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1.5 What is Ethics?

Ethics is concerned with **guidance**: what to do, how to do it.

"How should I live my life?"
"Should I ever sacrifice my interests for another's well-being?"
"What should I feel in this situation?"

Since we need guidance in many areas of life, ethics encompasses many topics. Here are a few of them...

Morality

- The "**queen**" of ethics
- Seen as encompassing the **higher-level**, more **significant** questions of what to do.
- Often seen as providing us with **overriding** considerations that trump other ethical aspects of the situation, such as convention and etiquette.
- Usually focused on the question of **how we should treat other human beings**.
- A point of view from which to **criticize the mores of another society**.
- A central concern for both **the classical Chinese thinkers** as well as **the West**.

Aesthetics

- Concerned with what is **beautiful**, what counts as **art**, etc.
- *E.g. What paintings and novels should I see and read? Why?*
- Touches on questions about **style** and **taste**.

Political theory

- Asks how we should **organize society**, what are the **right social institutions**.
- Concerned with **justice**, punishment, distribution, democracy, rule of law, and so on.

Etiquette, mores,...

- Concerned with **manners** and **etiquette**.
  What's the appropriate way to behave in this situation?
- Concerned with a society's **mores**, which differ among societies and times.
  Should I eat pizza with a fork in New York? How ought someone to have behaved in Beijing fifty years ago?