

Ethics and Values
Dr. M Rashmi
Department of Social Sciences
VIT University, Vellore

Lecture – 3
Values

Hello friends!

In the previous lecture, we discussed the relevance and scope of ethics. So now you might have understood the meaning and the issues where ethical conduct is required. Now, let's move on to the meaning of values. The moment we hear the term, "value", some sort of definitions do come to our mind. Value literally means something that has a price, precious, dear and worthwhile and one is ready to sacrifice anything for it. In simple terms we can say, it is the degree of importance of something. It reflects one's attitudes, choices, decisions, judgments, relationships, dreams and vision. Values can also be defined as the conceptions of the desirable, which influence selective behaviour. They can be regarded as the criteria and moral judgement or certain subjective standards through which individuals or groups distinguish between good or bad, true or false and between ought to be or not to be etc.

It shapes individual personality, social morality and guides individuals to be a part of or function within distinctive socio-cultural system. Or we can say that it is a set of principles which guide the standard of behaviour. Without values, life will be chaotic. Values are beliefs about what is right and what is wrong and what is important in life.

They define the purposes of life and the means of achieving them. According to International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, "all purposive actions fall within the boundaries of evaluative action. Within purposive actions we can identify three main kinds of value: conative which signifies a desire or liking, achievement (success versus frustration), and affective (pleasure versus pain or unpleasantness)". Well, there are some writers who believe that anything good or bad is a value, or a value is anything of interest to a human subject. However, it would be inappropriate to simply extend the meaning of a term to the extent of making it meaningless or complicated. While discussing values, we also need to understand another term called norms. Values and norms are deeply related to each other and both are concerned with accepted assumptions about what is considered to be right or wrong, or what is defined as desirable or undesirable.

Values constitute the basis of norms and norms depend upon values and are justified through the standards of "true", "good" and "beautiful". When we look at values and norms, we can say that values are more abstract than norms whereas norms are relatively specific. Let's pause for a moment and have a reflection spot. Now answer this question: Based on the classification of values by the International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences; competition falls into which category of value?

- a) Conative
- b) Affective
- c) Achievement

Take a moment and think about it. Competition, in very simple terms, is a form of striving or struggle between two or more persons to attain a common goal which is limited in availability. It's a feeling which you can easily relate to your class assessments; the struggle to become 9 pointers, the struggle to become top ranked student and ultimately to get placed in a good company with a good package. No doubt there will be pain and pleasure when you obtain your desired goal or when you fail to attain your target. All of this is associated with the value of achievement. Hence, option c is the right answer. So coming back to our topic of discussion, that is norms. Norms are basically the rules or expectations that are socially enforced through positive and negative reinforcements. For example: you might be appreciated by your family, teachers and friends for being truthful and loyal in your conduct. Touching the feet of elders is an expression which signifies respect for elders. The meaning of this expression varies in different situations, strata and professions. Therefore, as you can see, the values of respect and obedience to superiors underline various sets of norms related to widely different institutions such as the family, military, schools, and administrative, political or religious organisation. So, values involve more of preferences and norms showcase prescriptions. As human beings we are both creating and fulfilling values. And it is this particular ability which leads to the formation of our personality and the formation of groups and institutions in society. Hence, humans are not only the source of values but they also judge the behaviour involved in day to day functioning of society. We have both personal and social values. However, even those values which are regarded as personal are largely acquired by the individual from the society, or a segment of it, to which he/she belongs. As an individual I have strong adherence towards values like perseverance, humility and resilience. Apart from these, there are other sets of values like equality, humanity, peace which can be considered as important from a social perspective. So, with this we come to the end of this lecture. I hope you might have understood the importance of values in framing our personality and our society. In the next lecture, we will learn about the two values, truth and non-violence, now when I say truth and non-violence, who comes to your mind? Yes, it's none other than Mohandas Karamchand Gandhiji. Let me end this lecture with a beautiful yet powerful quote by Maya Angelou who was a famous American poet and a civil rights activist, "You will face many defeats in life, but never let yourself be defeated".

Thank you!