

1. What is virtue ethics? Explain its significance in public life.

Introduction

Virtue ethics is a broad term for theories that emphasize the role of character and virtue in moral philosophy rather than either doing one's duty or acting in order to bring about good consequences. These traits derive from natural internal tendencies, however, once established, they become stable.

Body

Significance of virtue ethics in public life:

- **Longevity or Constancy:** Most virtue ethics theories take their inspiration from Aristotle who declared that a virtuous person is someone who has ideal character traits throughout. For example, a virtuous person is someone who is kind across many situations over a lifetime because that is his/her character and not because he/she wants to maximize utility or gain favours or simply do his/her duty.
- **Independent of existence of set laws:** It helps an individual in assessing and maintaining one's character. It invariably makes a person contribute to the society without the requirement of laws and punishments. Following virtue ethics enables a person to develop and follow virtues like honesty, integrity, transparency etc. and live and be righteous.
- **Modesty:** leads the individual to perform his/her function with utmost humbleness and simplicity, especially for civil servants, preventing them from asserting haughtiness.
- **Temperance:** as quality of self-refraining is practiced resulting in prevention of unnecessary conflicts and clashes in general.
- **Inherent nature:** They make us better human beings as our motivation to do something good stems from inside and are not based on the result of doing that action. For instance, if a person finds out an immoral act of his/her organisation then he/she will be not in any dilemma of actual welfare vs. loyalty to his/her organisation in pursuit of his/her growth in the company. The person will take the required action to disclose the immoral act directed as a virtue of honesty.
- **Inculcation of traits:** Virtue ethics consider many feminine traits, such as caring and nurturing, as equally important for the wholesome growth of an individual.

Virtue Ethics in Indian Philosophy:

From early protagonists like Lord Buddha and Chanakya to modern thinkers of India like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi etc, Virtue Ethics has always been an inherent morally responsible way of living propagated by various leaders and thinkers of this country, adopted and spread in different ways.

Mahatma Gandhi and his stand for ethics in Indian Freedom Struggle: Gandhi believed that as human beings, men can never reach the perfection of divine virtues. Still, they should strive with all their strength to follow the virtues of truth, love, nonviolence, tolerance, fearlessness, charity and service to mankind. Men have to uphold the right, regardless of the personal consequences they may face. He urged Satyagrahis to adapt to these virtues. He regarded that Indian struggle for freedom stands for truth and represents a just struggle for national and individual autonomy.

Selfless service to mankind: He believed that all humans are equal and there are no differences amongst us. He stood for the unity of life and humans, which was evident in his selfless works for untouchables (calling them Harijans).

Conclusion:

Though virtue ethics comes with its own set of objections like self-centredness, failure of practicality and lack of lawfully guided principles, the constant self-awareness, self-development and knowledge building that a person inculcates as a result of virtue ethics cannot be overlooked. Emotional intelligence along with practicality where required will make a wholesome combination for an individual's growth and help her/him contribute essentially to the society.

2. Explain the concept and applications of consequentialism with the help of suitable examples.

Introduction

Consequentialism is the class of normative ethics considering that the consequences of one's conduct are the ultimate basis for any judgment about the rightness or wrongness of that conduct. It focuses on ends or goals or consequences.

Body

Consequentialism is based on two principles:

- Whether an act is right or wrong depends only on the results of that act.
- The better consequences an act produces, the better or more right that act is.

For example- To control the militancy in Kashmir during early 90s many actions were taken by the Army that violated the Human Rights. A senior army officer accepted the fact and said that we are sorry for the actions, but sometimes in order to prevent

the larger evil, small evil has to be done. Integrity of the country was more important.

Ethical egoism: Ethical egoism is the consequences for the individual agent are taken to matter more than any other result. Thus, egoism will prescribe actions that may be beneficial, detrimental, or neutral to the welfare of others.

Example- Business man selling his products for above price to benefit his family and their lifestyle.

Ethical altruism: Ethical altruism can be seen as a consequentialist ethic which prescribes that an individual take action that have the best consequences for everyone except for himself.

Example- Helping the homeless can be altruistic as long as it is not done for recognition or to make oneself feel better.

Utilitarianism: Benefits everybody including the individual that is greatest welfare of work for larger number of people.

Example: Fostering scientific temper by the government by allocating more money in the budget in a country can help all sections of the society with a benefit of good will for the government.

Hedonism: Hedonism is a school of thought that argues that pleasure and happiness are the primary or most important intrinsic goods and the proper aim of human life. It is based on two principles pain and pleasure that is feeling pleasure in their own way

Example: A drug addicts would overdose him/ her for pleasure but it might not give him/ her real happiness.

Rule consequentialism: it is a theory that is sometimes seen as an attempt to reconcile deontology and consequentialism—and in some cases, this is stated as a criticism of rule consequentialism.

Example: Killing one person to save life of ten others would be against the 'moral' rules here.

Disadvantages of consequentialism:

- Future consequences are difficult to predict.
- Measuring and comparing the 'goodness' of consequences is very difficult.
- It is easy to bias in favour of particular groups.
- It ignores things we regard as ethically relevant.

Conclusion

Though Consequentialism is having many favourable outcomes, inculcating moral rules and ethical behaviour is essential during means of result.

3. What was more important to Mahatma Gandhi - means or end of an action? How did he practice these principles in his public life?

Introduction

The Means vs. Ends Debate of an action has been so prominent in ethics that two separate schools of thought emerged. **Consequentialism** focussing on judging the moral worth of the results of the actions and **Deontological ethics** on judging the actions themselves.

Body

Mahatma Gandhi's Philosophy:

Gandhi observed that "Noble Goals can be achieved only through Noble Means" Here he adheres similarity with Immanuel Kant's philosophy of moral command that action should end in itself.

That's why Gandhi advocated that people should reform themselves and then preach to people i.e. more focus in the cultivation of self.

Gandhi used an example to explain why means always take precedence over ends in the context of usage of Non-violence over violence to establish Peace .

"If I want to deprive you of your watch, I shall certainly have to fight for it; if I want to buy your watch, I shall have to pay for it; and if I want a gift, I shall have to plead for it; and, according to the means I employ, the watch is stolen property, my own property, or a donation."

Application of principles in real life:

Gandhi withdrew the first large scale mass movement "Non co-operation movement", because of one single '**Chauri Chaura incident**' because the incident deviated from his Non-violence stance and he immediately called off the movement despite criticism.

The **Seven Sins philosophy** also emphasises on Importance of Means. For example, in the list of sins - Politics without Principles, Wealth without Work, Worship without Sacrifice, etc., the former are the ends whereas the latter symbolises means which imply that Ends are of lesser value without the desired means.

Gandhi's **notion of democracy** is that under it the weakest shall have the same opportunities as the strongest. Which stands for Deontological ethics i.e. putting dignity of an Individual over narrow definition of democracy.

With respect to **concept of development** (END) he emphasised on the idea of village level sustenance through small and cottage industries thereby making villages self-reliant (Desired Means).

Gandhi's Ideas of politics with principle and special stress on 3rd tier Panchayati raj, respect for others' religion and pride for one's own & the famous Gandhian quote - "the nature is sufficiently endowed to satisfy every man's need but not every man's greed" are respectively the wide dimensions that emanate from Gandhi's Deontology philosophy.

Conclusion

Mahatma Gandhi was not only a capable leader but a great thinker as well. His Philosophy can be summed up in his words- "Means are after all, everything'. As the means so the end..."

The philosophy is of great importance in today's situation mired with a lot of pains and conflicts. These principles are instrumental in holding the society together.

4. What is deontology? Do you agree with its principles?

Introduction

Deontology is the normative ethical theory that the morality of an action should be based on whether that action itself is right or wrong under a series of rules, rather than based on the consequences of the action.

Body

- It is often associated with philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant believed that ethical actions follow universal moral laws, such as "Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't cheat."
- This is generally the philosophy of most of the organized religions. Bhagwat Geeta says that your duty is important rather than the consequences. The five vows of Jainism too are based on deontological ethics.
- According to Mahatma Gandhi also, wrong means cannot lead to a right end.

Principles of deontology:

- Deontology just requires that people follow the rules and do their duty.
- It doesn't require weighing the costs and benefits of a situation. This avoids subjectivity and uncertainty because you only have to follow set rules.

In favour:

- By applying ethical duties to all people in all situations the theory is readily applied to most practical situations.
- By focusing on a person's intentions, it also places ethics entirely within our control – we can't always control or predict the outcomes of our actions, but we are in complete control of our intentions.

- There are absolute principles, like do not cheat, do not steal etc. which apply to everyone.
- There are things you have to do, even though you know they are wrong, such as shooting that intruder to protect your family.

Against:

- It is seen as strongly opposed to utilitarianism as it ignores what is at stake in terms of consequences. Kant, for example, argued it would be unethical to lie about the location of our friend, even to a person trying to murder them!
- Bioethical decisions in areas such as abortion, euthanasia, cloning, organ harvesting, end-of-life decisions, etc. are against the ethics of a medical practitioner, yet practiced for the greater good.
- It can produce results that can be unacceptable to most. For example, suppose you're a software engineer and learn that a nuclear missile is about to launch that might start a war. You can hack the network and cancel the launch, but it's against your professional code of ethics to break into any software system without permission. And, it's a form of lying and cheating. Deontology advises not to violate this rule. However, in letting the missile launch, thousands of people will die.

Conclusion

The rigidity of deontology can be done away by using threshold deontology, which argues we should always obey the rules unless in an emergency situation, at which point we should revert to a consequentialist approach.

5. Can lack of morality be compensated by laws? Critically examine.

Introduction:

Law is the codification of societal norms and values which helps in delivering justice. While Morality is very those values and norms on which law is framed to decide what is right and wrong. Law and morality are intimately related to each other. Laws are generally based on the moral principles of society. Both regulate the conduct of the individual in society.

Body:

Morality forms the basis of good law and therefore laws are framed to prohibit any immoral act. For example, Laws in India prohibits domestic violence, atrocities on lower castes, child marriages, crimes like murder and rapes because they are immoral.

Where lack of morality is compensated by law:

Law is an enactment made by the state. It is backed by physical coercion. Its breach is punishable by the courts. Laws influence moral behaviour to a great extent. Laws, to be effective, must represent the moral ideas of the people. But good laws sometimes serve to rouse the moral conscience of the people and create and maintain such conditions as may encourage the growth of morality.

For example, when society started to think that Sati is immoral then it was formed as law. Similarly having a law on something like following traffic rules shapes morality that we are responsible for other's life too.

Where lack of morality cannot be compensated by Law:

However, laws deal with only external affairs of humans while morality deals with both external and internal affairs. Hence Laws cannot be used to regulate internal affairs of man even when they are immoral e.g. immoral acts like rude attitudes of people towards others, selfishness, telling lie etc. are not regulated by law.

Where there are laws but still society lacks morality:

Individual behaviour can't be controlled every time. There are situations where we have stringent laws but still, we observe a lack of morality in that particular area. For example:

- We have well-defined tax laws, but there are less compliance and tax avoidance by using loopholes in tax laws, which is immoral.
- There are harsh punishments for rape by laws, but every minute a girl is being raped in the world.
- Similarly, we have laws for theft but it is happening every now and then.
- In spite of constitutional provisions, we still see cases of untouchability as the full moral conscience of the people has not been aroused in favour of such laws.

Therefore, obedience to law depends upon the active support of the moral sentiments of the people. Laws which are not supported by the moral conscience of the people are liable to become dead letters.

Conclusion:

The only check against the breach of morality is social condemnation or individual conscience. Moral actions are a matter of choice of inner conscience of the individual; laws are a matter of compulsion. Law cannot be made on each and every aspect of life. More than law behavioural change is the key to a moral society, as rightly said by BR Ambedkar, "No law can protect us if it's not avowed by the moral conscience of the society at large".