

# *Year 11 into 12 induction ...*

## *The only way is ethics!*



**Ethics** = moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or the conducting of an activity.

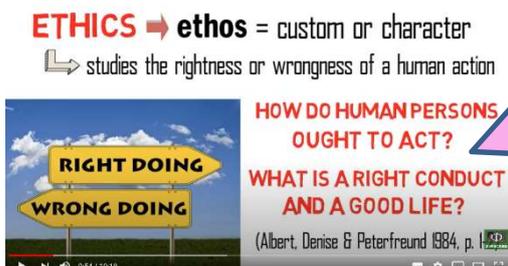
*In this half of the course we are going to debate what is right and wrong!*

Ethics / moral philosophy is concerned with what is good for individuals and society and is also described as moral philosophy. The term is derived from the Greek word *ethos* which can mean custom, habit, character, or disposition.

### **Ethics covers the following dilemmas:**

- how to live a good life
- our rights and responsibilities
- the language of right and wrong
- moral decisions - what is good and bad?

Our concepts of ethics have been derived from religions, philosophies, and cultures. They infuse debates on topics like abortion, human rights, and professional conduct.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr7U49RPPts&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rr7U49RPPts&feature=emb_logo)

Watch the introduction clip to ethics and learn more about the topics of course!

This video briefly discusses the meaning, nature, and dynamics of ethics. Broadly construed, ethics is a branch of philosophy that studies the rightness or wrongness of a human action. In particular, this branch of philosophy is concerned with questions of how human persons ought to act, and the search for a definition of a right conduct and the good life. It is for this reason that the attempt to seek the "good" through the aid of reason is the traditional goal of ethicists.

## **There are generally thought to be three different types of ethics:**

**Normative ethics:** Begins by asking what things are good and what things are bad, and what kind of behaviour is right or wrong. It then makes a value judgment based on the outcome. May come from an established group or culture, i.e. Christianity or philosophical ideal. It decides how people ought to act, how moral choices should be made and how the rules apply.

**Descriptive ethics:** describes and compares the different ways in which people and societies have answered moral questions. It is simply a description of the situation and the choices made by people. It presents what it believes to be the facts of a situation and avoid any moral judgment or bias.

**Meta-ethics:** sometimes called philosophical ethics, attracts a great deal of interest today. It is concerned with what do we mean when we use words such as 'good', 'bad', 'right' or 'wrong'. It explores the meaning and function of moral language.

**TASK:** Identify the kind of ethical approach that these phrases fit best explaining why.

1. Adultery is wrong because God's law forbids it.
2. When you say euthanasia is wrong, you are only saying you don't like it.
3. In some Muslim communities' men may take a number of wives, while in most Christian communities only one wife is permitted.

Explanation:

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Why is it important to understand meta-ethics before getting to grips with normative ethical theories?

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**Deontological ethics:** concentrates on moral rules that can't be broken.

For deontological ethics, the important thing isn't the result or the consequence of the action but the action itself. Deontological ethics is concerned with the nature of the acts themselves and it is the action which is the defining feature of importance in moral decision-making. Deontologists maintain that acts are right or wrong in themselves (they are intrinsically right or wrong) because some absolute law perhaps laid down by God, or because they go against some duty or obligation. A deontologist might say that murder is wrong the very act of murder is intrinsically evil. Pacifists claim that all physical violence is wrong, and many religious groups maintain that certain acts are inherently sinful. Deontologists have advantage of being able to take strong moral positions on certain actions such as abortion. On the other hand they are not flexible enough to take account of special circumstances or culture groups with different religious perspectives on life. Example of this is absolutism and some religious ethics

**TASK:** Summarise deontological ethics in no more than 50 words:

**Teleological ethics** is concerned with the ends or consequences of actions. The word telos is Greek for 'end'. Teleological theories, sometimes known as **consequentialist**, hold up the link between the act and the consequence as extremely important in moral decision-making. A teleological theory maintains that the rightness or wrongness of an action is decided by the consequences of an action is decided by the consequences that it produces. For a teleological ethical thinker, the end justifies the means. If my action causes pain and suffering then it is bad. If my action causes happiness and love, then it is good. The action isn't good itself (not intrinsically **good**), but **by virtue of the result**. You decide the rightness of an action by judging the end that it produces so this is the key in moral decision making.

In this type of ethical formulation stealing or lying is right if it leads to a better situation afterwards – for example, if the theft feeds a starving family. Qualities such as love, honesty and kindness are not good in themselves. They are only good in an instrumental way because they cause good results. Two teleological theories are **utilitarianism**, which values actions that produce the greatest amount of happiness

and wellbeing for the just people, and **situation ethics**, which values the most love filled result.

**TASK:** Summarise teleological ethics in no more than 50 words:

**TASK:** Teleological or deontological?

- “We should permit the abortion because she is too young and poor to have a child”.
- “you should help your mother because it is your duty”
- “Its ok to steal if you are starving”
- “If you tell her the truth she will be really upset”
- “Whatever you say, you must tell the truth”

**Make a list of 3 deontological moral statements and 3 teleological statements.**

Teleological

Deontological





# Do Moral Truths exist?

## **Moral Truth - The Correspondence Theory of Truth**

A statement is true when it corresponds with reality. In other words, a statement is true if it matches up with the way the world really is. This is the *common* definition of truth that we all know. It is only when we come to *moral* truth that people change the definition.

Subjective truth is not confirmed by science & depends on one's opinion or belief & may be true or false

### **Moral Truths:**

Objective truth is confirmed by science & universally accepted.

### **Subjective Truth vs. Objective Truth**

**Task:** <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/subjectivism.shtml>

Using this link read up on Subjectivity. Think about why matters of ethics maybe more realistic being described as 'subjective'.

An example to describe why might be:

### **The Trolley Problem**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vfldNV22LQM>

Watch the clip explaining the Trolley problem on the series "The Good Place"



### **Answer:**

1) What is the ethical problem being described?

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2) Is killing someone wrong?

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3) Why does it explain that ethical situations are not easy and sometimes you need to break the law/rules?

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4) In conclusion – why would someone say ethics is subjective?

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**Task** - So... what kind of criteria would you use to judge the ends/outcomes of an action?  
e.g. loving? The best outcome for the greater number of people? The most selfless? To achieve justice?

### Further details now:

What is the best flavor of ice cream? The claim, "Chocolate ice cream is delicious" can be true for me but false for you because it is a *subjective* claim of truth. This claim is not really about the ice cream, but about me, the subject. Subjective truths are personal, private, and individual [think of *ice cream*].



What if I said, "Chocolate peanut butter ice cream treats diabetes"? Can this be true for you but not true for me? No, because it is an *objective* truth, a reality in the external world we discover and cannot change by our feelings. Objective facts are what they are, regardless of how we feel or think about them [think of *insulin*].

Here are the key questions:

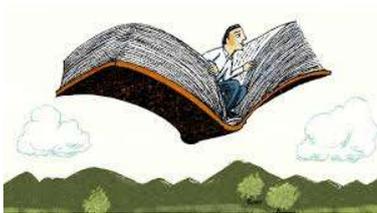
**Are morals subjective (like ice cream preference) or are they objective (like insulin)?**

**Examples of subjective truths are:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Examples of objective truths are:**

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



## **Ethical Absolutism**

An ethical absolute is a moral command or prohibition that is true for ALL TIMES, in ALL PLACES and in ALL SITUATIONS.

- Things are wrong from *an objective point of view*. Not just from *your perspective*.
- Things that are right or wrong **CANNOT CHANGE**. It is true for all time.
- It is **UNIVERSALLY BINDING**.

**So...**

According to moral absolutism, there are eternal moral values applicable everywhere.

This is a popular stance for those who believe in a God who establishes moral order in the universe.

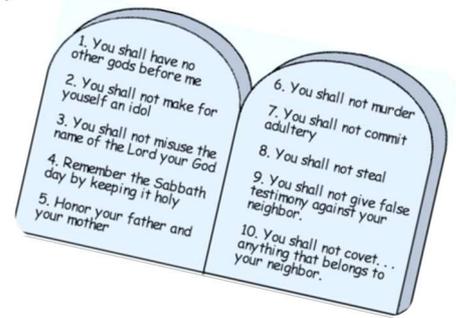
***This ethical system is easy and simple to apply. E.g. a crime is a crime, regardless of circumstances.***

Absolute ethics allows us to make judgements based upon the actions of others – we can say the Holocaust was absolutely wrong. Therefore, absolute ethics allows courts of law to exist and to maintain order.

Ethical Absolutism is a command that is true for all time, in all places and in all situations.

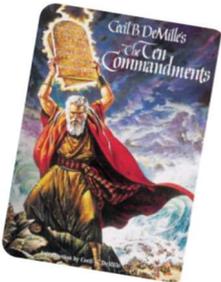
It is an **Objective** principle.

According to the ethical objectivist, the truth or falsity of typical moral judgments does not depend upon the beliefs or feelings of any person or group of persons.



## Where do absolute laws come from?

1. For a **theist** the answer is simple – they come from God.
2. For the agnostic or atheist the answer is more complicated – they just see **a priori** in nature.



Most religions have moral absolutes which they see as having been set by the deity or deities.

These absolutes are unchanging and perfect; for example the Ten Commandments.

### Key Words:

- a priori ("prior to")
- Theist (Belief in the existence of a God or gods)

## Ethical Relativism

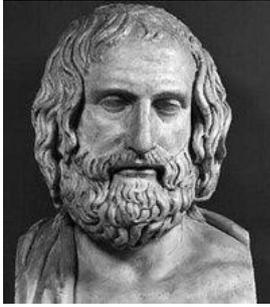
The theory that there is no single moral standard which is equally applicable to all people at all times.

***There is no single code or standard, there are many.***

It does not just mean people have different opinions about morals but that there is no single moral code.

There is a difference between what people think and what is true. The relativist says there is no single truth.

## Relativist views:



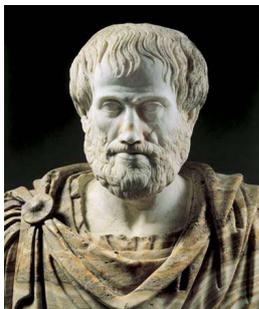
### **The ancient Greek philosopher Protagoras:**

*'there is no truth in anything beyond the way it seems. There is NO objective knowledge, because all knowledge depends on the perceptions of the person'.*

There is NO objective truth. Truth is only true for you, or true for me. Things are good or bad relative to our perceptions. Take snow for example. For children snow is amazing! You wake up rushing to the window hoping that school will be cancelled, but when you learn it isn't you are still thrilled at the prospect of a massive lunch time snow fight! From my perspective, snow means a treacherous journey to school followed by 4 lessons of over excited, soaking wet kids.

Each view is relative to each person's perspective. If I argue "the snow is frustrating" and somebody else argues "the snow is fantastic" who is correct?

We are both saying things that are true, because what we are saying is true for ourselves. **This is a RELATIVISTIC view – there are no universally valid moral principle.**



### **The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle:**

**Aristotle's ethics were collected in a 4<sup>th</sup>C BCE book *Nicomachean Ethics*, also presented a RELATIVISTIC view.**

He argued that we should seek a midway approach of behaviour between two extremes. Human circumstances are infinite and it is not possible to have a general rule which will cover every situation. Moral rules hold for the most part, but there are times when they won't.

An absolutist may hold the view that killing is ALWAYS wrong. However a relativist may argue that killing may not have been wrong if it was done in self-defence.

## **Cultural Relativism**

Many anthropologists, including William Graham Sumner, believe that moral rules are expressions of culture and nothing more. There is nothing absolute or universal about morality.

There's no way of deciding between one set of moral rules and another, because there's no objective measure. What is right and wrong depends upon the perspective of the group. Therefore we cannot judge the conduct of other societies, we need to be tolerant.

This is called **CULTURAL RELATIVISM**.

In 2005, 25 year old Bibi Amina was publicly executed in Afghanistan for adultery.

In 2009 Tiger Woods was exposed for committing adultery and received a severe telling off from his wife.

**What does this suggest about moral rules and culture?**

**Task:** How would you summarise the two points of view? **Use the idea cards below to help you complete the charts...**

<i><b>Absolutism</b></i>	<i><b>Relativism</b></i>

**Absolutism: Strengths and weaknesses**

<i><b>Strengths</b></i>	<i><b>weaknesses</b></i>


**Relativism: Strengths and weaknesses**

<i>Strengths</i>	<i>weaknesses</i>

Inflexible	makes it hard to criticise horrific acts like those of the Nazis
It puts rules before people	People need rules and society cannot function without laws

Sometimes the end does justify the means	What do you do if two relativists disagree?
It is elitist and intolerant of other cultures and societies	It can't take into account the circumstances of a situation
It explains the different values that people hold and encourages diverse cultural expressions	It prohibits a dominant culture from enforcing itself over others simply because 'we're right and they're wrong'
It is a flexible ethical system that can accommodate the wide diversity of lifestyles found in the modern world.	Provides a fixed ethical code by which to measure actions
Gives clear guidelines of behaviour that reinforce a global view of the human community	One country may judge the actions of another country as wrong and act on that judgement

**Explain how an absolutist and a relativist may respond to each of these statements:**

*It is morally wrong to have an abortion:* \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

*Capital Punishment is morally wrong* \_\_\_\_\_

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*It is morally wrong to torture people* \_\_\_\_\_

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*It is morally wrong to have more than one wife* \_\_\_\_\_

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**If you believe that a certain thing is wrong, should you try to persuade others not to do it?**



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