

## **ETHICS**

### **What is Ethics?**

*“In civilized life, law floats in a sea of ethics.”* – Earl Warren

Ethics is the branch of philosophy that **seeks to understand the nature of, purpose, justification and funding principles of morals rules and the systems they compromise.**

The etymology of the words “ethics” and “morality” is derived from the root *ethos* and *mos*, which both convey a meaning describing customs and habits.

*Ethos* = ethics

*Mos* = mos

Ethics focuses on the **rightness and wrongness of actions**, as well as the goodness and badness of motives and ends.

Ethics encompasses the decision-making process of determining ultimate actions.

- Answering *“What should I do?”*
- *“Is it the right thing to do?”*

Ethics is important because it provides principles that guide human behavior in personal life, professions, government, and society.

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### **Types of Ethics**

#### **Microethics**

Microethics involves an **individual’s view** of what is right and wrong based on one’s personal life teachings, traditions, and experiences.

#### **Macroethics**

Macroethics involves a **more global view** of right and wrong.

It focuses on ethical issues that affect society as a whole such as social justice, environmental responsibility, public policy, and collective moral responsibilities.

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## Philosophical Ethics

Philosophical ethics: **ways of life and rules of conduct**

A general pattern or way of life: **religious ethics**

“Set of rules of conduct” or “moral code”: **professional codes**

Examples include ethical codes for doctors, teachers, engineers, lawyers, and other professions that guide professional behavior and responsibilities.

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## Why Study Ethics?

- Make sound judgements
- Good decisions
- Right decisions (if not, then better choices)

Studying ethics also helps individuals:

- develop moral reasoning
  - resolve moral conflicts
  - understand social responsibilities
  - promote fairness, justice, and respect in society.
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## The Meaning of Morality

- Morality describes a **class of rules held by society to govern** the conduct of its individual members.
- It implies the quality of being in accord with standards of right and good conduct.
- Morality is a **code of conduct**.

- It is a guide to behavior that all rational persons should put forward for governing their behavior.
  - Morality requires us to reach a decision as to the rightness or wrongness of action.
  - Morals are ideas about what is right and wrong.
  - Morals are deeply ingrained in culture and religion and are often part of its identity.
  - Morality often reflects the shared values and beliefs of a community and may vary between different cultures and societies.
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### **Moral and Non-Moral Standards**

Norms or prescriptions that serve as the frameworks for determining what ought to be done or what is right or wrong action, what is good or bad character.

**Moral standards** involve serious matters such as justice, honesty, rights, and harm to others.

**Non-moral standards** refer to rules that are not necessarily about morality, such as etiquette, customs, or organizational policies.

Examples include dress codes, table manners, and social conventions.

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### **Ethical Theories**

Ethical theories seek to understand how human actions and judgements are wrong or right.

They provide frameworks that help people evaluate moral decisions and determine appropriate behavior.

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### **Meta-Ethics**

Meta-ethics is the study of the origin and meaning of ethical concepts.

It seeks to understand ethical terms and theories and application.

Explores connection between values, reasons for action and human motivation.

It asks questions such as:

- “How can we know what is right and wrong?”

- “What do words like good, bad, right, and wrong really mean?”
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### **Normative Ethics**

Normative ethics is prescriptive in that it attempts to determine what moral standards should be followed so that human behavior and conduct may be morally right.

It involves the critical study of major moral precepts:

- What things are right?
- What things are good?

Normative ethics provides rules or principles that guide moral actions.

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### **Descriptive Ethics**

Descriptive ethics also known as comparative ethics, is the study of what people believe to be right and wrong and why they believe it.

It examines moral beliefs, customs, and practices of different cultures and societies without judging whether they are right or wrong.

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### **Applied Ethics**

Applied ethics is “the philosophical search (within western philosophy) for right and wrong within controversial scenarios”.

Normative theories to practical moral problems.

Examples include issues such as medical ethics, environmental ethics, business ethics, and bioethics.

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## **Major Ethical Theories**

### **Consequential Ethics**

The theory of Consequential Ethics ( Niccolò Machiavelli )

The morally right action is whatever action leads to the maximum balance of good over evil.

“The ends justifies the means.”

Revolve around the premise that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the consequences or effects of an action.

This means the results or outcomes of actions determine whether the action is morally right.

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### **Utilitarian Theory of Ethics**

Associated with philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

Involves the concept that the moral worth of an action is determined solely by its contribution to overall usefulness.

Meaning that the moral worth of an action is determined by its outcome.

It describes doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

Utilitarianism focuses on maximizing happiness and minimizing suffering for the largest number of individuals.

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### **Deontological Ethics**

Commonly attributed to the German philosopher Immanuel Kant.

Duty-based ethics.

Deon = duty.

Doing the right thing may not always lead to an increase in what is good.

Non-consequential ethical theory.

Denies that the consequences of an action are the only criteria for determining the morality of an action.

Believes right and wrong depends on the action.

This theory emphasizes moral duties, obligations, and principles regardless of the consequences.

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### **Ethical Relativism**

Ethical relativism holds that morality is relative to the norms of the culture where one lives.

Right or wrong depends on the moral norms of society.

According to this view, there are no universal moral standards that apply to all people at all times.

Different cultures may have different moral beliefs and practices, and each culture determines what is morally acceptable within its own context.

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### **MORAL REASONING**

- Civilization's oldest written documents attest that evaluating and regulating moral conduct were among the earliest concerns of human social life.
  - Infuse any pragmatic question with moral significance and the emotional stakes are immediately high.

Despite the distaste expressed by Socrates for mixing two **morality and emotion are inextricably intertwined**. Humans care deeply about right and wrong, and will go to extraordinary lengths to protect and promote their moral beliefs.

Moral judgements are so frequently made against a backdrop of emotion, it seems obvious to ask how passionate feelings we often have about moral issues.

## **REASONING**

- It is the **Justices**, whose job it is to fairly, analytically, and objectively adjudicate “**the truth**”

As the embodiment of “blind” justice, their charge is to be free of a priori preferences

- We understand the potential to be biased by irrelevancies like race, gender or physical attractiveness but we perceive ourselves as able to rise above their influence.
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## **ASSESSMENTS OF MORAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

- Concerned with determining whether an act is morally permissible or impermissible

**Most of us already possess a mental list of sins and virtues**

- We go to great lengths to arrive at the right answer to these questions
- Moral decision makers actually adhere to prescriptions of these normative theories
- Individuals are very sensitive to the presence of intentionality—whether or no a bad action was performed purposefully.

### **Controllability and Culpability**

- Those showing that individuals are more likely to judge that an individual possess causal control over an outcome if they are not motivated to blame that individual.
- These argues that spontaneous judgements of blame lead..”**Blame validation**”

### **Memory of the “Facts”**

- Pizzaro and colleagues demonstrated that the degree of blame given to an individual could influence memory..
- High-blame condition
- Low-blame condition

## Intentionality

- Knobe: it has been shown that people are more inclined to say a behavior was performed intentionally when they regard that behavior as morally wrong.
- For instance: when given a scenario in which a foreseeable side effect results in a negative outcome, individuals are more likely to say that the side effect was brought up intentionally

Our studies of perceived intentionality suggest that people with divergent moral values are likely to make different intentionality judgments. If an action poses little affront to our moral sensibilities, we tend to think intentional behaviors as only those that are directly intended or desired.

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## Use of Moral Principle

- Politicians are famous for portraying themselves as men and women of principle, and infamous for adjusting their principles for the sake of expediency.
- But while politicians may be the most shameless and visible manipulators of principle, there is a good reason to believe that they are not alone in adopting a flexible approach to principled argumentation.

It is clear all do to some extent flex some of our rational and moral principles to most arguments concerning morality.

## Principle Based Reasoning

- Moral reasoning occupies a peculiar middle ground between **aesthetic preference and fact-based inference**.
  - We simply like or hate with no articulable reason is acceptable when it comes to matters of personal taste.
  - Moral judgments, like aesthetic ones, often come to us intuitively, people frequently find themselves similarly dumbstruck when asked to justify why a given act is thought to be right or wrong

Pressure to provide a rationale for moral assessments > aesthetic preferences  
( *Morality seen as something more than just a matter of taste* )

But how does one **justify** a moral belief?

- Factual beliefs can be supported= by data, but what data can be mustered to prove one's assertion that terrorism is immoral or that a white lie is morally justified if it leads to a greater good?

Reasoning one's way from a general moral principle to a specific moral belief allows moral reasoning to take a form very much like fact -based inference.

- *Fundamental to principle-based* reasoning is the idea that principles are **general rather than case-specific**, and that they should not be applied (or ignored) selectively.
- The power of principles as explanatory mechanisms derives precisely from their generality, but this is also what makes them.

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## MORALITY, CULTURE AND RELIGION

### *I. Religion and Morality*

- Religion is deemed to be the whole mechanism of ethical decisions and moral reasoning.

Religion and morality are not synonymous though, but some scholarly positions argue that sometimes religion affects morality.

Different religions claim different positions on what could be deemed right or wrong depending on the origin of the religion in question and the culture of locality.

- According to Tripathi (2009), **human beings are wired to reflect and rethink their decisions and accompanying actions.**
  - Religion cannot be evaded since it is one of the leading aspects of human development and more so a shaper of morality especially to children.
  - His views are supported by Subhamoy (2022) where he asserts that religion is a mirror of morality and children should be well guided through the religious values that instill morals.

The influence of morality in contemporary society has subsided because the main religion of the world, Christianity has been affected by *secularism*.

Theoretical underpinnings: Divine Command Theory:

- *Divine Common Theory*, a theological voluntarism perspective theory postulates that someone's actions are morally acceptable if *they originate from God and is determined by Divine Command*.

*Murphy (1998)*

God's will is fulfilled in three ways which are:

- A. Through personal conscience
- B. Through religious authorities
- C. By the uses of holy scriptures

*Secularism Position on Morality:*

A contrary position being floated by non-religious people on the other side of the divide argues that there is *no noticeable difference between a religious society and a non-religious one*.

- Secularists believe that one of the elements that promote moral standing is the regional settings and environmental characteristics rather than religion.

*Secular Morality*, a branch of morality that deals with aspects of morality based on foundations outside religious traditions have gained a mileage in regards to modern society.

The *proponents of free thought* argue that any opinion formed and expressed should be done on the basis of science, logic and reason without the influence and interference of tradition, authority or any other form of dogmas

The position of secular humanism posits that there is no need for religion or God when it comes to issues of morality and ethics and that man is neither good nor evil or above nature.

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## *II. Culture and Morality*

*Evolutionary Theoretical Perspective:*

- The development of moral values is related to *fostering cooperation and altruism as evolutionarily advantageous forms of social behavior*.

Humans have the cognitive ability to take the perspective of another person; they can develop a theory of mind, can view themselves and their persons from a third perspective, and they can experience emotions of justice and injustice and moral emotions of shame and guilt.

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## The Moral Agent: Capacity and Accountability

A moral agent possesses the ability to discern right from wrong and to be held accountable for their actions.

- Requirements: Moral agency requires rationality (logical thought) and empathy to understand the ethical dimensions of a situation.
- Accountability: Because agents can make decisions based on moral principles, they are responsible for their actions and for not causing unjustified harm.
- Limits: While generally applied to adults with full mental capacity, moral agency may be limited in children or adults with certain mental disabilities.
- Agent vs. Patient: Moral agents have responsibilities towards "moral patients" – individuals or entities that matter morally but may not be capable of moral agency themselves, such as animals.

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## Ethical Egoism

- Selfishness is often considered as vice and selfish actions are often judged to be wrong
- We ought to do what's best for ourselves: in a sense, we sometimes should be selfish.

Ethical Theory known as *ethical egoism* is the belief that human beings should always act in what they perceive to be their own, individual, best interest.

- should be guided entirely by self-interest.
- Often contrasted with psychological egoism, the empirical claim that advancing one's self-interest.

*Hedonistic Ethical View*: "the Good" or goal of ethical life is understood as pleasure or happiness.

*Psychological Egoism*: the belief that human beings always act in what they perceive to be their own, individual and best interest.

This theory says we are "hard-wired" to be selfish.

- People do in fact always act in ways that are self-serving.

**Psychological Egoism:** *We do act* in our own self-interest.

- We can't help but always act from self-interest.

**Ethical Egoism:** *We should act* in our own self-interest.

- We should always do so

*Universal Ethical Egoism*

"All people should do what is in their own interests."