# General Knowledge Today

# Ethics & Integrity-1: Ethics and Human Interface

# Contents

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Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions; dimensions of ethics; ethics in private and public relationships

# Nature & Scope of Ethics

Ethics {origin from Greek word *Ethikos*} is a key branch of philosophy, concerned with *systematic study of right or wrong human actions & conduct in the backdrop of standards or moral principles set by society*. Thus, it refers to <u>one's moral character</u> and the way in which <u>society expects</u> people to behave in accordance with accepted principles.

Ethics may also refer to the *rules of conduct* recognized in respect of a particular class of human activities {e.g. medical ethics, business ethics, Hindu ethics etc.}.

The nature & scope of Ethics can be summed up in the below points:

## Ethics is a science

Ethics is a science, concerned with a particular sphere of nature that deals with *certain judgments that we make about human conduct*. It also talks about systematic explanation of rightness or wrongness in a man's life.

## Ethics is a normative science

A natural science or descriptive science is concerned with "what is the case". It deals with facts and explains them by their causes. However, Normative science is concerned with *what ought to be done*. Ethics is a normative science as it deals with norms by which *we can judge human actions*. *Ethics does not deal with facts. Rather, it deals with values and principles.* Therefore, it is clear that ethics is concerned with judgments of value, while natural science deals with judgments of facts. That is why ethics is not a natural science but a normative science.

However, with respect to ethics, there is no clear distinction between science and philosophy. Ethics is both scientific and philosophical, both normative and descriptive science.

## Ethics is different from morality

Ethics and morality {term *moral* comes from the Latin *moralis*, meaning customs or manners} are often used interchangeably. In earlier times, the scholars used to call ethics a 'science of morals'. However, this was fallen to disuse. Ethics does not teach how to lead a moral life. Ethics merely help us to *justify the right and good* which leads us to achieve our goals. Morality deals with purpose, motive, intention and choice which are considered right or wrong in the light of customs and manners.

Another difference between the two is that – the term 'ethics' is usually applied to persons while 'morality' to acts and behaviour.

## Ethics is a science of values

Ethics is a science of values as it discovers the forms of conduct or behaviour, which have the character of moral obligation. Ethics deals with a phenomena and it observes, classifies and explains them by moral values. It distinguishes moral judgments from logical judgments and aesthetic judgments and reduces them to a system.

# Branches of Ethics

The four main branches of ethics include *descriptive ethics, normative ethics, meta-ethics* and *applied ethics.* They have been discussed in brief here:

## Descriptive Ethics

Descriptive ethics deals with what *people actually believe (or made to believe) to be right or wrong*, and accordingly holds up the human actions *acceptable or not acceptable or punishable* under a custom or law.

However, customs and laws keep changing from time to time and from society to society. The societies have structured their moral principles as per changing time and have expected people to behave accordingly. Due to this, descriptive ethics is also called *comparative ethics* because it compares the ethics or past and present; ethics of one society and other. It also takes inputs from other disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology and history to explain the moral right or wrong.

## Normative Ethics

Normative Ethics deals with "norms" or set of considerations how one should act. Thus, it's a *study of "ethical action"* and *sets out the rightness or wrongness* of the actions. It is also called **prescriptive ethics** because it rests on the principles which determine whether an action is right or wrong. The Golden rule of normative ethics is "*doing to other as we want them to do to us*". Since we don't want our neighbours to throw stones through our glass window, then it will not be wise to first throw stone through a neighbour's window.  Based on this reasoning, anything such as harassing, victimising, abusing or assaulting someone is wrong. Normative ethics also provides justification for punishing a person who disturbs social and moral order.

Aristotle's **virtue ethics**, Kant's **deontological ethics**, Mill's **consequentialism (Utilitarianism)** and the Bhagwad Gita's ***Nishkam Karmayoga*** are some of the theories in Normative Ethics.

### Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics focuses on one's character and the virtues for determining or evaluating ethical behaviour. Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas were major advocates of Virtue ethics. Plato gave a scheme of *four cardinal virtues viz. prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude (courage)*. His disciple

Aristotle categorized the virtues as moral and intellectual. He identified some of the moral virtues including "wisdom".

## Deontological ethics

Deontological ethics or **duty ethics** focuses on the rightness and wrongness of the actions rather than the consequences of those actions. There are different deontological theories such as categorical imperative, moral absolutism, divine command theory etc.

First famous deontological theory is *Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative* or *Kantianism*. Kant said that the *human beings occupy special place in creation* and there is an *ultimate commandment* from which all duties and obligations derive. The moral rules, as per Kant, should follow two principles viz. universality and principle of reciprocity. By universality, he meant that a moral action must be possible to apply it to all people. By principle of reciprocity, he meant said "*do as you would be done by.* Such premise of morality is found in all religious systems, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism etc.

Second famous deontological theory is ***Moral absolutism***. It believes that there are *absolute standards* against which moral questions can be judged. Against these standards, certain actions are right while others are wrong regardless of the context of the act. For example, theft is wrong, regardless of context in which theft was carried out. It ignores that sometimes wrong act is done to reach out to right consequence.

Third deontological theory is *Divine command theory*. It says that an *action is right if God has decreed i*t to be right. As per this theory, the rightness of any action depends upon that action being performed because it is a duty, not because of any good consequences arising from that action.

## Consequentialism (Teleology)

Consequentialism or **teleological ethics** says that the morality of an action is contingent with the outcome of that action. So, the *morally right action would produce good outcome while morally wrong action would produce bad outcome.* Based on the outcome, there are several theories such as *Utilitarianism* {right action leads to most happiness of greatest number of people}, **Hedonism** {anything that maximizes pleasure is right}, *Egoism* {anything that maximizes the good for self is right}, *Asceticism* {abstinence from egoistic pleasures to achieve spiritual goals is right action}, **Altruism** {to live for others and not caring for self is right action}.

The core idea of consequentialism is that "*the ends justify the means*". An action that might not be right in the light of moral absolutism may be a right action under teleology.

## Meta Ethics

Meta Ethics or "*analytical ethics*" deals with the *origin of the ethical concepts themselves.* It does not

consider whether an action is good or bad, right or wrong. Rather, it questions – what goodness or rightness or morality itself is? It is basically a _highly abstract way of thinking about ethics_. The key theories in meta-ethics include _naturalism, non-naturalism, emotivism and prescriptivism._

Naturalists and non-naturalists believe that moral language is cognitive and can be known to be true or false. Emotivists deny that moral utterances are cognitive, holding that they consist of emotional expressions of approval or disapproval and that the nature of moral reasoning and justification must be reinterpreted to take this essential characteristic of moral utterances into account. Prescriptivists take a somewhat similar approach, arguing that moral judgments are prescriptions or prohibitions of action, rather than statements of fact about the world.

## Applied Ethics

Applied ethics deals with the philosophical examination, from a moral standpoint, of particular issues in private and public life which are matters of moral judgment. This branch of ethics is most important for professionals in different walks of life including doctors, teachers, administrators, rulers and so on. There are six key domains of applied ethics viz. _Decision ethics_ {ethical decision making process}, _Professional ethics_ {for good professionalism}, _Clinical Ethics_ {good clinical practices}, _Business Ethics_ {good business practices}, _Organizational ethics_ {ethics within and among organizations} and _social ethics_.

It deals with the rightness or wrongness of social, economical, cultural, religious issues also. For example, euthanasia, child labour, abortion etc.

# Human Action – Ethical Foundation

There are two main groups of ethical theories of human actions viz. deontological approach {based on human action itself} and teleological approach {based on consequences of human actions}.

## Comparison of Deontological and Teleological Approach

We have discussed these approaches while discussing the branches of ethics. Here are a few comparative notes on these two approaches:

- While deontological approach is based on the human act itself, the teleological approach is based on the outcome of an act.
- In deontology, assessment of human actions is based on ultimate or absolute standards or criteria or moral principles. In Teleological approach, the assessment of action is based on judgement taken in consideration of the consequences of that action. Thus, rules, laws or regulations don't help in judging such consequences. In reality, teleological approach is "situation ethics".

- The individual needs to have a clear understanding of moral principles and rules in deontological theory. Thus, means to an end is important here. In teleological approach, there is no need to have a clear understanding of moral duties. The very correct consequence makes the action ethical { *the ends justify the means}.* Due to this, teleological approach is called interpretivist theory.
- In Deontological approach, stress is upon duty, obligation, right and wrong. In Teleological approach, the stress is upon good, valuable and desirable outcome.

Practically, neither deontological not teleological approach would solve all ethical issues. In fact both applied together also may not judge the human actions as right or wrong.

## Actus Humanus and Actus Hominis

Human actions can be of two types viz. *actus humanus* {deliberate actions} and actus hominis {undeliberate actions}. Ethics is applicable to only deliberate human actions. They don't apply to undeliberate human actions or the actions of the animals. The question is – how to arrive at a conclusion that the particular action was deliberate or undeliberate?

According to Thomas Aquinas, there are three basic criteria to apply a litmus test to an action to decide whether it was deliberate or not deliberate. These include: *Involvement of knowledge*; *Presence of voluntariness*; and *freely done*. If any of these elements is not present, the action is not called deliberate.

### Involvement of Knowledge

Knowledge is essential requirement for an action to be human and subject to test of ethics. Absence of knowledge is ignorance. Ignorance may lead to undeliberate actions and diminishes the humanness of an action. The ignorance may be of two kind viz. ignorance of law and ignorance of act. Ignorance of law for a public servant is not expected. For others, action that result in violation of law due to ignorance don't qualify to be considered as human actions. Although violation of law due to ignorance may lead to punishment, it is considered human action liable for ethical scrutiny.

### Presence of voluntariness

To qualify as a human action, an action needs to be done voluntarily. Something done involuntarily does not considered as human action.

### Free will

The doer of an action must have his / her free will while carrying out an action to be considered as human action. The thumb rule here is that if a person is doing an action with his free will {has options, can control and cause that action}, it qualifies for ethical scrutiny. If there is no free will, it would be sort of involuntary and will not be considered a human action. This implies that all voluntary actions may not be out of a free will but all free will actions are voluntary action.

There are several ways in which the above three may manifest in human actions due to the complex nature of factors that lead to human actions, it is very difficult to classify an action between *Actus Humanus* and *Actus Hominis.* Some examples are as follows:

- One of the powerful emotions leading to human action is "*passion*". Passions exerts an influence on humans leading to actions. It includes human instincts such as anger, grief, hatred, greed, love etc. So, one can argue that if there is no passion, there is no element of free will and voluntariness, and thus the actions done without passion may not qualify as human action for ethical scrutiny.
- A sense of *fear* may influence human action to such an extent that it may destroy its nature of being a human action.
- A force such as physical or emotional coercion or violence, blackmail etc. can lead the actions of doer *Actus Hominis.*
- Habits, temperament, diseases- mental or physical can also impact the voluntariness of an action.

Thus, there are a variety of factors that may help in deciding if an action is human action for which ethical scrutiny can be applied.

# Approaches to Ethical Decision Making

To arrive at ethical decisions during complex situations, the various dimensions to study of ethics are helpful. Such dimensions include Utilitarian approach, Rights approach, Justice Approach, Common Good approach and Virtue approach.

### Utilitarian Approach

The concept of Utilitarianism was given by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill in 19th century. As per this approach, the ethical actions are those that provide the <u>greatest balance of good over evil</u>. In this context, war against terror is ethical because it tries to curb death and injury to innocent people.

### Rights Approach

This theory emanates from philosophy of Immanuel Kant et al and is based on actions based on free will. This approach supports that individuals have dignity on their ability to choose freely what they do with their life and have basic moral right to do so. Anything that respects this moral right is ethical.

### Justice Approach

This approach emanates from the philosophy of Aristotle and other Greek Philosophers, and says that all equals should be treated equally. This approach asks- how fair is an action? And does it manifest in favouritism or discrimination? The core idea is that ethical actions treat all human beings

equally and fairly.

**Common Good Approach**

This approach also emanates from the writings of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. The core idea is that ethical actions are those which result in everyone's advantage.

**Virtue Approach**

This theory says that the ethical actions ought to be consistent with certain ideal virtues that provide for the full development of our humanity. Some of the virtues include honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, tolerance, love, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, prudence etc.

# Meaning & Elements of Ethical Competency

A public servant needs to be ethically competent. An ethically competent public servant has commitment to _high standards of personal and professional behaviour_; has _knowledge of relevant ethics, codes and laws_; has the _ability to engage in ethical reasoning_ when confronted with challenging situations, acts ethically, and _promotes ethical practices and behaviour_ in public agencies and organisations.

Thus, these five viz. commitment, knowledge, ethical reasoning, action and promotion make the key elements of ethical competency.

Thus, for a public servant, the key prerequisites for ethical competency include:

- Knowledge of ethical principles
- Information about professional code of ethics
- Respect for constitutional principles of equality, fairness, representativeness.
- Public's right to know about public business
- Respect of law
- Respect for public interest
- Ethical reasoning

These are some of the prerequisites for an ethically competent public servant.

# Tests to Determine Ethical Decisions

On the basis of various ancient and modern philosophies, various tests to determine the ethical decisions have been proposed such as smell test, utility test, rights test, exceptions test, choices test, justice test, common good test, character or virtue test etc. A brief idea about each of them is as follows:

### Smell Test

This test focuses on _what is considered good in society_. It _prevents the actions which don't smell good in public_. Thus, getting nude in public is not a good idea and not ethical also, because it is against social norms in almost all civilized society. The weakness of this test is that social norms are dynamic and keep changing with time. For example, the practice of Sati in India was prevalent since early medieval India but we took a lot of time to smell it as a bad practice. Similarly, even today, most of us don't smell bad of caste discrimination in the society.

### Utility Test

This test is based on utilitarian approach. It focuses on best results or consequences. The ethical decisions give happiness, benefits; justice {social, economic and political} to society and individuals. For example, following constitutional ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity in action leads to ethical decisions that pass the utility test. This test needs correct assessment of the outcomes. And, in complex situations, it becomes rather difficult or impossible to judge a decision on utility test.

### Rights Test

This test is based on rights approach. Likewise social norms, rights are also not empirical truths of human life and keep changing from time to time. This test focuses on intrinsic value of each human regardless of their physical, mental and social status. For this test, Universal declaration of Human Rights has become a powerful tool in modern world. Similarly, almost every democratic nation including India, give some basic fundamental / legal rights to every individual. The test determines if these basic rights are violated.

### Choice Test

This test focuses on choice of the people to decide what is good for them. It gives due importance to their preference. People should be able to choose what they value. However, this test needs the rationality in individuals while making their choices. A person of unsound mind and children may not define what they value.

### Justice Test

This test ensures that the particular action ensures social and economic justice for all. It follows the maxim – _Treat equals equally and unequals unequally._ However, the problem is – how to define the equal treatment? There are no single criteria for that.

**Common Good Test**

This test focuses on common goods such as social institutions, natural and technological environments, and ways of understanding etc. This test is against the individualism.

**Virtue Test**

Virtue test or mirror test focuses on the question – If I do this action, will I be able to face myself in mirror? Thus, it is based on human virtues and character and action taken are as per personal character of the individual.

The above discussion makes it clear that some tests focus on individualism while others on community as a whole. Each test is different in its approach but outcomes are almost similar. Thus, while arriving at an ethical decision, we should try to follow multiple tests.

# Determinants of Ethical Behaviour

There are few influences that determine whether behaviour and decisions are ethical or unethical.

## Legal Interpretations

The need to control, legislate and regulate, the ethical conduct at the government, individual, and corporate levels has its roots back to the ancient world. For example, one of the earliest law codes developed, the *Code of Hammurabi*, made Bribery a crime in Babylon during the eighteenth century B.C

Most ancient societies' shares common ethical codes, such as against murder, causing injury to fellow human, and attacks on honour and reputation of an individual. In modern world societies, Law and justice to the public are closely related to ethics and they enforce certain rights and duties in an attempt to repress and punish deviations from these standards.

## Culture/Country

The culture and the country, in which an individual is based, influence one's ethical decisions or behaviour. All cultures differ in values and morals. In western culture, one may look into the person's eyes when one is conversing or talking to them. But in certain Asian cultures such as Korea, it is very rude to converse with a person that is "higher" status (age, work etc.) while looking into their eyes. Thus, what is ethical in a country may not be ethical in other countries.

## Individual factors

The individual factors that determine the ethical standards of a person are moral development, personal values, family influences, Peer Influences and Life experiences.

**Stages of moral development**

Moral development is the process through which children develop proper attitudes and behaviors toward other in society, based on social and culture norms, rules and laws.

**Personal values and morals**

An individual's values and morals will also influence his or her ethical standards. A key variable which affects the ethical behavior is "locus of control". An individual with an internal locus of control believes that he/she can control the events in his/her life. An individual with an external locus of control believes that fate or luck or other people affect his life.

**Family influences**

Individuals start to form ethical standards as children in response to their perception of their parent's behaviour and are likely to adopt high ethical standards if they see that their family members adhere to high ethical standard. They develop lower ethical standards if their family members are involved in unethical behaviours.

**Peer influences**

Peers are colleagues who are always around us in conducting our daily work. The behaviors and attitudes of peers influence an individual's decisions in their life. They play an important role in ethical decision making. Thus, an employee must establish good relationships with colleagues. If there are no good relations among colleagues, there is no harmonious atmosphere which further leads to failure in achieving one's goal.

**Life experiences**

Individual's life experiences analyze key ethical concepts such as "right", "wrong," and "permissible." It lets us explores possible sources of moral obligation such as God, human reason, or the desire to be happy. It seeks to establish principles of right behavior that may serve as action guides for individuals and groups.

# Ethics in Private and Public Relationships

Each individual plays various roles in society. The role played by them defines the relations with others. Every day, we play different roles {father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, husband, wife, teacher, student, doctor, leader, businessman, fried, foe, worker, employer, colleagues and so on}. Each of these roles carries expected behaviour called "norms". The roles define relationships such as marriage, family, friendship, kinship in private sphere of life and teacher-student, doctor-patient, leader-followers, author-reader, employee-employer etc. in public life.

## Private Relationships

Each private and personal relationship has its own irreplaceable value. Each of it has its own unique history, character, and set of implicit and explicit understandings about what is to be expected of the parties to it. The governing factors for ethics in private relationships include individual virtues, universal human values, religion, social norms and law.

## Public Relationships

Public relationships are governed by many aspects. They may or may not be inherited. Many a times, they comprise complex situations, contradictory values and conflict of role and interest.

## Difference between Private and Public Relationships

The private relations are obviously <u>more intimate than public relations</u>. They are generally inherited, relatively permanent; accommodate more tolerance for imperfections, and are full with *expectations of love and affection*. In contrast, public relations may or may not be inherited, are often temporary; with people who are different from us or even strangers, are likely to be instrumental, engaged in due to mutual benefits (quid pro quid), full *with expectation of respect, and accountability* and are guarded.

## Conflict of Role for a Public Servant

At times, Public servants play conflicting role due to conflict in private life and public life. The private relationships demand individual's responsibilities towards the role played in private life such as father, mother, husband, etc. These are self-imposed and voluntary and are backed by sanctions of one's obligations towards self, family and society since ancient times. For example, in our country, the Dharmashshtras provide moral codes to regulate the private relations.

However, in public relationships, the public servant needs to cope with several roles altogether. This includes – role in private life, role in personal and family sphere, role as a professional, role for job, role towards his / her area of jurisdiction, role towards seniors and society / humanity at large.

The public service role invokes legal and constitutional obligations, which when violated invite legal sanctions and penalties. Thus, a public servant needs to cope with these different roles which many a times conflict with each other.

The question is – how to survive while playing such conflicting roles? The key to this is "personal integrity". *Personal integrity is simply taking a sincere and ethical stand.* It also serves as a building block of public confidence and to establish a trust in society.

## Ethical Claims and Managing Ethics in Public Service

As per Dwight Waldo, there are 12 spheres of <u>*ethical claims*</u> {means, what they should or ought to do} for a public servant viz. constitution; law; nation; people; democracy; bureaucratic norms; professionalism; family & friends; personal groups; public interest and welfare and religion. Similarly, the OECD countries publish a set of core values to guide public servants. These core values include impartiality, legality, integrity, transparency, efficiency, equality, responsibility and justice.

This apart, Nolan, in his famous report of <u>*Committee of standards of Public life*</u> in Britain gave seven basic principles for public servants viz. Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness; Honesty and Leadership.

## Conflicts of Interest

Conflict of Interest refers to a situation in which the concerns or aims of two different individual / parties are incompatible. In other way, it is a situation in which a person is in a position to derive personal benefit from actions or decisions made in their official capacity.

There are two levels of arise of conflict of interest viz. Organisational conflicts of interest; and Personal conflicts of interest. When a person is not able to render impartial service because of relationships or other activities, it is called organizational conflict of interest. When a person is not able to render impartial service because of his / her own private interests, it is called personal conflict of interest. When one is confused between ethical issues in private and public relationships, the personal conflict of interest is bound to arise. A public servant must also endeavour to avoid conflict of interest by avoiding situations where he / she either benefits personally.

Ideally, the private and public relationships—should be separate. However, practically it is not possible. The public office holders do have private lives, which are driven by whole gamut of emotions and other factors.

# Great Britain's Seven Principles of Public Life

What is the importance of a Code of Ethics for public servants? In your view, what should be the principles for managing ethics in the public service. Public service is a public trust. Citizens expect public servants to serve the public interest with fairness and to manage public resources properly. Following cases of corruption and misuse of office all over the world, most advanced countries have prescribed a Code of Ethics for public servants. There are seven basic principles prescribed for holders of public office: Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness; Honesty; Leadership and this is given by Nolan, in his famous report of Committee of standards of Public life in Britain and it is universally applicable to everyone in public life, public officials can and should be punished for transgressing them without needing detailed explanations about the principles.

## Great Britain's Seven Principles of Public Life

- Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.
- Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organization that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.
- In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make

choices on merit.

- Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
- Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
- Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
- Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.