

## **Basic ethical questions**

### **Can one definitively delineate the difference between ethical and unethical?**

No, philosophy has been discussing this question for over 2000 years without being able to come up with a universally binding answer. Even the appeal to

- the Bible,
- the Kantian categorical imperative,
- responsibility ethics (evaluation of an action on the basis of its consequences) or
- discourse ethics (consensus among the partners to discussion in the absence of an objective judgment)

can do nothing more than to provide the individual with guidelines for his/her personal decision of conscience.

### **Is ethically correct behaviour not an unreachable goal?**

No, provided one does not define it as some kind of paradise in which everything is good, correct and ethical. Instead it should be seen as a process that unrolls in many tense situations in which what is decisive is to create a framework for individuals and for the system as a whole in which observation of certain basic ethical principles is rewarded and non-observance is punished.

### **Is ethic something one must be able to afford?**

No, this way of putting the question supposes that ethic is merely “something nice to have”, as if one can afford an ethic only when it doesn’t cost anything, when it brings no disadvantages, and when everyone else observes it: only then and not otherwise! Such an attitude goes against the fact that in today’s cross-linked, globalized world we are not independent of the behaviour of others. To demand ethical behaviour of others presupposes our own ethical commitment.

### **Aren’t ethic and morals something very personal and private?**

Yes and no. When someone, unobserved, finds a wallet full of money on the street, he or she must decide for themselves, whether to keep it or to turn it in at the lost property office. When, however, the society fosters giving up the found object with a finder’s reward and sanctions not giving it up as theft, then it incorporates the moral and ethical principles into a comprehensive moral framework.