

ETHICS: Origin and Meaning

The word ethics comes from the Greek ethos which means customs or habits.

It is also often called moral philosophy.

While morals refer to customs, ethics extend to mean habitual conduct or character.

Morality deals with our reasoning and ethics with our doing.

Thus, ethics means the science of rightness and wrongness of character and conduct.

It is also the '**science of the highest good.**'

What is Ethics?

Definition: *"Set of standards of conduct and moral judgments to determine rightness and wrongness in behavior and action"*

Ethics also called **moral philosophy**, the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right

Nature of Ethics

- It is a normative science. Normative sciences seek to determine norms, ideals or standards.
- It is not a natural but regulative science.
- Ethics is a science because it aims at systematic explanation of rightness and wrongness.
- It is the basis of moral reasoning and the root of all moral distinctions.

ETHICS IN HUMAN ACTS

The Science of Ethics is greatly concerned with the study of man, particularly with his/her actions. Ethics intends to determine whether the action taken by man is moral or immoral in the grounds of morality.

Human action or human act should be investigated. It is confusing but it is being determined that the act that was committed must be done knowingly and willfully by any individual before we can declare that he/she is accountable for it. In short, an act committed without the knowledge and consent should not be considered as a human act.

Essential elements of human acts-

1. To consider that the act is a human act, it should be a voluntary act committed by an individual.
2. The act must also be done with the individual's knowledge and consent.
3. The act committed should be considered as an act that is proper to man as man (in consideration that of all the animals, man alone has the intellect and the freedom of will to do the act).
4. The act should also be committed in a conscious state and under the control of

the individual in which he/she is responsible.

5. The act should also be of those events or time that the individual is considered to be as the master, possessing the power to do the act or not as he/she intends to do.

Basically, Acts of man can become human acts when he/she employs his/her intellect and will in performing the act.

SCIENCE OF MORALITY

Morality (from Latin: *moralis*, which means 'manner, character, proper behavior') is the differentiation of intentions, decisions and actions between those that are distinguished as proper and those that are improper.

Morality can be a body of standards or principles derived from a [code of conduct](#) or it can be derived from a standard that a person believes should be universal. Morality may also be specifically synonymous with ["goodness"](#)

A moral act depends on whether or not there is consent by the will. All human acts are subjected to morality. They are either good or evil.

The moral object can either be:

Good - Praying, helping, respecting (for e.g.)

Bad - Stealing, cheating, lying

Indifferent - Eating, sleeping

Human acts receive their morality essentially from the object which is intended by the will. For example, you cannot go for stealing to help the poor because the act itself i.e. act of stealing is always wrong.

A bad act can never be morally good no matter how good the intention is.

The circumstances cannot change an act from good to bad or bad to good.

Norms, Values, and the Law

Ethics deals with well-based standards of how people ought to act. Ethics does not describe the way people do act. It deals with the way people should act. Ethical people always strive to make the right decision in all circumstances. They do not rationalize their actions based on their own perceived self-interests. Ethical decision-making entails following certain well established norms of behavior. The best way to understand ethics may be to differentiate it from other concepts.

Values are basic and fundamental beliefs that guide or motivate attitudes or actions.

Values are concerned with how a person will behave in certain situations whereas ethics is concerned with how a moral person should behave. A person who values prestige, power, and wealth is likely to act out of self-interest whereas a person who values honesty, integrity and trust will typically act in the best interests of others. It does not follow that acting in the best interests of others precludes acting in one's own self-interest. Indeed, the Golden Rule prescribes that we should treat others the way we want to be treated.

Laws versus Ethics

Being ethical is not the same as following the law. While ethical people always try to be law-abiding, there may be instances where your sense of ethics tells you it is best not to follow the law. These situations are rare and should be based on sound ethical reasons. Here's one example:

Assume you are coming home from the store one day and see a fast moving fire approach your neighbor's house. You notice that the neighbor's car is in the garage. The garage door entrance to the house is locked as is the main entrance. You bang on the door and no one answers. You call the neighbor on your cell phone and no one answers. You don't think there is enough time to call the fire department ten miles away before serious damage is done to the house. What would you do next and why? If you break into the house to save your neighbor, you have broken the law. However, you have acted out of concern for the safety of your neighbor in a life-threatening situation thereby acting ethically.

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), the noted English novelist, debater, and former prime minister, said that, "When men are pure, laws are useless; when men are corrupt, laws are broken." A person of good will honors and respects the rules and laws and is willing to go beyond them when circumstances warrant. As indicated by the above quote, such people do not need rules and laws to guide their actions. They always try to do the right thing. On the other hand, the existence of specific laws prohibiting certain behaviors will not stop a person who is unethical (e.g., does not care about others) from violating those laws. A useful perspective is to ask:

What does the law require of me?

What do ethical standards of behavior demand of me?

How should I act to conform to both?

An ethical society is one that values a commitment to do the right thing regardless of personal costs. It's not an easy standard to live by but one worth pursuing.

ETHICS AND RELIGION

Often, religion and ethics are treated as the same thing, with various religions making claims about their belief systems being the best way for people to live. In general, all religious traditions believe that their faith represents a path to enlightenment and salvation.

Ethics are universal decision-making tools that may be used by a person of any religious persuasion, including atheists. While religion makes claims about cosmology, social behavior, and the “proper” treatment of others, etc. Ethics are based on logic and reason rather than tradition.

The reason that we need ethics is that what is good and bad in life are often complicated by our personal circumstances, culture, finances, ethnicity, gender, age, time, experience, personal beliefs, and other variables. Often the path that looks most desirable will have negative consequences, while the path that looks the most perilous for an individual or organization will often result in doing the most good for others. Doing what is “right” is a lot harder than doing what is expedient or convenient.

All religion is a means of providing an ethical compass for the common man. A religious person on the other hand, follows his or her code of conduct because he believes that it is proper behavior and reaction to the varying challenges and circumstances which arise during the course of life.

Religious ethics are the moral principles that guide religions and that set the standard for what is and isn't acceptable behavior.

Exploring some religious ethics in daily life:

Compassion

The word *compassion* means, “to suffer with”. All religions believe in showing compassion to others. Although humans’ capacity for compassion and kindness isn’t limitless, as God’s is, believers strive to nurture it, even when doing so is hard, because it brings them closer to God. Having compassion means that you can feel others’ pain.

Humility It is a sign of respect for God and awareness that all blessings flow from God to whom all thanks are due.

Hope: What happens happens for a reason, and the faithful will be rewarded in paradise and the irreligious punished in hell. Religious hopefulness is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism is the attitude that things are great. Religious hopefulness is actually built upon the idea that things aren’t so great, but that we don’t see the whole picture. The incompleteness of human knowing is met by the hope that the world holds more promise than we can see from our limited perspective.

Ethics as Skills

At work place; Ethics can be used as way of performing tasks in a manner where are stakeholder can be benefits and get appropriate credits and rewards.

At family; A family is made up of people who live together with the ethical behavior of elder member and this tendency transfers from seniors to juniors members which help in living with peace and harmony.

In social group; In society different types of people live with different religion, ethnicity, faith, region and thoughts ethics brings togetherness among these groups and build a sound relationship, harmony, peace and brotherhood.

Behavior; ethics determine our behavior which reflects our values, thoughts and education. These elements make people happy in the society.

To obey the law

Ethical practices in society endorse people to obey the law and follow the rules of the society and nation.

Practices of values

People use their value education to behave in the society so ethics also enhance value education in every stratum of society to run routine life.

Harmony builder

Ethics is the one of the best tool which maintains harmony at every aspects of the life.

Team spirit

Ethics create feelings of team spirit in the society, family and workplace by:

- *Creating Synergy*
- *Image building*
- *Promoting Loyalty*

ETHICS AT WORKPLACE

Definition of Business Ethics

According to Andrew Crane,

"Business ethics is the study of business situations, activities, and decisions where issues of right and wrong are addressed."

According to Wikipedia,

"Business ethics (also corporate ethics) is a form of applied ethics or professional ethics that examines ethical principles and moral or ethical problems that arise in a business environment. It applies to all aspects of business conduct and is relevant to the conduct of individuals and entire organizations."

Nature and importance of Ethics at workplace

The characteristics or features of business ethics are:-

- **Code of conduct** : Ethics is a code of conduct. It tells what to do and what not to do for the welfare of the society. All Employees must follow this code of conduct at workplace.
- **Based on moral and social values** : Ethics is based on moral and social values. It contains moral and social principles (rules) for doing business and work. This includes self-control, consumer protection and welfare, service to society, fair treatment to social groups, not to exploit others, etc.
- **Gives protection to social groups** : Ethics give protection to different social groups such as consumers, employees, small businessmen, government, shareholders, creditors, etc.
- **Provides basic framework** : Ethics provide a basic framework for doing tasks at workplace.
- **Voluntary**: Ethics must be voluntary. The Employee must accept business ethics on their own.
- **Ethics must be like self-disciplined**
- **Requires education and guidance**: Workmen must be given proper education and guidance before introducing work ethics. The employee must be motivated to use business ethics. They must be informed about the advantages of using work ethics
- **Relative Term**: It changes from one country to another. What is considered as good in one country may be taboo in another country.

The issues of ethics at workplace:

- *Discrimination issues i.e. discrimination on the bases of age, gender, race, religion,*

- disabilities, weight etc.*
- *Sexual harassment.*
- *Issues surrounding the representation of Issues affecting the privacy of the employee: workplace surveillance, drug testing.*
- *Issues affecting the privacy of the employer*
- *Whistle-blowing.*
- *Issues relating to the fairness of the employment contract and the balance of power between employer and employee.*
- *Occupational safety and health.*

ETHICS IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Science

Scientific knowledge is often understood as pure knowledge, unrelated to values other than epistemic values (e.g., coherence, truth, simplicity, and explanatory).

By the Compact Oxford English Dictionary, where science is defined ***as “a systematically organized body of knowledge on any subject”***.

Technology

According to the Compact Oxford English Dictionary Technology is:

- 1 the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes.
- 2 the branch of knowledge concerned with applied sciences.

These definitions go along well with the idea that that science is a body of pure knowledge. From this perspective, science would be neutral and ethical problems would arise only with respect to its applications.

Ethical Aspects Regarding Science and Technology

- Research involving human subjects should do no intentional harm, while maximizing possible benefits and minimizing possible harms, both to the individuals involved and to society at large.
- Justice - Attention needs to be paid to the equitable distribution within human society of benefits and burdens of research involving human subjects. In particular, those participants chosen for such research should not be inequitably selected from group unlikely to benefit from the work.

UNESCO continues to build and reinforce linkages among ethicists, scientists, policy-

makers, judges, journalists, and civil society to assist Member States in enacting sound and reasoned policies on ethical issues in science and technology.

Addressing the emerging ethical challenges by providing an intellectual forum for multidisciplinary, pluralistic and multicultural reflection on ethics of science and technology.

Developing the Global Ethics Observatory

Providing Member States with the necessary tools and technical support for the enhancement of their national ethics infrastructure:

Cooperating with key international stakeholders in the field of ethics of science and technology and fostering coordination among the major factors.

THEISTIC & ATHEISTIC APPROACHES

In order to deal with arising questions such as –

Is it necessary to be religious in order to be ethical?

If an individual is not religious, does it mean he is not ethical as well?

Theists (who believe in existence of God) and

Atheists (who don't believe in the existence of God) have two different perspectives to deal with above mentioned questions.

Theistic Approach says-

- ❖ *Only those who believe in God know what is right or wrong.*
- ❖ *To be ethical one needs to believe in God.*
- ❖ *Only a religious person can be ethical*
- ❖ *All of the ethical principles have emerged from religion itself.*
- ❖ *These are type of rules and laws made by God.*
- ❖ *Ethical and moral principles can never be important for those who don't believe in God.*
- ❖ *One follows ethics or is moral when he/she has fear of God and that he/she will be punished for their sins.*
- ❖ *It is necessary to rely on sacred books and their interpretations to know good and evil.*
- ❖ *Without being a theistic an individual becomes selfish and his/her goals are self oriented.*

Atheistic Approach says-

- ❖ *It is not necessary for an individual to believe God in order to be ethical.*
- ❖ *Ethical principles are formed and given by society itself.*
- ❖ *Even an individual who doesn't believe in God can resolve conflicts, disputes and bifurcate between good and bad.*
- ❖ *How can we know what God exactly wants from us and what is correct*

according to him?

- ❖ *Every sacred or religious book has its own different interpretation. So how can we say which sacred book to rely on in order to become ethical?*
- ❖ *Can all religious authorities interpreting the sacred holy books can be trusted?*
- ❖ *Even Atheists and agnostics can be ethical.*

There are other possible connections between religion and ethics. It has been said that, even if standards of good and evil exist independently of God or the gods, divine revelation is the only reliable means of finding out what these standards are. An obvious problem with this view is that those who receive divine revelations, or who consider themselves qualified to interpret them, do not always agree on what is good and what is evil. Without an accepted criterion for the authenticity of a revelation or an interpretation, people are no better off, so far as reaching moral agreement is concerned, than they would be if they were to decide on good and evil themselves, with no assistance from religion.

Traditionally, a more important link between religion and ethics was that religious teachings were thought to provide a reason for doing what is right. In its crudest form, the reason was that those who obey the moral law will be rewarded by an eternity of bliss while everyone else roasts in hell. The motivation provided by religion is more inspirational and less self-interested. Whether in its crude version or something in between, religion does provide an answer to one of the great questions of ethics: "Why should I be moral?"

BENEFITS OF ETHICS MANAGEMENT

Many people are used to reading or hearing of the moral benefits of attention to **business ethics**. However, there are other types of benefits, as well. The following list describes various types of benefits from managing **ethics** in the workplace.

1. Attention to **business ethics** has substantially improved society.
2. **Ethics** program help maintain moral course in turbulent times.
3. **Ethics** programs cultivate strong teamwork and productivity.
4. **Ethics** program support employee growth and meaning.
5. **Ethics** programs are an insurance policy they help ensure that policies are legal.

6. **Ethics** programs help avoid criminal acts 'of omission' and can lower fines.
7. **Ethics** programs help manage values associated with quality management, Strategic planning and diversity management this benefit needs far more attention.
8. **Ethics** programs promote a strong public image.
9. Overall benefits of **ethics** programs.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

"CSR is a gesture of showing the company's concern and commitment towards society's sustainability and development."

Aspects included in CSR:

1. EMPLOYEE WELFARE PROGRAMMES

A socially responsible company is responsive to the various needs of its employees. It voluntarily takes proactive steps to advance their well-being by providing the workers with housing and health care facilities, schools, hygienic working conditions etc.

For example: some companies provide flexible working hours to suite the needs of women employees, provide professional counseling to solve personal problems, hiring physically challenged persons and training them for suitable jobs etc.

2. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Increasing number of companies realizing that they need to be a good neighbor for community where they are located. Companies support a social cause and advertise this fact to promote marketing of their products. Companies tend to help the rural communities with different beneficial schemes.

For Example: TISCO has a separate Community and Social Welfare Department for tribal and poor village communities around their plant area.

3. CORPORATE PHILANTHROPY

Under this companies often earmark or contribute a part of their earnings (five percent or ten percent) for charitable purposes. Many companies also spend money for religious activities like renovating temples and dharamshalas; spend money in orphanages, NGOs etc.

For Example: Companies such as Microsoft, Coca-Cola are considered as most prominent philanthropists

4. CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP

Like individuals, corporations are also citizens of a nation. As such they have citizenship rights as well as citizenship duties. Fulfilling these duties is their social responsibility. These activities include:

- ✓ Promoting the economic growth of the country. An example of such a line of thinking is shown by NTPC.
- ✓ Paying taxes
- ✓ Obeying laws
- ✓ Preserving environment and non renewable resources.
- ✓ Preserving National and Cultural heritage.
- ✓ Lending helping hand in times of natural calamities and other national emergencies.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Professional Ethics encompass corporate standards or behavior expected from professionals.

The centre for professional ethics was established at Case Western Reserve University.
CANADA

Ethical values in professions include:

- HONESTY
- INTEGRITY
- TRANSPARENCY
- ACCOUNTABILITY

- CONFIDENTIALITY
- RESPECTFULNESS
- OBJECTIVITY
- OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW
- WHISTLEBLOWING

(A whistleblower is a person who raises concern about frauds, corruption, and wrong doings and exposes corruptive practices within the organization. He tells someone in authority about dishonest or illegal activities occurring in a government department or any private organization.)

CODE OF ETHICS TO BE FOLLOWED IN PROFESSION

The primary aspect of code of ethics is to provide the basic framework for ethical judgment for a professional.

Code of Ethics are guidelines for specific group of professionals to help them perform their roles, to know how to conduct themselves and know how to resolve various ethical issues.

Code of Ethics helps to clarify the profession's values and provide a reference point for decision making.

ETHICS AS RELATING TO ENGINEERING

Engineering often is based on Preventative Ethics which is based on two dimensions:

- Engineers must be able to think ahead to anticipate possible consequences of their professional actions.
- Engineers must be able to think effectively about those consequences and decide what is the 'ethically' correct manner to handle the situation.