

Is ethics natural or learned behavior?

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



Human beings have an innate ethical sense that urges them to make predictable choices. Although most people believe their actions are guided by logic and reason, reason often acts only as a way to justify these choices. Ethics is a learned behavior, a behavior that starts from childhood. Every individual has choices in life. And everyone's perception of right and wrong may not be the same. This discussion will be based on is ethics natural or learned behavior? The ability to speak allows people to come up with rationales which support what are genetically driven decisions.

Even though genetics may play a part, I believe ethics is a learned behavior. In understanding ethics, we must first realize that pretense and dissimulation are rooted in our genes. As part of the prehistoric mechanism for survival, human beings unfortunately identify with lying and manipulating. Lying and cheating are believed by too many to be legitimate tools in the quest to achieve selfish ends ([www. ethicseducation. com](http://www.ethicseducation.com)). Despite this truth, as we learned as children, cooperation is actually the better way to achieve individual success therefore ethics can definitely be learned.

The history of ethical thought is in this regard a record of attempts to promote communal behavior in order to ensure stability within a group. Many middle and high school students today will tell you that they themselves determine, as does every other individual, the standards of right and wrong. Students will resist the notion that they owe anything to anyone, or that they have any absolute obligation toward society. They recognize that wrongs can be done, but have a very difficult time judging their own actions to be wrong.

There is an underlying attitude of: nothing I do can be truly wrong because I am ultimately the final judge of what is right and wrong for me. Ethics is about the individual. The fact that students can be taught to be tolerant of different opinions and see that a variance of viewpoints can be legitimate contradicts the belief that ethics is a natural occurrence. In some instances moral behavior can be natural. Recent studies have shown that dolphins and other marine mammals, chimpanzees, apes, monkeys and even dogs possess a moral sense, and display many of the behaviors considered basic to most normative human ethical standards.

Equality, reciprocity, even altruism, have been detected and recorded among these animals, as well as treachery, deceit and manipulation. In fact, a kind of what goes around comes around golden rule is fundamental to the social relationships of most primates. This being said, there must be some sort of social instinct rooted in our genes. Man is driven by innate genetic forces and is capable of making thoughtful assessments of what is happening. Ethics investigates how we can evaluate our behavior in terms of right and wrong, good and bad.