

Excerpts of Ethics Notes compiled based on authoritative text books

What is Ethics? (Essence of ethics)

There are three normative systems that regulate human conduct: laws, conventions, ethics. Ethics is a normative system of moral values that make human conduct fair and benevolent.

What are essential differences between laws, conventions, and ethics?

Genesis: Laws are made, interpreted, and enforced by the legislative, judiciary and executive arms of the state. Conventions of a community come out of long cultural evolution over many years. Ethical principles come out of deep rational and reflective thinking of philosophers.

Sanctions: Sanctions for violation of laws are external and effective. Sanctions for violation of conventions are external and not necessarily effective. A powerful member of a community may violate social conventions without incurring punishment. Sanctions for violations of ethical principles are internal and critically determined by ethical commitment.

Nature: Laws and conventions are negative, preventive and reactive. Ethical principles are positive, promotive and proactive. (More in subsequent para)

Why do humans need ethics?

Laws, conventions are primarily meant to prevent the human actions that pose threats to social order. These negative and reactive normative systems prevent undesirable human conduct rather than promote fair and benevolent human acts. So, the laws and conventions have a minor role in promoting fairness in human society. For example- laws and conventions can prevent violence, but can't promote harmony and cohesion in society. Laws can create favorable atmosphere for economic growth, but can't promote economic equality. So proactive and positive measures are required to promote social harmony and economic equality through distributive justice.

Unless approved by conscience, laws and conventions can be violated through manipulative techniques without inviting punishments. This happens in society. The persons committed to ethical values don't resort to manipulative techniques to comply with laws and conventions. So, ethics is also important to faithful compliance with laws and conventions.

When ethical principles are embodied in laws and conventions, promoting fairness and justice becomes easy and impactful through enforcement by state agencies. Laws like progressive taxation, right to food, right to health, right to education embody ethical principles. On the contrary, unjust laws and conventions become highly oppressive. For example, apartheid law, patriarchal social conventions. Laws can be deliberately misused, misinterpreted to oppress targeted people. Literal interpretation of laws may favor the rich and powerful. A law is just if it protects every right of every individual and promotes distributive justice. So, ethics is very important to shaping and faithful enforcement of laws and conventions.

What are the dimensions of ethics?

Ethical standards, put forward by eminent philosophers, can be broadly divided into two categories: (1) Deontological Ethics (2) Teleological Ethics. While moral values determine the standards of deontological ethics, non-moral values determine the standards of teleological ethics. Deontological ethics is divided into two branches: (1) Ethics of virtue (2) Ethics of principles. Teleological ethics is also divided into two branches (1) Utilitarianism (2) Egoism.

Ethics of virtue versus Ethics of principles: The prominent advocates of Ethics of virtue are Socrates, Plato, Aristotle. Kant is the prominent advocate of Ethics of principles. Ethics of virtue emphasizes the development of character informed by moral values whereas Ethics of principles emphasizes compliance with universal moral principles. In fact, these two branches are complementary. Without moral character (moral commitment), compliance with moral principles is ad hoc or circumstantial or motivational. Besides, it is difficult to determine moral principles in a complex situation. On the other hand, without awareness of moral principles, it is difficult to develop moral character. So, moral character is directionless without moral principles. Moral principles are weak without moral character.

What are moral values? There are two cardinal moral values: fairness/justice and beneficence. (Elaboration in a subsequent para)

Ethics of principles: Kant believes that human conduct is not determined by antecedent circumstances and natural laws. Humans possess transcendental freedom and free will. As free moral-rational agents, humans should not let their conduct to be motivated by self-interests. Human conduct should be motivated by the duties imposed by universal moral principles. A universal moral principle is the one that appeals to all rational beings. So only a moral individual is rational and free individual whereas an immoral individual is irrational and slave to natural/biological desires. There may not be pleasure or personal utility in observing moral duties. Sometimes, it is indeed sacrificial and painful. But the real reward of it is upholding human dignity and exercise of free will.

Significance of deontological ethics in public administration: It focuses on the inherent moral duty of individuals to act in a certain way, regardless of the consequences. For a civil servant, this means they are obliged to follow rules, laws, codes of conduct, irrespective of the situation. They must follow the rules, even when faced with personal or external pressures. Deontological ethics emphasizes that one's actions should be universalizable. Civil servants must ensure that their actions are consistent across the time and space. Deontological ethics stresses individual moral autonomy, where individuals should make ethical decisions based on their reasoning. Civil servants are often required to make tough decisions in public interest. Their choice should reflect moral autonomy. Deontological ethics holds individuals accountable for their actions. Civil servants must own moral accountability. Deontological ethics places an emphasis on doing what is right, regardless of personal gains. Civil servants should resist temptations to act unethically for personal gains. They should always act in public interest.

Significance of virtue ethics in public administration: Virtue ethics, associated with philosophers like Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, focuses on the development of virtuous character traits and emphasizes the importance of moral virtues in guiding one's actions. Civil servants are expected to develop and embody the foundational values of civil service- integrity, impartiality, objectivity etc. Virtue ethics encourages individuals to consider the full context of a situation when making moral decisions. Virtue ethics promotes the idea that individuals should serve as moral exemplars for others. Virtue ethics values practical wisdom in making ethical decisions. Civil servants often encounter complex

and ambiguous situation. They need to exercise moral wisdom and judgment to navigate these situations effectively. Virtue ethics promotes continuous self-improvement in moral virtues.

Utilitarianism: British philosopher Bentham is the main advocate of utilitarianism, which emphasizes “maximum happiness for maximum people”. According to this hedonistic theory, happiness means sensual pleaser, pointing to quantitative measurement of happiness. Happiness in this view doesn’t take into account intellectual, aesthetic, and other non-material achievements of humans. It advocates legislative measures that can secure maximum happiness for maximum people. Moral values such as fairness and beneficence don’t find importance in this theory. It doesn’t consider distributive justice in distribution of happiness.

Significance of utilitarianism in public administration: Utilitarianism emphasizes maximization of overall happiness or utility as the primary goal of moral decision-making. This underscores the importance of promoting the greatest overall well-being. A civil servant should keep in mind the interests of maximum possible people in their actions and decisions. Utilitarianism is a consequentialist ethical theory, meaning it focuses on the outcomes of actions. Civil servants must consider the potential consequences of their decisions on society. Utilitarianism encourages the use of cost-benefit analysis to determine the most advantageous course of action. Civil servants often need to make resource allocation decisions. Utilitarian principles encourage them in assessing the trade-offs. Utilitarianism encourages the measurement and assessment of outcomes to ensure that decisions are achieving their intended purpose. So, utilitarian ideals make civil servants efficient and effective.

Ethical egoism: According to this theory, an individual should always be concerned about his/her own interests. It emphasizes prudentialism. However, this prudentialism is not necessarily undesirable from moral point of view. Concerns about self-interests make humans active and hardworking. When a person becomes health conscious, he/she becomes concerned about hygiene and nutrition. When a person becomes concerned about future, she/he studies hard, may become a good professional, innovative entrepreneur. All this indirectly benefits society as a whole. But this enlightened self-interest is different from egoism. Egoism motivates achievement of self-interests at the cost of others, which is not at all desirable from moral point of view.

Objectivity versus relativity in ethics: According to objectivism, an ethical proposition is independent of time, space, and person. But relativism emphasizes the dependence of ethical propositions on time, space and person. Relativism underlines the diversity in moral values in cultural context. But the objective-relative dichotomy is more apparent than real. For example- In place X, there is a rule for walking on the left side of roads. In place Y, there is a rule for walking on the right side of roads. In both places, the real objective of the road rule is to prevent accidents and loss of lives, properties. Besides, a relative value may be rooted in faulty beliefs. For example- a patriarchal society believes in subordination of women, restrictions in their freedom and autonomy. This can’t be justified in the name of cultural relativism. In essence, ethical values and principles are objective(universal). (To be continued.....)

The following question paper has been generated by ChatGPT

CIVIL SERVICES (MAIN) EXAMINATION

General Studies – Paper IV (Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude)

Time Allowed: Three Hours Maximum Marks: 250

Instructions

1. Answer **all** questions in **both** sections.
2. **Section A:** Questions 1–5 have two sub-parts **(a)** and **(b)**. Each sub-part carries **10 marks** and should be answered in **about 150 words**. Question 6 has three sub-parts **(a)**, **(b)**, **(c)** of **10 marks** each, to be answered in **about 150 words**.
3. **Section B:** Six case-studies, each carrying **20 marks**. Answer their sub-questions in about **100 words** each.

Section A (130 Marks)

1.

(a) “Ethical behaviour is determined less by written rules and more by the quality of moral reasoning.” Analyse this view with reference to ethics in private and public relationships. *(10 marks)*

(b) Discuss how the **family–school–society** triad functions as a continuum in inculcating civic virtues among citizens. *(10 marks)*

2.

(a) Distinguish between *explicit attitudes* and *implicit attitudes*. How do these distinctions help a civil servant avoid unconscious bias in decision-making? *(10 marks)*

(b) “Persuasion is more sustainable than coercion for behavioural change programmes.” Examine this statement with recent public-health campaigns in India. *(10 marks)*

3.

(a) Integrity and objectivity are often invoked together in civil-service codes. Explain the complementarity and potential conflict between these two values in administrative practice. *(10 marks)*

(b) Empathy and compassion are regarded as ‘soft skills’ but have hard governance outcomes. Illustrate with two policy initiatives where these attributes made a measurable difference. *(10 marks)*

4.

(a) Emotional intelligence (EI) has moved from being a personal trait to an organisational competency. Discuss how EI tools can be integrated into public-sector performance appraisals. (10 marks)

(b) Choose **any one** moral thinker from the following—Buddha / Aristotle / Confucius—and explain how his philosophy can guide present-day public administrators in resolving ethical dilemmas. (10 marks)

5.

(a) “Codes of ethics prevent corruption only when backed by a culture of accountability.” Critically analyse this assertion in the context of contemporary Indian public administration. (10 marks)

(b) In the light of recent corporate frauds, evaluate whether the shift from **shareholder primacy** to a **stakeholder model** truly enhances corporate governance in India. (10 marks)

6.

Critically examine the following three statements in the context of ethical governance and moral philosophy. (10 marks each)

(a) “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.” — **Immanuel Kant**

(b) “A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, he becomes.” — **Mahatma Gandhi**

(c) “In a conflict between the heart and the brain, follow your heart.” — **Swami Vivekananda**

Section B – Case Studies (120 Marks)

(Answer each sub-question in about 100 words.)

Case Study 1 Digital Welfare vs Data Privacy

The state government launches “**JAN-AI**”, an AI-driven platform to automate eligibility verification for social-security pensions, claiming it will reduce leakages and speed up delivery. Civil-society groups allege that the algorithm embeds socio-economic biases and that citizens were not consulted about sharing personal data. As the District Social-Welfare Officer, you must roll out the scheme next month.

1. Identify the ethical issues involved.
2. Suggest a course of action that balances efficiency with citizens’ rights.

3. How would you engage stakeholders to enhance transparency and trust?

(20 marks)

Case Study 2 Road to Prosperity or Road to Nowhere?

A 200-km expressway, part of a national economic corridor, will cut through fertile agricultural land and two tribal hamlets in your district. Farmers demand higher compensation; tribal elders fear cultural erosion. The project has tight deadlines and high political stakes. As the District Magistrate:

1. Analyse the conflict of interest between development and livelihood.
2. Propose a participatory framework for land acquisition and rehabilitation.
3. What ethical principles will guide your decision-making under political pressure?

(20 marks)

Case Study 3 The Inflated Invoice

You are an accounts officer in the State Health Department. During an internal audit you discover that medical-equipment bills worth ₹8 crore appear inflated by 30%. Your immediate superior dismisses the finding, hinting at “higher-level” involvement and pressuring you to clear the payment before the fiscal year-end to avoid lapse of budget.

1. Enumerate the ethical dilemmas you face.
2. Evaluate the options available to you, including whistle-blowing.
3. Outline the steps you would take to uphold probity without jeopardising your career.

(20 marks)

Case Study 4 Disaster within a Disaster

A coastal district battered by a cyclone is simultaneously grappling with a dengue outbreak. Relief materials are arriving, but allegations surface that influential local leaders are diverting supplies to their constituencies. As the Emergency Relief Coordinator:

1. Discuss the ethical challenges in equitable distribution of scarce resources.
2. Design an accountability mechanism to minimise diversion and corruption.
3. How would you maintain morale among overworked staff while ensuring transparency?

(20 marks)

Case Study 5 Ransomware at the Smart-City Control Centre

A ransomware attack cripples the municipal command-and-control centre managing traffic lights, water supply, and CCTV feeds. Hackers demand ₹10 crore in cryptocurrency. Disruption is causing public outrage and safety risks. The insurance policy covers cyber-incidents but prohibits ransom payments. As the City Commissioner:

1. Weigh the ethical pros and cons of paying the ransom.
2. Outline an immediate action plan to restore services and reassure citizens.
3. Suggest long-term cyber-security measures to prevent recurrence.

(20 marks)

Case Study 6 Rumours, Reels and Riots

Fake videos alleging child-abductions by a minority community have gone viral in your district, leading to sporadic violence. Social-media platforms are slow to remove the content citing verification protocols. As the Superintendent of Police:

1. Identify the competing values involved in controlling misinformation and safeguarding free speech.
2. Devise a strategy to quell violence while respecting constitutional rights.
3. Recommend policy measures to enhance platform accountability without over-regulation.

(20 marks)
