



We can use the scientific method to learn something about the nature of physical reality, but we have no accurate instruments to test morality. We have a moral compass of course, called a **conscience**, but it has no external testability. We may have religious beliefs, laws, and **social norms** to guide our behavior, and of course we learn correct attitudes from our parents, teachers, and friends- but none of these methods are universal. This diverse modern age we live in compounds the problem further: the times seem to get increasingly **ambiguous** morally, and **skepticism** about everything is becoming more and more ordinary. Indeed, many people **scoff at** the very idea of moral certainty. They claim that all morality is situational, that the “right” behavior varies from time to time, place to place, and circumstances to circumstances. Others go even further, insisting that socially imposed ethics are alien to the liberty of a free individual. Under this **notion**, we should all choose for ourselves what behavior is acceptable and honorable, and be accountable only to our own consciences. However, morality cannot be merely a private code of conduct; it is also a matter of community standards of behavior and practice, with the purpose of promoting decent, harmonious relations among us all.

VOCABULARY WORDS

conscience
social norms
ambiguous
skepticism
scoff at
notion

LET'S TALK

1. Is capital punishment moral? Explain your answer.
2. Is it wrong to steal food if children are starving?
3. What responsibility do the rich have to help the poor? Why?
4. **AGREE or DISAGREE.** Prostitution is sometimes called “ the oldest profession. The implication is that it has been practiced in every society throughout history, despite legal and moral prohibitions. Perhaps it serves an important social purpose by making sex available to the most damaging of all forms of control. Perhaps the wisest thing is to allow the government to regulate the industry, impose strict health standards, protect the young and collect taxes that can be used for the good of all.