

The Definition of Ethics

The word '*Ethics*' is derived from the Greek adjective '*ethica*' which comes from the substantive '*ethos*'. '*Ethos*' means customs, usages or habits. Ethics is also called '*Moral Philosophy*'. The word '*moral*' is derived from the Latin substantive '*mores*' which also means customs or habits. Customs are not merely habitual ways of acting. They are also ways approved by the group.

Thus literally '*Ethics*' means the science of customs or habits of men. It is the science of the habitual conduct of men. Habits are the expression of settled disposition of the will or character. Character is the permanent habit of willing, the inner bent of the mind, which is expressed in habitual conduct. Character is the inner counterpart of conduct, which is its outer expression. Thus Ethics is the science of character and conduct. It evaluates the voluntary actions and habitual actions of persons and considers their rightness and wrongness. It evaluates the character of persons and considers its virtuousness or viciousness.

Ethics is the science of rightness and wrongness of conduct. Conduct is purposive action, which involves choice and will. It is the expression of character which is a settled habit of will. The will is the self in action. Thus Ethics is the science of human character as expressed in right or wrong conduct. But rightness and wrongness refer to the Good which is the ideal of human life. Thus Ethics is the science of the Highest Good. It is the science of morality.

Ethics is not concerned with the origin and growth of conduct like psychology. It is concerned with evaluation of conduct with reference to an ideal. It seeks to determine the supreme ideal involved in human conduct. It seeks to teach us how we can pass correct moral judgements upon human conduct, consider it as right or wrong, with reference to the supreme ideal of human life. Ethics is the science of the ideal involved in human life.

Ethics may, therefore, be defined as the science of the Highest Good. It is the science of the supreme ideal of human life. It is the science of the highest end or purpose of human life. Mackenzie defines Ethics as "the study of what is right or good in human

conduct" or the "science of the ideal involved in human life".
Ethics is the science of rightness and wrongness of human actions.
It is the science of moral evaluation of the voluntary actions of
persons. It is the science of the highest Good of man. The ideal
involved in human life includes Truth, Good and Beauty. Ethics
is the science of the Moral good of man.

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Is Ethics a Science?

Ethics is a science because it aims at systematic explanation of rightness and wrongness or our voluntary actions in the light of the Highest Good of man. It aims at systematic valuing. It is not a natural science because it does not explain our volitions and voluntary actions by their antecedent mental events like psychology. A science aims at systematic knowledge. Ethics also aims at systematic knowledge. So Ethics is a science. All sciences (e.g., sociology, economics, politics, etc.), do not yield such knowledge as admits of verification by experiment. Ethics also does not yield such knowledge as can be verified by experiment. Positive sciences aim at systematic causal explanation of facts. Ethics aims at systematic evaluation of our volitions and actions. It is a normative science.⁵

Is Ethics a Science or a part of Philosophy?

A science deals with a particular department of phenomena. It deals with a limited portion of our experience. But Ethics deals with the whole of our experience, like philosophy, though it deals with it from the standpoint of the pursuit of ends or ideals. Hence Mackenzie regards Ethics as a part of philosophy. It deals with the whole of human experience, but only from the point of view of will and activity. It considers man as doing or pursuing an end, but not as knowing or feeling. It seeks to determine the nature of the good which he seeks in his whole activity.

But Ethics should be treated as a normative science rather than as a part of philosophy. It is a science in so far as it deals with moral phenomena as distinguished from other kinds of phenomena. It observes and classifies moral phenomena and explains them by the moral ideal. It distinguishes moral judgements from logical and æsthetic judgements and reduced them to a system. Therefore its method is scientific. Of the three parts of the universe—God, world and man,—Ethics is particularly concerned with man. It is the business of Ethics to determine what is human good, and not what is cosmic good. But Metaphysics investigates the nature of the universe and the cosmic good or the goal of the universe. So Ethics is not a part of Metaphysics.

But Ethics, as a normative science, closely approaches

philosophy. In determining the moral ideal or the highest good man Ethics has to transcend observation. In order to enquire into the validity of the moral ideal, Ethics has to enter into philosophical investigation. The question of the validity of the moral ideal leads us on to the discussion of the ultimate nature of the reality. The metaphysical problems involved in ethical investigations are the assumptions taken for granted and Ethics does not enquire into their ultimate nature and validity. The existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the freedom of the will are the postulates of morality. But these postulates are not proved by Ethics. Hence Ethics should be regarded as the normative science of conduct, and not as a part of philosophy.

Ethics should not be identified with Metaphysics for three reasons. First, it assumes the validity of moral judgements, and seeks to reduce them to a system. Secondly, it abstracts the moral value from the logical value, and the æsthetic value. Thirdly, it abstracts the judgements of value from the judgements of fact. Metaphysics investigates the ultimate validity of the judgements of value as well as the judgements of fact. It investigates the relation of value to reality. The Good or the moral value is the supreme value, superior to Truth and Beauty; and true metaphysics is the metaphysics of Ethics. Therefore Ethics should not be regarded as a part of Metaphysics.⁶

Motive and Intention

Bentham and J.S. Mill take the term 'motive' in the sense of 'spring of action' or feelings and emotions, and the term 'intention' in the sense of the aim, object, or end of action. Motive is the

efficient cause of action, whereas intention is the final cause of action. But this is wrong. Motive and intention both are the final causes of action. Only intention is wider than motive. Motive is a part of intention. The motive of a voluntary action is the chosen end which is realized by it. It induces the self to act. But in order to realize an end, we have to employ means. The end may be pleasant. But it may be realized through an unpleasant means. Or, the end may be realized through means which are partly pleasant and partly unpleasant. Motive is the idea of the chosen end. Intention is the idea of the end and the idea of the means pleasant or unpleasant, chosen by the self. Thus intention is wider than motive. It consists of the ideas of the chosen end or motive, chosen means, agreeable or disagreeable, and also the foreseen consequences of the action.

Bentham formulated the distinction by defining motive as that for the sake of which an action is done, and intention as that for the sake of which, and that in spite of which, anything is done. Thus intention includes persuasives as well as dissuasives the motive as well as the deterrent. The father punishes his child for his good. The good of the child is his motive. But he also intends to punish the child. The punishment of the child is part of his intention. But it cannot be said to be his motive. Thus intention includes the idea of the end or motive, the idea of the means, and the idea of foreseen consequences.

The motive of an action is the idea of the end that induces a person to perform it. This must be included in the intention, but is not identical with the whole of it. Intention includes the idea of the means which may dissuade the agent from performing the action. When terrorists resorted to robbery and murder to liberate India from foreign rule, their motive was freedom of India, while their intention included robbery and murder. Thus intention is wider than motive. It includes the idea of the chosen end, the idea of the chosen means, and the idea of the foreseen consequences.