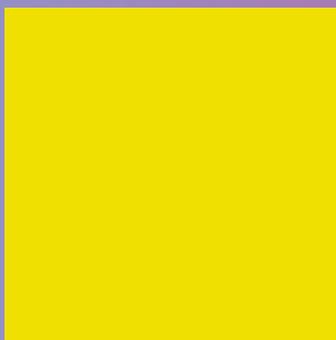


6



ETHICS

6.2 ETHICS, MORALITY AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The term “ethics” comes from the Greek word “ēthikós”, which is a variant of “êthos” and primarily refers to our moral character, that is to the persons that we are or aspire to be. Another term for ethics is morality as in when we say that somebody did something that was morally right or morally good. Ethics is the foundation of our relationship to ourselves and the world around us. The purpose and role of ethics have always been the preservation of the human being as a person, human dignity, and the conditions for leading a good life. Today, the current culture in which we live is characterized mainly by pluralism. We have to deal, with crises and turmoil that we are experiencing, with the increasing interconnectivity of the world (globalization) and our dependency on one another. Our cultures are often characterized by the “relativization” of values, which is fundamentally an expression of diminished confidence in society and the loss of confidence about the answers to our existence’s fundamental questions. Ethics protects and sustains the humanity of our existence, both in ourselves and in others. We always live in relationship with others, namely in a relationship of mutual giving and receiving. Therefore, acknowledging our dependence on others and caring for others is essential (Ethics education resources, 2021).



Figure 6.2
Parthenon
Source: © Pixabay /
Pexels.com

This relational and communitarian nature of ethics is fundamental and requests reflections on justice, solidarity, compassion, and cooperation. Dialogue should build on openness, mutuality, and reciprocal recognition. These aspects are essential for ethics education, since its primary goal is to encourage and grow such a dialogical and emphatic stance. One should not stress only basic ethical norms (such as dignity, respect for life, non-violence, solidarity), but also virtues that are at the heart of each individual and can emerge on society's level (e.g., courage, civility, justice, humility, etc.). The dialogical nature of ethics and ethics education invites us to be open in the process of mutual growth and learning (Ethics education resources, 2021).

6.3 BASIC ETHICAL CONCEPTS

6.3.1 GOOD AND BAD

The terms “good” and “bad” are most commonly used as evaluative classifications of things, situations, persons and their characters. In this sense, judgments about something being good and bad are value judgments or evaluations. Ethical evaluations are of key importance for ethics, since they determine what our lives should be focused on (what we should strive to achieve and what to avoid or prevent). In evaluating things, we distinguish between things that are good in themselves or intrinsically valuable and things that are merely instrumentally good (e.g., in the sense that they help us achieve what is good in itself). For example, money is only instrumentally valuable, while the pleasure of listening to a wonderful concert that I bought the tickets for is intrinsically valuable. In modern times, many ethical puzzles and problems stem from the fact that individuals often mistake something that is merely instrumentally good for being intrinsically valuable. An important concept is also the concept of the common good, which exceeds the sum of the good of all individuals in society. Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that happiness is the ultimate value that all human beings aspire after.

6.3.2 VALUES

Values are things that we value relatively permanently and firmly, and, in this way, they guide our interests and actions. Values are things that we as individuals or as a society set as aims or guidelines for our lives (e.g., wellbeing, health, knowledge, virtue, freedom, safety). We strive to realize them. The fundamental values of ethics are the elements that are important for human life, dignity and the preservation of common humanity. Given the acceptance and universality of values, we can talk about the values of the individual, societal values, and universal values. Axiology as a discipline of ethics systematically investigates values.

6.3.3 MORAL RIGHTNESS, WRONGNESS, AND THE CONCEPT OF DUTY

Moral rightness and moral wrongness are usually understood as evaluative classifications of actions or acts, for example, when we say that we acted rightly or that a certain act was wrong. In a slightly different vocabulary, we often talk about morally obligatory actions, impermissible actions, and permissible actions. Our duty is primarily to perform morally obligatory actions and abstain from doing impermissible ones. To have a certain duty means, in the most direct sense, to be bound by a binding ethical requirement. If we have a certain duty, then we must do so unless there are other reasons that would prevent us from doing so or justify a different course of action. Ethical principles and rules are an important part of ethics and their observance protects the conditions of human existence and common humanity. Moral principles are usually more general (e.g., “Respect the freedom, autonomy, and equality of people”), and moral rules are more

specific (e.g., “Don’t lie”).

Moral principles and rules can be understood in several ways. The most fundamental is the understanding of moral principles as moral criteria or standards. The principles and rules thus understood set out the ethical criteria for our conduct and the judgment of that conduct; they define what is right and what is wrong. Closer to everyday morality is another way of understanding moral principles and rules, i.e., as guides in our decision-making and action. Their value lies in their usefulness as reliability of guidance regarding what to do.



Figure 6.3
Dimensions of Ethics
Source: © N.Savranska /
Adobe Stock

6.3.4 VIRTUES

Virtues are morally valuable qualities of our character, dispositions for action and personality traits. The opposite of virtues are flaws or vices. Moral virtues include honesty, kindness, compassion, civility, generosity, and courage. Not all personality traits of an individual are also moral virtues (or vices), e.g., introversion, sociability, sense of humor, etc. These traits are part of our character but have no inherent moral significance, since they are mostly not under our control. Virtues include several components, namely cognitive, emotional, motivational, and action-focused. This means that, for example, an honest person is first convinced that a lie is something bad (cognitive component). Then such a person is appropriately emotionally oriented in the sense that he is deterred from lies and liars, while having a positive attitude towards honest actions and persons (emotional component). Next, an honest person is also motivated not to lie (motivational component). And, finally, such a person must act in accordance with this virtue, e.g., avoid lying (the action-focused component).

6.3.5 DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Dignity is a concept that obtained its ethical significance fairly recently. It can be defined as a basic, inherent, and inalienable value that all people have on the basis of their humanity. It is often regarded as the basis for basic entitlements and human rights of each individual. Dignity is therefore associated with an inalienable status that belongs to all human beings, regardless of their characteristics and circumstances. The dignity of each individual protects against interferences or types of improper treatment that would interfere with their dignity (e.g. degrading treatment, torture, etc.) or situations in which he may find himself (e.g. extreme poverty, slavery, etc.). Human dignity in the modern world is often understood as a civilizational and ethical foundation of legal norms, especially human rights. These, on the other hand, can be understood as the minimum conditions for providing or for protection of the dignity of the individual. Dignity, therefore, justifies the latter (in the ethical and legal sense), grants them inalienability from the point of view of the holder of these rights, and therefore it can be understood as the foundation of freedom of decision and action to the limit, without interfering with the freedom and rights of others.



Figure 6.4
Human Rights
Source: © STOATPHOTO /
Adobe Stock

Therefore, dignity is also a common concept in the most important legal documents. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN 1948) derives from the following statement: “Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” and its Article 1 states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” Similarly, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (EU 2012) sets out in its preamble dignity as the foundation of all human rights: “The peoples of Europe, in creating an ever closer union among them, are resolved to share a peaceful future based on common values. Conscious of its spiritual and moral heritage, the Union is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity; it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law.” and its first article is: “Human dignity: Human dignity is inviolable. It must be respected and protected”.

6.4 ETHICAL THEORIES AND VIEWS ABOUT MORALITY

There are three main types of ethical theories: deontological ethics, teleological ethics, and virtue ethics. Each of them sees a different moral concept as the fundamental one. Deontological ethics puts the concept of duty in the center, teleological ethics sees value as fundamental, while virtue ethics stresses the dimension of a person's character.

Deontological ethics (from the Greek word *déon* – duty, what is binding, proper or right) emphasizes that the moral status of actions is determined by the type of action (and not, e.g., by the value of its consequences). For example, deceit and stealing are morally wrong actions, no matter the consequences. This means that we must act in accordance with general moral principles that specify some types of actions as wrong and others as right. Such principles impose duties on us. A typical representative of this type of ethical theory is Immanuel Kant with his ethics of duty, which is based on the categorical imperative *“Act only according to that maxim of action whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law”*, or in its alternative formulation, *“Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in another, always as an end and never as only a means to an end.”*

Teleological ethics (from the Greek word *télos* – purpose, aim or goal) centers on the claim that the moral status of an action gets established in relation to good, i.e., a desirable end to be achieved or value. In its most common form, it states that the moral status of a given action is determined by the value of its consequences. Its central moral advice is thus *“Act in such a way that your action will lead to the most good or the best consequences.”* The key question that is inherent in this is which things have value. There are several kinds of teleological ethical views (e.g., hedonism, eudemonism) and among them utilitarianism is surely the most widely held. Its most notable representatives are Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism claims that the morally right action (duty) is the action that brings about the most utility (value), while this is usually understood in terms of net surplus of pleasures over pain, happiness, or well-being of individuals. An action is morally right if it tends to promote happiness or pleasure and morally wrong if it tends to produce unhappiness or pain.

The third form of ethical theory is virtue ethics. If the first two types of ethical theories put actions at the forefront, virtue ethics emphasizes our character or what kind of person we should be. The moral status of actions is determined by the virtues or virtuous character from which those actions are performed.

Virtues are human morally important qualities, dispositions for action or personality traits. They are closely related to human character and can be understood as excellencies. The opposite of virtues are vices, flaws or shortcomings. For example, moral virtues are honesty, kindness, compassion, courtesy, generosity and so on. Virtues include several components, namely cognitive, emotional, motivational, and action-oriented. Morally correct are those actions that are the result of or originate from our virtuous character. The founding fathers of virtue ethics are Plato and Aristotle.



Figure 6.5
Gratitude
Source: © sosiukin /
Adobe Stock

The dispute over which ethical theory is most plausible exceeds the purposes of this shallow module on ethics; but still, these theories and the differences between them can be very useful in discussion about ethical questions with students. Often our ethical views are pre-reflective, conditioned by our own tradition or culture or based on our gut reactions, so the perplexities of a given action, person or situation that we are evaluating escape us. The core views embedded in the three basic moral theories can help us to evaluate actions, persons or situations. In the student's book some of the concepts and theories are presented using some key philosophers that shaped our ethical thinking (Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, Mill, etc.).

6.5 ETHICS EDUCATION*

The significance of ethics education is highlighted in the 1996 UNESCO report on education for the 21st century. “In confronting the many challenges that the future holds in store, mankind sees in education an indispensable asset in its attempts to attain the ideas of peace, freedom and social justice. The Commission does not see education as a miracle cure or a magic formula opening the door to a world in which all ideals will be attained, but as one of the principal means available to foster a deeper and more harmonious form of human development and thereby to reduce poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression and war” (Delors et al. 1996).

Ethics education encompasses all dimensions of education and the educational process, which are directly or indirectly associated with our lives’ ethical dimensions. Ethics education may be a tacit part of the educational processes and often remains unconscious or unreflected. It can be planned, designed, controlled, and monitored with suitable educational methods and tools. It, among other things, centers on promoting ethics and values (justice, fairness, dignity, inclusiveness, human rights, etc.) as part of education, creating and sustaining a respectful attitude towards others, encouraging the positive development of character, building capacities for thoughtful and informed moral judgment, etc. Education as a process is inherently value-laden. This concerns what is conveyed (content), as well as the way it is conveyed (methods), the consequences of it (educational outcomes), and the relationships that are formed in the educational context. “Education implies that something worthwhile has been intentionally transmitted in a morally acceptable manner” (Peters 1970, 25). Ethical education takes this implicitly contained ethical dimension, reflects upon it, and sets it as an explicit aim. Education, especially early education, is one of the most significant elements in the development of autonomous, caring, resilient individuals. Ethical education can play an imperative part in nurturing such an individual (Strahovnik 2018; 2016).

* Different terms are used to designate this domain, including ethics education, moral education, values education, education for values, character education, etc.

“The oftmentioned goals of ethical education are the following: (i) to promote ethical reflection, attentiveness, autonomy, and responsibility in children as well as all other members of the educational community being established in a given educational setting; (ii) to enable children to examine and understand important ethical principles, values, virtues, and ideals, and to equip them with intellectual and moral abilities (critical thinking, reflection, comprehension, appreciation, compassion, valuing, etc.) needed for responsible moral judgment, decision-making, and action; (iii) to guide children to explore different values, different dimensions of values and different moral justifications on the basis of these values and combine them into a guiding unity; (iv) to focus children towards the commitment to the recognized basic values and the fundamental meaningfulness of life, while at the same time cultivating their self-image and the feeling of self-worth; (v) to enable children to overcome any possible prejudices, biases, discrimination, and other unethical attitudes and practices, and at the same time help them to create an appropriate, respectful attitude towards themselves, others around them, society and the environment, (vi) to promote cooperative, collaborative behaviour and to deepen the motivation for creating a group, class, or school environment as a genuine ethical community; (vii) to build character (including intellectual and moral virtues) of children in a way that will enable them to achieve a morally acceptable, flourishing and personally satisfying good life (the ancient ideal of eudaimonia), and (viii) to develop and reflect on how to situate children and ourselves as members of local and global communities with one of the tasks being that of contributing to them” (Strahovnik 2018, 13, cf. Strahovnik 2016).



Figure 6.6
Manifestation
Source: © Brett Sayles /
Pexels.com

Such a broad understanding of ethical education was, among others, advocated by John Dewey. According to him the general goal of education is “the formation of a cultivated and effectively operative good judgment or taste with respect to what is aesthetically admirable, intellectually acceptable and morally approvable” (Dewey, 1980, 262). Furthermore, “[o]ne purpose of moral education is to help make children virtuous – honest, responsible, and compassionate. Another is to make mature students informed and reflective about important and controversial moral issues. Both purposes are embedded in a yet larger project – making sense of life” (Nord and Haynes 1998).

6.5.1 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO ETHICAL EDUCATION

There are several methodological approaches to ethics education. These range from a rather direct transfer and integration of values through the contents in the educational process, school practices or policies, to more open and reflective approaches such as philosophy with children and critical thinking. Some methodologies focus on individual aspects of morality (the ethics of care approach, an empathy-based approach, ethical education focused on cognitive moral development, character education, an infusion approach, etc.). Others emphasize ethical education through ethical action(s) (experiential learning, learning through research, community-oriented projects and activities, etc.) (Strahovnik 2018).

There are also proposals that ethical theory itself is the foundation for ethics education must be centered around it. Warnick and Silverman note that “[a]nother way of looking at ethics education, a favourite among traditional philosophers, is to see professional ethics education as an opportunity to learn about philosophical theories of ethics. Under this approach, the students are taught one or more ethical theories (usually utilitarianism, Kantian deontology, or care theory) and are then taught to apply these theories to resolve, or at least inform, ethical dilemmas” (2011, 274).



Figure 6.7
Source: © Min An /
Pexels.com

In the recent period, there have been movements towards multi-dimensional, holistic, and integrative approaches that combine both traditional educational goals and recent findings of moral psychology and other sciences (Silcock and Duncan 2001). When it comes to content, comprehensive ethical education includes both personal and social values. The diverse methodological approaches involve students and teachers or educators and the whole community and other institutions as agents of ethical education (Strahovnik 2018).

Such integrative approaches can attain the indispensable balance between individual and societal aspects of ethics education. "As Socrates would have it, the philosophical examination of life is a collaborative inquiry. The social nature of the enterprise goes with its spirit of inquiry to form his bifocal vision of the examined life. These days, insofar as our society teaches us to think about values, it tends to inculcate a private rather than a public conception of them. This makes reflection a personal and inward journey rather than a social and collaborative one and a person's values a matter of parental guidance in childhood and individual decision in maturity" (Cam, 2014, 1203; cf. Strahovnik 2018).



Figure 6.8
Source: © Pixabay /
Pexels.com

6.6 GUIDANCE FOR ASSIGNMENTS AND DISCUSSION WITH STUDENTS

There are five educational assignments, activities, or prompts for this shallow module in the Student's book. Some assignments are related to the scenario of the video animation. This section elaborates on them and provides to you as a teacher some additional ideas and resources for how to utilize them as part of the educational process. Four optional or additional assignments – labeled as A, B, C, and D – are elaborated in the section below and you can use them. (In parentheses there is an indication of the approximate time that students need to complete the assignment).

Assignment 1 (3-5 minutes): This assignment is focused on the reflection about values, their importance in our lives, and our situatedness in the wider environment (social, natural, spiritual, etc.). The aim is first to motivate students to reflect upon values and then use their moral sense in combination with creative imagination to draw out our mentioned situatedness in relation to values. In the follow up activities, you can use discussion to highlight the individual choices of values, justification for choosing them, differences between the students' choices and to search for a possible unity among them. Also, the drawings can be put on display and you can further use them in discussion on other themes and topics. (Part 2* of the assignment is optional).

Assignment 2 (5 minutes): The assignment is a follow up to the prompt already present in the animation video about the role models for students in today's society. In virtue ethics the stress is neither on the list of moral rules that one must obey nor on the list of values that one must pursue, but on the question of the person one should become. Within such an approach, moral education essentially involves the use of role models. You can further supplement this assignment with a follow-up discussion focusing on the choices of students.

Assignment 3 (3-5 minutes): The fourth assignment includes a famous quote attributed to Socrates: "The unexamined life is not worth living". The main aim of the activity is for students to reflect on it and develop their own interpretation.



Figure 6.9
Statue of Socrates
Source: © anastasios71 /
Adobe Stock

Assignment 4 (5-8 minutes): The assignment is designed to give students the opportunity to reflect upon the universality of ethics and uses the example of Kant’s categorical imperative. It is related to the topics of human dignity and human rights, you can follow up with a discussion of human rights and their interrelatedness with ethics.

Assignment 5 (5 minutes): This assignment uses some of the aspects of utilitarianism to motivate students to recognize and appreciate the importance of our similarities and interconnectedness with animals, to understand the unity of the ecosystem and its moral importance, and to be able to reflect on our own, human perspective in light of the topics that are discussed in animal ethics. You can expand it with further activities, which you can find in the Ethics Deep Module that deals with our relationship with the environment.

6.7 OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENTS

Optional assignment A (10 minutes): is linked to Assignment 1. Instructions for students: use a blank piece of paper to draw yourself (roughly in the middle of the provided space, your drawing may be more schematic than realistic) and the world around you in a way that you can use the values you have chosen above as part of the picture. Write the values into the drawing, e.g., if a clean environment matters to you, you can draw a river or a forest and write down “clean environment” between you and the forest. Or, if you value justice, draw where justice is important. The same value can be used more than once.

Optional assignment B (8-10 minutes): is linked to the section about moral rightness and wrongness. The assignment is intended to foster an understanding of the concepts of right, wrong, and duty in relation to moral dilemmas. The use of cases, whether real or imagined, is prominent in ethics education. A case is presented, usually in the form of a dilemma, and students are then asked to analyze it from several perspectives. Two goals are inherently presupposed in this. First, in this way students can more easily bridge the gap between ethical theory and practice in the sense that they can try out different approaches to the situation and see which one is more fitting. Secondly, such use of cases increases engagement and gives students an opportunity to more fully invest themselves in the situation; all of this then enables a cultivation of moral reasoning that is sensitive to context and related to actual experience.

In discussion, you can use the following questions:

- What are the morally relevant features (reasons) involved in the case?
- Which one of these features is most important?
- Are there any clashes between these features? How should the clash be resolved?
- Are there any similar or analogous cases for comparison?
- How do we morally evaluate these other cases?

Discussion should be open and several alternative solutions can be established (Strahovnik 2014). In the assignment below the moral dilemma story comes from research into moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg.

Instructions for students

What you are about to read is a moral dilemma story. Read it, think about it carefully and answer the questions posed below. (You can answer only some of them.)

Heinz's wife is dying from a particular type of cancer. Doctors say that a newly developed drug might save her life. The drug had been discovered by a local pharmacist and Heinz tried desperately to buy some, but the pharmacist was charging ten times the money it cost to make the drug and much more than Heinz could afford. Heinz visits everyone he knows to borrow the money, but he could only raise half the money. He goes to the pharmacist and explains his situation, asking him to sell him the drug for what he can afford. The pharmacist refuses. Heinz is desperate and later that day he breaks into the pharmacist's store and steals the drug.

Is this situation fair? Should Heinz have stolen the drug? Was that the right thing to do? Why or why not? Should Heinz be punished for what he did? If something is against the law, does that make it also morally wrong? Should people generally do everything they can to avoid breaking the law?

Optional assignment C (5 minutes): is linked to the section on Plato. This assignment is related to one of the oldest ethical questions or concerns, i.e. why be moral. It focuses on the issue of what is the motivation for being ethical and why motivation matters at all. The story of the Ring of Gyges (Plato) is used as a starting point. You can further supplement the activity with a follow-up discussion, but remember that there are no right or wrong answers. It is also apt to include experiences that the students have from their own lives. Another possible topic for discussion is how do we know what motivates others around us and how confident we can be in ascribing motives to other persons.

Instructions for students

Think about the mentioned story of the ring of Gyges. What would you do if you were in possession of such a ring for a period of time and why? Would you try to act ethically or not care about this at all?

Optional assignment D (5-7 minutes): is linked to Assignment 1. This assignment focuses on Aristotle and eudaimonistic ethics, which stresses the concept of happiness (flourishing, well-being) and the good life. You can further supplement this activity with a follow-up discussion focusing on the answers/choices of students.

Instructions for students

In the space below write down 5 essential things that (for you) constitute happiness or a happy life and 5 things that such a life should exclude.

+	-
+	-
+	-
+	-
+	-

6.8 GLOSSARY

Care ethics/ethics of care: a moral theory that takes caring about individuals as the central ethical consideration that provides the basis for thinking about our duties and values.

Categorical Imperative: a supreme principle of morality according to Kant, which requires that we act only on those maxims that we can will to be universal laws or, in another formulation, requires that we treat humanity, in ourselves and in others, always as an end in itself, never as a mere means.

Character education: is a specific form of ethics education, focusing primarily on character development, e.g., development of moral virtues, habits and other aspects of character, which then translates into morally desirable or appropriate behavior.

Deontology/deontological ethics: an ethical theory that takes the notion of a duty as a fundamental ethical concept.

Dignity: basic and special, inalienable value that all people have on the basis of their humanity. It is often regarded as the foundation for basic entitlements and human rights of each individual.

Duty: an action that is morally required or morally right as opposed to actions that are wrong or morally impermissible.

Ethics education: ethics education represents all aspects of the process of education, which either explicitly or implicitly relate to the ethical dimensions of life and are such that can be structured, guided and monitored with appropriate educational methods and tools.

Ethics: a reflective system of values, principles, virtues, and ideals that shape our lives and determine the basis for the relationships that we form with others as well as ourselves. It is the primary subject of moral philosophy as an academic discipline.



Figure 6.10
Ethics Word Cloud
Source: © canbedone /
Adobe Stock

Human rights: basic rights that belong to every human individual (or a group of individuals) solely on the basis of being human. They protect their basic interests and safeguard the possibility of leading a good and meaningful life (e.g. right to life and liberty, right to privacy, right to fair trial, freedom of religion, etc.).

Moral principle/rule: a statement that sets conditions under which an action is right or wrong or something is good or bad. A moral rule could either be a moral standard or a guide on how we should act.

Philosophy with children: philosophy for/with children primarily denotes a set of methods devised to encourage and cultivate critical thinking and reflective understanding in children. The key stress is on critical thinking, i.e., thinking that is based on the use of reason, is guided in an appropriate manner by (good) reasons as opposed to, e.g., uninformed desires and inclinations, prejudices, fears, etc., and which helps a person answer questions about what to believe and what to do.

Utilitarianism: a moral theory that claims that the morally right action (or our duty) is the action that brings about the most utility/value (usually understood in terms of net surplus of pleasures over pain, happiness, or well-being of individuals).

Value/worth: concerns the goodness and badness of persons and the goodness and badness of character traits and associated motives of persons.

Values: are important, deep-rooted, pervasive and lasting beliefs, attitudes, ideals, and attachments which are usually shared by the members of a given community and concern what is good or bad.

Virtue(s) and vice(s): a virtue is a praiseworthy or commendable character trait such as courage, benevolence, charity, and humility (as opposed to vices as blameworthy trait such as dishonesty, cowardice, vanity, cruelty, chauvinism, etc.). Character traits are dispositions to act, feel, and think in certain ways. Aristotle understood virtues in relation to his principle of the Golden mean, that is, as a mean between two extremes.

6.9 SCENARIO OF THE VIDEO

Hello! My name is Iris. Ethics forms the basis of my daily conduct and my orientation in the world. The word “ethics” comes from the Greek word “ēthikós” or “êthos” and refers to our moral character, that is to the persons we are or aspire to be. Ethics investigates which things are valuable, important, meaningful. And it guides me on how to act and behave. It is a part of my everyday life.

When I am with my friends and schoolmates, I try to treat everybody else as I would like to be treated by them. This certainly makes sense. I learned in an ethics class that this is called the Golden rule and that it is very ancient, present in all cultures. It means showing respect for others and caring about each other. In my school class we have also written down a code of ethics in which I took a great part and which I am enthusiastic about following. It unites us together as a class, importantly, each and every one of us needed to accept it. I am always trying to be fair, caring, and cooperative. I also strive to obey laws and rules and to improve myself.

When I am playing football with my friends, we all aim to play fair. Of course, there are football rules. But these rules are not enough for a fun game that everybody would enjoy. Fair-play or good sportsmanship means showing respect for others in the game, cooperation and fellowship, having a team spirit and not focusing on winning for the sake of winning or ridiculing the side that loses. You have to play the game fair. Just following the rules of the game or the decisions of the referees is not enough. I don't like it when somebody cheats or fakes a foul, and the referee does not see this. What is important is that we shake hands at the end of each game.

Fairness is not important only in sports, but it is the basis of how we live together as a society. This is what is called justice. Our common institutions and practices must be just. A court, for example, should treat everybody the same, since we are all equal before the law. This last thought comes from

the Chinese tradition and Athenian democracy tradition. In present times it is most often a part of the constitution or the basic legal document for a state. There the most fundamental rights of every citizen are written. Human rights are related to what is called dignity. Dignity is a fundamental value of an individual and the absolute status that belongs to all humans. The dignity of each individual protects against interference and all forms of unworthy treatment, like for example, torture and humiliation, and it speaks against human circumstances such as slavery and extreme poverty.



Figure 6.11

Poverty

Source: © Milan Rout / Pexels.com

Last month in our school, we learned about children rights written in The Convention on the Rights of the Child. We made large colorful posters and described each right in our own words. My task was to present the right to food, clothing, and a safe home. Many kids do not have access to such basic things, and it is our duty to try to help them. I read some of their stories. The difficulties they are facing and the conditions they are living in made me sad and angry. And our society here lives in affluence, so we take some things for granted. My grandmother is a retired theatre actress and she grew up in great poverty. Our family thus decided to organize and stage a theatre play in the local park, and the money collected went for famine relief charity. I forgot some of my lines, but we all laughed. We also handed out leaflets through the entire town about ways to give. All members of my family helped me with this and we made some new friends in our neighborhood.

My mother is a medical doctor and researcher. She tells me that each time she wants to study a disease, she needs the permission of an ethics committee. That is important since such a committee is there for the protection of the most vulnerable ones and to guard their rights. In my boy scout group, we have a similar committee. At meetings, we sometimes decide how to solve disputes and whether one acted in a way contrary to being brave, noble, and caring. We vote and each member has the same say as any other, even though some leaders are older and more experienced. It is always important to vote and decide as you think is right.

I like holidays, especially Christmas and New Year season holidays. All the family comes together and we enjoy a shared meal, play games and tell stories. We exchange gifts. My grandfather always tells how giving and receiving is the most universal activity and how it is important that we are humble, generous and thankful. It is a ritual of a sort. And it is a bond with family and friends. I am most thankful that the whole family is together.

What I most look forward in school to is the Nature and environment week celebrating Charles Darwin day. We pack our things and go camping somewhere, learning about the surrounding nature and its importance. Last year we camped at the riverbank, and every day we walked for hours picking up the trash from the river and its surroundings. At the end, we collected more than a ton of trash. The river area looked completely different, more beautiful and healthier. We saw fish, bees, butterflies, dragonflies, turtles, and even otters. On the last day we together created a charter of the rights of animals. We wrote down what would they expect from us and how they can be preserved for future generations.

And I can now sum up, what I think is the most important for leading an ethical life. Ethics is not just following customs or the law, and it is not just about following one's feelings. Something is not good or right just because we like it, and if we disapprove of something, that does not mean that it is wrong. Ethics means thinking carefully about what is right and what is wrong and acting accordingly. And it extends beyond us humans and includes taking into consideration other fellow beings and the Earth as a whole, not merely because it sustains our life, but because it is valuable as such.

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EDUC8 Consortium



This booklet was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police.

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