

Unit 1

Thinking About Ethics

Introduction

When we get into an argument, we need to know how to construct a solid case, supported by evidence, to prove our point. In this first unit, we think through some different ways of constructing an argument, before considering the source of the ethical principles on which we can build our case.

In the first chapter of Waller's book, he challenges us to think about our thinking—and then to think about the source of the moral principles we hold. Where does our morality come from? Is it a natural understanding of ourselves and the world around us, or does it come from a transcendent reality? Is there one ethical standard, or does it vary according to time and place—and according to the person asking the question? If we rely on religious principles, how do we explain their origin—especially to someone who does not share our religious tradition or perhaps any religious belief system at all?

Learning objectives

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

1. identify some basic philosophical principles;
2. outline the process of reasoning that leads to making ethical decisions; and
3. identify the ways in which religious belief, particularly in a monotheistic God, has affected the process of ethical decision-making in the Western tradition.

Assigned reading

Waller, Bruce N. *Consider Ethics: Theory, Readings and Contemporary Issues*. 3rd ed. Toronto/Montreal: Pearson Longman, 2011.

Chapter 1, "Thinking About Ethics"

Chapter 2, "Egoism and Relativism"

Learning activities

Completing the learning activities will help you prepare for the assignments and the final exam.

Find the exercises at the end of Waller's chapters with questions for reflection, and be able to answer them. If you have further questions, check out some of the additional readings and sources Waller lists.