

Approaches of Ethical Study as Indian Perspective and Western Perspective

The Answer writing of GS Paper IV for the UPSC Mains exam it is important to understanding the different approaches to ethical study in Indian and Western perspectives requires focusing on their core principles, goals, and methodologies.

Indian Perspective

Indian ethics is deeply integrated with philosophy and spirituality, seen as a practical guide to living a good life aimed at self-realization and liberation (moksha).

Key highlights of Indian Perspective

- **Foundation:** Rooted in ancient scriptures like the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Buddhist/Jain teachings.
- **Core Concepts:**
 - **Dharma:** Emphasizes duty, righteousness, and the moral order that sustains individual and social harmony. Duties are often context-dependent (e.g., kshatriya dharma for a warrior).
 - **Karma:** The universal moral law that all actions have consequences, which may manifest in this life or future lives.
 - **Moksha/Nirvana:** The ultimate goal of life is liberation from the cycle of rebirth (samsara), achieved through spiritual discipline and ethical conduct.
 - **Ahimsa:** Non-violence and compassion towards all sentient beings is a central ethical principle.
 - **Purusharthas:** A framework for a balanced life, encompassing Dharma (virtue), Artha (wealth), Kama (pleasure), and Moksha (liberation), with Dharma guiding all pursuits.
 - **Nishkama Karma:** The selfless performance of duties without attachment to the results, as advocated in the Bhagavad Gita.
- **Approach:** Primarily practical and holistic, focusing on inner transformation, character development, and a synthesis of theory and practice. It often incorporates intuition and spiritual experience alongside reason.

Western Perspective

Western ethics is generally more theoretical, rational, and focuses on human conduct and behaviour as it relates to defining right and wrong through established theories.

Key highlights of Western Perspective

- **Foundation:** Traced back to ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, evolving through the Enlightenment to modern theories.
- **Core Concepts/Theories:**
 - **Deontology (Kantian Ethics):** Focuses on moral duties, rules, and universal principles, irrespective of consequences. Actions are inherently right or wrong (e.g., Kant's categorical imperative).
 - **Consequentialism (Utilitarianism):** Evaluates the morality of an action based on its outcomes or consequences, aiming for the "greatest happiness for the greatest number".
 - **Virtue Ethics (Aristotelian):** Emphasizes the cultivation of virtuous character traits (e.g., courage, temperance, justice) as the basis of ethical behavior.
 - **Rights and Justice:** Strong emphasis on individual rights, autonomy, social contracts, and fairness (e.g., John Locke, John Rawls).
- **Approach:** Relies heavily on logic, rational argumentation, and empirical evidence. It often separates ethics from religion and focuses on universal moral principles that can be applied to specific situations.

Feature	Indian Perspective	Western Perspective
Focus	Holistic life, spiritual liberation (Moksha)	Individual conduct, moral theories, social contracts
Methodology	Practical, intuitive wisdom, way of life	Theoretical, logical reasoning, formalized rules
Key Frameworks	Dharma, Karma, Purusharthas, Ahimsa	Deontology, Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics, Rights
Scope of Duty	Extends to all sentient beings (holistic/ecocentric)	Primarily human-centered (anthropocentric)
Goal	Self-realization and inner harmony	Achieving "the good life" or social welfare in this life

Space for Class Discussion

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