# Ethics & Morality · GS - IV

**“A system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true.” – Socrates**

| EXAM YEAR | PAPER | SUBJECT |
|---|---|---|
| 2020 | GS - IV | Ethics & Morality |

| MARKS | WORD LIMIT |
|---|---|
| 10 | ~150 words |

## Answer Hint

**Objective moral principles, emotional subjectivity, reason, conscience, universal values, justice, ethical relativism, rational deliberation, moral consistency, contextual sensitivity**

## Model Answer

### Introduction

Socrates' quotation emphasises that morality cannot rest solely on changing emotions or personal preferences. Ethical judgement requires reasoned reflection and principles capable of being defended consistently.

### Meaning of the quotation

- **Emotions are subjective:** Anger, affection, fear and prejudice may distort judgement. Treating these feelings as the sole basis of morality can produce inconsistent decisions.
- **Reason is essential:** Rational examination helps distinguish genuine right from personal convenience or social prejudice.
- **Consistency matters:** Ethical principles such as justice, honesty and respect for human dignity should guide decisions even when emotions favour a different outcome.

- **Universal considerations:** Human rights and equal treatment provide standards that extend beyond individual likes and dislikes.

**Relevance to public administration**

A civil servant must not distribute benefits according to personal sympathy, political pressure or emotional attachment. Eligibility criteria, fairness and constitutional principles should guide decisions.

For instance, an officer may feel sympathy for a particular applicant but must apply welfare rules consistently while ensuring that all eligible persons receive their entitlements.

**A critical perspective**

The quotation should not be interpreted as suggesting that emotions have no ethical value. Empathy and compassion help us recognise suffering and motivate moral action. Similarly, ethical decisions require sensitivity to circumstances, not mechanical adherence to rules alone.

The sound approach is to combine empathy with reason, and contextual understanding with principled judgement.

**Conclusion**

Morality becomes unreliable when governed exclusively by fluctuating emotions. A defensible ethical framework combines rational scrutiny, consistent principles and humane sensitivity, enabling individuals and institutions to make fair, responsible and compassionate decisions.

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