

Theme of morality and ethics-Collected Notes

THEMES IN *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*

This is a story about the innocent, exemplified by Tom Robinson, Boo Radley, and the children, and how they can be hurt or killed by evil or misguided people, personified by Mr. Ewell, Mr. Radley, and the prejudiced community. The story is also about the mature/good people, represented by Atticus, Calpurnia, Sheriff Tate and, by the end of the story, a maturing Scout, who understand that the world contains both good and evil and who do their best to protect and nurture the innocent.

The story teaches the following lessons about life and the way it should be lived:

Innocent people must be protected and should not be hurt; "It's a sin to kill a mockingbird."

Racial prejudice leads to injustice and causes grave harm.

Comment: This will seem obvious to children in the 21st century. However, it was not obvious to millions of Americans in 1960 when the book was published or 1962 when the film was made. In those days, the South was still mostly segregated and African-Americans suffered from discrimination throughout the United States. While students will readily assent to this principle it is harder for them to apply in their own lives and, in fact, many people today still harbor prejudice.

People should follow the rule of law but in extraordinary circumstances, the rule of law should be tempered with mercy.

It is important to stand up for your principles and oppose injustice.

Violence is not a good way to resolve conflicts.

Comment: Atticus is steadfast in his refusal to use force against another human being. He will stand alone against a lynch mob, but he won't strike back, even at severe provocation. Thus, when Mr. Ewell spits in his face, Atticus merely walks away. Mr. Ewell, on the other hand, is a violent man. He beats his daughter and seeks revenge upon Atticus by attacking Jem and Scout. Seeking to live by the sword, Mr. Ewell dies by it.

Tolerance of people who are different, including the mentally ill, is a virtue; fears of others fall away when we come to see them as people.

Comment: As the film opens, Scout and Jem live in a world of innocence. Jem is concerned with outward and immature shows of maturity: responding to a dare to touch the Radley house; wanting to have a gun; wanting his dad to play football with the other fathers, etc. Through the events of the story, the children learn about the existence of evil and that a person they had once feared can protect them and become their friend. By the end, Jem has started to think about serious issues such as good vs. evil, and justice vs. injustice. Scout has also matured, shedding her fear of Boo Radley and understanding that thrusting him into the limelight would be like killing an innocent animal, a mockingbird.

Mature masculinity involves love, nurturing, and treating others with respect; you don't need a gun to be a man.

Comment: The only possible criticism of Atticus Finch is that he is too tolerant of the prejudices of his community, but then bearing witness and being a good example are at certain times the best way to change society.

In the novel, "To kill A mockingbird", Morality and Ethics play a large part in the story's theme and is a core theme and nobody represents these qualities better than Atticus Finch. Aticus Finch was the standard that the reader henceforth judged all the other characters in the book by. This is all because he was one of the few adults who didn't prejudice and plus the fact he is a lawyer. Morality and ethics then appear a lot in the novel, "to Kill a Mockingbird", because Atticus is the leading factor as to why many characters in the novel "have a change of heart".

The first notable time morality and ethics are shown in the book comes from Calpurnica,

"He ain't company, Cal, he's just a Cunningham-" "Hush your mouth! Don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, , this sentence was uttered by scout when "a Cunningham" was over for dinner.

Calpurnica was the black woman Atticus hired to be a "maid", but Calpurnica soon became a member of the finch household in all but name. In These sentences Calpurnica was reprehending scout because she wasn't showing respect to the "Cunningham" people's differences, even if you think you're better than them. And acting like you're better than other people is the surest way to show that you're not. Another example is,

"There are just some kind of men who – who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one"

The sentence indirectly states about the bad ethics of Nathan Radley and people like him. The reason behind this is because Mrs. Dubouse compares the people who share Mr. Radleys dislike of her garden to Atticus, who never hates. Next is Atticus explaining to Scout why he's working hard whilst defending Tom Robinson,

"For a number of reasons," said Atticus. "The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again."

This quote shows Atticus's morality and ethics is a large way at once because even though he was chosen to defend a "nigger", who the town is prejudice against for raping a white woman, he will do his best against the all white jury.

Another few times when Atticus's ethics and morality is showcased and how he has had his ideals rub off onto scout. The ideal that scout gained from Atticus was what she knew she didn't and couldn't tell him,

"...I said I would like it very much, which was a lie, but one must lie under certain circumstances and at all times when one can't do anything about them."

What Scout was saying is following the old proverb, "goin' with the flow". " Going with the flow" in Scout's mind was "going along with what the town wanted" and this was not right. She knew this but she knew when to keep a closed mouth and not complaining and henceforth stress her father out anymore than necessary. Next is a quote from Atticus explaining the difference between his morals and the town's morals,

"They're certainly entitled to think that, and they're entitled to full respect for their opinions," said Atticus, "but before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience."

The quote demonstrates Town's morals that were hierarchy based, "Whites on top, then the others." This didn't bide well with Atticus because these morals contradicted his own, doing it his way first then caring about the town. Now is a quote by Atticus near the end of the trial,

"...that boy might go to the chair, but he's not going till the truth's told." Atticus's voice was even. "And you know what the truth is."

This quote again shows Aticus's morality because he knows that this trial wont end well, but he will try his hardest to get the truth out of Tom Robinson before the "day is done".

Finally there are the quotes which demonstrate Atticus's morals and ethics hugely. All three of the quotes here were near the end of the novel where Atticus's morals and his ethics had time to rub off onto the characters,

"...if I connived at something like this, frankly I couldn't meet his eye, and the day I can't do that I'll know I've lost him. I don't want to lose him and Scout, because they're all I've got."

This quote is when Atticus was talking to Scout about how Jem has changed because of the trial and how highly Atticus respects his kid's opinion of him and is afraid if how he acted might have turned his children against and he wouldn't be able to ask for their respect anymore. Next is a quote by Heck Tate, the sheriff, after Mr. Yule was killed.

"..To my way of thinkin', Mr. Finch, taking the one man who's done you and this town a great service an' draggin' him with his shy ways into the limelight – to me, that's a sin. It's a sin and I'm not about to have it on my head. If it was any other man, it'd be different. But not this man, Mr. Finch."

This quote is directed at Atticus because Atticus reminded Heck Tate about his job. Heck Tate's Reply would have been different at the start of the book because Atticus's morals hadn't rubbed off onto him at that time. The next and final quote was Atticus's ending speech at the trial of Tom Robinson.

"You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women – black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing, and there is no man living who has never looked upon a woman without desire"

This quote is THE quote that has inspired people to become lawyers, or judges and this quote puts Atticus's morals out on display for the whole town to see and says more in simple words than many people can't express in a lifetime. In this quote Atticus states that he knows that some Negroes can't be trusted but also states that not everybody can be trusted. He also states white people lie as well and this indirectly describes all of the white witnesses' who had testified at the trial.

Throughout the book, "To Kill A Mockingbird", Atticus's Morality and ethics were put in question, but they withstood the onslaught and came out the victor and rubbed off onto the other townfolk of Maycomb.

Shmoop Notes:

Atticus thinks that everyone deserves a fair trial. Maycomb thinks that only white men do. Scout thinks that her father is right. Maycomb thinks that her father is wrong. So, who's more moral—the community standard, or the individual conscience? Where do the rights of the community end and the rights of the individual begin? *To Kill a Mockingbird* examines the conflict between the individual and the community. On the one hand, standing up for your beliefs can get you into a lot of trouble. But if your beliefs are moral, then you just might end up dragging the whole community in a more satisfactory direction. After all, a community's morals are the sum of what its individuals believe.

Questions About Morality and Ethics

1. What do individual characters in the novel base their ideas of right and wrong on?
2. How does the community work to enforce collective standards of morality? Where do those collective standards come from?
3. What moral principles does the novel suggest are desirable? Does anything in the novel undermine these moral principles? Are there times when the novel appears to be hypocritical?
4. Does Bob Ewell have bad morals or no morals? What's the difference?

Chew on This

Try on an opinion or two, start a debate, or play the devil's advocate.

Atticus presents himself as morally consistent—the same at home as on the streets—but really he has two moral systems: one for himself (based on a strict moral code); and one for others (based on sympathetic understanding).

While the novel in general presents honesty as a virtue, it also suggests that honesty is not always the best policy.

MORALITY AND ETHICS QUOTES

1) "There's some folks who don't eat like us," she whispered fiercely, "but you ain't called on to contradict 'em at the table when they don't. That boy's yo' comp'ny and if he wants to eat up the table cloth you let him, you hear?"

"He ain't company, Cal, he's just a Cunningham-"

"Hush your mouth! Don't matter who they are, anybody sets foot in this house's yo' comp'ny, and don't you let me catch you remarkin' on their ways like you was so high and mighty! Yo' folks might be better'n the Cunninghams but it don't count for nothin' the way you're disgracin' 'em—if you can't act fit to eat at the table you can just set here and eat in the kitchen!"

Calpurnia sent me through the swinging door to the diningroom with a stinging smack. (3.26-29)

Cal's moral lesson here is to respect people's differences, even if you think you're better than them. And acting like you're better than other people is the surest way to show that you're not. This interaction is an early blow against the stereotype that white people have morals but African-Americans don't—and Cal follows it up with a loving "blow" of her own. There's nothing like a smack to make a lesson hit home, right?

2) "There are just some kind of men who—who're so busy worrying about the next world they've never learned to live in this one, and you can look down the street and see the results." (5.44)

Miss Maudie's talking about Nathan Radley here, but also about his fellow foot-washing Baptists who think she's going to hell for making her garden pretty. Miss Maudie's no party girl, but she still strikes out at those who think that all pleasure is bad—except for the pleasure they obviously take in judging their neighbors as sinners.

3) "If you shouldn't be defendin' him, then why are you doin' it?"

"For a number of reasons," said Atticus. "The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't even tell you or Jem not to do something again." [...]

"Atticus, are we going to win it?"

"No, honey."

"Then why-"

"Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win," Atticus said. (9.16-25)

For Atticus, you have to judge yourself before you can judge anyone else. Or something like that. His own self-respect is bound up with his good morals: if he did something he knew was wrong, even if it was justified, he would lose all moral authority over others.

4) "Son, I have no doubt that you've been annoyed by your contemporaries about me lawing for niggers, as you say, but to do something like this to a sick old lady is inexcusable. I strongly advise you to go down and have a talk with Mrs. Dubose," said Atticus. "Come straight home afterward." (11.43)

Even when others do things that Atticus would rather eat spiders than do, he still thinks they should be treated with respect. In his moral system, just because Mrs. Dubose strikes out at Jem doesn't mean he's allowed to strike back. Atticus is definitely a [New Testament](#) kind of guy, turning the other cheek rather than going after an eye for an eye.

5) "Atticus, you must be wrong...."

"How's that?"

"Well, most folks seem to think they're right and you're wrong...."

"They're certainly entitled to think that, and they're entitled to full respect for their opinions," said Atticus, "but before I can live with other folks I've got to live with myself. The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience." (11.54-57)

Democracy may determine how a group will act, but it can't control what a person thinks: the jury can vote to find Tom guilty, but it can't make everyone in Maycomb believe that he is. (But you think that makes him feel any better?)

6) I said I would like it very much, which was a lie, but one must lie under certain circumstances and at all times when one can't do anything about them. (13.20)

Adulthood lesson numero uno: sometimes doing what people want you to do is the best way. Is it moral? Well, when it comes to little white lies to spare someone's feelings—maybe it actually is.

7) "Link, that boy might go to the chair, but he's not going till the truth's told." Atticus's voice was even. "And you know what the truth is." (15.23)

Atticus knows it's more unlikely than a Lindsay Lohan presidency that Tom will be acquitted, and yet getting the truth out there is still an accomplishment—even if we're not quite sure what it'll accomplish.

8) "You know the truth, and the truth is this: some Negroes lie, some Negroes are immoral, some Negro men are not to be trusted around women—black or white. But this is a truth that applies to the human race and to no particular race of men. There is not a person in this courtroom who has never told a lie, who has never done an immoral thing, and there is no man living who has never looked upon a woman without desire." (20.48)

Racism logic fail: Tom is black, black is bad, therefore Tom is bad. Atticus tries to transform it into, "Tom is a man, some men are bad, some men are good, and now listen to the evidence and decide which group Tom belongs to." Convicting Tom because he is black, Atticus argues, would be as silly as convicting him because he is a human being.

9) "Heck," Atticus's back was turned. "If this thing's hushed up it'll be a simple denial to Jem of the way I've tried to raise him. Sometimes I think I'm a total failure as a parent, but I'm all they've got. Before Jem looks at anyone else he looks at me, and I've tried to live so I can look squarely back at him... if I connived at something like this, frankly I couldn't meet his eye, and the day I can't do that I'll know I've lost him. I don't want to lose him and Scout, because they're all I've got." (30.37)

Here's a new way of looking at parenting: instead of telling your kids not to embarrass you, how about trying not to embarrass your kids? Only, we're not talking about retiring your mom jeans or putting your cellphone in your pocket instead of clipping it to your belt. We're talking about living an upright, honest, and moral life—and that's a lot harder.

Transcript of TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD- MORALITY AND ETHICS

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Theme Statement

People should always do the right thing even when faced with huge obstacles.

QUOTE 1:

Atticus was trying to set up a court date for his son because he thought Jem killed Mr. Ewell. He was going to do what was right.

QUOTE 2:

Atticus told Scout not to fight people just because they talk bad about him. He wants her to do what's right.

QUOTE 3:

When Dill ran away from home, Atticus went and told Dill's aunt because it was the right thing to do.

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QUOTE 4:

After reading this story we all can tell that Atticus has good morality and ethics

Quote 5:

The reason why Atticus does what's right is because he wants his kids to grow up and do what's right

Jem and Scout

Boo

Atticus and Tom

More info here:

<http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=20671>

http://scholarship.law.nd.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1598&context=law_faculty_scholarship

<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mocking/themes.html>

The Trial of Tom Robinson

- Tom Robinson, a black man, is falsely accused of raping a white woman. Despite the pressure the community puts on Atticus Finch, Robinson's defense attorney. Atticus upholds the law in his own right and truthfully defends Tom based on his belief that all men are created equal. Author Harper Lee exposes the evil of racial prejudice throughout the novel through the innocent observations of young Scout who is perplexed but not undone by the hateful behavior of others.

Atticus Teaches Integrity

- Atticus Finch teaches his two children, Jem and Scout, the importance of integrity throughout the book. He teaches them the morality of doing the right thing despite the evil that exists in the world and to never lose faith in the goodness of people. As Atticus gives reasons to his children why he must defend Tom Robinson truthfully despite the condemnation he faces from the townspeople. Atticus tells them, "... if I didn't I couldn't hold my head up in town; I couldn't represent this county in the legislature; I couldn't even tell you or Jem to do something again."

Social Inequalities Baffle Scout

- The Ewel family of Maycomb are on the low end of the social totem pole while Scout's family, the Finches are higher in society. Scout doesn't understand why the Ewel's and Cunninghams are so disliked and why these poor families are too prideful to receive help from others. Scout contemplates that all people should be treated equally, whatever their social standing. She understands that there are inequalities in Maycomb; she just doesn't understand why they exist and sees the injustice in all of it.

Read more : http://www.ehow.com/list_7805186_examples-morality-kill-mockingbird.html

- Ethics: The Keys to Humanity's Forbearance

Morality is not a virtue that many can tolerate without a conscience. It was considered the critical awareness of humanity's standards of conduct that are accepted as proper. Yet, for Scout, morality becomes not only a principle, but also a necessity in order for her to survive in the prejudiced society of Maycomb County. It is solely the essence of ethics that causes her to frown upon the injustices brought about by intolerance. Thus, Scout's maturity towards understanding the vitality of morality allows her to become a noble individual in an unjust social order. Scout's innocence is solely a consequence of her age and prevents her from truly understanding the complexities of the South in the 1930's. Her world is insular and small: her home county of Maycomb, Alabama, "an old town [...] a tired old town/ [...] / There was no hurry, for there was nowhere to go, nothing to buy and no money to buy it with. Maycomb had [...] nothing to fear but fear itself" (Lee 6). As Maycomb is a genuine Southern community, its values and customs are old-fashioned. Progress has been halted due to the discrimination that is still heavily embedded within its population. Although Scout interprets the weariness of her town quite literally, it is more symbolic of the general tenets and out-dated beliefs of a racist community. Moreover, her age is an obstacle that impairs her ability to comprehend the dire circumstances of the Great Depression and discount the meaning of President Roosevelt's ominous words. Yet, she is not wholly ignorant of the effects of the depression, which leads her to become very curious about the economy at such a young age; " [her] honest and often confused reactions reflect [her] development as [a person] and also helps the reader gauge the moral consequences of the novel's events" (Felty 298). While Scout may not be aware of the rampant bigotry that...

The Importance of Moral Education

The Importance of Moral Education was another theme used greatly by Harper Lee. There were a lot of lessons which Atticus and other characters taught to Jem and Scout about life, and opportunities, risks etc. They taught them life lessons based on what they knew.



"I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what. You rarely win, but sometimes you do," (Lee, 119). This relates to Moral education because Atticus was trying to teach Jem and Scout a lesson about what courage really means and what happens when you become courageous.

Another example of Moral Education is when Scout says to Mr. Dolphus Raymond, "Atticus says cheatin' a colored man is ten times worse than cheatin' a white man. Says it's the worst thing you can do," (Lee, 201). This is an example of moral education because Scout is explaining how her dad taught her about cheating other people. She knows it's wrong to cheat anyone whether they are Black or White. However, she knew specifically not to cheat black people as they are already cheated enough. Both Scout and Jem are very good and well behaved individuals, usually well-respected by their peers and neighbourhood friends because of the morals and ethics which Atticus continues to influence them with.

SYMBOLS AND OTHER LITERARY DEVICES

Symbols: The mockingbird which sings and does no harm is the symbol for innocent people who need protection. The mockingbird figures prominently in the title which refers to the statement, "It's a sin to kill a mockingbird." Atticus makes this statement at lunch on Scout's first day of school. At the end of the film Sheriff Tate says it would be a sin to expose Boo Radley to the public. Scout then comments that it would be like killing a mockingbird.

The names of the characters are interesting symbols. Jem is a gem. Scout, the narrator, is the explorer for understanding. Atticus is a name that invokes the grandeur and rectitude of the classical virtues. The surname for the family of Atticus, Jem and Scout, is Finch, recalling another bird. The black man who is killed is Tom Robinson, yet another name recalling a bird. The Finch's mother

substitute/housekeeper is named Calpurnia, who, like her namesake Caesar's wife, is beyond any reproach. Mr. Ewell's name is "Robert E. Lee Ewell" highlighting the irony that the best of the old Confederacy (Robert E. Lee) has degenerated into racism and drunken, child-beating criminality. Some commentators have noted that the name "Ewell" is very close to the word "evil". "Boo" is seen as a spook for much of the film. His name is ironic because he's painfully shy.

Guns are a symbol of dangerous power that has only a limited use. The immature Jem desires but is not permitted to have a gun. Sheriff Tate, who exhibits wisdom throughout the story, declines to use a gun on the rabid dog. He asks Atticus, the better marksman, to make the shot. Atticus uses the gun with precision and gains immeasurably in the eyes of his immature son. Mr. Radley, the meanest man in town, almost kills Jem when shooting blindly at what he thinks is a prowler. The mob that comes to the jail has guns and the deputy shoots Tom Robinson to injure but "misses his aim" and kills the man. As the story unfolds and Jem starts to mature, he doesn't ask for a gun again. In contrast, when guns are needed for specific and limited purposes, they are used. Atticus kills the rabid dog with a gun. Young Walter Cunningham has a gun and goes hunting with his father. He and his family are country people who live on small game. They need to hunt.

The treatment of guns in this story is a criticism of the idea that having a gun makes a person a man. In the book, Atticus says to Jem, "I wanted you to see what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand. It's when you know you're licked before you begin but you begin anyway and you see it through no matter what."

Plot: The two main plots curl around each other and end with the same moral, the innocent must be protected. The main plot involves the trial and death of Tom Robinson. The conflict was between the Finch family, primarily Atticus, and the racism in the town. The resolution was not satisfactory: Robinson was wrongly convicted and died. He deserved protection that he did not receive. The primary subplot is the story of Scout and Jem coming to realize that Boo Radley is a person and not just a freak. It ends after Boo kills Mr. Ewell and Scout understands that it would be like killing a mockingbird to drag Boo into the limelight. The conflict for the subplot is between the children and their own ignorance and immaturity.

Tom Robinson and Boo Radley have much in common. They both try to help. They are the only people in the story who are imprisoned. Tom Robinson is persecuted because he's black and Boo is persecuted by his parents for some long ago infraction. They are both at risk in the justice system of Maycomb. They are both "mockingbirds". Wise men try to protect them both: Atticus tries to protect Tom Robinson and Sheriff Tate tries to protect Boo Radley.

Contrasting Characters (Foils): In this story, the good qualities of Atticus Finch find a foil in several other characters or groups of characters. As a man who upholds the rule of law, a man who is not prejudiced, a man who is courageous, and a man who is nurturing to his children, Atticus is contrasted with Robert E. Lee Ewell. Ewell is a racist, child-beating coward who is willing to manipulate the legal system to satisfy his desire for revenge and to protect his reputation. At the end of the story, Atticus goes along with the Sheriff's suggestion that they bend the strict rule of law to avoid involving Boo Radley in Mr. Ewell's death. Had Boo's role in the incident been disclosed, the young man would have suffered immensely from the public exposure involved in an inquest. Atticus' actions and those of the Sheriff are merciful and do not violate fundamental justice, whereas Ewell sought to have a man falsely convicted, imprisoned, and hanged for base reasons.

The lynch mob and the jury provide another contrast with Atticus' belief in the rule of law and his lack of racial prejudice. Another character that contrasts with Atticus is Mr. Radley, who is not a nurturing parent and is overly strict, causing immense psychological damage to his son. This contrast points up how Atticus nurtures his children.

Contrasting Situations and Actions: In addition to contrasts among the characters, contrasting actions highlight themes of the story. The lynch mob tries to take justice into its own hands. This is properly portrayed as evil. However, at the end of the film, the Sheriff and Atticus take justice into their own hands, deciding to be merciful to Boo and lie about how Mr. Ewell died. Technically, they have committed the crime of obstruction of justice; as a practical matter, they are tempering justice with mercy.

Another contrast is the gentleness and forbearance of the black people shown in the film as opposed to the racism and violence of the white community in Maycomb.

Irony: There are many instances of irony in the story. Examples are: (1) Jem and Scout fear Boo Radley but he is the one who comes to their rescue. (2) Mr. Ewell dies while trying to hurt Jem and Scout. He thought he was attacking vulnerable children and didn't count on having to face Boo Radley. (This is another example of the unexpected consequences of revenge. For more on this, see [Learning Guide to "Hamlet"](#).) (3) It is Sheriff Tate, who may "not be very much" rather than the smart lawyer Atticus Finch, who comes up with the stratagem that will protect Boo. (4) Atticus Finch, the best shot in town, doesn't own a gun and won't let his son have one. (5) Ewell screams that Atticus is a "nigger lover" when the only white person in the story who has loved a black man is his own daughter, Mayella.