

UNIT 91 – UPSC - Dimensions of ethics

The different dimensions to study the ethics help in arriving at ethical decisions during complex situation. These varied approaches to ethics look into the question of how ethical action is determined during a particular situation. Human beings are confronted with situations wherein their decisions about actions may lead to opposed and perhaps equally unwelcome alternatives. There are many dimensions of ethics (Reddy, Nanda Kishore, Ajmera, Santosh, 2015):



I. Utilitarian approach: Utilitarianism was conceived in 19th century by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill to help legislators determine the law which were morally correct and better. According to them, ethical actions are those that offers the greatest balance good over evil. The ethical administrative action is the one that produces greatest goods and does the least harm for all who are affected such as citizens, communities, employees, environment and society at Large. Ethical warfare balances the good achieved in ending terrorism with the harm done to all parties through death, injuries and destruction. Utilitarian approach is one of the teleological approaches to ethics dealing with consequences tries to increase the good and reduce the harm that is done (Reddy, Nanda Kishore, Ajmera, Santosh, 2015). To scrutinise an issue using the utilitarian approach, people first identify the various courses of action available to us. Secondly, they ask who will be affected by each action and what benefits or harms will be derived from each. And they choose the action that will produce the greatest benefits and the least harm. The ethical action is the one that provides the greatest good for the greatest number.

It focuses on the consequences that actions or policies have on the well-being ("utility") of all persons reasonably foreseen to be directly or indirectly (but rather immediately) affected by the action or policy.

It must be established that different people often identify benefits and harms differently.

The principle states: "Of any two actions, the most ethical one will produce the greatest balance of benefits over harms."

II. The right approach: This approach is rooted in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and others who focused on the individual's right to choose actions based on his or her free will. These

philosopher stated that people have dignity based on their capability to choose freely what they will do with their lives and they have fundamental moral right to have these choices respected. The Rights Approach focuses on respect for human dignity. This approach holds that our dignity is based on our ability to choose freely how we live our lives, and that we have a moral right to respect for our choices as free, equal, and rational people, and a moral duty to respect others in the same way. People are not objects to be manipulated, it is violation of human dignity to use people in way wherein they do not freely choose their own actions. Other philosophers and ethicists suggested that ethical action is one of the best protects and respects the moral rights of those affected. Right to truth, right to privacy, right to not to be injured and right to what is agreed are some of the rights considered under this approach to ethics (Reddy, Nanda Kishore, Ajmera, Santosh, 2015).

III. Fairness or justice approach: Aristotle and Greek philosophers have contributed the idea that all equals should be treated equally (Reddy, Nanda Kishore, Ajmera, Santosh, 2015). In basic term, The Fairness Approach focuses on the fair and equitable distribution of good and harm, and/or the social benefits and social costs, across the spectrum of society. It starts with the principle that all equals should be treated similarly, and those who are unequal due to relevant differences, should be treated differently in a manner that is fair and proportionate to, or commensurate with, their difference. Rawls suggested the idea of "original position", a mental exercise whereby a group of rational people must establish a principle of fairness (such as distribution of income) without knowing beforehand where on the resulting pecking order they will end up themselves.

IV. Common goods approach: Greek philosophers have contributed the notion life in community is a good in itself and that our actions should contribute to that life. The common good concept was originated in ancient time by many philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Cicero. More recently, contemporary ethicists, John Rawls defined the common good as certain general conditions those are equally applicable to everyone's advantage. This approach to ethics assumes a society comprising individuals whose own good is inextricably linked to the good of community (Reddy, Nanda Kishore, Ajmera, Santosh, 2015). Rawls's theory of justice revolves around the adaptation of two fundamental principles of justice which would, in turn, guarantee a just and morally acceptable society. The first principle guarantees the right of each person to have the most extensive basic liberty compatible with the liberty of others. The second principle states that social and economic positions are to be (a) to everyone's advantage and (b) open to all. In this approach, the focus is on ensuring that the social policies, social systems, institutions, and environments are beneficial to all. Examples of goods common to all include affordable health care, effective public safety, peace among nations, a just legal system, and an unpolluted environment.

V. Virtue approach: This is very primitive approach to ethics in which ethical actions ought to be consistent with certain ideal virtues that provide for the full development of our humanity. The virtue approach to ethics assumes that there are certain ideals toward which we should strive which offer overall development of humans. These virtues are dispositions and habits that enables us to act according to the highest potential of our character and on behalf of values like truth and beauty. Honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, tolerance, love fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, and prudence are examples of virtue (Reddy, Nanda Kishore, Ajmera, Santosh, 2015).

In dealing with an ethical problem using the virtue approach, people might ask, What kind of person should I be? What will promote the development of character within myself? within my community.

This approach focuses on attitudes, dispositions, or character traits that enable us to be and to act in ways that develop our human potential. It is to be noted that different communities may identify differing virtues. The principle states: "What is ethical is what develops moral virtues in ourselves and our communities."