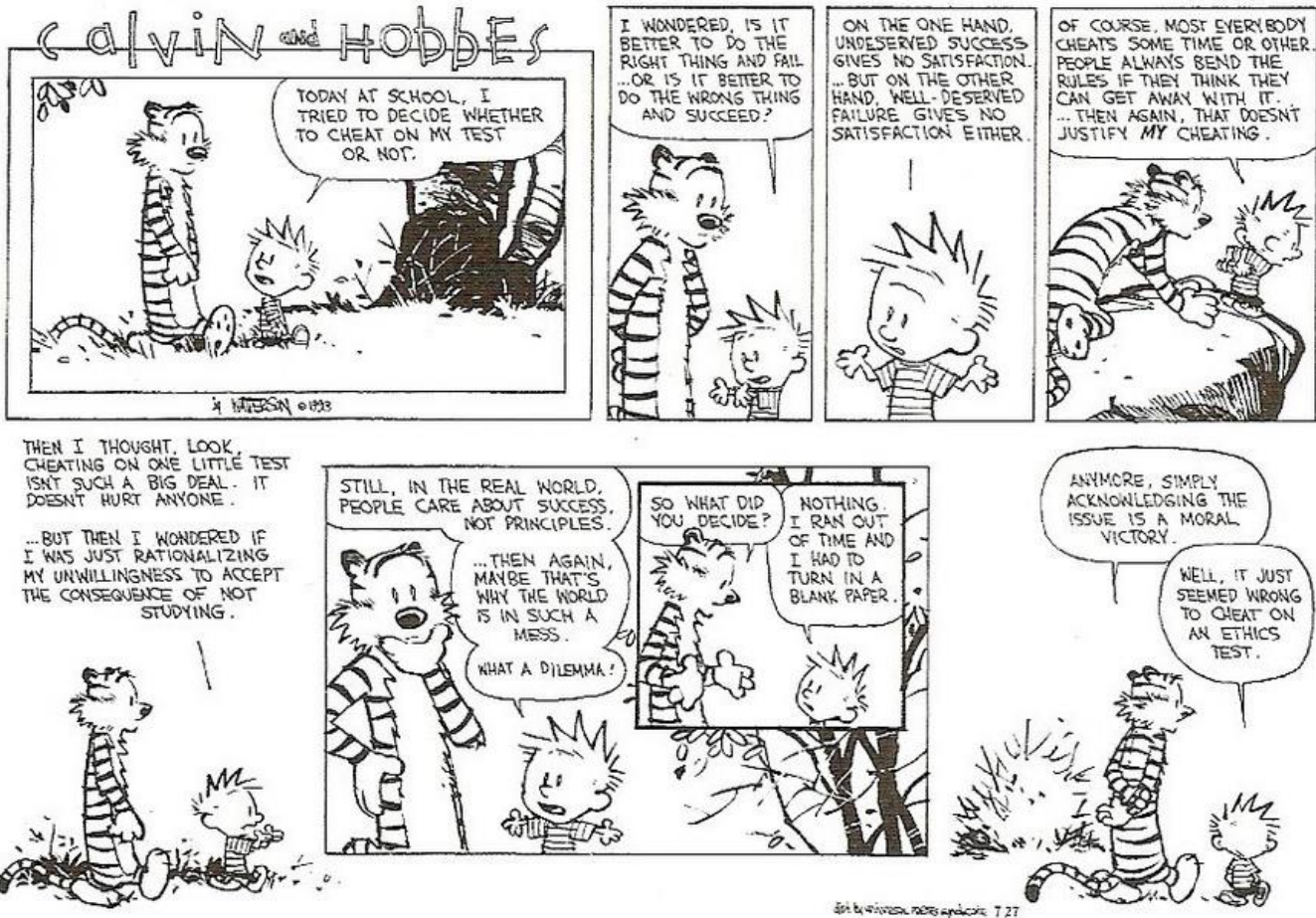


# ETHICS



# MORALITY AND ETHICS

*The branch of philosophy that studies values is ETHICS... Ethics defines a code of values to guide human actions... it provides the standard by which people are to judge good and evil, right and wrong, the desirable and the undesirable. -Leonard Piekoff*

## **MORALITY:**

A code of values distinguishing right from wrong; the study of good and evil. "Moral" denotes "good"; "immoral" denotes "evil"; amoral implies neutral...neither good nor evil.

## **ETHICS:**

The branch of philosophy dealing with right and wrong and the morality of motives and ends. Ethics deals with discovering and defining the correct moral code (universal, or for a specific society, depending on one's philosophy).

*What is "GOOD"? What is "EVIL"?*

*How is one to determine what is moral and immoral?*

*How can we know if our society's view of morality is correct?*

*How can we know the right moral decision in a given situation?*

*Can two people come up with opposite moral answers to the exact same circumstances, and both be right?*

*Do universal truths exist which we can use discover what is moral and immoral, or are the concepts of right and wrong created by each society and relative to time, location, culture, and individuals?*

*Do individuals have universal "Natural Rights", or are rights determined by each society and therefore relative to time, location, culture, and custom?*

The above questions focus on our quest to determine if there are principles which should govern our behavior towards each other, and what those principles should be. Fundamentally there are two opposing camps. First, those who believe that universal standards of morality exist, that these standards are based upon God, Truths, or Natural Laws, and that these standards apply to all humans in all time periods and in all locations. In opposition are those who believe that standards of morality are human creations which are relative to time, location, and other circumstances, and therefore do not apply to all people. This view holds that moral "truths" do not exist- only beliefs which change over time.

# **I. MORAL RELATIVISM**

"What might be right for you might not be right for someone else."

## **MORALITY**

the determination of right and wrong- is relative to time period, geographic location, culture, ethnicity, nationality, and even individual beliefs. MORAL RELATIVISTS believe that concepts of good and evil are human creations, just as language, culture, and customs are.

## **RELATIVE TO LOCATION**

Different individuals and societies have different views of what is good and evil, right and wrong. Each view is as "correct" as the next- and no view is "correct"- because they are all merely points of view. **Morals are made-up values and beliefs.** Each society has its own code of proper and improper behavior, and that code is "right"- for that society. Opposing views held by other societies are only "wrong" from the point of view of those who disagree. From their own view, they are "right". This category of Relativism is often called cultural relativism. For example, in some cultures in the jungle regions of Central America, giant "bird-eating" spiders are considered a delicious source of protein. In the U.S., most of us would squeal at the sight of such a spider, never mind eating it. What is "normal" for some is "abnormal" for others- it is simply a matter of how one is brought up. In some culture regions, men have the right and even obligation to beat their wives as a form of punishment and discipline. Other locations host cultures which condemn and forbid such practices.

## **RELATIVE TO TIME**

Each set of moral values is "right" to the society that embraces those values. That is, "right" until that society changes its mind. Societies tend to change views over time on given moral topics. For example, 160 years ago in the United States, the prevailing moral attitude towards slavery by whites was that the institution was permissible. Some even argued that it was good for black people to be slaves. At the time, that was the "right" moral view. Today, most Americans shudder at these examples, because they are viewed as examples of an "immoral" institution. But this institution was not considered immoral by the majority at that time. One may say that the institution became immoral by the year 1865, when it seems certain that the majority of Americans had decided that slavery should be ended.

We are witnessing another transformation today, as traditional attitudes on the morality of homosexuality are changing. What makes one view "right" in one time period and "wrong" in another time period is, very simply, the attitudes and values of the people. As attitudes change, right and wrong change.



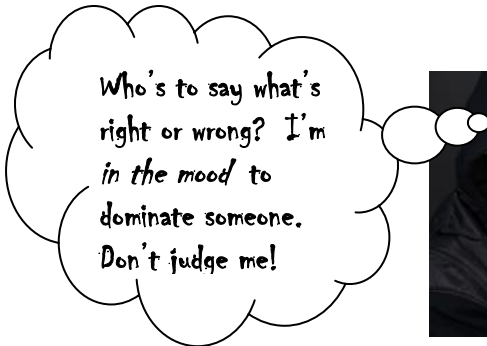
### THOU SHALT NOT JUDGE.

Since right and wrong are human creations, one should not say that there are universal moral codes that apply to all people. That would be **insensitive** and **intolerant** towards the beliefs and values of others, because inevitably that position would hold that some moral views are correct, and some are not. An individual or society should never impose their own morals on others; the conduct of others must be judged according to their own standards, not one's own. Judging others according to the standards of one's own society is **ethnocentric** and the cause of much conflict, violence, suffering, and **hate**. Adherence to moral relativism also means not judging another individual within one's own society. That person has his/her own moral beliefs, and you have no business imposing your own beliefs on them.

### IN CONCLUSION:

**MORAL** - that which is considered good, just, or right by a specific society or individual.

**IMMORAL** - that which is considered evil, unjust, or wrong by a specific society or individual.



## II. MORALITY IS DETERMINED BY UNIVERSAL TRUTHS.

**Natural Law and Natural Rights** philosophy conclude that all humans are bound by the same moral code; immoral behavior destroys the dignity and rights of our fellow human beings, while following this code recognizes equal human worth and universal human rights. The idea of a universal moral code is the basis for **Natural Equality, Mutual Individualism, Universalism**, and the **Ethic of Reciprocity**, also known as:

**THE GOLDEN RULE:** "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

A natural moral right is a power one gives oneself that does not infringe upon the rights and dignity of others. This requires an acknowledgement that all humans have inherent worth and value; one "sees oneself in others."

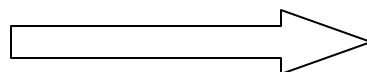
To believe in human rights- that is, rights all humans have by nature, the infringement of which are unjust, is to recognize the universal moral code. It is immoral to violate the natural rights of others.

To believe that all people are equal in intrinsic worth and dignity is to believe in a universal moral code. It is immoral to treat others as lesser in human worth and value.

If it is possible for a law of government to be unjust, then governments or societies are not the ultimate arbiters of justice. A law's justness, then, is based on its adherence to a Higher Law: the universal moral code of equal human dignity and universal natural rights.

Most of human history is a history of injustice, or IMMORALITY. This is because those in power have usually denied some or all natural rights of some or all of the people. The fact that humans have come up with opposing moral answers to the same exact questions does not mean there is no correct answer- it means that some people were / are WRONG. **SLAVERY** in the United States was wrong whether the majority agreed or not, because it ignored certain universal truths about human beings. Human societies have never truly and fully obeyed the moral code, and it is doubtful than any individual has lived a perfectly moral life. Again, this does not mean there is no objective, true set of moral principles; it merely shows that humans are not perfect, and some are downright evil.

Conversely, whether we have known it or not, we have almost always established our moral codes loosely on the concept that people have rights. Many crimes such as rape and murder are almost universally condemned. Those who rationalized their justification, interestingly, still do not want to be raped or murdered themselves.



*It's not relative!  
He's objectively wrong  
for violating her  
natural human rights.*



*Innocent  
Victim.*



*MORAL UNIVERSALISM:*

*“ACID ATTACKS ARE WRONG, WHATEVER YOUR DAMM CULTURE SAYS.”*

Post Modern thinkers who defend moral relativism cannot help but use the language and logic of universal moral truth. For instance, they argue that no one should judge another, and that everyone has a right to their own moral code. In doing so, they acknowledge the intrinsic value of fellow human beings who should not be judged; and the rights of those fellow humans to their beliefs. Intolerance, judgementalism, ethnocentrism, and racism are held to be absolute wrongs. It is absurd to argue that being judgmental is wrong, but the morality of theft, slavery, murder, torture, and rape are relative. And how can relativists claim we have a right to our own moral beliefs but not to any of the classically recognized natural rights? These relativist thinkers might be forgiven for their intellectual and logical gymnastics if it weren't for the catastrophic real life consequences of moral relativism.

Unfortunately, those with the most **POWER** have traditionally been in the position to dictate how moral codes are applied, and who they are applied to. Natural Rights philosophy calls for all humans, not just the powerful, to have their human dignity and rights respected.

### **TRUTHS V. OPINIONS**

Much of what we discuss as “good” or “bad” are not ethical matters. Music, styles, recipes, and many lifestyles are generally matters of preference, not morality. It is important to make this distinction! But we often don't, causing much confusion. Further, people who believe that morality is based on universal truths do not automatically agree upon what those truths are. Very often, Natural Law thinkers disagree over about whether certain rights are moral, and what rights should be given up. The controversy over "victimless crimes" is just one example. Is there really no victim? Abortion is perhaps the most controversial: is the unborn an equal human being entitled to the respect of his/her natural rights? A Natural Law advocate would not claim these controversies have no correct answer. Hopefully, through logic, reason, and intelligent deliberation, we can move closer to the Truth.

## **NATURAL RIGHTS ARE NOT UNCONDITIONAL**

According to Natural Law, murder violates a person's Right To Life and is therefore immoral. This is a Universal Truth, not subject to become an "untruth" if enough people disagree. At the same time, it is a truth that killing another human being at times is MORAL. Wait- isn't that RELATIVISM? Not if the circumstances require one to kill an aggressor in order to save an innocent. Countless facts (truths) come together every instant to affect the circumstances of each event. During all of this, one must look at how the circumstances affect people's RIGHTS. For example, your rights should be respected by others- unless you no longer respect others' rights. Other people are no longer morally bound to respect your right to life if you're about to murder someone. The very word "murder" entails morality: murder is the UNJUST or IMMORAL taking of a life; KILLING is merely the taking of a life. At times, killing is morally justifiable. Murder never is. THE CIRCUMSTANCES CAN CHANGE THE MORALITY OF A SPECIFIC ACT.

## **SOURCES OF UNIVERSAL MORAL CODES.**

Believers in universal moral truth tend to rely on two sources to discover truth: RELIGION and/or REASON.

## **ETHICS AND FAITH**

Some regard pure faith in religious teachings, the inspired Word of God or His prophets, as the only source of truth. When one examines the basic moral teaching of most major religions, it becomes apparent that they usually correspond with Natural Law / Individualist Philosophy. Keeping the concepts of Natural Rights and moral equality in mind, consider the Hebrew 10 Commandments, or the moral teachings of Islam, or Jesus's message to "love thy neighbor as thyself," or this teaching of Buddha:

### **HARMLESSNESS**

*All beings tremble before violence. All fear death. All love life.*

*See yourself in others. Then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do?*

*He who seeks happiness, by hurting those who seek happiness, will never find happiness.*

*For your brother is like you. He wants to be happy.*

*Never harm him, and when you leave this life, you too will find happiness.*

*-From the DHAMMAPADA*

## THE UNIVERSAL MORAL CODE IS RATIONAL.

This is not to imply that religions always conform to Natural Law Philosophy. Humans often interpret religious teachings to justify immoral acts; sometimes the very opposite of what their religions teach.

Nor do all Natural Law Philosophers embrace religion. Some natural rights thinkers consider religion nothing more than superstition. They call on people to use their capacity to REASON, not mysticism, to discover moral truths. Many who identify as Humanists identify with this point of view.

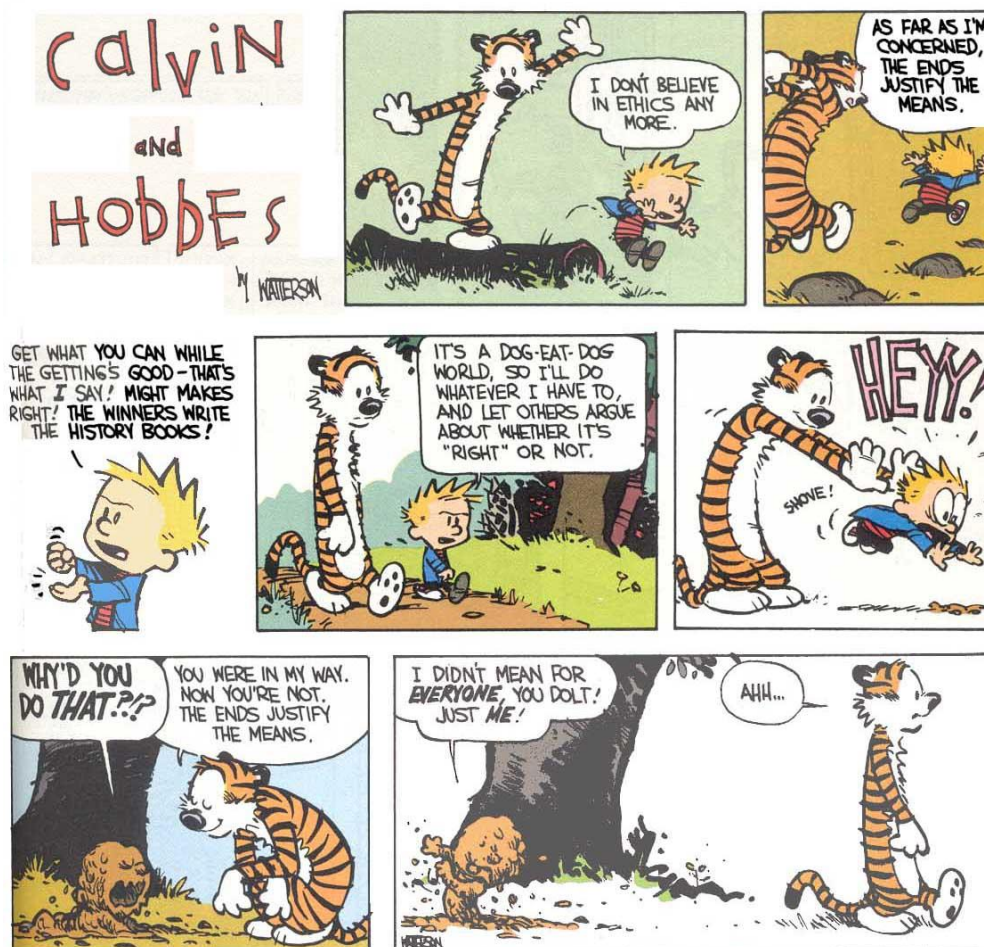
## FAITH AND REASON TOGETHER.

Finally, others hold religion AND reason compatible. Believing that God endowed humans with Free Will and the capacity of reason, they hold that we can discover truth for ourselves. Thomas Aquinas falls into this camp. It happens that religions often provide "extra help"- moral teachings to guide our behavior. Still, these moral teachings usually are, if one examines them, based on truth discoverable through logic and reason.

## IN CONCLUSION:

**MORAL**- That which respects the rights and dignity of others.

**IMMORAL**- That which unjustly denies (infringes upon) the rights and dignity of others.





## PHILOSOPHY: THE GOLDEN RULE

**THE ETHIC OF RECIPROCITY.** The Natural Law argument that morality has objective, universal standards is reflected in the "Golden Rule." This is the idea that through reason, we can empathize with others, and respect them in the manner we desire the respect of others. It is called the Golden Rule because it came about independently in virtually all cultures across the globe.

**The Dalai Lama:** *"Every religion emphasizes human improvement, love, respect for others, sharing other people's suffering. On these lines every religion had more or less the same viewpoint and the same goal."*

### Versions of the Golden Rule from different Religions and Wisdom Traditions:

**Confucianism** – Do not unto others what you would not they should do unto you. *Analects 15.23.*

**Taoism** – Regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss. *T'ai shang kan ying p'ien.*

**Jainism** – In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self, and therefore should refrain from inflicting upon others such injury as would appear undesirable to us if inflicted upon ourselves. *Yogashastra 2.20.*

**Shinto:** *"The heart of the person before you is a mirror. See there your own form"* Munetada Kurozumi

**Hinduism** – This is the sum of duty: Do nothing to others which if done to you, would cause you pain. *Mahabharata 5.15.17*

**Buddhism** – Hurt not others with that which pains yourself. *Udanavarga 5.18.*

**Zoroastrianism** *That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself.* Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,5

**Judaism** – What is hurtful to yourself do not to your fellow man. That is the whole of the Torah and the remainder is but commentary. Go learn it. *Talmud.*

**Christianity** – Always treat others as you would like them to treat you. *Matthew 7:12.*

**Islam** – No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself. *Traditions.*

**Sufism:** *"The basis of Sufism is consideration of the hearts and feelings of others. If you haven't the will to gladden someone's heart, then at least beware lest you hurt someone's heart, for on our path, no sin exists but this."* Dr. Javad Nurbakhsh, Master of the Nimatullahi Sufi Order.

**Sikhism** – As you deem yourself so deem others. Then you will become a partner in partner to Heaven. *Kabir.*

### Some philosophers' statements:

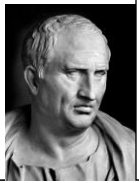
**Plato:** *"May I do to others as I would that they should do unto me."* (Greece; 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE)

**Socrates:** *"Do not do to others that which would anger you if others did it to you."* (Greece; 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE)

**Seneca:** *"Treat your inferiors as you would be treated by your superiors,"* Epistle 47:11 (Rome; 1<sup>st</sup> century CE)

**Epictetus:** *"What you would avoid suffering yourself, seek not to impose on others."* (circa 100 CE)

**Immanuel Kant: THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE:** *"Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature."*



**MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO:**  
**Morality is based on**  
**Universal Laws of Nature**  
*The Laws*, Rome circa 70 BC

...The origin of Justice is to be found in Law, for Law is a natural force; it is the mind and reason of the intelligent man, the standard by which Justice and injustice are measured... But in determining what Justice is, let us begin with that supreme Law which had its origin ages before any written law existed or any state had been established.

...Surely there comes nothing more valuable than the full realization that we are born for Justice, and that right is based, not upon men's minds, but upon Nature. This fact will immediately be plain once you get a clear conception of man's fellowship and union with his fellow men. For no single thing is so like another, so exactly its counterpart, as all of us are to one another. Nay, if bad habits and false beliefs did not twist the weaker minds and turn them in whatever direction they are inclined, no one would be so like his own self as all men would be like all others.

And so, however one defines man, a single definition will apply to all... and indeed reason, which alone raises us above the level of the beasts... is certainly common to us all, and, though varying in what it learns, at least in the capacity to learn it is invariable. For the same things are invariably perceived by the senses, and those things which stimulate the sense, do so in the same way in all men; and those rudimentary beginnings of intelligence...which are imprinted in our minds, are imprinted in all minds alike... in fact, there is no human being of any race who, if he finds a guide, cannot attain virtue...

Well, then, I find that it has been the opinion of the wisest men that Law is not a product of human thought, nor is it an enactment of peoples, but something eternal which rules the whole universe by its wisdom in command and prohibition. Even if there was no written law against rape at Rome in the reign of Lucius Tarquinius, we cannot say on that account that Sextus Tarquinius did not break that eternal law by violating Lucretia, the daughter of Lucretius! For reason did exist...urging men to right conduct and diverting them from wrong-doing, and this reason did not first become law when it was written down, but when it first came into existence simultaneously with the Divine mind.

What of the many deadly, pestilential statutes [laws] which nations put in force? These no more deserve to be called laws than the rules a band of robbers might pass in their assembly. For if ignorant and unskilled men have prescribed deadly poisons instead of healing drugs, these cannot possibly be called physicians' prescriptions; neither in a nation can a ruinous statute of any sort be called a law, even though the nation, in spite of its being a ruinous regulation, has accepted it. Therefor Law is the distinction between things just and unjust, made in agreement with that primal and most ancient of all things, Nature...



**RUTH BENEDICT:**  
**Morality is relative**  
*Defense of Moral Relativism*, Journal of  
 General Psychology (1934)

In the higher cultures the standardization of custom and belief over a couple of continents has given a false sense of the inevitability of the particular forms that have gained currency... Most of the simpler cultures did not gain the wide currency of the one which...we identify with human nature. Modern civilization, from this point of view, becomes not a necessary pinnacle of human achievement but one entry in a long series of possible adjustments.

As a matter of fact, one of the most striking facts that emerge from a study of widely varying cultures is the ease with which our abnormal functions within other cultures. It does not matter what form of "abnormality" we choose for illustration, those which indicate extreme instability... or character traits like sadism or delusions of grandeur or of persecution, there are well-described cultures in which these abnormals function at ease and with honor, and apparently without danger or difficulty to the society.

The most spectacular illustrations of the extent to which normality may be culturally defined are those cultures where abnormality of our culture is the cornerstone of their social culture. A recent study of an island in northwest Melanesia by Fortune describes a society... that look upon each other as prime manipulators of black magic... they look upon a good garden crop as evidence of theft...They have even rigorous religiously enforced customs that forbid the sharing of seed even in one family group. Anyone else's food is deadly poison to you, so that communality of stores is out of the question. For some months before harvest the whole society is on the verge of starvation, but if one falls to the temptation and eats up one's seed yams, one is an outcast and a beachcomber for life. There is no coming back. ...Among the Kwakiutl it did not matter whether a relative had died in bed of disease, or by the hand of an enemy, In either case death was an affront to be wiped out by the death of another person. A chief's sister and her daughter [disappeared upriver]. [A war party was gathered] ...They set out, and found seven men and two children asleep and killed them. "Then they felt good when they arrived at Sebaa in the evening."

We do not any longer make the mistake of deriving the morality of our locality and decade directly from the inevitable constitution of human nature. We do not elevate it to the dignity of a first principle. We recognize that morality differs in every society, and is a convenient term for socially approved habits. Mankind has always preferred to say "It is morally good" rather than "it is habitual," and the fact of this preference is matter enough for a critical science of ethics. But the two are synonymous.