

BLOCK-4 INTRODUCTION

Social ethics is a major branch of philosophy, encompassing right conduct and good life. It is significantly broader than the common conception of analyzing right and wrong. A central aspect of ethics is “the good life,” the life worth living. Social ethics attempts to convince thinkers that individualist ethics have failed to make the world a safe place, and that we cannot progress to a fully social ethics unless we understand the morality of collective action from a specifically sociological point of view. In order to be fully progressive, ethics must shift from its traditional focus on individual behaviors to the structure, morality, and outcomes of social actions and social problems. Some of the major social ills we face today – suicide, euthanasia, abortion, violence, terrorism – are treated in this block.

Unit 1, “Suicide,” presents the inquiry concerning the motives underlying a human’s decision to take one’s own life and the moral responsibility thereby. Human life is basically a gift and it remains the same no matter how much pain and suffering it may bring at one stage or another of its continued existence. Life is authentic only when it is received as a gift, not as burden.

Unit 2, “Euthanasia,” begins with an analysis of the word ‘euthanasia’ taken from the Greek “eu”, which means good and “*thanatos*,” meaning death. It has come to mean the intentional killing, by a deliberate act or omission, of a person whose life is felt by oneself or others not to be worth living. It is often called “mercy killing”, and may mean (aid of) killing by relatives or friends for supposedly “merciful” reasons, or intentional killing by doctors or other health care professionals. There are many words used to describe euthanasia such as active or passive euthanasia, direct or indirect euthanasia, voluntary or involuntary euthanasia, assisted suicide and mercy killing.

Unit 3 is on “Abortion,” which is the termination of a pregnancy by the removal or expulsion from the uterus of a fetus or embryo, resulting in or caused by its death. An abortion can occur spontaneously due to complications during pregnancy or can be induced. An abortion induced to preserve the health of the female is termed a *therapeutic abortion*, while an abortion induced for any other reason is termed an *elective abortion*. The term *abortion* most commonly refers to the induced abortion of a human pregnancy, while spontaneous abortions are usually termed miscarriages. Abortion and abortion-related issues feature prominently in the national politics in many nations.

Unit 4, “Violence,” exposes the student to the nature, kinds and causes of violence, and to the means to face the challenges posed by it. A casual look at our society will tell us the untold miseries caused by it and how it is perpetuated under various shades. There is cultural violence, religious violence, economic violence, media violence, group violence, sexual violence, political violence, etc. Violence begets further violence and not peace. Hence, we need to strive for a practical solution to the problem.

Unit 5, “Terrorism,” explains how terrorism builds a kind of psychological state of extreme fear, insecurity and anxiety, besides the physical damages it causes in terms of loss of life and material goods. A terrorist activity is able to cause massive impairment to an individual and the society at large due to its surprise and shock tactics. The target is selected at random to produce

the maximum panic among the innocent people. It seeks above all to create a sensation within the ranks of the enemy in the public opinion and abroad.

To conclude: Social ethics, treated in this block, aims at understanding the morality of collective action and analyzes the major social ills we face today – suicide, euthanasia, abortion, violence, terrorism. These ills are a serious depreciation of humans as dignified beings and a constant threat to a peaceful and happy living.

