

Applied Ethics, Meaning, Types, Major Dimensions, Key Principles

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Applied Ethics is a branch of **ethics** that deals with **real-life moral issues** and **practical decision-making**. It focuses on how **ethical principles** can be used to solve **everyday problems** in areas like **healthcare, environment, business, and technology**. Instead of only discussing what is **right or wrong in theory**, Applied Ethics helps people make **responsible and fair choices** in **real situations**. It connects **moral ideas** with **actions**, guiding individuals and societies to act in a more **ethical and thoughtful way**.

Types of Applied Ethics

Environmental ethics

- **Environmental ethics** studies how humans should morally behave toward **nature**. It expands moral concern beyond humans to include **animals, plants, rivers, forests, and ecosystems**, emphasizing that nature deserves both **respect and protection**, not just use.
- It is important across fields like **environmental law, ecology, geography, sociology, and economics**, as it guides decisions on **development, conservation, pollution control, and sustainable resource**

use.

- It raises key moral questions such as whether we should clear **forests** for development, continue using **polluting vehicles**, or allow **species extinction** for human benefit. It also focuses on responsibilities toward **future generations** and ethical use of **natural and space resources**.
- Indian tradition strongly supports environmental respect through texts like the **Vedas and Upanishads**, promoting **harmony with nature** and seeing elements like **rivers, trees, mountains, air, water, and earth** as sacred.
- Core Indian values include **Ahimsa (non-violence)** toward all living beings, **respect for life**, and **simple living**, encouraging humans to avoid unnecessary harm to **animals, plants, and ecosystems**.
- In modern times, **industrialization and urbanization** have weakened traditional environmental values, leading to **pollution, overuse of resources, and human dominance over nature**, despite growing awareness.
- The Indian Constitution supports environmental protection through **Article 48A** (duty of the State to protect environment, forests, and wildlife) and **Article 51A(g)** (duty of citizens to protect nature and show compassion to living beings).
- Environmental ethics is important because it promotes **sustainable development**, ensures **responsible resource use**, guides **environmental laws and policies**, and encourages **ethical behavior toward nature and society**.
- It helps balance **economic development and environmental protection**, supports **climate action**, reduces **pollution**, and ensures conservation for **future generations**.

Bio Ethics

- **Bioethics** is a branch of ethics that deals with moral issues arising from developments in **biology, medicine, healthcare and biotechnology**. It studies how modern science affects human life, society, law, and moral values, and helps guide responsible decision-making in sensitive biological matters.
- A major concern in bioethics is **abortion**, which means ending a pregnancy before the fetus can survive outside the womb. Ethical debates include the **right to life of the fetus, women's reproductive rights, state responsibility for maternal care**, and whether decisions about life and death should be purely human or morally restricted. Technologies like **ultrasound and amniocentesis** have also raised concerns about **sex-selective abortions**, especially in some societies.
- **Animal rights** is another important issue, which argues that non-human animals also deserve protection from suffering and have basic rights. The debate often revolves around **biocentrism (life-centered view)** versus **anthropocentrism (human-centered view)**, especially in research, food production, and animal testing.
- **Biological patents** refer to legal ownership rights over biological inventions such as **genetically modified organisms, biotech processes and genetic material**. Ethical concerns include whether **nature and genetic resources should be treated as private property**, and whether indigenous communities should share benefits from biological discoveries based on their traditional knowledge.
- **Bio-piracy** refers to the unfair use of **indigenous knowledge and natural resources** by companies or organizations without proper permission or compensation. It often leads to **loss of rights for local communities**, unequal profit distribution, and exploitation of biodiversity-rich developing regions.

- The foundation of bioethics rests on four key principles: **Autonomy** (patient's right to decide), **Beneficence** (doing good), **Non-maleficence (do no harm)**, and **Justice** (fair distribution of healthcare resources). These principles guide doctors and researchers in ethical decision-making.
- Bioethics covers several important fields including **clinical ethics** (patient care decisions like consent and end-of-life issues), **research ethics** (safe and fair human/animal experiments), **public health ethics** (fair access to healthcare and vaccines) and **environmental and animal ethics**, which focus on the moral relationship between humans, nature and animals.

Business Ethics

- **Business ethics** refers to the set of **moral principles and standards** that guide how businesses and individuals behave in the commercial world. It ensures that business activities are not only focused on **profit-making**, but also on **fairness, integrity, accountability and social responsibility**, while staying within **legal boundaries**.
- A strong ethical system in business helps create a healthy and sustainable working environment where decisions are made responsibly, considering the impact on **customers, employees, investors and society**.
- **Honesty and transparency** mean providing clear, truthful, and complete information to all stakeholders, including **customers, investors and employees**, without hiding facts or misleading others. It builds long-term trust in the organization.
- **Integrity** refers to doing the right thing even when it is difficult or when there is no immediate benefit. It reflects a company's commitment to strong moral values and ethical consistency in all situations.
- **Accountability** means taking responsibility for one's actions and decisions. In an ethical business, both **leaders and employees** are answerable for their behavior and the consequences of their decisions.
- **Fairness** ensures that all individuals are treated equally without **bias, favoritism, or discrimination**, especially in areas like hiring, promotions, salary distribution, and customer dealings.
- **Environmental concern** highlights the responsibility of businesses to reduce harm to the environment by controlling **pollution, waste, and carbon emissions**, and adopting sustainable practices for long-term ecological balance.
- **Confidentiality** involves protecting sensitive information such as **customer data, employee records, business strategies, and financial details** from unauthorized access or misuse.
- Business ethics is important because it helps build **customer trust**, as people prefer companies that are honest, responsible, and transparent in their operations.
- It strengthens the company's **reputation and brand value**, making it more reliable and respected in the market, especially during challenges or crises.
- Ethical practices also reduce **legal and financial risks** by ensuring compliance with laws and preventing issues like fraud, corruption and regulatory penalties.

Military Ethics

- **Military ethics** deals with the moral principles that guide the use of **armed force** and the professional conduct of soldiers. It focuses on how war should be fought in a responsible and humane way, even during

conflict situations.

- It is often based on the framework of **Just War Theory**, which helps evaluate when war is morally acceptable and how it should be conducted. This theory has been influenced by thinkers like **Plato, Cicero, St. Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas**, and is used in many modern ethical and legal systems.
- A major concern is the **justification of war (Jus ad bellum)**, which asks whether going to war is morally right. It includes conditions such as **self-defense, legitimate authority, and war as a last resort** only when all peaceful options fail.
- Another key aspect is **conduct in war (Jus in bello)**, which defines how war should be fought. It emphasizes **proportional use of force** and strict protection of **civilians and non-combatants**, ensuring that unnecessary harm is avoided.
- The third principle is **justice after war (Jus post bellum)**, which focuses on achieving fair peace settlements, rebuilding affected regions, and ensuring justice for victims after conflict ends.
- One of the biggest ethical issues in war is **civilian protection**, as modern warfare often leads to unintended harm to innocent people despite international laws and safeguards.
- The use of **Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs)** raises serious moral concerns because of their large-scale destruction and long-term human suffering. Events like the **Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings** remain widely debated in terms of necessity versus humanitarian impact.
- The **treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs)** is another important ethical issue. International law requires that prisoners be treated with **dignity, respect, and protection**, and strictly prohibits **torture and inhumane treatment**.
- The idea of **preemptive war** refers to attacking when an immediate threat is clear and unavoidable, while **preventive war** is more controversial because it is based on possible future threats rather than actual danger.
- Military ethics also addresses violations of war laws and stresses accountability for actions that break international humanitarian rules, ensuring that even during conflict, **moral responsibility and justice** are maintained.

Political Ethics

- **Political ethics** refers to the study of moral principles that guide **political behaviour, governance, and decision-making**. It focuses on how leaders, institutions, and citizens should act responsibly in managing public affairs and ensuring the **common good** of society.
- Politics, derived from the idea of **"affairs of the city,"** involves collective decision-making in a state or community. Political ethics ensures that this process is guided by **justice, fairness, accountability, and transparency**, rather than personal or party interests.
- A major challenge in politics is the involvement of multiple actors such as **politicians, citizens, political parties, media, judiciary, and civil society**, all of whom must act ethically to maintain a healthy democratic system.
- One of the key problems in modern politics is the decline of **public trust**, often caused by **corruption, self-interest, misuse of power, and lack of accountability** among political leaders and institutions.
- Weak political ethics can lead to serious issues such as **populism, authoritarian rule, dictatorship, and misuse of democratic systems**, which can harm freedom and equality in society.

- Movements for ethical politics have emerged across the world, including **anti-corruption movements in India, the Arab Spring, citizen activism in Latin America, social media-driven protests in North America, and leadership reforms in Africa and Europe**, showing growing demand for transparent governance.
- Political ethics is broadly divided into two areas: **ethics of process (office ethics)**, which focuses on how public officials behave and maintain transparency, and **ethics of policy**, which evaluates whether laws and public decisions are fair and just.
- A key principle of politics is the **limitation of power**, which ensures that authority is controlled through **rule of law, democratic institutions, fair elections, and checks and balances**, preventing misuse of authority.
- Another important principle is **accountability to the public**, meaning leaders must justify their actions and ensure smooth and fair **transfers of power**, respecting democratic norms.
- **Efficiency and effectiveness in governance** are also essential, ensuring that public resources are used properly and **corruption, waste, and misuse of power** are minimized.
- Core values of political ethics include **diversity and inclusion**, ensuring respect for different identities and cultures within society while maintaining unity and harmony.
- It also emphasizes **peace and security**, ensuring stability in society through fair laws and responsible governance.
- **Freedom and responsibility** are balanced in political ethics, meaning individuals enjoy rights but must also act responsibly toward society and institutions.
- **Equity and fairness** ensure that policies treat all citizens justly, especially marginalized and disadvantaged groups, promoting **social justice and equal opportunity**.
- **Solidarity with weaker sections of society** is important, ensuring that governance supports those who are economically or socially disadvantaged.
- **Sustainability** is also a core value, focusing on responsible use of **natural resources and public goods** for present and future generations.
- Key principles guiding political ethics include **justice and impartiality**, where decisions should serve the common good rather than personal or political gain.
- **Transparency** ensures that government actions, decisions, and spending are open and accessible, reducing corruption and increasing public trust.
- **Accountability** requires political leaders and officials to answer for their decisions and remain responsible to the people they serve.
- Managing **conflicts of interest** is essential, ensuring that public officials do not let personal or financial interests influence their official duties.

Professional Ethics

- **Professional ethics** are the basic **values and rules** that guide how people should behave in their workplace. They help professionals like doctors, lawyers, teachers, and employees work with **honesty, responsibility, and respect**, which builds **trust** and maintains a good **reputation**.
- One important part of professional ethics is **integrity**, which means being **honest** and **truthful** at all times. It involves not cheating, not misleading others, and making decisions based on **strong moral values** even

in difficult situations.

- Another key aspect is **confidentiality**, which means keeping **sensitive information** safe. Professionals must not share **private data** about clients, employees, or organizations without proper **permission**.
- Being **impartial** or fair is also very important. It means treating everyone **equally**, avoiding **bias**, **favoritism**, and **conflicts of interest**, and making decisions based on **facts and merit**.
- **Accountability** is a core principle, which means taking **responsibility** for one's actions and decisions. It includes accepting **mistakes** and making efforts to **correct them** instead of blaming others.
- Following professional ethics helps in building **trust** and a strong **reputation**. Ethical behavior attracts **clients, customers**, and **talented employees**, and strengthens relationships.
- It also ensures **legal compliance**, meaning organizations follow **laws** and **regulations**, reducing the risk of **legal issues** and **penalties**.
- Ethical practices create a **positive work environment** where there is **fairness, respect**, and **inclusivity**, and where issues like **discrimination, conflicts**, and **misuse of power** are minimized.

Media Ethics

- **Media ethics** act as a **moral guide** for professionals like journalists, news anchors, and content creators, helping them share information in a **responsible** and **ethical** way. It ensures **public trust**, protects **individual rights**, and prevents the spread of **harmful or misleading content**.
- One of the most important principles is **truth and accuracy**, which means all information must be **fact-checked, verified**, and presented in the **correct context**. Media should avoid **distortion** and must quickly **correct mistakes** to maintain credibility.
- **Fairness and impartiality** require the media to present news in a **balanced and unbiased** manner. It should include **multiple perspectives**, clearly separate **facts from opinions**, and avoid **favoritism or personal bias**.
- **Objectivity** is closely related, meaning journalists should focus on **facts** rather than personal views, allowing the audience to form their own **independent opinions**.
- **Independence and integrity** mean that media professionals should work free from **political, corporate**, or **personal pressure**. They must avoid **conflicts of interest**, and should not accept **bribes or favors** that could influence their reporting.
- **Respect for privacy and dignity** is essential, meaning the media should not unnecessarily invade someone's **private life**, especially during **sensitive situations** like grief, illness, or trauma. People's **dignity and consent** must always be respected.
- **Minimizing harm** means thinking about the **impact** of content before publishing. Media should avoid **sensationalism, spreading panic, glorifying crime**, or reinforcing **stereotypes** that may harm individuals or society.
- **Accountability and transparency** require media organizations to take **responsibility** for their work. They should openly **admit mistakes**, issue **corrections**, and remain **transparent** in their processes to maintain public trust.
- Ethical media focuses on **public interest** rather than just **public curiosity**, meaning it should report what is truly **important for society**, not just what is **sensational or attention-grabbing**.

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