



GS FOUNDATION BATCH FOR CSE 2024

Ethics - 01

**(Ethics General Introduction,
Keywords)**

INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

WHAT IS ETHICS?

- When narrowly defined, the word 'ethics', according to its original use, is traceable to ancient Greece. Ethics would account as a branch of philosophy which that used to study ideal human behaviour and ideal ways of being. The ideal ways of being could be understood as '*what ought to be*' in contrast to '*what is*'.
- The approaches to ethics and meanings of concepts have varied and developed over a period of time. For example, Aristotle believed that ideal way of life for oneself would be to undertake actions that lead to *eudaimonia* (loosely translated as highest state of well-being or happiness). Immanuel Kant who comes around two thousand years later argue that ideal behaviour entails acting according to one's duty. Well-being for him means freedom to exercise autonomy, being an end in oneself and not treated as a means to an end, and having the capacity to think rationally.
- Etymologically the term "ethics" correspond to the Greek word "ethos" which means character, habit, customs, ways of behaviour, etc. Ethics is also called "moral philosophy". The word "moral" comes from Latin word "mores" which signifies customs, character, behaviour, etc.
- As a well-established branch of philosophy, ethics is a systematic approach to understanding, analysing, and distinguishing matters of right and wrong, good and bad, and admirable and deplorable as they relate to the well-being of and the relationships among 'beings' who are capable of taking voluntary actions. Ethical determinations are applied through the use of formal theories, approaches and codes of conduct, such as the codes developed for professions and religions.
- Ethics not to be construed as a monolithic system but a system that involves different approaches, determinants and thus consequences. Consider some of the following definitions of ethics.

"Ethics is a system of moral principles."

"Ethics is a set of standards that a society places on itself and which helps guide behaviour, choices and action."

"It is a discipline based on the logical justification of human actions."

WHY STUDY ETHICS?

- From times immemorial, humans have sought to know how to lead a good life. Modern society has witnessed extensive debates over the conception of a 'good life'. This is primarily due to- the spread of education, advances in science and technology, problems associated with the modern way of life and communication and transportation revolution.
- Importance of ethics is felt in every sphere of our life. The power of the traditional religions and ideologies is on a decline. Crime, terrorism, ecological degradation, deception and other unfair practices are on the rise. The significance of studying ethics is understood by the fact that the study of moral philosophy or ethics can deepen our understanding of the ultimate goal of life. Through ethics, an individual can look upon his life critically and evaluate his actions and decisions.
- We instinctively know that it is good to be ethical and act with integrity, but by coming to an understanding of the reasons for ethical behaviour and integrity, we will be motivated to champion such behaviour.
- The study of ethics can enable a person to deliberate upon moral principles. Moral philosophy, or ethics, can help in clearing our mind on the questions of morality. Thus, our actions are more thoughtful and conscious.
- Study of Ethics trains our mind to think rationally and logically. Ethics become an inevitable part of human existence since man is a social animal. Thus, no one can escape the ethical questions of life.
- The rational nature of human individual makes her aware of certain fundamental principles of logical and moral reasoning. Every human action has a subjective aspect and an objective aspect, which prompts the individual to base herself on certain common principles.
- The human society is necessarily driven by certain rules and regulations, which are the conditions of satisfactory human life in a society. These rules and regulations cannot exist without any moral principles.
- Especially for someone going to be an administrator, holding positions of authority and influence, it becomes mandatory to continuously monitor ones own actions and behaviours, without which the very purpose of that roles gets defeated.

ETHICS VS. MORALITY

- Morality and Ethics both concern themselves with what is right and what is wrong. Morality is set of principles that an individual holds to be right. Whereas ethics is set of principles that a homogeneous group of people (i.e., society) holds as right. Although both have a separate existence, they work in tandem with each other.
- Morality is person specific. Although it is derived from the value system outside, the individual believes that the particular action is desirable from her, irrespective of other person's view. It depends upon her understanding of things.
- Ethics, on the other hands, is a set of moral values established in the given group of people at a given point of time. Ethics often takes the form of traditions, laws. It is what society as a whole considers moral.
- For example – During the start of 19th-century self-immolation of Sati was considered as the moral duty of a faithful wife. It was part of the ethics of the society of the day. However, at the same time, a person like Rammohan Roy's morality indicated against it. Here what society considered right and what an individual considered right were opposite to each other. This clearly indicates that morality and ethics have a different set of values, although they are connected and influence each other.
- Today Rommohan Roy's view is considered right not just by a few individuals but also by society at large. So, morality and ethics are a different set of values having many common points. They indeed influence each other.
- Wise and visionary personalities has the capacity to influence the public at larger. They have the requisite insight and persuasion skill to convey their understanding in impactful way. This society at large accepts as moral values to be followed. These ethics are generally formed by influencing personalities of the day. Mostly wise persons are perceived to be visionary and the values she considers moral are considered moral by the society as whole in that time.
- For instance –
 - (i) When Buddha talked about non-killing, the society of that time and onwards started considering killing of even animals as unethical.
 - (ii) Caste was considered ethical once upon time in India but after Ambedkar and other thinkers persuaded society in other direction, ethics of the society changed and caste is now treated to be unethical.

BASIC TERMS IN ETHICS

Beliefs - Beliefs are an internal feeling as something is true. It is not directly proven but inferred from the available limited experience. Belief plays a very important role in shaping the ethical value system of a person which, in turn, constitutes the ethical character of the person.

Value - Values are building blocks of one's morality. They shape the conscience of an individual. Values play the most crucial role in making an action 'moral'. Basically, values are principles which one values and feels worth following. They are an integral part of one's conscience. They are particular and personal to an individual. Values guide the individual in times of ethical dilemma. For instance, if one feels compassion is the most important value, she will compromise the value of static law-abiding to go rather with compassion. The set of values decide the moral character of an individual.

Integrity- It is the practice of being honest and showing consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values. In ethics, integrity is regarded as the honesty and truthfulness or accuracy of one's actions. It is considered as a personal choice of an individual which is uncompromising under any kind of adversarial circumstances. It ensures correct actions and stands in stark contrast to hypocrisy. Thus, integrity is the harmonious relationship between what we think, what we say, and what we do.

e.g. No favour is given in allotment of purchase tender which would have otherwise might have benefited the officer, personally.

Responsibility - It is a moral value, according to which a person feels a sense of ownership about some work to be done. It is Suo moto in nature. Guided by this, one takes action on herself intrinsically, irrespective of the demand from outside. Responsibility is what officers have for her citizens. Responsibility is morally superior to accountability.

e.g. Volunteers takes responsibility to clean the surroundings

Accountability - It is moral-legal value, according to which an official is bound to act in a particular way. It is in nature of legal compulsion. Accountability is what Citizens ensure from government official extrinsically. It is a control mechanism.

e.g. Govt official following rules to avoid punishment

Transparency - It indicates that the information impacting the general public must be made available to them, and nothing should be kept hidden from them. As an ethical principle, it indicates suo moto declaration of information to the public. It makes administration participative, aware and efficient. The diversity of opinion can be easily accommodated.

Rationality - Rationality is a faculty of thinking wherein the prejudices, emotions, and other outside influences have no place. It is a scientific approach to things. It helps us

see things as they are and not adulterated by subjective opinions. It is the tool to bring objectivity in decision making. This instrument helps us discriminate between right and wrong, good and bad by their merits.

e.g. The constitutional value for gender equality is the result of rationality

Objectivity - Objectivity implies that one's action/decision should be rationally based on facts, figures, principles, and standard judgements, rather than emotions, passions, biases, prejudices etc. it reduces chances of discrimination against someone.

e.g. If a person, patronized by a politician comes to a civil servant asking him to issue a tender in favour of him though he does not deserve it, but the politician is ordering to issue him. In this case, objectivity must outweigh submissiveness to authority.

Non-partisanship - It means exercising one's authority with no favour to any one as against others. This brings in the sense of equality and justice in administration. This constitutes the most crucial aspect of administration.

e.g. Police officer taking action against all type of political violence irrespective political party in power.

Impartiality- It is an ethical value wherein one does not use her discretion to favour someone undeservingly. It is one of the most important ethical values for an administrator as she holds a position of authority and responsibility, and her decisions impact the lives of many people. So if the decisions taken by her are not impartial, the trust of people in administration will reduce causing serious damage to governance. Impartiality helps maintain efficiency and merit.

e.g. A district magistrate allots the tender to a party with merit and not to the party involving his friends, despite such a demand for a favour from the friends

Discretion -It is the act of using one's free will. Every moral action presumes an act of discretion. In administration, it gives room to administration to act morally and not just mechanically following legal books. As the situations and the demands of the administration are dynamic, there is always a need to tackle it with applying one's own mind and heart, without which one cannot act on one's own value system.

Conscience -It is an internal compass which motivates and also compels a person to do ethical things. If in case the person, due to overriding of self-interest, does an unethical act this conscience tortures the person from inside, through a sense of guilt. E.g. when in need I steal some money from my friend's wallet after some time, my conscience starts compelling me to say sorry to him and return the money.

Dutifulness - Dutifulness is acting based on one's legal, professional or moral obligations and willing to do them well and without complaint and is the desire to alleviate another's suffering.

e.g. A doctor's duty is to save a patient whereas a critical patient suffering from huge pain is asking the doctor to perform active euthanasia on him. Here, the legal, professional and moral obligation of the doctor does not allow Euthanasia, but compassion allows. In this case, the Dutifulness

Guilt - It is a cognitive or an emotional experience that occurs when a person believes or realizes that they have compromised their standards of conduct or have violated a universal moral standard and bear significant responsibility for that violation. It is a feeling of deserving blame for offences. It is closely related to the concept of remorse.

Crisis of Conscience – A situation in which the inner voice is unable to provide the way forward is called a crisis of conscience. It is a very difficult situation in which one worries because he thinks that his act is wrong or immoral. It is similar to a case of an ethical dilemma but, in a very strong sense. Here the individual thinks that his actions are against the voice of conscience and hence ethically not tenable.

Ethical Dilemma- The ethical dilemma is a situation where a person is required to apply his discretion in selecting an option among two contradicting options in front of him/her. Moreover, each of the two options depicts an ethical value. It is choosing between two right things. It is a difficult situation as in choosing one the other ethical value is compromised. The final selection manifests the ethical priority of that individual.

Sympathy & Empathy - Sympathy is a feeling of sadness in response to the fact that someone else is suffering. This is an emotional response to someone's pain. Here you may not feel the same pain, but you can understand that the person is in pain and respond accordingly to it. The motive of sympathy is not to contribute to increasing the pain of others. It is an act of feeling the pain of another person in exactly the same way as he is feeling. Here efforts are made to reduce the pain of the person.

E.g. I felt huge pain when I came to know that my friend has lost his mother.

Compassion- Compassion, on the other hand, is the quality of a person to be able to do something to alleviate the pain of the person in pain. Compassion is the inherent characteristic of a person due to which he/she always has a compassionate view for other human beings. **E.g.-** Mother Teresa about all human being

Gratitude - It is the quality of being thankful towards someone who has helped us in any way. It improves a sense of worth in both the parties involved. It is in the form of emotion. It helps improve relations with another human being.

e.g. The sense of gratitude I feel towards all the people who contributed to India's freedom struggle. Due to those efforts only, our lives today can be as free as it is.

Penance- It is the act of infliction of pain to oneself as a response of a perceived wrong done by oneself against someone else. Penance is Suo moto in nature. The basic objective of penance is purification of one's mind.

e.g. According to Indian mythology, Rama, after killing of Ravana, went away to the Himalayan forest as an act of penance for wrongs, according to himself, he committed to killing Ravana

Confession - Confession is when one accepts the mistake/wrong that has been done by her/him. It is the starting point of penance. It is the act that follows after the realization that one has done something immoral. It helps to purify her/his mind and strengthens her/his conscience.

e.g. Roy confessed to his mother because he used the money given by her towards the wrong things.

Forgiveness- It is the virtue which helps a person to be strong enough to pardon another person who has harmed him in any way. Any act of forgiveness purifies the mind and strengthens the character of the one who forgives. It also helps in reducing enmity in the mind of the offender and compels him to self-reflect and rise morally. Forgiveness provides a win-win situation for both thereby upholding moral fabric at large.

e.g. When a person A verbally abuses person B for some reason.

Moreover, when the truth comes out that the assumptions by A were wrong, B do not feel anger or hatred towards A, understanding B's compulsions to do that act. Due to this B neither go for revenge or retaliation against A nor sulks inside his mind. Here the act of B is called an act of forgiveness.

Fairness - It means to be reasonable, just in making choices while taking decisions. It builds the trust of the general public in the process. In public organisations, it improves cooperation and participation in administration, which, in turn, improves efficiency.

e.g. Whenever there is a flood situation, the distribution of relief material is done according to the need and on reasonable and fairground.

Sense of Service - It means to have the feeling of being humble in front of the public for whom work is done. Here the desired duty is perceived as a noble cause by the service provider. It is seen as an opportunity to contribute back to the society, which has given everything to her/him. It flows from a sense of gratitude towards everything.

Spirit of service - It is the sense of responsibility and self-motivation towards the duty assigned to oneself. It is going beyond the legal duty. It comes by adhering to not just the letter of the law but also with its spirits. Spirit of service creates a sense of meaning in the work the administrator is doing. It creates a win-win situation where both administrator and general public both are happy.

e.g. IAS officer Armstrong Pame's dedication for the people when he decided to build a 100km road with the contribution of people themselves.

Commitment - Commitment is the consistency and strength of a decision concerning something/someone. It depicts clarity and certainty in behaviour concerning a thing one is committed to. It strengthens her/his confidence with respect to that particular thing.

e.g. Bhagat Singh's commitment to independence.

Justice - It is equal and fair treatment. It is a value that is required to be maintained while taking a decision. Especially for the civil servant, as she holds much authority, application of justice is the most important value to stick to.

e.g. Affirmative actions in support of weaker sections are an act of justice even though it means treating people unequally.

Equality & Equity - When decisions are taken ignoring the existing inequality and by assuming that all are equal is called equality. Whereas, when this is taken into consideration, it is called equity. Equity always recognizes inherent inequality and strive to eliminate it. Apparently it seems as an unequal treatment, but it is toward the goal of equality. In this case, efforts must focus on equality of opportunity. This means those who are less privileged must be given more than those of more privileged.

e.g. In Indian society, some groups of people are historically less privileged due to the prevalent caste system. To cure this inequality, the constitution of India provides for positive discrimination. This is upholding equity.

Dignity - Dignity is a moral value. It is that attribute of morality which keeps a human being grounded, holistic, integrated and happy with what she is and possesses. The root word of dignity refers to 'worth' and 'self – worth'. A peasant working on the land with all his passion for the sheer pleasure he gets from producing something from the earth refuses the offer of selling his farm to a real estate developer, he rejects the money but keeps his dignity.

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