Islamic law, known as Sharia, based on the Qur'an, the divine revelation, and Sunnah (Hadith), articulates moral obligations and social responsibilities. One clear projection of the Quranic guidance on ethics and justice is seen in "give full measure and weight, in justice, and do not deprive people of their due" (Qur'an 11; 85). This verse commands honesty in trade, integrity in economic transactions, and a set of moral obligations. Considerably, religion and belief systems preached for a complete ethical framework and human conduct within the societies.

In Pre-Enlightenment times, Western societies regarded religion as the ultimate source of morality. Moral values and ethical precepts were deeply rooted in religious teachings, fostering social stability. The Judeo-

Christian tradition is the shared religious, moral, and cultural heritage of Christianity and Judaism. This tradition was not only the enforcer of faith but also the moral and ethical guide to public norms of Western society as well as individual life. The dependency on religion created a clear and one-sourced moral system. Alasdair MacIntyre considers that "the pre-modern moral order was supported by a belief in a teleological universe governed by divine law that upheld a clear sense of purpose and moral duty" (55). The shared conviction was that the universe had a particular purpose, instituted by God's law. This common faith gave people a strong sense of their purpose in life and a clear sense of what is right and wrong. In consequence, following God's law was the norm, and religious morality was embodied by two major elements notably divine command as well as sin and accountability.

The vital principle in religious morality of the pre-modern order was the Divine Command Theory. It posits that moral judgment is conditioned to God's law. In other words, "Divine Command Theory includes the claim that morality is ultimately based on the commands or character of God and that the morally right action is the one that God commands or requires" (Austin). The deeds which comply with the divine command are ethically correct; and are ethically incorrect if God forbids them. Accordingly, right and wrong are seen as a reflection of divine wisdom rather than subjective preferences. Hence, this theory articulates "objectivity, universality, and normality of morality" (Lee and Evans qt in Jakobsen 2). The essential understanding sustained practicing morality as a normal thing to conduct and an objective thing to judge.

Besides, the divine command theory comprised abstracting virtues exclusively from one supreme source regardless of the religion. As Evans resolved "divine command theory may not need Christology, it could

include it" (ibid 4). The hierarchy maintained in this aspect ensured moral absolutism and unified principles. If the divine law is the only judge of wrong and right then no two people will disagree on what is ethical (Austin). Furthermore, disobedience was not preserved only as unethical behavior or antisocial but as a violation of religious law. Therefore, it provided a clear authoritative source for moral seriousness, drawing a strong connection between God and morality.

On the other hand, sin and accountability fundamentally structured moral thought. The notion of disobeying God made actions not simply harmful but sinful, requiring repentance. Similarly, the religious belief of the afterlife and eternal fate, Heaven and Hell, as in "heaven for the faithful and an underground hell for the wicked" (Schiano 5), upheld a strong sense of accountability on one's moral decisions "the internal judgment proceeds according to man attitude" (Catholic Encyclopedia). These doctrines imbued moral choices with profound significant seriousness. As Sierra Schiano demonstrated

The idea of a second judgment, followed by a second death for the wicked, is perplexing, but it may have served to reinforce the Christian emphasis on morality. Given this worldview, the risks involved in doing wrong and the need to purify one's soul are compounded, since divine retribution comes not only in the distant future but also immediately after death. Despite all the contradictions, the Judeo-Christian belief in the afterlife is deeply concerned with the moral fiber of the soul (7).

Morality was more than mere convenience or social agreement; it was not negotiable but a life-long commitment. The risks of conducting wrong deeds emphasized moral responsibility. In addition, this spiritual discipline strengthened embodying morality with conviction and will.

Accordingly, the divine command theory and the doctrine of sin and accountability had grounded the Pre-Enlightenment morality. Where both

individuals and collective norms had little doubt distinguishing right from wrong. This moral structure was clearly and significantly conducted; no two people will disagree on what is moral. God's law, as a source of morals, and the irreversible eternal consequences of immorality enforced the sense of personal moral responsibility. Hence, accountability at that time relied on people's awareness of the afterlife, as articulated, "it is clear that Christians and Jews also believe that salvation and damnation are determined solely by an individual's righteousness" (Schiano 8).

Furthermore, the collective norms also aligned with religious teaching of what was considered good and bad, emphasizing the connection between God and morals within societal standards. Thus, the religious groundings established absolutism and objectivity of morality. Nevertheless, morality was also approached by natural understanding and reason, with a logical comprehension and absolutism.

1.2.2. Nature Law Theory:

In the Pre-Enlightenment Western world, Nature Law Theory provided a widely accepted moral framework. Morality was grounded on religious foundations, as mentioned. Nevertheless, all human exposition to the divine revelation and its commandment was not assured. In other words, Natural moral theory served as a bridge between divine order, human reason, and societal norms. Nature law philosophy was nothing novel during medieval times. It originated from the ancient Greek philosophy tradition of nature morals. As Aafiza Asif defined Greek natural law as "a system of justice held to be common to all humans and derived from nature rather than from the rules of society. Aristotle held the view that what was "just by law" was not always "just by nature". Simply put, natural law is universal and unchanging" (Asif). Stoics developed this philosophy in conformity with the reason '*logos*' inherited in human nature to a universal

moral order. Nature law articulated that moral principles are inherent in nature and understood through reason, rather than human-made law or religious doctrines.

However, with Christianity, Natural law was integrated into the theological framework. Jean Porter in her book *Nature and Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* noted that the most systematic Christian Nature Law framework was structured by the theologian S.t Thomas Aquinas. He synthesized Aristotelian and Stoic philosophy with theology, emphasizing that moral human reason is able to abstract moral truth from nature which is ultimately the will of God in his creation. As stated that "Thomas was the first theologian to distinguish with great clarity between theology and philosophy" (Elders 528). He demonstrated that theology drives its principles from divine revelation relying on faith. Meanwhile, philosophy is grounded in reason and acquiring knowledge through logical analysis and evident insights. Leo J. Elders in *Faith and Reason: The Synthesis of St. Thomas Aquinas* detailed how S.t Aquinas harmonized philosophy and theology. The condition of this alignment was "if philosophy tells us something contrary to the faith, it is no longer true philosophy, but error, and the result of defective reasoning. Thus it is possible to refute such errors based on philosophical principles" (ibid 538). Essentially, the true moral knowledge embodied in nature cannot contradict divine truth. As a result, this implantation of Thomas Aquinas introduced the Nature Law Theory.

Natural law posited that certain moral truths could be discerned through human reason and were evident in the natural world. Reason itself is applied to philosophy; it can be applied to theology in the same manner. "Western theology had tended to over-emphasise the importance of rationality ever since Thomas Aquinas" (Armstrong 151). Rationality and

the use of reason are effective in simplifying the delivery of God's commandments comprehensively. Therefore, moral conduct is clear and valid; "Reason has a positive role in theology and is essential for determining our moral duties" (ibid 532). The Nature Law theory of this period was founded on Christian theology. The moral principle could be understood from nature and God's revelation which in itself, this understanding is the will of God. Both religious foundations and the natural law theory of morality complemented one another. Neither faith nor reason precluded the other. Fundamentally, reason and faith are complementary regarding morality.

Accordingly, Nature Law morality embodied objectivity and absolutism; as Jean Porter elaborated "human morality in all its diverse forms reflects the goodness of the human creature, and as such it is an expression of God's will that creatures should exist and flourish—whatever we are to say more specifically about the substance of particular moralities"(Honer 104). She acknowledges that morality reflects the goodness of humanity and expresses God's will. This perspective assimilated nature law theory with Christian theological principles, demonstrating the rational discernibility and theological significance of morality. In this context, Moral order remained unchangeable within the shared belief and natural law theory reinforced its absolutism; "morality itself must then be absolute; it must cause the order of values to be terminated and at the same time grounded in a supreme value and good" (Rommen 128).

Furthermore, this moral order was legalized as a universal system directed to all humankind. In other words "natural law discourse concerns, at its core, the existence of God-given universal principles which God revealed to humankind at creation" (Doe 12). God provides every human

with the capacity to understand right and wrong throughout his creation. Natural law theory served as the moral and legal system of Western society. Likewise, morality was approached with both faith and rationality, providing a common ground for meaningful discussions on moral concerns

1.2.3. Moral Certainty:

Moral principles have been perceived as absolute, characterized by clear distinctions between right and wrong. This viewpoint was deeply rooted in the belief of morality derived from divine will and natural law, within Western society before the Enlightenment. This moral framework which left little room for ambiguity stabilized moral clarity and objectivity. People knew the source of morality, the reason it mattered, and the expectations preached. Thus, the society upheld a concept of moral certainty.

Certainty as defined in the Cambridge Dictionary refers to "the state of being completely confident or not doubting something". It carries the definitive state of no doubt at all. Likewise in linguistics, certainty is associated with high probability including "modal adverbs of certainty generally express a meaning towards the high probability extreme" (Dang and Zhang 71). Alternatively, philosophy considers that "Certainty consists of a valuable cognitive standing, which is often seen as an ideal" (Belkoniene). The philosophical context articulates that certainty should consist of no reasonable justification for doubt. This perspective aligns with the meaning of the term and its use, as certainty highlights a definitive opinion.

However, certainty regarding morals was embodied in the "confined moral code". Established in religious foundation and nature law theory, this code provided society with undoubted truths. Karen Armstrong articulated

that the divine authority gave moral values legitimacy. It grounded society in a sense of certainty (151). Preserved in higher power, right and wrong were not subjective or situational but objective and definitive. In other words, "in the Middle Ages, this was organized through authorities. Orientation towards the Bible and the interpretations of the Church Fathers provided a lot of certainty"(Berentzen). Essentially, religion offered certainty by assuring that things were held objectively and free from doubtful negotiation.

Additionally, natural law theory suggests that certain moral truths are accessible through human reason and are evident in the natural world. It further reinforced the notion of moral monopoly. Alongside its presupposition to divine law, natural law theory embodied moral certainty within the absolute, in other words, "the order in which divine providence proceeds does not take away from things what is natural for them, but God takes care of each thing according to its nature"(Elders 529). Since it is maintained within both nature and God's will to conduct goodness then it is definite. Accordingly, what is right and why are constrained sets of norms, reflecting moral certainty in the Western society at that time.

Nevertheless, despite its internal coherence, the moral structure of the Pre-Enlightenment era was bound to institutional authority notably the Church. This authority did not maintain only the role of moral guardian and enforcer but weaved ethical obedience with institutional control. The absolutism constraint eventually evoked upcoming upheavals claiming both liberation and reformation of the ruling traditions. Moreover, the end of the era was marked by particular movements, such as the Renaissance and the Scientific Revolution. The Renaissance restored humanistic exploration; while the scientific revolution shifted the intellectual cosmos. Therefore, the seeds of moral redefinition were planted for the enlightenment to harvest.

1.3. The Enlightenment and Age of Reason

The Enlightenment, also known as the Age of Reason was a period from the 17th to the 18th century, which marked the end medieval era. The fundamental intellectual shift accrued as a rejection of the old traditions authorities which were deemed impediments. It gave rise to new models of systems, philosophies, science, and ethics; more specifically "the Enlightenment worldview, the prestige of natural science played a key role in setting people free. Achievements in mathematics, physics, and astronomy allowed humans to dominate nature, which formerly had dominated them" (Christian 126). The thinkers of that era claimed that the true and only source of any perceived knowledge that of rational and empiric approaches. This knowledge included various systems of ethics which were produced at that time. The enlightenment movement of liberation from the inherited regime and doctrine introduced new faith in reason rather than divine revelation. Therefore, the moral certainty subjected to the supreme source of Western society was grounded in individual moral truths. Rational autonomy replaced God's commandments; while nature and reason excluded faith with an emphasis on the freedom of individual intellectual competence. This shift gave birth to moral autonomy, secularization, liberalism, and individualism, as it shattered the fragment of shared ethical order and blurred the unified clarifies. That is to say "the Enlightenment began and ended with the assumption that human liberty ought to be cut away from the moral order, never integrated meaningfully with it" (ibid).

1.3.1. Rationalism Challenging Traditional Morality

The Enlightenment brought a profound transformation in the relationship between religion-based morality and reason. This era

witnessed numerous scientific advancements in mathematics and physics, such as Newton's laws of motion, offering an explanation of the universe's dynamics. The old tradition of viewing the world had been questioned; by which "applying reason to nature and human beings" (Christians 126). The effective implementation of reason in any question upheld a strong faith in science over metaphysics. Thus, rationalism became a core principle of knowledge and belief. Many Enlightenment philosophers including Rene Descartes, Voltaire, and Immanuel Kant championed critical thinking, deep understanding, and logical decision making. They also approached morality with pure rational thinking while questioning the traditional moral foundations. To put it differently, "if it was possible to discover universal laws that governed the physical workings of the universe, the same, they concluded, applied to the world of morality" (The Enlightenment). Accordingly, the rational intellectual movement embraced radical challenges, ultimately reshaping previous moral principles.

One of the significant thinkers of the Age of Reason was Rene Descartes. The first philosopher and scientist to break through the traditional Scholastic Aristotle philosophy was Descartes; referring to Descartes as the "Father of Modern Philosophy, This title is justified due both to his break with the traditional Scholastic-Aristotelian philosophy prevalent at his time" (Skirry). Descartes' method of doubt formed the modern rational approach with the emphasis on thinking 'Cogito' for oneself. As noted by Sachdev,

Descartes' skeptical method of doubt in the First Meditation is often viewed as having been revolutionary for its time—a highly original means of turning inwards to arrive at the discovery of a self-evident and internally intuited first principle of philosophy (*the cogito*) (72).

He dismissed knowledge from authorities and centered intuition, thinking, and reason as the main source of any belief. Which, is his method

of Skepticism¹ was introduced. It underscored questioning whether claims and assumptions are certain. It is essential to mention that Descartes did not focus on morality practically. Yet he cracked the holdings of it, offering an acceptance replacement, reason. The celebration of individual reason and understanding stroked the old tradition and any external convictions. Therefore, various meanings changed concurrently with distinguished philosophies, particularly concerning commonly known moral foundations.

Religion-based morality, in this case, was addressed through reason, emphasizing only human nature. In other words, "what the philosophers of the Enlightenment project attempted to do was to ground morality in human nature, using reason alone, without any reference to Aristotelian teleology or Christian dogma" (Teo). This call to dismiss Aristotelian teleology and religious teaching from the governing ethical system led to the emphasis on reason-based morality only. Voltaire, the French Enlightenment philosopher openly criticized religious institutions. He addressed the church's corruption and hypocrisy and advocated for its separation from the government. Voltaire who planted a solid doubt in traditional moral establishment argued that morality is entrenched in reason and human wisdom instead of religious doctrine, promoting collective harmony (Bradley). Voltaire questioned the ethical commandments of religion frankly, as he writes "ought religion to be barbaric, or should it rather be charitable" (Bennett 5). His moral philosophy emphasizes that morality is shaped by needs and realities of humans' coexistence which is accurate because it is reasonable, not because it is from divine commands. He articulated in *Treatise on Metaphysics* that harming and benefiting the collective judge evil actions

¹ "the doctrine that true knowledge or knowledge in a particular area is uncertain, or an attitude of doubt or a disposition to incredulity either in general or toward a particular object" (Merriam)

from good actions. Thus the ultimate detector of moral principles is not that of the divine but the well-being of society. This explicitly diverges from the religious foundation-oriented human moral principles to societal acceptance and tolerance.

Furthermore, nature law theory was redefined in terms of guiding the moral system. The modern ethical order was the highlight of various approaches. The source from which morality is governed became a major intellectual interest. Certain moral philosophies grounded human reason as the basis of morality. For instance, the philosopher John Locke highlighted personal reason as the final ground of morality. Lock did not dismiss the divine authority on morality, yet he argued that God bestowed human reason the full capacity to abstract morals. In his well-recognized work *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he elaborated "human reason may be weak with regards to our understanding of the natural world and the workings of the human mind, but it is exactly suited for the job of figuring out human moral duty" (Sheridan). Locke's theory upheld reason as the unified moral source which all humans share. The capacity to distinguish right and wrong is equal, unlike scientific reason. He did not contradict the divine as supreme lawgiver however he challenged the old use of reason in God's commandments. John Locke's morality diverged from Aquinas's conditional application of reason in God's will. It admitted that reason is a tool for understanding moral law, yet each person's reason is allowed to interpret this divine law as he sees fit. Thus, individual rationality is the judge of wrong and right; by which, moral responsibility falls on every rational human being, maintaining universal rational morality. The nature law theory, therefore, fell short of the foundation of morality.

Meanwhile, the main founder of a structured universal rational morality which replaced traditional morality was Immanuel Kant. His

philosophy centered on the Enlightenment moral order, fundamentally. It argued that moral obligations come from rationality itself and humans have the innate duty to act ethically (Mwewa). Kant emphasized rational thought as a moral guide. In order to determine right and wrong is up to individual intellect. He articulated the absolute moral obligation which is imposed upon all rational beings regardless of desires and outcomes. In *Groundwork of The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant's ethical philosophy was based on his Categorical imperative. It considered the idea of "act only according to that maxim which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction" (Kant 196). Meaning, that before any moral conduct, the individual should presume that particular action is a universal law to conduct; whether it would be acceptable or not if everyone acted the same. The action is deemed morally permissible or impermissible following universally accepted principles. For example, if someone ought to lie he must come to an agreement that lying will become conducted by everyone else as definitive law. The truth will be useless thus the rational conclusion will not act upon it. Kant's morality allowed no violation or excuses for violating the moral code. Therefore, Immanuel Kant laid the foundation of morality in universal reasoning.

Ultimately, The traditional moral foundation notably religion and nature law theory were challenged by the rise of rationalism. The universe's mysteries have been resolved with science; while the faith in knowledge grew deeper. The reformation of the old system and institutions included the ethical system they held as well. Religious ethical beliefs were doubted and reason was highlighted, emphasizing collective harmony, inherited rationalism and universal reason were highlighted instead. The shift was from the external supreme morality to the internal from within morality.

1.3.2. Moral Autonomy

The emphasis on reason and intellect over external fractures introduced autonomy as the capacity for self-rule. The term autonomy originated from the Greek *auto* (self) and *nomos* (law/legislation). Moral autonomy, however, was grounded by Immanuel Kant; as mentioned in "moral autonomy, usually traced back to Kant, is the capacity to deliberate and to give oneself the moral law, rather than merely heeding the injunctions of others" (Dryden). The modern concept asserts that moral rules should be determined by one's self rather than deriving them from others. However, the elimination of outsider authoritative sources highlighted not only the reason but also the sentiments and feelings of the self.

Kant argued for "autonomy to the will to be the 'supreme principle of morality' " (Kleingeld 61). The third formulation of the categorical imperative averred the will is self-legislating as it is subjective to its moral laws. As demonstrated,

The will is subject to moral laws, and the idea that the obligatory force of these laws originates in the will itself. If the will's highest governing principles depended on an authority outside the will, this would be heteronomy² that is the property of being subject to the legislation of another (ibid 63).

This will guide moral laws which are acquired through reason solely not from authorities nor inclinations and desires. To illustrate, if an individual attempted to steal something he desires, yet he rationally acknowledged integrity as a moral duty and stopped. Rather than following his desires, he was subjected to his will of conducting the moral duty. However, if the will followed over the rational convictions, no moral obligation will be sustained. For Kant, autonomy is the prime source of morality; as explained by Tsahuridu "it is through autonomy that morality

² The submission to the external law, authority, or other than the self (Tsahuridu 16)

comes to exist" (28). Moral autonomy assures moral agency and autonomy itself is a result of rationality alone.

On the other hand, Jean Jacques Rousseau the French philosopher known for his political philosophies emphasized the notion of moral autonomy by defining moral freedom. In his *The Social Contract*, Rousseau introduced the General Will Theory as a collective will of all individuals who rationally and selflessly aimed for the common good. It argued that sovereignty does not mean holding power but rather is directed to the public good (Delaney). Regarding morality, Rousseau viewed moral autonomy as the ability to self-legislate moral principles in accordance with general will. He elaborated on moral freedom and autonomy as

Freedom can be defined from Rousseau's works as a morally autonomous state of deliberations where moral autonomy denotes an ability to reflect on one's own will and to deliberately act in the absence of any external authority (Salvat 11).

The philosophy of this sort aligned with Kant's definition of moral autonomy. It is free from desires and external authorities. While the general will is centered on a common good over individual desires, it still refers to the collective will as a sum of individuals' will; in which, one's person will dedicate moral law. Morality to Rousseau, therefore, is autonomous.

Antithetically, the philosopher David Hume argued that morality can be derived from sentiments. Even though, his moral philosophy did not ground moral autonomy which was developed by Kant in its essence. However, Hume's theory bases the source of moral judgment on sentiments and feelings, asserting certain self-legislation i.e. autonomy.

David Hume, in *Treatise on Human Nature*, rejected moral rationalism as a conception of morality. He disagreed with several theorists on the 'reason alone' conclusion. Instead, Hume claimed moral judgments to be derived from sentiments;

Hume contends that moral evaluations depend significantly on sentiment or feeling. Specifically, it is because we have the requisite emotional capacities, in addition to our faculty of reason, that we can determine that some action is ethically wrong, or a person has a virtuous moral character (Rayner 10)

He elaborated on the legitimacy of feelings over reason in the theory of 'is-ought' often referred to as Hume's law. He argued that moral conduct (ought to) had no relation with the rational fact (is). Just because humans seek happiness, a factual observation does not necessitate they ought to pursue it as a moral conduct. Therefore, moral perception is separated from logical facts. Hume's philosophy is known as sentimentalism. He argued that virtue is rooted in the response of pleasure and pain; as he demonstrated that "virtue is that which causes pleasurable sensations of a specific type in an observer, while vice causes painful sensations of a specific type" (Pollock). In essence, human moral conducts operate in accordance with feeling not logical truths. Hume also introduced sympathy as responsible for deliberating morality. Since morals are derived from emotions the notion of sympathy keeps moral rule sustained. By adopting others' emotions and as a social being, the individual is preserving moral principles.

Accordingly, Hume's morality is both abstracted and legislated in the self which can be considered as moral autonomy. Regardless of Kant and Hume's disagreement on its terms or the gap between reason and sentiment, morality was primarily positioned within the individual. The determination of right and wrong was neither from God nor authorities but autonomously

distinguished by rational conviction and pleasurable pursuit. This rearrangement paved the way for moral secular and utilitarian philosophies, dominating Western social beliefs in the latter half of the Enlightenment.

1.3.3. Secular Morality and Utilitarianism

Amid the emergence of the Enlightenment, the preexistence beliefs of morals and ethics had lost its religious grounding. The divine law and God were excluded on account of liberty, reason, and nature. Therefore, various alternatives were sought to compensate for both God and moral foundation. The adaptation of secular morality was merited by two major factors; reason and critical inquiry and human-centric values. Enlightenment thinkers including Baruch Spinoza and Baron Paul D'Holbach vocalized their critics of religion and creed promoting rational empirical moral discourse. Particularly, prioritizing human welfare, the utilitarian ethical theory advocated human-centric values as a core moral principle developed by various thinkers notably Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

The logical analysis of nature and evidence-based interpretations embraced the beliefs of human ethical behavior. The essential concern was the understanding of God or the supreme substance. Baruch Spinoza argued in Ethics that two substances cannot co-exist. He determined that God is synonymous with nature, not a separate transcendent being. That is to say "Spinoza's God is not, after all, transcendent and "other." God is nature itself and necessarily expresses his perfection in the perfect modification, arrangement, and disposition of His attributes" (Esikot et al 17). This argument claims that God is not external or beyond the universe but rather he is immanent within the world humans perceive. Hence, God prescribes his guidance through the perfection of nature. The source of any evaluation

must be abstracted from rational conclusions that nature might offer. Spinoza argued that moral evaluation must follow the same pattern. In addition, Spinoza's moral philosophy defended God, i.e. nature, as perfect thus no imperfection like evil exists. Good or evil, however, results from human understanding and misunderstanding of the law of the universe. In other words, it is considered that "all things follow from the necessity of the divine nature, and hence...whatever seems immoral, dreadful, unjust, and dishonorable, arises from the fact that [we conceive] the things themselves in a way which is disordered, mutilated, and confused" (Spinoza 154). This argued that morality is scaled by the intellectual competence of an individual. Thereby, moral judgment is subjective to humans' shortcomings in approaching nature. Accordingly, the will to follow the ethical divine law was substituted by individual reason within nature, advocating secular morality.

Another Enlightenment philosopher who advocated the severance of God and morality was Baron Paul D'Holbach. While Spinoza redefined the notion of God and its function with moral order, D'Holbach advocated the total eradication of the divine from moral truth. In his work *Common Sense* which articulates the critique of religion and a defense of rational morality, he writes

to discover the true principles of Morality, men have no need of theology, of revelation, or of gods: They have need only of common sense. They have only to commune with themselves, reflect upon their own nature, to consider the objects of society, and of the individuals, who compose it; and they will easily perceive, that virtue is advantageous, and vice disadvantageous to themselves (D'Holbach 3).

He argued that instead of revelation and theological doctrine moral truths are exclusively discovered through individual reason and reflection.

For D'Holbach morality can be grounded in common sense, and self-reflection in relation to human nature and society. Human experience and interaction with society allow more accurate and beneficial ethical evaluation not a submission to any universal moral law. His argument upholds the superiority of man's reflection and intellectual understanding of nature thus man with no need of God is morally astute. As he elaborated in *The System of Nature* "Man will ever mistake his true happiness, as long as he neglects to study nature, to investigate her immutable laws, to seek in her alone the remedies for those evils which are the consequence of his present errors"(Kitchener 181). Moral truths are clear when one's judgment states so, highlighting human-centric principles. Therefore, codifying morality falls in the hands of an individual's evaluation which not only dismissed moral objectivity but founded it in a pure subjective sphere. , secular moral principles made the notion of right or wrong fluid where two people can argue for a moral conduct based on each one rational conclusion. This new era climate and the intellectual movement of redefinition caused the immanence emphasis on rational abilities and human well-being which celebrated philosophies addressing morality.

The utilitarian moral theory which advocated the concept of the greatest good for the greatest number reflected significantly secular morality by the embodiment of human-centric values. This philosophy approached moral evaluation by considering the result of an action. Good moral conduct is judged by its good consequences on account of intentions. Only the consequences of ethical behavior and social interaction can sustain the well-being of humans. As Nicholas Drake articulated,

Utilitarianism can be viewed as the combination of two ideas, consequentialism and welfarism. Consequentialism is the view that an act is right to the extent that it has the best consequences. And welfare

is the view that the only thing that ultimately matters ethically is well-being (1).

The notions of consequentialism and welfarism founded the moral theory on the basis of utility; as actions should be chosen based on their consequences which enhance overall well-being, morality then serves the ultimate good. However, this broad definition was concluded after the understanding of certain Enlightenment thinkers. Even though the essence was known since Greek philosophies the Enlightenment utilitarianism emerged as a practical framework rather than an individual mannerism.

The first philosopher who introduced the term 'utility' in association with ethics and provided its systematic approach was Jeremy Bentham. Drake explains Bentham's understanding as follows "by "utility," Bentham meant "the quality of being instrumental for wellbeing;" something has utility just if it will promote wellbeing" (2). Therefore, moral actions are judged wrong or right in accordance with their utility. In his work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Bentham establishing the principle of utility, wrote "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. They were alone point out what we ought to do and determine what we shall do" (14). Bentham, as an Enlightenment philosopher, rejected religious moral frameworks and elaborated on nature as the essential provider of moral legislation. However, He considered that Nature bestowed two fundamental governor pain and pleasure. This theory centers on reducing pain and increasing pleasure. In other words, people conduct ethical rightness for the sense of satisfaction or moral pleasure it results; whereas, they avoid pain or moral guilt of conducting ethical wrongness. His principle highlighted legislation morality in happiness; "it has been shown that the happiness of the individuals, of whom a community is composed, that is their pleasures

and their security, is the end and the sole end which the legislator ought to have"(Bentham 27). Accordingly, morality is determined by the 'happiness' and pleasure it produces. Utilitarianism also emphasized the general good; as Bentham articulated that the scope covers all actions and all people privately or publicly.

On the other hand, John Stuart Mill as an American fundamental utilitarian figure built on the core belief of utilitarianism. In his book *Utilitarianism* 1861. Mill defended those utilitarian principles as the foundation of morality. He defined happiness as the absence of pain, thus a rational and logical pursuit of either individual or social happiness evaluates morality (Schefczyk). Actions, therefore, are morally right and only if they promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Additionally, in *On Liberty*, he established his political regulation ideology known as the harm principle. Mill wrote "the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others" (Mill 14). This principle upheld that individuals are free unless their freedom causes harm to others. As it went hand in hand with utilitarian belief and regardless of its political purposes, the harm principle became fundamental as moral evaluation.

John Mill, however, objected to the general understanding of Bentham of pleasure and went further to classify the layers of pleasure. As cited, "Mill refines the concept by emphasizing that pleasure and pain are the ultimate measures of moral worth... arguing that it recognizes qualitative differences in pleasures, suggesting that higher intellectual pleasures hold greater value than simpler, sensory ones" (Deiningner and Whitaker T). The qualitative distinction Mill articulated consists of two layers of pleasure. The higher pleasure is experienced through intellectual

inquiry while the lower pleasure is the sensory or physical pleasure. As he famously stated, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied" (ibid). He liberated utilitarianism from being a theory of pain and pleasure by advocating for a more sophisticated ethical framework.

Both Bentham and Mill dismissed abstract moral principles. Therefore, they established Utilitarianism, prioritizing human wellbeing as the basis of morality; in other words secular ethics. Utilitarianism defends human nature's ability for altruism and self-improvement. As long as humans are beings with inherited pursuit of happiness aligning with their internal sanction, the societal moral order will persevere. Accordingly, morality can be founded only on human nature.

The Enlightenment understanding of morality together had broken from the religious and authoritative foundation. Philosophers' efforts to ground morality on a new universal framework failed to determine which foundation; whether it should be based on autonomous reason, human nature, or secular utilitarianism. Therefore, another age was marked by rejecting the Enlightenment struggle.

1.4. Postmodern Morality:

During the mid-20th century, postmodernism seceded modernism and the Enlightenment era. Postmodernism fused with various aspects of life and continues to shape various fields of study, including art, literature, philosophy, and cultural criticism" (Lone 1). As Jean Francois Lyotard, the founder of the movement elaborated how "it designates the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature, and the arts" (Branco 6). This movement emerged as a reaction against enlightenment ideologies. Postmodernism refers a "philosophical, cultural and artistic

movement that emerged as a reaction to the intellectual and philosophical ideas of modernity" (Espínola). It also refers to the period in which today's world takes place in history. Postmodern intellectual shift rejected modernism's the Enlightenment era view on reason, objective truths, and the inquiry of universal knowledge. Thereby, postmodernism primarily revolved around questioning the traditional structure and rejecting authorities' discourse and factual absolutism. Rather it celebrated diversity, multiplicity, and pluralism over the universal truths. Therefore, postmodernists including Richard Rorty, Zygmunt Bauman, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida advocated for cultural relativism, loss of narratives and meanings in addition to power and discourse as sources of knowledge and principles (Lone 3).

In the process, objecting to previous moral principles and universal ethical philosophies was inevitable. Postmodernism challenged the absolutism truths of morality and its universal rule; according to Deng, "Postmodern morality came into being with the popularity of postmodernism in western countries. It features obvious "de-universality" and provides a new mirror for reflections on modern morality"(1). Thinkers including Rorty considered "moral values are a kind of cultural preferences that represent the ideals and values that the majority of people have accepted them as moral principles" (Rahnama and Jahan 3). Postmodernism views moral truths as cultural and diverse rather than standard and fixed systems. Moral order was redefined based on anti-fundamentalism, cultural determinism, and social solidarity and discourse (ibid 4). Therefore, the morality of this era was characterized as fluid, ambiguous, and relative.

1.4.1. Critique of Grand Narrative:

Jean Francois Lyotard is a French philosopher and sociologist best known for his essential contribution to postmodern philosophy. Valentini declared that "the term "postmodernism" first entered the philosophical lexicon in 1979, with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by the French intellectual Jean-François Lyotard"(9). Lyotard marked the new era as he argued against grand theories which claim universal truths; advocating instead for fragmented knowledge. He challenged the grand dominating narratives of progress and liberation; as cited "Jean-François Lyotard and Jean Baudrillard have taken their leave from all "grand meta-narratives" of history, all universal claims to truth and any remaining faith in the Enlightenment project of rationalizing every aspect of live" (Valentini 2).

In his work *The Postmodernism Condition*, he writes "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives" (25).

Accordingly, Lyotard explored the shift from modernism to postmodernism by challenging 'meta' or grand narratives' credibility and "their reliance on some form of transcendent and universal truth" (Ali 297). He highlighted "the increasing skepticism" towards these narratives and addressed them as limited and exclusionary of human experience's multiplicity. Therefore and as an alternative, His philosophy underscored petite narratives as contextual, diverse, and local truths and meanings.

The notion of little narratives argues in favor of cultural and social diversity where an individual's minor and unique experiences are tackled rather than rejected for the unchangeable. The condition of postmodernism as Lyotard demonstrated centered on "the concept of a multiplicity". It is a condition of fragmented and diverse discourse meanings, each embodying its rule and legitimacy (Ali 297). More than neutral or universal acceptance,

knowledge and truths are preserved in multiple contexts and languages. Correspondingly, pluralism, complexity, and disagreement are embraced.

Jean-François Lyotard's critique of modern universal narratives reshaped the foundation of morality once more. Lyotard's postmodern linguistic studies and the notion of language games rejected ethical absolutism in favor of ethical pluralism and differences. In his work *Libidinal Economy*, he demonstrated the interplay between passions and desires, rejecting the traditional moral rational framework. Diversity, on the other hand, embraced moral values within relativism. The "positive celebration of diversity or "difference" and emphasis on the ethical demands of the other" (Valentini 1), Lyotard's ethical values are contingent and contextual. Unlike previous ideologies of autonomous morality or nature-centered legislation, postmodern ethics rely on the other, as in the fluid constantly changeable other. This essential postmodernism ethical view paved the path for the intellectual figures of the era to tackle morality in accordance to the tents of postmodernism notably power and discourse, relativism, and pluralism.

1.4.1.1. Power and Discourse:

One foundational way of projecting the refusal of moral truths and authority was the redefining notions of power in French philosopher Michel Foucault's theory. Foucault introduced the dynamic interplay of power, discourse, and knowledge. He articulated that power produces knowledge through discourse while knowledge reinforces power (Hall 75). This notion argued that morality is sustained within this complex social mechanism rather than discovered, as modernists believed.

Foucault's critique dissociated ethical values from the classical rational foundation. The core of Foucault's argument demonstrates that power is not

merely held by authoritative groups but "power is everywhere". It embodies knowledge, behavior, identity, and social norms through discourse. Foucault considered that "power is the most usual thing since it is present everywhere, in family, between two loved ones, in the office, in a workshop, in one-way streets"(Ahmeti 4). In his work *Order of Discourse* 1971, Foucault elaborated on discourse as a tool of power; he stated "discourse is not simply that which translates struggle or systems of domination, but is the thing for which there is a struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized" (Zhiyi 157). Likewise, discourse controls and preserves knowledge which is the "truth". His theory states that "knowledge is determined by the possibilities of use and adaptation offered by discourse" (ibid 156). In other words, this theory asserts the reinforcement of power through knowledge which is produced by discourse. He argued that power operates at a capillary level, influencing individuals through everyday interactions, institutions, and discourse. Rather than being a hierarchical force imposed from above, power circulates dynamically, shaping knowledge, truth, and social norms (Ahmeti 4). This dynamic interplay, however, shapes social norms as it is enhanced in them. Therefore, the truths of morality are not fixed or universal but embodied in the discursive practices that govern social behavior.

Accordingly, moral judgments are not neutral about what is right and what is wrong, thus no objective evaluation reinforces and controls truth. Morality to Foucault refers to the actions of real historical figures in terms of whether they followed, disobeyed, accepted, or rejected the values and rules set by institutions or systems of authority (Robinson). The postmodern philosopher, Foucault discusses ethical values and morals in his ethical turn³. Foucault's critical ethics argued that ethical norms are already

³ Michel Foucault's new understanding of ethics. He does not consider ethics as a moral philosophy or normative ethics but defines it as a moral agency (Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

established. He elaborated on ethics in his mode of subjection as a form of resistance and liberty from the power-subject relation (Ahmeti 5). Foucault demonstrated his moral understanding of *Ethics, Subjectivity, and Truth*. According to Foucault morality is legislated through power and social norms as denotology i.e. moral subjection. As he elaborated;

The mode of subjection is the way in which the individual establishes their relation to the moral code, recognizes itself as bound to act according to it, and is entitled to view its acts as worthy of moral valorization. The mode of subjection is, as Foucault refers to it, the 'deontological' or normative component of ethics (Robinson).

His theory, therefore, argued that ethics are forms of dominance less than a guide to the truth, by which moral values are followed merely to human subjective nature. Whereas in reality, morality is more about the societal coding of what is acceptable and unacceptable. His critique destructed moral certainty as one fixed entity and situated moral order in a contingency construct.

Ultimately, Foucault's theory argued that moral systems are produced within a network of power maintained as a form of societal discourse. Thus, power and discourse upheld moral principles and ethical values as practical subjectivity toward the governing power within societies. Morality has little to do with moral and immoral judgments but rather right and wrong are synonymous with socially acceptable and unacceptable (Analyzer). Foucault's analysis held a relativist tone, emphasizing morality as shaped by both individual and public, influenced by institutional standards, as simply dynamic and contingent means of power. Even though the moral system is historically constructed and culturally implemented, moral truth turns out to be calculated rather than a factual reality. In this vein of thought, morality is considered the norm of a particular system of power and language. As a result, this theory reinforced the postmodern perception of moral relativism.

1.4.1.2. Moral Relativism:

Postmodern moral thought considers moral relativism a vital element to its ethical understanding. This ideology disproves universal moral truths in the favor of historical, cultural, and contextual moral principles. To put differently, "moral relativism is the view that moral judgments are true or false only relative to some particular standpoint... and that no standpoint is uniquely privileged over all others" (Westcott). Essentially, moral relativism evaluates right and wrong on the beliefs' basis and values of cultures and individuals. Mainly, this evaluation is determined diverse and changeable not falling under any unified moral system. The core thesis of moral relativism theory is the claim " not only that the correctness of moral judgments can in this way depend on a thinker, or the value system relevant to the thinker, but also that there is no privileged correct value system (or a thinker who is the ultimate authority)" (Kölbel 1). Postmodernist theory advocates the cohesion and co-existence of multiple truths embodied in the variation of individuals' experiences and their systems of beliefs. Relativism denies objective truth in the favor of subjective interpretations.

Richard Rorty, an American Philosopher, symbolizes a key figure in postmodern moral thought due to his moral philosophy which is a singular form of moral relativism. Rorty advocated for grounding morality in various fractures including cultural adherence and human interactions. Instead of the modern reliance on objective moral truths, Rorty grounded moral values in the shared norms of communities, language use, and human involvement. Essentially, he has "demonstrated that there is no design or purpose in history. There is, therefore, a need for "metaphoric re-descriptions" of nature. The recognition of the contingency of ourselves, language, community, consciences, and culture will help us to see that we are the 'makers of ourselves'" (Nijoku 2). Rorty firmly denies human nature,

metaphoric or rational foundation of ethics. As noted "Rorty, is that we ought to replace the Kantian moral notion of obligation with Humean ideas of trust and sympathy. Morality turns on something like imaginative sensitivity rather than on something like rational duty" (Koopman 51). Alternatively, He articulated that moral principles are rooted in cultivated empathy and social collaboration. As Rorty argued "moral development in the individual, and moral progress in the human species as a whole, is a matter of re-making human selves so as to enlarge the variety of the relationships which constitute those selves" (ibid). Moreover, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty centered his moral theory on solidarity. For him, "solidarity with others is synonymous with their inclusion in the scope of our moral concern" (Jordan 3). Rather than moral truths, humans develop their moral judgment based on sympathy which they share in their solidarity as communities. As Fischer and Fichus elaborated on Rorty's theory;

"[he] adheres to a principle, which can be associated directly in the sphere of morality: solidarity. This term can serve as an example of how Rorty's understanding of a moral principle in a specific context of life is supposed to work. Rorty's view of solidarity is an alternative to an understanding of solidarity that is dependent on objectivity" (553).

However, this Solidarity is not deemed as a universal reference of moral evaluation but more localized within small communities assuring its effectiveness as a framework; in which, "solidarity is exclusionary, as, according to Rorty, 'our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as 'one of us', where 'us' means something smaller and more local than the human race" (Jordan 5).

Moral relativism, therefore, substituted the prior ultimate search for the absolute moral truth and an objective, certain morality with pragmatic

ethics, cultural contingent, discursive interaction, and historical background. It upheld the ultimate significance of subjectivity and diversity. Moral relativism was the endnote of secular morality's track, from divine command to moral rationality and from moral autonomy to individual subjectivity. Indicating the loss of moral certainty, postmodern morality is placed in the fluid, ambiguous sphere (Deng 1).

1.4.2. The Decline of Moral Absolutes

Moral absolutes were well established within an ultimate objective and supreme source, the divine will and nature law theory, during the Middle Ages and Pre-Enlightenment era. Yet with the earnest enlightenment's tries to find an equal alternative as one universal moral system, these absolutes fell under speciousness and latter under postmodern critique. As stated "the postmodernist perspective is the denial of absolute and objective truths, facts, moral values and conscience" (Muhammad and Shaukat 123). Postmodernists deny objective realities and universal criteria of truths and moral, celebrating a complex and diverse nature of moral values and truths. The fierce rejection of any unified moral grounding weakened the universal shared norms. On the other hand, their perceptive did not offer any replacements or resulting solution to the rise of diversities. As noted, "Postmodernists have mainly adopted a critical and destructive approach towards absolute ideals, moral values and beliefs. However, they have only criticized the system but have not provided any remedies and alternate solutions" (ibid 125). Therefore, the decline of moral absolutes marked the fragmented ethical values of the era. Still, this moral absolute decline did not accrue only due the denial of universal ethical framework, but other factors are held responsible as well.

The postmodern anti-fundamental tendency disrupts the hierarchies of ethical values. The previous maintained hierarchy of morality which acted as a legitimate imposed rule over all humanity was destroyed. Akbar Rahnama and Javad Jahan articulated that postmodern anti-fundamental nature in ethics as “ethics and moral affairs are usually considered as fundamental and unchangeable things, while according to postmodern thinkers, such fixed foundations and bases for ethics cannot be imagined” (2). In other terms, postmodern morality refuses the existence of fixed, unchangeable hierarchies or moral absolutes. Instead, subjective and diverse frameworks are promoted.

Furthermore, the moral absolutes decline is reflected in the rise of emotional authority and subjectivity. Postmodernists like Rorty, addresses sympathy towards minorities and the human sense of solidarity as moral based values. As articulated, “instead of relying on a single story, postmodernism advocates for including diverse, marginalized voices, recognizing that no narrative can capture human experience’s complexity” (Stocker). The increase exposure to diverse cultures and differing moral truths authorized multiple emotions and subjective experiences over a singular universal, objective ethics.

Besides, the scientific and technological advancements shift the priority from absolutism and ethics. As alternative tradition, postmodern morality was influenced by the existentialist⁴ and pragmatist⁵ philosophies (Sullivan and Pecorino). Stated differently, “the Existentialists called for an acceptance of the inescapable role of human emotions [and] the Pragmatists focused on the impossibility of reason reaching beyond the frailties of limitations of human reason” (ibid). These traditions revolve mainly around

⁴ Existentialism refers to a philosophical movement which investigates the nature of human existence and advocates for individual choices and responsibility within meaningless world.

⁵ Pragmatism refers to philosophical movement, which oppose abstract and absolute truths and evaluate actions and meanings based on their practical consequences.

subjective experience and practical consequences rather than abstract, universal truths.

Therefore, morality was definitely cut off any divine, external, objective or universal source. This decline resulted in loss of shred hierarchical judgment as well as the rise of subjective, emotional moral authority, fostering characteristics of ethical pluralism and moral ambiguity. Both pluralism and ambiguity emerge as direct and clear ramifications of moral absolutes collapse, while functioning as its outward reflection.

1.4.2.1. Ethical Pluralism

Ethical pluralism turned out a significant feature of postmodernism which is caused by and manifestation of moral absolutes decline. It is a moral normative posits the coexistence of diverse, and even incompatible moral systems and legitimized values with no superior distinction (Gill 276). This ethical framework is based on two essential tents, notably arguing against ethical universals and shared moral authority, as well as addressing diverse and multiplicity of moral subjectivity and principles. As explored in *W. D Ross's The Rights and Good 1930*, monistic⁶ moral systems like Kantianism and utilitarianism are not valid in pluralistic societies. Also in *Thomas Nagel's Mortal Questions 1979*, moral conflicts are viewed as an inherited response from the divergent perspectives in humans.

Ethical pluralism, in this sense, is the recognition that there are in the world different ethical traditions, that these distinguish themselves at least in name one from the other, and differ not only in matters of practical

⁶ Refers to moral theory which drives all its values from one foundation principle (Mill 4), as in (Kantian, Utilitarian, and divine command)

judgment on moral issues but in modes of reasoning used to reach such judgments (Madsen and Strong 4).

Semantically, ethical pluralism adheres to the requirement of contextual sensitivity and consideration for all distinguished individual truths in moral reasoning; addressing all conclusions as valid.

Rahnama and Jahan 2024, in their study on postmodern ethics and knowledge, note the core aspect of postmodern ethics; "postmodernisms accept diversity and plurality and attach great importance to it in the field of opinion and practice; counting the phenomena of difference and differentiation and relying on it is another moral doctrine related to pluralism" (3). Pluralism in itself "is about having multiple frames of analysis", as stated by Wight (Unger 1). Therefore, as a moral principle, it recognizes all differences in beliefs, practices, and perspectives without imposing one moral structure. Thereby, ethical pluralism opposes the radically monistic aspect of moral absolutism and fixed foundation.

Moreover, Francesco Allegri elaborates on the conflicting trait of ethics in his journal *Conflicting Values and Moral Pluralism in Normative Ethics*, as

an important dimension of the conflict between values can be found in the area of normative ethics and more precisely in the field of the theory of moral obligation, the kind of theory that has the task of identifying what are the basic ethical principles from which to derive our duties in specific contexts (10).

Conflicting values are pivotal in normative ethics, where such disagreements and clashes are acceptable. Unlike, the pursuit of fundamental moral principles which aims to eliminate these conflicts and unify moral values less than one rule. Similarly, normative diversity notes that "pluralist views, in contrast, hold that there are multiple fundamental

principles, that these principles can require incompatible actions, and that there is no comprehensive ranking method for resolving such conflict" (Gill 276). This perspective fundamentally embraces moral conflicts due to the celebrated incompatibility. Thereby, transcendent moral systems are meaningless in societies rich with complexity and differences which are celebrated within ethical pluralism.

Navigating moral decisions and judgments, however, becomes challenging among individuals and societies. This is referred to as "the problem of conflict arises in all its drama, because different principles may require, and often do require, different courses of action, obliging the individual involved to make a choice" (Allegri 10). Decision-making necessitates respecting varied objective truths which eventually leads to conflicts. However, ethical pluralism, as loyal to diverse valuable truths, underscores no resolution to these conflicts is the essence of ethics (Unger 4). It is argued that the conflicting nature of values highlights the deficiency attempt to unify one tuneful ethical system; to elaborate "some margin of indeterminacy in moral theories is inevitable. And it is good that there is. Moral theories should not be a handbook of answers to be applied mechanically, without leaving room for autonomy of judgment" (Allegri 9). It is worth mentioning that ethical pluralism differs from relativism multiplicity in accepting various objective truths; whereas, moral relativism denies objectivity together.

Accordingly, the pluralistic theory confirms the rejection of moral norms, celebration of multiple objective values, and conflicts without resolutions. Zygmunt Bauman addresses the fragmentation of contemporary ethics that resides within its essence 'choices' and 'conflicts'. He advocates for the complexity and fragmentation of ethical pluralism. In *Postmodern Ethics* 1993, Bauman demonstrates the fluidity and uncertainty reflected in

the irrelevance of moral values. In other words, "he identifies the place of contemporary morality within what appears to be the post-truth, post-legislative postmodern/liquid modern condition" (Best 1), asserting that too many choices mean too little guidance. He described the current ethical and moral sphere as "liquid modernity". Therefore, Bauman advocated the notion of "peace within the collapse". As he articulated, in *Life in Fragment* 1995, this liquid state revolves around personal responsibility and ambivalence. He understands responsibility towards "the other", influenced by Emmanuel Lévinas, can lay the grounds for peaceful and ethical pursuit in life. It also facilitates a harmonious existence. In this context, Bauman elaborates.

My responsibility for the other.... includes also my responsibility for determining what needs to be done to exercise that responsibility. This means in turn that I am responsible for defining the needs of the Other; what is good, and what is evil for the Other (Bauman 65).

His theory on moral judgment proclaims not only recognition but also involvement and determination of other needs and benefits. Only with this self-proclaimed responsibility each individual should adhere to the balance between good and evil, and correct and incorrect is maintained. This standpoint draws his border idea of adiaphorization, "flouting responsibility", where social processes and culture form and neutralize moral accountability (Best 9). As a pluralist and postmodernist, his ethical view aligns in accordance with subjective authorized mortality within contingent reality.

Moreover, Bauman's notion of ambivalence is derived from his severe critique of the traditional moral framework. He argues that modernity's reliance on a monistic foundation limited not only immorality but also

ambivalence and diversity (Bauman 173). Further, he asserts that conflicting choice-making and indecisiveness often entail sacrifices as unconditional responsibility towards the other. However, Bauman acknowledges moral ambiguity facing these incommensurable values. Ambivalent is used to "describe a more general sense of ambiguity, uncertainty or inconsistency when confronted with something triggering opposing or conflicting responses and as an outcome of 'contradictory feelings' towards something" (Jacobsen 348). Shaun Best explores in his journal *Voice and the Generalised Other in the Ethical Writings of Zygmunt Bauman*, that Bauman's liquid modernity assures mortality as all vacations are recognized. Unlike a universal moral foundation which prioritizes a superior principle over the others, regardless of contradictory claims, it results in insurgent social behavior (Best 7). Ultimately, ethical pluralism embraces incommensurable, complex, and subjective moral values which essentially entail uncertainty and ambiguity.

1.4.2.2. Moral Ambiguity

The collapse of moral absolutes led to fogged and blurred moral values and ethical conduct. Moral ambiguity, as a valid indication of this collapse, characterizes late postmodern moral sphere. When the distinction between right and wrong is unclear or its determination is risky, moral judgment thus is deemed ambiguous; as cited by Fairchild and Wedlock "moral ambiguity is the perception of behavior projected from individuals whose basis of morality is incapable of being established appearance of contrary" (3). Considering values as pivotal in defining the nature of humanity, this ethical indeterminacy witnessed a rise in various postmodern artistic aspects. For example, in literature, movies and real life the notion of moral grayness is manifested through characters behavior and choices. Stated

differently “it defies the black-and-white moral absolutism that we often see in traditional good versus evil stories...[and introduces] characters who blur the lines between good and evil, who act out of mixed motives or challenging ethical stances” (McKee). The reason behind the audience’s engagement and familiarity symbolizes the accuracy of reflecting their reality. Therefore, moral ambiguity mirrors the contemporary ethical state which navigates uncertainty and celebrates opacity.

Jacques, Derrida much like postmodern theorist, is concerned with destroying the western philosophical binary or oppositional tradition. The tradition of opposition is “ characteristically ‘binary’ and ‘hierarchical’, involving a pair of terms in which one member of the pair is assumed to be primary or fundamental, the other secondary or derivative” (Encyclopedia Britannica); for instance, speech and writing, man and women, good and evil. Derrida is infamous with his deconstructive philosophy which fundamentally is so textually based, yet unfixed neither in terms of its definition nor its use and application in other fields. However, the closest definition can be found in its practicality, as noted

To deconstruct an opposition is to explore the tensions and contradictions between the hierarchical ordering assumed (and sometimes explicitly asserted) in the text and other aspects of the text’s meaning, especially those that are indirect or implicit or that rely on figurative or performative uses of language (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Derrida’s deconstructive theory challenges fixed and oppositional meanings, emphasizing contradiction and puzzlement within literary and philosophical framework. He, as other postmodernist, rejects absolute, hierarchical and stable meanings in favor of marginalized and uncertain implications. Although, the deconstruction theory has little to do with ethics, ambiguity in itself is central in Derrida philosophy. As stated “In

deconstruction the significance is neither before nor after or neither inside nor outside of the text” (Gnanasekaran 212). Its revolutionary tendency towards the known tradition, celebration of confusion and between-ness are more than welcomed in the incommensurable, conflicted and complex morality.

Therefore, its application on moral binaries, such as right and wrong, moral and immoral, even acceptable and unacceptable, is feasible. “Deconstruction entails a paradoxical move; one that enables a simultaneous challenge to, without rejection of, the binary choice making and decision-taking that has been characteristic of metaphysical ethics” (Anderson 48). In other words, rather than the complete rejection of ethical principles, deconstruction proves their unsuitability and fluidity. Therefore, moral judgments are based on perplexity and. The blur boundaries between right and wrong, as well as the preeminence of paradoxes within ethical conduct reinforced its ambiguity.

However, Derrida did tackle ethics, arguing that ethics are contradictory norms and ethical choices are deemed ambiguous. Derrida noted “if there is to be a decision, must be heterogeneous to the accumulation of knowledge. Otherwise there is no responsibility. In this sense not only must the person taking the decision not know everything . . . the decision, if there is to be one, must advance towards a future which is not known, which cannot be anticipated” (O'Brien 6). He argued that moral decisions require responsibility. However, true ethical responsibility involves being irresponsible. Derrida thus elaborates that the quandary nature of ethical decision-making which leads to one moral choice, defies other ethical demand; since what may seem right in a certain context may turn otherwise in another. Thereby and in contrast to Bauman’s view, ethical responsibility is in constant display to irresponsibility.

In this regard, Jacques Derrida's thought deepens the end state of morality. By his deconstructive approach and ethical view, Derrida undermines or even displaced the notion of stable, fixed moral categories. "Derrida's deconstruction does not abandon ethics but reconfigures it as a practice of endless questioning. Moral ambiguity is not a failure but a necessity—an openness to the Other that resists totalizing claims" (Critchley 4). While, ethical understandings as just and good, no longer hold any obvious meaning, morality became grounded in conditioned contextual evaluation. Moral ambiguity, therefore, is a vital requirement in the current Western society which highly rates complexity, subjectivity and uncertain truths.

The postmodern, in opposition to the enlightenment tradition, embraces complexity, multiplicity and changeable truths. Morality manifests in the collapse of absolute, rational, universal moral framework and the collapse of moral absolutes. Influenced by Lyotard and Foucault's conclusions, ethical systems as tool of power and authority, moral values turn to relative cultural and subjective pluralist's principles. Therefore, ethics are held incommensurable and diverse perceptions with more confusion.

1.5. Conclusion

The Western morality tackled in this chapter morality has undergone various philosophical concerns. It shifts from theological certainty and Pre-Enlightenment absolutism, through Enlightenment reliance on reason and autonomy, only to end in postmodern ambiguity and uncertainty. The decline of a moral universal framework and shared standards led to the emphasis on diverse and contextual values shaped by moral relativism and pluralism. This absence of shared ethical judgment blurred the distinction

between ethical and unethical. In this context, western society witnesses the gradual decline of morality as a whole

Chapter Two

The Implications of The Moral Decline

2.1. Introduction

The decline of moral certainty is a settled trait of the contemporary Western world, as previously concluded. The chapter in hand shifts from a historical and intellectual review to the cultural, social and legal exploration of the ramifications of moral uncertainty. This uncertainty is reflected in cultural values, social identity, public discourse and legal norms. Therefore, this chapter accounts analytical description of societal ethos and the proposed resolution. The current Western environment is witnessing a post-truth state, where neither objectivity nor facts matter, necessitating a return to certain moral foundation.

2.2. Post-Truth Culture

The moral discussions which accrued in the previous decades indicate the collapse of religious, universal foundations and moral absolutes by giving rise to subjectivity which overtook the source of morality. The condition commonly termed as moral decline, in this context, is entailed in the transference from certainty to autonomy, then to relativism and inevitably ambiguity. Essentially, the uncertain moral foundations concluded in the ethical pluralism have weakened the ethical sense of right and wrong and moral claims are not only to conduct but have become debatable matters. Moral decline, therefore, involves the deterioration of social values, ethical principles and shared moral standards over time. However, this decline is both embodied and implemented in the contemporary dominating phenomena in the western world, namely post-truth culture. It is stated that the western society has entered a post-truth era where morality is nothing more than a subjective preference

As a societal state where objectivity is less telling, post-truth culture refers to a situation where people are more likely to accept an argument

based on their emotions and beliefs rather than facts (Cambridge Dictionary). Post-truth culture symbolizes devaluing truth. This phenomenon is primarily characterized by political polarization, misinformation, and lack trust in institutions which collectively destroy moral frameworks. Moral truths also become dependent on what feels right rather than what is ethical.

Lee C. McIntyre (2018) articulates that post-truth subjectivity is influenced by several factors, including cognitive biases and misinformation. He explains cognitive biases through individual behavior as “individuals not only favor information that confirms their beliefs but actively discredit and dismiss information that challenges their viewpoints” (McIntyre 10). In other words, individuals tend to believe their conclusions are well-reasoned, even when they are not, dismissing any rational argument or objection. Emotional truths, therefore, are logical and more superior to factual accuracy. Accordingly, people are seeking emotionally comforting perceptions on reality over reality. In this sense, postmodernism's focus on minorities and rejection of general truths are explicit in the post-truth culture.

2.2.1. Death of Objectivity

The decline of morality in post-truth culture is reflected in the gradual rejection of objectivity itself. Moral claims are also included in the culture of dismissing objective facts, evidence, and rational analysis. In public discourse, morality is tackled through diverse personal perceptions, identities, and various individualized narratives. These discourses fracture shared ethics and dismantle shared ethical evaluation. Therefore, moral determination is no longer easily attainable. When each moral conduct necessitates interminable discussions, it becomes more pragmatic to align

with personal and emotional preferences about morality than to discuss its judgment.

The post-truth culture has marginalized objectivity primarily by two critical components. The first component is the denial of scientific consensus and the broader assault on expertise. The refusal of scientific facts and the erosion of trust in common knowledge have influenced society and public policies. A well-known example of this is the climate change denial despite strong scientific consensus on human-induced global warming. As stated by McIntyre “Despite overwhelming evidence and near-universal agreement among climate scientists about human-induced global warming, a significant portion of the public and some political leaders continue to dispute the reality of climate” (19). This denial of empirical, scientific evidence and discoveries is entailed significantly by a lack of trust in institutions and acceptance of misinformation.

The second influential factor is the erosion of trust in institutions. In Western society, skepticism towards the traditional pillars of knowledge like academia, science, and media has led to favoring personal perceptions. This can be traced back to Foucault’s redefinition of truth and power. When Foucault argues that truths and knowledge are not objective entities but rather misinformation produced and maintained by authority and institutions of power, he changes the perception of forward realities claimed by authorities and experts (Becermen 133). Therefore, the distrust in knowledge representatives and factual truths has influenced the public attitude toward declared facts. Similarly, the established moral values have become secondary to personal beliefs. Bauman’s concept of ‘Liquid Modernity’, in ethical pluralism, tackles the lack of permanence and reliability in moral frameworks due to the erosion of institutional trust. Therefore, the reliance on personal claims regarding ethical judgments undermines moral certainty within society. The lack of shared moral values

and the fragmented understandings stem from subjective meanings, creating deep moral confusion. As a result, moral language has become hollow. When people lose the shared meanings of words like “justice”, “wrong”, “fair”, and “right”, moral judgments become confusing and debatable.

Nevertheless, this demise of objectivity in moral and ethical discussions is the core belief of moral relativism and critiques of grand narratives, as well as the overarching secular morality, all previously discussed. Moral subjectivism posits its arguments mainly on the basis of two principles. The first argues for the relativist essence of ethical relativism. As the cultural variation asserts the changeable traits of morality wherever rooted in feeling, societies, or individual perception can only contradict a standard objective code that is agreed upon by the changeable human. Meanwhile, the second principle argues against absolute supreme truths or divine moral framework, emphasizing the invalid use of God as a source for objective morality. Accordingly, subjective moral foundations are concluded.

The moral relativist J. David Velleman (2013) argues that the coexistence of multiple subjective truths is as simple as the absence of a singular universal language, and imposing a universal moral code would be as absurd as imposing a single language globally(17). Nonetheless, this argument emphasizes diversity rather than purpose. _Indeed, languages differ yet they still agree on sharing meanings and communicating. However, moral relativism does not achieve morality’s purpose, notably, an ethical judgment. Language shares meaning and differs in the way, but moral relativism agrees on the way but differs in meaning.

Additionally, when objectivity has become less significant, moral discussions lack common ground. This loss of shared factual reality causes debates with no logical evidence, and rational agreements unattainable.

Therefore, the subjective interpretations of values and morals amid various meanings cause moral confusion and perplexity. Likewise, this death of objectivity and the rise of moral uncertainty reflect the decline of morality.

A prime instance of this decline is the way subjective morality enforces phenomena, such as cancel culture and non-judgmentalism. According to Victor Ajluni, In today's society, we grapple with a paradox that intertwines non-judgmentalism, subjective morality, cancel culture, and the mental health implications they entail. Although we are encouraged to embrace tolerance and understanding, the absence of objective moral standards complicates ethical evaluation, leading to public scrutiny and consequences (par 3).

In other words, these phenomena occurred as a result of tolerance and subjectivity. However, in the absence of definitive standards for moral correctness, personal claims have become the standard. Thus evaluating ethical behavior is challenging.

The non-judgmental culture spreads as the practice of avoiding judgment on principles, actions, and beliefs, celebrating complexity and contemporary ambiguity. Additionally, the non-judgmentalism “promotes inclusivity and empathy”, thereby allowing a more authentic response to uncertainty.

Moreover, cancel culture upholds the restrictions of this acceptance; as it refers to public removal of support individuals or institutions to objectionable behavior or expression of beliefs which is known as “canceling” including moral claims (Britannica). In essence, this phenomenon involves shaming and social ostracizing and calls for accountability or punishment against any perceived offensive action or belief. However, the subjective basis of the ‘justice instrument’ which is fundamentally fused with emotional response cannot be fairly taken as valid. Furthermore, even if a valid falsehood is held accountable, on what shared understanding can the punishment be judged? Anna Sawka, in her critical

analysis, states that cancel culture “has been overpowered by the harmful side with doxxing⁷, cyberbullying, misinformation being spread and death threats to families” (4). Empowering marginalized voices can foster more immoral and harmful behaviors. Therefore, to what extent can moral accountability be considered legitimate rather than merely an emotional reaction to moral disagreement or unpopular opinions?

Furthermore, Misdirected accountability which originally centers on marginalized minority's claims, has escalated into harassment, implying the loss of moral clarity. Also, the absence of objectivity and justified factual truths has affected the credibility of arguments. In this context, it is a less favorable situation to lose shared moral frameworks and common understanding in favor of preferences and subjectivity; as stated “to what degree has the new phenomenon of “cancel culture” had a harmful and/or beneficial effect on society in the U.S” (Bella et al 4). On the other hand, public shaming and ethical deliberation have undermined moral reasoning. Consequently, morality diminishes in value and credibility as it transcends individual perception or subjective beliefs of right and wrong. They are becoming more appealing attempts and pursuits for social acceptance.

Besides, the tense interplay between non-judgmentalism and cancel culture exists due to the blurred line between liberal expressions and subjective accountability. Where morality is based on acceptance rather than rightness, individual mental health weakens significantly as social engagements become more stressful and effort-demanding. In other words, “the mental health consequences of cancel culture are significant. Fear of

⁷ “Doxxing refers to the action of exposing, or posting, one’s personal information, whether that be the location of another person via address, name(s), etc. Usually with the goal of inducing fear and harassment, or imminent threat”(Bella et al 9).

public scrutiny and retribution can hinder genuine dialogue, and suppress dissenting opinions” (Ajluni par 5). This psychological pressure sustains a fragmented trait in society. While post-culture accentuates the individual, the moral decline undermines him, leading to a society predicated upon a frail entity. Ultimately, the death of objective fact demands an alternative framework rooted in subjectivity and personal preferences.

2.2.2 Feeling over Facts

The intellectual and cultural shift that the contemporary western society has been witnessing prioritizes emotional facts over factual ones. As an alternative to the disintegration of objectivity and rational moral foundation, feelings dominated public claims and opinions. As cited by Lawrence Eppard, the dominant characteristic of the post-truth culture “refers to the bending of reality to fit one's opinions, stoking doubt in the existence of reality itself, and privileging feelings over facts”(71). Furthermore, moral truths also turn into a reflection of personal sentiment rather than an accurate representation of reality or ethical value.

This culture of feelings over facts is regarded as a consequence of the loss of objective moral framework, as explored in Chapter One's discourses on moral certainty and the decline of moral absolutes alongside with the postmodern emphasis on the minorities' experience narratives. Without shared moral absolutes the individuals' subjective emotional experiences become a primary source of moral validation and truth. Thus morality is defined by “how I feel” rather than “what is right”. Accordingly, the decline of morality implies several social and intellectual occurrences, including morality as an emotional validation, moral indecisiveness, and the personal unaccountability and emotional victimhood.

The preeminence of emotional validation which overtakes rational ethical argument represents a profound moral transformation. This validation refers to the act of acknowledging and affirming a personal emotional state (Horkovska). However, concerning moral precedence emotional validation is estimated over justice or objective truth. It is studied that “emotions usually elicit deontological

choices while cognition leads people to make utilitarian choices” (Cecchetto et al 6). Regarding moral choices, therefore, it is inevitable occurrence for individuals to prioritize their emotions when making decisions, even in account of ethical or social consideration. For instance, if one harbors animosity towards another, based on no particular reason, they may act immorally towards them. This undermines and he foundational virtue of justice and fairness. On this basis, morality is devalued in itself, as it suggests that personal feelings can justify immoral actions towards others by affirming the subjective emotional authority.

Nevertheless, the western moral culture undergoes a loss of personal accountability alongside with the rise of victimized emotional moral authority. As stated, that “in modern society, there is often a lack of accountability, and people may do as they please without fear of consequences. Accountability is essential for maintaining ethical standards” (Kelleher). Wherein feeling hurt is credible to justify immoral behavior, while being held accountable is considered an abuse. As subjective emotional experiences are considered morally sacred; when emotional discomfort is interpret as violence, still the rejection of subjective identity claims perceived harassment. For instance, an event when a group of university student demands the annulment debates by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Jordan Peterson, arguing that simply hearing their view constituted emotional violence. Thus, psychological safety is justifying censorship. Maia Livne addresses such occurrences in her critical takes on freedom of speech. She acknowledges that it is valid that people cannot “walk around spitting slurs”, meaning, the limitations on harmful or abusive language is a social justice. However, Livne is skeptical that restricting unpleasant views an obsessive selection of language is considered social justice; she asserts that “if you want to change the world, it is better to truly hear the people you are fighting with and against”. Here, an offense is a seen as a form of victimization. Wherein, any intellectual discomfort is regarded, first as an emotional discomfort and second a violence and abuse. This aligns with McIntyre analysis of the current culture and “the tendency of individuals to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information that confirms their preexisting beliefs and

attitudes” (10). Therefore, moral claims and judgments are rooted in emotional and subjective understanding, dismissing any skepticism or questioning.

Moreover, internal feelings are asserted as independent truths and moral scale. Numerous activists within the western society, advocate the widespread acceptance of questioning someone’s claim is regarded unfair and a denial their truth, For instance, the contemporary public debate surrounding the objection of non-binary gender identity underscores a societal tension. As in the subjective truth and emotional validation in “my gender is what I feel it to be” goes against the empirical and biological “facts”. This narrative challenges the traditional understanding of gender by the demand of emotional recognition of “what feels real” as a valid knowledge and truth. While, this discussion explains how facts and science were dismissed in favor of feelings, still homosexuality is regarded immoral in both Judeo-Christian traditions and conservative societal rule. However, the emergence of neologism “my truth” has evolved into a moral validation agreement which delegitimizes all competing assertions and traditional beliefs. Therefore, morality failed as indicator of ethical truths when truths has become self-declared and socially defended, regardless of biological, sociological, or traditional scrutiny. The moral decline is consequently grounded in the transformative purpose of moral principles, shifting from ethical guidance and authoritarian control over actions to an object utilized only for personal gratification. In other words, it is articulated that “virtually all individuals irrationally inflated their moral qualities, and the absolute and relative magnitude of this irrationality was greater than that in the other domains of positive self-evaluation” (Young). The tendency of overestimating one’s own qualities moral is misused in a society that appreciates subjective emotional logic and undermines any other auxiliaries.

On another hand, this moral decline and complexity not only affects ethical judgments and intellectual competence and decision making. Emotional-based decisions are deemed uncertain. A prime example of the public and personal doubtfulness is seen in any ethical discourses that might address an individual understanding or perception of a particular ethical conduct, the concepts of relativity and uncertainty prevail. The perceptions and judgments are dependent upon the emotional state experienced in various situations, where the frequent answer response in such context is “it depends”. This dependence is based on the context, the circumstances, and the accompanying sentiment. It is elaborated on this as

People say “it depends” for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, the answer truly does hinge on certain variables, and they may want to be accurate. Other times, they may be hesitant to give a definitive response due to uncertainty, fear of being wrong, or wanting to consider every angle. (Sharad Kerur)

The current mindset is devoid of clear decisiveness while profound moral values are built on this uncertainty. It is no longer a matter individual subjectivism; it evolves into a state of moral fluidity within the individual himself rather than within society at large.

That being the case, it is crucial to mention that emotions are vital component of human understanding. Still prioritizing them over verifiable facts and social norms affects community cohesion when making radical claims or policy decisions is detrimental. Feelings indeed inform but do not replace factual evidence and rational considerations. This balance is pivotal for a functional society. Therefore, the post-truth morality which advocates for the death of objectivity and the dominance of feelings over fact disrupted western social cohesion and displayed the consequences of moral decline.

2.3. Cultural and Social Transformations

The moral collapse into ambiguity costs the western world crucial social and cultural transformations. These transformations demonstrate moral decline by ideological movements and communal life changes. The

collapse of shared moral standards reflects the moral ramifications of individualism and consumerism. The individualism influenced morality with radical redefining of responsibilities and rights. On the other hand, consumerism and technological significance shift societal values to materialism and exacerbates ethical dilemmas and uncertainties.

2.3.1 Individualism

Individualism, as a social and political movement, was grounded in the Enlightenment's liberty ideologies. Early individualism centered primarily in resistance of the absolute authoritarianism and individual essential rights, advocated by known figures including John Lock and Jean Jacques Rousseau. It was more of resistance and reformative response and its moral implication remained peripheral during that time. However, individualism has evolved, in the contemporary moral prospect, remarkably under the postmodern influence. Under the influence of challenging traditional communal obligations, moral individualism emphasizes personal right and choice, self-fulfilment, and subjective experiences. Accordingly, the rise of individualism has occurred as it aligns with the contemporary advocated ideologies.

The current society has focused more on individual needs and desires. The well-being of the community and societal bond are more insignificant than personal concerns. The article titled "On the Rise of Individualism and the Decline of Morality" addresses the inverse relationship between individualism and moral decline; claiming that

Over the past half-century, society has become more individualistic...it has also become less morally aware, because social and moral fabrics are inextricably linked. The atomization and demoralization of society have led to certain forms of social breakdown (Brooks and Chris par 3).

The decline in moral awareness stems from a vague sense of right and wrong that is tied to social connections and effective interactions. As elaborated in the first chapter, moral certainty is rooted in a unified moral understanding within a society. However, with the conflicting approaches on which framework should claim this agreement, society has to retrain the essential judgment of right and wrong which is shaped by strong social connections. Therefore, the moral decline implications manifest in the account of the cultural shift social fragmentation, and loss of meanings within confusion.

Western society is experiencing the impact of a cultural shift; as the family-based social culture is replaced with an individualistic way of life. This individualism loosens familial ties thus social cohesion falls as well. It is stated that “individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: Everyone is expected to look after himself/herself and her/his immediate family only” (Scott 20). The downfall of the extended family structure and the valorization of personal lifestyle choices diminish social cohesion and well-being. As societies are more divided and people are not as connected through families, churches, and communities, it has affected morality. Once, these institutions provided shared values and enforced common norms. However, as moral awareness declines, ethical responsibilities are increasingly seen as meaningless burdens.

Meanwhile, this decline of morality within the current rise of subjective understanding has impacted social cohesion. In addition, a lot of public goods "diminished as a result of groups getting more individualistic" (ibid 6). This shift harms society's well-being. Likewise, when decisions are based primarily on emotions, as in “how I feel” rather than what is right, the credibility of moral judgments decreases. An illustrated manifestation of this diminishment is the liberal movement, particularly the contemporary

feminist and LGBTQ movements, which has challenged the traditional idea of family. As individuals prioritize their own beliefs and values, the public good that benefits everyone is being affected.

The advocated “my truth” and personal choices are understood in these liberal movements. The current feminism and LGBTQ rights presumably promote moral values by defending marginalized voices and respecting individuals’ choices over social wellbeing. For instance, promoting same-sex marriage or challenging the notion of marriage itself creates heterogeneity within society, affecting the children's uprisings. Moreover, the impact of personal choices influenced Western society. Traditional moral responsibility is insignificant in making decisions regarding family formation, "family structure in the United States has changed over the last 60 years: Marriage rates fell, divorce rates climbed, and the share of family income earned by mothers doubled” (McKay). Furthermore, empowering and favoring certain moral and personal choices while undermining whatever is traditional is argumentatively unjust. As a consequence, this social fragmentation and a decline in traditional institutions influence one’s moral responsibility toward both the family and society as a whole. When the moral compass is lost and this fragmentation is increasing, both social and personal issues are inevitable.

The rise of individualism also led to the loss of ethical meanings and confusion. American society, for instance, values “strongly conveys that both relentless self-interest and genuine selflessness are moral imperatives” (Harrist and Richardson 1). This reflects that societal standards are confusing, leading the individual to prioritize personal interests while showing care to others. It is articulated that “individuals in our culture are faced with the perplexing, perhaps even disorienting challenge of making sense of mixed messages and sometimes conflicting ethical demands

emanating from this framework”(ibid). While the moral scale is acceptance instead of justice, disclaimers risk one’s social safety. Cancel culture dominance and the perplexing reality along with the marginalizing of social institutions has increased the loss of meaning and and purpose. The moral fall in uncertainty struggle weakens mental health and under the frail familial support alongside identity crises; Charles Taylor states that “to know who you are involves being oriented in a moral space... An acute form of disorientation on this order would be equivalent to an identity crisis” (ibid 4 5). Thus, the shared moral understanding addressed human behaviorism. In the past, the individual had clarity, but with the current freedom of choice, the individual struggles to find meaning while managing daily life. Thus, identity must be rooted in purpose rather than simply recognized.

2.3.2 Consumerism and Technology Impacts

The interplay between consumerism and technology in Western society manifests the decline of ethical standards. The individualistic society has accelerated the spread the phenomenon of isolation. It has led to the dominance of consumerism and technology. While consumerism has become a shared cultural value, redefining traditional moral values; technology contributes to this dominance through social media, and the advancement of Artificial intelligence, in particular. These advancements align with the isolated nature of individuals, further deepening uncertainties.

Consumerism is a widespread culture that offers an alternative sense of belonging, one that can be lost. As traditional sources of ethics lose meaning, consumption offers materialistic significance instead. A consumer-centered culture promises meaning, enjoyment, and happiness. Consumerism promotes that “smartphones promise to “connect” us,

vacations offer relaxation and deeper insights, and streaming subscriptions tempt us with pleasurable entertainment” (Widmann par 2). Therefore, the market is selling promises rather than products. The current society needs meaning, thus it is occupied with pursuing material satisfaction as a replacement for values and purpose. The ethical issues with consumption address individuals particularly, as mentioned,

At the individual level, consumerism is often associated with the pursuit of happiness and self-fulfillment. Advertisements and media constantly reinforce the idea that purchasing the latest products can lead to a better life. While there's nothing inherently wrong with seeking comfort or pleasure through material goods, ethical issues arise when consumerism becomes a primary source of identity and self-worth. One significant ethical concern is the promotion of materialism. (Takkar par 2).

When personal identity and material possessions are closely tied through consumption, the individual value becomes what is owed rather than what is conducted. Personal values and proclaimed happiness matters than anything else. Therefore, people are condemned to fall into an open-ended loop of gaining possessions for temporary pleasure and self-fulfillment. Such a pattern is more of a distracting form of deeper sources of fulfillment, like meaningful relationships, personal clarity, and genuine connections.

Furthermore, moral rules and ethical beliefs transform into an empty fleeting purpose. When the ethical understanding is dislocated, a pragmatic, pursuit of material goods dominates. For instance, if personal gain contradicts ethical values such as honesty or integrity, the choice inevitably falls on where personal value resides rather than on debatable traditional virtue. As Ayn Rand says about self-interest “by the grace of reality and the nature of life, man—every man—is an end in himself, he exists for his own sake, and the achievement of his own happiness is his highest moral

purpose” (Rand 101). This shift in moral judgment is influenced by emotional-based morality and liberal subjective truths.

The technological advancement, on the other hand, reinforces this ethical fall and misinformed beliefs. Social media and Artificial intelligence play a significant role in shaping livelihoods, offering endless information and a variety of truths. This immanence exposure to information affects the capacity to develop one’s thoughts, as the controversial theorist Baudrillard states “we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning” (Laybats and Tredinnick 204). Essentially, the overload of digital information can decrease the capacity for meaningful understanding; thus the more diverse the information, the deeper uncertainty becomes.

Additionally, as long as social media platforms champion influential content, the credibility of media platforms is questionable. While social media platforms celebrate numerous opportunities and expressions, they influence moral judgments. According to Shaziya social media impacts the youth, as he states “the impact of social media on the moral values of youth is profound and multifaceted, shaping not only their thoughts but also their actions and attitudes” (Shaziya par. 2). The constant display of various self-expressions content creates a sense of familiarity with a different type of behaviors. A prime illustration of how this familiarity is manifesting is the spread of the hashtag #Normalize or #LetNormalize on TikTok platform, which gained popularity as it advocates for normalizing various acts and behaviors, often including those that are unconventional. Hashtags represent “collectively shared topic designators with considerable surface variation that can hamper semantic interpretation” (Declerck and Lendvia 107). This hashtag emerged in 2020 but gained widespread popularity in

2025⁸, encouraging participants and users to share and normalize different and often personal behaviors. This familiarity calls for normalizing various unethical or socially unaccepted acts. Ethical and social change is accelerating hastily. While the current behavior determination is acceptable, rather than moral, the public's call for changing the acceptable is in itself a source of confusion.

Moreover, the spread of Artificial Intelligence contributed to the variety of moral debates and discussions on what is acceptable or moral, which are interminable. Individuals tend to avoid complex or challenging conclusions when such extant uncertainty is frequent. For example, in 2023 CNC News Articles articulated that “hundreds of Western University students failed assignments, courses and exams last year for cheating, plagiarizing, or engaging in one of several scholastic offences, a new report shows” (Trevithick par 1). The dishonest academic use of A.I or their malpractices are left unsolved. As personal benefits conflict with ethical principles, unresolved debates, and less clarity take the blame. Moreover, social media and Artificial Intelligence advocate for external validation over depth. This aligns with how personal value is externally judged, enforcing the insignificance of ethical values.

Ultimately, individualism, combined with consumerism and technology demonstrates the moral decline influence on transforming social and cultural settings. Overlooking the traditional enforcers of societal norms and ethical rules terminates social cohesion. Instead, it has upgraded self-expression and pluralism of moral choices. However, society stood with no primary enforcer of basic standards.

⁸ This data is observed in TikTok platform and generated via A.I.

2.4. Legislation of Moral Choices

The Enlightenment liberal movement empowered political and legal interference in human rights movement and ethical systems, sustaining its moral philosophies as foundations. The legal reforms shift to individual rights and secular principles and the legislation of morality displays the social values (Startup 948). John Locke for example, articulated the government's role in protecting personal moral rights⁹ in 1698. However, the current society embodies various values and different principles. And as the shared narrative collapsed, the law, therefore became the only enforcer of moral choices

Legislation of moral choices allows the government or legal institutions to proceed transforming moral values into enforceable laws. On a social scale morality is judged as right or wrong; while on the legal scale moral conduct is considered legal or illegal; as mentioned “law forthrightly attempts to shape citizens’ moral beliefs; when the law forbids murder, this is because murder is evil, and the language of the law sometimes makes explicit the moral implications of the prohibited act” (Bilz and Nadler 5). Accordingly, the law has always played a significant role by reinforcing moral values. The moral legislation’s significance is reflected in the societal exchangeable use of “moral” and “legal” (Tyson 89).

⁹ John Locke in his political philosophy in *Two Treatises of Government* he articulated moral imperatives as the human right of life, liberty, and property.

Furthermore, law does not merely coexist with morality, but embeds and enforces shared value standards, particularly within a pluralistic society. On the other hand, legislation of different moral choices, as a form of neutrality, has blurred morality as well. The legalization of behaviors once regarded immoral promotes social approval, which discredits morality and reflects its decline. If what once was believed immoral is now accepted and promoted, morals are deemed changeable, indicating moral decline. Prominent examples of the legalization of immoral choices are prostitution and same-sex marriage.

Several Western governments decriminalized sexual activities as liberal policies. For example, The European Union members, by the majority of 78%, allow prostitution either legally or regulated such as France in 2016, Germany in 2002, and Netherlands in 2000...etc. Likewise, same-sex marriage was officially legislated by many countries, notably Spain in 2005, the United Kingdom in 2014, and the United States in 2014. These legislation were claimed under the light of individual liberty and human rights. Even though objections to these immoral choices were raised, for instance, many argue against the morality of homosexuality, as cited;

Being homosexual or engaging in same-sex marriage is unnatural because it is contrary to what a person ought to be or what one ought to do...Close to the 'unnatural' objection is the objection posed mainly by Christians. The religious argument is that homosexuality is immoral because it has been condemned in the Bible (Akpan 5).

The foundations of this argument are purpose-oriented and religious, reflecting their truths. Still ethical pluralism advocates the coexistence of diverse truths and moral choices, even who oppose these principles have to submit to multiplicity.

Nevertheless, the political enforcement of these legislations which was also adopted as a moral principle is the liberation of harm principle¹⁰. As it upholds that individuals are free unless any harm is caused to others; the legal resections and regulations is accurate. However, the morality of harm principle is quite contradictory. Allowing prostitution may cause adultery which is both harmful and immoral. Regardless, prostitution itself might be causing harm. A conducted research, titled *Study on National Legislation on Prostitution and Trafficking in Women and Children*, has elaborated that the harm caused by this legislation is more liberal than ethical, as “a significant number of victims suffer deprivation of their basic human rights and their lives are often at risk” (Di Nicola et al. 10). Therefore, ethical-based harm are accepted as the norm while prioritizing liberal choices and personal freedom. Moreover, following the same logic of no harm is conducted by homosexuality; incestuous marriage should be legalized as well (Andrade 147). As it is possible, in the coming days what is regarded undignified and immoral act today may be accepted. Accordingly, Legal reinforcements have little care for public wellbeing, as the law which is the maintainer and enforcer of shared moral and ethical standards is keeping neutrality towards moral choices even if they contradict human rights.

Besides, law alone is not enough to maintain the moral order, as cited in Tyson that “Mooney has asserted that laws alone are poor substitutes for moral or ethical conduct... the law is both minimum and necessary [standard, law as a [moral or ethical] standard is incomplete” (46). In other words, the limitation of the law as a substitute for morality is incomplete. When the law enforces minimum yet essential standards, it is

¹⁰ John Stuart Mill’s principle is explained in the Utilitarian Morality section.

rather unable to contain the borders of morality. Moral institutions are more of individual, public mentors, as elaborated.

In times past, transgressing the morals of the family, church, and community could lead to far worse private and public consequences for the violator than criminal sanctions. Parents and families, schools and teachers, parishioners and churches, and fraternal, service, and veteran organizations mutually reinforced the expected behaviors, supported patriotism, and sanctioned violators. The punishments within the home or school could be worse than what was imposed by the courts for similar conduct. The decline in enforcement of moral and ethical violations has shifted expectations of laws. Law...is now viewed and enforced as the expected level of conduct, rather than the lowest-tolerated level of conduct. (101)

The erosion of moral and ethical frameworks shifts the authority to the law. The reliance on law as the primary enforcer, therefore, degrades public morality to a minimum, legal one which neglects virtue and moral excellence in account of preventing harm.

Ultimately, morality with its broad dominance, the legislation of moral choices and interference of law in moral values reflect and enforce the implication of the present moral decline. The dismissal of shared moral traditions and understandings undermines virtue and high morals. Enforcing morality by law creates a protected society but unsafe, when no harm is conducted does not necessarily mean good is conducted either. Morality fuels societies and individuals to higher meanings, and its decline costs purpose.

2.5. Loss of Confined Moral Code and Return to Religion

The loss of the confined moral code can only be traced to the first break from restrictions. The Enlightenment intellectual revolution against religious dogma marked the departure from the divine moral authority; the first break whatsoever was an

intellectual one. Western man, however, sought various alternatives to ground morality in a unified, common, and shared framework. The per-enlightenment moral certainty was something familiar and a well-established concept to Enlightenment thinkers. Therefore, and despite the liberal call, the concept of moral certainty's significance led to desperate struggles to establish one universal framework. Theories differ on whether morals are founded on rationality, secularism, or utilitarianism. However, all theories shared regulations and limitations and persevered in principle and social consideration, evidence of a unified system. Still, the various debates remained unsettling on a single efficient alternative. Furthermore, postmodernism has rejected the attempts to apply a universal moral framework and deemed it oppressive to different societies and cultures. Instead of grounding morality, postmodernism embraces the social and cultural diversities of its subjective tendencies. Therefore, the second moral break from restrictions is a subjective diverse one.

Moreover, if the break from religious morality is clear in Enlightenment thought, the postmodern break from rational, intellectual morality is well self-representative in the cultural, social, and legal morality. However, neither rationally structuralized nor fluid ambiguous code enables man to preserve moral order. In contrast to divine morality which has maintained through religious teachings and natural law, man-made morality is mutable. It is constructed within human rational, cultural, and emotional interpretations, excluding any external reference for ethical judgments. Nonetheless, since the withdrawal from these very judgments, morality has become more uncertain. As the loss of the confined moral code was sourced by man, the decline resolution lies in the rupture from his shortcoming restrictions, and the final break shall be an absolute one.

2.5.1. The Cost of Man-Made Ethical Framework

The first strain on the confined morality loss is the exclusion of rationality from religious teachings. Enlightenment thinkers tried to apply reason and rationality, justifying moral conclusions regardless of their metaphysical roots. However, the rational application was not new at that time. St Thomas Aquinas applied reason in the Christian tradition. His application, however, is restricted by one condition, if human interpretation “tells us something contrary to the faith, it is no longer true philosophy, but error, and the result of defective reasoning”(Elders 538). Therefore even with the limitations of man's understanding of certain truths and the variation of rational interpretations; the source that corrects these possibilities is the Supreme Being. Assuring that, these interpretations are inherited nature of human beings but cannot stand alone or shall be invalid. However, the Enlightenment rejection of the ultimate source and grounding of morality in human reason alone is the spark of man-made foundation especially morality. Similarly, Kant's attempt to derive universal moral judgments from reason alone is explained in the categorical imperative. However, on what basis can reason regard moral and immoral values, meaning that his theory fails as a unique universal law by which morality is judged. Essentially, the categorical imperative is more about discipline to one's ethics. While Hume's sentimentalism favored feelings over reason and logic it was also, a rational interpretation of human behavior. Regardless, feelings and desires are “conflicting and mutually incompatible” and cannot judge virtue universally (MacIntyre 39).

Therefore, rationality alone failed and fell, as argued “the project of providing a rational justification for morality... had decisively failed, and this failure had itself been disguised” (ibid 50). Standing alone, individual rationality is as limited as the individual himself. Besides, this rationality was primarily applied as justifications of per-selected and per-determined

values. Man-only reason was aimlessly tended to correct its errors, making it unable to yield an alternative universal rule, provoking instability, and uncertainty. By contrast, the clarity and stability experienced in the previous era were due to the supreme hierarchical certainty.

Furthermore, the uncertainty resulting from man-made morality costs Western society this moral decline. At the loss of common standards, moral claims cannot appeal to any shared ground or convictions, resulting in disagreements and incommensurable principles. This leads to the loss of comprehension and ‘emotivism’ culture, which MachInery 1981 introduced. It refers to a social environment, where moral language no longer refers to standards, instead saying something is wrong is understood as saying I do not prefer that act, or not act upon it. The ethical disagreements, thereby, formed the essence of moral relativism and pluralism. Once moral judgment turned into an expression of a personal feeling, society rejected reason judgment as it is considered a violation when one’s feelings are judged reasonably. This moral reflection of uncertainty led to the social reflection of instability. While any clash of preferences translates to moral disagreement, the absence of neutral resolve entails instability. Besides, moral agreement centers more on appeal or rhetoric persuasions. These disputes and fragmentation usually are resolved by moral enforcement; however, the law cannot interfere in every day’s discussions and disagreements. The man-made foundation costs the society its stability, agreement, clarity, and decades of uncertainty. In accordance to the man inconsistent nature his foundation is therefore entitled to be to change and instability.

The second strain of the loss of moral restrictions is accountability. As the man is the legislator of his moral code, responsibility to uphold its values can change at will. The continuance pattern of establishing and

demolishing a moral system or theory is historically proven. Accountability towards one's actions and moral once had a heavy sense to it, when immorality was understood through God's will, to be held accountable meant divine punishment. Immoral action was not a mere moral failure, instead it was considered a sin that requires confession, repentance and God's forgiveness¹¹. In addition, immorality was breaking a societal norm, admitting to oneself a further failure. As long as, the individual belongs to a group the consequences of his behavior affect weight on him more, since "it is precisely because people need to see themselves and the groups they identify with as morally good" (Goupal 9). By this logic, an individual who is the legislator and within an accepting society is free to drop responsibility for his unethical behavior. Bandura's 1999 theory of moral agency explained that moral accountability operates through self-regulating moral agency which applies how people tend to avoid unethical behavior, persevering self-image. However, this self-image should not be damaged, many "are motivated to try and justify behaving badly" (2). The tendency seen in consumerism influence reflecting group norms and normalization may easily find unethical behavior "permissible if not desirable"(ibid 5). Howsoever, the lack of accountability stems as well from the absence of restrictions, within a society which celebrates pluralism and diversity, the individuals is not held accountable for neither the outcomes nor the process of their actions, morality means less. Therefore, virtues like responsibility and accountability are insignificant when, a changeable by nature, man holds the foundations of self-satisfactory decisions.

That said, the decline of the shared moral code in favor of a man-made ethical framework resulted in a lack of virtue, obligations, and moral language. Western society today reflects the abandonment of religious

¹¹ As explained in Religious morality in the Pre-Enlightenment era.

morality and secularization of ethical frameworks as well as empowering society and individuals with moral judgment. As the void left by secularism, pluralism and relativism, did not affirm inclusiveness but rather has resulted uncertainty, and make right and wrong an ambiguous concept. In *How Should We Then Live?* Francis A. Schaeffer write “if there is no absolute by which to judge society, then society is absolute”. Indeed, he warned of the collapse of moral absolutes in a secular society as he argued that only a return to religion and theism could restore moral clarity and certainty.

2.5.2. Restoring Moral Coherence and Social Stability

The post-truth morality, as examined, has displayed the outcome of secular, man-made ethical frameworks. The display of an emotionally responsive, culturally fractured, and legally constructed society proves these frameworks' inability to enforce moral values. Whether detached from the divine or detached from reason, contemporary morality has deviated from any form of authority. Therefore, an attempt to restore moral coherence affirms a moral internal consistency, a universal grounding, and an external authority. Religion provides more than coherence; it provides purpose, meaning, and clarity. The certainty and stability religion offers are known within the Pre-Enlightenment era. The implementation of divine authoritative framework is proposed by many, including Alasdair MacIntyre and C.S Lewis, as moral critics, foresee the Enlightenment project implications. Therefore, rather than a theological imposition, it is a moral analysis that answers to restoring certainty, accountability, and social stability.

The ultimate solution to achieving cohesion is a religious moral dogma that is founded on three principles; internal consistent truths that resolve moral relativism, religion as a universal legitimacy that offers complete

agreement and shared moral judgments, and an immutable authority that minimizes the legal moral authority.

The coherence of theism and religion addresses, such as the Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity and Islam, objective truths as internally consistent with no contradictions or subjective truths. Moral relativism, on the other hand, asserts that there are no absolute and no universal moral truths, while moral frameworks in both Christianity and Islam claim the opposite. The two claims are totally contradictory and both cannot be true in the same epistemic framework. By the Principle of Non-Contradiction, if the moral relativism claim is true, religions with objective truths do not exist. However, in this case, there is an objective truth and a divine lawgiver, therefore moral relativism is false. Likewise, theistic tradition offers coherent internal epistemologies, such as divine revelation scriptural hermeneutics, and rational theology, which supports the existence of objective moral truths. Therefore, moral relativism is necessarily incoherent within a theist system that is epistemically proven true.

Religion asserts the universal legitimacy of one unified moral truth and rejects the multiplicity of subjective moral truths, advocated by relativism and emotivism. Religion, in this sense, has provided two evidences. The first is the revelation scriptures which are considered books of all truths, the word of God, and morality is abstracted from them. This argues in favor of objectivity,

The second piece of evidence is articulated by Lewis and MacIntyre asserting that all humans share moral intuition bestowed upon them by God. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, articulated that God provides a shared moral judgment of morality within humans. For that he argues against divine command theory that “things are not good because God commands them; God commands certain things because He sees them to be good. In other words, the Divine will is the obedient servant of the Divine Reason”

(Shrock 109). The traditional Christian teachings relies on the divine command theory. However, Lewis's approach is that humans share an innate sense of right and wrong. Meaning, the distinction between right and wrong is rooted in human intuitions and reason, but, only and only if, this intuition does not reject God and religion, because this intuition is regulated by accountability and awareness of God. However, initially, all humans share a universal moral code. MacIntyre agreed that by his criticism of the categorical imperative, he rejected Kant's claim that there is no divine morality only reason and intuition. MacIntyre argument was if there is no divine morality than on what basis a moral act is judged. He writes "the concept of the moral law and of moral obligation out of which Kant constructed his moral philosophy was a concept with a history... and that history had been largely forgotten or ignored by Kant and his successors" (62). The history addressed is the religious traditions Enlightenment thinkers reject. Thus, he asserts that intuition originated from God. As long as it does not undermine it, then it becomes man-made judgment. Therefore, this intuition is influenced by history, society, or culture but with a sense of awareness and accountability, it is sustainable as a universal law.

Moreover, the internal intuition aligns with the Islamic belief, namely "*Fitrah*" the natural inclination and primordial nature that every human is born with. As best quoted

In Islamic belief, every human being is born with a *fitrah* a pure, innate disposition. This concept refers to the natural state in which Allah creates all people, encompassing not only belief in one God, but also an internal compass that guides us towards moral goodness, truth, and purity. (AbuMohammed pr 1)

Islam teaches that all mankind is created upon this *Fitrah* which naturally guides them toward truth and towards the One and Only God, Allah. This embedded orientation towards faith and truth, right and wrong,

is unalterable and universal. Though this innate awareness exists, it can be obscured by parents, society, culture, or ego. Fitrah is also mentioned in the Qur'an.

So be steadfast in faith in all uprightness 'O Prophet'—the natural Way of Allah which He has instilled in 'all' people. Let there be no change in this creation of Allah. That is the Straight Way, but most people do not know. (30:30)

Allah asserts that this nature was bestowed upon all people. However, this internal nature will not prevent humans from conducting evil deeds. Thereby, accountability is essential for how to act and behave. Indeed, this intuition and human nature act as a moral compass, but it is also the will that leads to this morality. That said, religion unifies moral rules in both teachings and human nature. The objectivity of judgment is preserved, rejecting subjectivity and emotivism which entail confusion and fragmentation.

In terms of authority, a society that upholds a clear and strong sense of a morality, enforces clear and respectful public values with certainty and simple principles. Moreover, authority functions through morality, Chomsky explains his political philosophy as the “authority must always justify themselves. He argues that most hierarchical institutions, whether political, economic, or social are fundamentally illegitimate unless they can provide a compelling moral justification for their existence” (Das and Chakraborty 207). The moral standards are beyond the state. Accordingly, for a society to be qualified to judge legal morality it should operate with a strong moral framework. In this case, religious framework is suitable due to its internal consistent and objective absolute moral truth such as justice,

dignity, and truthfulness. These traits sustain a shared moral coherence that aligns with public judgments toward authorities.

Additionally, religious morality empowers social morality. It empowers civil disobedience and affirms public well-being, human rights, and moral conviction. Therefore, a religious moral framework guarantees such engagements, unlike post-truth morality; it creates stability and affirms it. Social clarity and cohesion impact and also impact the authorities.

Ultimately, a unified moral code has been lost as a result of man-made ethical foundations. This can only be resolved with a return to certainty, clarity, and accountability. Religion serves as the foundation for moral judgments, not because it is the only option but because it is the best option. In addition, to providing meaning and purpose, religious morality also stabilizes society and upholds virtue and excellence. One possible explanation for the disorder and instability in Western societies is the constant redefining of morality and moral theory. Man alone is proven limited to establishing a shared morality. Thus many secular theories tried to root morality in a supreme substitute, Spinoza's theory is one example because even if man can govern, man cannot govern fairly, and correctly. Also, the changeable nature of man only necessitates unchangeable by nature authority, as in God.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter addresses the implications of the moral decline and man-made ethics in Western society. Following postmodernism morality, post-truth advocated for subjective morals in favour of objective moral standards. This has resulted in personal truths, social fragmentation and legal enforcement of morality. While individualism has affected social bounds and asserts isolation, consumerism and technology enforce materialistic values, loss of meaning and uncertainty. On the other hand, the legislation

of moral choices has degraded moral values and excellence and legalized immorality in the name of neutrality. These events necessitate moral coherence and social stability, a resolve attained only by the return to religious morality.

General Conclusion

The historical development of Western morality reveals a progressive departure from certainty to fragmentation, marked by a shift from divinely grounded ethics to subjective relativism. As this research has traced the pattern of moral decline through philosophical timelines and social implications. It is therefore revealed that the decline of morality occurred due to dismantling of moral universality in favor of rationality autonomy, feelings, and subjectivity.

Western moral thought has fundamentally displaced certainty by skepticism. The discussions of moral autonomy, relativism, and the collapse of moral absolutes shifted moral certainty to ambiguity and subject, the first chapter demonstrated how rejecting divine will and natural law theory, enables man to achieve a framework that maintains moral clarity. The implications of this attempt are elaborated in the second chapter. The post-truth subjectivity, individualism social fragmentation, and lack of social cohesion prove the limitation of man-made morality and underscore the need for reorientation.

These transformations have contributed to the decline of moral clarity and the weakening of collective ethical responsibility. The absence of a unified moral reference has led to societal disorientation, legal ambiguity, and a growing inability to distinguish moral obligation from personal choice

General Conclusion

Hence, this study reconsiders the value of a divinely grounded moral code, not as a theological imposition but as a needed resolve. It concludes that restoring moral coherence requires a return to transcendent foundations rooted in divine authority. Religious morality provides a stable ethical framework that affirms human responsibility, limits subjectivism, and sustains social integrity. this research concludes by proposing a return to religious foundations of morality.

In sum, the decline of morality in the Western world reflects a deeper loss of moral certainty. The solution does not lie in further deconstruction, but in reaffirming the existence of objective moral truths capable of guiding individuals and societies toward a coherent and meaningful ethical order. However, liberty in larger scope was not achieved by Christianity. Therefore, as an alternative, I consider the Islamic thoughts capable of upholding moral absolutism within the contemporary society. Especially, in an era of globalization and Western hegemony, it is crucial to critically examine the current state of Western morality and its implications.

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