

Chapter 1

The Nature of Morality

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Morality claims our lives. It makes claims upon each of us that are stronger than the claims of law and takes 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 helps us use our freedom responsibly and 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.

OBJECTIVES

After you have read this chapter, you should be able to

1. Define *philosophy* and explain the relationship of ethics to it.
2. Define key terms concerning ethics or morality.
3. Explain the various approaches to the study of morality.
4. Understand what morality is and how it differs from aesthetics, nonmoral behavior, and manners.
5. Understand to whom morality applies.
6. Have some idea of where morality comes from.
7. Distinguish between morality and the law.
8. Distinguish between morality and religion.
9. Understand why human beings should be moral.

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS' RELATIONSHIP TO IT?

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 book: *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.

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 *know* 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"? From time to time throughout this book, epistemological questions will be discussed, especially in Chapter 5, which deals with absolutes and truth.

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? Here again, we will deal with some of these questions throughout the book, but especially in Chapter 5 (Are there any absolutes, or is everything really relative?) and Chapter 6 (Is there any such thing as freedom, or are all things in reality predetermined?)

Ethics, our main concern, deals 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?

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 book, 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.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Ethical, Moral, Unethical, Immoral

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 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 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, who, with Jimmy Lee Smith, 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 *The Onion Field*.⁵ Another such example is Colin Pitchfork, 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.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF MORALITY

Scientific, or Descriptive, Approach

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.

Philosophical Approach

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

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, human beings should always act in their own self-interest” (egoism). Or they might say, “Human beings should always act

in the interest of others” (altruism), or “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.

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. First, metaethicists analyze ethical language (e.g., what we mean when we use the word *good*). 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.

Synthesis of Approaches

One of the major aims of this book 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 in the book 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.

MORALITY AND ITS APPLICATIONS

What Is 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 book. In this chapter, however, the goal is twofold: to make some important distinctions and to arrive at a basic working definition of morality.

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.

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) 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.

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.

Let us take an example from everyday life: an employer giving a secretary a routine business letter to type. Both the act of giving the letter to the secretary and the secretary's act in typing it involve nonmoral behavior. Let us now suppose that the employer uses four-letter words in talking to the secretary and is loud and rude in front of all of the employees in the office. What the employer has done, essentially, is to exhibit poor *manners*; he or she has not really done anything immoral. Swearing and rudeness may be deemed wrong conduct by many, but basically they are an offense to taste rather than a departure from morality.

Let us now suppose, however, that the contents of the letter would ruin an innocent person's reputation or result in someone's death or loss of livelihood. The behavior now falls into the sphere of morality, and questions must be raised about the morality of the employer's behavior. Also, a moral problem arises for the secretary concerning whether he or she should type the letter. Further, if the employer uses four-letter words to intimidate or sexually harass the secretary, then he or she is being immoral by threatening the employee's sense of personal safety, privacy, integrity, and professional pride.

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 swearing, 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. I do not mean to 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, manners 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.

To Whom or What Does Morality Apply?

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

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.

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 Far East. 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.

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.

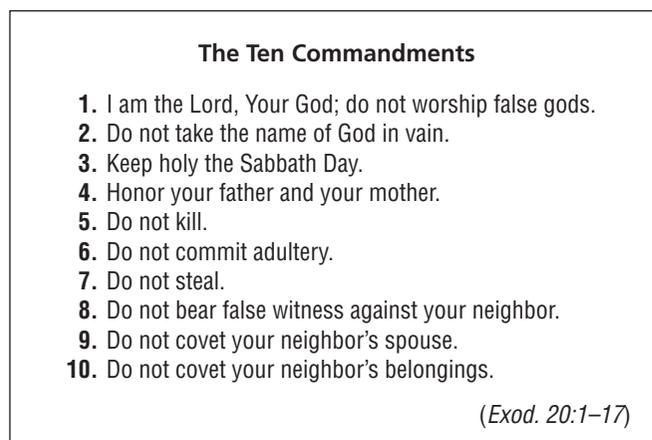


FIGURE 1–1 A paraphrased version of the Ten Commandments.

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.) play, Antigone opposes Creon because of God's higher law; but the Antigone in Jean Anouilh's 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.

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. 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 when He says (and I paraphrase), "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. 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 (see Chapter 3) 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. These theories will be dealt with in detail in Chapters 2 and 3. 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.

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.

WHERE DOES MORALITY COME FROM?

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.

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.

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 morality. For example, some people will state that homosexuality is immoral because it goes against “natural moral law”—that is, it is against nature for beings of the same sex to sexually desire or love one another or to engage in sexual acts.

Values as Totally Subjective

In opposition to these arguments, there are those who would argue that morality stems strictly from within human beings. That is, they believe that things can have values and be classed as good, bad, right, or wrong if and only if there is some conscious being who can put value on these things. In other words, if there are no human beings, then there can be no values.

Evaluation of Objective and Subjective Positions

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.

CRITICISMS OF THE NATURAL LAW THEORY. On the other hand, we certainly talk about “laws of nature,” such as the law of gravity, but if we examine such laws closely, we see that they are quite different from man-made laws having to do with morality or the governing of societies. The law of gravity, for example, says, in effect, that all material objects are drawn toward the center of the earth: If we throw a ball into the air, it will always fall back down to the ground. Sir Isaac Newton discovered that this phenomenon occurred every time an object was subjected to gravity’s pull, and he described this constant recurrence by calling it a “law of nature.” The key word in this process is described, for so-called natural laws are *descriptive*, whereas moral and societal laws are *prescriptive*. In other words, the natural law does not say that the ball, when thrown into the air, *should* or *ought to* fall to the ground, as we say that human beings *should not* or *ought not* kill other human beings. Rather, the law of gravity says that the ball *does* or *will* fall when thrown, describing rather than prescribing its behavior.

The question we should ask at this point is, “Are there any natural *moral* laws that *prescribe* how beings in nature should or ought to behave or not behave?” If there are such moral laws, what would they be? As mentioned earlier, homosexuality is considered by some to be “unnatural” or “against the laws of nature,” a belief that implies the conviction that only heterosexual behavior is “natural.” If, however, we examine all aspects of nature, we discover that heterosexuality is not the only type of sexuality that occurs in nature. Some beings in nature are asexual (have no sex at all), some are homosexual (animals as well as humans), and many are bisexual (engaging in sexual behavior with both male and female of the species). Human beings, of course, may wish to *prescribe*, for one reason or another, that homosexual or antiheterosexual behavior is wrong, but it is difficult to argue that there is some “law of nature” that prohibits homosexuality.

CRITICISMS OF VALUES EXISTING IN THE WORLD AND ITS OBJECTS. Is it feasible or even possible to think of something having a value without there being someone to value it? What value do gold, art, science, politics, and music have without human beings around to value them? After all, except for gold, didn’t human beings invent or create them all? It seems, then, almost impossible for values to totally exist in the world and in things themselves.

CRITICISM OF THE SUBJECTIVE POSITION. Must we then arrive at the position that values are entirely subjective and that the world in all of its aspects would have absolutely no value if there were no human beings living in it? Let us try to imagine objectively a world without any human beings in it. Is there nothing of value in the world and nature—air, water, earth, sunlight, the sea—unless human beings are there to appreciate it? Certainly, whether or not human beings exist, plants and animals would find the world “valuable” in fulfilling their needs. They would find “value” in the warmth of the sun and the shade of the trees, in the food they eat and the water that quench their thirst. It is true that many things in the world, such as art, science, politics, and music, are valued only by human beings, but there are also quite a few things that are valuable whether human beings are around or not. So it would seem that values are not entirely subjective any more than they are entirely objective.

VALUES AS BOTH SUBJECTIVE AND OBJECTIVE—A SYNTHESIS. It would seem that at least some values reside outside of human beings, even though perhaps many more are dependent on conscious human beings, who are able to value things. Therefore, it would

seem that values are more complex than either the subjective or the objective position can describe and that a better position to take is that values are both objective and subjective. A third variable should be added so that there is an interaction of three variables as follows:

1. The thing of value or the thing valued.
2. A conscious being who values, or the valuer.
3. The context or situation in which the valuing takes place.

For example, gold in itself has value in its mineral content and in that it is bright, shiny, and malleable. However, when seen by a human being and discovered to be rare, it becomes—in the context of its beauty and in its role as a support for world finances—a much more highly valued item than it is in itself. Its fullest value, then, depends not only on its individual qualities but also on some conscious being who is valuing it in a specific context or situation. Needless to say, gold is one of those things whose value is heavily dependent on subjective valuing. Note, however, that gold's value would change if the context or situation did. For example, suppose someone were stranded on a desert island without food, water, or human companionship but with 100 pounds of gold. Wouldn't gold's value have dropped considerably given the context or situation in which food, water, and human companionship were missing and which no amount of gold could purchase? This example shows how the context or situation can affect values and valuing.

WHERE DOES MORALITY COME FROM? Values, then, would seem to come most often from a complex interaction between conscious human beings and “things” (material, mental, or emotional) in specific contexts. But how can this discussion help us answer the question of where morality comes from? Any assumptions about the answer to the question of morality's origins certainly have to be speculative. Nevertheless, by observing how morality develops and changes in human societies, one can see that it has arisen largely from human needs and desires and that it is based upon human emotions and reason.

It seems logical to assume that as human beings began to become aware of their environment and of other beings like them, they found that they could accomplish more when they were bonded together than they could when isolated from one another. Through deep feelings and thoughts, and after many experiences, they decided upon “goods” and “bads” that would help them to live together more successfully and meaningfully. These beliefs needed sanctions, which were provided by high priests, prophets, and other leaders. Morality was tied by these leaders not only to *their* authority but also to the authority of some sort of supernatural being or beings or to nature, which, in earlier times, were often considered to be inseparable.

For example, human beings are able to survive more successfully within their environment in a group than they can as isolated individuals. However, if they are to survive as a community, there must be some prohibition against killing. This prohibition can be arrived at either by a consensus of all of the people in the community or by actions taken by the group's leaders. The leaders might provide further sanctions for the law against killing by informing the people that some supernatural being or beings, which may or may not be thought to operate through nature, state that killing is wrong.

It is also possible, of course, that a supernatural being or beings who have laid down such moral laws really exist. However, because most of these laws have in fact been delivered to human beings by other human beings (Moses, Jesus, Buddha, Muhammed, Confucius, and others), we can only say for sure that most of our morality and ethics comes from ourselves—that is, from human origins. All else is speculation or a matter of faith. At the very least, it seems that morality and moral responsibility must be

derived from human beings and applied in human contexts. Furthermore, people must decide what is right or good and what is wrong or bad by using both their experience and their best and deepest thoughts and feelings and by applying them as rationally and meaningfully as they can. This brings us to the important distinction between customary or traditional and reflective morality.

CUSTOMARY OR TRADITIONAL AND REFLECTIVE MORALITY

Customary or Traditional Morality

We are all quite familiar with customary or traditional morality because we are all born into it; it is the first morality with which we come into contact. Morality that exists in various cultures and societies is usually based on custom or tradition, and it is presented to its members, often without critical analysis or evaluation, throughout their childhood and adult years. There is nothing necessarily wrong or bad about this approach to training society's youth and also its members as a whole.

Many customs and traditions are quite effective and helpful in creating moral societies. As suggested in the previous paragraph, many moral teachings have arisen out of human need in social interaction and have become customs and traditions in a particular society. For example, in order to live together creatively and in peace, one of the first moral teachings or rules has to be about taking human life because, obviously, if life is constantly in danger, then it is very difficult for people to live and work together. However, in order for customs and traditions to be effective and continuously applicable to the members of a society, they must be critically analyzed, tested, and evaluated, and this is where reflective morality comes in.

Reflective Morality

Philosophers in general demand of themselves and others that every human belief, proposition, or idea be examined carefully and critically to ensure that it has its basis in truth. Morality is no different from any other area of philosophic study in this respect. Philosophers do not suggest that custom and tradition be eliminated or thrown out, but they do urge human beings to use reason to examine the basis and effectiveness of all moral teachings or rules, no matter how traditional or accepted they are. In other words, philosophy requires human beings to reflect on their moral customs and traditions to determine whether they should be retained or eliminated. The revered Greek philosopher Socrates (470?–399 B.C.) said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” For morality, a corollary might be, “The unexamined custom or tradition is not worth living by.” Therefore, just as people should not accept statements or propositions for which there is no proof or significant logical argument, so they should not accept moral customs or traditions without first testing them against proof, reason, and their experience.

A good example of reflective morality is an examination of the aforementioned Ten Commandments, which many people in Western culture swear by and claim to follow. Interestingly enough, a good many people don't even know what most of them are (with the possible exception of the one against committing adultery, which everyone seems to know!) and often cannot even list them in order or otherwise. Further, how many have examined them in the manner suggested in this chapter and realized that they apply to different aspects of morality? How many people realize that the first three commandments apply only to human beings in relationship to a supernatural being or beings, that commandments four through eight apply to their relationships with others, and that nine and ten basically apply to themselves as individuals?

It is important, then, that all customs, traditions, systems of ethics, rules, and ethical theories should be carefully analyzed and critically evaluated before we continue to accept or live by them. Again, we should not reject them out of hand, but neither should we endorse them wholeheartedly unless we have subjected them to careful, logical scrutiny. Throughout the remaining chapters of this book, you will be strongly encouraged to become reflective thinkers and practitioners when you are dealing with morality and moral issues.

MORALITY, LAW, AND RELIGION

At this point, it is important that we use reflection to distinguish morality from two other areas of human activity and experience with which it is often confused and of which it is often considered a part: law and religion.

Morality and the Law

The phrase *unjust law* can serve as a starting point for understanding that laws can be immoral. We also have “shysters,” or crooked lawyers, who are considered unethical within their own profession. The Watergate conspirators, almost to a man, were lawyers, and the men who tried and judged them were also lawyers. Obviously, morality and the law are not *necessarily* one and the same thing when two people can be lawyers, both having studied a great deal of the same material, and one is moral, whereas the other is not. The many protests we have had throughout history against unjust laws, where, more often than not, the protestors were concerned with “what is moral” or a “higher morality,” would also seem to indicate that distinctions must be made between law and morality.

Does all of this mean that there is no relationship between law and morality? Is law one thing that is set down by human beings and morality something else that they live by? Is there no connection between the two? A “yes” answer to these questions would be extremely hard to support because much of our morality has become embodied in our legal codes. All we have to do is review any of our legal statutes at any level of government, and we find legal sanctions against robbing, raping, killing, and physical and mental mistreatment of others. We will find many other laws that attempt to protect individuals living together in groups from harm and to provide resolutions of conflicts arising from differences—many of them strictly moral—among the individuals composing these groups.

What, then, is the relationship between law and morality? Michael Scriven points out one important difference when he discusses the differences and distinctions among the Ten Commandments, which are some of the earlier laws of Western culture believed by Christians and Jews to have been handed down by God. Scriven distinguishes between the laws against coveting and the laws against murder, stealing, and adultery (see Figure 1–1). There is no way a law can regulate someone’s desire for another man’s wife or belongings as long as the adulterous act or the act of stealing is never carried out. Therefore, the statements about coveting contained in the Ten Commandments would seem to be moral admonitions with regard to how one should think or maintain one’s interior morality, whereas statements against stealing, murder, and adultery are laws, prohibitions that are in some way enforceable against certain human acts.¹¹

The law provides a series of public statements—a legal code, or system of do’s and don’ts—to guide humans in their behavior and to protect them from doing harm to persons and property. Some laws have less moral import than others, but the relationship between law and morality is not entirely reciprocal. What is moral is not necessarily legal and vice versa. That is, you can have morally unjust laws, as mentioned earlier. Also, certain human actions may be considered perfectly legal but be morally questionable.

For example, there were laws in certain parts of the United States that sanctioned the enslavement of one human being by another, despite the fact that freedom and equality for all human beings is a strong basic principle of most ethical systems. It is an important principle in many societies, in theory if not always in action, and it is an important part of the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution that each person within the society ought to have a certain amount of individual freedom and a definite moral equality. (This principle will be discussed more fully later on.) If individual freedom and equality are considered to be moral, then laws preventing them must be immoral. To take another example, there is no law against a large chain store's moving into an area and selling products at a loss in order to force the small store owners out of business. But many ethicists would make a case for the immorality of an action that would result in harm to the lives of the small store owners and their families.

Another example of the distinction between law and morality is the recent increase of ethics courses as a significant part of the curriculum in most law schools across the nation. Since scandals such as Watergate, Whitewater, and the Rodney King and O. J. Simpson trials, the public's opinion of lawyers is at an all-time low, but whether lawyers are popular with the public is not the point. Ethics and ethical behavior seem to be missing from many lawyers' activities to such a degree that law-school faculties have seen an intense need for courses that teach future lawyers the rules of ethical behavior within their profession. Also, many states now require that lawyers who did not have the benefit of a strong ethics course in school take ethics refresher courses. All of this is an indication that to be schooled in the law is not necessarily to be instilled with ethical standards of behavior.

In fact, it should be obvious, then, that morality is not necessarily based on law. A study of history would probably indicate the opposite—that morality precedes law, whereas law sanctions morality; that is, law puts morality into a code or system that can then be enforced by reward or punishment. Perhaps the larger and more complex the society, the greater the necessity for laws, but it is not inconceivable that a moral society could be formed having no legal system at all—just a few basic principles of morality and an agreement to adhere to those principles. This is not to suggest that law should be eliminated from human affairs, but rather to show that law is not a necessary attribute of morality.

Can law, however, do without morality? It would seem that morality provides the reasons behind any significant laws governing human beings and their institutions. What would be the point of having laws against killing and stealing if there were not some concern that such acts were immoral? Very few laws have no moral import. Even laws controlling the incorporation of businesses, which do not seem to have any direct moral bearing on anyone, function at least to ensure fairness to all concerned—stockholders, owners, and employees. It is difficult to think of any law that does not have behind it some moral concern—no matter how minor or remote.

We can say, then, that law is the public codification of morality in that it lists for all members of a society what has come to be accepted as the moral way to behave in that society. Law also establishes what is the moral way to act, and it sanctions—by its codification and by the entire judiciary process set up to form, uphold, and change parts of the code—the morality that it contains. The corrective for unjust laws, however, is not necessarily more laws, but rather valid moral reasoning carried on by the people who live under the code.

Law is a public expression of social morality and also is its sanction. Law cannot in any way replace or substitute for morality, and therefore we cannot arbitrarily equate what is legal with what is moral. Many times the two "whats" will equate exactly, but many times they will not; and indeed many times what is legal will not, and perhaps should not, completely cover what is moral. For example, most ethicists today seem to

agree that except for child molestation and forced sexuality of any kind, there should be no laws governing sexuality among consenting adults. Given this view, one can discuss adult sexual morality without bringing in legal issues. To summarize: It should be obvious that law serves to codify and sanction morality, but that without morality or moral import, law and legal codes are empty.

Morality and Religion

Can there be a morality without religion? Must God or gods exist in order for there to be any real point to morality? If people are not religious, can they ever be truly moral? And if belief in God is required in order to be moral, which religion is the real foundation for morality? There seem to be as many conflicts as there are different religions and religious viewpoints.

Religion is one of the oldest human institutions. We have little evidence that language existed in prehistoric times, but we do have evidence of religious practices, which were entwined with artistic expression, and of laws or taboos exhorting early human beings to behave in certain ways. In these earlier times, morality was embedded in the traditions, mores, customs, and religious practices of the culture.

Furthermore, religion served (as it has until quite recently) as a most powerful sanction for getting people to behave morally. That is, if behind a moral prohibition against murder rests the punishing and rewarding power of an all-powerful supernatural being or beings, then the leaders of a culture have the greatest possible sanction for the morality they want their followers to uphold. The sanctions of tribal reward and punishment pale beside the idea of a punishment or reward that can be more destructive or pleasurable than any that one's fellow human beings could possibly administer.

However, the notion that religion may have preceded any formal legal or separate moral system in human history, or that it may have provided very powerful and effective sanctions for morality, does not at all prove that morality must of necessity have a religious basis. Many reasons can be given to demonstrate morality need not, and indeed should not, be based *solely* on religion.

DIFFICULTY OF PROVING SUPERNATURAL EXISTENCE. First, in order to prove that one must be religious in order to be moral, we would have to prove conclusively that a supernatural world exists and that morality exists there as well as in the natural world. Even if this could be proved, which is doubtful, we would have to show that the morality existing in the supernatural world has some connection with that which exists in the natural world. It seems obvious, however, that in dealing with morality, the only basis we have is this world, the people who exist in it, and the actions they perform.

One test of the truth of this claim would be to take any set of religious admonitions and ask honestly which of them would be absolutely necessary to the establishment of any moral society. For example, we might make a case for any of the Ten Commandments except the first three (see Figure 1–1 on p. 9). The first three may be a necessary set of rules for a Jewish or Christian community, but if a nonreligious community observed only Commandments four through ten, how, *morally* speaking, would the two communities differ—assuming that the religious community observed all ten of the commandments? (One could probably find reasons for eliminating some of the other seven commandments, too, but that is another issue.) We need not imply that morality cannot be founded on religion; it is an obvious empirical fact that it has been, is, and probably will be in the future. However, morality *need* not be founded on religion at all, and there is a danger of narrowness and intolerance if religion becomes the *sole* foundation for morality.

RELIGIOUS PEOPLE CAN BE IMMORAL. It is a known fact that some religious people can be immoral, one only needs to look at some priests of the Roman Catholic Church, who even though highly trained in religion and the ethics of their church, nevertheless were guilty of molesting children under their supervision. Also, consider the many wars and other persecutions carried out by almost every religion in the history of humankind.

NONRELIGIOUS PEOPLE CAN BE MORAL. If we can briefly characterize morality in this world as not harming others or murdering our fellow human beings and generally trying to make life and the world better for everyone and everything that exists, and if many human beings do not accept the existence of a supernatural world and yet act as morally as anyone who does, then there must be some attributes other than religious belief that are necessary for one to be moral. (These attributes will be discussed in later chapters.) Although it is obvious that most religions contain ethical systems, it is not true that all ethical systems are religiously based; therefore, there is no necessary connection between morality and religion. The very fact that completely nonreligious people (e.g., humanist ethicists) can evolve significant and consistent ethical systems is proof of this.

DIFFICULTY OF PROVIDING A RATIONAL FOUNDATION. Providing a rational foundation for an ethical system is difficult enough without also having to provide a foundation for the religion that purportedly founds the ethical system. And the difficulty of rationally founding most religious systems is inescapable. It is impossible to prove conclusively the existence of any supernatural, afterlife, God, or gods. Traditional and modern arguments for the existence or nonexistence of God or gods provide a rational basis for both claims, but there is no conclusive evidence that such beings do or do not exist.¹²

Therefore, if no evidence is conclusive and none of the arguments' logic is irrefutable, then the existence of a supernatural world, an afterlife, God, or gods, is at least placed in the category of the unproven. This, of course, does not mean that many people will not continue to believe in their existence, basing their belief on faith, fear, hope, or their reading of the evidence, but as a logical foundation for morality, religion is weak indeed except for those who believe.

If one maintains that we are moral (or should be) because a being exists who is all-good or because we will be rewarded or punished in another life, and the existence of these things cannot be proved, then the entire system is based on unproved assumptions. Believing that God or an afterlife exists may make people "feel" better about acting in certain ways. It may also provide powerful sanctions for acting morally or not acting immorally. But it does not provide a valid, rational foundation for morality that can give us reasons, evidence, and logic for acting one way rather than another. Again, as Michael Scriven has stated, "Religion can provide a psychological but not a logical foundation for morality."¹³ Alternative, nonreligious, foundations for morality will be presented in later chapters.

WHICH RELIGION? Even if religions could be rationally founded, which religion should be the basis of human ethics? Within a particular religion that question is answered, but obviously it is not answered satisfactorily for members of other conflicting religions or for those who do not believe in any religion. Even if the supernatural tenets of religions could be conclusively proved, which religion are we to accept as the true or real foundation of morality? It is certainly true that different religions have many ethical prescriptions in common—for example, not murdering—but it is also true that there are many conflicting ones.

Among different sects of Christianity, for example, there are many conflicting ethical statements concerning sex, war, divorce, and abortion, marriage, stealing, and lying.

How, if they all believe in God and Jesus and their teachings, can there be so many divergent opinions on what is moral or immoral? The obvious answer is that there can be many interpretations of those teachings as set down in the Bible or otherwise passed down through tradition. But what gives a Roman Catholic, for instance, the right to tell a Protestant that his interpretation of Jesus' teachings is wrong? There can be no adjudication here—only referral to passages in the Bible, many of which are open to different interpretations or even to some teachings not held by either of the differing sects. In short, there is simply no rational basis for resolving serious conflicts when they exist.

The difficulty is underscored even more when we consider that people who believe there is no God or supernatural or afterlife (atheists) or people who are not sure (agnostics) are essentially excluded from moral consideration. If such people do not believe, or neither believe nor disbelieve, then how can any of the moral precepts set down within any particular religion have any application to them? They are automatically excluded from the moral sphere created by the ethics of religion. Provisions are, of course, made within each religion for nonbelievers, but these provisions very often involve some sort of eventual conversion to that religion or, frequently, some patronizing statement about loving one's enemies as well as one's friends.

DIFFICULTY OF RESOLVING CONFLICTS. How do we resolve the conflicts arising from various religiously based ethical systems without going outside of all religions for some more broadly based human system of morality—some wider base from which to make ethical decisions? When such resolutions are successful, it is usually because we have gone beyond any particular religion's ethical system and used some sort of rational compromise or broader ethical system that cuts across all religious and nonreligious lines. Accordingly, it is both important and beneficial that we pursue this approach more strongly and consistently than we have.

Furthermore, it is possible that we can establish a system and method by which this can be done. But in order to achieve a more comprehensive synthesis that facilitates the resolution of moral conflicts, all people, religious or nonreligious, must be willing to accept an essentially nonreligiously based overall ethical system within which many of their own moral rules and methods can function successfully. So the question that arises is: How do we resolve moral conflicts without going outside the narrow boundaries of religion? We don't. We must establish a basis for morality from outside religion, but it must be one in which religion is included. This is a necessary first step toward a moral society and a moral world. The foregoing statements and questions enable us, at the very least, to see that the relationship between morality and religion is, as Michael Scriven has said, "a very uneasy one indeed."¹⁴

In summary, then, just what is the connection between religion and morality? The answer is that there is no *necessary* connection. One can have a complete ethical system without mention of any life but this one—no God or gods, no supernatural, and no afterlife. Does this mean that to be moral we must avoid religion? Not at all. Human beings should be allowed to believe or disbelieve as long as there is some moral basis that protects all people from immoral treatment at the hands of the religious and nonreligious alike. A religion that advocates the human sacrifice of unwilling participants, for example, would not be moral as it deprives others of their lives. A religion that persecutes all who do not accept its tenets is equally immoral and should not be allowed to exist in that form under a broad moral system. If, however, religions can agree to some broad moral principles and their members can act in accordance with those principles, then they can exist with nonreligious people and still serve their principles meaningfully and well.

One last point about religion and morality is that religion, for most people who are involved with it, is much more than an ethical system. For example, because Jews and Muslims believe that there is a being far worthier of their love than any being in the natural world, it is their relationship with this being that is of uppermost importance to

them, rather than how they act within the natural world. In this sense, religion is more than (or other than) an ethical system.

Considering all of the differences that exist among religions and between religionists and nonreligionists, it makes sense that we should strive all the harder to create a wider-based morality that allows these differences and personal religious relationships to continue and develop, while at the same time allowing for ethical attitudes and actions toward all. What we need is not a strictly religious or a strictly humanist (atheist) ethics but rather what Professor Jacques P. Thiroux called *Humanitarian Ethics*, which includes these two extremes and the middle ground as well.

KOHLBERG'S THEORY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

In the 1970s, Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987) advanced, what many consider to be, the most important theory of moral development in the twentieth century. His typography, influenced by the work of Swiss child psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980), sets up three distinct levels of moral thinking: the preconventional, conventional, and postconventional; autonomous; or principled levels. Each level is arranged in two stages which are “structured wholes” or organized systems of thought that give rational consistency to moral judgments. Kohlberg was concerned about the expanding knowledge of cultural values and the implications of this knowledge in support of the position of ethical relativity. Although he acknowledged that values and their specific content vary from culture to culture, nevertheless, he believed that there exists a universal developmental sequence to structures of moral development that extends across all cultures.

Definition of Moral Stages

PRECONVENTIONAL LEVEL. Here terms like *good* and *bad*, *right* or *wrong* are interpreted in terms of either physical or hedonistic consequences of action.

Stage 1: The Punishment and Obedience Orientation

Moral decisions at this stage are made in response to authority. Avoidance of punishment and deference to an authority, who has the power to deliver physical consequences in response to an agent's acts, account for stage one of moral decision making.

Stage 2: The Instrumental/Relativist Orientation

Stage two individuals are pragmatic, and moral decision making is conditioned primarily by self-interest. According to Kohlberg, “Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's needs and occasionally the needs of others.”¹⁵ Human relations are interpreted in terms of the street or the marketplace where reciprocity is interpreted as “You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours.”

CONVENTIONAL LEVEL. Level two of Kohlberg's theory is similar to the customary or traditional morality as discussed earlier in this chapter. This level of morality is unreflective and consists in maintaining or conforming to the expectations of others, family, group, or society. In business situations, Kohlberg's conventional level would involve conformity to the corporate culture and compliance with the firm's ethics policies.

Stage 3: The Interpersonal Concordance or “Good Boy—Nice Girl” Orientation

Stage three individuals are “people pleasers.” Being well-intentioned, for example, “He/she means well,” carries weight at this stage. Conformity with the group, living up to other's expectations, and earning the approval of others by being “nice” characterize people at the third stage of moral development.

Stage 4: The “Law and Order” Orientation

People at stage four are concerned with maintaining the social order for its own sake or as an end in itself. A stage four individual, for example, obeys the law because it is the law. Right behavior at this level is characterized by doing one’s duty and showing respect for authority.

POSTCONVENTIONAL, AUTONOMOUS, OR PRINCIPLED LEVEL. Level three requires reflective morality and the ability to effectively engage ethical reasoning apart from, or independently of, group identification and authority.

Stage 5: The Social Contract Orientation

Stage five individuals understand that there are ends beyond the law and that laws are crafted to bring about these ends. Furthermore, stage five decision makers understand how laws are made and that laws can be changed for good reasons. That is, the stage five person views laws as a “social contract” based on valid considerations designed to bring about socially good ends.

Stage 6: The Universal-Ethical-Principle Orientation

For the stage six individual:

Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete rules such as the Ten Commandments.¹⁶

In other words, stage six individuals possess a large stock of ethical concepts and understand the operative principles behind moral rules, law, and ethical policy. Furthermore, persons at this stage of moral development can think clearly and well about moral dilemmas wielding such concepts as justice, reciprocity, equality, and respect for human dignity and, thus, are able to independently arrive at sound moral judgments.

Kohlberg attempted to identify innate cognitive structures that are universal to all human beings. Such structures explain both moral development and the basis for moral decision making at various stages. His theory helps us understand “why” certain decisions are made and how previous stages are integrated into higher order of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg’s theory, one tends to move to the next highest level of moral development in order to resolve conflict that arises within the individual’s own point of view. His theory provides an additional tool for analyzing the level of moral reasoning in many of the cases presented in this text.

WHY SHOULD HUMAN BEINGS BE MORAL?

Before going on to discuss ethical or moral systems in greater detail, there is one last question that must be dealt with in this chapter, and that is, “Why should human beings be moral?” Another way of putting the problem is as follows: Is there any clear foundation or basis for morality—can any reasons be found for human beings to be good and do right acts rather than be bad and do wrong acts? The above question should not be confused with the question, “Why should *I* or any one individual be moral?” As Kai Nielsen says in his brilliant essay “Why Should I Be Moral?” these are two different questions.¹⁷ The second one is very difficult to answer with any clear, conclusive evidence or logic, but the first one is not.

Difficulties involved in founding morality on religion, and especially on religion as a sole factor, have already been pointed out. But, if a person has religious faith, then he or she does have a foundation for a personal morality, even though this foundation is basically psychological rather than logical in nature. The use of religion as the

foundation of morality frequently leads to the assumption that if there is no supernatural or religious basis for morality, then there can be no basis at all. A related, and perhaps deeper, statement is that there can be no real meaning to human life unless there is some sort of afterlife or some other extranatural reason for living. Readers are encouraged to critically examine the above claims. However, it is obvious that for many individuals this is psychologically true; that is, they feel that their existence has meaning and purpose and that they have a reason for being moral if and only if there is a God, an afterlife, or some sort of religion in their lives. We must respect this point of view and accept the conviction of the many people who hold it, because that is how they *feel* about life and morality.

It is also obvious, however, that many people do not feel this way. And, many people also think it is terribly presumptuous of religious believers to feel that if some people do not have a religious commitment, their lives are meaningless or that such people have no reason for being moral in their actions. But if religion does not necessarily provide a “why” for morality, then what does? Let us assume for the moment that there is no supernatural morality and see if we can find any other reasons why people should be moral.

Argument from Enlightened Self-Interest

One can certainly argue on a basis of enlightened self-interest that it is, at the very least, generally better to be good rather than bad and to create a world and society that is good rather than one that is bad. As a matter of fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, self-interest is the sole basis of one ethical theory, ethical egoism. However, it is not being suggested at this point that one ought to pursue one’s own self-interest. Rather, an argument is being presented that if everyone tried to do and be good and tried to avoid and prevent bad, it would be in everyone’s self-interest. For example, if within a group of people no one killed, stole, lied, or cheated, then each member of the group would benefit. An individual member of the group could say, “It’s in my self-interest to do good rather than bad because I stand to benefit if I do and also because I could be ostracized or punished if I don’t.” Therefore, even though it is not airtight (as Kai Nielsen’s essay illustrates), the argument from enlightened self-interest is compelling.

Argument from Tradition and Law

Related to the foregoing argument is the argument from tradition and law. This argument suggests that because traditions and laws, established over a long period of time, govern the behavior of human beings, and because these traditions and laws urge human beings to be moral rather than immoral, there are good reasons for being so. Self-interest is one reason, but another is respect for the human thought and effort that has gone into establishing such laws and traditions and transferring them from one historic period and one culture to another. This can be an attractive argument, even though it tends to suppress questioning of traditions and laws—a kind of questioning that is at the core of creative moral reasoning. It is interesting to note that most of us probably learned morality through being confronted with this argument, the religious argument, and the experiences surrounding it. Don’t we all remember being told we should or should not do something because it was or was not in our own self-interest, because God said it was right or wrong, or because it was the way we were supposed to act in our family, school, society, and world?

Evolution of the Arguments

All of the arguments put forth are compelling and valid to some extent, provided that free questioning of the moral prescriptions that they have established or that they support is allowed and encouraged. Some of the difficulties associated with establishing a religious basis for morality have already been pointed out, but problems exist with the other two

arguments as well. The self-interest argument can be a problem when other interests conflict with it; often it is difficult to convince someone who sees obvious benefits in acting immorally in a particular situation that it is in his or her self-interest to do otherwise. Morality established by tradition and law is problematic because it is difficult both to change and to question successfully. This lack of questioning sometimes encourages blind obedience to immoral practices. It encourages the belief that because something has been done a certain way for hundreds of years, it must be right. (A good example of the tragic consequences that can ensue from this type of thinking may be found in Shirley Jackson's excellent, frequently anthologized short story "The Lottery.")

Common Human Needs

Are there any other reasons we can give as to why human beings should be moral? If we examine human nature as empirically and rationally as we can, we discover that all human beings have many needs, desires, goals, and objectives in common. For example, people generally seem to need friendship, love, happiness, freedom, peace, creativity, and stability in their lives, not only for themselves but for others, too. It doesn't take much further examination to discover that in order to satisfy these needs, people must establish and follow moral principles that encourage them to cooperate with one another and that free them from fear that they will lose their lives, be mutilated, or be stolen from, lied to, cheated, severely restricted, or imprisoned.

Morality exists, in part, because of human needs and through recognition of the importance of living together in a cooperative and significant way. It may not be the case that all human beings can be convinced that they should be moral, or even that it will always be in each individual's self-interest to be moral. However, the question "Why should human beings be moral?" *generally* can best be answered by the statement that adhering to moral principles enables human beings to live their lives as peacefully, happily, creatively, and meaningfully as is possible.

Significance and Relevance of Ethics

There has been a marked increase in the teaching of ethics in both law schools and business schools. The same types of courses have been established at medical schools, and there has been an increase in bioethics and other ethics committees in hospitals and various businesses. For example, James O'Toole has been conducting values-based leadership seminars for CEOs and other managers in business. One might ask, "Does this mean that we are becoming more ethical, or that we will be, as these ethics begin to filter down to the general populace?" Certainly it is admirable that so many—even politicians—are interested in values and in improving the ethical life in America. How superficial is this concern especially as it comes from politicians trying to get elected? No doubt that some of these politicians are sincere, but one might wonder whose values do they wish to impose and how much training have any of these people had in ethics?

Yet regardless of how popular, superficially or not, ethics may become, it certainly should be the most important aspect of your life. After all, what could be more important than learning how to live more ethically and improving the quality of your life and the lives of others around you? As Albert Einstein said, "The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life."¹⁸

Hopefully, by the time you have finished this book and others like it, and the ethics course you are taking, you will have a much better background in ethics than most of those who mouth the values without perhaps knowing what they are talking about.

Morality: A Working Definition

In this chapter a great deal has been said about what morality or ethics is not, but we have not yet said what it *is*. Here is a definition of morality: Morality deals basically with humans and how they relate to other beings, both human and nonhuman. It deals with how humans *treat* other beings so as to promote mutual welfare, growth, creativity, and meaning as they strive for what is good over what is bad and what is right over what is wrong.

In the next three chapters, we will examine major ethical viewpoints. These contain a number of traditional ethical theories that are concerned not with *why* human beings should be moral, but rather with *how* morality can be attained. There is no point in “starting from scratch” in the study of morality when we can benefit from our own ethical traditions, out of which almost all modern ethical theories have, in one way or another, evolved.

Chapter Summary

- I. Philosophy and ethics' relationship to it
 - A. Philosophy literally means “the love of wisdom.”
 - B. It is concerned with five areas of study:
 1. Epistemology—the study of knowledge, belief, truth, falsity, certainty, and perception.
 2. Metaphysics—the study of what exists, the nature of what exists, cause and effect, freedom, and determinism.
 3. Ethics—the study of morality and what is good, bad, right, and wrong human conduct and behavior in a moral sense.
 4. Aesthetics—the study of values in art or beauty and what is good, bad, right, or wrong in art and what constitutes the beautiful and the nonbeautiful in our lives.
 5. Logic—the study of argument and the principles of correct reasoning.
- II. Definition of Key terms
 - A. *Moral* and *ethical* (and *immoral* and *unethical*) are interchangeable in ordinary language.
 1. Moral means what is good or right.
 2. Immoral means what is bad or wrong.
 - B. Characteristics of “good, bad, right, wrong.”
 1. “Good” or “right” should involve pleasure, happiness, and excellence and also lead to harmony and creativity.
 2. “Bad” or “wrong” will involve pain, unhappiness, and lack of excellence and will lead to disharmony and lack of creativity.
 3. The terms good and bad should be defined in the context of human experience and human relationships.
 - C. *Amoral* means having no moral sense or being indifferent to right and wrong.
 - D. *Nonmoral* means out of the realm of morality altogether.
- III. Approaches to the study of morality
 - A. The scientific, or descriptive, approach is used in the social sciences and is concerned with how human beings do, in fact, behave. For example: Human beings often act in their own self-interest.
 - B. The philosophical approach is divided into two categories.
 1. The normative, or prescriptive, is concerned with what “should” be or what people “ought to” do. For example: Human beings ought to act in their own self-interest.
 2. A second category is concerned with value judgments. For example: “Barbara is a morally good person.”
 3. Metaethics, or analytic ethics, is analytic in two ways.
 - (a) It analyzes ethical language.
 - (b) It analyzes the rational foundations of ethical systems or of the logic and reasoning of various ethicists.
- IV. Morality and its applications
 - A. In the course of determining what morality is, some distinctions must be made.
 1. There is a difference between ethics and aesthetics.
 - (a) *Ethics* is the study of morality, or of what is good, bad, right, or wrong in a moral sense.

- (b) *Aesthetics* is the study of art and beauty, or of what is good, bad, right, or wrong in art and what constitutes the beautiful in our lives.
 - 2. The terms *good*, *bad*, *right*, and *wrong* can also be used in a nonmoral sense, usually in reference to how someone or something functions.
 - 3. Manners, or etiquette, differs from morality even though the two are related, in that manners is concerned with certain types of social behavior dealing with taste, whereas morality is concerned with ethical behavior.
 - B. There are four main aspects related to the application of morality.
 1. Religious morality is concerned with human beings in relationship to a supernatural being or beings.
 2. Morality and nature are concerned with human beings in relationship to nature.
 3. Individual morality is concerned with human beings in relationship to themselves.
 4. Social morality is concerned with human beings in relationship to other human beings. This is the most important category of all.
 - C. Evidence exists to help us determine who is morally or ethically responsible.
 1. Recent experimentation with communication with certain animals reveals that in the future animals could conceivably be taught to be moral.
 2. At the present time, however, humans and only humans can be considered to be moral or immoral, and therefore only they should be considered morally responsible.
 - V. Theories addressing where morality comes from
 - A. There are three ways of looking at values being totally objective.
 1. Some people believe that values originate with a supernatural being or beings or principle.
 2. Some believe that values are embodied in nature itself—that is, that there are moral laws in nature.
 3. Some believe that the world and the objects in it embody values whether or not there are any human beings around to perceive and appreciate them.
 - B. Some hold the theory that values are totally subjective: that morality and values reside strictly within human beings and that there are no values or morality outside of them.
 - C. One must evaluate these two conflicting positions.
 1. It is possible to criticize the position that values are objective.
 - (a) It is difficult to prove conclusively the existence of any supernatural being, beings, or principle or to prove that values exist anywhere other than in the natural world.
 - (b) There is a difference between “natural laws,” which are descriptive, and “moral and societal laws,” which are prescriptive; and there is no conclusive evidence that “natural moral laws” exist.
 - (c) Is it really possible to think of things of value without someone to value them?
 2. It is possible to criticize the position that values are subjective. Because aspects of the world and nature can be valued whether or not human beings exist, values would not seem to be totally subjective.
 - D. Values are both subjective and objective. They are determined by three variables.
 1. The first variable is the thing of value, or the thing valued.
 2. The second is a conscious being who values, or the valuer.
 3. The third is the context or situation in which the valuing takes place.
 - E. Given the belief that values are both subjective and objective, it is possible to construct a theory concerning the origin of morality.
 1. It comes from a complex interaction between conscious human beings and material, mental, or emotional “things” in specific contexts.
 2. It stems from human needs and desires and is based on human emotions and reason.
- VI.** Customary or traditional and reflective morality
- A. Customary or traditional morality is based on custom or tradition and is often accepted without analysis or critical evaluation.
 - B. Reflective morality is the careful examination and critical evaluation of all moral issues whether or not they are based on religion, custom, or tradition.
- VII.** Morality and the law
- A. Morality is not necessarily based on law.

- B. Morality provides the basic reasons for any significant laws.
- C. Law is a public expression of and provides a sanction for social morality.

VIII. Morality and religion

- A. Morality need not, indeed should not, be based solely on religion for the following reasons.
 1. It is difficult to prove conclusively the existence of a supernatural being.
 2. Religious people can be immoral.
 3. Nonreligious people can be moral, too.
 4. It is difficult to provide a rational foundation for religion, which makes it difficult to provide such a foundation for morality.
 5. If religion were to be the foundation of morality, which religion would provide this foundation and who would decide?
 6. There is a difficulty in resolving the conflicts arising from various religiously based ethical systems without going outside of them.
- B. There is, it seems, a need for a humanitarian ethics that is neither strictly religious nor strictly humanistic (atheistic) but that includes these two extremes and the middle ground as well.

IX. Kohlberg's theory of moral development

Kohlberg's theory of moral development sets up three distinct levels of moral thinking, and each level is arranged in two stages which are "structured wholes" or organized systems of thought that give rational consistency to moral judgments.

- A. **Preconventional level:** Here terms like *good* and *bad* and *right* and *wrong* are interpreted in terms of either physical or hedonistic consequences of action.
 1. The Punishment and Obedience Orientation.
 2. The Instrumental/Relativist Orientation.
- B. **Conventional level:** This level of morality is generally unreflective and customary. It consists

in maintaining or conforming to the expectations of others or the rules of society.

1. The Interpersonal Concordance or "Good Boy—Nice Girl" Orientation.
 2. The "Law and Order" Orientation.
- C. **Postconventional, autonomous, or principled level:** This level of moral development requires reflective morality and the ability to engage ethical reasoning apart from, or independently of, group identification and authority.
 1. The Social Contract Orientation.
 2. The Universal-Ethical-Principle Orientation.
 - X. The importance of determining why human beings should be moral
 - A. The question is not "Why should any one individual be moral?" but rather "Why should human beings in general be moral?"
 - B. Various reasons for being moral have been posited.
 1. Religion, or the supernatural, has been used as the foundation of morality.
 2. It has been argued that enlightened self-interest is the basis for morality.
 3. Tradition and law have been posited as yet another basis for morality.
 - C. There are problems with all the reasons given in A and B; therefore, it is my contention that morality has come about because of common human needs and through the recognition of the importance of living together in a cooperative and significant way in order to achieve the greatest possible amount of friendship, love, happiness, freedom, peace, creativity, and stability in the lives of all human beings.
 - XI. A working definition of *morality*. Morality or ethics deals basically with human relationships—how humans treat other beings so as to promote mutual welfare, growth, creativity, and meaning as they strive for good over bad and right over wrong.

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Exercises for Review

1. In your own words, define the following terms: *moral*, *immoral*, *amoral*, and *nonmoral*.
2. What is the difference between descriptive and normative (or prescriptive) ethics?
3. What is metaethics (or analytic ethics), and how does it differ from descriptive and normative (or prescriptive) ethics?
4. Explain the four aspects of morality.

5. Why is the social aspect the most important?
6. Do you agree that morality is not necessarily based on the law but that the law gets its real meaning from morality? Why or why not?
7. Give examples of how the law embodies morality.
8. What does it mean to assert that the law provides “sanctions” for morality? How does it do this?
9. Critically examine the Ten Commandments in the following ways:
 - (a) Separate them to show how they would fit into any of the four aspects of morality.
 - (b) Which commandments do you consider to be absolutely necessary for any society to be moral? Why?
 - (c) Which commandments can be enforced legally and which cannot? Why?
10. Do you agree that what we need is a humanitarian ethics that includes both religious and nonreligious systems? Why or why not?
11. Do you agree with the author’s list of the characteristics of “good, bad, right, wrong”? If so, explain why in your own words. If not, explain why not. In either case, provide any additional characteristics that you think these terms possess.
12. What are philosophy, epistemology, metaphysics, aesthetics, and logic, and how do they differ from or relate to ethics?
13. What is the difference between customary or traditional morality and reflective morality?
14. List and explain the six stages in Kohlberg’s theory of moral development.

Discussion Questions

1. Critically examine any ethical system or code (e.g., a religious code, or a code or system used in business or any of the professions), and show how each of the do’s or don’ts of this code apply to the various aspects of morality.
2. Go to the library or consult other sources at the discretion of your instructor and get a copy of your city’s, county’s, or state’s laws governing a specific area of community activity. Analyze to what extent these laws relate to your community’s moral views and standards and in what ways they do so. To what extent are any of the laws non-moral or moral in their implications?
3. To what extent do you feel that human beings have an obligation to be moral in their dealings and relationships with nature (excluding other human beings), and for what reasons? Give specific examples of such dealings and relationships, and argue your position fully.
4. Do you think that human beings are essentially good or bad, or a combination of both? Why? In a well-organized essay, argue for and bring evidence to support the position you have taken. How does your position affect your approach to morality—for example, should a moral system be strict, clear, and absolutistic or permissive, flexible, and relativistic? (See Chapter 5 and Glossary for a definition of these terms.)
5. Do you believe that morality should or should not be based *solely* on religion? Why? Is it possible to establish a moral system without any reference to religion? If so, how? If not, why not? What could be the basis of such a system, if not religion? Describe your position in detail.
6. Examine your own life and try to establish as honestly and accurately as possible where your values have come from.
7. Do you feel that you should always be moral? Why or why not? Do you think that human beings in general should be moral? Why or why not?

Ethics Problem

Why Be Moral?

Plato tells the story of Gyges (*The Republic, Book II*), a shepherd, who finds a magic ring. When Gyges turns the ring 180°, he becomes invisible, and upon turning the ring again, he reappears. Under the cloak of invisibility he performs a series of unethical and immoral acts, including murder. He is a villain and a rogue yet becomes wealthy and famous. Gyges not only accrues benefits by appearing to be moral but also enjoys the bounty reaped from wrongdoing with no punishing consequences—he will never be caught!

Now, imagine a second magic ring given to a just and upright individual. Will the temptation to engage in wrongdoing for personal gain be too great? Knowing there will be no punishing consequences, would a good person quickly turn into a scoundrel? Given the situation just described, why would anyone be moral? Discuss.

What would you do if you were given a Gyges ring? Why be moral?

Notes

1. William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd edn. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 91.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Lester A. Kirkendall, *Premarital Intercourse and Interpersonal Relationships* (New York: Julian Press, 1961), 6.
5. Joseph Wambaugh, *The Onion Field* (New York: Dell, 1973).
6. Jean L. McKechnie, ed., *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 1454.
7. Joseph Wambaugh, *The Blooding* (New York: Bantam, 1989), 325.
8. *Ibid.*, 341.
9. *Note:* Figure 1–1 is a paraphrased version of the Ten Commandments. The text of the Ten Commandments appears in the *Bible* not only in Exodus 20:1–17 but also in Deuteronomy 5:6–21. In different translations, as well as religious denominations, the division and grouping of the Ten Commandments vary. For example, many widely accepted translations list the second commandment as “Thou shall not make unto thee any graven image... nor serve them.” In this division, the first four commandments deal with a person’s relationship to God and the final six with other people. No bias toward any theological point of view is intended in this text’s use of a paraphrased version.
10. Mark Winocur, *Einstein, a Portrait* (Corte-Madera, CA: Pomegranate Artbooks, 1984), 96.
11. Michael Scriven, “Rational Moral Education.” Speech delivered at Bakersfield College, California, February 18, 1971.
12. See John H. Hick, *Philosophy of Religion* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1973), 16–17, and John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis*, 2nd edn. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 425–90, for a discussion of these arguments from the religious (Hick) and the nonreligious (Hospers) point of view.
13. Scriven, “Rational Moral Education.”
14. *Ibid.*
15. Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard H. Hersh, “Moral Development: A Review of the Theory,” in *Business Ethics: Problems, Principles, Practical Applications*, 2nd edn., ed. Keith W. Krasemann (Acton, MA: Copley, 2004), 308–18.
16. *Ibid.*
17. Kai Nielsen, “Why Should I Be Moral?” in *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 2nd edn., ed. Paul W. Taylor (Belmont, CA: Dickenson, 1972), 539–58.
18. Winocur, *Einstein, a Portrait*, 92.

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“The Myth of Gyges,” Plato, *The Republic*.