

Basic Concept of Ethics Morality and Value

The basic concepts of ethics, morality, and values are foundational principles that guide human behaviour, though they differ in their source and application.

Values

Values are the fundamental, deeply held beliefs and ideals that individuals or groups consider important or desirable in life. They are the core on which morals and ethics are built and serve as a general framework for decision-making and priorities.

- **Source:** Personal, shaped by family, culture, religion, and life experiences.
- **Flexibility:** Relatively permanent but can evolve over time.
- **Function:** Motivate and determine an individual's priorities and general behavior.

Examples: Honesty, integrity, respect, freedom, success, loyalty, kindness, and responsibility.

Morality

Morals are specific, learned values that guide an individual's sense of right and wrong. They are generally private, internally enforced via one's conscience, and determine an individual's character.

- **Source:** Internal (personal beliefs), though influenced by external sources like culture and religion.
- **Flexibility:** Can be subjective and vary from person to person or culture to culture.
- **Function:** Act as a personal compass to distinguish between right and wrong actions.

Examples:

- Believing it is wrong to lie, regardless of the situation.
- A personal belief that all people deserve equal respect.
- Feeling guilt or remorse after doing something you believe is wrong.

Ethics

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that provides a systematic, rational framework of principles and rules for behaviour, usually within a specific community, profession, or society. Ethics are often formal, objective, and externally enforced.

- **Source:** External (societal or professional norms, laws).

- **Flexibility:** Tend to be more consistent and absolute within a given context, though they can be debated and refined over time.
- **Function:** Establish a standard code of conduct for group interaction and provide a basis for social order.

Examples:

- **Medical ethics:** The principle of confidentiality between a doctor and patient.
- **Professional ethics:** A lawyer's duty to defend their client to the best of their ability, even if they personally believe the client is guilty.
- **Business ethics:** A company's code of conduct that requires all employees to avoid conflicts of interest.

NOTE POINT: Values form the foundation, morals are an individual's application of those values to determine right/wrong for themselves, and ethics are the formal, shared rules a group or society develops based on collective moral reasoning. While an individual's morals might conflict with a group's ethics (e.g., a moral objection to capital punishment vs. the legal ethics of a prosecutor), the ethical framework often supersedes personal morals for the sake of maintaining a functioning system or society.

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