

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM 103)

ETHICS AND MORALITY: AN INTRODUCTION

LECTURE BY RIAZ P KHAN



A man without ethics is a wild beast loosed upon the world (Albert Camus)

Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle (Socrates)

The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in all our actions (Albert Einstein)

What you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others (Analects of Confucius)

*We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit (Aristotle)*

- Ethics and humanity
- As a philosophical discipline, originated in the teachings of Laozi and Kongzi in ancient China over 2,500 years ago
- In the western tradition, ethics is traced back to the teachings of Socrates and the Sophists in ancient greece over 2,000 years ago



Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. It is a study of what are good and bad ends to pursue in life and what is right and wrong to do in the conduct of life. It is therefore, above all, a practical discipline. Its primary aim is to determine how one ought to live and what actions one ought to do in the conduct of one's life. (John Deigh, *Introduction to Ethics*, 2010: 7)

1. ***Morality*** consists of the standards that an individual or a group has about what is right or wrong, or good and evil. (Manuel Velazquez, 432)

2. ***Morality*** [consists of] standards of right and wise conduct whose authority in practical thought is *determined by reason rather than custom*. (John Deigh, 10)

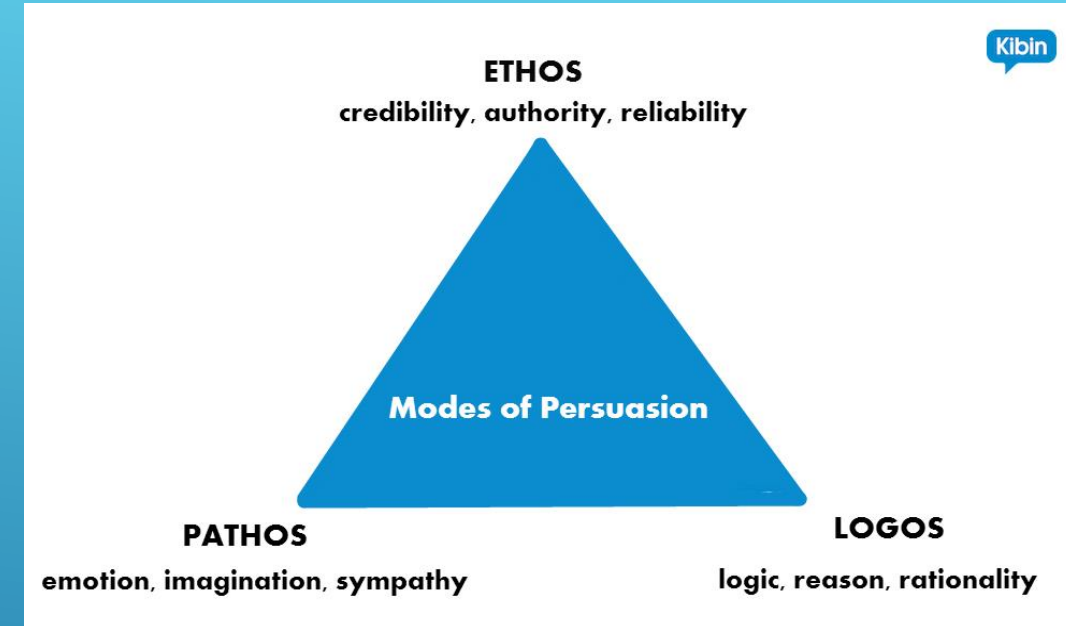


The word **Ethics** derived from Greek word *Ethos*

- A mode of persuasion
- Two meanings
 - *Character* (singular)
 - *Custom* (plural).

The word **Moral** comes from Latin word *Moralis*

- Greek term *ethos* translated as *moralis*, *mores*
- Again, two meanings
 - *Character* (singular)
 - *Custom* (plural)



Fields/Types of Ethical Inquiry

- *Descriptive Ethics*
 - Describes what a group actually believes to be right or wrong
- *Normative Ethics*
 - What ought to be the case, the way we should live
- *Metaethics*
 - Status of normative ethics – is normative ethics possible?
- *Applied Ethics*
 - Ethical/moral dilemmas that arise in different fields or areas of personal or professional life



Metaethical Questions

Are there moral truths?

- If yes, what makes moral claims true?
- And, how do we know these truths?

Are there moral facts?

- If yes, what are they like?

What is a moral judgment?

- Is it a 'belief-like state' similar to believing that the Earth is a sphere?
- Is it a 'emotion-like state' similar to feeling disgust at drinking urine?

Moral Realism versus Moral Relativism



Moral Realism

Moral Realism is the view that there are moral truths that are objective and mind-independent

Two kinds of Moral Realism:

- *Moral Absolutism*: View that moral truths are ‘absolute’ in the sense that *there are no exceptions*
- *Moral Particularism*: View that moral truths are determined by particular situations



Example: Stealing

Moral Absolutist: If stealing is wrong at all then it is always wrong

Moral Particularist: Sometime it is (really) wrong to steal, but sometimes it is (really) right to steal depending on the situation

- *Moral Particularism* is not the same as *Moral Relativism*



Moral Relativism

Two kinds of views that can be considered “relativist” from an ethical standpoint:

- The view that *there is no moral truth*
- Truth depends on what the person believes (*moral subjectivism*) or what a culture believes (*cultural relativism*)

Examples of relativism in daily life

But not everything around us is relative



Relativism in Morality

There can be two types of arguments in favor of moral relativism:

- Arguments that claim that there is no objective moral fact or truth
- Arguments that claim morality is relative.

We will focus only on the first set of arguments, and how Moral Realists refute those arguments:

- *Cultural Difference argument*
- *No Foundations argument*
- *Source/Authority of Moral Commands*
- *Differences with Moral Particularism*

*"Relativity
applies to
physics, not
ethics."*

Albert Einstein

NobleQuotes.com



Normative Ethics: Person & Actions

Teleological Theories

- *Telos* – Greek word for ‘end’ or ‘purpose’
- *Actions* are evaluated as moral or immoral depending on whether they help or hinder in achieving that end

Examples of Teleological Theories

- *Egoism* – Happiness, Pleasure
- *Eudaimonism* – Wellbeing, Flourishing
- *Utilitarianism* – General good or welfare of humankind



Normative Theories (cont)

Deontological Theories

- *Deontos* – Greek word for duty (*deon*) and Greek word for reason (*logos*)
- The morality in action is grounded by some form of authority that is independent of the consequences of the action

Examples of Deontological Theories

- Religious conceptions of divine law or commandments
- Kantian conceptions of moral reason and duty ethics



The Question of Human Nature

- Human nature is inherently good;
- Human nature is inherently evil or bad
 - “*the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short*” (Hobbes)



Study Tips for Lecture Two: Introduction to Ethics and Morality

Lots of new terms and definitions

- Ethics and Morality: *Ethos, Moralis* (in singular and plural)
- Fields of Ethical Inquiry: *Descriptive Ethics; Normative Ethics; Metaethics; Applied Ethics*
- ***Moral Realism: Moral Absolutism; Moral Particularism***
- ***Moral Relativism: Moral Subjectivism; Cultural Relativism***
- **Relativist arguments against objective morality:** *Cultural Difference, No Foundations*

GOOD NEWS

- *You don't have to memorize all these different terms and definitions;*
- *You won't even be specifically tested on these terms and definitions in your exams;*
- *Introduction to the broad categories, differences, debates, and theories that you will encounter throughout course; This just gives you a sense of ethics as a field - a broad overview of the lay of the land.*

