

Human Values & Professional Ethics (BAS-11)
Assignment Answers
(Week-1)

Q.1 Define Ethics with its origin, meaning and nature. Also explain how general ethics differ from special ethics.

Ans. Ethics, also called **moral philosophy**, the discipline concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong. The term is also applied to any system or theory of moral values or principles. The English word ethics is derived from an Ancient Greek word êthikos, which means "relating to one's character". Historically, the term 'ethics' comes from Greek ethos which means the customs, habits and mores of people. Thus, ethics means the science of rightness and wrongness of character and conduct. It is also the 'science of the highest good.' Ethics can also be used to describe a particular person's own idiosyncratic principles or habits.

Definition: *"Set of standards of conduct and moral judgments to determine rightness and wrongness in behavior and action"*

Richard William defines ethics as "a set of concepts and principles that guide us in determining what behavior helps or harms sentient creatures".

The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy states that the word ethics is "commonly used interchangeably with 'morality' and sometimes it is used more narrowly to mean the moral principles of a particular tradition, group or individual."

Nature of Ethics

Nature of Ethics refers to the normative standards of behavior pertaining to the ideal code of conduct of human beings. This is substantially different from that of our feeling. The ethical choices get affected significantly by our feelings. Highly developed habits of some people make them feel guilty after doing something wrong while others might seem unperturbed by any form of wrongdoing.

The nature/characteristics of Ethics can be understood as follows:

Ethics is a normative science

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 a science- It is 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. It is the basis of moral reasoning and the root of all moral distinctions. It is not a natural but regulative science.

Ethics is a science of values

Ethics is a science of values as it discovers the forms of conduct or behavior, 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.

Ethics has two parts: **General ethics** and **Special ethics**.

General Ethics is the branch of Ethics which deals about the general principles of ethics. "General" means applicable to a lot of cases without much exemption. It develops general principles concerning the morality of human actions. General ethics relies on experience and psychology. It sees humans as composite beings, composed of a body and a soul, endowed with speech with which to communicate and needs. Through a combination of deductive reasoning and experience, ethics sees society as natural to humankind. Ethics in general are applicable to whole society. Every person living in the society should follow them to make the society a habitable place, in simple terms a good society. ex., respecting elders, helping someone cross the road, not to steal from anyone, helps an accident victim by taking him to hospital etc. These are not our moral duties but ethical duties which we owe to society at large.

Special Ethics is the branch of Ethics which deals with a specific case or a specific scenario. Special ethics applies the general principles developed in general ethics to people's conduct toward themselves, other human beings, society and the state. The methodology is deductive. Special ethics deduces from general principles. Therefore Special ethics is **Applied Ethics**. Examples: Ethics in the Workplace, Ethics in Friendship etc.

Q.2 Explain ethics in human acts.

Ans. All the definitions of ethics suggest that it focuses on human actions and their morality. It is concerned with the morality of human behavior. The major focus of ethics is on human actions; this also happens to be the starting point for most legal systems. They are primarily interested in human actions and, following that, in their legality or illegality. Furthermore, ethics focuses only on people's deliberate human actions, and not on actions done because of ignorance. What is it that makes an action human? What are the principal ingredients of a human action?

Scholastic philosophers maintain that three requirements must be concurrently present for any action to be human: (1) There must be some knowledge involved; (2) There must be voluntariness present; and (3) The action must be freely done.

Thomas Aquinas discussed these three elements at length and states that if any one of these elements is not present, the action is not a human action, and therefore it is not a fitting subject for ethics. Knowledge is an essential requirement for an action to be human. As discussed in psychology, we cannot will anything unless we first know it. So knowledge of some kind is an absolute for an action to be human. Besides knowledge, the action must be voluntary—that is, it must proceed from the will. In psychology, the will enables us to incline or strive after an object apprehended as good. Some actions proceed directly from the will—such as consenting—or indirectly through other faculties commanded by the will—such as thinking, seeing or walking. The will controls the performance of external actions—the will is the cause of our actions.

The Science of Ethics is greatly concerned with the study of man, particularly with his/her actions. Ethics intends to determine whether the action taken by man is moral or immoral in the grounds of morality. Human action or human act should be investigated. It is confusing but it is being determined that the act that was committed must be done knowingly and willfully by any individual before we can declare that he/she is accountable for it. In short, an act committed without the knowledge and consent should not be considered as a human act. Acts of man can become human acts when he/she employ his/her intellect and will in performing the act.

Essential elements of human acts-

1. To consider that the act is a human act, it should be a voluntary act committed by an individual.
2. The act must also be done with the individual's knowledge and consent.
3. The act committed should be considered as an act that is proper to man as man (in consideration that of all the animals, man alone has the intellect and the freedom of will to do the act).
4. The act should also be committed in a conscious state and under the control of the individual in which he/she is responsible.
5. The act should also be of those events or time that the individual is considered to be as the master, possessing the power to do the act or not as he/she intends to do.

Q.3 How ethical norms and values are related?

Ans. Norms function to provide order and predictability in society. On the whole, people want approval, they want to belong, and those who do not follow the norms will suffer disapproval or may even be outcast from the group. This is how we keep society functioning, not just with direct rules but also expectations. When people know what is expected of them they tend to comply. Norms can change according to the environment, situation, and culture in which they are found, and people's behavior will also change accordingly. Social norms may also change or be modified over time. Some examples of social norms include:

Maintaining direct eye contact with the people while speaking, not to talk with food in the mouth, dressing neatly and appropriately for the job.etc

Social norms are standards, rules, guides and expectations for actual behavior, whereas values are abstract conceptions of what is important and worthwhile. Values are general guidelines, while norms are specific guidelines. Values are general standards, which decide what is good and what is bad. Norms are rules and expectations that specify how people should and should not behave in various social situations.

Sometimes, the values and norms of a society conflict with each other. The change in one element of material culture may sometimes conflict with the associated aspect of non-material culture (system of joint family or collective living). Though there is a difference between norms and values, still, there is often a direct relationship between values, norms, and sanctions of a society. For example, if a society highly values the institution of marriage, it may have norms and strict sanctions which prohibit the act of adultery and allow divorce only in hard cases. If a society views private property as a basic value, it will probably have stern laws against theft and vandalism. The most cherished values (right of life) of a society will receive the heaviest sanctions (capital punishment), whereas matters regarded as less critical will carry light and informal sanctions.

'Norm' refers to attitudes and behaviors that are considered normal, typical or average within that group. Even though norms influence every facet of our lives, including what we value, our attitudes, and how we behave, we are often unaware that we are influenced at all. The culture of a nation is transmitted through its existing systems. Three systems play a key role in the transmission of cultural norms - government, education and family. Typically, government sets forth an ideology or set of beliefs. These beliefs, and the behaviors that support them, are then taught by schools and by families. The beliefs are often referred to as values, and the behaviors that support these values are referred to as norms.

**Q.4 Explain the ethical theories and differentiate between:
Meta-ethics, Normative Ethics and Applied Ethics.**

Ans. The Five Ethical Standards/theories or approaches include:

- Utilitarian Approach
- Deontological or Rights Approach
- Justice or Fairness Approach
- Common Good Approach
- Virtue Approach

Utilitarian Approach

Ethical action has been emphasized by many ethicists as that one thing which creates the greatest balance of good in comparison to harm. Ethical corporate action inflicts the least harm to its employees, customers, shareholders, environment and supporting community. While dealing with the ultimate consequences, the Utilitarian approach tries to reduce the harm done by increasing its positive effects.

Deontological or Rights Approach

Several philosophers and ethicists hold the view that ethical action needs to respect and protect the moral rights of affected segments. This approach believes that all human beings have a certain amount of dignity which is derived from their ability to choose a preferred lifestyle.

Justice or Fairness Approach

Greek philosophers like Aristotle have contributed greatly to the ideal of equality among human beings. Modern day ethics, therefore, treat all human beings equally. And if they cannot be treated equally, then they are dealt based on some defensible standard.

Common Good Approach

Greek philosophers held the belief that community life is good in itself. They also felt that our actions should contribute to the betterment of such life. Compassion and respect for others are the basic requirements of such reasoning.

Virtue Approach

This approach lays special emphasis on virtues like courage, honesty, compassion, tolerance, generosity, integrity, self-control, fairness, fidelity, prudence and love. These guide us in unleashing the highest potential of our character for the development of humanity.

- 1) **Meta-ethics**- Meta-ethics is a relatively new discipline in the ethical arena and its definition is the most blurred of all. The Greek Meta means after or beyond and indicates that the object of meta-ethical studies is morality and ethics itself. The aim is to better understand the logical, semantic and pragmatic structures of moral and ethical argumentation as such, their origin and meaning. It attempts to answer the fundamental philosophical questions about the nature of ethical theory itself. Example: Are ethical statements such as "lying is wrong", or "friendship is good" true or false? It talks about the nature of ethics and moral reasoning. Discussions about whether ethics is relative and whether we always act from self-interest are examples of meta-ethical discussions
- 2) **Normative ethics** is the study of ethical action. It is the branch of philosophical ethics that investigates the set of questions that arise when considering how one ought to act, morally speaking. Normative ethics is the study of what makes actions right or wrong, what makes situations or events good or bad and what makes people virtuous or vicious. Normative ethics is distinct from meta-ethics because it examines standards for the rightness and wrongness of actions, while meta-ethics studies the meaning of moral language and the metaphysics of moral facts. *Normative ethical theories seek to provide action-guides; procedures for answering the Practical Question ("What ought I to do?")*. Normative ethics means the methodological reflection upon morality tackling its critique and its rationale. Norms and standards for acting and conduct are being set up or tore down, and argued for or against. When "ethics" is talked about in a common sense then we are talking about this general normative ethics. When enquiry is directed towards the principles of moral judgment or the criteria for the ethical analysis of morality, then we talk about fundamental ethics.
- 3) **Applied Ethics** attempts to deal with specific realms of human action and to craft criteria for discussing issues that might arise within those realms. The contemporary field of Applied Ethics arose in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Today, it is a thriving part of the field of ethics. Applied ethics consists in the attempt to answer difficult moral questions actual people face in their lives.
 - Normative ethics studies what features make an action right or wrong. Applied ethics attempts to figure out, in actual cases, whether or not certain acts have those features.
 - If we agree that slavery is wrong but disagree about what makes it wrong then our disagreement is a matter of normative ethics.
 - If we agree that morality is whatever produces the best consequences but disagree about whether the death penalty produces the best consequences then our disagreement is a matter of applied ethics.