**Ethics – Introduction**

Ethics is very significant in the world of business. It is the study of morally appropriate behaviour and decisions, and examining what should be done. Ethics helps to mould and shape human behaviour. It aids employees to perform their roles. However, ethics cannot be instilled unless we ‘practice what we preach’.

Ethics is the science of judging specifically human ends and the relationship of means to those ends. In some way it is also the art of controlling means so that they will serve human ends.” — Thomas Garret

**Characteristics :**

(i) Ethics is a set of moral standards and values acceptable in a society. It is relevant in the context of a society only.

(ii) Ethics guides human conduct or behaviour. If any member of the society behaves contrary to the norms and customs, society disapproves it. Moral principles serve as a guide for personal and professional conduct. Ethics checks people from taking decisions and actions which are harmful to society.

(iii) Ethical principles are universal in nature. These prescribe obligations and virtues for everybody in a society. Ethics is important not only in business and politics but in every human endeavour.

(iv) Ethical standards differ from society to society. What is considered ethical behaviour in one society might be considered unethical in another.

(v)Ethical norms might not be legally binding. But these are more powerful than law because these have the sanction of society.

(vi) Ethics is normative or prescriptive in nature. It deals not with what is but what ought to be. It does not rest on feelings of approval or disapproval but on principles.

(vii)There exist no sharp boundaries between ethical and non-ethical. Therefore, people often face ethical dilemmas wherein a clear cut choice is very difficult.

(viii)The concepts of equity and justice are implicit in ethics. Fair and equitable treatment to all is its primary aim.

**Ethics – 3 Basic Approaches to Ethical Behaviour**

i. Utilitarian Approach:

This approach proposes that actions and plans should be judged by their consequences. People should therefore behave in such a way that will produce the greatest benefit to society with the least harm or the lowest cost. This approach suffers from the difficulty in recognizing all the benefits and the costs of any particular decision.

ii. Individual Rights Approach:

This approach proposes that human beings have certain fundamental rights that should be respects in all decisions. A particular decision or behavior should be avoided if it interferes with the rights of others.

iii.Justice Approach:

The justice approach proposes that decision makers be equitable, fair and impartial in the distribution of costs and benefits to individuals and groups. It follows the principles of distributive justice and fairness. This approach can also include redistributive justice and compensatory justice.