

Chapter 1: Ethics and Ethical Reasoning

Why Study Ethics?
What Is Ethics?
Ethical and Other Types of Evaluation
Sociobiology and the Naturalistic Fallacy
Ethical Terms
Ethics and Reasons
Intuitionism, Emotivism, Subjectivism,                      Objectivism
Ethical Reasoning and Arguments
The Structure of Ethical Reasoning
and Argument
Evaluating and Making Good
Arguments
Ethical Theory
Types of Ethical Theory
Can Ethics Be Taught?

Readings:

Hume, *Ethical Judgments and Matters of Fact*  
Stevenson, *Emotivism and Ethics*

Key Terms

Philosophy	Ethics	Metaethics
Rational Emotions	Moral Philosophy	Reason
Evaluative Norms	Descriptive	Motive
Deontological Right	Ethical Theory	Normative
Consequentialist Rights	Teleological	Good
Nonconsequentialist	Divine Command Theory	Ought

Getting Started

One might begin a discussion of ethics by asking what it is and why we need it. People disagree about issues such as abortion and gay marriage. It is important to understand why we think things are right or wrong. There are several aspects to the *nature of ethics*: that ethics addresses questions of good and bad or right and wrong, that it asks us to give *reasons* for our views or opinions about this, and that when these views are traced to questions of basic *values* they form the beginnings of an ethical theory.

### Answers to the Review Exercises in the Text

1. F a. Ethics studies not how people *do act* and why, but how they *ought* to act and why.  
T b.  
F c. This is a descriptive statement, not a normative one.

2. a. N and R  
b. D  
c. N, and A  
d. D  
e. N and L  
f. N and E

3. Philosophers differ about whether our moral judgments refer to something objective, or are reports of our subjective opinions.  
Those who say that ethics is objective believe that values are objects available for knowledge. The objectivists maintain that the things we desire are not good; instead, we ought to desire things that are good. They emphasize the goodness of the thing-in-itself.  
Those who believe ethics is subjective claim that value judgments express a subjective opinion. Moral judgments rest upon subjective experience; the things that we desire are good.

4. Philosophers differ on how we know what is good. Emotivism maintains that when we say something is good, we are showing our approval of it. Instead of describing the item or experience, we are recommending it to others.  
Intuitionism claims that good or goodness is known through our intuition. We have some intuitive knowledge about ethical truths.

5. Natural law ethics focus on human nature and determine ethical precepts on the basis of what is natural for humans. Natural law ethicists argue that the way in which nature is ordered allows us to derive ethical precepts.  
The advantage of using naturalistic explanations is that it is insightful, and leads us to understand the basic functions of our species. The disadvantage is that they can easily commit the

naturalistic fallacy. The naturalistic fallacy is that that the way in which we behave cannot tell us how we ought to behave. The fact that we desire something does not tell us that the desire is good. Therefore, the use of naturalistic explanations can lead to unethical behavior.

6. a. C                      b. A                      c. M

### **Questions for Further Thought**

1. Do you think that Ethics can be taught? Why is this a difficult question to answer? What does it depend on?
2. Which of the following have played a role in the development of your moral beliefs: your family, your religion, your experiences, other people? Any other sources?
3. What role, if any, do you believe that emotions should play in moral reasoning? Why?
4. Do you think that an action ought to be judged morally in terms of its motive, its consequences, something about the nature of the action, or some combination of these? Explain.

### **Answers to the Study Questions Preceding the Reading by Hume**

1. No, morality is not a fact that can be discovered through understanding. It is not an object of reason.
2. If morality were a fact, then animals would be subject to the same standards of morality as humans.
3. There is no actual vice in murder. To understand the vice, you must turn toward your feelings about it.
4. Hume believes that morality is an issue of feeling, not fact. Moral topics do not have meaning unless people consider their feelings about them.
5. *Ought* expresses a new relationship between the sentiment and the behavior. It gives the impression that a reason should be given.

## **Answers to the Study Questions Preceding the Reading by Stevenson**

1. Arguments about values include disagreements about attitude, which are difficult to reconcile. Scientific methods are not always successful in obtaining an agreement in attitudes. Only when a commonly accepted body of scientific beliefs would lead us to have a commonly accepted set of attitudes would the scientific method achieve an agreement on values.
2. Ethical claims attempt to change attitudes by changing people's beliefs. Redirecting an attitude is actually a type of activity, not knowledge.
3. Ethical terms are not simply descriptive. They don't only state facts; their goal is to create an influence. Telling someone that an action is wrong and explaining the consequences has the effect of changing that person's attitudes. The ethical terms attempt to direct someone's interests.
4. When someone tells a man not to steal, the intent is not simply want to express a moral principle. The intent is to convince the man himself to disapprove of stealing. If the man does not end up disapproving of stealing, the person who spoke to him about stealing would feel that he or she had failed.
5. One person's statement of which behavior is good influences the approval of another person, who then makes the same ethical judgment. That, in turn, influences another person, until, through a process of mutual influence, people take on the same attitudes.
6. The "emotive meaning" of ethical terms is a tendency for the terms to produce affective responses in people.

## Chapter 2: Religion and Global Ethics

Freedom, Cosmopolitanism and the European Enlightenment  
Religion, Civic Life and Civil Disobedience  
Ethics, Religion and Divine Command Theory  
Pluralism and the Golden Rule  
The Problem of Evil and Free Will  
Secular Ethics and Toleration  
Criticisms of Secularism and Global Ethics

### Reading

Plato, *Euthyphro*  
Gandhi, *Religion and Truth*  
Ignatieff, *Reimagining a Global Ethic*

### Key Terms

Secular Ethics	Divine Command Theory	Theodicies
Cosmopolitanism	Religious Pluralism	Secularization
The Enlightenment	Value Pluralism	Paradox of Toleration
Civil Disobedience	Golden Rule	Fundamentalism
Eurocentricism		

### Getting Started

You might begin by discussing how the diversity apparent in our increasingly integrated world both improves relationships and creates strife. The U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights aims for global agreement about basic rights, but there are outstanding disagreements

about the nature of those rights, such as the roles of women and expression of irreligious beliefs. Ask students for examples from the news about the clash of freedom of expression and religious convictions. They should start to grapple with the issue of how ethics intersects with religion, and especially with religious fundamentalism.

### **Answers to the Review Exercises in the Text**

1. According to the U.N.'s Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the nations of the world are supposed to share basic moral principles, despite our vast cultural, religious, and political differences. The Declaration upholds the inherent dignity of human beings and equal rights of men and women. This often clashes with the religious convictions of many people, who believe that free speech is contraindicated, especially in regard to religious criticism.
2. Much of the terminology about freedom of religion and morality is rooted in Western thinking. We tend to tell a Eurocentric or Western-focused story about the development of tolerance, liberty and individual rights. To people who identify with non-Western religions and cultures, this approach reflects a predominantly Christian and European worldview.
3. As imagined by Ignatieff, a global ethic would reach out to common ground where it exists, while agreeing to disagree about the claim that ethical conduct must be derived from a spiritual or religious duty. The global ethic would be based on reasoning and justification of ethical ideas and behavior.
4. One defense of the Divine Command Theory of Ethics is that if there were no God, then there would be no morality. Without God as a source for morality, there would be no eternal, absolute or objective basis for morality. Additionally, without a divine judge who gives out punishments and rewards in the afterlife, there would be no motivation to be ethical.  
An argument against this theory is religious diversity. Given the broad array of religious beliefs throughout the world, and even the diversity of beliefs within each religion, it is difficult to determine which truly reflects the divine command.  
It is inaccurate to say that if there were no God, then everything would be permitted. A number of ethical theories provide reasons and justifications for ethical principle without reference to God.
5. The advantage of a religious approach to ethics is that it describes the "highest good," and leads people to strive for highly ethical behavior. The advantage of the secular approach is that it provides an "overlapping consensus" among people who disagree about religion. It provides a system of values and fair rules that can be agreed upon by people of different religious traditions.

The secular approach can be compatible with religion, as its principles recognize basic ideas about human rights that transcend religious boundaries.

6. Socrates asks whether things are good because they are approved by the gods or whether the gods approve of them because they are good. To say that actions are good just because they are willed or approved by the gods or God seems to make morality arbitrary. Socrates believes that God or the gods condemn or disapprove of certain beliefs and actions because they are inherently bad. Therefore, we should also condemn such actions.
7. There is a goal of moving toward a cosmopolitan and pluralist point of view that would incorporate the insights of the world's great moral and religious traditions. Whether the goal can be attained is an open question. Consider ongoing racial and religious tensions across the world.
8. Consider similarities and differences among the world's religions. Are religious moderates and religious fundamentalists of different faiths similar in their thinking?

### **Questions for Further Thought**

1. Kant thought that history would develop in a cosmopolitan direction. Do you think he was correct? Given the cultural and religious differences across the world, do you think his vision is possible?
2. Religion is at the center of many applied ethical topics. Give two recent examples from current events. How did religious ethics play a part in these events?
3. For religious believers who think that God requires absolute obedience to his commandments, a secular ethic that does not explicitly embrace God as the source of morality will appear to be morally suspect and blasphemous. Do you think this strain of thought can be compatible with a global moral ethic?
4. Do you believe that there are limits to toleration? Should we tolerate those who are intolerant of the very idea of toleration?

**Answers to the Study Questions Preceding the Reading by Plato**

1. Piety is “that which is dear to the gods,” or that which is favored by the gods or approved by them.
2. Yes, even the gods disagree about what is just and unjust. This poses a problem for Euthyphro’s first definition of piety because what will be agreeable to one god will be disagreeable to another. Thus some action could be both pious and impious at the same time according to Euthyphro’s definition.
3. Euthyphro amends his definition of piety to what all the gods approve of.
4. He asks “whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved of the gods.”
5. This shows that being pious comes first. Something is first pious or holy and because of this it is loved by the gods.
6. Being loved is an attribute of holiness, not its essence. What is needed is to give the essence of holiness. This is yet to be done and is a continuing question throughout the Platonic dialogues.

#### **Answers to the Study Questions Preceding the Reading by     Gandhi**

1. Gandhi describes the permanent element in human nature that yearns to know its Maker and appreciate the true correspondence between the Maker and itself.
2. Gandhi believes in the goodness of God, as proven by the fact that even in the midst of death, life persists, and even in the midst of untruth, truth persists, and even in the midst of darkness, light persists. His argument is debatable.
3. God is truth and fearlessness, so in order to know God, one must be willing to identify with and face every creature. Therefore, religious people should not avoid any field of life.
4. Ahisma is necessary because God cannot be realized by one who is not pure of heart.
5. Many people of faith would agree with Gandhi’s contention, but others would disagree, saying that various religions are radically different from one another.
6. Gandhi believes that God has created all the different faiths and their religious leaders.
7. Gandhi states that belief in God is the cornerstone of all religions.

#### **Answers to the Study Questions Preceding the Reading by     Ignatieff**



1. Global ethical discussions used to be based on the ideas of a Western, university-educated elite. Now, we no longer exclude others, but we face the challenge of conducting a global discussion on the premise of equal inclusion.
2. Since philosophers have been using the idea of natural law, they have employed the idea of universal laws to criticize ethical partiality that is rooted in attachments to class, identity, nation or religion.
3. To deal with the conflict between religious traditions, we should reach out to common ground where it exists, while agreeing to disagree about the claim that ethical conduct must be derived from religion.
4. Often, nations do not believe that the universal ethic should not trump their local interests. Examples of concrete problems that arise are the question about whether to assist other people in other countries, and whether to permit female genital cutting.
5. Ignatieff believes that as defenders of the particular claims of nations and religions encounter one another in the global arena, the fact of adversarial justification will become unavoidable. We will discard the idea that any one value trumps another, and we will need to justify our values through persuasion with reason. The particular values of each nation, and the global values, will all have to justify themselves.