



## Moral Psychology

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Questions of [morality](#) concern the disciplines of [Psychology](#) and [Philosophy](#). Morality was originally the province only of Philosophy. Beginning with Socrates in ancient Greece, thinkers throughout the ages have been concerned with human actions and what makes them good or bad. Since the development of [Psychology](#) in the last couple of centuries, the psychological aspects of morality also concern psychologists and researchers. While philosophers are concerned with all aspects of morality, the focus of psychologists tends to be on the moral development of an individual in relation to his or her [psychological capacity](#).

### What is Moral Psychology?

[Moral Psychology](#) is a branch of psychology that studies moral development in human beings. [Moral Psychology](#) concerns the capacity to judge whether actions are moral (good) or immoral (bad). Moral development occurs over time, beginning in infancy. A person's level of moral development refers to the level of moral consciousness a person has at a particular time, and the moral status of his or her actions.

Aspects of moral development that concern moral psychologists include action, awareness, decisions, development, motivation, reasoning, responsibility and sensitivity. Together, these aspects contribute to a person's [moral identity](#) or character, and how they present themselves to and interact with the world.

The meaning of morality and what constitutes a moral or immoral action is a controversial one. Different cultures use different criteria to determine what types of actions are or are not moral. The question of whether morality can be culturally determined, or whether it sits outside of culture is one for [Philosophy](#). For psychologists, the questions of how moral development occurs and manifests itself are the main issues.

Studies and other research carried out by psychologists in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries include questions about the relationship between moral reasoning and moral actions. Does, for example, our reasoning about morality influence the motivation for our actions? Do we, in other words, first think out our moral stance and then act accordingly, or alternatively, are our actions motivated by other concerns and our moral stance is a reflection on those actions, rather than the cause of them?

### Moral Identity

[Personal identity](#) - our identity as a person - refers to both how we see ourselves and how others see us, as a person distinct from other persons. Identity therefore necessarily implies descriptive features that mark that distinction. [Moral Identity](#) refers to the moral features of that description. [Moral Identity](#) is the outcome of the combination of our moral reasoning and moral actions (regardless of which comes first). Some studies indicate that the stronger our moral identity, the stronger and more cohesive is our identity as a whole. If I am clear and unambiguous about what I believe in, and act accordingly, I am stronger and surer of myself.

I know what I want to do, why I want to do it, and why it is important to me. I don't mess around contemplating the pros and cons, I just get on with it. I own my actions and take responsibility for them. By corollary, the degree to which I take responsibility for and own my actions is an important contributor to the strength and cohesion of my identity as a whole. In other words, the more responsible I am, the stronger and more self-confident I am as a person. See also [Responsibility](#).