

# Morality and ethics

[Sociology](#), [Ethics](#)



Morality and Ethics Morality and ethics are terms often used as if they have the same meaning. At other times, they are used as if they have no relationship to one another. I think most people realize ethics and morality have something to do with the concepts of good and bad. However, English is not like French, which has the Académie Française acting as its linguistic jury - establishing what proper French is. English changes at the impulse of the crowd. One can bomb, and that's bad, but if one is the bomb, and that's good.

The word "morality" has been co-opted by groups, such as the Moral Majority, making us think morality only deals with acts these religious groups think aren't proper, or are therefore immoral. The meanings of the terms "ethics" and "morality" can be differentiated based on their origins in ancient Greek and Latin, respectively. As a result, words that come into the English language from the Greeks often have meanings that are primarily philosophical study, while the Latin-derived words imply "doing the thing." Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos* - moral character or custom. Morality comes from the Latin word *moralis* - custom or manner. The words both deal with the customs or the manner in which people do things. Their modern meanings relate to the way people act - either good or bad. Morality, strictly speaking, is used to refer to what we would call moral conduct or standards. Morality is looking at how good or bad our conduct is, and our standards about conduct. Ethics is used to refer to the formal study of those standards or conduct.

Sometimes, one refers to the study of conduct as moral philosophy, but that is less common than just saying "ethics." One might say that morality is

ethics in action, but in the end, the two terms can be used interchangeably. The study of ethics or moral philosophy can be divided into three broad areas: descriptive, normative and analytical or met ethics. Ethics deals with such questions at all levels. Its subject consists of the fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its major concerns include the nature of ultimate value and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong.

The terms ethics and morality are closely related. We now often refer to ethical judgments or ethical principles where it once would have been more common to speak of moral judgments or moral principles. These applications are an extension of the meaning of ethics. Strictly speaking, however, the term refers not to morality itself but to the field of study, or branch of inquiry, that has morality as its subject matter. In this sense, ethics is equivalent to moral philosophy.

Although ethics has always been viewed as a branch of philosophy, its all-embracing practical nature links it with many other areas of study, including anthropology, biology, economics, history, politics, sociology, and theology. Yet, ethics remains distinct from such disciplines because it is not a matter of factual knowledge in the way that the sciences and other branches of inquiry are. Rather, it has to do with determining the nature of normative theories and applying these sets of principles to practical moral problems.

Virtually every human society has some form of myth to explain the origin of morality. In the Louvre in Paris there is a black Babylonian column with a relief showing the sun god Shamash presenting the code of laws to Hammurabi. The Old Testament account of God giving the Ten

<https://assignbuster.com/morality-and-ethics/>

Commandments to Moses on Mt. Sinai might be considered another example. In Plato's Protagoras there is an avowedly mythical account of how Zeus took pity on the wretched humans, who, living in small groups and with insufficient teeth, weak claws, and lack of speed, were no match for the other beasts.

To make up for these deficiencies, Zeus gave humans a moral sense and the capacity for law and justice, so that they could live in larger communities and cooperate with one another. There is some difficulty, already known to Plato, with the view that morality was created by a divine power. In his dialogue Euthyphro, Plato considered the suggestion that it is divine approval that makes an action good. Plato pointed out that if this were the case, we could not say that the gods approve of the actions because the actions are good. Why then do the gods approve of these actions rather than others?

Is their approval entirely capricious? Plato considered this impossible and so held that there must be some standards of right or wrong that are independent of the likes and dislikes of the gods. Modern philosophers have generally accepted Plato's argument because the alternative implies that if the gods had happened to approve of torturing children and to disapprove of helping one's neighbors, then torture would have been good and neighborliness bad. That morality should be invested with all the mystery and power of divine origin is not surprising. Nothing else could provide such strong reasons for accepting the moral law. By attributing a divine origin to morality, the priesthood became its interpreter and guardian, and thereby secured for itself a power that it would not readily abandon. This link

between morality and religion has been so firmly forged that it is still sometimes asserted that there can be no morality without religion. According to this view, ethics ceases to be an independent field of study. It becomes, instead, moral theology.