

Examrace

Indian Ethics: Gandhian Ethics Practical Idealism and Moral Acts

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Indian Ethics: Gandhian Ethics Practical Idealism(Philosophy)

Ethics: Practical Idealism

- Gandhian ethical theory or Gandhian ethics is a double-edged weapon theory.
- Gandhi used the principles of truth and non-violence to reform both, the individual and the society/nation, simultaneously.
- Gandhi has written extensively on a number of subjects ranging from politics, ethics, economics, to religion.
- In the domain of socio-political writings and writings on economics, he was highly influenced by the works of Tolstoy, Carlyle, Thoreau, etc.
- On the other hand, in the domain of ethics, he was influenced by the ethical principles embedded in Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and especially, Jainism.
- The two cardinal principles of Gandhian Ethics are Gandhi's thought on truth and non-violence.
- These two principles took place within a matrix of violent mass political struggles for independence.
- Gandhi was not an academic thinker; he was a barrister by profession and became a mass leader.
- Therefore, his emphasis is not on idealism; rather, his emphasis is on practical idealism.
- The term practical idealism was first used by John Dewey and subsequently it was adopted by Gandhi.
- Practical Idealism is a philosophical thinking according to which it is an ethical imperative or ethical duty of each and every one to implement or cultivate the ideals of virtue in one's life.
- Gandhi's philosophy is considered timeless and universal philosophy because the ideals of truth and non-violence are two such ideals which are as relevant to the humankind today as they were almost eighty-years ago.

Moral Acts & Behaviour

- According to Gandhi, being a practical idealist, he believed that an action is moral if it is volitional, intentional, universal, practical, selfless and free from the fear and compulsion.
- His views come really close to the nature of moral action defined in Bhagavad Gita as Nishkama-karma.
- The concept of Nishkamkarma means self-less or desire-less action.
- It also means performing an action without keeping into mind the results or the fruits of that action.
- It is the central tenant of Karma Yoga and is mentioned in the Bhagavad Gita.
- Hence, such actions alone are called “pure actions” for they do not carry any involvement or interest.
- Accordingly, Gandhi believed that a moral act is necessarily associated with a moral behaviour.
- So, cultivation of calmness, curbing of wildness, foreseeing of good habits, observances of chastity, altruism, righteousness, tranquility of personality, etc. are some of the elements of moral life and behaviour in Gandhian ethics.
- Similarly, the moral law, according to Gandhian ethics is pious, universal, eternal, and immutable, beyond space and time and dwells in the very heart of the human being.
- He also avers that the moral law is the inner being of one’s personality.

Non – Violence

- The principle of non-violence in Gandhian ethics follows from a strong religious thinking.
- Gandhi was a theist, according to him, non-violence in its active and wider sense, includes truth and fearlessness.
- Gandhi insisted that non-violence is the strongest tool for action.
- According to him, it is not a creed of in-action.
- Nor, is it for the weak and timid?
- It also does not signify weak inner and outer strength.
- Rather, according to him, it is better to be violent than to be cowardly.
- Gandhi avers, many prerequisites are necessary for attaining the persistent pursuit of ahimsa or non-violence, foremost amongst such prerequisites are truthfulness and fearlessness.
- Gandhi feared that non-violence must never become a convenient alibi for avoiding conflicts with the British.

- So, he avers, except God, men must not fear anyone else.
- From this he follows the path of Satyagraha, which in English means, the fearless pursuit of truth. Satyagraha was a means of non-violent or peaceful protests carried out by Gandhi and his followers for the fight against independence with the British.
- The peaceful protestors are hence called satyagrahis.

Some of the important characteristics of satyagrahis are;

- A true satyagrahi will never harbour anger.
- Rather, he will suffer the anger of the opponent peacefully.
- He will never retaliate when up with assaults from the opponents but at the same time, he will not submit out of fear of punishment and terror.
- A true satyagrahi will voluntarily submit oneself to arrest and will never resist.
- A true satyagrahi will never abuse or use frivolous and foul words.
- A true satyagrahi will not disrespect the Union Jack and also never insult and pick a fight against its officials, both Indian and British.
- A true satyagrahi will follow the five vows;
 - Ahimsa
 - Satya
 - Asteya
 - Brahmacharya
 - aparigraha

The Concept of Seven Deadly Sins

- Gandhi mentions the concept of seven deadly sins by saying that these seven things can destroy any human being. All these seven sins are political and social conditions. They are;
 - Wealth without Work (importance of Bread-labour concept)
 - Pleasure without Conscience
 - Knowledge without Character
 - Business without Morality (importance of the concept of trusteeship)
 - Science without Humanity
 - Religion without Sacrifice
 - Politics without Principles

Questions

1. Gandhi was highly influenced by the works of

- A. Tolstoy, Carlyle, Thoreau, etc.
- B. Jainism, Gita, Hinduism, Christianity, etc.
- C. Both A and B
- D. Plato, Aristotle and Kant

Answer: C

2. The term Practical Idealism was first used by

- A. Peirce
- B. William James
- C. Gandhi
- D. John Dewey

Answer: D

3. According to whom, moral law is the inner being of one's personality

- A. Vivekananda
- B. Gandhi
- C. Tagore
- D. Tilak

Answer: B

4. Except God, men must not fear anyone else, is said by

- A. Vivekananda
- B. Gandhi
- C. Tagore
- D. Tilak

Answer: B

5. Wealth without work is a deadly sin, it emphasises on Gandhi's view on

- A. Bread-labour concept
- B. Trusteeship concept

C. Both A and B

D. None of the above

Answer: A

-Manishika

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