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ETHICS, INTEGRITY & APTITUDE

CIVIL SERVICES EXAMINATION 2024

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Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude

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ETHICS AND HUMAN INTERFACE

1.1 Introduction to Ethics

Definition

"In just about every area of society, there's nothing more important than ethics".

—Henry Paulson

Ethics, like other branches of philosophy, originates from apparently simple questions. What makes honest actions right and dishonest ones wrong? Whether I keep a purse found in bus with me or return it back to its owner? Is it right to cut a tree near my home to make space for car parking? Should my nation accept refugees of other nations? These are questions that naturally occur in the course of our lives, just as they naturally occurred in the lives of people who lived before us and in societies with different cultures and technologies from ours. They are seemingly simple but ultimately perplexing. Ethics is basically reflective study of such questions and finding out what actions are good or bad.

Etymologically the term "ethics" corresponds to the Greek word "ethos" which means character, habit, customs, ways of behaviour etc. Ethics is also called "moral philosophy". The word "moral" comes from Latin word "mores" which signifies customs, characters, behaviour etc. In simple words, ethics refers to what is good and the way to get it, and what is bad and how to avoid it. It refers to what ought to be done to achieve what is good and what shall not to be done to avoid what is evil.

As a philosophical discipline, ethics is the study of the values and guidelines by which we live. It also involves the justification of these values and guidelines. It is not merely following a tradition or custom. Instead, it requires an analysis and evaluation of these guidelines in light of universal principles. As moral philosophy, ethics is the philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems, and moral judgments.

Ethics is also a science as its principles are deduced from human reasons. Ethics is also theoretical and practical. It is theoretical in as much as it provides the fundamental principles on the basis of which moral judgements are arrived at. It is practical in as much as it is concerned about an end to be gained, and the means of attaining it.

Thus, ethics may be defined as:

- The systemic study of human actions from the point of view of their rightfulness or wrongfulness, as means for the attainment of the ultimate happiness.
- Ethics is a set of standards that society places on itself and which helps guide behavior, choices and actions – 2nd ARC Report.
- It is reflective study of what is good or bad in that part of human conduct for which human has some personal responsibility.
- A system of accepted beliefs that control behavior, especially such a system based on morals – Cambridge Dictionary.

1.1.1 Evolution of Ethics

Ethics is as old as the humanity. It is obvious that the earlier ethical principles were passed down by the word of mouth by parents and elders. As societies learned to use the written word, they began to record their ethical beliefs. These records constitute the first historical evidence of the origins of ethics.

A. Evolution of Ethics in Western Philosophy

(i) Ancient Period

In the Western Philosophy, the history of ethics can be traced back to the fifth century B.C with the appearance of Socrates. As a philosopher among the Greeks, his mission was to awaken his fellow humans to the need for rational criticism of their beliefs and practices. *Plato's theory* of forms could be seen as the first attempt at defending moral realism and offering an objective ground for moral truths. Plato constructed a systematic view of nature, God, and human from which one derived one's ethical principles. His main goal in his ethical philosophy was to lead the way towards a vision of the Good. *Aristotle's* ethical writings constitute the first systematic investigation into the foundations of ethics. Aristotle's account of the virtues could be seen as one of the first sustained inquiries to arrive at moral standards that regulate right and wrong conduct.

(ii) Medieval Period

The medieval period was dominated by the thoughts of Christian philosophers and theologians like Augustine and

Thomas Aquinas. The influence of Christianity dominated the ethical scenario. In St. Augustine, ethics became a blend of the pursuit of earthly well-being with preparation of the soul for eternal salvation.

Thomas Aquinas brought about a true reconciliation between Aristotelian science and philosophy with Augustinian theology. According to both Aristotle and Aquinas, every human being desires her or his own happiness, and all human beings do what they do for the sake of becoming happy. Since both see happiness as the end goal of human life and the fulfillment of human nature, they approach ethics as the study of how human beings can best fulfill their nature and obtain happiness. Ethics thus has a practical as well as a theoretical goal.

(iii) Modern Period

The social and political changes that characterized the end of medieval period and the rise of modern age of industrial democracy gave rise to a new wave of thinking in the ethical field. Some of the modern philosophers who contributed to the great changes in ethical thinking were Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Further developments in ethical thinking in the west came with Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud.

(iv) Contemporary Period

The conditions of contemporary civilization forced philosophers to seek for a genuine ground for ethics and moral life. In much of the English-speaking world G.E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (1903) is taken to be the starting point of contemporary ethical theory. Others like Martin Buber, Gabriel Marcel, Emmanuel Levinas, Max Scheler, Franz Brentano and John Dewey too have made significant contributions to the ethical thinking in other parts of the world.

B. Evolution of Ethics in Indian Philosophy

(i) Ancient Period

Beginnings of the Indian ethics have to be traced from Vedas, particularly the Rig Veda. One of the central ethical concepts of the Rig Veda is '*RTA*', a conception of unifying order or moral law, pervading all things. The concept '*RTA*' has given rise to two other important concepts, the concept of Dharma and the concept of Karma. The more important and essential element in the Vedic ethics is that of love and worship offered to the gods in complete submission.

The Upanishadic ethics is primarily atman-centric and intellectualistic. The Upanishads declare that the Vedic sacrifices are totally irrelevant for the realization of moksha. And therefore, man is constantly exhorted to seek his individual liberation and not worry about other social, moral obligation.

The institutes of Manu and other Dharmashastras are the main source books of both Hindu ritualism and social morality. The Upanishads emphasized the liberation of the individual, but the Manusmriti subordinated individuality to social structures. Man's duties are accepted to be relative to time (Yuga) and place (Desa). The duties of a person are also strictly relative to his Varna (class) and the stage of Life (Asrama). Manu has decreed certain virtues as universal.

Bhagavad Gita emphasizes both on Karma Yoga and Gnana Yoga for the attainment of the Supreme Bliss. The concept Karma signifies that there is a uniform moral law, governing the actions of man and the rewards and the punishments appropriate to their actions. The Jnana Yoga is a spiritual practice that pursues knowledge with questions such as "who am I, what am I" among others.

Lord Buddha proposes Universal Love, through which he invites one to cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings. Buddha gave ten meritorious deeds for us to perform in order to gain a happy and peaceful life as well as to develop knowledge and understanding. Buddhism invites the lay Buddhists to adopt five precepts voluntarily. Buddhist morality judges an action good or bad basing on the intention or motivation from which it originates.

Jainism also rejects Vedic ceremonialism and sacrificialism and also it takes ahimsa to be the most important ethical virtue and consequently denounces the Vedic sacrifices. The pancamahavrtas and triratnas form the ethics of Jaina tradition.

(ii) Medieval Period

Ethical thinking in this period was largely influenced by the Bhakti and Sufi Movement. Prominent Bhakti movement reformers were Ramananda, Kabir, Ravidasa, Tulasidas, and Tukaram. Both movements believed in compassion towards all fellow human beings. They advocated equality between men and women. They condemned the orthodox social traditions like casteism and Sati.

(iii) Modern Period

The values and ethical trend in contemporary Indian philosophy may be seen in philosophy of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, M.K. Gandhi, Vivekananda, Aurobindo, Ravindranath Tagore and Radhakrishnan. Their ethical thoughts influenced the Indian social reform movement as well as freedom movement.

(iv) Contemporary Period

Some prominent thinkers which have influenced contemporary period are Deendayal Upadhyaya, Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam. Philosophy of Integral Humanism by Deendayal Upadhyaya gives a development model that has human beings as its core focus. Dr. A.P.J Abdul Kalam

has inspired work ethics. With the advent of internet and social media present Indian generations have influence of diversity of old and new, foreign and Indian ethical thoughts.

Some of the ethical thinkers and thoughts mentioned above will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

1.1.2 Need to Study Ethics

- **Reflection on the Questions of Life:** The study of moral philosophy or ethics can deepen our reflection on the ultimate questions of life. The study of ethics helps a person to look at his own life critically and to evaluate his actions/choices/decisions.
- **Better Understanding of Morality:** Due to spread of education, advances in science and technology, easier communication media, faster means of travel whereby people of one culture come in closer contact with people of another culture traditional moral values (e.g. the 'just' war, indissolubility of marriage) as well as the very 'meaningfulness' of an unchanging and universally valid morality is brought into question. The study of moral philosophy can help us to think better about morality. It can help us clarify our moral positions when we make judgments. It can also improve our thinking about specific moral issues that we face (e.g. abortion and euthanasia).
- **Sharpen our General Thinking Processes:** The study of moral philosophy can help us to sharpen our general thinking processes. It trains our mind to think logically and reasonably and to handle moral issues with greater clarity.
- **Pinpoint a Disagreement:** Using the framework of ethics, two people who are arguing a moral issue

can often find that what they disagree about is just one particular part of the issue, and that they broadly agree on everything else. That can take a lot of heat out of the argument, and sometimes even hint at a way for them to resolve their problem.

- **For Ethical Institutions and Citizens:** There is need for ethics in every profession, voluntary organization and civil society structure as these entities are now vitally involved in the process of governance. Finally, there should be ethics in citizen behavior because such behaviour impinges directly on ethics in government and administration. (2nd ARC Report).

1.1.3 Differentiating Ethics

A. Ethics and Other Sciences

Most sciences are concerned with certain uniformities of our experience – with the ways in which certain classes of objects (such as rocks or plants) are found to exist, or with the ways in which certain classes of events (such as phenomena of sound or electricity) are found to occur. These sciences have no direct reference to any end that is to be achieved or to any ideal by reference to which the facts are judged. However, ethics as a science is concerned with an end or ideal or standard.

Although ethics is sometimes regarded as a practical science, it is not a 'practical science' as medicine, engineering or architecture in as much as it is not directed towards the realization of a definite result (such as definite result that an architecture wants to achieve is raising a good structure). Ethics is often said to be the fruit of all the sciences since it ultimately perfects human person, by ordering all other sciences and all things else in respect to an ultimate end that is absolutely supreme.

Other Sciences		Ethics
Psychology	How a man behaves.	How a man must behave.
Anthropology	Nature of human.	How man's actions ought to be.
Social and political sciences	Man's social and political life.	How man's social and political life must or ought to be organized in order to be moral.
Economics	Concerned with goods, i.e. with those objects which are the means of satisfying any human want.	Deals with those acts which are the conditions of the attainment of the highest end of life.

B. Ethics and Religion

Ethics has no necessary connection with any particular religion. A religion is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence. Often, religion and ethics are treated as the same thing, with various religions making claims about their belief systems being the best way for people to live. In general, all religious traditions believe that their faith represents a path to enlightenment and salvation. On

the other hand, ethics are universal decision-making tools that may be used by a person of any religious persuasion, including atheists.

For Example: Norms of good behavior mandated by a particular religion may not be applicable to an atheist but still his behavior is expected to follow certain ethics.

While religion makes claims about cosmology, tradition and beliefs, ethics are based on logic and reason rather than tradition or injunction.

Many of the practices of religion are ethical but some religious practices may not be considered as ethical. Ethics can question even religious practices.

For Example:

1. Custom of Sati was religious but considered as unethical.
2. Women are not allowed to enter in sanctum sanctorum of some temples as a religious practice but it may be considered as unethical.

The core of every religion in fact focuses on certain universal morals (e.g. love, compassion, truth).

But the periphery which includes certain rituals, customs, and traditions may be unethical.

C. Ethics and Law

The Law is systematic set of universally accepted rules and regulation created by an appropriate authority such as government, which may be regional, national, international, etc. It is used to govern the action and behavior of the members and can be enforced, by imposing penalties.

Ethics are the principles that guide a person or society, created to decide what is good or bad, right or wrong, in a given situation. It regulates a person's behavior or conduct and helps an individual in living a good life, by applying the moral rules and guidelines.

Many laws are ethical but one must note that some laws may not be considered as ethical i.e., *what's legal* isn't always *ethical*. It is said that the law sets minimum standards of behaviour while ethics sets maximum standards.

For Example:

1. Clinical trials are legal in many countries but they may not be considered as ethical.
2. Non-consensual sex after marriage is legal in some countries but may be considered as unethical.
3. During British period, suppressing freedom of expression through Vernacular Press Act, Sedition Act was legal but not ethical.
4. Apartheid was legal but was unethical.
5. Racially segregated seating on buses was legal in Montgomery, Alabama but is not ethical.

Law	Ethics
It is a system that enforces set of rules and guidelines to govern social behavior.	It is a branch of moral philosophy that guides people about the basic human conduct.
These are governed by certain authority like government.	Governed by individuals themselves.
These are expressed and published in writing.	These need not be published.
These are binding, violation of which is not permissible and may result in punishment like imprisonment or fine or both.	These are not binding. There is no punishment for violation of ethics.
These directly state what is right and what is wrong.	Ethics help people to decide what is right and what is wrong.

D. Ethics and Morals

Many times ethics and morals are used interchangeably but there are slight and subtle differences between morals and ethics.

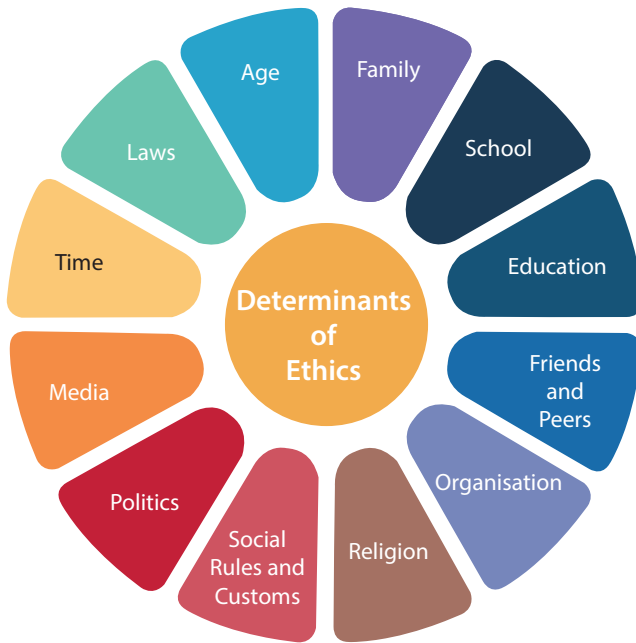
Morals are the beliefs of the individual or group as to what is right or wrong. Morals are the social, cultural and religious beliefs or values of an individual or group which tells us what is right or wrong. For Example: Be loyal, obey your elders, a guest is akin to god (Atithi Devo Bhava), simple living high thinking.

Ethics are the guiding principles which help the individual or group to decide what is good or bad. Ethics examines and analyses the logic, values and principles that are used to justify morality. Ethics basically studies morality. It tries to find the meaning of principles such as honesty, compassion, social interest; what can be their effects for conduct in particular situation; how one can give priority to one principle over another. In a nutshell, "morality is the subject matter and ethics is the study of that subject matter" like social issues are subject matter and sociology is its study.

Morals	Ethics
Morals are the beliefs of the individual or group as to what is right or wrong.	Ethics are the guiding principles which help the individual or group to decide what is good or bad.
Morals are expressed in the form of general rules and statements.	Ethics are abstract.
Governed by individuals themselves.	Governed by social and cultural norms.

1.1.4 Determinants of Ethics

We already know that ethics helps us to determine right or wrong. However, there are multiple factors which determine our notion of what is ethical or unethical i.e. what is right or wrong. Following are some important determinants of ethics:



Family: Family is our first agent of socialization. Some values like honesty, love, companionship, caring etc. are automatically inculcated in children. Many customs, traditions followed by family shapes our ethical thinking.

School: After family, school has the most profound impact on children. Child learns values of tolerance, brotherhood, team spirit etc. in school.

Education: We must differentiate between literacy and education. While an educated person can be literate, every literate person cannot be called educated. Education is a broader concept which takes into consideration the all-round development of a human personality. Type of education a person gets also affects his ethical thinking. Values and education imparted in schools can shape moral behavior of a person.

Friends and Peers: Our friends and peers may have different values than we have. This may create a mutual influence on each other's thinking. We inculcate values like team spirit, care, competitiveness from our peers.

Organisation: Our values and morals are also shaped by the organizational values and work culture.

Religion: Every religion has its own moral values which can shape our ethical thinking. We avoid doing many things because our religion prohibits us to do so. Moral values given by religion are considered to have divine mandate and that's why its have more impact on our ethical thinking.

Social Rules and Customs: Social rules and customs vary according to place and time. Most people follow them and thus they shape our ethical thoughts and behavior. E.g. Purdah system is acceptable in some societies while is condemned in others. Similarly, Purdah systems acceptability has reduced in Indian society over the period of time.

Politics: Political philosophy/system present in country can have influence over our ethical thinking. In a theocratic nation mainly religious morals are followed and may have less freedom for morals followed by individuals, while democracy shows acceptance for different moral thoughts. Similarly, political philosophies such as communism, capitalism can have impact on morals followed by the people in those nations.

Laws: Some laws are ethical while some are not, still individuals in general follow them. So, law abiding citizens may follow unethical laws and thus it can lead to unethical conduct. While ethical laws lead to ethical conduct.

Media: It is through print media, electronic media or social media we become aware of different thoughts by thinkers, philosophers, politicians of different parts of the world. Media plays a significant role in movement of bringing temporal change in the values. E.g. Awareness created by media regarding homosexuality has increased acceptance of homosexuality in many societies.

Time: Morals and values are not static. They change over a period of time. E.g. Chaturvarna system, which was highly rigid in past, has very low acceptance in society today.

Age: A person may become morally more mature as he becomes older. He gains many experiences in life which can shape his ethical thinking and understanding.

1.2 Ethics and Human Actions

1.2.1 Relationship between Ethics and Human Actions

After learning about ethics and morals we understand that ethics concentrates on human actions or on the consequences of human actions and their morality. But first it is important to separate human actions from their morality. Ethics, then, does not concern itself with the actions of animals. Furthermore, ethics focuses only on people's 'deliberate' human actions (actus humanus), and not on 'undeliberate' (actus hominis) actions or actions done because of ignorance.

The question here is what makes action human? Scholastic philosophers maintain that three requirements must be concurrently present for any action to be human. 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: Knowledge is an essential requirement for an action to be human. We cannot will anything unless we first know it. So, knowledge of some kind is an absolute for an action to be human. E.g. If you put a gun before child and child shoots someone the action is not a human action. Here child does not have any knowledge about use of gun, its end result. So, we can't term child's action as ethical or unethical.

Voluntary Action: It means it must proceed from will. The will can be defined as a faculty that 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.

For example, if someone places a gun in your hand and quickly pulls the trigger, it is obvious that your will does not control or cause that action, and therefore the shooting is not voluntary and not human.

Free Action: Free will means the capacity to act or not to act or to act in one way as opposed to another or in other words free will means that human beings have choices. Although some human actions are voluntary, in that the actor carries out the action, not every voluntary action is free. Every free action is voluntary in that the actor without restraint carried out the action, but not every voluntary action is free. That means that while an actor may be the cause of an action, the actor was operating under conditions such as force or fear that prevented the action from being freely done. The actor was unable to exercise choice; therefore, the action, although voluntarily done, was not a free action.

For example, you are carrying a gun with you and suddenly you encounter a person with gun who is aiming at you with intention to harm you. In such a situation if you pull the trigger of your gun and kill that person then the action cannot be called as human action. Though you voluntarily pulled the trigger, you did not have any other choice. So, though the action was voluntarily done, it was not a free action.

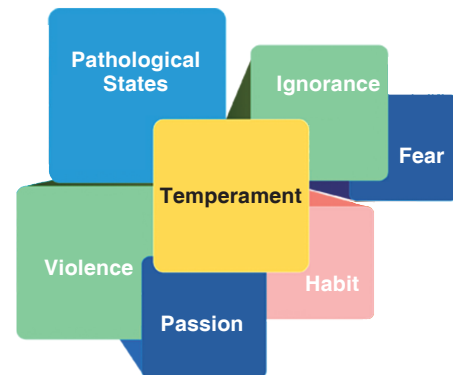
1.2.2 Impediments to Human Action

The above mentioned three criteria imply that there may be other factors that render actions non-human and therefore not subject to scrutiny in ethics. There are several such factors, some of which St. Thomas Aquinas addressed.

A. Ignorance

Ignorance is the absence of knowledge in a subject capable of having knowledge, or lack of knowledge in a subject who should have knowledge.

For example, an animal cannot be ignorant because of its inability to have human knowledge. But a public manager can be ignorant if she lacks knowledge of managerial principles or ethics in public organizations.



Impediments to Human Action

Several types of ignorance have ramifications on whether actions are human or not:

- **Ignorance of Law and Ignorance of Fact:** Ignorance of law means, the actor is ignorant- does not know that the law exists. In ethics, ignorance of the existence of the law through no fault of the actor does diminish the humanness of the action; if the actor violates the law through such ignorance, the action is not a human action.

Ignorance of fact means that the actor is aware of the existence of the law but uncertain or ignorant about the nature of his action or the circumstances in which he is operating the actor is unsure that his action is violating the law. This may reduce humanness of the action.

- **Invincible and Vincible Ignorance:** Invincible ignorance means that the actor does not even suspect that she is ignorant or that she is in doubt about the nature of the action, but does not have access through common sense to dispel the doubt. Vincible ignorance means that the actor through the use of ordinary care or common sense can dispel the doubt.

Invincible ignorance destroys the voluntariness of an action. The actor does not know or cannot know the truth about his action, and so invincible ignorance destroys one essential ingredient of a human action- knowledge. Actions done through invincible ignorance are not human actions, and the actors are not responsible for the consequences of these actions.

Vincible ignorance does not destroy voluntariness because the actor in these circumstances adverts to her ignorance and does not take sufficient steps to dispel the ignorance. Such a person must accept the consequences of the action.

B. Passion

Passions are powerful emotions or appetites springing from a pretense of something perceived as good or evil; they are usually accompanied by bodily changes. Passions include human emotions, such as anger, grief, love, hatred or greed. Passions influence human action.

Some passions precede an act of the will and cause the will to act. Sometimes, the actor deliberately arouses his passions. If the passions that precede an action are not deliberately aroused, such as a sudden rage or a fit of anger, they help to increase the onward movement of the will to act, but simultaneously diminish the freedom of the will. The action is still a human action to the extent that freedom of the will can be measured. If, on the other hand, we do not cause a particular passion to arise through will, that passion destroys the use of reason and also destroys the voluntariness of the action and thus renders it an *actus hominis*.

C. Fear

Fear is mental trepidation or an emotional reaction arising from an impending danger. Fear may influence human action to the extent of rendering it nonhuman, somewhat human or totally human. There are two kinds of fear:

- **Grave Fear:** It would affect a person of ordinary courage in the same circumstances.
- **Light Fear:** It would not affect a person of ordinary courage in the same situation.

Fear may come from sources outside ourselves or from within. It can be inflicted justly or unjustly— justly when inflicted by a person with the right to inflict it and in the proper manner, as happens when a judge acts; or unjustly when inflicted either by a person without authority or in an improper manner.

The principle governing fear is that whatever fear (usually grave fear) is so strong as to destroy a person's freedom of choice also destroys the voluntariness of that action. The action is not a human action. If the fear (usually light fear) does not destroy the person's freedom but only diminishes it, the subsequent action is voluntary in proportion to the amount of liberty the person had.

D. Violence

Violence is external physical force exerted on a person. Violence can influence the degree to which actions are human or not. When a person offers all the resistance he can, actions done in these circumstances are not free and therefore not human actions. If he does not offer as much resistance as possible, the actions performed may be less free and so human in proportion to the resistance not exerted.

E. Habit

Habit is a quality acquired through frequent repetition that enables the subject to act easily and promptly. It is an inclination that is also difficult to remove. Good habits are virtues and bad habits are vices. The issue here is the influence of habits on voluntariness. That a person acquires a habit shows voluntariness at work. But when we acquire habits our individual actions, such as smoking, may become less voluntary because of a lack of advertence to a particular action. However, if a person acquiring a habit foresees the results, good or bad, that does not lessen the voluntariness of subsequent actions.

F. Temperament

Temperament is the sum of a person's natural propensities as opposed to character, which is the collection of a person's acquired propensities, such as habits. Temperament and character may sometimes lessen the voluntariness of actions, but never destroy it.

G. Pathological States

There are many pathological states that may interfere with voluntariness, in that they blur knowledge and weaken the will. Amentia, or arrested mental development caused by injury or disease, and dementia, or disorder in a once developed mind, clearly affects the voluntariness of human actions because they impair knowledge. Insanity, psychoneurosis, psychosis, schizophrenia and the like may also impact on the voluntariness of human actions.

Another issue is sleep walking. If a sleepwalker kills another person or commits a crime, is he guilty and to what extent? From what has been said, if the sleepwalker is completely asleep and lacks all knowledge, voluntariness or freedom, the action is not a human action; it falls into the *actus hominis* category. So it is not an action that ethics can judge. However, if there were some reason or knowledge involved, ethics would assess the nature of the action based on that factor.

1.3 Ethical Decision Making

Human beings are confronted with situations wherein their decisions about actions may lead to opposite and perhaps equally unwelcome alternatives. The different dimensions to study the ethics help in arriving at ethical decisions during complex situation.

Ethical decisions generate and sustain trust; demonstrate respect, responsibility, fairness and caring; and are consistent with good citizenship. These behaviors provide a foundation for making better decisions by setting the ground rules for our behavior.

Ethical decisions can be made based on various schools of ethics. These varied approaches to ethics look into the question of how ethical action is determined during a particular situation.

Hence, having a clear idea about different dimensions and approaches to ethics will help in taking ethical decisions. Thus, we are going to learn in detail about different approaches to ethics hereafter.

1.4 Approaches to Ethics

There are basically four different approaches to the study of ethics that can be divided in two parts:

A. Non-Normative Approaches: The non-normative approaches examine morality without concern for making judgments as to what is morally right or wrong. They do not take any moral position regarding moral issues.

1. Meta Ethics
2. Descriptive ethics

B. Normative Approaches: The normative approaches instead make judgments as to what is morally right or wrong. They take a clear moral position regarding moral issues.

1. General Normative ethics
2. Applied ethics

1.5 Non-Normative Approaches

1.5.1 Meta Ethics

The term “meta” means *after* or *beyond*. Meta ethics is a branch of analytic philosophy that explores the status, foundations, and scope of moral values, properties, and words. Meta ethics focuses on the analysis of the meanings of the central terms used in ethical reasoning and decision-making. It attempts to answer questions of meaning. It studies where our ethical principles come from and what they mean. It tries to analyze the underlying principles of ethical values.

Meta ethical positions may be divided according to how they respond to questions such as the following:

- (a) What is the meaning of moral terms or judgments? i.e., what exactly are people doing when they use moral words such as “good” and “right”? This is dealt by Semantic Theories.
- (b) ‘What is the nature of moral judgments?’ i.e., are some things morally right or wrong for all people at all times, or does morality instead vary from person to person, context to context, or culture to culture? This is answered by Substantial Theories.
- (c) How may moral judgments be supported or defended? i.e. ‘Where do moral values come from, what is their source and foundation? These questions are covered in Justification Theories.

A. Semantic Theories

These theories mainly put forward a position on the question “what is the meaning of moral terms or judgements?” These theories are further classified as:

(i) Cognitivist Theories

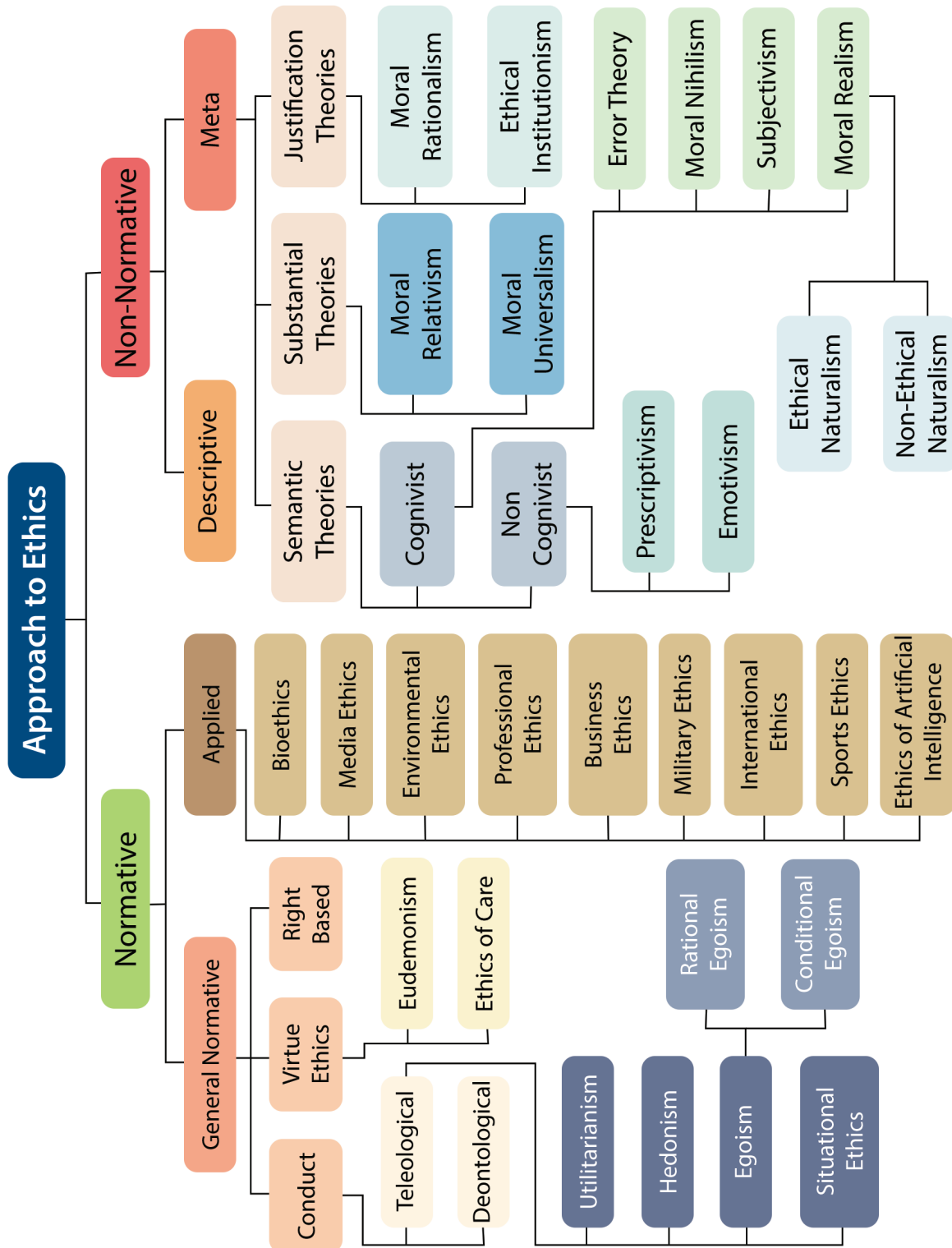
Cognitivism is the view that ethical sentences express propositions and can therefore be true or false (i.e., they are truth-apt). Thus, moral judgments are capable of being objectively true, because they describe some feature of the world.

- (a) Moral Realism:** Moral realism is based on the idea that there are real objective moral facts or truths in the universe. Moral statements provide factual information about those truths. It is the meta-ethical view that there exist such things as moral facts and moral values, and that these are objective and independent of our perception of them or our beliefs, feelings or other attitudes towards them. Therefore, moral judgments describe moral facts, which are as certain in their own way as mathematical facts. It is a cognitivist view in that it holds that ethical sentences express valid propositions (and are therefore “truth-apt” i.e., they are able to be true or false), and that they describe the state of the real world.

Moral Realism has two types:

- **Ethical Naturalism:** It says that there are objective moral properties of which we have empirical knowledge, but that these properties are reducible to entirely non-ethical or natural properties, such as needs, wants or pleasures. It holds that the meanings of these ethical sentences can be expressed as natural properties without the use of ethical terms such as good or right.
It suggests that inquiry into the natural world can increase our moral knowledge in just the same way it increases our scientific knowledge, and that any “ethical value” is confirmable through the methods of science. Moral facts are therefore effectively facts of nature.
- **Ethical Non-Naturalism:** It says that ethical statements express propositions that cannot be reduced to non-ethical statements in the way that Ethical Naturalism assumes. It therefore holds that it is not possible to define “good”, for example, in terms of one or more natural properties (e.g. “pleasant”, “more evolved”, “desired”, etc.), and that it is in fact indefinable in that it cannot be defined in any other terms. Thus, the meaning of sentences containing the word “good” cannot be explained entirely in terms of sentences not containing the word “good”.

- (b) **Subjectivism:** It says that moral statements are statements about the feelings, attitudes and emotions that particular person or group has about a particular issue. If a person says something is good or bad they are telling us about the positive or negative feelings that they have about that something. It is type of moral anti-realism. E.g., when a person says "I disapprove of murder". This is subjectivism i.e., she is telling us that she disapproves of murder.
- (c) **Moral Nihilism:** It says that ethical claims are generally false. It holds that there are no objective moral facts or true propositions: that nothing is morally good, bad, wrong, right, etc., because there are no moral truths. E.g. a moral nihilist would say that murder is not wrong, but neither is it right.



(d) Error Theory: Error Theory is a form of Moral Nihilism which combines Cognitivism (the belief that moral language consists of truth-apt statements) with Moral Nihilism (the belief that there are no moral facts). It is the view that ethical statements can be propositions, but that all ethical propositions are false (or cannot be true), that we are generally in error when we make any moral statement. The concepts of ethics introduce a mistaken, erroneous, way of thinking of the world or of conducting practical reasoning.

Error Theory holds that we do not know that any moral claim is true because:

- all moral claims are false,
- we have reason to believe that all moral claims are false, and
- because we are not justified in believing any claim we have reason to deny.

(ii) Non-Cognitivist Theories

Non-Cognitivism is the meta-ethical view (or family of views) that moral utterances lack truth-value (i.e., they are neither true nor false) and do not assert propositions. Therefore, if moral statements cannot be true, and if one cannot know something that is not true, Non-Cognitivism implies that moral knowledge is impossible, and moral truths are not the kind of truths that can be known.

(a) Emotivism: Emotivism is the view that moral claims are no more than expressions of approval or disapproval. This sounds like subjectivism, but in emotivism a moral statement doesn't provide information about the speaker's feelings about the topic but expresses those feelings. So when someone makes a moral judgement they show their feelings about something. E.g. When an emotivist says "murder is wrong" it's like saying "down with murder!" or just saying "murder" while pulling a horrified face, or making a thumbs-down gesture at the same time as saying "murder is wrong".

(b) Prescriptivism: Prescriptivists think that ethical statements are instructions or recommendations. So if a person says something is good, she is recommending us to do it, and if she says something is bad, she is telling you not to do it. E.g. A person might be giving an instruction "Don't murder people". This is prescriptivism. There is almost always a prescriptive element in any real-world ethical statement. Any ethical statement can be reworked into a statement with an 'ought' in it. For example: "Lying is wrong" can be rewritten as "people ought not to tell lies".

B. Substantial Theories

These theories answer questions: "What is the nature of moral judgements?"

It has following divisions:

(i) Moral Universalism:

It says that there is a universal ethic which applies to all people, regardless of culture, race, sex, religion, nationality, sexuality or other distinguishing feature, and all the time. A universal ethic is a moral system that applies universally to all of humanity, and thus transcends culture and personal whim. The source or justification of this system is variously claimed to be human nature, a shared vulnerability to suffering, the demands of universal reason, common themes among existing moral codes, or the mandates of religion.

E.g. Many religions, have morally universalist positions, and regard their system of morality as having been set by a deity, and therefore absolute, universal, perfect and unchangeable.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations can be seen as an example of global efforts to bring a universal, equal and common moral justice to all people.

(ii) Moral Relativism

Moral Relativism (or Ethical Relativism) is the position that moral or ethical propositions do not reflect objective and/or universal moral truths, but instead make claims relative to social, cultural, historical or personal circumstances. It does not deny outright the truth-value or justification of moral statements but affirms relative forms of them. It may be described by the common aphorism: "When in Rome, do as the Romans do".

Relativistic positions may specifically see moral values as applicable only within certain cultural boundaries (Cultural Relativism) or in the context of individual preferences. E.g. some religions/cultures oppose eating non veg food while others allow it.

A related but slightly different concept is that of Moral Pluralism (or Value Pluralism), the idea that there are several values which may be equally correct and fundamental, and yet in conflict with each other. E.g. the moral life of a nun is incompatible with that of a mother, yet there is no purely rational measure of which is preferable.

C. Justification Theories

These theories answer questions like, "How moral judgments be supported or defended?"

(i) Ethical Intuitionism

It says that our intuitive awareness of value, or intuitive knowledge of evaluative facts, forms the foundation of our ethical knowledge. It is the view that some moral truths can be known non-inferentially (i.e. known without one needing to infer them from other truths one believes). Intuitionism teaches three main things:

- There are real objective moral truths that are independent of human beings.
- These are fundamental truths that can't be broken down into parts or defined by reference to anything except other moral truths.
- Human beings can discover these truths by using their minds in a particular, intuitive way.

Intuitionism does not mean that all moral decisions are reached by relying on intuition. Intuition enables the discovery of the basic moral truths, and everyday moral decision-making then involves thinking about the choices available and making moral judgements in an ordinary sort of way.

Jonathan Haidt has identified four categories of ethical intuitions:

1. **Harm/Care:** Not wanting to harm others, caring for others, compassion. The prohibitions against killing and stealing enter in this category.
2. **Fairness/Reciprocity:** Wanting an equal share, fair trades, just outcomes, and so on. This is the origin of egalitarian commitments.
3. **In-group Loyalty:** Following the obligations of in-group membership so that the group can benefit, such as self-sacrifice and ferreting out freeloaders and traitors. Manichean thinking finds its origin in these intuitions.
4. **Respect for Authority:** Following one's proper place and role in social hierarchies, obeying orders, respecting one's superiors.

(ii) Moral Rationalism

It says that moral principles are knowable a priori, that is, by reason alone. Moral rationalism is similar to the rationalist version of ethical intuitionism; however, they are distinct views. Moral rationalism is neutral on whether basic moral beliefs are known via inference or not.

Kant's Rationalism "is a kind of Rational Intuitionism. It regards the Moral Law or the internal law of conscience as the moral standard. According to Kant, the internal law of conscience or practical reason is the ultimate moral standard. The Moral quality of an action is not determined

by any end or its consequences, but by the purity of its motive.

Reason is the universal element in human nature. It imposes the categorical imperative upon itself. It is self legislative. This is the prerogative of a rational being. The will ought to be guided by its own moral law or categorical imperative. It should not be guided by feeling or desire; if it is so guided, it is not autonomous, self-governed or free, but heteronomous or governed by something other than itself.

In the opinion of Kant, a right action should satisfy two conditions:

1. It should conform to the moral law revealed by reason;
2. The person should perform it out of pure regard for the moral law.

1.5.2 Descriptive Ethics

It describes and sometimes tries to explain the moral and ethical practices and beliefs of certain societies and cultures. This is what sociologists, anthropologists, and historians often do in their study and research. In their descriptions they do not make judgements about the morality of the practices and beliefs but simply describe the practices observed in the different groups or cultures. Descriptive Ethics is a value-free approach to ethics.

Descriptive ethics can broadly be thought of as the study of morality and moral issues from a scientific point of view. It can be thought of as the branch of ethics that attempts to develop conceptual models and test those models empirically in order to enhance our understanding of ethical or moral behavior, moral decision making, and more broadly moral phenomena.

E.g. how do individuals process and resolve perceived moral conflicts? What are the most important influences or causes for individuals behaving ethically or unethically? What is the system of beliefs that guide individuals or groups in making the moral choices that are observed? Answers to these kinds of questions are descriptive or explanatory in nature.

