

Topics Covered:

- ✎ Basic Introduction to Ethics
- ✎ Why do we need Ethics
- ✎ Important keywords and terminology
- ✎ Comparison values, Morals, Social Norms, etc.



Basic Introduction to Ethics

‘Ethics’ comes from the Greek word ‘ethikos,’ which means custom, habit, character, or disposition. Simply put, ethics is a way of thinking about moral principles. It’s the study of figuring out ‘What is the right thing to do?’ and influences how people make decisions and live their lives.



- We all have opinions on various things, but have you ever wondered how we form these opinions?
- How do we decide if something, even if it doesn’t directly involve us, is good or bad, right or wrong?
- This is where ethics comes in – it guides us in making these judgments.

These questions don’t have simple yes or no answers. However, the way we think about them can’t be random; it has to be based on reasoning. What could be the moral argument for or against such differences?

Moreover, as a civil servant, not only do you have to make decisions that affect others' lives, but you also have to make choices for yourself.

For instance:

- Is it a conflict of interest to accept tenders from a company run by a relative? How should we approach such situations?



- So, ethics is like a system of moral principles that helps us tell right from wrong, good from bad, and fair from unfair.
- These principles guide human behaviour and actions, helping us create a society where everyone can live together peacefully.
- Now, some people debate whether there are universal moral principles that apply to everyone, regardless of who they are or the situation.
- Throughout history, every society has tried to define good or acceptable conduct and discouraged or punished bad behaviour.
- Religious views on ethics, for instance, often aim to be universal. The concept of the Categorical Imperative by Immanuel Kant provides a test to see if an action can be considered universal.

KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

- UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLE
 - A person should act that the principle of one's act could become a universal law of human action in a world in which one would hope to live.
 - A person should treat other people as having intrinsic value, and not merely as a means to achieve one's end.

What is ethics?

- **Ethics is not religion:** Many people aren't religious, but ethics applies to everyone. While most religions promote high ethical standards, they might not cover all the issues we face.

“it’s possible to have ethics without religion, but religion without ethics isn’t truly ethical.”

- You can be very ethical without being religious, but the combination of ethics with religion can be helpful.
- **Ethics is not following the law:** Although a good legal system includes many ethical standards, the law can sometimes differ from what is considered ethical.
- There may be challenges in designing or enforcing standards, and the law might be slow to address new problems. *“For instance, marital rape might not be illegal but can be considered unethical.”*
- **Ethics is not following culturally accepted norms:** While some cultures are ethical, others may become corrupt or overlook certain ethical concerns. *“For example, the historical prevalence of slavery in the United States before the Civil War or the caste system in India.”*

Why do we need Ethics?

“Ethics plays a role in our lives through our interactions with human connections. These connections are built through various human institutions like family, friends, school, community, market, and the government. By understanding how our thoughts are connected to these relationships, we can uncover the core principles that shape our behaviour.”

- The core of ethics is about having shared principles that help us achieve common goals like peace, harmony, and stability in society. In our public life, these principles are best seen in values such as accountability, empathy, honesty, integrity, compassion, and more.
- Ethics is essential because we don’t automatically know what’s good or bad for our lives. We face many complex choices that can impact the length and quality of our lives.
- We have to decide where to live, how to spend our time, who to be with, who to trust, what to think about, and how to achieve our goals.
- We also need to figure out which qualities to develop and which to get rid of. We must understand which emotional responses are helpful and which are harmful.
- We need criteria to judge others and decide how to interact with them. If we don’t think about these things and just go with the flow, we might be influenced by social and emotional factors that aren’t necessarily the best for us.



Ethics is all about the decisions we make or don't make. We are aware of our thoughts and our ability to make smart choices, which we call free will. We know that the choices we make affect us and others, and we understand the responsibility we have for our actions.

- However, we don't have **built-in knowledge or instincts** that automatically guide our survival and well-being.
- While we may naturally desire to survive and avoid pain, we don't instinctively know how to achieve those goals.
- A rational and **consistent ethical framework** can help us make better choices for our lives and the well-being of society.
- The individual choices people make can solidify over time into the beliefs and values of a society. The legal system of a country heavily relies on these values and beliefs.

For instance:

- **Surrogacy laws:** Does the freedom to become a biological parent give us the right to put a monetary value on something as fundamental as motherhood?

The laws on surrogacy in India reflect Indian values, while in other countries, they mirror their own.

Important Keywords and Terminology

"The words beliefs, norms, values, morality, ethics, and principles are often used interchangeably, but they have subtle differences. To understand these differences, we can think of them in an evolutionary way—from an individual's beliefs to a social norm to a country's law."

Bureaucratic Inertia:

- Bureaucratic inertia is when organizations stick to established procedures, even if they are counterproductive or go against the organization's goals. It's like organizations continuing to grow and operate on their own, regardless of success or failure.
- **Example:** The U.S. Department of Agriculture has offices in many counties, even where there's little agricultural relevance.

Intuition:

- **Definition:** Intuition is the ability to understand or know things without explicit reasoning. It's like an inner perception that can develop with age, maturity, or experience. Intuition guides and motivates us, sometimes giving us a sense of déjà vu.
- **Example:** You might feel you've experienced something before because your intuition sensed or understood it earlier.

Prudence:

- **Definition:** Prudence is the ability to govern oneself using reason. It's considered a virtue and one of the four Cardinal virtues. Prudence involves judging between virtuous and unvirtuous actions, especially in specific situations. It helps distinguish courageous acts from reckless or cowardly ones.
- **Example:** Knowing when an action is courageous rather than reckless is an example of using prudence.

Beliefs:

- **What They Are:** Beliefs are the foundation of our thoughts. **For example**, if there's a coffee mug on my table, I believe it's there. In stories like the Ramayana, some people believe that Ram killed Ravan.
- **Where They Come From:** Our experiences shape our beliefs. They influence our ideas, viewpoints, knowledge, and attitudes. Beliefs can create stories, myths, traditions, and superstitions. They can also be based on true facts, history, or legends.
- **Cultural Influence:** Beliefs form the basis of a cultural group, but the group might not always be aware of them. They are like hidden building blocks.
- **Importance:** Beliefs are crucial because they give us hope. Our well-being often relies on what we believe in. Importantly, beliefs aren't fixed—they can be changed.
- **Differences:** People can have different beliefs about the same thing, from simple matters like seeing a glass as half empty or half full to complex questions about the origin of the Earth or life.
- **Emotional Impact:** Beliefs can evoke emotions, although they might not always lead to actions.

Values:

- **What They Are:** Values are like preferences for what's good or bad. They're long-lasting beliefs about what's desirable or undesirable.
- **Where They Come From:** Values come from the world around us, our personal experiences, and our interactions with family and school. They're often expressed using words like 'should.'
- **Learned from Stories:** Stories like Ramayana and Mahabharata can teach us values like respecting elders, doing our duty, being honest, and having integrity. We can also assign negative values to actions like kidnapping and insulting.
- **Guiding Principles:** Values are like guiding principles that influence how we move forward. They have a big impact on how a person behaves and their attitude.

Norms:

- **What They Are:** Norms are like commonly accepted social practices that guide how people behave. For example, it's a norm to say thank you when someone helps you as a way of showing gratitude.
- **How They Work:** Norms act as informal guidelines within a specific group or community about what's considered right or wrong in social behaviour. They represent collective expectations among community members.
- **Social Control:** Norms serve as a kind of social control or pressure on individuals to fit in, encourage conformity, and discourage deviant behaviour. They are expressed through social customs, folkways, or mores.
- **Order in Society:** Norms help maintain order in a society. For instance, in a traditional society, it's a norm for a son to obey his father's commands and fulfil his wishes.
- **Consequences of Non-Conformity:** Not following social norms can lead to punishment. This punishment might involve being looked down upon, criticized,

scolded, boycotted, or asked to perform some penance. Laws, which come later, are a more formalized version of norms. Society codifies expected and unexpected behaviors and those who deviate may face trials in a court of law and receive appropriate punishment.

Principles:

- **What They Are:** While values, beliefs, and morality can differ between individuals and communities, principles are like moral rules that are seen as universally true. For example, the idea that honesty is the best policy can be a personal principle because it's widely accepted by everyone.
- **Universal Nature:** Principles are about universal truths and standards, like fairness, truthfulness, equality, and justice. They are considered applicable to everyone, regardless of individual differences or cultural variations.

Morals:

- **What They Are:** Morals are the values and beliefs about what's right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable in a specific situation.
- **Personal Compass:** They guide our behaviour, but morality is ultimately a personal compass—a personal choice. Take Jainism, for instance, which has five principles guiding its followers. However, individuals decide which morals they actually follow to judge the rightness or wrongness of an action.
- **Individual Choice:** Morality is a personal choice, and people may follow different moral guides. Those who are indifferent to right or wrong are called amoral, while those who do evil acts are called immoral.
- **Change Over Time:** Morals can change over time. Historically, religion has been a significant source of morals, but new knowledge can lead to shifts in personal morals. For example, the perception of homosexuality as unnatural and immoral is changing globally. Some morals, like considering selfishness as immoral and valuing loyalty and truthfulness as moral, remain consistent across time and cultures.

Absolutism:

- Absolute belief that there is one right way to live morally, applicable to everyone. It's often associated with the will of God, nature, or human reason.

Act Deontology:

- The idea is that individuals should apply ethical principles to each unique situation, as situations are too different for general rules. This is different from rule deontology.

Act Utilitarianism:

- Belief that the principle of utility (maximizing overall good) should be directly applied to specific actions in specific situations. Contrast with rule utilitarianism.

Altruism:

- Concern for others. It can be descriptive (observing people acting for others) or normative (suggesting people should act for others, not just themselves). Contrast with egoism.

Autonomy:

- Respecting individuals' freedom and self-determination. It often points to personal liberty in accordance with one's own chosen plan, as long as it aligns with universal moral principles.

Beneficence:

- The moral principle is to help others with their important interests. This can respect autonomy or involve paternalism, but it's generally understood with restrictions to minimize risk, inconvenience, or expense.

Confidentiality:

- Keeping promises about not disclosing information. It's a subset of fidelity duties.

Consequentialist Theories:

- Approaches to morality based on consequences. Common expressions include utilitarianism (act and rule utilitarianism). They focus on what should be done based on outcomes.

Deontological Theories:

- Approaches to morality are based on fundamental principles, not just consequences. Actions or rules are right if they satisfy non-consequentialist moral duties. This can be grounded in religious revelation, natural law, or human reason.

Duty:

- Actions or acts that are morally or legally obligatory. Rights create duties, whether non-interference (negative rights) or providing social goods (positive rights). Duty is not only based on rights but also arises in day-to-day social interactions.

Facts

- This is about separating what is true (facts) from what we think should be true (values). People don't always agree on where to draw the line between them.

Fidelity:

- Fidelity means keeping promises. It's a principle that suggests you should do what you say you'll do.

Justice:

- Justice is often described as fairness, but it's more about giving people what they deserve. This can be tricky because deciding what is fair or deserved isn't always clear-cut. It involves treating similar cases or people alike.

Morality (Ethics):

- Morality is like a guidebook for human behaviour. It's about doing what's right and avoiding harm.

Nonmaleficence:

- This is the idea of not causing harm to others. A simple way to put it is "First, not harm." This contrasts with the principle of beneficence, which is about helping others.

Paternalism:

- Paternalism is when someone restricts another person's freedom for their own good. It's like a parent making decisions for a child because they believe it's in the child's best interest.

Rights:

- Rights are things that individuals are owed based on ethical principles. Negative rights are about not being interfered with (like freedom of speech), while positive rights involve receiving things (like education or healthcare), often grounded in principles of justice.

Rule Deontology:

- This theory says that ethical principles should be turned into rules, and these rules determine whether actions are right or wrong. It contrasts with act deontology.

Rule Utilitarianism:

- This theory argues that rules should be based on maximizing overall happiness or well-being (utility). Even if following a rule doesn't always create the most happiness in a particular situation, overall, it's better to have rules.

Utilitarianism:

- This is a way of thinking about morality that focuses on the overall good consequences of actions. It can be about individual acts (act utilitarianism) or following general rules (rule utilitarianism).

Veracity:

- Veracity is about telling the truth. It's the principle that honesty is the best policy.

Virtues:

- Virtues are positive qualities like kindness, honesty, and fairness. They correspond to ethical principles or duties, such as benevolence, confidentiality, justice, and so on.

Red tapism :

- Red tape is a term used for too many strict rules and procedures that can slow down or block decision-making. It often happens in big organizations like governments or companies.

Comparison of Values, Social Norms, etc.

Difference Between Norms and Values

- Norms are like accepted rules for how we behave, and values are like guiding principles that help us know what's right and wrong.
- Norms are specific rules to follow, while values are more like general guides.
- Norms are about what's accepted by a group of people (society), and values are about what an individual believes is right.
- Norms can change from one society to another, but values can differ from person to person.

Examples:

- Norms are things like covering your mouth when you sneeze, shaking hands to greet someone, or saying 'sorry' when you bump into someone.
- Values are bigger ideas like honesty, kindness, fairness, and courage.

Norms are like specific rules for behaviour, and values are like overall principles for deciding what's right and wrong. Both are important for how we act in society.

Norms V/s Values	
NORMS	VALUES
Norms are accepted standards of behaviour.	Values are principles that help you to decide what is right and wrong.
Specific guidelines.	General guidelines.
Behaviours that are accepted by the society.	Principals believed by an individual.
May vary from society to society.	May vary from individual to individual.
Ex: covering your mouth when coughing, shaking hands when you meet someone, saying sorry when you bump into someone, etc.	Ex: honesty, integrity, courage, kindness, fairness, and generosity.

Comparison between Morality and Ethics:

Morality	Ethics
1. More general and prescriptive based on customs and traditions.	1. Specific and descriptive. It is a critical reflection on morals.
2. More concerned with the results of wrong action, when done.	2. More concerned with the results of a right action, when not done.
3. Thrust is on judgment and punishment, in the name of God or by laws.	3. Thrust is on influence, education, training through codes, guidelines, and correction.
4. In case of conflict between the two, morality is given top priority, because the damage is more. It is more common and basic.	4. Less serious, hence second priority only. Less common. But relevant today, because of complex interactions in the modern society.
5. Example: Character flaw, corruption, extortion, and crime.	5. Example: Notions or beliefs about manners, tastes, customs, and towards laws.

Difference between self-esteem and self-respect:

Self-respect	Self-esteem
1. A moral concept.	1. A psychological concept.
2. Valuing oneself in morally-suitable ways.	2. Having a positive attitude towards oneself. It may be excessive or unwarranted or normal.
3. It includes virtues of recognition and appraisal. It promotes virtues of sense of honor, self-control and courage.	

Comparison between Ethics and Values:

Difference between Ethics and Values:	
Ethics	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ethics are a set of morals that are derived from one's behaviour strengthened by society or a certain group of people. ➤ Ethics help in both personal and professional development. ➤ They help in distinguishing between right and wrong through established principles. ➤ They are unvaried. ➤ It limits one's negative actions through rigid principles. ➤ It generally means "character". ➤ It gets influenced by profession, organization, or institution. ➤ Ethics has mainly three types:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Meta-Ethics II. Applied Ethics III. Normative Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Values help one to determine the priority of anything. ➤ They are personal to an individual. ➤ They help in deciding what is important and what is not, They differ from one individual to another. ➤ It influences and inspires a person. ➤ It means someone or something's importance or worth in life. ➤ It is generally affected by family, society, culture, or religion. ➤ Values have several types:- <ol style="list-style-type: none"> I. Religious Values. II. Social Values. III. Moral Values, etc.