

Reflection of Ethics and Human Values in William Goldings Lord of the Flies

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Abstract

Ethics, the very widely discussed issue all over the world, investigates what is the best for humans to live, and what kinds of actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances. There are many types of Ethics, but it is the descriptive ethics which gathers particular information about how people live and draw general conclusions based on observed patterns. The main objective of descriptive ethics is to explain which actions are right and wrong, and which characteristics of moral agents are virtuous. Each generation has its own set of morals and values. This paper attempts to focus descriptive ethics with reference to William Golding's novel Lord of the Flies.

Introduction:

Ethics, the very widely discussed issue all over the world, investigates what is the best for humans to live, and what kinds of actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy defines the word ethics as "the moral principles of a particular tradition, group or individual" (1995). As a branch of philosophy, Ethics is divided into several areas of study but major areas among them are: descriptive ethics, meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics. In this paper an attempt has been made to focus descriptive ethics with reference to William Golding's novel Lord of the Flies.

Descriptive ethics is a form of empirical research. Its main objective is to uncover human values and to explain which actions are right and wrong, and which characteristics of moral agents are virtuous. It also investigates people's ethical ideals. The core areas of descriptive ethics are found in the fields of social sciences and art studies. Literary scholarship and literature itself are, on the most fundamental level, associated with human values and attitudes. In Lord of the Flies, William Golding has explained sets of morals and values through the actions and behaviour of the characters. The general meaning of the term 'ethics' in the context of this paper refers to man's concept of what is right or man's ability to discriminate between right and wrong. The dominant problem raised in the novel Lord of the Flies is concerned with the concept of right and wrong.

Introduction to Lord of the Flies:

William Golding, a serious novelist and playwright of the twentieth century, is best known for his novel **Lord of the Flies** (1954). His four novels viz. Lord of the Flies (1954), The Inheritors (1955), Pincher Martin (1956), and Free Fall (1959), are moral parables in which specific distinction are made between what is generally called good and evil. Golding calls himself as a fabulist. According to him, "The fabulist is a moralist and a moralist can not make a story without a human lesson". (1965: 85). He believed that even in the scientific world of rationalism man is irrational. He was of the opinion that the evil or devil rises not from air or water but

from the inner darkness of man's heart and the source of evil is found in the will of man itself. Golding has presented this essential illness or the darker side of man's heart and its conflict with the goodness in *Lord of the Flies* through the conflict between the major characters and explicated an accurate portrayal of human nature and the importance of ethics and human values.

Lord of the Flies (1954), William Golding's first and the most important novel tells the story of a group of English schoolboy's stranded on a deserted island that turned into savages and denies the ethics and human values. The exploration of the idea of the right and wrong is partly based on Golding's experience with the real-life violence and brutality of World War II. The novel presents the story of a group of English schoolboys marooned on a tropical island after their plane is shot down during a war. Two of the boys, Ralph and Piggy, find a conch shell. When Ralph blows it like a horn, all the boys on the island come together. At the meeting, Ralph is elected as their leader and Jack is made as the leader of the hunters group. Soon after, they set up rules to govern themselves. At the meeting, one young boy claims he saw a "beastie" in the jungle, but Ralph dismisses it as just the product of a nightmare. He, then, suggests creating a signal fire at the top of a mountain as a means of their rescue from the island. The boys use Piggy's glasses to light the fire, but they are careless, and accidentally set part of the forest on fire. The boy who saw the beastie vanishes during the fire and is never seen again.

As time passes, the rivalry between Ralph and Jack begins. Jack challenges Ralph's authority at an assembly. His tribe hunts a pig and then, leaves its head as an offering to the beast and describes it as the Lord of the Flies-the beast within all men. Jack invites everyone to come to a feast. In the mean time Simon comes and tells everyone about the "beast," but Jack's tribe thinks Simon as the beast and kills him. After killing Simon Jack's group tortures the twins, and then kills Piggy. The next day the tribe hunts Ralph, setting fire to the forest as they do. He avoids them as best he can, and becomes a kind of animal that thinks only of survival and escape. Eventually the boys catch Ralph on the beach where they first set up their society on the island. But the burning jungle has attracted a British Naval ship, and an officer is standing on the shore. When officer comes to know the fact, he is shocked and disappointed that English boys would act in such a manner. The officer, then, helps the boys to go to England.

Reflection of Ethics and Human Values in Lord of the Flies:

In his portrayal of the small world of the island, Golding paints a broader portrait of the fundamental human values through struggle between Ralph and Jack. Here, Ralph represents order, leadership, and civilization, but Jack and his group represent unbridled savagery and the desire for power and domination. Like the characters in the novel, a number of objects have symbolic meaning. For instance, the conch shell, which is used to summon the boys for the meeting is a powerful symbol of civilization and order in the novel. Piggy's glasses, which are used to make fire, represent the power of science and intellectual endeavor. The imaginary beast that frightens all the boys stands for the primal instinct of savagery that exists within all human beings. The Lord of the Flies, the bloody, severed sow's head that Jack impales on a stake as an offering to the beast, represents savagery, violence, and the power of evil. Throughout novel, Golding uses these characters and objects to represent and emphasize the traits of human nature and human values.

The characters in *Lord of the Flies* possess recognizable aspects of human nature. Ralph, fair-haired, good-looking charismatic protagonist of the novel is the representative of civilization and democracy. He lives by rules, acts peacefully, and follows moral commands and values the good of the boys. Driven by his instinct of civilization and democracy, Ralph wants to set up a civilized utopia for all the boys on the island. However, Jack, Ralph's antagonist, represents forces of evil, the instinct of savagery and violence. Under the enforcement of savagery, he leads the hunters not only to kill pigs but also to kill his companions such as Simon, and Piggy. Although he fails in the vote, it does not defeat him. He continuously rages and breaks the democratic procedures of the assembly. The character of Jack not only shows us how the primitive desire and actions are released where there are no restrictions of civilization but also what a dictator would do when driven by his evil power and lust for blood.

Unlike Ralph and Jack, Simon stands on a different plane in the novel. He represents saintliness and a kind of innate, spiritual human goodness that is deeply connected with nature. The other characters in the novel abandon moral behavior as soon as civilization no longer imposes upon them; they are not innately moral but have simply been conditioned to act morally in the adult world with the threat of punishment for misdeed. Simon is endowed with insight into the unchanging nature of human beings and communities. When the boys are confused about the beast of air, Simon is the real skeptic and he suggests "I think we ought to climb the mountain". (William Golding: 142) What's more important is that Simon alone with his inner vision climbs the mountain to explore the evil without any awareness of losing his life or anything. It is his belief in spiritual reality that diminishes his fear of death, and he enters the dark forest without any fear of strange "beast". Through the dialogue with the lord of the flies, Simon has been aware what is the beast, and has discovered the dead parachutist. Simon has found the truth that the imaginary beast is "harmless and horrible". (William Golding:162) Simon ignores the threat of the lord of the flies and goes down to give the good news to the boys on the beach, who are having a beast-slaying dance. Before he preaches his truth, Beelzebub's promise is fulfilled; he is killed with tearing of teeth and claws of his companions. Simon does not successfully tell the boys truth, but Golding does give reader enlightenment and a warning through Simon. The enlightenment is that the innate goodness is the fundamental way of saving the world and the warning is that people are sick. Only if people had been aware of these, the world would avoid killing and destruction in the atomic and nuclear war nowadays and in future.

The central concern of *Lord of the Flies* is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one's immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one's will. This conflict might be expressed in a number of ways: civilization vs. savagery, order vs. chaos, reason vs. impulse, law vs. anarchy, or the broader heading of good vs. evil. William Golding has presented the basic evil through the murder song "Kill the pig! Cut his throat! Kill the pig! Bash him in!" (106) the fire set by the boys at the end to trap Ralph symbolizes the cruelty.

Golding suggests that Cruelty is possible only when the individual either neglects his individual human responsibility for other individuals or else neglects his social responsibility for the welfare of his self. Many instances in the novel illustrate the consequences when one individual or a group neglects social responsibilities.

Piggy's death occurs because he demands that Jack and his cohorts remember their social responsibilities. Ignorance, the second evil in this novel, is also represented by the death of Piggy, whom Ralph eventually recognizes as a "true, wise, friend" (187) His ideas and intelligence provide the rational concepts but they are often scorned and rejected by the boys. The deaths of Piggy and Simon cannot be evil acts and terrifying symbols of even greater evils. The boys senselessly murder those prophets who want to tell them the truth about their physical and spiritual situations. These evil acts show man's total neglect of his fellows' welfare, rights, and beliefs. So the consequences of the neglects social responsibilities is the major concern of the novel Lord of the Flies.

Conclusion:

The novel Lord of the Flies focuses on understanding of oneself and others because the major source of all evils is within all men. Man's basic goodness is his kindness toward others. Simon perfectly understands himself and others. So Simon is the dominant figure in the context of goodness. Through the character of Simon, Golding's makes it clear that man cannot hope to achieve goodness until he understands his innate tendency of evil. So Simon is regarded as a living symbol of goodness. If Simon represents good, then Ralph represents the potential for good in man. In Lord of the Flies Golding exposes that the world of the good is totally moral; the world of the wicked is totally amoral. So the ethics of the novel is 'know yourself and others' and this understanding of self and others is the major concern of Lord of the Flies. In short, the central concern of the novel is the conflict between two competing impulses that exist within all human beings: the instinct to live by rules, act peacefully, follow moral commands, and value the good of the group against the instinct to gratify one's immediate desires, act violently to obtain supremacy over others, and enforce one's will.

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