

# Where do we get ethical values?

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The idea of ethics, or morality, pertains to what we *ought* to do and what is *good* to do. And we've all heard it said that *ought* and *is* are fundamentally different concepts. So, for example, science addresses *is* but cannot address *ought*.

However, if we think more deeply about these ideas, we realize that the dichotomy between *ought* and *is* is a false dichotomy. For we see that the concept of *ought* has meaning only in reference to a goal, and the idea of *ought* refers to skill in achieving the respective goal.

What is skill? *Skill* is the use of the simplest, most accurate means for achieving a goal of interest. Equivalently, *skill* is the use of the most efficient, most effective means for achieving a goal of interest. We covered this topic in the meeting last December.

Hence, given a goal of interest, it follows that we ought to do what achieves the goal more skillfully. And now we see that the concept of *ought* reduces to the concept of *is*, namely, accuracy and simplicity in achieving goals of interest.

In this light, the problem of ethics reduces to the problem of determining what goals we should adopt. But this problem is an *ought* problem, so it can be solved only by determining respective goals, that is, the fundamental, universal goals of human life.

The topic of ethics, accordingly, pertains to determining these goals and determining how to skillfully achieve these goals. Hence, the topic of ethics follows logically from the last meeting on where we get our goals. So why don't we start this discussion with a hypothetical scenario similar to that with which we started the last meeting.

Suppose that there were no people on the earth and that you could magically create ten adult humans and put them somewhere on the earth in close proximity to each other. But suppose that their only knowledge is of basic physical activity and of basic individual survival techniques. What would they do? How would they develop goals? How would they develop ethical values?

## Meeting format

We'll cover the foregoing material interactively, discussing the concepts as we proceed.