

Psychology of Ethics and Moral Values

The "psychology of ethics and moral values" is highly relevant, especially concerning the development of foundational values, emotional intelligence, and ethical decision-making in public administration.

Core Concepts and Definitions

- **Values:** Guiding principles and fundamental beliefs that influence an individual's judgment, choices, and actions. They form the core of one's character.
- **Morals:** Specific, context-driven rules or habits of conduct derived from values, often associated with a common good and considered binding by society (e.g., honesty, kindness).
- **Ethics:** A system of principles and rules of behaviour (often from an external source like a professional code of conduct or constitution) that gives a basis to moral theory and helps decide what is right or wrong in a specific context.
- **Moral Reasoning/Judgment:** The cognitive process individuals use to determine whether an action is right or wrong, considering the consequences, intentions, and underlying principles.

Key Psychological Theories of Moral Development

Understanding these theories helps in analysing how values and ethics are formed and applied:

1. Jean Piaget's Theory:

Proposed a shift from heteronomous morality (rules as unchangeable, focusing on consequences) to autonomous morality (rules as socially agreed-upon, considering intentions, fairness, and reciprocity).

2. Lawrence Kohlberg's Theory (most relevant)

Describes six stages in three levels of moral development, arguing moral reasoning progresses from self-interest to universal ethical principles.

➤ Pre-conventional Level: Morality is externally controlled.

- **Stage 1:** Obedience and punishment orientation (actions judged by consequences to self).

- **Stage 2:** Self-interest and reward orientation (actions that serve one's own needs; "tit-for-tat").
- **Conventional Level: Individuals adopt society's views and expectations. Most adults remain here.**
 - **Stage 3:** "Good boy/nice girl" orientation (seeking approval and maintaining good relationships).
 - **Stage 4:** Law and order orientation (upholding laws and rules for a functioning society).
- **Post-conventional Level: Individuals are guided by self-accepted moral principles and universal ethical principles.**
 - **Stage 5:** Social contract orientation (laws are viewed as flexible instruments for the general welfare; rights and values should be respected).
 - **Stage 6:** Universal ethical principles orientation (decisions based on abstract, self-chosen ethical principles like justice and equality, even if they conflict with law).

3. Carol Gilligan's critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory

Carol Gilligan's critique of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development argues that it is biased against women. She contended that Kohlberg's model, based on male participants, emphasized an "ethic of justice" centered on rules and rights, while overlooking the "ethic of care," which focuses on relationships, compassion, and responsibility and is often more prevalent in women. Gilligan proposed that women's moral reasoning, which centres on care, was undervalued by Kohlberg's stages, and called for a broader understanding of morality that includes both justice and care perspectives.

Key points of Gilligan's critique:

- **Ethic of Justice vs. Ethic of Care:** Gilligan contrasted Kohlberg's emphasis on justice and abstract principles with her concept of an "ethic of care".
 - **Ethic of Justice:** Focuses on rules, rights, and fairness (more common in men, according to the theory).
 - **Ethic of Care:** Focuses on relationships, compassion, and responsibility for others (more commonly associated with women).

Relevance and Application

The psychology of ethics is crucial for the aptitude and foundational values required for a civil servant:

- **Foundational Values:** Psychological concepts underpin core values like integrity, impartiality, objectivity, non-partisanship, empathy, tolerance, and compassion.
- **Ethical Decision Making:** Understanding one's own stage of moral reasoning and that of others helps in navigating complex ethical dilemmas and making objective, fair decisions, free from personal bias.
- **Emotional Intelligence (EI):** EI (understanding and managing one's own emotions and those of others) is vital for empathy and compassion, which are essential for effective public service, especially towards vulnerable sections of society.
- **Public Trust and Accountability:** Ethical behaviour and moral courage in civil servants foster public trust and social capital, which are cornerstones of good governance.
- **Codes of Ethics vs. Moral Conviction:** While codes provide external guidance, a strong internal moral compass (conscience) is vital for action in ambiguous or challenging situations.
- **Impact on Work Culture:** Shared positive values promote unity, cooperation, and a healthy, efficient work culture within the administration.