

Discuss the key determinants of ethics in human actions, such as individual conscience, social norms and institutional mechanisms.

Question Understanding – Finding Information

- **Precise Syllabus Mapping:** Essence, Determinants and Consequences (Ethics and Human Interface). (GS Paper – IV)
- **Essential Instructions in GS Paper IV Answer Writing:**
 - Answer the question as a future civil servant, not as a philosopher. Clearly mention the ethical principles involved; keep any flowcharts/diagrams simple and concise.
- **Directive words:**
 - Discuss → Explain the determinants with depth, balance and examples
- **Focal points of the questions:**
 - Identify and explain: Individual conscience, Social norms & Institutional mechanisms
 - Show how they influence ethical behaviour in personal and public life

Answer Writing Structure (Outline)

Introduction Paragraph

- Clear definition of ethics
- Recognition of multi-level determinants

Body Paragraph

A. Individual Conscience (Internal Determinant)

- **What to Explain**
 - Moral awareness and inner voice
 - Integrity, values, moral reasoning
 - Shaped by upbringing, education, life experiences
- **Ethical Role**
 - Acts as the primary guide for ethical action
 - Enables resistance to unethical orders
- Mention at least one example after

B. Social Norms and Cultural Values (Social Determinant)

- **What to Explain**
 - Collective beliefs, traditions, customs, peer expectations
 - Social approval/disapproval influencing behaviour
- **Ethical Role**
 - Normalises ethical or unethical conduct
 - Can both strengthen or dilute ethics
- Mention at least one example after

C. Social Norms and Cultural Values (Social Determinant)

- **What to Explain**
 - Laws, rules, codes of conduct, accountability institutions
 - Enforcement and deterrence mechanisms
- **Ethical Role**
 - Provides external regulation of behaviour
 - Ensures ethics even when conscience or norms fail
- Mention at least one example after

D. Interrelationship Among Determinants (Analytical Angle)

- Strong institutions compensate for weak social norms
- Ethical individuals strengthen institutions
- Social norms influence both conscience formation and institutional design

Conclusion (max. 30-35 Words)

- Ethical maturity
- Forward-looking synthesis

Dos & Don'ts**• Do for Maximum Marks**

- ✓ Can use Brainstorming idea (in words): Conscience → Social Influence → Institutional Enforcement → Ethical Action
- ✓ Use ethics terminology (integrity, accountability, moral autonomy)
- ✓ Give simple real-life examples
- ✓ Maintain balanced analysis
- ✓ Use sub-headings and clarity
- ✓ Keep answers non-preachy and analytical

• Don't do these Common Mistakes

- × Don't write like a philosophy essay
- × Avoid moral preaching or idealism
- × Don't ignore institutional mechanisms
- × Avoid abstract language without examples
- × Don't confuse with case study format

Notes Oriented Content for Writing Answer

Ethics in human action refers to the set of moral principles and standards that guide individuals in distinguishing right from wrong. The ethical quality of these actions is not determined by a single factor, but rather by a complex interplay of internal and external "determinants" that shape how people perceive and act upon moral issues.

Individual Conscience (Personal Level)

This is the internal moral compass and the ultimate subjective checkpoint for actions.

- **Core Principle:** Conscience is the "inner voice" that distinguishes right from wrong, often functioning during an ethical dilemma.
- **Influences:** Shaped by upbringing, education, and personal values like honesty and compassion.
- **Application:** Whistleblowers often act on their conscience to expose corruption despite personal risks.

Social Norms (Societal Level)

Society provides the external collective standards that members are expected to follow.

- **Culture and Traditions:** Cultural background shapes beliefs about justice and responsibility from a young age. For example, the Indian ethos of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam promotes global harmony.
- **Religion:** Provides foundational ethical frameworks, such as the principle of Ahimsa (non-violence) in Hinduism and Buddhism.
- **Peer Influence:** The behaviour of social groups and friends can reinforce or challenge an individual's ethical standards.

Institutional Mechanisms (Structural Level)

Formal frameworks provide external guidelines and enforce accountability.

- **Legal Frameworks:** Laws establish baseline standards for acceptable behaviour, such as anti-corruption laws to deter misuse of public resources.
- **Codes of Conduct:** Professional ethics (e.g., Civil Service Conduct Rules) provide clear boundaries for civil servants.
- **Transparency Tools:** Mechanisms like the Right to Information (RTI) Act reduce unethical practices in public administration by ensuring accountability.

Other Important Determinants

- **Family:** First institution of learning, instilling values like honesty and compassion.
- **Religious Beliefs:** Frameworks providing guidance on morality (e.g., Karma, Eight-fold path).
- **Education:** Develops rational, critical thinking for ethical dilemmas.
- **Media & Peer Influence:** Social media, films, and peers strongly influence behaviour.
- **Situational Factors:** Pressure of circumstances (e.g., saving a life by breaking a minor law).

Conclusion

- **Interplay:** Ethical behavior is a complex interplay of personal, social, and institutional factors.
- **Synthesis:** A strong, educated conscience, guided by progressive social norms, and upheld by robust institutional mechanisms, is essential for good governance.
- **Goal:** To move from mere compliance with laws to internalizing ethical values (virtue ethics).