

CHAPTER - 1

BASICS OF ETHICS

Ethics literally means the study of moral principles. The term comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which means "character". It indicates a set of principles that each individual agrees to abide by, being a member of the group. Ethics is characteristic of a group. It is **a discipline based on the logical justification of human actions**. Ethics, on the other hand, set of moral values established in the given group of people as a given point of time. Ethics often takes the form of traditions and laws. It is what society as a whole considers Right.

Ethics, hence, are moral principles or values that govern the conduct of an individual or a group. It is not a burden to bear, but a prudent and effective guide which furthers life and success.

IMPORTANCE OF ETHICS

So, every society/group of people living together as one unit requires some set of common principles/values which every individual is required to abide by. Such a set of principles is called ethics of that society/group.

However, why we need to have these set of rules at all? The following are the importance of ethics:

- **Make society better.** When we help make society better, we are rewarded with also making own lives and the lives of our families and friends better. Without ethical conduct, society would be a miserable place.
- **Treat everyone equally.** Equality is a cornerstone of most democracies, where all individuals are afforded the same rights. This is not possible without the majority of citizens behaving ethically.
- **Lessen stress.** When we make unethical decisions, we tend to feel uncomfortable and concerned about our decision making. Taking an ethical decision or a principled perspective on an issue, reduces stress.

Ultimately, ethics is important not so that "we can understand" philosophically, but rather so we can "improve how we live" (Lafollette, 2007). By being ethical, we enrich our lives and the lives of those around us.

WHAT MAKES ONE PERFORM AN ETHICAL/MORAL ACTION?

Any act will be called ethical when it flows from the set of values which are considered Right. For any individual, the following are the motivating factors to act ethically:

1. **Conscience:** this is the most effective instrument which motivates and also compels a person to do ethical things. If a person, due to an overriding sense of self-interest does an unethical act, this conscience tortures the person through sense of guilt. E.g. when in need I steal some money from my friend's wallet after some time, the guilt starts compelling to say sorry to him and return the money.
2. **Social recognition:** Man is a social animal, and hence, there are some social customs and conventions that naturally gets inculcated in the person who compels her to do ethical acts. By

How do you know as an individual if you pass the ethics test?

As an individual, you can ask yourself what society would be like if everyone conducted their moral selves like you do. Would society be better or worse? By asking yourself this question, you are really testing the universality of your behaviour. Immanuel Kant, a famous scholar of ethics, suggests we should only act in ways that we would want everyone else in the same situation to act. We should also consider any way that we can improve our moral life to make society better.