

# Ethics

## Ethics

Ethics is the philosophical study of moral phenomena. Also called moral philosophy, it investigates normative questions about what people ought to do or which behavior is morally right. Its main branches include normative ethics, applied ethics, and metaethics. Normative ethics aims to find general principles that govern how people should act. Applied ethics examines concrete ethical problems in real-life situations, such as abortion, treatment of animals, and business practices. Metaethics explores the underlying assumptions and concepts of ethics. It asks whether there are objective moral facts, how moral knowledge is possible, and how moral judgments motivate people. Influential normative theories are consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics. According to consequentialists, an act is right if it leads to the best consequences. Deontologists focus on acts themselves, saying that they must adhere to duties, like telling the truth and keeping promises. Virtue ethics sees the manifestation of virtues, like courage and compassion, as the fundamental principle of morality. Ethics is closely connected to value theory, which studies the nature and types of value, like the contrast between intrinsic and instrumental value. Moral psychology is a related empirical field and investigates psychological processes involved in morality, such as reasoning and the formation of character. Descriptive ethics describes the dominant moral codes and beliefs in different societies and considers their historical dimension. The history of ethics started in the ancient period with the development of ethical principles and theories in ancient Egypt, India, China, and Greece. This period saw the emergence of ethical teachings associated with Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and contributions of philosophers like Socrates and Aristotle. During the medieval period, ethical thought was strongly influenced by religious teachings. In the modern period, this focus shifted to a more secular approach concerned with moral experience, reasons for acting, and the consequences of actions. An influential development in the 20th century was the emergence of metaethics.