

# **CHAPTER ONE: Understanding Civics and Ethics**

## **Defining Civics, Ethics, Morality**

### **Civic Education**

Since human being is a social animal and couldn't live alone, he/she has to respect certain fundamental principles and values to live together with his/her fellow beings and consequently build peaceful society and lead prosperous life.

Though the most cited definition of civic education is an education that studies about the rights and responsibilities of citizens of a politically organized group of people, different writers define it in many ways. The following are some of the definitions:

- Citizenship education can be understood as the knowledge, means, and activities designed to encourage students to participate actively in democratic life, accepting and exercising their rights and responsibilities.
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2004) defines civic education as a way of learning for effective participation in a democratic and development process.
- Aggarwal (1982) linked civic education to the development of ideas, habits, behaviors and useful attitudes in the individual which enables him to be a useful member of the society.
- It is also defined as the process of helping young people acquire and learn to use the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens throughout their lives.

Actually, these different concepts and meanings were used to differentiate between a maximal and a minimal civic education. The minimal concept of civic education is content-led, teacher-based, whole-class teaching and examination-based assessment. However, the maximal concept of civic education is comprised of knowledge, values and skills, and aims to prepare students for active, responsible participation. Unlike narrow minimalist civic education, it extends learning beyond the curriculum and classroom to all activities inside and outside school. In addition, it is highly dependent on interactive teaching, which requires discussion, debate and the creation of many opportunities for students to participate effectively.

## **The Definition and Nature of Ethics and Morality**

### **A. What Ethics is?**

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that attempts to understand people's moral beliefs and actions. Ethics, or moral philosophy, considers theories about what human beings are capable of doing, alongside accounts of what they ought to do if they are to live an ethically good life. Ethics also explores the meaning and the ranking of different ethical values, such as honesty, autonomy, equality and justice, and it considers ethical quandaries that human beings face in the course of living their own independent but, also, socially interdependent lives.

Ethics may share common ground with the law, religious belief, popular opinion, professional codes and the dictates of authority figures, but it is also broader than all of these and offers a set of tools and values against which their appropriateness can be evaluated.

Occasionally the term ethics is used interchangeably with morals. When we speak of moral problems then, we generally refer to specific problems, such as "Is lying ever right?" or "Is stealing always wrong?" in contrast, we can look at ethical problems as being more general and theoretical. Thus, "what makes any act, such as lying or stealing, right or wrong?" and "what makes any entity good?" are ethical problems. In short, morality refers to the degree to which an action conforms to a standard or norm of human conduct. Ethics refers to the philosophical study of values and of what constitute good and bad human conduct

Generally, ethics:

- Is philosophical study of the code, standards or norm of human conduct and it is more theoretical and general one.
- It establish the standards, norms, or codes to be followed by human beings are the study of morality, moral principles, and moral decision making.
- Is the development of reasonable standards and procedures for ethical decision-making.

- Is a set of normative rules of conduct, a code, a standards that govern what one ought to do when the well-being, or duties to oneself, others or institutions is at stake.

## **B. What is Morality?**

Of course, morality is a complex concept. It has been a topic of discussion for a very long time. It can be used to mean the generally accepted code of conduct in a society, or within a subgroup of society.

Morality, whatever else may be said about it, is about things over which we have control that lead to “bettering human life”. It is different in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits.

Generally, morality:

- Refers to the code of conduct one follows while ethics is the study of moral conduct or the study of the code that one follows.
- Is the conformity of human behavior to the established code of conduct .If an action conform to the established code, it is called moral ,if not immoral.
- Refers to the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by one’s conduct.

## **Morality and Law**

Laws are norms, formally approved by state, power or national or international political bodies. Many laws are instituted in order to promote well-being, resolve conflicts of interest, and promote social harmony. However, there are several reasons why ethics is not law.

**First**, some actions that are illegal may not be unethical.

**Second**, some actions that are unethical may not be illegal.

**Third**, laws can be unethical or immoral.

**Fourth**, we use different kinds of mechanisms to express, teach, inculcate, and enforce laws and ethics.

**Finally**, we use the coercive power of government to enforce laws. People who break certain laws can be fined, imprisoned, or executed. People who violate ethical or moral standards do not face these kinds of punishments unless their actions also violate laws.

## **Morality and Religion**

Can there be a morality without religion? Must God or gods exist in order for there to be any real point to morality? If people are not religious, can they ever be truly moral? And if belief in God is required in order to be moral, which religion is the real foundation for morality? There seem to be as many conflicts as there are different religions and religious viewpoints.

Many reasons can be given to demonstrate morality need not, and indeed should not, be based *solely* on religion.

### **A. Difficulty of Proving Supernatural Existence**

First, in order to prove that one must be religious in order to be moral, we would have to prove conclusively that a supernatural world exists and that morality exists there as well as in the natural world. Even if this could be proved, which is doubtful, we would have to show that the morality existing in the supernatural world has some connection with that which exists in the natural world. It seems obvious, however, that in dealing with morality, the only basis we have is this world, the people who exist in it, and the actions they perform.

However, morality *need* not be founded on religion at all, and there is a danger of narrowness and intolerance if religion becomes the *sole* foundation for morality. Rather than relying on holy books or religious revelations, philosophical ethics uses ***reason and experience*** to determine what is good and bad, right or wrong, better or worse.

### **B. Religious People Can Be Immoral**

It is a known fact that some religious people can be immoral; one only needs to look at some priests/pastors, who even though highly trained in religion and the ethics of their church, nevertheless were guilty of molesting children under their supervision. Also, consider the many wars and other persecutions carried out by almost every religion in the history of humankind.

### **C. Nonreligious People Can Be Moral**

If moral right and wrong were grounded only in religious beliefs, then non-believers could not be said to have moral views or make moral judgment that are not based strictly on their religious views but rather ***on reflection and common sense***. Although it is obvious that most religions contain ethical systems, it is not true that all ethical systems are religiously based; therefore, there is no necessary connection between

morality and religion. The very fact that completely nonreligious people (e.g., humanist ethicists) can evolve significant and consistent ethical systems is proof of this.

#### **D. Religious foundation for ethics is difficult to rationally establish**

Providing a rational foundation for an ethical system is difficult enough without also having to provide a rational foundation for the religion. And the difficulty of rationally founding most religious systems is inescapable. It is impossible to prove **conclusively** the existence of any super nature, afterlife, God. Traditional and modern arguments for the existence or nonexistence of God or gods provide a rational basis for both claims, but there is no conclusive evidence that such beings do or do not exist.

Therefore, if no evidence is conclusive and none of the arguments' logic is irrefutable, then the existence of a supernatural world, an afterlife, God, or gods, is at least placed in the category of the unproven. This, of course, does not mean that many people will not continue to believe in their existence, basing their belief on faith, fear, hope, or their reading of the evidence, but as a logical foundation for morality, religion is weak indeed except for those who believe.

#### **E. Which Religion Would Be Best Ethically?**

Even if religions could be rationally founded, which religion should be the basis of human ethics? Within a particular religion that question is answered, but obviously it is not answered satisfactorily for members of other conflicting religions or for those who do not believe in any religion. Even if the supernatural tenets of religions could be conclusively proved, which religion are we to accept as the true or real foundation of morality?

The difficulty is underscored even more when we consider that people who believe there is no God or supernatural or afterlife (atheists) or people who are not sure (agnostics) are essentially excluded from moral consideration. If such people do not believe, or neither believe nor disbelieve, then how can any of the moral precepts set down within any particular religion have any application to them? They are automatically excluded from the moral sphere created by the ethics of religion.

#### **F. Difficulty of Resolving Conflicts.**

How do we resolve the conflicts arising from various religiously based ethical systems without going outside of all religions for some more broadly based human system of morality - some wider base from which to make ethical decisions? When such resolutions are successful, it is usually because we have gone beyond any particular

religion's ethical system and used some sort of rational compromise or broader ethical system that cuts across all religious and nonreligious lines. Accordingly, it is both important and beneficial that we pursue this approach more strongly and consistently than we have.

### **Aspects of Morality**

The question here is to whom or what does morality apply. Morality may be applied to four areas: religious morality, morality and nature, individual morality, and social morality.

- A. **Religious Morality:** Religious morality refers to a human being in relationship to a supernatural being or beings. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, for example, the first three of the Ten Commandments pertain to this kind of morality. These commandments deal with a person's relationship with God, not with any other human beings. By violating any of these commandments, a person could, according to this particular code of ethics, act immorally toward God without acting immorally toward anyone else.
- B. **Morality and Nature:** Morality and nature refers to a human being in relationship to nature. Natural morality has been prevalent in all primitive cultures, such as that of the Native American, and in cultures of the Far East. Some see nature as being valuable only for the good of humanity, but many others have come to see it as a good in itself, worthy of moral consideration. In the morality and nature aspect, he could be considered either moral or immoral, depending upon his actions toward the natural things around him.
- C. **Individual Morality:** refers to individuals in relation to themselves and to an individual code of morality that may or may not be sanctioned by any society or religion. *It allows for a "higher morality,"* which can be found within the individual rather than beyond this world in some supernatural realm. A person may or may not perform some particular act, not because society, law, or religion says he may or may not, but because he himself thinks it is right or wrong from within his own conscience.
- D. **Social Morality:** Social morality concerns a human being in relation to other human beings. It is probably the most important aspect of morality, in that it cuts across all of the other aspects and is found in more ethical systems than any of the others. A person thrown in the desert-island is incapable of any really moral or immoral

action except toward himself and nature. Such action would be minimal when compared with the potential for morality or immorality if there were nine other people on the island whom he could subjugate, torture, or destroy.

### **Who is Morally/Ethically Responsible?**

Morality pertains to human beings and only to human beings; all else is speculation. If one wants to attribute morality to supernatural beings, one has to do so solely on **faith**. If one wants to hold animals or plants morally responsible for destructive acts against each other or against humans, then one has to ignore most of the evidence that science has given us concerning the instinctual behavior of such beings and the evidence of our own everyday observations.

Therefore, when we use the terms *moral* and *ethical*, we are using them in reference only to human beings. We do not hold a wolf morally responsible for killing a sheep, or an eagle morally responsible for killing a chicken. We may kill the wolf or fox for having done this act, but we do not kill it because we hold the animal *morally* responsible. We do it because we don't want any more of our sheep or chickens to be killed. At this point in the world's history, only human beings can be moral or immoral, and therefore only human beings should be held morally responsible for their actions and behavior.

### **Moral Judgments**

Moral judgments refer to *deciding what is right and what is wrong in human relations*. Individuals are continually judging their own conduct and that of their fellows. They approve of some acts and call them "right" or "good." They condemn other acts and call them "wrong" or "evil or bad." Moral judgments always have to do with the actions of human beings and, in particular, with voluntary actions - those actions freely chosen.

*Involuntary actions* - those over which people have no control - are rarely open to moral judgment, as a person usually is not held responsible for an action that she or he did not initiate.

Finding the right course of action, choosing the right alternative, is not always simple. In judging conduct or action we have to consider **motives**, **means**, and **consequences** and sometimes the **situation**.

- 1. Motives:** Motives, as Jesus, Kant, and others have pointed out, are basic for a determination of morality. The motive refers to the *intention* or *why an action is done*. A good motive is a prerequisite to conduct that we approve without qualification. If a good motive is present when an act, through some unforeseen

factor, leads to harmful effects, we tend to disapprove less severely and to say, "Anyway, he meant well."

2. **Means:** Just as there may be many motives for desiring something, there may be many means for achieving it. The term *means* can be defined as an agency, instrument, or method used to attain an end. Though we expect people to use the best available means to carry out their purposes, we condemn them if their choice of means impresses us as unjust, cruel, or immoral. On rare occasions we may approve of an act when means are used that under other conditions would be condemned.
3. **Consequences:** Consequences are the effects or results of *a moral decision* based on a value. We expect the consequences of an act that we call "right" to be good. Ordinarily, when people ask, "what is right?" they are thinking about the consequences of the action. This depends on what ethical principle is in operation. In general, society judges conduct "right" if it proceeds from a good motive, through the use of the best available means, to consequences that are good. If these conditions are not fulfilled, we condemn the action or approve it with reservations. We rarely approve an action when the results are evil or wrong.
4. **The Moral Situation:** A moral situation involves moral agents - human beings who act, are empowered to make *choices*, and consciously make decisions. As moral agents, demands are made on us and place us under obligations: we have both duties and rights. We are faced with moral *alternatives*, and we can better weigh those alternatives when we have an understanding of the ingredients of the moral situation.

### **Why Should Human Beings Be Moral?**

The question that is worth mentioning at this point is "Why should human beings be moral?" Another way of putting the problem is as follows: Is there any clear foundation or basis for morality - can any reasons be found for human beings to be good and do right acts rather than be bad and do wrong acts?

#### **A. Argument from Enlightened Self-Interest**

One can certainly argue on a basis of enlightened self-interest that it is, at the very least, generally better to be good rather than bad and to create a world and society that is good rather than one that is bad. As a matter of fact, self-interest is the sole basis of one



ethical theory, ethical egoism. However, it is not being suggested at this point that one ought to pursue one's own self-interest. Rather, an argument is being presented that if everyone tried to do good and tried to avoid and prevent bad, it would be in everyone's self-interest. For example, if within a group of people no one killed, stole, lied, or cheated, then each member of the group would benefit. An individual member of the group could say, "it's in my self-interest to do good rather than bad because I stand to benefit if I do and also because I could be ostracized or punished if I don't." Therefore, even though it is not airtight, the argument from enlightened self-interest is compelling.

### **B. Argument from Tradition and Law**

Related to the foregoing argument is the argument from tradition and law. This argument suggests that because traditions and laws, established over a long period of time, govern the behavior of human beings, and because these traditions and laws urge human beings to be moral rather than immoral, there are good reasons for being so. Self-interest is one reason, but another is respect for the human thought and effort that has gone into establishing such laws and traditions and transferring them from one historic period and one culture to another.

### **C. Common Human Needs**

If we examine human nature as empirically and rationally as we can, we discover that all human beings have many needs, desires, goals, and objectives in common. For example, people generally seem to need friendship, love, happiness, freedom, peace, creativity, and stability in their lives, not only for themselves but for others, too. It doesn't take much further examination to discover that in order to satisfy these needs, people must establish and follow moral principles that encourage them to cooperate with one another and that free them from fear that they will lose their lives, be mutilated, or be stolen from, lied to, cheated, severely restricted, or imprisoned.

Morality exists, in part, because of human needs and through recognition of the importance of living together in a cooperative and significant way. It may not be the case that all human beings can be convinced that they should be moral, or even that it will always be in each individual's self-interest to be moral. However, the question "why should human beings be moral?" generally can best be answered by the statement that

adhering to moral principles enables human beings to live their lives as peacefully, happily, creatively, and meaningfully as is possible

### **The Importance/Goal of Moral and Civic Education**

Civic education is a discipline that deals with virtue traits rooted in values of respect and culture of tolerance to make individuals responsible and efficient member of their community. It teaches the values and sense of commitment that define an active and principled citizen, how to make responsible decisions, solve problems, care about others, contribute to society, and be tolerant and respectful of diversity.

Generally, the necessity of delivering the course emanates from:

#### **1) The need to instill citizens about their rights and duties:**

We need a fuller, richer and yet more subtle understanding and practice of citizenship, because what the ideal society needs and wants to be cannot be secured by coercion, but only through its members (citizens) who have a balanced understanding of rights and duties.

Sastry et al. (2011) presented four issues to look into the interplay between rights and duties. First, one's right implies the other's duty. Second, one's right implies one's duty to recognize similar rights of others. This implies that every exercise of right is subject to restrictions. Third, one should exercise his rights for the promotion of social good. Fourth, the State being a nucleus organ needs to take care of the social and legal interests of all its individuals. From this point of view, the State has the obligation to discharge duties towards its citizens.

#### **2) The Need for Participant Political Culture:**

According to the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1961) political culture is the set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provide the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behavior in the political system. Political culture shapes what people expect of their political system, what they see as possibilities for their own action, and what rights and responsibilities the various actors are perceived to have. Generally, political culture defines the roles which an individual may play in the political process.

Almond and Verba (1963) construct three political cultures: parochial cultures, subject cultures, and participant cultures. In ***parochial cultures*** citizens have low cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation regarding the political systems, government powers and functions and even their privileges and duties. In such political culture, the role of citizens in the political sphere of their countries is insignificant since individuals think of their families advantage as the only goal to pursue.

In ***subject cultures***, there is high cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation towards the political system and policy outputs, but orientations towards input objects (like political parties) and the self as active participants are minimal.

In ***participant cultures***, members of society have high cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientation to the political system, the input objects, the policy outputs, and recognize the self as an active participant in the polity. Largely, participant cultures are most compatible with democratic political structures because the qualities and attitudes of citizens determine the health and stability of a country's democracy.

## **2) The Need for Relevant Knowledge, Skills and Positive Attitudes:**

Relevant knowledge is a type of knowledge which is useful in dealing with a particular problem at a period of time. However, knowledge would remain inert knowledge unless it is functional or put into practice to achieve a certain goal. Still knowledge would remain infirm if the person is not equipped with right attitudes and requisite skills which are basic to enable him/her perform his/her role as a credible member of a society.

Right attitudes are very essential ingredients needed to ensure harmony and peaceful co-existence among people. It is reasonable to claim that skillful manpower is a pre-requisite for every nation that wishes to develop but a skillful manpower without positive attitudes to work is likely to result in counter production because vices like corruption, bribery, abuse of power, lateness to and work absenteeism among others will pop their ugly heads.

### **3) The issue of fostering intercultural societies:**

The recognition of cultural diversity is certainly meritorious, but civics and ethics education could move a step forward by appealing to the notion of inter-culturalism, which explicitly asserts the need for relationship, dialogue, reciprocity and interdependence.

### **4) The issue of inclusiveness:**

By framing a universal concept of citizenship constructed on the attributes/identities and practices of male subjects, gendered relations and the private sphere have been neglected. Civics and ethics as a subject is thought to nurture new and inclusive relations and practices in both public and private spaces that recognize gender differences while ensuring inclusiveness and equity.

### **5) The issue of peace-building:**

In an environment characterized by increasing militarization, terrorism, civil wars and genocidal acts, it is urgent for citizenship education to advance pedagogical strategies to promote cooperation, dialogue, and a sustainable peace that is based on justice.

In sum the goals of teaching civics and ethics at any level of educational institutions is to produce competent, high moral standard society and responsible citizens who can ask and use their rights and fulfill their obligations in accordance with the laws of their respective country.