

# IDEAS 37

**International Online Teachers Society  
Debate  
Educational Materials For  
Advance and Upper Intermediate  
Students**



**International Online Teachers Society  
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## ON ETHICS AND BEING ETHICAL

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Ethics is equated to moral philosophy or the concept of right and wrong behavior. We often hear expressions like: ethically-correct behavior; unethical practice; ethics beyond reproach, and some other related ones. Ethics is difficult to put in a specific boxed definition since what can be considered ethically appropriate in one culture is sometimes considered ethically-reprehensible in another. A lot of literature has focused on ethics, and the ones we used back in college seemed to me back then to be more relevant to logic and philosophy, and there can be too much philosophizing for any one person to bear. Hence, I don't remember much from my studies on ethics.

Lest I be taken to be a total reprobate, I have my own values on ethics that I subscribe to. Like, I found it unconscionable when the supermarket cashier refuses to give me my 40-centavo-change simply because the coins that correspond to them are often ignored. So I carry a coin purse that has various denominations of the Philippine peso in it. In like manner, a product that is not punched in by the cashier by mistake I immediately call attention to, even coming back on another day to point the fact out. I wouldn't want my favorite supermarket to be shortchanged, too, in the same manner that I do not wish to be shortchanged. Do unto others what you would have others do unto you. I live by the Golden Rule, despite what the rest of the world says. I believe that that is all we have to live by, and we'll be fine.

I am not ethically perfect. I have had my share of evil thoughts and actions also. I have harbored less-than-desirable grudges and thinking along the way. I am human, after all. That's one thing I have consistently found out on my journey through life. There's no such thing as perfect beings; we have been created equal in our imperfections. Where others are perfect of face, they may not entirely be perfect of body. Where there are those who are intellectually-gifted, they may be less physically-endowed or something. That is the truth. The Lord knows what we need and provides it accordingly, each to his own rights. God does not play favorites.

Ethics is often a one-person matter: whatever you consider appropriate or just or true, others do not have the right to question. Ethics comes bundled with free will, the determination to do what you must when you must according to your own standards. Philosophers like Plato and Confucius gave us guidelines, but the ultimate decision, the ethics to stand by those very guidelines lie in no one else but ourselves.

Such is the true concept of true and false, of right and wrong.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In your opinion, should we always stick to the teachings of philosophers like Confucius and Plato? Why or why not?
2. What specific teachings of Confucius do you subscribe to? Why?
3. Why is ethics quite difficult to study?
4. Is there a specific person you admire for his/her ethical practices? Why do you admire him/her?
5. Give examples of what you were taught by your parents to be ethical behavior. How was their teaching of such behavior reinforced?



## SEPARATING THE GRAIN FROM THE CHAFF

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What sets apart really honest politicians from their more selfish counterparts is the kind of ethical service that those honest ones are willing to provide. Where the innately corrupt ones aim to get the highest popularity ratings with the kind of rhetoric they deliver, the really honest ones work quietly without looking for fame and glory along the way. For the dastardly government officials, it's the quality and number of photo ops that they can get a hold of. But for the genuinely honest ones, it's the quality of service and the greater good they can do at all times.

The really power-hungry ones drop the names of more powerful people left and right to get their message across, for they believe that being associated with such people imbues them with greater influence and better portraits. However, the genuinely honest politicians challenge popular opinion when they see fit, relying only on the strength of their arguments and the support of the few who believe in them.

The power grabbers propose projects as often as possible, because more accomplishments mean more pay-outs for them and their minions. The honest ones are willing to do feasibility studies first and do not needlessly pursue projects that endanger people and property along the way.

The openly selfish politician winks at you or whomever while shaking your hand, with his other hand inside his pocket to signify, "What's in this for me?" But the honest one puts his hand on your shoulder, tells you he'll study your proposition and says, "What's in this for my constituents?"

It's quite difficult to point out the really honest ones from the crooked ones during elections. But as my favorite columnist once pointed out: be wary of those who earnestly want to be in position by promising to deliver the impossible. It is those who do not want to be in position in the first place who merit a second look; it is they who can't fathom what they would ultimately do when in position because they do not want the post. This reminds me of a great comedian who was once asked if he would ever run for public office if given the chance. He replied to this effect, "What would I do in public office, make people laugh?" These are the wisest and most intelligent words I have ever heard uttered, and from a non-politician yet.

During these uncertain but relatively darker times, let us ask ourselves: how many of those we have installed in power deserve getting voted for a second, third, fourth, and so on, time? How many of those in power have stayed uncorrupted and ethically-forward? Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Ethics or no ethics, the crooked, unfortunately, seem to prevail.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What do you think of politics? Share your thoughts on the subject.
2. Is there a particular politician you find most abhorrent? Why is this so?
3. Is there a particular politician you find ethically exemplary? Why is this so?
4. If you could be a powerful politician for a year, how would you go about your position?
5. Why are ethics seemingly easily forgotten by those in government?



## HOW PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ETHICS WORK

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Professionals in diverse fields also observe certain codes of ethics in their specific industry. Every career has its own accompanying list of ethics that must be observed by the specific professional in the conduct of his profession. By having such codes, professionals are also able to stay true to the tenets of their respective professions.

Teachers, being the molders of young minds, must always strive to be good role models to those they teach. Responsible for providing an environment that is conducive to learning, teachers must strive to stay devoted to their job at all times in order to empower their students in reaching their utmost potentials. Without dedication, a teacher can never hope to fulfill her huge responsibilities. Aside from devotion to her profession, a teacher must also be neutral in discussing certain sensitive topics with her students. Showing partiality in such issues as historical controversies and even current ones would only make the students choose sides unnecessarily. Yes, enlightened teaching necessitates that a teacher learn to take certain issues with her own stand, but she must always strive to be impartial especially with whatever concepts she teaches. In addition to devotion and neutrality, a teacher should also: learn to show respect to everyone, no matter what race or creed; conduct herself in the most professional manner at all times; and practice honesty and integrity in teaching her students.

The Hippocratic Oath taken by medical professionals at the onset of their career pretty much sets down the specific code of ethics for all medical practitioners. Aside from doing no harm, Medical professionals are also duty-bound to serve those in need, which translates to the universal access of patients to medical care. Aside from these, doctors are also to conduct themselves in all honesty and lawfulness, observing their patients' basic medical and human rights. Doctors are also bound to observe the doctor-patient confidentiality concept by being loyal to the people they serve.

Aside from conducting themselves in the most honorable and responsible manner possible, engineers are also responsible for ensuring that whatever structure or form they work on upholds the utmost safety, well-being, and health of the public. Part of their responsibility entails that engineers only perform tasks which are specific to their area of expertise. Intentional deception or misleading people into believing certain aspects of their work should never be done by responsible engineers.

Yes, different professions have their own codes of ethics to follow. As a career professional, doing one's assigned task is essential. But what is more crucial is conducting oneself according to the tenets of one's profession. In the end, that alone demonstrates just how professional one truly is.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In your opinion, are there any additional rules by which professionals should conduct themselves?
2. Why are professional codes of ethics necessary?
3. What would you do if your teacher wasn't conducting herself professionally?
4. Have you or someone you know ever had a bad experience with a medical professional? Be able to talk about that experience in detail, if you can.
5. In your own profession, how do you practice a professional code of conduct at all times? Be specific.

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## PEOPLE FOR ANIMALS, PEOPLE FOR PETA

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People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, or PETA, was established to uphold the rights of animals. Animals have rights too, simply because they are also creatures of a Higher Power. Being part of all creation, animals deserve to enjoy rights, maybe not as many as their human counterparts, but still privileged to enjoy them just the same. In the story of Creation, after all, animals were also given their fair amount of exposure just like Adam and Eve. And elsewhere in the Holy Bible, animals were an integral part woven into the many biblical stories we have read and enjoyed.

According to PETA's online website (<http://www.peta.org/>), animals are not ours, in more ways than one.

To quote:

Animals are not ours to eat.  
Animals are not ours to wear.  
Animals are not ours to experiment on.  
Animals are not ours to use for entertainment.  
Animals are not ours to abuse in any way.

Since time immemorial, animals have been eaten, slaughtered, poked fun at, used for experimentation purposes, and used for mocking other people. Crocodiles and snakes flourish in politics. Fur was not only worn by Cruella de Ville, but has always been an integral part of the wardrobe of certified, super-rich fashionistas. Who doesn't own at least one bag made from animal skin, or one leather shoe, purse or pair of gloves, for that matter? Roosters and dogs are pitted in cockfights and dogfights. Dog races have been a form of entertainment in certain, advanced countries. Mice have been used for inoculations, while monkeys have been sent up in space. People fear of diseases such as mad cow disease, the avian flu, and foot-and-mouth disease because they directly affect the world's greatest sources of food: cows; chickens ; and pigs. Or beef, chicken and pork, to be more exact. Alas, I myself can not imagine a day without at least one dish of any of these three.

I think it was from a certain movie where I heard a vegetarian character justify her going the healthy way thus: she never eats anything with a face. My goodness, I quickly checked myself: Do fish qualify as having faces, too? What will there be left to eat without the mooers, oinkers, and bok-bok-bokers on the dining table?

Certain religions prohibit partaking of certain food and foodstuff made from specific animals, for reasons of their own. Ours it is not to mock those beliefs, but ours it is to respect them. PETA or not, those beliefs are meant for their followers to be guided accordingly, and those who subscribe to other religious beliefs have no right to question what others uphold.

Yes, it still is an animal world after all. Besides, imagine what a healthier world it would be if we all went vegan, or vegetarian. Perhaps, the only drawback is when animals outrun us humans in their number.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In your opinion, what has probably brought about the deadliest diseases in the world?
2. Research on some other ways by which animals have been mistreated all over the planet. Share your findings in class.
3. Do you or someone you know have a pet? Why did you or that person choose that pet?
4. If you could come back as an animal later in life, which animal would you be and why?
5. Do animals really have rights? Why should animal rights be respected also?



## ETHICS – STAYING AT YOUR BEST

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Everybody wants to be morally upright and to act in a correct manner that is why ethics is necessary for staying at your best so you could achieve your goal. In our present society, people do not always do what is right. Even when it comes to the point that they are very much aware of the grave consequence of not doing the right thing, they still insist on doing just what they wanted to do and doing what is not right. Definitely, our behavior always counts and therefore we should have a check on it, we need to be motivated to have a right action. We need to know all about the moral values of our human conduct and the rules and principles on how to govern it. We should therefore know how to go about our personal conduct. We must bear in mind that our personal conduct can either make or break us in our workplace or even in our business.

Ethics is a set of personal values and this is the sole reason why it is needed for people to stay at their best. How we act especially in front of other people and how you mingle with them too play an important role in our lives. Ethics is very synonymous to morals. Furthermore, the dictionaries actually define the word as a guide to decisions that is related to moral duties and obligations. We as individuals living in a society that is set with certain standards and norms want to be an ethical person, develop our career and be a success. Consequently, we all want to be a credible person, one who has integrity (by being honest and telling the truth at all times), have confidence and be a trustworthy person, gain respect and also acquire the right attitude. Then, these are all the reasons why we really need to know ethics.

We need ethics to guide our actions and also recognize any obligations in our life. Have you ever been ethically challenged in your life? If you are, then I suggest that you do not stay in a workplace or organization where your ethics are out of sync. It is difficult to ignore ethics. Whether you encounter instances, experiences and you are having difficulties in showing that you are an ethical person, always consider to have ethical choices, meaning doing the right thing.

Do not cease to have an ethical behavior. Give people something to think about and have a measurement against which to assess your and their behavior and have ethics inculcated in your mind. Ask yourself if what you are doing is right and proper and just. In whatever circumstances and experiences that may surround an individual; we should continuously need to know ethics. Let us have a sound judgment, stand firm with the right decisions, be a person of integrity and practice ethics in all the aspects of your life. As you develop your career and reach your goal of success, know the true meaning of ethics in order for you to be staying at your best.

Questions for discussion:

1. Do you need to practice ethics in your life? Explain your answer.
2. Have you experienced difficulties in life in trying to be an ethical person? Justify your answer.
3. Do you agree that an individual needs to know all about ethics in order for him to be staying at his best? Why or why not?
4. Do you practice an ethical behavior in your life? Explain further.
5. In your opinion what do ethics mean?



## ETHICAL BEHAVIOR - THE GOOD PART OF US

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Every individual has a different set of attitudes and set of standards that may either be positive or negative but we all wanted to exhibit that kind of ethical behavior which consists of that good part of us. Apparently, we want to behave in an appropriate manner or in a right way based on the morals of our society. This is what we refer to as ethical behavior, that is, discerning the right from the wrong; the good from the evil, and I would surmise that all of us have undergone or is going through all of these, be it ethical or unethical behavior. Ethics is essentially a set of rules that we live by every day, which plays a large part of our lives. Of course we all would want to live, work, play in an ethical way, that is, live by the set of standards that are generally said to be right and good.

Generally, we all know that there are laws written to protect us and that they are based on ethics but not all of them are. We are then forced to practice ethical behavior, although not all ethical behavior has become a law. An example of which is cheating as in when we cheat on our taxes, it is against the law and is an unethical behavior. On the other hand, when you cheat while playing with some of your friends and even family members, it is not being against the law although it is still considered as an unethical behavior. In another case, we can take lying for instance, like when you are standing as a witness in front of the court and you lie, we know very well that is against the law and considered as perjury. However, when we lie with our friends or anybody else, that is not being against the law but it is still referred to as an unethical behavior.

We actually develop our own moral code, that is, our sense of what is right and wrong when we are in that process of growing up. Oftentimes, our morals are based on what we see and observe around us. Like when a child is brought up by parents who are prone to lying, definitely that child will also grow to lie as well. They pretty well know that lying is not a right action but they don't see it as an unethical behavior. Instead it has simply become a way of life for them. In spite of what and how we are raised up with, we can still redefine or redevelop our moral code as a grown up individual. It is probable by just trying to establish the ethical behavior in the world or work that you are engaged in.

As we gradually learn and perfect that ethical behavior, we should then use ethics in our life and even in our business dealings. The fact remains that it takes strong morals, a lot of courage and conviction to do what is right. Let us not conform to the standards of this world, instead let us practice that ethical behavior which consists of that good part of us to make this place a better place to live in.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is ethical behavior? Give an example of it.
2. What are some examples of ethical but illegal behavior?
3. What affects ethical behavior?
4. How can you differentiate ethical behavior from unethical behavior?
5. Give examples of unethical behavior.



## AN IMPRESSION ABOUT ETHICS

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People are bounded by their philosophies in life. One of these philosophies is what we call ethics. It deals with morality. It guides people to distinguish what is right and what is wrong. The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy points out that ethics involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong behavior. People are investigated where their ethical principles come from, people are given practical tasks to reach at moral standards that maintain and regulate right and wrong behavior, and people are personally involved of examining themselves on particular issues. These may seem to be blurry in a certain point because somehow the lines of distinction may interrelate with each other. In other words, ethics examines and studies moral values and rules. These moral values and rules guide people to become good citizens. These also serve as the measure of morality of a person. We learn to differentiate and distinguish a good and bad person because of his ethical standards in the society. Sometimes we could not avoid asking ourselves on how do we apply ethics in our lives. We also ask the standard social norms that we have to follow and what we have to avoid. Some people have difficulties to distinguish them. Some people do it intentionally or with a purpose. Whatever reasons and purposes do they have in mind; they are accepted because these reasons and purposes do well for themselves.

Albert Schweitzer once quoted in his book, *Civilization and Ethics*, "True ethics begin where the use of language ceases". He emphasized about character and behavior. Without saying a word, our actions could show it all. We don't need so many words to speak just to disclose our moral values. Our actions and attitudes guarantee well than words. As the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words". It's very true. These actions would certainly define who you are or what kind of a person you are. When a person sets a good living example to others, he is trying to bequeath the living legacy of good ethics. There are times that we do something wrong, we do cheating, we do something embarrassing, we do something unacceptable o the social norms of behavior yet we want to prove it isn't, we want to evade and hide the real cause and pretend everything is fine and okay. Can we call it an ethical behavior? Or we ask ourselves, "Where's the etiquette?" It's hard to accept this kind of behavior. The prescription for guidance of conduct seems to be useless. Because there's no proper decorum which is the major substance as far as ethics is concerned.

We know for a fact that no one is perfect. However, it's not a viable reason why do some people don't practice what is truly right. In another sense, they continue doing that because it becomes a habit. It is a habit that they have a hard time to quit. They know the real consequences. Perhaps some people really don't really care the moral values they have within. They don't know how to use it or put into practice. Whatever behavior do we have, it really matters. We have to check it from to time to be aware how far do we apply our ethics and our personal values towards other people. Our personal decisions are guided by our good manners or moral obligations. Therefore, when our ethics is affected, we need to review again and again on how far we have dealt with all the circumstances and actions having an ethical behavior which guides us to come up and apply ethical preferences in life.

Questions for discussion:

1. What images spring to mind when you hear the word "ethics"?
2. How do we distinguish right from wrong actions?
3. Why do actions speak louder than words? Give an example.
4. How do we maintain our ethical behavior?
5. Why do some people choose to do what is wrong?



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