

## **What is Morality?: The Concept of Morality from Prospective Teachers' Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to reveal the perceptions of prospective teachers about the concept of morality. The study group consisted of 141 prospective teachers from the Faculty of Education 1<sup>st</sup> year Art Teaching, Turkish Language Teaching, and Elementary Mathematics Teaching Departments at a university in the Middle Black Sea Region in the 2019-2020 academic year. A structured open-ended questionnaire consisting of items aiming to explore the perceptions of prospective teachers about the concept of morality was designed to collect data. The descriptive analysis method was used for data analysis. The results of the analysis showed that prospective teachers mostly perceived morality as a society-centered concept. While nature-centered perceptions, which indicate that morality has innate characteristics that include personal/internal processes of human beings, ranked second place, God-centered morality perception ranked third place. The metaphorical perceptions of prospective teachers were also greatly influenced by their society-centered understanding. In their metaphors about the concept of morality, prospective teachers mostly mentioned objects suitable for growing and shaping, such as flowers, trees, plants, saplings, and ivy. Moreover, it is possible to say that while prospective teachers were exemplifying moral behaviors, they focused more on external factors that are generally accepted in a society.

**Keywords:** Morality, prospective teachers, metaphor

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## **Introduction**

The concept of morality, which is described as temperament, character, or manners, expresses the established character structure in humans and the behaviors of individuals that occur under their own will. Although moral preceptions vary by time, society, and culture, they also exhibit mandatory and unchanging rules of behavior (Kılıç, 2012). This is one of the most emphasized concepts in the field of philosophy. Many philosophers have tried to answer the question of what morality is and associated morality with different concepts. Generally speaking, morality is defined as "the group or network of beliefs, values, norms, orders, prohibitions, and designs which are involved in the life of a person, group, people, social class, nation, or cultural environment in a certain historical period and which guide their actions" (Özlem, 2004, p.7).

The nature of morality calls for preventing the wrong and doing the right. Moral precepts basically tell us what is important and how we should behave towards other people (as well as animals and nature) (Folger, Cropanzano & Goldman, 2005). In this sense, morality is utilized both to determine the concepts associated with good and bad, right and wrong in a society, and to evaluate the status of a particular action and practice in that area. However, concepts of good and bad, right and wrong may differ from society to society. For example, while female circumcision is seen as necessary and moral in some societies, it is defined as a violation of rights and seen as immoral in others (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2010). Morality is seen as cases under a special light as the reasons for actions, rather than behaving in line with learned principles and it is stated that once this perceptual capacity is acquired, it can be predicted in different situations and can be used in new conditions. In other words, moral precepts that determine what is good and right vary by the situations people encounter (McDowell & McFetridge, 1978). This shows that perceptual judgments and beliefs play a role in morality (Goldie, 2007).

## **Literature Review**

It is known that philosophers have different opinions about whether morality is changeable, as well as their efforts to define morality. They gather around two main views on this issue. The first view states that morality is innate and underlies the belief that environmental factors will not bring about any change in human morality. Among the representatives of this view are Schopenhauer, Lamarck, Darwin, as well as the Islamic philosophers Yusuf Has Hacip, Sa'ddi-I Shirazi, and Nasreddin-iTusi. The second view claims that morality can change. According to this view, morality and temperament can be structured later by the effect of environmental factors. Many philosophers, such as Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, John Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Farabi, Ibn-iSina, and Ghazali, adopted this view (Erdem, 2002). This second view also emphasizes the belief that people can become moral individuals through education. Socrates, who believed that

virtue is knowledge, was among the first representatives of this view (Batista, 2015). On the contrary of this view of Socrates, John Locke, who was one of the representatives of the utilitarian view of morality, mentioned that the moral principles varied according to people, societies, and countries (Timuçin, 2016). However, both views believe that moral principles are necessary both for the happiness of the individual and for the social order. Kropotkin was one of the philosophers who thought morality was associated with social variables and claimed that it could be handled within different frameworks. Kropotkin classified morality into three categories, namely, religious morality, utilitarian morality, and morality resulting from the necessity of living in society. Religious morality refers to the behaviors shown with the expectation of reward or punishment as a result of religious teachings coming through revelation. Utilitarian morality means the determination of moral principles in line with one's own interests, while in the understanding of morality arising from the necessities of living in society, the individual evaluates whether a behavior is moral or not according to whether the criterion is appropriate for social life. In the third moral category, the person is expected to feel the need to act with the feeling of sharing the joy and grief of others (Kropotkin, 2005).

The question of how to determine which actions are moral is one of the questions frequently asked by philosophers. Many philosophers seeking an answer to this question have come up with different moral philosophies. For example, Protagoras claimed that right and wrong changed from person to person and mentioned that there was no common morality and that morality was individual-centered. Also, philosophers, like Aristippos and Bentham, paved the way for the idea that morality could be related to the internal processes of the individual by stating that what gives pleasure to the individual is good and what hurts is bad. Contrary to these views, Socrates and Plato stated that the main purpose of people was to achieve virtue or the highest good, and they argued that virtue or the highest best could take place by possessing qualities that also concerned society, such as moderation and justice. Pericles, too, emphasized that people should not isolate themselves from social problems while carrying out their own business. Dividing morality into two types, Bergson, on the other hand, described the type of morality, which he defined as closed morality, as associated with social traditions and taboos, and the other as open morality, which took into account other individuals and was a more libertarian type of morality. Bergson adopted a society-based moral understanding in both types. Also, Kant emphasized the importance of placing society at the center in determining moral rules by adopting the view that "Don't do unto others what you don't want done unto you." While Bacon argued that one could be moral without religious beliefs and orders, Saint Augustinus adopted a God-centered moral understanding and stated that people should submit to God's sovereignty to be moral (Aktan, 1999). Based on the views of all these philosophers, it is possible to state that the nature of the individual, society, or religion has an important place in determining moral precepts.

It would not be wrong to say that education assumes the greatest role in the internalization of certain moral rules (Oral & Çoban, 2019). For this reason, the definition of education has been associated with the concept of morality from past to present, and new approaches that aim to help students internalize moral values have been debated (Kirschenbaum, 1995). The adoption of morality and moral precepts is not just about the transfer of these rules to the next generation through education. At the same time, moral decisions have an effect on the implementation of educational practices, making changes in these practices, and making interventions in the education system (Stein & Fischer, 2011). In other words, failure to review whether a practice or change to be made in the education system complies with the moral precepts may adversely affect all stakeholders in the system. It is aimed that all stakeholders of education are aware of basic moral precepts and are willing to apply these rules. For this reason, it is seen that the concept of morality and values and teaching of them is given a special place especially in teacher education (Covell & Howe, 2001; Curtis, 2015; Hand, 2014; LePage, Akar, Temli, Şen, Hasser, & Ivins, 2011; Narvaez & Lapsley, 2008; Revell & Arthur, 2007; Samuelsson & Lindström, 2017; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). In Turkey, the concept of morality and moral precepts that teachers should have are taught within the framework of the courses, such as 'Educational Philosophy', 'Educational Sociology', and 'Morality and Ethics in Education' within the programs of Educational Faculties, which were renewed in the 2018-2019 academic year, thereby helping prospective teachers to internalize this concept and its practices (Higher Education Council, 2021). However, it is thought that determining prospective teachers' perceptions of the concept of morality will be important in terms of structuring their knowledge of the concept based on these perceptions.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study aimed to reveal the perceptions of prospective teachers about the concept of morality.

### **Research Questions**

In line with the purpose of the research, the following questions were tried to be answered:

1. What are the perceptions of prospective teachers about the concept of morality?
2. What kind of metaphors prospective teachers create related to morality concept and what are their explanations about the reasons for using these metaphors?

### **Methodology**

#### *Research Design*

This study was structured in accordance with the basic qualitative research design by utilizing the qualitative research method. The basic qualitative research design, which has all the features of the qualitative research method, tries to reveal how participants "make sense of a situation, process, perspective, or world view". This design, in which inductive

strategies are used, aims to reach descriptive results (Merriam, 2002, p.6). Since this study, too, aimed to reveal the perceptions of prospective teachers about the concept of morality, the data were obtained by asking the subjects to make their own definitions of the concept of morality and to create metaphors. Metaphors help describe a situation, event, or phenomenon as it is (Morgan, 1986, as cited in Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In this sense, it was thought that the basic qualitative research design would be appropriate for the study since the study aimed to reach descriptive results based on the descriptions of prospective teachers.

### *Study Group*

Some predetermined criteria were taken into account in the selection of the participants in the study. Therefore, it is possible to say that the research was structured in accordance with the criterion sampling method. In this sampling method, it is possible to include people, events, objects, or situations with certain qualities in the research (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç-Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2013). The inclusion criteria determined for this research were as follows: 1) the sample should consist of prospective teachers; 2) the sample should consist of first-year students to avoid exposure to the concept of morality in the courses taken previously; and 3) the sample should represent students from science field, social field, and fine arts. Students from Mathematics, Turkish and Art departments were selected to represent each of the numerical, verbal and artistic fields. Information about the participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Demographic Information about the Study Group*

Demographic Information		Total	
Gender	Female	101	141
	Male	40	
Age	17	5	141
	18	51	
	19	57	
	20	14	
	21	5	
	22	4	
	23	1	
	24	1	
	25	1	
	Missing	2	
Department	Department of Art Teaching	37	141
	Department of Turkish Teaching	51	
	Department of Elementary Mathematics Teaching	53	

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The study data were collected in a single class hour in the first weeks of 'Educational Sociology' course from first-year prospective teachers in Art Teaching, Turkish Language Teaching and Elementary Mathematics Teaching Departments at a university in the Central Black Sea Region in Turkey in the fall semester of the 2019-2020 academic year. To comply with the ethical rules in the study, the prospective teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and the researcher. In addition, participants were informed about the possible outcomes of the study and where the information obtained from the study would be used. Also, the data collection form included the contact information of the researcher and a statement that participation in the study was voluntary and participants could quit the study at any time. In this sense, the research was conducted with the consent of the prospective teachers. They were also informed that no personal information such as name, surname, or school number, was asked on the questionnaire and that the data obtained would not be evaluated as a course grade in any way.

In the study, an open-ended questionnaire form consisting of two parts was created as a data collection tool. The first part presented a short introduction to the study and consisted of items questioning demographic information, such as gender, age, and department. The second part included two open-ended questions, the first asking the participants to define the concept of morality from their own point of view and the second asking them to create metaphors related to this concept and explain the reasons for using these metaphors (*Morality is like ..... because .....*). The descriptive analysis method was employed to analyze the data. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, methods, such as depth-focused data collection, detailed description, consistency analysis, and transferability, were used. To ensure depth-focused data collection, there was no time limit for the participants to fill out the questionnaires and they were asked to write their answers to the questions in detail. Direct quotations were frequently included in the findings to provide detailed descriptions. While making direct quotations, prospective teachers were coded in a way to reflect their demographic information. In the coding, the number given to the participant, the abbreviation about their gender, and then a short expression of their department were included (e.g. T3, F, Arts teach.). To ensure consistency in the study, expert opinions were obtained for the content and face validity. To strengthen the transferability of the research results to similar media, the information about the participants and the steps for collecting and analyzing the data were explained in detail.

### **Results**

The findings obtained in the study were evaluated under headings, such as "prospective teachers' definition of the concept of morality" and "prospective teachers' metaphorical perceptions of the concept of morality".

*Prospective Teachers' Definition of the Concept of Morality*

First of all, students were asked to define the concept of morality in their own words. The definitions of students were evaluated under society-centered, nature-centered, and God-centered categories. Table 2 presents findings on the types of definitions according to the school year.

Table 2.

*Ways to Define the Concept of Morality*

Classification	Art teach.	Turkish teach.	Elementary Math teach.	Total
Society-centered	24	43	37	104
Nature-centered	19	15	25	59
God-centered	6	5	-	11

As seen in Table 2, students generally defined the concept of morality with an approach that puts society in the center. As a matter of fact, 104 prospective teachers used keywords, such as society and social behavior, in their definitions. One of the prospective teachers highlighted society in her definition by saying, "*Morality is any type of activity that is welcomed by a society or deemed appropriate by that society.*" (T62, F, Turkish teach.) According to the views of these students, morality, in general, includes "behaviors approved, accepted, welcomed, and adopted by society". In this sense, an example for the prospective teachers' own expressions was like "*Morals is set of behaviors that society will adopt when it is considered good and exclude when is considered as bad. This situation may differ in every society.*" (T116, F, Elementary Math teach.)

Secondly, prospective teachers made definitions that indicated morality involved personal/internal processes of human beings and innate characteristics and emphasized human nature (n=59). For this reason, the second category was named nature-centered perceptions. One of the prospective teachers expressed this view briefly by saying, "*Morality is within us ...*" (T78, M, Turkish teach.). Another prospective teacher said, "*Morality is a natural power given to people by birth. Morality is innate.*" (T79, M, Turkish teach.). With this definition, he stated that trying to impose moral precepts on people is unnecessary and even harmful because the repetition of already existing behaviors can create negative effects on the person. Another prospective teacher mentioned that morality could be shaped according to an individual's perceptions.

The third category of the study regarding the definition of morality consisted of a God-centered understanding of morality. It was found that some of the teachers (n=11) mentioned that religious elements and God were involved in the concept of morality. One of the prospective teachers expressed her opinions by saying "*It is called morality when a person does not go beyond the rules given by God.*" (T21, F, Turkish teach.)

Some of the prospective teachers made definitions that can be classified in more than one category. One of these participants included both nature and society-centered morality in the definition of morality by saying, "It is the innate characteristic of the person that distinguishes him/her from others. They are the rules and decisions that are not written anywhere but are made by society by determining what is right and what is wrong." (T95, M, Mathematics teach.). Another prospective teacher made a definition of morality involving both God and society by saying, "Religiously and socially accepted behaviors" (T68, F, Turkish teach.).

### *Metaphoric Perceptions of Prospective Teachers on the Concept of Morality*

In this part of the study, it is aimed to reveal the metaphorical perceptions of the students regarding the concept of morality. Therefore, it is asked the students what they likened the concept of morality to and what their reasons were for this analogy. The metaphors created by the students were evaluated under sixteen categories (See Table 3).

Table 3

#### *Categories and Metaphors*

Categories (Morality as...)	Art Teach.	Turkish Teach.	Elementary Math Teach.	Total
a value shaped by guidance/ education	Ivy (1), book (2), book author (1), plant (1), sapling (1), soil (1), dough (1), ball (1), water (1)	flower (1), tree (1), book author (1), education (2), seed (2), water (1), sapling (1), soil (2), family (1), sprouted corn (1), ceramic clay (1), play dough (1)	Tree (1), flower (1), television (1)	28
a value shaped by society	Picture board (1), pencil (1), book (1), olive tree (1), pickle (1), clothes (1)	Sculptor (1), sour apple (1), clear water (3), tree (1), puzzle (1), parents (1), poem (1)	Hourglass (1), newborn baby (1), friend (1), faithful dog (1), paper (1), chipped stone (1), filter (1)	22
a value that encompasses intrinsic/personal processes	Computer processor (1), art (1), writing a book (1)	Cooking (1), fly (1), play dough (1), life (1)	Play dough (1), seed (1), money (1), human (1), mirror (2)	13
a requirement of social acceptance	Cart (1), syrup (1), clean water (1)	Gift (1), job interview (1), cat (1), tree (2)	Adhesive (1), knife (1)	10
an element that eliminates wrongs/takes one to the rights	Eraser (2), pencil (1), glasses (1)	rain (1), a burning candle (1), a steel armor (1)	Bleach (1), pencil (1), strainer (1)	10
a value that provides happiness and peace and also benefits			Chocolate (1), earth (1), tree (2), car (1), information (1), flower (3), smiley emoji (1)	10



a value understood from behaviors	Food (1), drawing paper (1)	Clothes (1), colors in nature (1)	Clothes (1), rose (1), water (1)	7
a value that requires knowledge	Piggy bank (1), a running water (1)	Sculptor (1), boxcar (1)	Human (1)	5
an element of balance	Cotton thread (1), pencil (1), shoelaces (1)		Building columns (1)	4
an element that is difficult/ impossible to change		Stone (1), ice (1), tongue (1)	Law (1)	4
a basic need		Water (1)	Mother (1), spice (1), water (1)	4
a value that shapes/guides the individual	Glasses (1)		Hijab (1), compass (1)	3
a religious element	Good deeds (1), prophet (1)			2
a value to be protected	Favorite Goods (1)		Vase (1)	2
a phenomenon that is open to interpretation/changes according to the person		The Quran (1), Hz. Abraham's effort to think while looking for the creator (1)		2
a feature that distinguishes one from other beings	Speaking skill (1)			1
Total	38	46	43	127

The categories and quotations from students' own sentences are as in follow.

#### Category 1. Morality as a Value Shaped by Guidance/Education

In this category, prospective teachers created 28 metaphors in total. This finding showed that students saw the concept of 'morality' as a value that can be shaped by education and guidance. In other words, prospective teachers thought that morality can be changed through education/guidance.

*"Morality is similar to a small ivy because it is a tiny sprout at the beginning but grows under the effect of the environment and it is not clear where it will go. If that ivy is guided by humans while it is a tiny sprout, it will be different from other ivies." (T5, F, Arts teach.)*

*"Morality is like a sapling or soil because if you take care of the sapling, it will grow into a huge tree or it will die if you don't. The better you cultivate the soil, the better the product you will get. Morality is like that. It is something that should be given in childhood because most of the behaviors are from childhood." (T60, F, Turkish teach.)*

### Category 2. Morality as a Value Shaped by Society

Under this category, prospective teachers created a total of 22 metaphors. According to prospective teachers, morality was structured and shaped by society. Prospective teachers talked about the influence of the external environment on the structuring of morality under this category.

*"Morality is like a blank picture frame and a pencil because initially, the pencil is in the hands of the external environment. A draft is drawn. If the person wishes, he/she can erase this picture and create a brand new model or add a few extra patterns and motifs to the existing one." (T3, F, Arts teach.)*

*"Morality is similar to the sculpting profession because principles in morality are determined by the sculptor, that is, by people, and take a certain form accordingly. While taking this form, a certain amount of time and accumulation is required." (T46, F, Turkish teach.)*

### Category 3. Morality as a Value That Encompasses Intrinsic/Personal Processes

Thirteen of the metaphors created by prospective teachers classified the concept of morality as a value that included intrinsic and personal processes.

*"Morality is like a fly because having good morals is not under our control. Just like a fly; it can perch on either a flower or garbage." (T51, F, Turkish teach.)*

*"Morality is like play dough because it will be whatever you want it to be. It is up to a person to have good or bad morals. He/she becomes someone as he/she wishes." (T89, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

### Category 4. Morality as a Requirement of Social Acceptance

The metaphors formed by 10 of the prospective teachers showed that they saw the concept of morality as a necessity of social acceptance.

*"Morality is like a job interview because if you have the appropriate criteria, you stay there or you have no job there." (T62, F, Turkish teach.)*

*"Morality is like the glue because it makes people respect each other and holds them together." (T109, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

### Category 5. Morality as an Element that Eliminates Wrongs/Takes One to the Rights

In the fifth category, prospective teachers saw the concept of morality as an element that eliminated wrongs and took people to the rights. A total of 10 metaphors were created under this category.

*"Morality is like an eraser because a person with morals tries to remove wrongs from their life" (T10, F, Arts teach.)*

*"Morality is like bleach because, just as bleach cleans our homes from bacteria and bad images, morality keeps us away from evil." (T101, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

#### Category 6. Morality as a Value that Provides Happiness and Peace and also Benefits

In this category, prospective teachers saw the concept of morality as a value that makes or should make a person feel happy and peaceful and that benefits the person and society. Ten metaphors were created under this category. All of the metaphors of this category were created by the students of the Elementary Math teaching department.

*"Morality is like chocolate because it makes you feel happy and peaceful when you taste it and behave accordingly." (T102, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

*"Morality is like a tree because everybody is happy when they behave with good morals. Many benefits are obtained from trees." (T114, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

#### Category 7. Morality as a Value Understood from Behaviors

There were 7 metaphors under the seventh category, where prospective teachers perceived morality as a value understood from behaviors.

*"Morality is similar to colors in nature because colors have different features. We can distinguish objects by their colors. In addition, colors define the content of nature. Morality is also the expression of human thoughts." (T76, M, Turkish teach.)*

#### Category 8. Morality as a Value that Requires Knowledge

Prospective teachers saw the concept of morality as a value that required knowledge in this category. There were a total of 5 metaphors under this category.

*"Morality is like a moneybox because as our moral accumulation increases, so do respect, love, and tolerance among people." (T7, M, Arts teach.)*

*"Morality is like a freight wagon because it is added new cargo at each station and unloaded at the last station." (T79, M, Turkish teach.)*

#### Category 9. Morality as an Element of Balance

In this category, prospective teachers saw the concept of morality as a balancing factor. Four metaphors, including cotton yarn, pencil, shoelaces, and columns, were used under this category.

*"Morality is like cotton thread because it is very sensitive. One should not pull it too much; otherwise, it breaks. It is necessary to be moderate in behaviors towards society, individuals, religion..." (T9, F, Arts teach.)*

*"Morality is like columns of a building because it makes a person live in peace just as those columns keep the building up." (T132, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

#### Category 10. Morality as an Element that is Difficult/Impossible to Change

Prospective teachers also saw the concept of morality as an element that is difficult or impossible to change. The four metaphors under this category were stone, ice, language, and law.

*"Morality is like a stone because it cannot be broken easily." (T42, F, Turkish teach.)*

*"Morality is like a law because it has definite and unchangeable provisions." (T141, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

#### Category 11. Morality as a Basic Need

In this category, it was determined that prospective teachers perceived morality as a basic need. The metaphors under the basic needs category were water, mother, and spice.

*"Morality is like water because it is one of the basic human needs. It is a must." (T77, M, Turkish teach.)*

#### Category 12. Morality as a Value that Shapes/Guides the Individual

In this category, prospective teachers described the concept of morality as a value that shaped and guided the individual. Glasses, hijab, and compass made up the 3 metaphors under this category.

*"Morality is like a compass because it guides people and helps to guide their lives within certain rules." (T139, F, Elementary Math teach.)*

#### Category 13. Morality as a Religious Element

Some prospective teachers saw the concept of morality as a religious element. They used religious metaphors, such as prophets and doing good deeds under this category.

*"Morality is like being a prophet because prophets are the greatest examples of morality." (T25, M, Arts teach.)*

#### Category 14. Morality as a Value to be Protected

Prospective teachers also saw the concept of morality as a value that needed protecting. Favorite items and vases were two metaphors under this category.

*"Morality is like a vase because it is very valuable. You handle it so carefully not to break it. If it is broken, it is difficult to bring the parts together again." (T110, F, Elementary Math teach)*

#### Category 15. Morality as a Phenomenon that is Open to Interpretation/Changes according to the Person

Prospective teachers emphasized that the concept of morality could be interpreted differently by different individuals and change from person to person. They likened the concept to the Holy Quran and the Prophet Abraham's efforts while searching for the Creator.

*"Morality is similar to the Prophet Abraham's efforts while searching for the Creator because the exact truth is scientifically present, not philosophically. Whether a move is right or wrong varies because this is a situation that develops with human thoughts. In other words, something normal for me is inconvenient for others." (T49, M, Turkish teach.)*

#### Category 16. Morality as a Feature that Distinguishes One from Other Beings

One of the prospective teachers saw morality as a feature that distinguishes humans from other beings and compared it to language faculty.

*"Morality is like the ability to speak because without morality we would be no different from an animal." (T2, F, Arts teach.)*

The table below presents information about all categories, the departments of the students creating the metaphors, and the total number of metaphors.

### **Discussion**

As a result of this research, which was carried out to discover the perceptions of prospective teachers on the concept of morality, it was determined that the majority of the prospective teachers used society-centered definitions when defining the concept. This situation was parallel to the way they saw morality in the metaphors they created. For example, they saw the concept of morality as 'a value shaped by guidance/education',

'a value shaped by society', 'a requirement of social acceptance', and 'a value that shapes/guides the individual'. These opinions of prospective teachers have frequently been encountered in the literature. For example, in their study addressing the concept of morality, its nature, its legitimacy, and its role in social life, Copp (2001) mentioned two basic theories in moral structuring. While the first of these theories was the "standard-based theory", which included the definition of the conditions, the other was the "society-based theory", which meant the justification of moral standards and codes. According to society-based theory, a moral code can only be legitimized when society chooses it as a social moral code. In other words, society has a considerable place in determining moral rules and imposing sanctions. The influence of society on individuals' adoption and practice of moral rules has also been put forward by famous psychologists, behaviorists, and sociologists, such as Piaget, Freud, and Durkheim. Although they had different approaches, these three scientists mentioned that society and social norms had an important place in the development of morality. As a matter of fact, Piaget drew attention to the place of social traditions and acceptance in the adoption of moral rules. Freud stated that society caused restrictions in the biological needs and instinctive behaviors of people, and with this view, he accepted that society had an effect on moral structures. According to Durkheim, people have a tendency to join social groups. People accept the moral rules adopted by society so that they can join these groups (Turiel, 2002). These theories, views, and thoughts once again show the importance of society in the structuring of morality, and it reveals that most of the prospective teachers were aware of this fact.

Nature-centered understanding ranked second place in prospective teachers' definition of morality. This understanding emphasizes the intrinsic processes and innate characteristics of the individual. In the metaphors they used, participants mentioned that morality was a value that included intrinsic/personal processes and distinguished human beings from other beings. Also, prospective teachers saw morality as a basic need, which can be expressed as one of the indicators of its existence in human nature. As a matter of fact, prospective teachers compared morality to indispensable elements in human life, such as water, mother, and spice. It has also been stated in various studies that morality includes internal processes. In one of these studies, Başdemir (2007) stated that emotions were dominant among the primary causes of morality and that concepts such as conscience, choosing the good, sense of responsibility, and character were effective in the structuring of morality. According to Aktan (1999), philosophers like Aristippos and Bentham thought that things that gave pleasure to the individual were good and the things that caused pain were bad and that individuals associated the situations that they enjoyed internally with moral values. In other words, internal processes have an effect on the formation and adoption of moral rules. This situation shows us that moral precepts are not only rules formed in the process of structuring society but have an important place in

the formation of values in individuals' internal processes. The fact that more than half of prospective teachers had this perception showed that many of them included internal processes in their perceptions of morality.

The descriptions of morality made by some prospective teachers and the metaphors they created showed that there were a small number of participants who saw morality as God-centered. In addition, the metaphors of good deeds and prophets created by prospective teachers were among the metaphors that were suitable for God-centered descriptions. In the formation of moral values, external values are as important as internal values (Zimmerman, 2004), and people's perceptions of religion are among the external sources of motivation. For this reason, forming God-centered moral principles is frequently encountered in societies (Bloom, 2012; Broom, 2003; Eren, 2007; McKay & Whitehouse, 2015). Broom (2003, p.1-4) defined morality as a value "pertaining to right rather than wrong" and religion as "a system of beliefs and rules which individuals revere and respond to in their lives". Religion has an important place in people's definitions of right and wrong and in applying this to their lives. As a matter of fact, the fact that religious orders and prohibitions also touch on moral issues has an important place in the adoption of moral rules (Eren, 2007; Kılıç, 1996). According to Bloom (2012), religious teachings emphasize moral rules. However, these teachings can develop feelings such as empathy and love among people, as well as causing prejudice and intolerance against those who do not have a similar mindset. One of the reasons why a small number of prospective teachers made God-centered definitions may be that religious elements are also thought to be included in the society-centered understanding in general. However, the fact that prospective teachers are aware that religion and God-centered understanding has a role in the formation of moral principles but that this understanding should be structured in a way that will not include prejudices and intolerance will be important in transferring this concept to future generations.

In addition to society-centered, nature-centered, and God-centered definitions and metaphors, prospective teachers also tried to explain morality with metaphors different from these categories. For example, some of the participants saw the concept of morality as a factor that eliminates mistakes/takes people to the right, makes people feel happy and peaceful, and provides benefits. The concept of morality has been mentioned together with the concepts of happiness, peace, benefits, and the right from past to present. In almost all periods from Ancient Greece to Islamic Philosophy, the concept of morality is considered to be one of the ultimate sources of happiness. Achieving happiness is associated with doing the right and useful things and is perceived as a pioneer of feeling peaceful (Vatandaş, 2017). In this sense, it is possible to see that these perceptions of prospective teachers have a large place in the literature. These perceptions of participants also showed that they associated morality with positive concepts in general.

Some prospective teachers saw morality as a value that required knowledge. According to these prospective teachers, it is necessary to have certain knowledge in order to be moral. In addition, morality was seen by prospective teachers as a balancing factor. By using some metaphors that evoke balance, such as cotton thread and columns, prospective teachers mentioned that for a behavior to be moral, moderation should be the basis and that one of the most important elements that allowed people to live in peace was morality. These perceptions of prospective teachers are parallel to Socrates and Plato's definitions and views on virtue. As is known, Socrates identified the concept of virtue, which he thought always expressed moral well-being, with wisdom and concluded that inferiority was born out of ignorance. Also, Plato defined virtue as knowledge and emphasized that only those who had knowledge could have virtue (Oral & Çoban, 2019). The fact that prospective teachers saw morality as a value understood from behaviors shows that it is not enough to keep the knowledge acquired about morality in mind only as thoughts, feelings, or judgments but also that these values should be turned into behaviors (Adıgüzel, 2017).

Prospective teachers also saw morality as a value that needed protection. As can be understood from the metaphors created by participants, morality requires the individual to preserve these values. As a matter of fact, every society has tried to preserve morally adopted rules with the orders and laws created from the past to the present (Naderi, 2014). Ethical codes and legal regulations are frequently used in the adoption and protection of moral behaviors (Yüksel, 2015). According to Yıldız (2018), it is very common that morality is directly involved in law or that the law refers to morality. The main reason for this situation is that the social order is established within the framework of moral rules. Prospective teachers also stated that morality was an element that needed protection, thereby revealing this reality once again.

Prospective teachers had different views on the changeability of morality. As a matter of fact, while some of them saw morality as a phenomenon that was open to interpretation and changed according to the person, according to some others, morality was an element that was difficult and sometimes impossible to change. These participants mentioned that there were some basic rules of morality that would not be changed. This situation manifests itself in the literature in debates about whether moral rules or values are universal. Mentioning the existence of universal values, Schwartz (1992) saw the aim of the existence of these values as having feelings of respect, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and nature. For example, it will be a reality known by all humanity that showing no respect for other individuals who are different or damaging nature will lead to undesirable consequences, and therefore respect for others and nature will be involved in universal values. These universal values will be reflected in moral values. It is also known that famous philosophers, such as Schopenhauer, Lamarck, Darwin, Yusuf Has Hacı, Sa'ddi-i Shirazi, and Nasreddin-i Tusi emphasized immutable



moral rules (Erdem, 2002). Reboul (1995) mentioned that apart from philosophers who defended that moral values were universal, there were some sophists who rejected the universality of values since ancient Greece and thought that every value depended on the person who accepted it. These sophists said, "values and facts depend on the views of those who affirm them and therefore are relative. What is true, beautiful, and right depends on the person who interprets it. But, it may not be so for another person" (Reboul, 1995, p. 264). It is possible to say that many philosophers, such as Socrates, Aristotle, Kant, John Locke, Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Farabi, Ibn-iSina, Ghazali paved the way for the view that moral values are open to interpretation, with a changeable understanding of morality (Erdem, 2002). In this context, it is possible to state that there are some moral values that can change from society to society as well as values that are morally universal and unchangeable, and this fact should be known by prospective teachers, as well.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the results obtained from prospective teachers' definitions of the concept of morality and the metaphors they created indicated that there were considerable differences in their perceptions about this concept. It is thought that discovering the perceptions of prospective teachers, who will carry out the teaching profession in the future, regarding this concept will be important in terms of both giving clues about their own moral structuring and how they will affect the moral development of their students.

### **Recommendations**

It is seen that the moral perception of most prospective teachers is society-based. In addition, it has been determined that there are nature-centered and God-centered morality perceptions of prospective teachers. These three perceptions (social-centered, nature-centered and God-centered) can be considered while teaching the concept of morality to prospective teachers in the curriculum of Faculty of Education courses related to moral values.

The findings shows that prospective teachers are aware that religion and God-centered understanding has a role in the formation of moral principles. This understanding should be structured in a way that will not include prejudices and intolerance. Moreover, prospective teachers saw morality as a value understood from behaviors. This shows that it is not enough to keep the knowledge acquired about morality in mind only but also these values should be turned into behaviors. For this reason, clues about how to behave in certain situations can be given through case studies by giving moral dilemma scenarios to prospective teachers.

The results shows that prospective teachers saw morality as a value that needed protection. In future studies, the opinions of prospective teachers about what can be done to protect moral rules can be taken. Information on the protection of moral rules can also

be included in the curriculum of Faculty of Education courses related to moral values. More in-depth information about the perceptions of prospective teachers on the concept of morality can be obtained with qualitative and quantitative studies to be carried out in the future. Other than these, studies can be conducted to determine the moral perceptions of teachers as well as prospective teachers and studies can be conducted to determine the effect of teachers' morality perceptions on their students.

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