



Mains Practice Question

Q. What do you understand by Moral Emotions and what is their role? How are they different from basic emotions? (250 words)

31 Oct, 2019 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Define moral emotions and their role with examples.
- Differentiate between moral emotions and basic emotions with suitable examples.

Moral emotions are a variety of social emotions that are involved in forming and communicating moral judgments and decisions, and in motivating behavioral responses to one's own and others' moral behavior. Moral emotions help to make important moral judgments by directing people's moral choices.

Role of moral emotions

- Inner-directed negative emotions like **guilt, embarrassment, and shame** often motivate people to act ethically.
 - For example, a father asking his child to apologize and accept his mistake after being caught picking up chocolates from departmental store. The guilt within him will stop him from being a regular offender.
- Outer-directed negative emotions, on the other hand, aim to discipline or punish.
 - For example, people often direct anger, disgust, or contempt at those who have acted unethically. This discourages others from behaving the same way.
- Positive emotions like **gratitude and admiration**, which people may feel when they see someone else acting with compassion or kindness, can prompt them to help others.
- Emotions evoked by suffering, such as **sympathy and empathy**, often lead people to act ethically toward others. Indeed, empathy is the central moral emotion that most commonly motivates prosocial activity such as **altruism, cooperation, and generosity**.
 - For example, Compassionate Kozhikode, a social initiative by IAS Prashant Nair aims to mobilize people's moral emotions to help the poor and the most vulnerable.

Difference between basic emotions and moral emotions

Basic emotions	Moral emotions
These are animalistic emotions (even shared with animals) which are common across all cultures, and they're thought to be biologically determined.	They are ' self-conscious ' emotions referred to as moral, social or "higher-order" emotions. These are emotions that an organism can only feel if it has a highly developed sense of self-reflection .
Six basic emotions: Anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise.	Four moral emotions: guilt, shame, embarrassment, and pride.

For ex: the fear felt in an interview (heart beating fast, voice constricting, palms sweating) is a basic emotion.	Ex: The shame that might set in as you leave ("Why do I interview so poorly?!") is a self-conscious emotion.
Basic emotions are limited to personal grievances. Ex: The anger I might feel at having my wallet snatched is a basic emotion.	Emotions in which we imagine our conformity or nonconformity to society's norms. Ex: The pride felt after urging the MLAs to frame stricter laws addressing local crimes.

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