Ethical and Deontological Dimension - Foundations and References

Course Objectives

This course primarily aims to:

➢ Facilitate the immersion of students into university life and support their transition to responsible adult life

➢ Develop student awareness of fundamental ethical principles

➢ Introduce students to the rules governing university life, presenting their rights and obligations towards the academic community

➢ Prepare students for their integration into the working world, familiarizing them with professional and moral values

➢ Raise awareness about respect and valorization of intellectual property

➢ Explain the dangers related to immoral behaviors, such as corruption, and show ways to prevent and combat them

Chapter 1

Fundamental Concepts

I.   Introduction

The Algerian university system is currently experiencing a profound multidimensional crisis that affects both the quality of education and the overall academic environment. Overcrowded classrooms, deteriorating teaching and working conditions, insufficient material resources, and a significant shortage of permanent professors have weakened the mission of higher education. These challenges not only hinder effective knowledge transmission but also compromise the moral and professional values that should guide university life.

In response to these challenges, the course University Ethics and Deontology plays a vital role in fostering a culture of ethical awareness and professional responsibility among students. It emphasizes the importance of values such as integrity, respect, justice, and accountability, which are essential for ensuring a fair and transparent academic environment. The University Ethics and Deontology Charter serves as a guiding framework that defines the rights and duties of professors, students, and administrative staff, aiming to restore confidence and harmony within the university community.

More broadly, in every society, ethics and deontology are the cornerstones of civilized conduct. They provide moral direction, ensuring that individuals act responsibly toward themselves, others, and their professional surroundings. For university students the future leaders and professionals mastering these ethical principles is as important as acquiring scientific knowledge. It equips them with moral integrity, social responsibility, and civic awareness, which together form the foundation of a competent, ethical, and engaged citizenry capable of contributing positively to national development.

II.   La Morale

1. Définition:

➢   Morality is the set of values, norms, and principles that determine what is considered good or bad, just or unjust within a society. It represents the collective conscience that guides human behavior according to cultural, religious, and social traditions. Morality is often regarded as the science of good and evil, a theoretical framework that governs human conduct with the pursuit of good as its primary objective. It also encompasses customs, habits, and rules of conduct recognized and practiced by a community. Furthermore, morality is linked to institutions particularly legal and quasi-legal ones that enable society to achieve its ethical and social goals. Moral discourse is generally universal and not subject to strict prescription.

➢   The word "morality" is commonly used in two different senses.
It refers to the set of judgments that individuals or groups make about their own actions as well as those of others, with the aim of assigning them a very special value, considered incomparable to other human values.
This is moral value. A technical skill, no matter how great, has never been considered a virtue; it has never appeared that an act of dishonesty could be compensated by a fortunate invention, a brilliant painting, or a scientific discovery. What does this value consist of, and

what characterizes it? This incomparability of moral values is enough to establish that moral judgments occupy a distinct place among human judgments, and that is all that matters to us.

➢ Morality is also understood as any methodical and systematic speculation about moral matters. What this speculation consists of, its object, and its method are questions that thinkers have yet to determine precisely. This speculation partly shares the same object as the judgments spontaneously made by the moral conscience. In both cases, it concerns evaluating ways of acting, praising or blaming, distributing positive or negative moral values; indicating forms of conduct a person should follow, and others to avoid. However, in two essential aspects, the method of evaluation is different.

Citations:

- "True morality does not concern what we think and want, but what we do." Léon Trotsky - 1879-1940

- "There can be no scientific morality; but there can also be no immoral science." Henri Poincaré - 1854-1912 - Last Thoughts

- "Under no circumstances will I consent to judge as appropriate for any of my fellow beings what I consider morally intolerable for myself." Simone Weil - 1909-1943 - The Human Condition, 1937

2. Characteristics and examples

Characteristic	Description	Example
Origin	Morality originates from several fundamental sources such as religion, conscience, sense of duty, respect, justice, and virtue. These foundations shape moral behavior and guide individuals toward distinguishing right from wrong.	Religious teachings (*e.g.*, the Qur'an or the Bible), personal conscience, professional duty, mutual respect, fairness, and honorable conduct.
Collective	Morality is built upon social traditions, cultural values, and shared beliefs that define what is right and wrong in a community.	Showing respect for parents, elders, or keeping one's word in society.
Normative	It sets rules, duties, and prohibitions that define acceptable conduct.	"Do not lie", "Be honest", "Help those in need".
Internal	Morality acts within a person's conscience and is guided by inner conviction rather than external enforcement.	Returning a lost wallet without being seen or expecting reward.
Variable	Moral values evolve over time and differ across societies and historical periods.	Slavery, once accepted, is now considered immoral and unjust.

III. Ethics
1. Definition

➢ Ethics is the rational and critical reflection on moral values and human actions. It goes beyond merely judging or justifying behavior; it seeks to understand the principles that guide moral choices and explain why certain actions are right or wrong. Ethics helps individuals make thoughtful and responsible decisions, especially in complex or ambiguous situations. In essence, ethics is the reflective study of morality.

➢ It is the art of guiding human conduct while considering the relevant values, with awareness and a living conscience.

➢ Ethics is a philosophical approach that guides individuals or groups to choose the best solution to a problem based on moral principles and values, while considering the specific context of the situation.

2. Characteristics and examples

Characteristic	Description	Example
Origin	Ethics originates from human reason and conscience. It is based on rational reflection rather than imposed rules.	A person chooses to act honestly not because of fear of punishment, but out of personal conviction.
Reflective	Invites reasoning before action; seeks to understand why an act is right or wrong.	A doctor asks: *Should I prolong the life of a suffering patient?*
Universal	Goes beyond religion, culture, or social norms; aims for values applicable to all humanity.	Human rights and humanitarian principles are founded on universal ethics.
Flexible	Adapts to new and complex situations that laws or traditions may not address.	Ethical debates about artificial intelligence, cloning, or genetic modification.
Analytical	Focuses on justifying actions through rational and moral reasoning.	An engineer decides to stop a risky construction project to ensure public safety.

3. Types of Ethics

Type of Ethics	Description	Purpose / Example
Ethics of Conviction *(Personal Ethics)*	Based on **individual principles and personal beliefs**. It reflects one's moral values, inner convictions, and sense of duty.	Acting according to personal conscience, even if it goes against collective opinion (e.g., refusing to lie even under pressure).
Ethics of Responsibility *(Collective Ethics)*	Involves **collective reflection and dialogue** to justify actions and make informed moral decisions in complex situations.	Ethical debates about public health policies or environmental protection where multiple interests must be balanced.

4. Fields of Applied Ethics

Domain	Description	Examples
Medical Ethics (Bioethics)	Deals with ethical questions related to life, health, and medical practice. It examines what is good and beneficial for humans.	Abortion, genetic engineering, euthanasia, assisted reproduction, end-of-life care.
Environmental Ethics (Eco-Ethics)	Concerns the ethical relationship between humans and nature. It stresses responsibility toward the environment and living beings.	Pollution control, deforestation, overfishing, climate change responsibility.
War Ethics	Reflects on moral limits and responsibilities during armed conflicts.	Justification of war, treatment of prisoners, civilian protection.
Professional Ethics	Defines ethical duties and obligations specific to each profession.	Medical confidentiality, academic integrity, journalistic truth, industrial safety.
Ethics of Science and Technology	Examines the moral implications of scientific and technological progress.	Artificial intelligence, robotics, cloning, use of personal data.

IV. Deontology

1. Definition

Deontology, derived from the Greek words deon (duty) and *logos* (study or discourse), is the theory of moral duties and the set of rules of conduct that individuals must observe toward society as a whole. In a more practical sense, deontology refers to the collection of obligations and ethical duties that govern the behavior of professionals in the exercise of their occupations. These duties are often formalized by professional institutions or representative bodies in the form of a code of ethics.

2. Professional deontology

Professional deontology refers to the set of rules governing the conduct of professionals in the practice of their profession. It is linked to fundamental values and the basic principles underlying all ethics. Its main objectives are:

a. To ensure public protection by promoting conscientious, responsible, and high-quality professional practice.

b. To help professionals adopt ethical behavior that is more demanding than what is expected of ordinary individuals.

c. To prevent conflicts between professionals within the same profession or related professions.

d. To preserve a good reputation and the prestige of the profession in the eyes of the public.

e. To legitimize a privileged socio-economic status and a specific legal status (for example, professional corporations).

3. Characteristics and examples

Characteristic	Description	Example
Origin	Derived from the Greek words *"deon"* (duty) and *"logos"* (study or science). Deontology literally means "the science of duty," emphasizing moral obligations within professions.	The concept was introduced by philosopher **Jeremy Bentham**, referring to duties and responsibilities guiding professional conduct.
Professional	Applies to specific professions that require ethical responsibilities.	Medicine, law, teaching, journalism.
Codified	Written and formalized in professional codes, laws, or regulations.	Medical Code of Ethics, Teacher's Code, Engineer's Code.
Binding	Violations lead to disciplinary or legal actions.	A doctor violating patient confidentiality or a lawyer breaching client trust.
Applied Ethics	Translates ethical reflection into concrete professional standards and rules.	An engineer ensuring safety despite profit pressure or a teacher maintaining fairness in grading.

V.   Law

1. Definition

Law is a set of legal rules created by the State to organize social life, ensure justice, and maintain peace.

It is based on social relationships and defines the rights and duties of individuals. Law is binding, general, and enforceable by authority. It regulates human behavior, resolves conflicts, and protects the balance of society through justice and equality

2. Characteristics and examples

Aspect	Description	Example
Origin	Law originates from the State and its institutions (Parliament, government, courts). It represents the collective will expressed through legislation and regulations.	The Parliament passes a law on environmental protection.
Imposed by Authority	It is mandatory and enforced by the State; individuals are required to obey it.	Paying taxes is a legal obligation.
General and Impersonal	It applies equally to all citizens without discrimination.	Equality before the law regardless of status or origin.
Sanctioned	Violations lead to punishment or legal consequences.	Jail for fraud or fines for traffic violations.

3. Types of law

Type of Law	Definition	Relationship with Morality, Ethics, and Deontology	Example
Criminal Law	Defines crimes and their punishments to protect society.	Criminal law reflects **moral values** by prohibiting harmful acts (e.g., murder, theft). It raises **ethical debates** about justice and punishment, and it requires professionals (judges, lawyers, police) to follow **deontological codes** that ensure fairness and responsibility.	Murder and theft are both morally wrong, ethically unjustifiable, and legally punishable.
Civil Law	Regulates relationships between individuals and entities.	Civil law promotes **moral respect** for others' rights, **ethical responsibility** in contracts and interactions, and **deontological duties** of lawyers and notaries to act with honesty and integrity.	A person who breaks a contract violates moral honesty, ethical responsibility, and legal obligation.
Administrative Law	Governs public administration and the relationship between citizens and the State.	Encourages **moral integrity** in public service, **ethical transparency** in decision-making, and **deontological commitment** of public officials to impartiality and justice.	A public officer who accepts bribes violates ethics, deontology, and law simultaneously.
Constitutional Law	Establishes the structure and fundamental principles of the State.	Embodies **moral ideals** (justice, equality), **ethical governance** (respect for human dignity), and **deontological duties** of leaders and judges to protect citizens' rights.	Freedom of expression is both a moral value, an ethical right, and a legal guarantee.
Labor Law	Regulates relations between employers and employees.	Promotes **moral justice** by protecting workers' dignity, **ethical fairness** in treatment and pay, and **deontological responsibility** of employers and unions to respect labor codes.	Equal pay for equal work reflects moral, ethical, and legal justice.
Environmental Law	Protects the environment and natural resources.	Reflects the **moral duty** toward nature, promotes **ethical responsibility** for sustainability, and defines **deontological obligations** for professionals to act safely and responsibly.	Laws against pollution express both moral duty and professional responsibility.

V. Distinction Between the Concepts.

A. Distinction between Ethics and Morality.

Etymologically, there is no difference between ethics and morality. In fact, the word "mœurs" comes from the Latin term "mores", and the word "ethics" derives from the Greek word "ethos" both meaning "customs" or "moral behavior."

However, in common usage whether in scientific, social, or political language morality tends to have a religious connotation, whereas ethics has a more scientific connotation.
• We can note the following differences between ethics and morality:

Criterion	Morality	Ethics
Connotation	Religious	Secular
Nature	Set of established rules	Reflection on those rules
Origin	Society, religion, culture	Reason and personal conscience
Application	Collective	Individual and contextual
Character	-Stable and normative -Imposed by authority	-Dynamic and evolving -Encourages personal responsibility
Central Question	What should I do?	Why should I do it?
Mode of judgment	Serves as an absolute and fixed reference	Based on discernment and enlightened reasoning
Example	Telling the truth is a moral duty	Lying to save a life → ethical dilemma

B. Distinction between Ethics and Deontology

Professional ethics (deontology) can appear as sanctioned professional ethics. Between deontology and ethics, there may be only a difference in the degree of formalization and sanction. This is one possible interpretation; however, I have tried so far to emphasize the specific relationship of deontology to the profession: deontology produces professional identity by codifying the relationships within the profession, and these relationships are characterized by a certain moral economy.

Ethical reflection calls upon autonomy, judgment, and a sense of responsibility. When an engineer decides, based solely on their own values, to refuse to sign a document out of complacency, nothing compels them except themselves. The same decision, however, may also be dictated by an article in the Engineers' Code of Ethics. It is common to obey rules because they come from an authority, because of fear of sanction, or simply out of habit.

Criterion	Ethics	Deontology
Scope	Universal, applies to every individual	Professional, specific to an occupation
Foundation	Values, moral conscience	Rules, professional obligations
Source	Personal or philosophical reflection	Official code, regulation, or law
Purpose	Acting justly according to reason	Acting in accordance with professional rules
Nature	Flexible and interpretative	Formal and normative
Example	"Am I being fair in my decision?"	"Am I respecting the code of my profession?"

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, ethics, morality, deontology, and law together form the foundation of a just and responsible society. Each plays a complementary role:

- **Ethics** guides reflection and reasoning.
- **Morality** defines what is good and bad.
- **Deontology** regulates professional conduct.
- **Law** ensures order through enforceable rules.

For university students and future professionals, mastering these principles is essential not only for achieving technical excellence but also for cultivating moral integrity, social responsibility, and respect for human dignity. By integrating these values, individuals contribute to building a more trustworthy, fair, and civilized academic and social community