



## Mains Practice Question

**Q.** Ethical behaviour may be defined in terms of duties. Many philosophers have argued that certain core duties are imperatives, and as such will always apply, regardless of circumstances. Critically analyse (150 words)

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### Approach

- Briefly describe ethical behaviour.
- Explain the deontological approach.
- Provide criticism of Deontological approach.
- Provide conclusion.

### Introduction

- Behaviour can be said to be ethical if it can be justified as morally right. There are several approaches to judge whether an action is ethically right or not.
- There are some philosophers who consider an action as ethical on the basis of their consequences.
- On the other hand some philosophers judge actions on the basis of performance of certain duties and obligations, which are considered by these philosophers as imperatives, such an approach to ethics is Deontological approach to ethics.

### Body

- In the **Deontological approach**, focus is on the duties and obligations in a given situation, and consider what ethical obligations one has and what things one should never do. Ethical conduct is defined by doing one's duties and doing the right thing, and the goal is performing the correct action.
- **Immanuel Kant**, the foremost philosopher of Deontology, proposed a moral law called "**categorical imperative**" stating that morality is derived from rationality. According to Kant there are "categorical imperatives" which are in nature of absolute commands and need to be obeyed without exception for action to be judged as ethical.
- According to Kant, ethics based on the consequences are based up on hypothetical imperative and do not have moral sanction. The lack of absoluteness in consequential approach makes them a matter of desire. For instance, where a Public Servant has to take a decision where among stakeholders, one's gain is others loss e.g. in situation of land acquisition for setting up factory, farmers livelihood is lost but at the same time there will be job creation for Youths. In such a situation Consequential approach becomes a matter of preference for Public Servant with no objective guide to arrive at moral action.
- This framework has the advantage of creating a system of rules that has consistent expectations of all people. If an action is ethically required, it would apply to every person in a given situation. Thus, speaking truth in all situations is categorical imperative which is applicable universally.
- This approach is helpful in resolving dilemmas a civil servant may face during performance of duty where a course of action may resolve a genuine problem by going against established procedure. The categorical imperative of giving precedence to duty helps in resolving such dilemmas.

## **Criticism**

- This notion of finding a universal moral standard has been criticised by philosophers who argue that because of cultural differences in societies, arriving at absolute standards of morality is not possible.
- This approach can introduce impersonality by eliminating all the emotions for example empathy, which in certain situation can allow an individual to perform better in terms of ethics e.g. in achieving common good.
- This approach may require actions which are known to produce harms, even though they are strictly in keeping with a particular moral rule. For example, in situations like Second World War, where German bureaucrats may justify their actions as result of duty or obligations cast up on them.
- It also does not provide a way to determine which duty we should follow if we are presented with a situation in which two or more duties conflict.
- It can also be rigid in applying the notion of duty to everyone regardless of personal situation.

## **Conclusion**

- There are multiple approaches to ethics. Judging human behaviour on the basis of a single absolute imperative is likely to produce undesirable situation. The moral standard should be contextual or absolute depending upon the specificity of case.

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