

# Moral and ethical role of government

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Ethics and morality form a central position in the functioning of the government. Under normal circumstances, it is the role of the government to ensure a just society where order and harmony exist. As a result the government has to establish and enforce ethical and moral standards so as to ensure that the society functions well. Decision making is the government's chief role. Therefore it must make ethical and moral considerations in order to make decisions that are in line with the welfare of the society. Ethics and morality are used interchangeably. The two terms are related in several ways. Nonetheless, there is an inconsequential dissimilarity linking the two.

Most commonly is the fact that morality goes deeper than ethics in defining human behavior and conduct. Ethics refer to the standards that make the society a better place of all while morality provide for more deeper considerations that amount to religion and spirituality. In order for the government to ensure that ethical standards are adhered to, ethics and aspects of morality are entrenched into the law. This makes it conveniently possible to enforce ethical standards and ensure that all people conform to the law. However, certain aspects of ethics and morality cannot be made legal. This will make the society more complicated since certain morality aspects and ethics are perceptive. This brings into perspective the facet of belief and religion which formulates different people to hold diverse views on the concept of ethics and morality.

The upshot is that, the government plays a significant role in enforcing ethics and morality. As a result it is expected that the leaders ensure that the society is just and orderly for all. The aim of this paper is to critically

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examine the role of the government in morality and ethics. To succeed in this endeavor, the paper will discuss different aspects of morality and ethics.

## **Role of Government**

One of the central purposes of the government is to enforce the law. The law represents the will of the people who have their own cultural and ethical perceptions of reality. As a result the government enforces the ethical and moral values of the people it governs. In other words it can be rightly said that the government serves to accomplish the people's perceptions of reality as represented in their ethical and moral values. This makes the role of the government more complex not forgetting that not all values of ethical and moral consideration can be enforced by the government. However, the government remains the prime custodian of people's values. Ethics and moral values have a great influence on the operation of the society. It is therefore true that the government exercises control over the society. This is true in light of the task of enforcing laws.

In order to get a better understanding of the role of the government as far as ethics and morality is concerned; more focus should be on the law (Preston & Bishop 2000). The law is the government's instrument of power. To perform its functions, the government relies majorly on the law. On the other hand the law is perceived as being representative of the ethical, cultural and moral values of the people. Therefore as much as the law might not be the perfect tool of enforcing ethical and moral values, it remains the governments' chief weapon against unprincipled practices and immorality.

The law describes what is right and acceptable in society and therefore provides a blue print towards an ethical and just society. In order to affirm their quest for a just society, citizens are expected to adhere to the provisions of the law. Therefore, the law binds the society together bringing harmony among different people. Failure to conform to the law is perceived as breaking ethical standards established and is thus punishable. Therefore, the law is perceived as the people's will to be enforced by the government.

There are a lot of challenges the government faces in its ethical and moral roles. First and foremost are the different perceptions of ethics and morality. This is coupled by the practical reality that the law does not fully represent ethical and moral standards. Perceptions are a great threat to the government's role. This is due to the fact that certain parameters which are legal are sometimes perceived as violating ethical and moral standards.

A good example is the issue of abortion. As much as abortion might be legalized, it still remains a debatable ethical issue. This is due to the fact that it is seen by some members in society as unethical. Other issues include divorce and promiscuity. These conflicts underline the fact that the law is not a sufficient tool of enforcing ethical and moral values. It underscores the failure of the government to ensure a just society through enforcing the law.

## **Ethical and Social Obligations**

Ethics and a society are inseparable, due to the fact that ethical standards are the adhesive of a healthy society. Therefore there can never be a society without standards that define behavior and conduct. A just society can only exist in line with a set of values that represent the ethical and moral values

of the people. A society on the other hand is governed by a group of leaders through the institution of government (Kizza, 2010). Therefore, it is obvious that it is the role of the government to ensure that the society is just and orderly. This is what is referred to as social obligations of the government. In essence the government is a tool of the society. It is established by the society to govern it and enforce laws that are deemed to represent the wishes, values and convictions of the people.

The government's social obligations are nothing but the functions of ensuring that ethical and moral standards are adhered to accordingly. This involves the task of ensuring that the laws set represent the ethical and moral values of the people. Conversely, the government needs to go beyond the institutional role of enforcing laws to more welfare operations. This is line with the fact that the law in itself is inefficient as far as ensuring the enforcement of ethical and moral obligations is concerned.

## **Decision Making**

A critical look at the origin of government points at the true essence of the institution. Several theories outline the origin of politics or government. Nevertheless, the contract of social theory is much relevance to the government's decision making role. Under the social contract theory, members of the society came together and surrendered their freedoms in exchange for order. In order to achieve this objective, the people established a government which was to govern the state on their behalf. Among the principal roles given of this institution was that of making decisions on behalf of the people (Cremer 2009). Therefore the government's most significant

role is that of decision making. The role of making a decision is supposed to be in line with the interests and values of the society. This underscores the big role played by the government in ensuring a just society for all.

Therefore in making a decision the government plays an important part in enforcing ethical and moral standards. Apart from enforcing the law which is perceived as the will of the people, the government has the authority to make decision that affect the functioning of the society. Therefore in making these decisions the government ought to put ethical and moral obligations in prime focus. In this role the aspect of public trust emanates. The government has been given the public trust which must be reflected in every decision it makes. Therefore public officials must make decisions that not only promote ethics and morality but also represent the same. In making decisions the government needs to be guided by two principal aspects. First and foremost is respect of the law.

The law is the supreme guarantor of morality, ethics and justice. Therefore due importance should be granted to the law in the process of making decisions. Decisions that are contrary to the provisions of the law should be discouraged. The law should be the common denominator of all government decisions. This will protect the people from leaders with evil intentions.

Another critical aspect of consideration is that of ethical consideration beyond the law. This should be interpreted in a positive manner to mean that the law should be upheld in high esteem but should not be the end of ethics. Certain aspects of morality and ethics are not entrenched in the law but should be upheld in decision making. This regards appointments and other

aspects of governance. This calls for integrity on the part of state officials in the discharge of their duties.

## **Need For Appropriate Actions**

Leadership is a delicate affair which involves a lot of aspects. Since leadership involves the tasks of vision, direction and governance a lot of care must be made to ensure that ethical and moral; standards do not take a back seat. The government is bestowed with a daunting task of ensuring order and justice in the society. This is to be achieved through the enforcement of laws that represent the ethical and moral values of the society. This is also done through the making of legal and ethical decisions. The government therefore plays a primary role in the whole concept of ethics and morality. Through its actions, decisions and operations the government has a lot of impact on the functioning of the society. There is need for appropriate actions on the part of the government so as not to undermine ethics and morality (Kiel & Lennick, 2007). Since the success of a society depends on the manner in which ethical standards are adhered to, the government officials ought to be careful in their actions so as to promote a just and orderly society. It is against this background that governments need to put several measures in place so as to ensure that the aspect of ethics and morality plays an important role in its functions. This will result in a justly moral and ethical society which is what will make life better for the people.

As far as the governments' role in achieving justice and order in society is concerned, a number of considerations are necessary. Caution must be

exercised in the process discharging the functions of the government. State officers ought to conduct their activities in manner that does not undermine ethical and moral values. To start with, it will be necessary to vet people before appointment to such positions. This will ensure that all those who get these positions are people of integrity. This will go a long way in ensuring that the role of the government in guaranteeing ethics and justice is not undermined by the quality of personnel in its ranks.

## **Suggestions**

The ethical and moral role of the government is instrumental in ensuring justice and order in the society. Therefore it is upon the officials in the government to ensure that their actions and activities go in line which fostering harmony among the people. This will be achieved if all the laws are enforced in line with the people's ethical and moral values as envisaged in the law. On top of these, the decision making arm of the government must be fully used to enhance ethical and moral values in the society. It will be against the purpose of ethics should state officials make illegal and unethical decisions. Apart from that state officials must be men and women of integrity so as not to compromise the values of the society.

In order to succeed in this endeavor it will be appropriate for the government to classify its moral obligations into two. These are institutional duties and the social responsibilities. The former refers to the use of laws and structures of governance to enforce total adherence to moral and ethical values. This will call for the enactment of laws that represent the ethical and moral values of the people (Fisher 2003). Through the law, the government will



ensure that there is justice and order in the society. Those who break the law should be liable for punishment. These will dissuade offenders and make society orderly and harmonious. Social responsibilities refer to those roles that affirm ethical values in the cultural set up. Through this arm, the government will set up and fund several organizations and commissions to cultivate tolerance, orderliness and ethics among the society. This will call for equity and equality so that all sections of the society feels taken care of. On top of this is the decision making role of the government. The government should use its authority to make decisions in promoting justice, order and ethics.

## **Conclusion**

The government is the chief custodian of morality and ethical values in the society. It is the role of the government to ensure that moral and ethical standards are maintained in the society so as to assure order and justice. The political system gives government the sole responsibility of ensuring stability, harmony and conformity in the society. It is along this line that the government plays an immense role in guaranteeing ethical and moral values. This role can be performed in many ways. Most commonly the enforcement focuses on the enactment of laws that represent the cultural and ethical values of the people.

These laws are enforced so as to ensure conformity. Those who break the law are liable to punishment in accordance to the law. Through exercising the provisions of the law, the government achieves its objective of creating a just and orderly society. However, since ethics and morality are relative

terms, not all aspects of ethics and morality can be entrenched into the law. This poses a challenge to the government's role of fulfilling ethical obligations. Therefore, it is vital for the government to come up with other means of achieving justice and orderliness through ethics. Through its social obligations the government enforces ethical and moral standards in the society. This can be through its decision making arm and also through the establishment and funding of agencies and organizations that cultivate a culture of ethical values. The government also guarantees ethical values by granting freedom to the people to exercise their spiritual and religious convictions. Moral and ethical aspects have spiritual and cultural connotations, therefore through equality and freedom the government ensures justice in the society. The government plays a central role in ensuring ethics and morality in the society.