



Ministry of high education and Scientific Research

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# ETHICS AND DEONTOLOGY

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## RÉSUMÉ

This lecture establishes the foundational concepts of morality, ethics, deontology, and law within a university context

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## CHAPTER 01 : FUNDAMENTAL NOTIONS

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In this first chapter, we will see the fundamental notions essential for every person belonging to the university. First, we will look at the definitions of morality, ethics, deontology, and finally, Law. Secondly, we will attempt to distinguish between all these notions, which seem to have the same meaning but, in reality, are distinct and substantially different.

### I. Definitions:

#### I. 1. Morality

Etymologically, the word "moral" originates from the Latin «morales», meaning «related to customs». Morality encompasses a set of norms shaped by culture, education, traditions, and daily life, serving as guides for human behaviour within society. It constitutes one of the three components of philosophy, alongside logic and ethics. The rules established by morality define how individuals should act.

Morality is closely linked to values and conventions established collectively within each culture or society, stemming from individual conscience, which allows one to distinguish between good and evil, as well as between violence and actions based on peace and harmony. Moral principles such as honesty, benevolence, respect, virtue, etc., play a predominant role in defining the moral sense of each individual. These universal values govern human behaviour and foster healthy and harmonious relationships.

As an example, if a student, through abnormal behaviour, creates a hostile and stressful environment for others, it constitutes a violation of the moral rules of respect, tolerance, and the well-being of their peers and goes against the moral norms expected by the university community.

Moral rules can be disseminated as simple habits that have gradually become established within a social group, such as rules of politeness and civility. These rules are called - relative rules - because they are specific to a given group or society. Other rules can be explicitly stated as absolute norms, invariable over time, they are said to be - universal -.

## **I. 2- Ethics**

Derived from the Greek word « ethos » meaning « way of living », ethics is a branch of philosophy concerned with human behaviour and, more precisely, with the conduct of individuals in society. Ethics examines the rational justification of our moral judgments; it studies what is morally right or wrong, just or unjust.

In a broader sense, ethics reflects on the human person and their interaction with nature and other human beings, on freedom, responsibility, and justice. It can be said, in general terms, that ethics, insofar as it commits to reflecting on the relationship between human beings and the world, is concerned with the autonomy of the person. This autonomy is the primary condition for ethical decision-making and any objective analysis of facts. Autonomy manifests itself when an individual chooses, in a decision-making process, to free themselves, as much as possible, from their conditioning. To the extent that this operation requires a certain lucidity, allowing for objective judgment and deciding on the orientation to take, one understands that the practice of ethical decision-making is difficult to achieve.

## **I.. 3- Deontology: "Theory of Duty":**

The term "deontology" has its roots in ancient Greek, more precisely in the word "deontos", which evokes the concept of "duty". In its usual meaning, it refers to the obligations incumbent upon individuals within the framework of their professional activity.

Deontology represents a set of requirements and rules specific to a particular field or a given profession. These rules are based on a foundation of moral values and ethical norms, thus establishing an ethical framework that outlines the contours of professional conduct.

This body of rules applies both to members of the same profession, whether they are doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, or others, and to individuals in the service of the same employer, such as civil servants in public administration. The obligations shared by a professional group reflect values and principles deemed fundamental. Sometimes, these precepts are recorded in a code of deontology, also known as a "professional moral code".

Codes of deontology, generally developed by professional bodies, assume two primary functions: on the one hand, they aim to protect the public interest by establishing an ethical framework for action for professionals, and on the other hand, they seek to preserve the

reputation and integrity of the members of the profession. These two pillars become vulnerable in case of violation of the codes.

However, it is important to understand that a deontology charter sets out simple and clear rules governing all professional activities within a profession, regardless of the level of responsibility. This charter, while emphasising respect for the rights and duties of all, addresses aspects such as the prevention of conflicts of interest, compliance with national laws and conventions, adherence to an external code of conduct, and strict respect for established rules. Furthermore, legislative, regulatory, and institutional provisions that govern the corresponding professional activities back a deontology charter.

## **I.. 4- Law**

The rule of Law is a rule of conduct established within society by the representatives of the people, and it applies to all members of that society. Its objective is to protect both the individual and the community by balancing general interests with individual freedoms. The rule of Law defines our rights and duties, and can thus prohibit or punish actions that are dangerous or harmful to oneself or to society.

The rule of law is distinguished by the following essential characteristics:

- It is imperative, meaning everyone must follow it.
- It is general and abstract, applying impersonally.
- Only the rule of law is subject to sanctions imposed by the State in case of violation, which creates an unavoidable obligation for all citizens.
- These sanctions can take different forms, such as criminal penalties (like fines or prison sentences), civil remedies (like damages), or administrative sanctions (like the withdrawal of a driver's license).
- State authorities, particularly magistrates, are responsible for applying these sanctions, sometimes using public force.
- The set of legal rules constitutes what is called positive law, defining what is permitted or prohibited within society.

## II. Distinctions

### II.1 – Distinction between Ethics and Morality

The terms "morality" and "ethics" are intrinsically linked to the sphere of values and moral principles, but questioning whether they are synonymous or carry distinct meanings is a complex issue that has sparked various reflections over time.

For some thinkers, "morality" and "ethics" are considered interchangeable, finding their roots in the Latin "mores" and the Greek "éthos", both meaning «customs» and "mores". However, others see a fundamental distinction between these two terms, giving rise to a conceptual division.

Morality refers to a set of values and principles that serve as a guide to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, and acceptable from unacceptable. It prescribes norms to which one should conform. For example, one might say that "what I did by reporting the assault I witnessed is in accordance with morality" or that "morality requires giving everyone their due." Throughout eras and cultures, different conceptions of morality have emerged, each being called a "morality".

In contrast, ethics is not limited to a particular set of values or principles. It represents a reasoned reflection aimed at determining how to act virtuously. It invites us to question the moral values and principles that should guide our actions in various situations, with the aim of aligning them with these norms. Ethics can be explored at different levels, some more fundamental and others more practical, thus dividing into various domains.

Morality proposes a set of values and principles, such as charity and forgiveness... In contrast, ethics goes beyond these specific norms, engaging in a reflection on how these moral principles should be interpreted and put into practice in different circumstances.

Thus, the distinction between morality and ethics lies in the fact that morality focuses on established norms, while ethics engages in deep reflection on how we should act in accordance with these norms, thus offering a more nuanced and thoughtful perspective on our actions and decisions.

## **II. 2- Distinction between Ethics and Deontology**

Deontology, as mentioned earlier, encompasses all the duties and obligations imposed on members of a professional order or association. Similar to laws, deontological rules apply uniformly to all members of the group, regardless of the professional context. An authority is designated to ensure their compliance and to impose sanctions in case of infringement based on a code of deontology.

It is essential to note that compliance with deontology does not necessarily require reflection on the underlying values, nor even sharing these values. In contrast, ethics adopts a diametrically opposed approach, encouraging the professional to examine the values that motivate their action and to choose the most appropriate conduct accordingly.

This first distinction leads to several other significant differences:

- First, the source of constraint differs between deontology and ethics. Action based on values generally stems from the individual decision of the actor, while deontology imposes its rules through an external authority.
- Secondly, the way appropriate action is defined varies between the two approaches. Deontology is often very precise about the actions to be taken or avoided in common practice situations. When a situation is regulated by a single rule, the conduct to be adopted is pre-established. However, when there is a conflict between two or more rules, it can be more complex to determine the appropriate conduct. Ethics, on the other hand, does not impose a precise conduct in advance, but proposes a method of reflection to find the best action, especially in cases of value conflicts or when rule-compliant action raises questions from the point of view of the professional ideal.
- Regarding openness to other viewpoints on values, deontology often distinguishes the professional's obligations towards different stakeholders, such as the public, the client, and the profession. However, it tends to favour a single viewpoint, that of the profession, in all its rules. In contrast, ethical reflection is open to the viewpoints of all individuals or groups whose values or interests are affected by a decision. It helps, in the case of a professional, to resolve situations where obligations towards the client and the public are difficult to reconcile, as well as situations where the values of the profession conflict with other values or interests worthy of consideration.

- Finally, regarding responsibility for consequences, deontology focuses primarily on the conformity of the action to the rule, without requiring deep reflection or justification of the consequences. In contrast, ethics commits the person to assume responsibility for the consequences of their action, even when complying with the rules. It pushes them to minimise the negative effects of their decision, to be able to justify it in terms of values, to recognise the negative impact of their choice, and to propose solutions when possible.

### **II.3 - Distinction between the Rule of Law and Morality**

Moral rules, which aim at the perfection of man and indicate what is just, must be distinguished from legal rules, which have social order as their objective. The latter are more extensive, more complete, more precise, and more concrete than moral rules, which are very general.

The essential difference is that legal rules, which have a mandatory character, are accompanied by sanctions by a public authority. Moral sanction is, indeed, not sufficient to prevent the offence and oblige the perpetrator to repair the consequences of their actions.