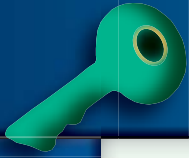# Ethics, Values, and Morals

Quick Write

Your best friend wants you to go with him/her to have some fun tonight. Jot down three personal guidelines you would use to decide whether it would be right or wrong to go with them.

Learn About

- ethics
- values
- core values of the US military services
- cultural and universal norms
- making ethical and moral decisions
- your personal code of conduct

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, American essayist, philosopher, and poet

Ethics

Adults make complex ethical decisions every day. We also know from psychology, which is *the study of the mind and of behavior*, that children at about the age of three begin to develop a conscience, a sense of right and wrong. So what is ethics and what effect does it have on us and others?

Ethics is a branch of philosophy, *the study of people's most fundamental and basic beliefs and how these beliefs are justified*. Not all philosophers agree on one definition of ethics. For our purposes, we define ethics as *the rules of conduct that people should follow*. The study of ethics helps us decide whether something we may do, say, choose, or think is right or wrong. While rules of conduct may change through the years to keep pace with changes in society, the fundamentals of ethics remain constant.

Conduct is a key word in the definition of ethics. Ethics assumes that we have the free will to make decisions and act on those decisions. You face ethical dilemmas every day you are at school. Over the course of a school year, you will take many exams to determine how much of the subject material you have learned. If your best friend sends you a text message with the answers to one of the exams, would you use the answers to cheat on the exam? When we decide whether to cheat or not to cheat, we are making a personal ethical decision about our conduct.

Four Basic Rules of Ethics

In general, philosophers agree that these four basic rules of ethics are enduring and universal:

1. Do good; avoid evil.
2. Be fair and unbiased, which means *free of favoritism*.
3. Respect the dignity of all people.
4. Be responsible for your thoughts and conduct.

The following list, derived from these four basic rules of ethics, contains a set of guidelines for human decency and well-being. Of course, this list does not contain every possible guideline. Also, a rule can be overridden if it is in conflict with another rule.

- Be honest.
- Keep promises.
- Obey and be loyal to proper authorities.
- Be courageous.
- Grow in knowledge.
- Be willing to work.
- Be moderate (don't do anything to excess).
- Maintain and enhance your health.
- Don't harm others.

Ethics and Personal Standards

What comes to mind when you hear the word *ethics*? Are your first thoughts of laws, judges, and criminals? On the other hand, do you think of humane treatment of animals or equal treatment for all humankind? How about letting someone copy your homework or telling your best friend the latest gossip? All of these areas involve decisions based on ethics.

Vocabulary

- psychology
- philosophy
- ethics
- unbiased
- integrity
- value system
- morals
- norms
- universal norms
- non-universal norms
- conscience

Willingness to work together is just one of the guidelines for human decency.
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Most of our moral beliefs are actually habits we learned as children. Doing the right thing brought praise, or at least no negative response. For example, when we walked on the rug with muddy shoes, our parents scolded us. With repetition, we learned to take off our shoes—or at least wipe them off before entering the house. We also learned that this type of behavior would keep us out of trouble.

For adults, the penalties and rewards of their habits are not so obvious—but they are just as real. Over the course of a lifetime, adults develop habits (good or bad) that can affect their reputation, social status, finances, or overall sense of well-being.

Even though habits are learned in social settings and reinforced by rewards and punishments, not all habits are right. Habits are right when they are ways of helping others and ourselves. That is, they help us to develop our best potential and to respect people's basic rights.

We use terms such as *right*, *good*, *should*, and *ought* in everyday conversations, but what do these terms mean? If we say an act is *right*, does that mean we approve of it? When we say we should not do something, is it because society disapproves of it? These are difficult questions. Both consequences and motives seem to be important in deciding what makes an act right or good. Philosophers continue to wrestle with these concepts. Meanwhile, each of us has an idea of what we believe to be right. Our beliefs may be based on what society or our parents believe or what our experiences have taught us. A combination of factors probably shapes many of our concepts. In any case, while we need to be tolerant of other people's concepts, beliefs, and feelings, we must also think and act according to our understanding of what is right and good.

As we said, not all decisions involve ethics. Nevertheless, many decisions that seem unrelated to ethics may actually have an ethical aspect. Consider the scientist who mixes together several harmless chemicals and then applies heat or pressure. The resulting products, such as plastic bags, are convenient for many types of shopping. The effect on the environment, however, can be very harmful. Plastic does not break down easily, and animals are harmed when they eat it. Thus, we must ask ourselves which we value more—the convenience of the disposable containers or the environment. These are not easy decisions to make. Technology continues to bring us new and better products; with these products come new and tougher decisions.

Concern for Others

Over time, we learn that our physical needs, such as food, air, and shelter, must be satisfied first. Once our basic needs are met, we are able to move on to higher-level needs, such as being able to recognize the needs of others, and being considerate of other people's opinions and feelings. Just like you, other people need recognition for a job or task well done; positive recognition is important to an individual's self-esteem. Receiving a pat on the back, earning a promotion, lettering in sports, or being applauded at a music recital are all examples of praise. Teachers encourage

students to excel in academics. Coaches encourage their students to excel in drama, sports, music, or dance. Parents encourage their children to be the best they can be. Our friends cheer us on to make a touchdown or do well on college entrance exams. We all need a boost now and then. We need to know other people care about us, and they need to know we care about them.

Integrity

Along with showing concern for others, we should display a level of *integrity* in our daily activities that shows others that we are able to take a stand for something that we believe in. Integrity means *being honest and sincere with ourselves and with others, closely following a consistent code of ethics*. The key word here is *consistent*: not acting by one set of standards on Friday at school and another on Saturday night. It means not picking or choosing only those rules that benefit just you. It means doing what is right whether someone is watching or not. It also means having a disciplined, balanced approach to life. Being honest is sometimes painful. No one likes to admit to doing wrong or making a mistake. The following story portrays this point about personal integrity.

A high school volleyball player named Emmee Ashby admitted to the referee that a ball hit by her opponent actually touched her in bounds after the referee had called it out of bounds. This prompted a reversal of the referee's call and, in a very close game, changed the score to 23–22 in favor of Emmee's opponents.

We need to practice this kind of integrity every day. This involves our conscience, a topic that we will consider later in this lesson.

Closely related to the issue of integrity is the problem of putting success before honor. A fine line exists between a true concern for success in school or work and advancing at whatever the cost. We see examples of this kind of blind ambition in professional sports and in the financial world every day. Blind ambition can cloud our judgment. It can lead us to cover up mistakes in an effort to look good at all costs. It can also lead us to cover up for the person in charge. It takes a great deal of personal courage to say "I made a mistake" and take responsibility.


It's often tempting to cheat, but being honest with yourself defines your integrity.
© Igor Mojzes/Fotolia.com

Every JROTC program provides a *Cadet Honor Code* that each member is expected to learn and uphold. The *Cadet Honor Code* provides guidance for personal honesty and integrity that will remain with you throughout your life.

Ethical Qualities of Effective Leaders

We just finished a discussion of personal standards of ethics. Now, let's look at professional ethics—the ethics of leaders.
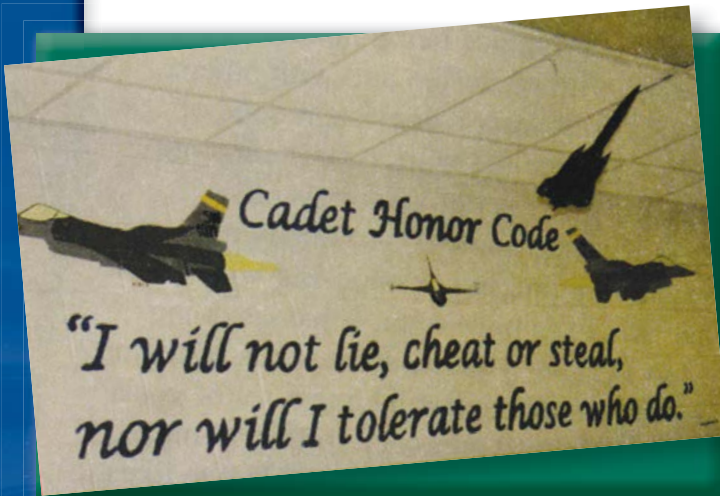
Cadet honor code.

Leaders are admired for their ability to influence others to achieve goals. Their ability to motivate people goes along with their knowledge in their field. Their technical and professional skills are finely tuned. They are able to evaluate complex situations and to determine the risks involved. They are willing to act on the judgments they make and to assume responsibility for the outcome. Continued success as a leader requires a great deal of self-discipline and personal stability. These qualities, to a large degree, are derived from the moral values and principles that influence their behavior.

Leadership decisions are based on many factors. These factors include all the considerations required by the situation. Most decisions require judgment that is influenced by the leader's own values, character, and background. In many cases, it is difficult to choose between the possible courses of action. Occasionally, there is no good alternative, and the leader is faced with having to choose between something that is bad and something that may be worse. All leadership decisions that affect the lives and well-being of people have ethical aspects and require moral judgment.

Professional Standards

Each profession has a set of standards that each member is expected to follow. When we choose to enter a profession (for example, teaching), we agree to abide by a prescribed set of professional ethical standards. Of course, we may not agree with all the standards; however, we should abide by all standards until we can work within the profession to change them. When we can no longer accept the standards, and find that we can't respect or choose to ignore them, we are ethically obligated to leave the profession—or we may be kicked out. Because professional ethical standards usually reflect the society the profession serves, disagreement with the standards is a serious action that requires serious thought. Every major action should be weighed against the effect it is likely to have on the profession, others around us, our self-respect, and the respect others have for us.

Right Choices

Right choices build confidence and self-respect; this is how integrity works. When we have taken proper action, we generally feel good about it. We regard ourselves as being worthwhile and capable. We have also earned the respect of those affected by our actions.

The ability to choose good behavior over bad behavior distinguishes effective leaders from average or poor leaders. Right choices are often difficult to make. The easy solution is frequently more attractive than the difficult, effective, and sound solution. Every day, we face situations that require action. Our choices in some situations may even call for inaction.

Here are twelve questions that may help you to make right choices.

1. If I do what I'm thinking of doing, would I be willing to have my action made into a law that requires everyone to act in the same way?

2. If I am considering using someone else for my own personal gain, would I allow myself to be used in the same way?

3. Would I be willing to explain to a jury why I chose this action?

4. Would I do this if I knew it would be on television news tonight or YouTube® tomorrow?

5. What would I think of this action if someone I disliked did it?

6. If my reason for acting this way is that everyone else does it, would I do it if no one else did it?

7. Would I do this if I knew I would have to explain my reasons to my family?

8. Would I be content with this action if it were taken by my boss or a member of my family?

9. Would I be content to have each of my followers behave exactly as I intend to in this situation?

10. My team could win the game by violating a rule. Before I call this play, would I be upset if the losing team took the same action?

11. If what I do hurts no one very much, would I be willing to let everyone do the same thing?

12. If there is very little harm in what I want to do, what kind of person will I become if it gets to be a habit?

Leaders who always try to make right choices show a great amount of ethical courage and maturity.

keys to LEADERSHIP

A key to building trust with your family, friends, and others you come into contact with is being able to *do the right thing*. If you follow the strategies in this lesson, you'll find that others will increasingly trust and value your judgment.

Cadets, more than most students, live with higher standards of order, obedience, and discipline.

Courtesy of Michael Wetzel/US Air Force JROTC

Rules and Principles of Ethical Decisions

Rules and principles have the greatest influence on our ethical decisions. When confronted with a decision that will affect others, we consciously or unconsciously ask ourselves, "What should I do?"

Society has standards for knowing what is right. The primary ethical standards in our culture are *telling the truth*, *keeping promises*, and *respecting people and property*. Cadets, more than most students, live with clear standards of order, obedience, and discipline.

Values

Our code of ethics is based upon our value systems, that is, our beliefs about what is and is not important to us as human beings. Freedom, happiness, equality, individualism, and volunteerism are some of the basic American values.

Every day, students add to their value systems. A value system consists of *our set of ideals, beliefs, interests, likes, and dislikes that we use every day to make decisions*. Activities like dating, skipping a school event, and even what we wear reflect our value systems. Deciding to date someone exclusively probably means we value that person's company. Skipping school band practice or a class indicates that we do not value the importance of getting an education.

Whatever the situation, ethics and value systems involve you in making individual choices, choices based on your own free will. Values do not involve involuntary behavior, such as blinking the eyes. Ethical conduct involves freely chosen behavior based on values that we individually, or as part of a group, believe to be very important.

Some people believe in doing whatever they want to do. Others believe in doing what helps other people, whether they really want to or not. Whatever the case, our beliefs are personal to each of us, and we are responsible for them. How do we know what values we have? One way is through voicing our likes and dislikes, and we do this fairly often. Another way is through positive or negative feedback on our behavior. Receiving an A on a test tells us we did well and may reflect the value we put on our studies.

One way we can begin to understand what we value as a society is through being aware of statistics on what we do and don't buy. For example, companies such as Nike® spend millions of dollars each year conducting research on what you buy and don't buy. This research will tell them which products are successful and which to eliminate.

Four Types of Values

The following four different types of values—personal, prudent, conventional, and moral—act as guidelines for our actions in all situations, whether at home, with friends, in school, while playing sports, or at work.

Personal Values

Our personal values guide our conduct. We get our personal values in many different ways. Parents, friends, family, church, and schools often affect our personal values. Freedom, happiness, equality, and peace, are some of the values that all Americans hold. Personal values may develop over time due to a number of different factors.

For the military professional, the greatest value is the public good. The aim of our defense forces is to ensure the security of the United States, and that may mean taking a new assignment every few years. On the personal side, individuals in the military want job satisfaction, a happy home, and an overall sense of fulfillment in life. Sometimes these personal and family values conflict with the values of the profession. So, our values are sometimes at odds with each other.

Prudent Values

Prudent values involve using good judgment when considering a likely course of action. These values may guide our behavior. For example, it is prudent to stay out of trouble with the law, to maintain your physical and mental health, and to establish a savings account. Sometimes people do not think ahead and therefore are not prudent. Sometimes they let values guide their conduct, such as spending money for the latest iPhone® instead of putting money in a savings account. Owning the latest and newest iPhone® may make you popular now, however, saving for the future may provide the money you need for college.

Our values are based on beliefs that are very important to us. Here US Naval Sea Cadets partner with Project Giveback, a DC-based food charity that helps feed needy families.
Courtesy of Joseph P. Cirone/Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System

Conventional Values

Conventional values are generally accepted and enforced within a given social order. They are binding upon the members of that social order. A social order might be as inclusive as a whole country or as specific as a sub-society within a larger group—such as members of a church, a high school or college community, or the United States Air Force. Respect for older people is an example of a conventional value.

Moral Values

While ethics are typically the basis for accepted rules of conduct in a society, as we stated earlier, ethics also have to do with the struggle between good and evil. The ethics of a society are written or stated to help us understand how we should act. On the other hand, the term morals refers to *our behavior, right or wrong*; often it is simply a substitute for the word *ethics*, but it may cover areas of conduct or thinking not related to ethics.

Moral values are rooted in a comprehensive view of human life, social living, and views of the ultimate purpose and meaning of life. People, even those who spend their lives devoted to the study of moral values, do not always agree completely about the nature of moral values. However, people with strong moral values believe they are the most important values to guide their lives. Moral values provide a point of view that people use to argue for social and personal change to an ideal set of values.

The moral code of Western society is based on Greek and Roman philosophy and the Judeo-Christian ethic. The Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule are Judeo-Christian contributions. So the rules we live by today have evolved through thousands of years. Some of our rules take the form of laws, such as laws against murder and arson. Others are customs, such as standing when the national anthem is played.

It is a custom to stand during the playing of the national anthem.
Courtesy of Petty Officer 1st Class Maurice Dayao/Defense Video & Imagery Distribution System

CHAPTER 1 Introduction to JROTC Programs

Still others are moral standards, such as rules against breaking promises (also covered by ethics) or gossiping about someone (which may or may not involve ethics).

Just as our living conditions change, our rules may change. For instance, we treat people with mental illness, people with disabilities, and people who struggle with alcoholism differently today from the way we did 50 years ago. Today, we better understand the causes of their disorders and what they need. In spite of changing conditions, however, we can agree on some common principles and rules of ethics. For example, in our society, we agree it is immoral for one of us to steal the worldly goods of another.

Some people say a moral code is meaningless because people always do what they believe is in their own best interest. They go on to say that we may claim we are interested in the welfare of others, but we always put ourselves first. For example, we tend not to conserve, preserve, or recycle unless laws force us to do so or we see a financial benefit in doing so. Some people won't conserve water unless the water rates are raised. Endangered species may have to be protected by law. Yet, we should be conserving, preserving, and recycling without these incentives, so future generations derive the same benefits we do from the environment. As a society, we need to find better solutions, ones that will meet everyone's needs. We need to internalize our moral and ethical values so completely that we *do unto others* automatically, without having to be urged or forced to do what is right.

At times we act selfishly on a personal level, despite what we may say or think we believe. When we drive our cars faster than the speed limit allows, we are breaking a rule set by society for the safety of all people on the highway. All of us are sometimes tempted to do what is in our own interest. If we are going to live together and develop into caring people, however, we must use good judgment in making moral decisions. This requires foresight, emotional control, and empathy, the ability to identify with another person's feelings and thoughts.

Rules and Values

We also use values, in addition to rules, to help us make ethical decisions. In discussing rules, we asked, "What should I do?" The questions here are "What is good? What value or ideal should I hold?" But values can sometimes be at odds with each other, too. The people who represent us in Congress must keep this philosophy in mind every time a bill comes up for a vote. Do we spend our tax dollars on landing a spacecraft on Mars and less on social programs? Do we need more aircraft carriers to keep our oceans safe and defend our coastlines, or do we need more research on diseases such as cancer and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS)? We have only a limited supply of tax money, so we should consider putting the money where it will do the most good for everyone affected by the decision.

Take football as an example. The main goal (value) is to score enough points to win the game. In doing so, the players and coaches choose among short-yardage plays, long-yardage plays, running, passing, kicking, and other plays to score a touchdown. All of these actions are governed by rules. If the ball is advanced but the rules are broken, the team can be penalized valuable yards. Thus, if we break the rules, we may not achieve our goals.

Sometimes the quarterback has to change the call made in the huddle. He must adjust to a changing situation. That type of call introduces us to a third element in ethical judgments—one based on the situation.

Our military has an additional set of values. The values of the individual men and women who serve in the military—and who come from every imaginable background—become values consistent with those of their organization, as they work with others toward the common goal of safeguarding our nation.

Core Values of the US Military Services

Consider how similar the core values of the nation's primary military services are, in spite of some differences in wording. Also consider how close these values are to your own beliefs, whether conscious or unconscious.

United States Air Force Core Values

Integrity first, *Service before self*, and *Excellence in all we do*. These are the Air Force Core Values. These values exist for all members of the Air Force family—officer, enlisted, and civilian; active reserve, Air National Guard, and retired; senior, junior, and middle management; civil servants; uniformed personnel; and contractors.

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Integrity First

As you will recall from our earlier definition, integrity is the adherence to a moral code. A character trait, integrity is the willingness to do what is right even when no one is looking. It is the moral compass—the inner voice, the voice of self-control, the basis for the trust needed in today's society. People of integrity, for example, are capable of acting on convictions, or their strong beliefs. They can control their impulses.

Service Before Self

This statement tells us that professional duties that we choose to undertake have precedence over personal desires. This core value also states that it is better to give back, whether to our school or community. To do this will make our school and community a better place.

Excellence in All We Do

This core value states that for any undertaking we choose, we should give it our best effort; whether you are doing your homework, playing on the school baseball team, or wearing the uniform, anything less should be unacceptable. This expression also directs us to develop a passion for continuous improvement that will propel us into a long-term, upward spiral of accomplishment and performance.

United States Army Core Values

Many people know what the seven terms *Loyalty*, *Duty*, *Respect*, *Selfless Service*, *Honor*, *Integrity*, and *Personal Courage* mean. Soldiers in the Army learn these values in detail during their basic training. From then on, they live them every day in everything they do—whether they're on the job or off.

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Loyalty

Bear true faith and allegiance to the US Constitution, the Army, your unit, and other Soldiers. Bearing true faith and allegiance is a matter of believing in and devoting yourself to something or someone.

Duty

Fulfill your obligations. Doing your duty means more than carrying out your assigned tasks. Duty means being able to accomplish tasks as part of a team.

Respect

Treat people as they should be treated. In the Soldier's Code, we pledge to "treat others with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same." Respect is what allows us to appreciate the best in other people and ourselves.

Selfless Service

Selfless service is larger than just one person. In serving your community and country, you are doing your duty loyally without thought of recognition or gain.

Honor

Honor is a matter of carrying out, acting, and living the values of respect, duty, loyalty, selfless service, integrity, and personal courage in everything you do.

Integrity

Do what's right, legally and morally. Integrity is a quality you develop by adhering to moral principles. It requires that you do and say nothing that deceives others. As your integrity grows, so does the trust others place in you. The more choices you make based on integrity, the more this highly prized value will affect your relationships with family and friends, and, finally, the fundamental acceptance of yourself.

Personal Courage

Face fear, danger, or adversity (physical or moral). Personal courage has long been associated with our Army. Facing moral fear or adversity may be a long, slow process of continuing forward on the right path, especially if taking those actions is not popular with others. You can build your personal courage by daily standing up for and acting upon the things that you know are honorable.

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United States Navy and Marine Corps Core Values

Throughout its history, the Navy has successfully met all its challenges. America's naval service began during the American Revolution, when on October 13, 1775, the Continental Congress authorized a few small ships. From those early days, the core values of the Navy and the Marine Corps have carried on to today. They consist of the three basic principles of *honor*, *courage*, and *commitment*.

Honor

"I will bear true faith and allegiance ...." Accordingly, we will: Conduct ourselves in the highest ethical manner in all relationships with peers, superiors, and subordinates; Be honest and truthful in our dealings with each other, and with those outside the Navy; Be willing to make honest recommendations and accept those of junior personnel; Encourage new ideas and deliver the bad news, even when it is unpopular; Abide by an uncompromising code of integrity, taking responsibility for our actions and keeping our word; Fulfill or exceed our legal and ethical responsibilities in our public and personal lives twenty-four hours a day. Illegal or improper behavior or even the appearance of such behavior will not be tolerated. We are accountable for our professional and personal behavior. We will be mindful of the privilege to serve our fellow Americans.

Courage

"I will support and defend …." Accordingly, we will have: courage to meet the demands of our profession and the mission when it is hazardous, demanding, or otherwise difficult; Make decisions in the best interest of the Navy and the nation, without regard to personal consequences; Meet these challenges while adhering to a higher standard of personal conduct and decency; Be loyal to our nation, ensuring the resources entrusted to us are used in an honest, careful, and efficient way. Courage is the value that gives us the moral and mental strength to do what is right, even in the face of personal or professional adversity.

Commitment

"I will obey the orders …." Accordingly, we will: Demand respect up and down the chain of command; Care for the safety, professional, personal, and spiritual well-being of our people; Show respect toward all people without regard to race, religion, or gender; Treat each individual with human dignity; Be committed to positive change and constant improvement; Exhibit the highest degree of moral character, technical excellence, quality and competence in what we have been trained to do. The day-to-day duty of every Navy man and woman is to work together as a team to improve the quality of our work, our people, and ourselves.

United States Coast Guard Core Values

The following core values are deeply rooted in the Coast Guard heritage. As the Coast Guard's website states, "They demonstrate who we are and guide our performance, conduct, and decisions every minute of every day. Because we each represent the Coast Guard to the public, we must all embrace these values in our professional undertakings as well as in our personal lives."

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Honor

Integrity is our standard. We demonstrate uncompromising ethical conduct and moral behavior in all of our personal actions. We are loyal and accountable to the public trust.

Respect

We value our diverse work force. We treat each other with fairness, dignity, and compassion. We encourage individual opportunity and growth. We encourage creativity through empowerment. We work as a team.

Devotion to Duty

We are professionals, military and civilian, who seek responsibility, accept accountability, and are committed to the successful achievement of our organizational goals. We exist to serve. We serve with pride.

Cultural and Universal Norms

Cultural Norms

We all have certain habits of work, play, cleanliness, and eating. In each culture, people have definite ideas about personal conduct. All societies have morals, values, and concepts of human rights that have been accepted by the members of that group. They hold sacred certain institutions that meet their needs. While customs, habits, and institutions vary a great deal from one culture to another, they are alike in that they all have norms, *patterns of behavior considered acceptable or proper by a social group*.

Customs and values depend upon the culture in which we live. The norm—what is considered to be acceptable conduct—in one culture may be considered wrong in another culture. Women in many southwest Asian countries, for example, are required to cover their arms, legs, and faces in public. Most Americans have a different view of what women are allowed to wear in public. A culture's value systems are accepted as right for the people who live within that culture. We usually embrace our society's values as our own because we understand from early childhood that we are expected to act according to these values. The same is true of all people in different cultures the world over.

In addition to the broad set of cultural norms recognized by society, the groups to which we belong—such as family, school, or even JROTC—abide by a set of universal norms. It is important that we know and respect the guidance each of these groups offers.

Universal Norms

Universal norms are *the normal beliefs of people in most cultures*. Anthropologists have found that lying, stealing, violating a group's social codes, or committing murder are almost always condemned by people everywhere. One example of a universal norm is how communication is conducted between people. People of higher rank or positions of importance are spoken to in a more respectful manner than someone of lower authority or position. We tend to address our classmates or co-workers by their first names, however, citizens of a country commonly address their President or Prime Minister as Mr./Mrs. President or Mr./Mrs. Prime Minister. They would not address someone of a higher rank or authority by their first name. Another example is that students should not call teachers by their first name. A teacher or professor is considered the authority in the classroom and should only be addressed as Mr./Mrs./Ms. or Professor.

Another universal norm is how societies view theft. Many universal norms can be viewed differently when influenced by cultural norms—for example, theft is considered punishable in every society, some more harsh than others. However, cultural norms tend to override universal norms. For example, an American Indian who stole a horse from a fellow tribesman was severely punished. However, if he took a horse from an enemy tribesman, he was not punished. If he took a horse from a European settler,

he was celebrated. The behavior was considered stealing only if he took the horse from his own people. The settlers, who thought of the Indians as thieves, would have been surprised to learn that the Indians did not think of themselves in the same way.

Without rules or norms, institutions would crumble. Keeping promises is a good example. We're all expected to do what we have said we will do. Most people keep their promises; if they didn't, society would fall into disorder. As citizens, we have an obligation to honor constitutional justice, civil law, and the moral norms of our communities.

Non-Universal Norms

Non-universal norms, by contrast, do not carry a universal moral obligation. These include *values such as duties specific to one's religion*—for example, worshipping, fasting, observing holy days and dress codes, and refraining from various activities— *toward which some people may feel a serious personal obligation*. This does not, however, mean that they should impose their personal obligations on others. Conflicts can be created when individuals try to impose their personal or non-universal norms on others.

Making Ethical and Moral Decisions

Ethics and morals present many tough questions. For instance, if acting according to a cultural norm harms someone, is this ethical? Is someone who does what is right simply out of fear of getting caught a moral person? Does the end result of a decision justify the means? Does the need to end a war quickly, for example, justify dropping an atomic bomb? We all must decide on the answers to such questions for ourselves. Nevertheless, how do we find answers to questions that may pose a moral dilemma? If you go through these four steps in this systematic process, it will to help you make the right ethical and moral decisions.

1. Consider all the facts, making sure to verify your information.
2. Determine the moral values or rules that apply to the situation.
3. Always make decisions and act in light of your knowledge of the values and facts in a way that is respectful of the life and well-being of all people.
4. Choose the lesser of two evils (or the least of many) when no better solution can be found. Ask, "Which of the possible choices I have will result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people?"

Students are faced with both simple and complex ethical decisions in their daily lives. Rules, principles, values, situations, and the possible results of our actions influence what we determine to be right. Exactly how do these affect our decisions?

Moral Courage and Maturity

One outstanding military leader, Vice Admiral William P. Lawrence, defined moral courage this way: To know right from wrong, to possess a firm set of values, and the strength to live by those values and do what is right regardless of the consequences.

Such courage is gained through knowledge and experience. The key to successful development of moral courage and maturity is the ability to set appropriate goals and achieve them. JROTC cadets should already possess:

- A conscience
- A sense of justice
- A personal code of conduct

The goals now are to refine our conscience, improve our sense of justice, and maintain a code of conduct sensitive to the right sort of values.

Conscience

Conscience is *the awareness of a desire to act properly and the awareness of guilt when improper acts are committed or intended.* Our conscience is not an automatic feeling or emotion. It is a product of knowledge and intelligence that allows us to judge right from wrong. The emotion of guilt is triggered by our conscience when we act in a manner contrary to what we know to be right. Our conscience is strengthened as our knowledge increases and we become more sensitive to important human values.

New facts, learned through experience and study, add to our ability to make right choices. Our moral courage is strengthened by our successes in attempting to act out our values. As our conscience continues to develop in the right ways and to mature, we become more realistic in judging the actions of others and more sensitive to their needs and motives. A properly informed conscience will allow us to be confident without being rigid and overbearing. It will give us the strength and purpose that build character.

Sense of Justice

A sense of justice is essential for effective leaders because it ensures fairness. As a leader, our sense of justice must prompt us to protect the rights of every individual. It must cause us to be aware of the need for fair distribution of benefits and burdens to all.

A sense of justice is developed from learning experiences over time. Just as our conscience goes through changes, our sense of justice must be allowed to mature. An effective beginning for developing an informed conscience and a true sense of justice is to be concerned with doing the right thing. It is also important to talk with other people about why our actions should be just and moral.

Personal Code of Conduct

Some guidelines on developing your personal code of conduct are offered in the following section.

Your Personal Code of Conduct

Our code of conduct need not be complicated or overly restrictive. It should not be a list of things we believe. Rather, it should be a list of reminders that cause us to practice acceptable behavior. We should state rules positively, as if they were goals that mean a great deal to us. The list should contain "I will" items. They can be as simple as, "I will do my best to be punctual and cause no one to wait for me," or "I will keep my room neat and orderly." Then we should put these rules or goals into daily practice.

Living right, that is, by a code of good conduct, has its own rewards. Among those rewards are developing good habits, having fewer occasions to apologize, possessing greater self-esteem, and earning the respect of others. Many opportunities that had been withheld will open to us. Our moral courage will increase and the frustration we experience when making choices will lessen in time. In short, we will be living a more fully human life.

Developing permanent good habits is very important. Dr. William James, an American physician and psychologist, stated that all of our behavior, our virtues and our vices, is really habit. As we repeat certain behaviors and thoughts, our nervous system "grows" in the ways we have used it, until we have a ready-made response to each sort of impression. We are bundles of habits.

Dr. James also said that if only young people could realize how soon they would become walking bundles of habits, they would pay more attention to how they were acting as their habits were being formed. Since children have no way of knowing these things, their teachers (and parents) must help them develop good habits. As we keep working to build our character in the right way, we get better and better at whatever we try. Dr. James offered these three practical steps to get rid of bad habits and to form good ones:

The ability to set appropriate goals and achieve them is the key to developing moral courage and maturity.

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1. To form a new habit or to get rid of an old one, begin the change in behavior as strongly as possible. Dr. James even recommended taking a public pledge, if possible. Consider the story of a man who advertised in his hometown newspaper a large reward to anyone who, after that date, should see him smoke a cigarette. The thought of having to pay the reward was a strong reason for him to stay away from cigarettes.

2. Never stop a new habit before it is firmly fixed in your life. Continuing to do the new behavior over and over helps make it a habit for life.

3. Take every chance you get to act on the change. Dr. James stated that the effects of practicing a new behavior communicate the new set of actions to the brain. Action, not simply the decision to change, builds the tendency to act in the new way you wish to behave.

Ethical behavior has been a key topic throughout history. Every culture has agreed that some actions are intolerable and some honorable. Consider the sources of guidance that are available to you. From the world's great thinkers and leaders, our civilization's and our nation's enduring values, and from your own use of the techniques in this lesson, you will develop your own system for responsible conduct in any situation.

✔ CHECKPOINTS

Lesson 5 Review

Using complete sentences, answer the following questions on a sheet of paper.

1. What is the definition of ethics?

2. What do we mean when we say someone is unbiased?

3. What is a value system?

4. What are the four types of values?

5. What are moral values?

6. Define the AF Core Value "Excellence in all we do."

7. What core value is commonly used by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard?

8. What is a cultural norm?

9. How do non-universal norms differ from universal norms?

10. How does the textbook define moral courage?

11. What does our conscience tell us?

12. How does an effective leader display a sense of justice?

13. Your personal code of conduct should be a list that will provide what for you?

14. To get rid of an old habit, what should you do with the new one?

15. Dr. James states that acting on a new behavior will communicate what to the brain?

APPLYING YOUR LEARNING

16. Think of one personal habit you would like to change. Using the three steps Dr. William James suggests to change this habit, write a plan to help you change the habit.