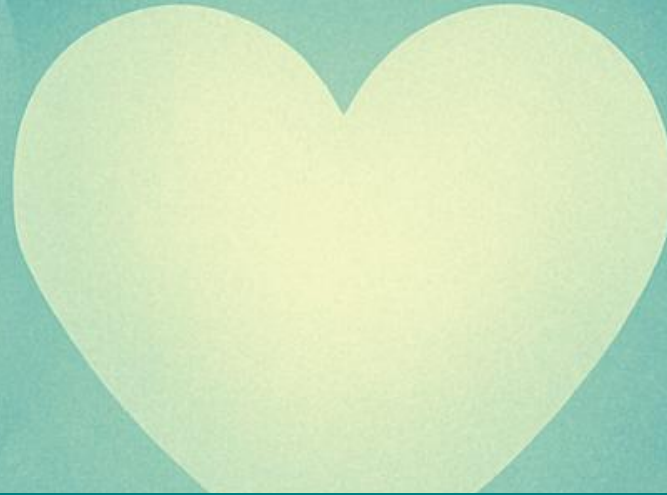


ETHICS



ETHICS AND VALUES

SUBJECT CODE: BELH-0017

Introduction to Ethics:

- **Definition:** Ethics is broadly understood as the philosophical study of morality. It is concerned with the study of "living well as a human being".
- **Scope:** Ethics is considered broader than morality. It encompasses considerations of personal development, human excellence of character, and the ultimate ends or goals one should pursue in life. Key questions in ethics include "How ought we to live?" and "What sort of person should I be?".
- **Components:** The field of ethics can be broken down into several areas of inquiry:
 - **The theory of the right:** Addressing what actions are right, what one ought to do, and what one owes to others.
 - **The theory of the good:** Focusing on what one should aim for and what constitutes the ultimate ends of life.
 - **Moral psychology:** Exploring how practical reason guides lives, the role of desires, and the possibility of acting on moral conclusions.
 - **Meta-ethics:** Examining the nature of moral judgments, their objectivity, and how moral knowledge is acquired.

Purpose:

Philosophers engage in moral theorising to provide a **systematic account of morality** as a normative system.

It aims to provide **moral guidance** and enable the **moral evaluation of human conduct**.

Core Questions in Ethics:

"How ought one to live?" or "What sort of person should I be?" (Socrates's question).

What is it right to do, what ought we to do, and what do we owe to people?.

What makes an action right or good?.

How can we know what is right and good? Can morality be rationally justified?.

What is Morality:

- **Definition:** Morality, in a more restrictive sense, refers to a **set of norms and principles that govern our actions with respect to each other**. These norms are typically taken to have a special kind of weight or authority.
- **Characteristics:** Moral norms are commonly held to be:
 - **Universal:** Applying to and binding everyone in similar circumstances.
 - **General:** Formulated without the use of proper names or rigged definite descriptions.
 - **Impartial:** Holding everyone to count equally.
- **Focus:** Moral norms primarily concern our interactions with others in ways that have significance to their well-being. Moral considerations are often viewed as inescapable and overriding, pushing towards generalization.

Key Terminology in Moral Evaluation:

Right Actions:

In a restrictive sense, synonymous with "obligatory". In a broader sense, it means "not wrong," encompassing obligatory, supererogatory, and morally neutral actions.

Obligatory Actions:

Actions that are **morally required** and not optional; failure to perform them is wrong. Often understood as *prima facie* (can be overridden by countervailing considerations, e.g., telling the truth unless it leads to an innocent person's death).

Forbidden Actions: Actions that one is **morally required not to do**; they are impermissible (e.g., failing to keep promises without unusual circumstances).

Supererogatory Actions: Actions that are **good but not obligatory**; they are admirable, but one is not blamed for not performing them (e.g., saving someone from a burning building).

Permissible Actions: Actions that are "not forbidden". This category includes obligatory, supererogatory, and morally neutral actions.

Morally Neutral Actions: Actions that are neither obligatory, forbidden, nor supererogatory (e.g., eating an apple instead of an orange).

Value Theory in Ethics:

Value theory is crucial because theories of right action often depend on defining what constitutes a "good" state of affairs.

Types of Value:

Intrinsic Value: Something that has **value in and of itself**, requiring no external explanation for its goodness (e.g., pleasure, for some philosophers).

Extrinsic Value: Value that **depends on some factor external to it** (e.g., a beautiful painting's value depends on the reactions of sentient beings).

Instrumental Value: Value derived from **what it brings about or its consequences** (e.g., a hammer's value for constructing things).

Conceptions of "The Good":

Subjective: The good consists of an individual's subjective states, such as pleasure, tranquillity, or desire satisfaction (e.g., Cyrenaics, Epicureans).

Objective: The good requires meeting a further standard beyond subjective states, such as acquiring genuine virtues or putting them into practice (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Aquinas).

Foundations of Morality: Sources of Normativity

The Question of Authority: What gives moral claims their distinctive authority over our actions, compelling us to follow them?

External Sources of Authority:

Divine Authority: Some theories posit that moral authority stems from **God's commands or will** (e.g., medieval voluntarists).

Internal (Human-Centric) Sources of Authority:

Human Nature: Morality is grounded in inherent features or facts about human beings (e.g., ethical egoists link morality to promoting self-interest based on human nature).

Reason: Moral principles are founded in **practical reason**, independent of desires or sentiments. Rational agents are inherently free and guided by rational will (e.g., Kantian ethics).

Sentiments/Emotions: Morality arises from human feelings, emotions, or a "moral sense," such as sympathy or compassion (e.g., sentimentalists like Hutcheson and Hume, and Schopenhauer).

Major Categories of Moral Theories

Consequentialism (Teleological Theories):

Criterion: An action is right based on its **consequences**, specifically if it produces the most good among available options.

Good Prior to Right: These theories define "the good" independently, then define "the right" as whatever promotes that good.

Value Promotion: Require the **promotion of value** (e.g., Jeremy Bentham, G. E. Moore).

Example: Classical Utilitarianism (the right action maximises overall pleasure or happiness).

Indirect Consequentialism: While aiming for good consequences, individuals might follow secondary rules without explicitly calculating utility in every instance.

Deontological Theories:

Criterion: An action is right based on **duty or adherence to rules**, independent of its consequences.

Value Honour/Respect: Value is to be honoured or respected (e.g., Kantian respect for rational nature).

Examples:

Kantian Deontology: Morally worthy actions align with the Categorical Imperative, respecting persons' rational nature.

Rossian Deontology: Right action accords with *prima facie* duties (e.g., keeping promises, showing gratitude).

Contractualism: Wrong actions are forbidden by principles that rational persons could not reasonably reject (e.g., T. M. Scanlon).

Virtue Ethics:

Focus: Prioritises **character evaluation** over individual actions, asking what kind of person one ought to be.

Criterion: The right action is what a **virtuous person would characteristically perform** in the given circumstances.

Example: Aristotelian ethics, which focuses on developing **human excellence of character** to achieve *eudaimonia* (flourishing).

Morality and Self-Interest: A Fundamental Debate

The Core Question: Is there an inherent conflict between acting morally and promoting one's own self-interest?. Does doing the right thing necessarily benefit others at one's own expense?

Ancient and Medieval Harmony:

Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Epicureans, Augustine, and Aquinas generally argued for a harmony between morality and self-interest.

They believed that living a virtuous or moral life was intrinsically linked to achieving one's own happiness or flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

Modern Perspectives: Conflict and Dualism:

Scotus: Rejected the harmony view, suggesting that morality sometimes conflicts with self-interest, prioritising an impartial view of justice.

Hobbes: Argued morality is justified by its consequences for self-preservation and peace, especially within an organised society. Without such societal enforcement, there is no reason to follow moral rules.

Butler: While aiming for harmony, he posited distinct "superior principles" like **conscience and reasonable self-love**, which, when properly understood, align with morality.

Sidgwick: Most famously articulated the "dualism of practical reason," highlighting a **sharp and potentially irreconcilable conflict between rational egoism and utilitarian morality**.

Summary:

"Ethics" is often used synonymously with "moral philosophy," indicating the philosophical inquiry into "morality". Normative ethics is the branch of philosophy specifically concerned with standards for right conduct and moral evaluation, aiming to provide moral guidance and explain the underlying justifications for moral judgments. It seeks to articulate what we "ought to do" or "ought to be like," distinguishing itself from descriptive ethics (which merely describes moral beliefs) and the law (as legal actions may still be immoral).

Sources :

- Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy (IEP) - "Ethics"
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP) - "Moral Theory"
- Terence Irwin - *Ethics Through History: An Introduction*
- Julia Driver - *Ethics: The Fundamentals*