

2. Scope or Province of Ethics

By the scope or province of Ethics we mean the range of subject-matter, *i.e.*, the particular subjects with which Ethics deals.

Ethics as a science of morality, discusses the rightness or wrongness of human actions. Here 'actions' mean 'voluntary actions'. Therefore, Ethics discusses the nature of voluntary actions, the distinction between voluntary and non-voluntary actions, and related topics, *e.g.* desire, motive, intention etc.

Ethics is primarily concerned with moral judgments or the distinctions of right and wrong. Moral judgment refers to the *standard* by which we judge actions. The question of moral standards is intimately related to the question of the *ultimate end* or the *highest good*. The actions which are conducive to this moral ideal are right or good, and those that do not conform to it are wrong or evil. Ascertainment of the moral ideal or ultimate end is the business of Ethics. Different thinkers have laid down different moral ideals. According to some, the moral ideal is a *Law*; to some others it is *pleasure* or *happiness*; to some it is *duty for duty's sake*; and to some again it is *perfection* or *self-realisation*. The business of Ethics is to explain these ideals and to determine which one is the best and most acceptable.

The consciousness of right and wrong is accompanied by the consciousness of 'oughtness', *duty* or *moral obligation*. When we are aware of something which is right, we also know that it is our duty to do what is right. Kant says that there is no meaning in 'right' unless it involves the 'ought'. Thus the ideas of obligation or duty and rights come within the scope of Ethics.

Consciousness of moral obligation is related to other notions such as those of merit of actions. We approve of the conduct of

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man who does what is right and disapprove of his conduct when he does what is wrong. There is merit in his action when the agent performs a duty in spite of many obstacles, and demerit is involved when one fails to do an act which he knows he should do. Ethics deals with the merit and demerit of action.

Ethics deals with moral judgment which leads to the questions as to which is the real subject of moral judgment, what should be the object of moral judgment, and what is the nature of the faculty of moral judgment.

Every science has certain fundamental postulates. Ethics as a science has also certain fundamental postulates, viz., Personality, Reason, and Freedom of will. Ethics, therefore, concerns itself with the discussion of these postulates. Besides this, Ethics deals with the *moral sentiment*. Moral sentiment means the feelings arising in the mind in connection with moral ideals and judgments. The questions as the nature and origin of moral sentiments and the relation of moral sentiments to moral judgment are discussed in Ethics.

Conscience is another name of the moral faculty. Ethics cannot remain indifferent to the discussion of the nature of conscience and different theories relating to it.

Man has freedom of will and, therefore, man has to take the moral responsibility of his actions. A wrong-doer is responsible for his wrong deeds, and he should be punished for wrong-doing. Punishment is ethically justified. Ethics, thus, deals with punishment and its different theories.

Though Ethics has a definite range of subject matters for its discussion, yet its primary aim is to attempt a definition of the highest good of man. In this attempt Ethics has indirectly to deal with several problems which are psychological, philosophical, sociological and political in nature. The psychological problems with which Ethics is concerned are those of the nature of voluntary actions, springs of action and freedom of will. The philosophical problems are those of the real nature of human personality, man's place in the universe, freedom of will, immortality of the soul etc. The sociological problem in Ethics is that relating to the relation between individual and society; and the political problems are those of the relation between the individual and the state and the moral basis of the state.