



## Ethics and Human Interface

**For Mains:** Dimensions of Ethics, Determinants and Consequences of Ethics in Human Action, Importance of Ethics in Private and Public Relationship.

### What is Ethics?

- Ethics is a set of principles that influences our decisions and determines the direction and goal of our lives.
- A society's own set of ethical norms serves as a guide for its people's behavior, decisions, and actions.
  - The preservation of principles and ideals is also a part of it.
  - It takes more than just following a tradition or custom, rather, it necessitates research and assessment of these rules in the context of universal truths.

### What is the Dimension of Ethics?

- **Dimension of Ethics**
  - **Descriptive Ethics:**
    - It is concerned with what individuals genuinely perceive to be correct or incorrect.
    - It gives us a broad picture of how people live their lives, or their life pattern.
    - It provides a history of certain stigmas, traditions, or practices.
  - **Normative Ethics:**
    - Normative ethics is also called perspective ethics.
    - It is basically intended to establish moral benchmarks that define what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior.
    - It is an effort to find the best yardstick for righteous conduct.
    - How individuals should behave is determined by the study of ethical theory.
  - **Meta Ethics:**
    - The issues that decide whether a certain issue or object is morally correct or wrong are the primary concern of meta ethics.
    - It is more concerned with the fairness of morality itself than with whether a particular conduct is moral or immoral.
    - The meta ethics has been divided into two parts by modern philosophers.
      - **Non- Cognitivism:** According to this conceptual perspective, whether we categorize anything as right or wrong is a reflection of our moral knowledge.
      - **Cognitivism:** This way of thinking places a strong focus on how facts and figures determine what is morally right and wrong.
  - **Applied Ethics:**
    - It is the discipline of ethics that examines specific, contentious moral concerns such as abortion, animal rights, and euthanasia. It is beneficial to apply understanding of moral concepts to contemporary issues.

### What is the Essence of Ethics?

- At the heart of ethics is a concern about something or someone other than ourselves, our own desires and self-interest. Ethics is concerned with other people's interests, with the interests of society, with the 'ultimate good'. Thus, when people think ethically they are giving some thought to something beyond themselves. The essence of ethics can be understood as follows:
  - The scope of ethics includes only voluntary human actions. This means the actions done by humans consciously, deliberately and in view of an end. It is concerned about that part of human conduct for which humans have some personal responsibility.
  - It is a set of standards that a society places on itself and which helps in guiding behavior, choices and actions of its members.
  - It is concerned about what is right, fair, just or good, about what we ought to do, not just about what is most acceptable or expedient.
  - It endeavors to analyze and evaluate the principles embodied in various alternatives for conduct and social order.
  - It includes study of universal values such as essential equalities of all men and women, human or natural rights, obedience to the law, concern for health and safety and, increasingly, also for the natural environment.

## What are the Determinants and Consequences of Ethics in Human Action?

- 'Human action' is the starting point of ethics. One of the very first points of consideration in judging the morality or immorality of any act of a person is that it must be a conscious human act, before it can have any moral quality whatsoever.
- Thus, since digestion, growth, movement of blood in the veins, etc. are not under the control of our will, they are not spoken of as moral acts at all. They are acts of a human person, but they are not called 'human acts'.
- A human act is one that proceeds from knowledge and free will. If either adequate knowledge or freedom is lacking in the act of a person, then that act is not fully human and therefore, not fully moral.
- Thus, the judgment of rightness and wrongness can be passed on only those actions which are voluntary. They have to be intended by the doer, based on adequate knowledge, i.e., the act must be voluntary.
- However, there are certain factors that diminish or reduce the voluntariness of human actions. These are called the impediments to conscious human action.
- **Determinants of Ethics in Human Action:**
  - The actions performed by human beings cannot be genuinely called human actions, if any of the aforesaid conditions, i.e., ignorance, passion or violence, are present. This action is not human and hence cannot be subjected to scrutiny in ethics.
    - However, when there is reason or knowledge involved, when the acts are voluntary, it can be determined whether a given human act is good or bad. As per moral theologians there are certain determinants of the moral quality of our actions. These are:
      - **Nature/Object of the Act:**
        - **One of the criteria of judging the morality/goodness of human acts is its object/nature.** Every action has a particular nature/essence that makes it different from other actions. An act thus specified may, when considered in itself, be good, bad, or indifferent. Thus, helping a blind person across the street is a good act in itself, to blaspheme is bad in itself, and learning to shoot is in itself an indifferent act and learning to shoot is in itself an indifferent act.
        - However, there are certain types of acts that are called intrinsically evil/immoral by its very nature, that is, by its inherent moral meaning. An intrinsically evil act is an act that is always bad, always sinful. It is never good, never appropriate, and never useful irrespective of the ulterior intentions of the one acting and the circumstances.
          - Reason also attests that some of the human acts by their very nature are incapable of being good because they radically contradict the notion of good, for instance, rape, murder of innocent children, or blasphemy.
        - Meanwhile, there are some specific acts such as abortion, embryonic stem cell research, same sex marriage, euthanasia, etc. that are considered intrinsically immoral as per moral codes of certain societies/religion. Even though intentions

may sometimes be good, and circumstances frequently difficult, these acts are considered non-negotiable and hence punishable by such societies.

- However, such instances of judging morally of an act as evil or sinful prior to a consideration of the circumstances and intentions might be questionable, debatable or even invalid in some other societies.

◦ **Intention/Purpose of the Action:**

- Actions may be either good or bad, depending on why we do them. According to Aristotle and teleological theorists every human action, no matter how trivial, has some purpose/ motive/intention behind it. A person has the moral responsibility for all such actions (deliberate or omissions, doing or withholding from an action, trying or attempting to bring about a certain result) that involves agent's foresight, cause, desire, or motivation. Therefore, the intention of the person in action is an element essential to the moral evaluation of an action. The manner in which purpose/intention affects the ethics of an action is outlined below:

- For a human act to be morally good the agent or doer must have good intentions.
- The motive of an agent can change an act morally good by nature into a morally evil act.
- A good intention, no matter how good, does not make something essentially immoral into something morally good.
- An action that has a good object can become more or less good because of its purpose.
- An action which is inherently wrong may become a greater or lesser wrong depending on the purpose of the moral agent.

◦ **Circumstances of the Action:**

- Every human act in a concrete order is done under particular circumstances. Circumstances may therefore affect the morality of an action and add something to the moral quality. Circumstances of a human action include such things as the act being done at a particular time, in a particular place, by a particular agent, in a particular manner. How the differing circumstances change the rightness or wrongness of actions can be understood as outlined below:

- Sometimes circumstances affect the morality of the action only in degree, that is, they contribute to increasing or diminishing the moral goodness or evil of human acts. For example, stealing is bad by object, stealing a rare object/or stealing from a destitute/poor increases the malice of the action. On the other hand, if a robber acts like Robin Hood by stealing from the rich to help the poor, his robberies become less immoral.
- Some circumstances impart a new type of goodness or badness to an action by the effect of when and where it takes place.
  - **When:** Whether it is done during war or peace. For instance, there is an increase in the guilt of an intelligence officer who, when caught by an enemy country at the time of war, succumbs to threat of violence and discloses highly confidential information that severely affects national secrets.
  - **Where:** Similarly, where the action takes place can affect its morality. For instance, a murder in a church/cathedral adds an additional moral evil to murder itself as it involves the profanation of a consecrated place of worship and hence the additional evil of sacrilege.
- Circumstances can also diminish or lessen the agent's responsibility. For instance, a woman who kills the person who attacks her chastity is absolved from the guilt of killing someone.

- Thus, since all human actions occur at a certain time and at a certain place, the circumstances must always be considered in evaluating the moral quality of any human act. Meanwhile, it must be understood that 'a morally good act requires the goodness of the object, of the end, and of the circumstances together'. If any one of the three is evil, then the human act in question is evil and should be avoided.

◦ Agents that influence/ determine the ethicality of human action:

- Individual personality traits

- Culture or country of the individual
- Organization/ industry

▪ **Consequences of Ethics in Human Action:**

- The consequences are the effects caused by an action. Many of our actions, decisions, and choices of everyday life are made with an eye to the consequences. Human beings by nature tend to be consequence oriented. That means we have a tendency to seek intended results and the quality of these results/consequences depend on how much goodness they contain.
- An action is judged to be good or bad on the basis of its outcome. If other people suffer, it is wrong. If people benefit, it is right. Consequences, then, are an important consideration in our analysis of ethical conduct. The cases where the consequences of an action are attributable to the doer who is held responsible for an effect, involve the following conditions:
  - If the doer holds notice (even if vaguely) or knows ahead what the consequences of a particular choice or action will be, he/she is presumed to have willed the effect. For example, in case of a bad effect, if a hunter sees an object, but is unsure whether it is a man or a deer. The hunter anticipates vaguely what the consequences of firing a shot may be killing of deer or killing of men. If the hunter chooses to shoot anyhow, he has willed the effect, whether the killing of deer or killing of men.
  - If the actor does not perform the act but causes another one to do it (in the form of help, encouragement or persuasion), the first person is still morally responsible for the consequences of the act to the degree that he or she foresaw those consequences. For instance, if a politician gives a hate speech that incites communal violence in a sensitive area, he will be considered guilty of the commission of a wrong act.
  - If one remains silent or does not take any action - If a person witnesses a road accident and refrains from helping the victim in critical condition, he fails to perform the duty of a good Samaritan therefore, is guilty of errors of omission and the bad consequences (death of the victim) that follow.
- Thus, whatever increases, lessens or destroys the liberty and knowledge that are essential for a moral act also increases, lessens or destroys the responsibility of the actor.

## How do Ethics work in Private and Public Relationships?

▪ **Ethics in Public Relationships:**

- Ethics is concerned with notions such as right and wrong, as well as good and bad human behavior in various social and organizational situations.
- **Private Relationship:**
  - Unlike a politician's or bureaucrat's interaction with the general public or a doctor's relationship with his patients, a person's private relationships, such as marriage, family, kinship, and friendship, are private. Private relationships are more personal.
- **Characteristics of private relationships:**
  - Expecting a spouse to be faithful, loving, and affectionate.
  - More tolerance for imperfections.
  - They are comparatively long-lasting.
  - Private relationships are frequently inherited or granted.
- Generally speaking, personal qualities, universal human values, religion, societal conventions, and the law of the nation guide ethics in private interactions. Actions guided by ethics are easier to justify in public. Moral standards and institutions with religious and constitutional considerations also have an impact on ethical issues in personal relationships in India.
- **Ethics in Public Relationships:**
  - Public Relations are now becoming a vital function affecting management decisions and influencing public opinion in every non-profit or profit-making organization. Monitoring and assessing public opinion as well as preserving goodwill and understanding between a company and its customers are all part of the management task of public relations.
  - **Characteristics of public relationships:**
    - In public, there are people who are different from dealing with people.
    - Public relationships are likely to be instrumental.



- Engagements due to work or benefit.
- Expectation for respect.
- A particular kind of role to be played in public relationships therefore responsible for what a person says.
- Accountability is what a person says and does.

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