

UPDATED ELEVENTH EDITION

ETHICS

THEORY AND PRACTICE



Jacques P. Thiroux ■ Keith W. Krasemann

Ethics

Theory and Practice

Updated Eleventh Edition

Jacques P. Thiroux

Keith W. Krasemann

College of DuPage

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Preface

The fundamental issues in today's rapidly changing and globally expanding world are ethical. Leadership in such a world demands courage, commitment, character, and good ethical reasoning skills to address these challenges head on. Accordingly, the importance of teaching ethics in higher education has never been greater. With this updated eleventh edition of *Ethics: Theory and Practice*, I wish to acknowledge the significant contributions made by all those involved in the teaching of ethics courses who engage students with the core moral issues of our time.

In this edition, I have been careful to keep the overall structure of the text and to preserve the many positive features of this book that instructors have adapted for use in their courses. Some of this material has been revised and updated and I expect to continue to make the text more inclusive and relevant. Some of the new material in this edition includes new critical thinking exercises and ethics problems dealing with bullying, cheating, sexual relations between humans and animals, human experimentation, euthanasia in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, rationalizations in business, and selling body parts on Craigslist.

Extensive editing was also done to update the language used in earlier editions of this text. Professor Thiroux wrote liberally in the first person and although this style was pleasing to many readers, comments like "I feel," "I believe," and "I agree" presented a distraction for others. Moreover, these comments gave a bias to the text. After all, the point of the text is to comprehensively survey the ethical landscape, clarify issues and problems, and lay out arguments on all sides in order that students may draw their own conclusions. And, since there are now two authors, the continued use of the first person was needlessly confusing and has been removed from the first sixteen chapters.

A decision was made to leave the use of the first person in the eight appendices: "Applying Humanitarian Ethics to Moral Problems." The Theory of Humanitarian Ethics was one of Jacques Thiroux's key contributions to the field of ethics and to this text. It also represents his attempt to work out and apply a philosophy of life. As such, these appendices represent the views of Thiroux and his use of the personal pronoun is usually accompanied by a justification for his position. Furthermore, because he is working out a philosophy of life, the frequent use of the personal pronoun gives the reader insight into "how" Thiroux is approaching a problem and "how" he is thinking about important issues which is different than "what" he is thinking.

I express my thanks to all the professors and students who for over 30 years have used Jacques Thiroux's text.

It meant a great deal to Jacques that you found this text usable and useful in teaching a topic of such importance. It was a privilege, for me, to be asked aboard as a coauthor for the ninth edition and I know Jacques was very pleased with the many new ideas I brought to that edition. I hope to continue Professor Thiroux's legacy with many new editions.

Updates to the Edition

The updated 11th edition of *Ethics: Theory and Practice* is focused on enhancing the student learning experience. New features to support student learning include:

- Revised learning objectives placed at the beginning of each chapter.
- Topically appropriate Shared Writing exercises are found at the end of each chapter.
- Statistics, dates and other facts are updated throughout the text.
- Additional materials were added dealing with health-care, pornography, and the environment.
- Outdated materials were removed.

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Ethics continues to be one of the more important human endeavors. We must continue debating the issues, allowing for dissent and using the best ethical reasoning we can muster, to deal with the difficult problems of the twenty-first century.

Keith W. Krasemann

Professor of Philosophy
and Religious Studies College of DuPage

Chapter 1

The Nature of Morality



Learning Objectives

- 1.1 Relate the three areas of philosophy to ethics
- 1.2 Recall the scientific or the descriptive approaches to understand morality
- 1.3 Describe the two parts of the philosophical approach to understand morality
- 1.4 Recognize that a complete study of ethics demands use of the descriptive, the normative, and the metaethical approaches
- 1.5 Distinguish between morality and other related terms to understand the concept of morality
- 1.6 Examine the four aspects of religious morality, morality-nature, individual morality, and social morality
- 1.7 Analyze the possible origins of morality
- 1.8 Review customary or traditional morality
- 1.9 Recognize that ethical theories should be critically judged before we continue to accept or live by them
- 1.10 Review the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional levels of moral thinking
- 1.11 Recognize that legal codes are empty without morality even though the law serves to codify and sanction it
- 1.12 Evaluate the relation between morality and religion
- 1.13 Argue in favor of the fact that human beings should be moral

Morality claims our lives. It makes claims upon each of us that are stronger than the claims of law and take priority over self-interest. As human beings living in the world, we have basic duties and obligations. There are certain things we *must* do and certain things we *must not* do. In other words, there is an ethical dimension of human existence. As human beings, we experience life in a world of good and evil and understand certain kinds of actions in terms of right and wrong. The very structure of human existence dictates that we must make choices. Ethics guides us in the responsible use of freedom and helps us understand who we are. And, ethics gives direction in our struggle to answer the fundamental questions that ask how we should live our lives and how we can make right choices.

1.1: What is the Relationship Between Philosophy and Ethics?

1.1 Relate the three areas of philosophy to ethics

Philosophy literally means love of wisdom, from the Greek words *philia* meaning love or friendship and *sophia* meaning wisdom. The following three areas of philosophy will be our major concern in this course:

- *epistemology* (the study of knowledge),
- *metaphysics* (the study of the nature of reality), and
- *ethics* (the study of morality)

Aesthetics (the study of values in art or beauty) and *logic* (the study of argument and the principles of correct reasoning) are two additional areas of philosophy that constitute its five major branches.

The following Table 1.1 lists different branches of philosophy:

Table 1.1 Branches of Philosophy

Branch name	Description
Epistemology	Epistemology deals with the following questions: What is knowledge? What are truth and falsity, and to what do they apply? What is required for someone to actually <i>know</i> something? What is the nature of perception, and how reliable is it? What's the difference between knowledge and belief? Is there anything such as "certain knowledge"?
Metaphysics	Metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality, asking the following questions: What is the nature of reality and of the things that exist? Specifically, such questions as the following are asked: Is there really cause and effect and, if so, how does it work? What is the nature of the physical world, and is there anything other than the physical, such as the mental or spiritual? What is the nature of human beings? Is there freedom in reality, or is everything predetermined?
Ethics	Ethics is concerned with what is right or wrong in human behavior and conduct. It asks such questions as what constitutes any person or action being good, bad, right, or wrong and how do we know (epistemology)? What part does self-interest or the interests of others play in the making of moral decisions and judgments? What theories of conduct are valid or invalid and why? Should we use principles or rules or laws as the basis for our choices, or should we let each situation decide our morality? Are killing, lying, cheating, stealing, and certain kinds of sexual acts right or wrong, and why or why not?
Aesthetics	Aesthetics is the study of values in art or beauty. It is concerned with what is good, bad, right or wrong in art and with what constitutes the beautiful and nonbeautiful in our lives.
Logic	Logic is the study of argument and the principles of correct reasoning. Logic is instrumental for good moral reasoning.

As you can see, the above three areas of philosophy are related and at times overlap, but each one is worthy of concentrated study in itself. The major concern in this course, as its title suggests, is ethics, and before going any further, it is important to define some key terms used in any discussion of ethics or morality.

1.1.1: Definition of Key Terms

In ordinary language, we frequently use the words *ethical* and *moral* (and *unethical* and *immoral*) interchangeably; that is, we speak of the ethical or moral person or act. On the other hand, we speak of codes of ethics, but only infrequently do we mention codes of morality. Some reserve the terms *moral* and *immoral* only for the realm of sexuality and use the words *ethical* and *unethical* when discussing how the business and professional communities should behave toward their

members or toward the public. More commonly, however, we use none of these words as often as we use the terms *good*, *bad*, *right*, and *wrong*. What do all of these words mean, and what are the relationships among them?

Ethics comes from the Greek *ethos*, meaning character. *Morality* comes from the Latin *moralis*, meaning customs or manners. Ethics, then, seems to pertain to the individual character of a person or persons, whereas morality seems to point to the relationships between human beings. Nevertheless, in ordinary language, whether we call a person ethical or moral, or an act unethical or immoral, doesn't really make any significant difference. In philosophy, however, the term *ethics* is also used to refer to a specific area of study: the area of morality, which concentrates on human conduct and human values.

When we speak of people as being moral or ethical, we usually mean that they are good people, and when we speak of them as being immoral or unethical, we mean that they are bad people. When we refer to certain human actions as being moral, ethical, immoral, and unethical, we mean that they are right or wrong. The simplicity of these definitions, however, ends here, for how do we define a right or wrong action or a good or bad person? What are the human standards by which such decisions can be made? These are the more difficult questions that make up the greater part of the study of morality, and they will be discussed in more detail in later chapters. The important thing to remember here is that *moral*, *ethical*, *immoral*, and *unethical* essentially mean *good*, *right*, *bad*, and *wrong*, often depending upon whether one is referring to people themselves or to their actions.

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD, BAD, RIGHT, WRONG, HAPPINESS, OR PLEASURE It seems to be an empirical fact that whatever human beings consider to be good involves happiness and pleasure in some way, and whatever they consider to be bad involves unhappiness and pain in some way. This view of what is good has traditionally been called "**hedonism.**" As long as the widest range of interpretation is given to these words (from simple sensual pleasures to intellectual or spiritual pleasures and from sensual pain to deep emotional unhappiness), it is difficult to deny that whatever is good involves at least some pleasure or happiness, and whatever is bad involves some pain or unhappiness.

One element involved in the achievement of happiness is the necessity of taking the long-range rather than the short-range view. People may undergo some pain or unhappiness in order to attain some pleasure or happiness in the long run. For example, we will put up with the pain of having our teeth drilled in order to keep our teeth and gums healthy so that we may enjoy eating and the general good health that results from having teeth that are well maintained. Similarly, people may do very difficult and even painful work for two days in order to earn money that will bring them pleasure and happiness for a week or two.

Furthermore, the term *good* should be defined in the context of human experience and human relationships rather than in an abstract sense only. For example, knowledge and power in themselves are not good unless a human being derives some satisfaction from them or unless they contribute in some way to moral and meaningful human relationships. They are otherwise nonmoral.

What about actions that will bring a person some good but will cause pain to another, such as those acts of a sadist who gains pleasure from violently mistreating another human being? Our original statement was that everything that is good will bring some person satisfaction, pleasure, or happiness of some kind, but this statement does not necessarily work in the reverse—that everything that brings someone satisfaction is necessarily good. There certainly are “malicious pleasures.”

EXCELLENCE William Frankena (1908–1994) states that whatever is good will also probably involve “some kind or degree of excellence.”¹ He goes on to say that “what is bad in itself is so because of the presence of either pain or unhappiness or of some kind of defect or lack of excellence.”² Excellence is an important addition to pleasure or satisfaction in that it makes “experiences or activities better or worse than they would otherwise be.”³ For example, the enjoyment or satisfaction gained from hearing a concert, seeing a fine movie, or reading a good book is due, to a great extent, to the excellence of the creators and presenters of these events (composers, performers, directors, actors, and writers). Another and perhaps more profound example of the importance of excellence is that if one gains satisfaction or pleasure from witnessing a well-conducted court case and from seeing and hearing the judge and the lawyers perform their duties well, that satisfaction will be deepened if the judge and the lawyers are also excellent people, that is, if they are kind, fair, and compassionate human beings in addition to being clever and able.

Whatever is good, then, will probably contain some pleasure, happiness, and excellence, whereas whatever is bad will be characterized by their opposites: pain, unhappiness, and lack of excellence. The above claims only indicate that there will probably be *some* of these elements present. For example, a good person performing a right action might not be particularly happy and might even find what he or she is doing painful; nonetheless, the recipients of the right action might be made happy by it and the right action might also involve excellence.

HARMONY AND CREATIVITY There are two other attributes of “good” and “right” that may add to our definition; they are harmony and creativity on the “good” side and discord, or disharmony, and lack of creativity on the “bad” side. If an action is creative or can aid human beings in becoming creative and, at the same time, help to bring

about a harmonious integration of as many human beings as possible, then we can say it is a right action. If an action has the opposite effect, then we can say that it is a wrong action.

For example, if a person or a group of people can end a war between two nations and create an honorable and lasting peace, then a right or good action has been performed. It can allow members of both nations to be creative rather than destructive and can create harmony between both sides and within each nation. On the other hand, causing or starting a war between two nations will have just the opposite effect. Lester A. Kirkendall (1904–1991) stresses these points and also adds to the earlier discussion about the necessity of placing primary emphasis on what is good or excellent in human experience and relationships:

Whenever a decision or a choice is to be made concerning behavior, the moral decision will be the one which works toward the creation of trust, confidence, and integrity in relationships. It should increase the capacity of individuals to cooperate, and enhance the sense of self-respect in the individual. Acts which create distrust, suspicion, and misunderstanding, which build barriers and destroy integrity are immoral. They decrease the individual’s sense of self-respect and rather than producing a capacity to work together they separate people and break down the capacity for communication.⁴

Two other terms that we should define are **amoral** and **nonmoral**.

AMORAL *Amoral* means having no moral sense, or being indifferent to right and wrong. This term can be applied to very few people. Certain people who have had prefrontal lobotomies tend to act amorally after the operation; that is, they have no sense of right and wrong. And there are a few human beings who, despite moral education, have remained or become amoral. Such people tend to be found among certain criminal types who can’t seem to realize they’ve done anything wrong. They tend not to have any remorse, regret, or concern for what they have done.

One such example of an amoral person is Gregory Powell (1933–2012), who, with Jimmy Lee Smith (1931–2007), gratuitously killed a policeman in an onion field south of Bakersfield, California. A good description of him and his attitude can be found in Joseph Wambaugh’s (1937–) *The Onion Field*.⁵ Another such example is Colin Pitchfork (1960–), another real-life character. Pitchfork raped and killed two young girls in England and was described by Wambaugh in *The Blooding*. In that book, Wambaugh also quotes from various psychologists speaking about the amoral, psychopathological, sociopathological personality, which is defined as “a person characterized by emotional instability, lack of sound judgment, perverse and impulsive (often criminal) behavior, inability to learn from experience, amoral and asocial feelings, and other

serious personality defects.”⁶ He describes “the most important feature of the psychopath . . . as his monumental irresponsibility. He knows what the ethical rules are, at least he can repeat them parrotlike, but they are void of meaning to him.”⁷ He quotes further: “No sense of conscience, guilt, or remorse is present. Harmful acts are committed without discomfort or shame.”⁸ Amoral, then, is basically an attitude that some—luckily only a few—human beings possess.

All of this doesn’t mean that amoral criminals should not be morally blamed and punished for their wrongdoings. In fact, such people may be even more dangerous to society than those who can distinguish right from wrong because usually they are morally uneducable. Society, therefore, needs even more protection from such criminals.

NONMORAL The word *nonmoral* means out of the realm of morality altogether. For example, inanimate objects such as cars and guns are neither moral nor immoral. A person using the car or gun may use it immorally, but the things themselves are nonmoral. Many areas of study (e.g., mathematics, astronomy, and physics) are in themselves nonmoral, but because human beings are involved in these areas, morality may also be involved. A mathematics problem is neither moral nor immoral in itself; however, if it provides the means by which a hydrogen bomb can be exploded, then moral issues certainly will be forthcoming.

In summary, then, the immoral person knowingly violates human moral standards by doing something wrong or by being bad. The amoral person may also violate moral standards because he or she has no moral sense. Something that is nonmoral can neither be good nor bad nor do anything right or wrong simply because it does not fall within the scope of morality.

1.2: Scientific or Descriptive Approach to Morality

1.2 Recall the scientific or the descriptive approaches to understand morality

There are two major approaches to the study of morality. The first is *scientific*, or *descriptive*. This approach is most often used in the social sciences and, like ethics, deals with human behavior and conduct. The emphasis here, however, is empirical; that is, social scientists observe and collect data about human behavior and conduct and then draw certain conclusions. For example, some psychologists, after having observed many human beings in many situations, have reached the conclusion that human beings often act in their own self-interest. This is a descriptive, or scientific, approach to human behavior—the psychologists have observed how human beings act in many situations,

described what they have observed, and drawn conclusions. However, they make no value judgments as to what is morally right or wrong nor do they prescribe how humans ought to behave.

1.3: Philosophical Approach

1.3 Describe the two parts of the philosophical approach to understand morality

The second major approach to the study of morality is called the *philosophical* approach, and it consists of two parts:

1. Normative or Prescriptive Ethics
2. Metaethics or Analytic Ethics

1.3.1: Normative or Prescriptive Ethics

The first part of the philosophical approach deals with norms (or standards) and prescriptions.

Using the example that human beings often act in their own self-interest, normative ethical philosophers would go beyond the description and conclusion of the psychologists and would want to know whether human beings *should* or *ought to* act in their own self-interest. They might even go further and come up with a definite conclusion. For example, given these arguments and this evidence, we arrive at the conclusions shown in the following Table 1.2:

Table 1.2 Ethical Perspectives

Perspective	Conclusion
“Given these arguments and this evidence, human beings should always act in their own self-interest”	Egoism
“Human beings should always act in the interest of others”	Altruism
“Human beings should always act in the interest of all concerned, self included”	Utilitarianism

These three conclusions are no longer merely descriptions, but *prescriptions*; that is, the statements are *prescribing* how human beings *should* behave, not merely *describing* how they *do*, in fact, behave.

Another aspect of normative, or prescriptive, ethics is that it encompasses the making of moral value judgments rather than just the presentation or description of facts or data. For example, such statements as “Abortion is immoral” and “Lupe is a morally good person” may not *prescribe* anything, but they do involve those *normative* moral value judgments that we all make every day of our lives.

1.3.2: Metaethics or Analytic Ethics

The second part of the philosophical approach to the study of ethics is called **metaethics** or, sometimes, **analytic ethics**. Rather than being descriptive or prescriptive, this approach is analytic in two ways.

1. First, metaethicists analyze ethical language (e.g., what we mean when we use the word *good*).
2. Second, they analyze the rational foundations of ethical systems, or the logic and reasoning of various ethicists.

Metaethicists do not prescribe anything nor do they deal directly with normative systems. Instead they “go beyond” (a key meaning of the Greek prefix *meta-*), concerning themselves only indirectly with normative ethical systems by concentrating on reasoning, logical structures, and language rather than on content.

It should be noted here that metaethics, although always used by all ethicists to some extent, has become the sole interest of many modern ethical philosophers. This may be due in part to the increasing difficulty of formulating a system of ethics applicable to all or even most human beings. Our world, our cultures, and our lives have become more and more complicated and pluralistic, and finding an ethical system that will undergird the actions of all humans is a difficult if not impossible task. Therefore, these philosophers feel that they might as well do what other specialists have done and concentrate on language and logic rather than attempt to arrive at ethical systems that will help human beings live together more meaningfully and ethically.

1.4: Synthesis of Approaches

1.4 Recognize that a complete study of ethics demands use of the descriptive, the normative, and the metaethical approaches

One of the major aims of this course is a commitment to a reasonable synthesis of ethical views. That is, this synthesis is intended to be a uniting of opposing positions into a whole in which neither position loses itself completely, but the best or most useful parts of both are brought out through a basic principle that will apply to both. There are, of course, conflicts that cannot be synthesized—you cannot synthesize the German dictator Adolf Hitler’s policies of genocide with any ethical system that stresses the value of life for all human beings—but many can be. For example, later we will see how the views of atheists and agnostics can be synthesized with those of theists in an ethical system that relates to all of them. We will also discover how two major divergent views in normative ethics—the consequentialist and the nonconsequentialist (these terms will

be defined later)—can be synthesized into a meaningful ethical worldview.

The point, however, is that a complete study of ethics demands use of the descriptive, the normative, and the metaethical approaches. It is important for ethicists to draw on any and all data and on valid results of experiments from the natural, physical, and social sciences. They must also examine their language, logic, and foundations. But it seems even more crucial for ethicists to contribute something toward helping all human beings live with each other more meaningfully and more ethically. If philosophy cannot contribute to this latter imperative, then human ethics will be decided haphazardly either by each individual for himself or herself or by unexamined religious pronouncements. Accordingly, this text makes a commitment to a synthesis of descriptive, normative, and analytic ethics, with a heavy emphasis being placed on putting ethics to use in the human community; this means, in effect, placing a heavier emphasis on normative ethics.

1.5: What Is Morality?

1.5 Distinguish between morality and other related terms to understand the concept of morality

So far, we have discussed terminology and approaches to studying morality, but we have yet to discover exactly what morality *is*. A full definition of morality, as with other complex issues, will reveal itself gradually as we proceed through this course. In this module, however, the goal is twofold: to make some important distinctions and to arrive at a basic working definition of morality.

1.5.1: Ethics and Aesthetics

There are two areas of study in philosophy that deal with values and value judgments in human affairs. The first is **ethics**, or the study of morality—what is good, bad, right, or wrong in a *moral* sense. The second is **aesthetics**, or the study of values in art or beauty—what is good, bad, right, or wrong in art and what constitutes the beautiful and the nonbeautiful in our lives. There can, of course, be some overlap between the two areas. For example, one can judge Pablo Picasso’s painting *Guernica* from an artistic point of view, deciding whether it is beautiful or ugly, whether it constitutes good or bad art in terms of artistic technique. One can also discuss its moral import. In it Picasso makes moral comments on the cruelty and immorality of war and the inhumanity of people toward one another. Essentially, however, when we say that a person is attractive or homely, and when we say that a sunset is beautiful or a dog is ugly or a painting is great or its style is mediocre, we are speaking in terms of aesthetic rather than moral or ethical values.

1.5.2: Good, Bad, Right, and Wrong Used in a Nonmoral Sense

The same words we use in a moral sense are also often used in a nonmoral sense. The aesthetic use described previously is one of them. And when, for example, we say that a dog or a knife is good, or that a car runs badly, we are often using these value terms (*good*, *bad*, etc.) in neither an aesthetic nor a moral sense. In calling a dog good, we do not mean that the dog is morally good or even beautiful; we probably mean that it does not bite or that it barks only when strangers threaten us or that it performs well as a hunting dog. When we say that a car runs badly or that a knife is good, we mean that there is something mechanically (but not morally or aesthetically) wrong with the car's engine or that the knife is sharp and cuts well. In short, what we usually mean by such a statement is that the thing in question is good because it can be used to fulfill some kind of function; that is, it is in "good" working order or has been well trained.

It is interesting to note that Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.) argued that being moral has to do with the function of a human being and that in developing his argument he moved from the nonmoral to the moral uses of good and bad. He suggested that anything that is good or bad is so because it functions well or poorly. He then went on to say that if we could discover what the function of a human being is, then we would know how the term *good* or *bad* can be applied to human life. Having arrived at the theory that the proper function of human being is to reason, he concluded that being moral essentially means "reasoning well for a complete life."

Over the years, many questions have been raised concerning this theory. Some doubt whether Aristotle truly managed to pinpoint the function of humans—for example, some religions hold that a human's primary function is to serve God. Others ask whether being moral can be directly tied only to functioning. But the point of this discussion is that the same terms that are used in moral discourse are often also used nonmorally, and neither Aristotle nor anyone else really meant to say that these terms, when applied to such things as knives, dogs, or cars, have anything directly to do with the moral or the ethical.

1.5.3: Morals and Manners, or Etiquette

Manners, or etiquette, is another area of human behavior closely allied with ethics and morals, but careful distinctions must be made between the two spheres. There is no doubt that morals and ethics have a great deal to do with

certain types of human behavior. Not all human behavior can be classified as moral, however; some of it is nonmoral and some of it is social, having to do with *manners*, or etiquette, which is essentially a matter of taste rather than of right or wrong. Often, of course, these distinctions blur or overlap, but it is important to distinguish as clearly as we can between nonmoral and moral behavior and that which has to do with manners alone.

Nonmoral behavior constitutes a great deal of the behavior we see and perform every day of our lives. We must, however, always be aware that our nonmoral behavior can have moral implications. For example, typing a letter is, in itself, nonmoral, but if typing and mailing it will result in someone's death, then morality most certainly enters the picture.

In the realm of manners, behavior such as crude speech, eating with one's hands, and dressing sloppily may be acceptable in some situations but be considered bad manners in others. Such behavior seldom would be considered immoral, however. The fact that it would seldom be considered immoral does not imply that there is *no* connection between manners and morals, only that there is no *necessary* connection between them. Generally speaking, in our society we feel that good manners go along with good morals, and we assume that if people are taught to behave correctly in social situations, they will also behave correctly in moral situations.

It is often difficult, however, to draw a direct connection between behaving in a socially acceptable manner and being moral. Many decadent members of societies past and present have acted with impeccable manners and yet have been highly immoral in their treatment of other people. It is, of course, generally desirable for human beings to behave with good manners toward one another and *also* to be moral in their human relationships. But in order to act morally or to bring to light a moral problem, it may at times be necessary to violate the "manners" of a particular society. For example, several years ago, in many elements of our society, it was considered bad manners (and was, in some areas, illegal) for people of color to eat in the same area of a restaurant as white people. In the many "sit-ins" held in these establishments, certain expectations about manners and proper behavior were violated in order to point out and try to solve the moral problems associated with inequality of treatment and denial of dignity to human beings.

Therefore, although there may at times be a connection between manners and morals, one must take care to distinguish between the two when there is no clear connection. One must not, for example, equate the use of four-letter words in mixed company with rape or murder or dishonesty in business.

1.6: To Whom or What Does Morality Apply?

1.6 Examine the four aspects of religious morality, morality-nature, individual morality, and social morality

In discussing the application of morality, four aspects may be considered: religious morality, morality and nature, individual morality, and social morality.

1.6.1: Religious Morality

Religious morality refers to a human being in relationship to a supernatural being or beings. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, for example, the first three of the Ten Commandments (Figure 1.1) pertain to this kind of morality.⁹ These commandments deal with a person's relationship with God, not with any other human beings. By violating any of these three commandments, a person could, according to this particular code of ethics, act immorally toward God without acting immorally toward anyone else.

Figure 1.1 A paraphrased version of the Ten Commandments

The Ten Commandments	
1.	I am the Lord, Your God; do not worship false gods.
2.	Do not take the name of God in vain.
3.	Keep holy the Sabbath Day.
4.	Honor your father and your mother.
5.	Do not kill.
6.	Do not commit adultery.
7.	Do not steal.
8.	Do not bear false witness against your neighbor.
9.	Do not covet your neighbor's spouse.
10.	Do not covet your neighbor's belongings.

(Exod. 20:1–17)

1.6.2: Morality and Nature

“**Morality and nature**” refers to a human being in relationship to nature. Natural morality has been prevalent in all primitive cultures, such as that of the Native American, and in cultures of the East Asia. More recently, the Western tradition has also become aware of the significance of dealing with nature in a moral manner. Some see nature as being valuable only for the good of humanity, but many others have come to see it as a good in itself, worthy of moral consideration. With this viewpoint there is no question about whether a Robinson Crusoe would be capable of moral or immoral actions on a desert island by himself. In the morality and nature aspect, he could be considered either moral or immoral, depending upon his actions toward the natural things around him.

WRITING PROMPT

Morality and Nature

Describe why human beings have or do not have an obligation to be moral in their dealings and relationships with nature (excluding other human beings).

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1.6.3: Individual Morality

Individual morality refers to individuals in relation to themselves and to an individual code of morality that may or may not be sanctioned by any society or religion. It allows for a “higher morality,” which can be found within the individual rather than beyond this world in some supernatural realm. A person may or may not perform some particular act, not because society, law, or religion says he may or may not, but because he himself thinks it is right or wrong from within his own conscience.

For example, in a Greek legend, a daughter (Antigone) confronts a king (Creon), when she seeks to countermand the king's order by burying her dead brother. In Sophocles' (c. 496–406 B.C.E.) play, Antigone opposes Creon because of God's higher law; but the Antigone in Jean Anouilh's (1910–1987) play opposes Creon not because of God's law, of which she claims no knowledge, but because of her own individual convictions about what is the right thing to do in dealing with human beings, even dead human beings. This aspect can also refer to that area of morality concerned with obligations individuals have to themselves (to promote their own well-being, to develop their talents, to be true to what they believe in, etc.). Commandments nine and ten, although also applicable to social morality, as we shall see in a moment, are good examples of at least an exhortation to individual morality. The purpose of saying “do not covet” would seem to be to set up an internal control within each individual, not even to think of stealing a neighbor's goods or spouse. It is interesting to speculate why there are no “don't covet” type commandments against killing or lying, for example. At any rate, these commandments would seem to stress an individual as well as a social morality.

1.6.4: Social Morality

Social morality concerns a human being in relation to other human beings. It is probably the most important aspect of morality, in that it cuts across all of the other aspects and is found in more ethical systems than any of the others.

Returning briefly to the desert-island example, most ethicists probably would state that Robinson Crusoe is incapable of any really moral or immoral action except toward himself and nature. Such action would be minimal when compared with the potential for morality or immorality if there were nine other people on the island whom he could subjugate, torture, or destroy. Many ethical systems would allow that what he would do to himself is strictly his business, “as long as it doesn’t harm anyone else.”

For a majority of ethicists, the most important human moral issues arise when human beings come together in social groups and begin to conflict with one another. Even though the Jewish and Christian ethical systems, for example, importune human beings to love and obey God, both faiths, in all of their divisions and sects, have a strong social message. In fact, perhaps 70 to 90 percent of all of their admonitions are directed toward how one human being is to behave toward others. Jesus stated this message succinctly when He said that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. These fall equally under the religious and social aspects, but observing the whole of Jesus’ actions and preachings, one sees the greater emphasis on treating other human beings morally. He seems to say that if one acts morally toward other human beings, then one is automatically acting morally toward God. This is emphasized in one of Jesus’ Last Judgment parables paraphrased as follows: “Whatever you have done to the least of Mine [the lowest human beings], so have you done it to Me.” Three of the Ten Commandments are directed specifically toward God, while seven are directed toward other human beings—the social aspect taking precedence. In other religions, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, the social aspect represents almost all of morality, there being very little if any focus on the supernatural or religious aspect. Furthermore, everything that is directed toward the individual aspect is also often intended for the good of others who share in the individual’s culture.

Nonreligious ethical systems, too, often stress the social aspect, as demonstrated by the following three ethical systems:

- **Ethical egoism**, which would seem to stress the individual aspect, says in its most commonly stated form, “*everyone* ought to act in his own self-interest,” emphasizing the whole social milieu.
- **Utilitarianism** in all of its forms emphasizes the good of “all concerned” and therefore obviously is dealing with the social aspect.
- **Nonconsequentialist**, or **deontological**, theories such as Kant’s stress actions toward others more than any other aspect, even though the reasons for acting morally toward others are different from those of ethical egoism or utilitarianism.

The important thing to note at this point is that most ethical systems, even the most individualistic or religious, will emphasize the social aspect either exclusively or much more than any of the other aspects.

How, then, are we to use these aspects? We may draw upon them as effective distinctions that will allow us to think in the widest terms about the applicability of human ethics. In the spirit of synthesis, however, it might be wise if we hold these distinctions open in unity so that we can accept into a broad human ethics the religious, nature and morality, and individual aspects, recognizing nevertheless that most ethical systems meet in the social aspect. We should, in other words, keep our eyes on the first three aspects while we stand firmly planted in the social aspect, where most human moral problems and conflicts occur.

WRITING PROMPT

Ethical Code and Various Aspects of Morality

Look up an ethical system or code (e.g., your university, work place, or a company you like). Review the do’s and don’ts of their ethical code. Select 4–6 and explain how they apply to the various aspects of morality.



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1.6.5: Who Is Morally or Ethically Responsible?

Who can be held morally or ethically responsible for their actions? All of the evidence we have gained to date compels us to say that morality pertains to human beings and only to human beings; all else is speculation. If one wants to attribute morality to supernatural beings, one has to do so on faith. If one wants to hold animals or plants morally responsible for destructive acts against each other or against humans, then one has to ignore most of the evidence that science has given us concerning the instinctual behavior of such beings and the evidence of our own everyday observations.

Recent experimentation with the teaching of language to animals suggests that they are at least minimally capable of developing some thought processes similar to those of humans. It is even possible that they might be taught morality in the future, as humans are now. If this were to occur, then animals could be held morally responsible for their actions. At the present time, however, most evidence seems to indicate that they, as well as plants, should be classified as either nonmoral or amoral—that is, they should be considered either as having no moral sense or as being out of the moral sphere altogether.

Therefore, when we use the terms *moral* and *ethical*, we are using them in reference only to human beings. We do not hold a wolf morally responsible for killing a sheep, or a fox morally responsible for killing a chicken. We may kill the wolf or fox for having done this act, but we do not kill it because we hold the animal *morally* responsible. We do it because we don't want any more of our sheep or chickens to be killed. At this point in the world's history, only human beings can be moral or immoral, and therefore only human beings should be held morally responsible for their actions and behavior. There are, of course, limitations as to when human beings can be held morally responsible, but the question of moral responsibility should not even be brought up where nonhumans are involved.

WRITING PROMPT

Assessing Whether Humans Are Good or Bad

Take a position on whether human beings are essentially good, bad, or a combination of both. State your position. Explain how this position affects your approach to morality.

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1.7: Where Does Morality Come From?

1.7 Analyze the possible origins of morality

There has always been a great deal of speculation about where morality or ethics comes from. Has it always been a part of the world, originating from some supernatural being or embedded within nature itself, or is it strictly a product of the minds of human beings? Or is it some combination of two or all three of these? Because morality and ethics deal with values having to do with good, bad, right, and wrong, are these values totally objective—that is, “outside of” human beings? Are they subjective or strictly “within” human beings? Or are they a combination of the two? Let us consider the possibilities.

1.7.1: Values as Totally Objective

There are three ways of looking at values when they are taken as being totally objective:

1. They come from some supernatural being or beings.
2. There are moral laws somehow embedded within nature itself.

3. The world and objects in it have value with or without the presence of valuing human beings.

THE SUPERNATURAL THEORY Some people believe that values come from some higher power or supernatural being, beings, or principle—the Good (Plato); the gods (the Greeks and Romans); Yahweh or God (the Jews); God and His Son, Jesus (the Christians); Allah (the Muslims); and Brahma (the Hindus), to name a few. They believe, further, that these beings or principles embody the highest good themselves and that they reveal to human beings what is right or good and what is bad or wrong. If human beings want to be moral (and usually they are encouraged in such desires by some sort of temporal or eternal reward), then they must follow these principles or the teachings of these beings. If they don't, then they will end up being disobedient to the highest morality (God, for example), will be considered immoral, and will usually be given some temporal or eternal punishment for their transgressions. Or, if they believe in a principle rather than a supernatural being or beings, then they will be untrue to the highest moral principle.

CRITICISMS OF THE SUPERNATURAL THEORY Albert Einstein (1879–1955), the great mathematician/physicist, said,

“I do not believe in immortality of the individual, and I consider ethics to be an exclusively human concern with no superhuman authority behind it.”¹⁰

It is, of course, possible that the supernatural exists and that it somehow communicates with the natural world and the human beings in it. This view is chiefly a belief, based on faith. There is of course rational justification for such a belief, and faith can have a rational basis. Evidence for the existence of a supernatural being is often cited and, indeed, there have been philosophical arguments put forward that attempted to prove God's existence. However, there is no *conclusive* proof of the existence of a supernatural being, beings, or principle. Also, there are a great number of highly diverse traditions describing such beings or principles. This diversity makes it very difficult to determine exactly what values the beings or principles are trying to communicate and which values, communicated through the many traditions, human beings should accept and follow. All of this does not mean that we should stop searching for the truth or for verification of the possibility of supernaturally based values, but it does mean that it is difficult to establish with any certainty that morality comes from this source.

THE NATURAL LAW THEORY Others believe that morality somehow is embodied in nature and that there are “natural laws” that human beings must adhere to if they are to be moral. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) argued for this as well as for the supernatural basis for