

**☞ DEFINITIONS: ETHICS AND DILEMMAS ☞**

**E-THICS:** - Widely accepted norms that form the basis of social behavior

- A system of moral principles followed e.g. in medicine, Christianity, law
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- That branch of philosophy dealing with values relating to rightness & wrongness of actions, behavior, conduct, decisions, ends, means, motives, policies. Other branches of philosophy are Aesthetics, Epistemology, Logic, and Metaphysics
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- The critical analysis of morality; moral reflection with the purpose of analysis, criticism, interpretation and justification of rules, roles, and relationships.
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- Being ethical is being analytical in arriving at a conclusion or taking action based on a moral claim or claims, rather than acting in blind conformity to a claim, appealing to doctrine, ideology, the scriptures, political correctness (acceptability, polls, popularity, or personal preferences. .
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- Being ethical requires recognizing the moral issues raised, the principles that apply, acting on them, and taking responsibility for the outcomes or consequences
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- Ethics is the name we give moral statements that have been systematically and critically examined, resulting in convincing reasons (justification) why or why not some socially presented moral position should be upheld or denied, i.e. it is the valid reason for saying that something is right or wrong
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- Ethics is reasoning about acts or potential acts that enhance the well-being of others and warrant our praise and those which harm or diminish the well being of others and warrant our condemnation.[adapted f Paul&Elder “Ethical Reasoning”]
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- Ethics may or may not conform to tenets of law, scripture, codes, ideology, or regime values. Moral reasoning/analysis is required to determine whether it does. Advocates of these value systems, however, often insist their tenets are ethical.
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- Administrative and political ethics are species of ethics in general and are applicable to agents who represent governments or the citizenry as a whole. These special cases require a disinterested perspective and a consideration of oaths, rules, laws, orders, and constitutional values of a polity. [adopted from Dennis Thompson] Intentions, means, and consequences of acts all count here. The public servant must not sacrifice public objectives for private advantage.
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- The ethical concepts and theories that we appeal to as a base for our reasoning derive from fifty centuries of the writings and teachings of the most, respected, knowledgeable and influential people of all time. While differing about the ends and means of the good life and the good society they have placed markers that we ignore at our peril in our search for justice and social peace for our own times.

## Ethical Dilemmas

An ethical dilemma can be described as a [choice] or decision that does not yield a “cost free” solution. In other words any solution has moral difficulties or sacrifices associated with it.

(Dr. Hank Edmondson, Georgia College & State University, Fall 1998)

A dilemma exists when you must act and give reasons for the best choice of action, but all alternatives have moral drawback; or when all known solutions deliver significant benefits but none can avoid significant harms or potential harms and action is necessary.

Dilemmas occur when there are choices or alternatives proposed about a decision or action but there are moral grounds for doing both or not doing both. Thus, the question is, which is more right or the less wrong. Several kinds of wrong options exist: 1. **non-feasance** (doing nothing about an obligation); 2.) **mis-feasance** (doing the right thing in the wrong way); and 3.) **Mis-feasance** (deliberately choosing to do the wrong thing for personal gain or advantage)

A decision maker faces a dilemma when, after initial analysis of his option, he still does not know which good is more desirable or which harms are more objectionable

An ethical dilemma is present when there is a situation where after moral rules and principles are examined one still does not know what the right course of action should be. (Terry Cooper)

There is a dilemma when the status quo is unsatisfactory compared to proposed actions that are also unsatisfactory, but in different ways. (Garrett Hardin)

Ethical dilemmas exist when one recognizes that some well intended proposal or action conflicts with some universal ethical duty, obligation, or objective. (Josephson)

In a dilemma there are ethical arguments both for and against each alternative considered, often requiring deeper and wider questions to be asked including further questions about one's motives, objectives, and premises.

Dilemmas are conflicts about what decisions are right and what action should be taken when moral reasoning is inconclusive. (Silva)

Dilemmas are ethically important situations in which the ethically right decision or action is not clear. Continuing to do X is morally questionable, but doing Y appears to be equally morally questionable. Perhaps only a third choice Z would be less morally questionable. Perhaps X or Y after deeper analysis will indicate which one is more morally desirable.

Dilemmas are conflicts between equally weighted alternatives – it is not possible to tell which alternative has more benefit, or utility, or virtue, or compels a higher obligation or duty. Likewise it is unclear which alternative avoids more harm. But a choice must be made.

A moral dilemma involves a situation in which the agent has only [certain] courses of action available, and each requires performing a morally impermissible action. (Encyl. Of Philosophy)