

UG SEMESTER : IV
MJC-06: WESTERN ETHICS
TOPIC - NATURE OF ETHICS

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Dated – 20.02.2025

Introduction :-

ethics is a normative science, which concerned with human conduct. Human beings are social animal and their actions affects other persons of the society. That is why, our action evaluated as good or bad, ~~is~~ right or wrong etc which is studied in ethics. ethics is also known as Moral philosophy. As it provides

moral standard to the people. Ethic related to those persons who live in the society. As Aristotle said, "one who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god." Hence, ethics is a

Objective -

The main objective of this lesson is to study the nature of Ethics as normative science of the conduct of human beings living in the society and also to determine the standard of the human conduct as good or bad right or wrong.

Main Theme

Meaning and Definition of ethics

The word "ethics" is derived from the Greek adjective "ethica" which comes from the substantive word "ethos" "ethos" means customs, usage or habits. Ethics is also called "Moral Philosophy." The word moral is derived from the Latin substantive "mores" which also means customs or habits. Customs are not merely "habitual ways of acting". They are also ways approved by the group.

Thus, literally "Ethics" means the science of customs or habits of men. It is the "science of the habitual conduct of men". Habits are the expression of settled disposition of the will or character. Character is the inner counterpart of conduct, which is its outer expression. Thus, ethics is the science of character and conduct. It evaluates the voluntary actions and habitual actions of persons and considers their rightness and wrongness. It evaluates the character of persons and considers its virtuousness and viciousness.

Prof. P.B. Chatterjee defines ethics as "Ethics may be defined as the science of morality or the study of right conduct or duty. It is the science which explains the fact of moral life and indicates the course in which human life should be directed. It is essentially an investigation into the notion of good and bad, right and wrong and the connected ~~with~~ notion of duty or applied to conduct of voluntary action."

[Principles of Ethics, Pg-1]

As William Lillie says "Ethics is the normative science of the conduct of human beings living in a society, a science which judges this conduct to be good or bad or in some similar way."

ethics may be also defined as the science of highest good? It is the science of the supreme ideal of human life. It is the science of the highest end or purpose of human life.

Mackenzie defines ethics as "the study of what is right or good in human conduct." or "the science of the ideal involved in human life."

Hence, it is clear from the above definition that ethics is a normative science. It give moral standard and moral judgement on the moral actions. While discussing the nature of ethics it is necessary to evaluate certain questions such as "Is ethics a science?, Is ethics a science or a part of philosophy? Is ethics a theoretical or practical science? Is ethics an Art? etc."

Is Ethics a Science?

ethics is a science because it aims at systematic explanation of rightness and wrongness or our voluntary actions in the light of the highest good of man. It aims at systematic valuing. It is not a natural science because it does not explain our volitions and voluntary actions by their antecedent mental events like psychology.

An science aims at systematic knowledge. Ethics also aims at systematic knowledge. So, ethics is an science. But sciences are of two types Positive Science and normative science. But ethics is not an positive science rather it is a normative science because it aims at systematic evaluation of our volitions and actions.

Ethics is a Normative Science

As we know that science can be ~~call~~ classified into two forms 1) Positive science and 2) Normative Science.

1) Positive science studies about natural phenomena and expose general laws of cause and effect relation in them. Thus, it study the "is" or "what is existing in the world." For eg Botany, Zoology, Physics etc are the positive sciences. Positive science is also called natural science.

ii) Normative Science - studies about "what ought to be" ethics, logic and Aesthetics are the normative sciences. A normative science is also called as regulative science. A normative science deals with values, it concerned with the norms that regulate human life. It gives us systematic valuing of our voluntary actions.

Thus, Normative Sciences seek to determine norms, ideals or standards. There are ~~there~~ three Ideals of human life i.e Truth, Beauty, and Good. These are the supreme values in human experience. They correspond to the three aspects of our conscious life - knowing, feeling and willing.

Logic is concerned with the general conditions involved in the pursuit of "truth". Aesthetic is concerned with the "Beauty" and Ethics is concerned with the "Good". Thus, Logic, ethics and Aesthetic are normative sciences, because they are concerned with the Ideals of Truth, Beauty Good and Beauty respectively. Because they are concerned with the norms, ideals and values.

Hence, ethics is a normative science, it concerned with the norms, ideals and values of human life. It passes judgement of value upon human actions with reference to the moral Ideal. As judgements of value are judgements of what ought to be. which is called as critical or appreciative judgement.

Ethics is not a Practical Science

There are two types of science - 1) Theoretical Science
2) Practical Science.

In theoretical science there is only the knowledge of laws and ideals. Ethics is called as theoretical science because we have the knowledge of ideal standard of human conduct. But "Practical Sciences" teaches us to know how to do. It is concerned with means for the realization of a definite end. For eg, medical science is a practical science, since it does not seek to determine the ideal of health but points out the means by which health may be best produced.

But ethics cannot be regarded as a practical science. It only tries to ascertain the moral ideal. It does not teach us how to live a moral life. It gives us a knowledge of guiding principles of life but does not tell us how to apply them. Thus, ethics, though a normative science, is not a practical science.

Ethicists like Mackenzie and Mu didn't accept ethics as a practical science. In the words of Mackenzie, "It must content itself with understanding the nature of the ideal and must not hope to formulate rules for its attainment. It is important to observe that the description of ethics as normative does not involve the view that it has any direct bearing on practice. It discusses the ideal of goodness and is not directly concerned with the means by which this ideal of goodness may be realised."

ethics, therefore, though a normative science is not to be regarded as a Practical Science."

[Manual of ethics, P.P. 9-10]

If we observe theoretical and practical science, actually there is no more difference in between them as the thinkers have said accepted.

Because practical knowledge always depends on the theory. As theory without practice is incomplete. So we find that both theoretical and practical science depends on each other. As Prof. Seth says "ethics often called practical as opposed to theoretical philosophy or metaphysics. The description is correct if it meant that ethics is the Philosophy of theory or practice."

ethics is not an Art.

If ethics cannot be regarded as a practical science, still less, can it be regarded as Art. Science, it does not teach us the art of living moral life. It does not lay down moral precepts. It does not teach us how to control our passions, resist temptations, strengthen our will, and cultivate a virtuous life. Thus, ethics is neither a practical science nor an art. It is simply a normative science.

The Method of Ethics

Different schools of moralists adopt different methods of ethics. The physical and biological method, historical or genetic method, the psychological method, and the metaphysical method have been adopted by different schools of ethical thinkers. But the true method of ethics is both scientific and metaphysical, empirical as well as transcendent.