



Morality and Politics in Ethics

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This editorial is based on the article "Private, public and political morality" which appeared in "The Hindu" on 14th May, 2019. The article talks about different types of morality in public and private life.

The Shades of Morality

Although political, public and private morality are related and come from same source, yet these moralities are different from each other.

- **Interpersonal morality**
 - Interpersonal morality is understood as the duties that we morally owe each other.
 - It is concerned with personal wrongs, but not with impersonal wrongs (i.e., actions that are wrong but wrong no one; e.g., perhaps voluntary euthanasia when this harms no one).
 - What we owe others is what they can claim from us, and this is that to which they have a right against us.
- Private morality is about obligations and virtues, of individual agents.

Public Morality

- In this type of morality, people see themselves as members of a large political community, as citizens of a state.
 - Public morality is concerned with collective obligations, and is generally based on the notion of consequentialism.
 - **Citizens in a political community must be bound together neither by feelings nor by self-interest but by a commitment to common values discovered by public reason — values such as political freedom, solidarity, shared traditions and cultural heritage.**
- Morality in this domain requires that we overcome our loyalty to blood relations, not

pursue only our private interests, and commit instead to using power grounded in shared principles.

- Love and hate are largely imposters in this domain where consensus is forged by the use of public reason.
- **Its democratic version requires that, guided by values of openness, equal respect and justice, we deliberate and help each other arrive at impartial laws and public policies, acceptable in principle to everyone in the polity.**

Political Morality

Political morality is guided by a commitment to justice, to impartiality.

- Those who wield political power must realise that what they do has enduring consequences affecting the lives of an incalculably large number of people.
- This brings with it enormous public responsibility which derives in no small part from the fact that they have at least temporary legitimacy to use force against ordinary citizens

Why Highest Levels of Political Morality is a Must?

- Even when an individual is righteous in his life, but is not adhering to principles of justice - it can create problems.
- **Moral scrupulousness** [i.e conformity to high standards of ethics or excellence] in one's private life doesn't always automatically guarantees high moral stature in political life.

Way Forward

The prophetic words of Abraham Lincoln that "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power" still holds today. **A just society can be built only if the highest principles of impartiality in public life can be adhered to.**

Drishti Input:

A strong conviction in the sense of justice rather than to personal righteousness, is needed to create a just society. Discuss.