

AN ETHICAL DISCOURSE ON LGBTQ AND GENDER STUDIES

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**BEING A RESEARCH PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
PHILOSOPHY, SS. PETER AND PAUL CATHOLIC MAJOR SEMINARY, BODIJA,
IBADAN, IN AFFILIATION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE
BACHELOR OF ARTS (B.A.) DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY.**

APPLIED ETHICS

SS/PHI/403

LECTURER: FR. MELCHIZEDEK OKPALA

BODIJA, IBADAN.

JANUARY 2026

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1.0 Introduction

Applied ethics is concerned with the examination of moral problems as they arise within concrete human situations. Unlike normative ethics, which focuses on what we ought to do and which actions, values, or ways of life are morally right or wrong, applied ethics asks how these principles should guide human conduct in real social contexts. In contemporary society, one of the most debated moral issues concerns LGBTQ identities and gender studies. These debates touch directly on questions of human dignity, personal freedom, justice, moral limits, cultural identity, and social responsibility.

The ethical debates surrounding LGBTQ and gender studies lie in the conflict between modern claims about autonomy and self-identification, and long-standing moral traditions grounded in natural law, religion, and culture. While some argue that ethical progress demands full recognition and protection of LGBTQ identities, others contend that such recognition undermines moral order and social meaning. This paper examines these competing claims through the lens of applied ethics. It argues that while ethical theory strongly supports the protection of human dignity and freedom from harm, it also leaves room for legitimate moral disagreement concerning gender theories and their broader social implications.

1.1 Thesis Statement

The ethical questions surrounding LGBTQ identities and gender studies centre on human dignity, personal autonomy, social justice, and moral responsibility, as contemporary ethical theories argue strongly for recognition and protection of LGBTQ persons, even as serious moral, cultural, and religious objections to it continue to exist.

1.2 Conceptual Clarifications

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that studies moral values and moral conduct. It asks basic questions about what is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, and how human beings ought to live and act in society.

Normative ethics is the area of ethics that develops moral standards and principles for judging human actions. It asks questions such as *What should we do?* and *What kind of life is morally good?* Theories like utilitarianism, Kantian duty ethics, virtue ethics, and natural law belong to normative ethics.

Meta-ethics is the branch of ethics that examines the nature and meaning of moral concepts and moral language. It does not tell us what is right or wrong but asks what moral judgments mean, whether moral values are objective or subjective, and how moral knowledge is possible.

Applied ethics is the practical branch of ethics that applies moral principles to concrete moral problems in real life. It deals with issues such as medical ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, bioethics, and questions of sexuality and gender, including LGBTQ-related debates.

The full meanings of LGBTQ are: **L Lesbian:** A woman who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to other women. **G Gay:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to people of the same sex (often used especially for men). **B Bisexual:** A person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to both men and women. **T Transgender:** A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. **Q Queer (or Questioning):** Queer is a broad term used by some people to describe non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities. Questioning refers to people who are still exploring or unsure about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

2.0 Conceptual and Ethical Foundation

Ethical inquiry requires conceptual clarity. Aristotle warns that moral reasoning becomes defective when concepts are confused, noting that “it is a mark of an educated person to look in each area for only that degree of accuracy that the nature of the subject permits.”¹ In

¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.3, trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 5.

traditional discourse, *sex* refers to biological distinctions rooted in anatomy and reproduction, while *gender* is increasingly used to describe social roles, identity, and self-understanding. Gender studies, as an academic discipline, examines how gender norms and identities influence social structures, power relations, and cultural practices.

Applied ethics becomes relevant because these concepts are no longer merely descriptive. Claims about gender and sexuality now shape laws, educational policies, and social expectations. Ethical reasoning must therefore evaluate not only what these concepts mean, but how they ought to influence human action. Beauchamp and Childress emphasize that applied ethics concerns respect for persons, avoidance of harm, and “social justice,” which “is concerned with human well-being.”² LGBTQ issues fall squarely within this domain, since moral judgments in this area have direct consequences for how individuals are treated in society.

3.0 Major Ethical Arguments in Support of LGBTQ Recognition

One of the strongest ethical arguments in support of LGBTQ recognition comes from deontological ethics, especially the moral philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant grounds morality in the intrinsic worth of rational persons. He insists that human beings must never be treated merely as means but always as ends in themselves, stating: “act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.”³ This principle implies that degrading, exploiting, or dehumanizing individuals on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity is morally impermissible.

Furthermore, closely connected to dignity is the concept of autonomy. Kant understands autonomy as the capacity of rational agents to govern themselves according to

² Tom L. Beauchamp and James F. Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 9.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959): 47.

moral law. He describes the will as “not only subject to the law but... also as self-legislative.”⁴ From this perspective, supporters argue that personal identity, including sexual orientation and gender identity, falls within the sphere of moral self-determination. Ethical restrictions on such identity, therefore, require strong justification, especially when they concern deeply personal aspects of life.

Utilitarian ethics offers another line of support. John Stuart Mill defines moral rightness in terms of consequences, holding that “actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.”⁵ From this view, social practices that lead to stigma, exclusion, or psychological harm toward LGBTQ persons are morally suspect, especially when they do not yield clear social benefits. Policies aimed at reducing discrimination are often defended as ethically justified because they minimize suffering and promote social well-being.

Virtue ethics adds a further dimension by focusing on moral character rather than rules or outcomes alone. Aristotle argues that the goal of ethics is *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing, achieved through virtuous dispositions. He defines virtue as “the state that makes a human good and makes him perform his characteristic activity well,”⁶ lying in a mean. Cruelty, hatred, and injustice are vices regardless of their target. From a virtue-ethical perspective, moral disagreement does not excuse the failure to act with compassion, moderation, and practical wisdom.

4.0 Ethical Objections and Critical Perspectives

Despite these arguments, serious ethical objections to aspects of LGBTQ and gender studies remain. Natural law ethics, articulated most clearly by Thomas Aquinas, holds that moral norms are grounded in human nature and its purposes. According to Aquinas, “the

⁴ Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 49.

⁵ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001): ch. 2.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, II.6, 29.

natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law.”⁷ From this standpoint, critics argue that separating gender identity entirely from biological sex undermines the natural structure of human embodiment. Moral norms concerning sexuality and gender, they claim, must respect biological realities rather than treat identity as purely subjective.

Moreover, religious and cultural traditions further strengthen these objections. Charles Taylor explains that a person's moral life is closely tied to how they understand who they are. According to him, “our identity is what allows us to define what is important to us and what is not.”⁸ This means that moral beliefs about issues such as gender and sexuality are not picked at random but grow out of deeply held views about what gives life meaning and direction. For many communities, these beliefs shape how people see themselves, relate to others, and maintain social order. When ethical discussions overlook this moral grounding, they risk treating serious convictions as mere opinions rather than as expressions of a lived moral understanding.

Another serious concern is the danger of moral relativism. When moral claims about identity are treated only as matters of personal choice, it becomes difficult to uphold shared moral standards. Alasdair MacIntyre warns that in modern moral debates, disagreements often become endless because moral language is detached from common standards of reasoning. He observes that “there seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.”⁹ If this is the case, ethical support for LGBTQ recognition must avoid reducing morality to individual preference alone and must instead present reasons that can be openly discussed, examined, and judged within the public moral space.

⁷ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I–II, q. 91, a. 2. trans Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Brothers, Inc., 1947): 997.

⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989): 30.

⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 6.

5.0 Evaluation

Having looked at both the supporters and the critics, I think that LGBTQ goes against human nature. Even though I hold this view, I still believe in justice and treating everyone fairly. I believe this trend warrants careful study, as human society has undergone numerous changes since time immemorial. It is possible that someone may not be completely wrong to say that he is a she or that she is a he, as the arguments of those involved in this trend show. However, I also feel that some extreme claims, like identifying as animals, may suggest a mental issue or confusion, and these cases need more careful attention.

6.0 Conclusion

This paper has examined LGBTQ and gender studies through the lens of applied ethics. Deontological, utilitarian, and virtue-based ethical theories provide strong reasons to uphold human dignity, protect persons from harm, and encourage compassionate social relations. At the same time, natural law ethics, religious traditions, and concerns about moral relativism raise serious questions about moral limits, social meaning, and the foundations of ethical judgment. A responsible, ethical position avoids extremes. It neither dismisses LGBTQ persons as morally insignificant nor treats all gender claims as beyond moral critique. Applied ethics demands careful reasoning, respect for persons, and openness to dialogue. In a morally diverse world, ethical maturity lies not in forced consensus but in the pursuit of justice, understanding, and peaceful coexistence.

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