

Welcome to Ethics

The fundamental question in ethics is, How should people behave? In many situations, people act (or choose not to act) to avoid negative consequences. But what about decisions in which no choice is illegal, and no choice will lead to any particular problems for the decision maker? If a person has a genuine free choice, what principles should guide his or her actions?

Objectives

- Identify common ethical principles and sources of ethical beliefs.
- Distinguish among etiquette, law, and ethics.

Key Terms and Concepts

ethical principles, p. 3
relativism, p. 3
legalism, p. 3
authority, p. 4
culture, p. 4
morality, p. 4

intuition, p. 4
reason, p. 4
standard of etiquette, p. 6
standard of law, p. 7
standard of ethics, p. 7



{HARD Choices}

Ed the Entrepreneur buys a cheap piece of California land in the middle of the Mojave Desert. It is located a mile back from a major highway, and it is exactly between the two closest gas stations, which are 85 miles distant in either direction. In the summertime, average high temperatures are often above 110 degrees.

Ed then builds a shack and paints it bright orange so that it is easily visible from the highway. He installs a phone, a large refrigerator, and the strongest air conditioner available. He adds a giant HDTV, a couch, and a PlayStation^{®3}. Usually, weeks or months pass without anyone dropping in. From time to time, however, desperate people knock on his door. When they do, Ed offers to let them have a gallon of cold water, the use of his phone, and a chance to wait

for their ride inside. His price is \$50,000.

If his customers don't have the money handy, Ed makes them sign a contract promising to pay him later, out of future wages if necessary. If they refuse to pay or sign, Ed throws them out, locks the door, and goes back to playing PlayStation^{®3} after telling his surprised visitors to "say hello to the vultures." In the end, everyone signs the contract. Ed makes a profit of about \$300,000 per year.

No one has ever walked away and met with harm in the heat. In his heart, Ed knows he would not allow someone to remain outside, even if he or she refused to sign the contract.

Ignore the fact that a court would probably invalidate the contracts. Assume the contracts would stand up in court, and answer the following question strictly from an ethical perspective.

{WHAT Do You Think?}

Is Ed's operation ethically justifiable as it is currently run?

■ What Is Ethics All About?

Ethical principles are general statements of how people should or should not act. These principles are often the reasons behind a person's actions, thoughts, and beliefs. Some ethical principles are frequently described as universal, meaning that rational people thinking logically would have to agree that everyone should follow them. A popular universal ethical principle is known as the golden rule—you should treat others as you would want to be treated. Other common ethical principles include the following:

- People should respect the rights of others.
- They should keep their promises.
- They should be honest.
- People should take responsibility for their actions.
- They should act in the best interests of others.
- They should help others in need when possible.
- People should be fair.

Do Right and Wrong Exist?

Do moral right and wrong really exist? Some people argue that they are mere social inventions created to control people's behavior. Others assert that they are little more than emotional reactions or social agreements. Such skepticism is often based on two arguments.

The first is **relativism**, the belief that because ethical values vary so widely, there can be no universal ethical principles that apply to everyone. After all, no two individuals, societies, or religions agree completely on what is right or wrong. If a set of moral guidelines did exist for all people, wouldn't it seem logical that everyone could agree on what those guidelines are? Since everyone does not agree, the argument continues that moral right and wrong cannot be anything more than personal opinion.

The problem with that criticism of ethics is that people *do* agree, at least most of the time. That may not seem to be the case, since people tend to focus more on their differences than their similarities. How many people believe that helping others or standing up for the truth in a difficult situation is wrong? Most people agree about the vast majority of life's ethical questions.

The second criticism of ethics is legalism. **Legalism** is the belief that because there are laws and policies to cover issues of right and wrong, ethics is irrelevant. It's not necessary to discuss whether people should be allowed to smoke marijuana because doing so is illegal. If an action is illegal, it must be wrong. If someone isn't sure whether an action is right or wrong, all he or she has to do is find out what the law says.

You may already understand that this problem is based on a fundamental misunderstanding about law and ethics. Yes, societies write laws to back

Ours is a world of
nuclear giants and
ethical infants.

—JEF I. RICHARDS

up and formalize their ethical values, but the laws don't take the place of those values. They only reinforce them. At times, the laws don't even do that. Sometimes societies discover that their laws are actually in conflict with their ethical values. That's what happened when Americans decided that laws allowing slavery, the second-class status of women, harmful child labor practices, and discrimination of all kinds had to be changed. "Legal" is not the same as "ethical." In fact, the ethical standard is usually higher, as you will see later in this chapter.

Sources of Ethical Beliefs

Since it seems reasonable to assume that moral right and wrong do exist in some form, where do people get their ethical principles and values? Some are the result of lessons taught at home, in school, or in religious training. Others are the result of individual life experiences. Some people acquire their principles and values from messages that society sends through television, music, magazines, and books. In other words, people's ethical beliefs come from a variety of sources. However, writer and philosopher Richard Doss has pointed out that some sources are more influential than others. When asked where they acquired their beliefs about an ethical issue, most people tend to identify one or more of the following sources.

One source of ethical beliefs is **authority**. According to this approach, an action is right or wrong because someone important said so. This way of thinking is often seen in religious ethics, but other moral authorities in history have included political leaders (for example, monarchs).

Another source of ethical beliefs is **culture**, the idea that the morality of an action depends on the beliefs of one's culture or nation. **Morality** refers to that part of human behavior that can be evaluated in terms of right and wrong. This approach says that cultures and nations, like individuals, have different values and principles based on their different experiences and histories. A belief that works well for one culture may be harmful for another.

A third source of ethical beliefs is **intuition**, which is the idea that principles of right and wrong have been built into a person's conscience and that he or she will know what is right by listening to that "little voice" within. This reliance on intuition is very common. People often seem to know instinctively whether actions are right or wrong.

A fourth source of ethical beliefs is **reason**, the idea that consistent, logical thinking should be the primary tool used in making ethical decisions. If stealing is judged to be wrong, for example, then there should be solid arguments and logical principles that back up that judgment. In other words, the arguments against stealing are stronger than the arguments for stealing. With the appeal to reason, an action is not wrong *just* because an authority says so, *just* because it is unpopular within a culture, or *just* because someone's inner voice warns against it. Instead, this approach suggests that a person look open-mindedly at the arguments on both sides of an issue and then use reason to carefully choose the stronger arguments.

Do the **RIGHT THING**



Some companies set a “tone at the top” by placing their values in a mission statement, statement of core values, or credo. These statements can offer guidance to employees as they face dilemmas. They can also serve as a useful tool for prospective investors, who may be attracted by a mission statement that reflects strong values. Companies are well served by stating guiding principles up front, and Johnson & Johnson certainly does this.

The Johnson & Johnson Credo

We believe our first responsibility is to the doctors, nurses and patients, to mothers and fathers and all others who use our products and services. In meeting their needs everything we do must be of high quality. We must constantly strive to reduce our costs in order to maintain reasonable prices. Customers’ orders must be serviced promptly and accurately. Our suppliers and distributors must have an opportunity to make a fair profit.

We are responsible to our employees, the men and women who work with us throughout the world. Everyone must be considered as an individual. We must respect their dignity and recognize their merit. They must have a sense of security in their jobs. Compensation must be fair and adequate, and working conditions clean, orderly and safe. We must be mindful of ways to help our employees fulfill their family responsibilities. Employees must feel free to make suggestions and complaints. There must be equal opportunity for employment, development and advancement for those qualified. We must provide competent management, and their actions must be just and ethical.

We are responsible to the communities in which we live and work and to the world community as well. We must be good citizens—support good works and charities and bear our fair share of taxes. We must encourage civic improvements and better health and education. We must maintain in good order the property we are privileged to use, protecting the environment and natural resources.

Our final responsibility is to our stockholders. Business must make a sound profit. We must experiment with new ideas. Research must be carried on, innovative programs developed and mistakes paid for. New equipment must be purchased, new facilities provided and new products launched. Reserves must be created to provide for adverse times. When we operate according to these principles, the stockholders should realize a fair return.

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Are companies better off adopting a statement like Johnson & Johnson’s, or do you imagine most people would pay no attention?

CHECKPOINT 1-1

1. Look back at the seven ethical principles listed at the beginning of this section. Which three do you think are most important?

2. Return to the opening passage on Ed the Entrepreneur and reexamine his operation. Support your critique of it with the three ethical principles you listed in your answer to the last question.

3. Everyone would presumably be in favor of a convenience store at Ed's location that charged \$5 for water and let customers use a phone and rest inside for free. Let's change the price points for Ed's services. Circle the amount that is the *most* you think Ed can ethically charge.

\$50 \$500 \$5,000 \$50,000 \$500,000 \$5,000,000

4. Are your opinions about Ed's business shaped most by authority, culture, intuition, reason, or some other source? What makes you say so?

Standards of Behavior

Honor is better than honors.

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A standard, or norm, is an accepted level of behavior to which people are expected to conform. The level may be set low (a minimum standard), in the middle (an average standard), or very high (a standard of excellence). Whatever the level, all standards involve some kind of expectation. To say that stealing is wrong does not mean that it is wrong for just one person or even for a few people. If stealing is forbidden by a social standard, then the assumption is that stealing is wrong for everyone. Certainly, there are ethical issues that are individual and personal, too, but ethics often deals with principles that apply to everyone. People's actions can be evaluated according to many standards, but three of the most common standards are those of etiquette, law, and ethics.

Etiquette

The **standard of etiquette** refers to expectations concerning manners or social graces. Societies and cultures have their own rules of etiquette that their members are expected to meet. Most people understand their social

etiquette standards and try to live up to them. Thus, a person knows to knock before entering someone's office and tries to remember to say "please" and "thank you." It is assumed that everyone understands these rules, even though many of them are not written down. People who violate the standards of etiquette run the risk of being embarrassed or of having others look down on them. Some large corporations actually send their employees to etiquette classes—proper manners can be that important to the company's image.

In a crowded, busy, and stressed society, etiquette also reduces social friction and makes it easier for people to live together as a community. There is an important difference, however, between the standards of etiquette and ethics. That difference is *seriousness*. The issues covered by the standard of etiquette are not as serious as those that pertain to ethics. People rarely die due to poor manners, but the ethical standard applies to many life-and-death issues such as abortion, euthanasia, war, and capital punishment. Even ethical issues that are not associated with death, such as censorship, honesty in government, and sexual ethics, still have serious implications.

Law

The **standard of law** has to do with rules of behavior imposed on people by governments. Like ethics, this legal standard can be serious, too. After all, many laws deal with life-and-death issues, including rules forbidding murder, drunken driving, drug use, and child abuse. Yet while legal and ethical standards are serious, there is an important difference—people *must* follow legal standards, or they will face specific negative consequences.

Ethics

The primary factor in determining the validity of a law is whether the creator of the law had the legitimate authority. With the ethical standard, however, authority is not what matters. The **standard of ethics** refers to social expectations of people's moral behavior. The ethical principles and rules making up this standard are made valid by *the reasons and arguments supporting them*. If you say, "The death penalty is morally wrong," what you're really saying is that the reasons and arguments supporting that statement make more logical sense than the reasons and arguments on the other side of the debate. For ethical statements to be valid, they must make logical sense.

Because of that crucial difference, legal standards and moral standards do not always agree. Some laws may be morally wrong. Many people in history have gone to prison—and even to their deaths—rather than violate their ethical beliefs.

Another difference between legal and ethical standards is in when and how they change. Legal standards (based on authority) may change as authorities change. Ethical standards (based on reason) change only when new information causes people's thinking about the standards to change.

CHECKPOINT 1-2

1. How is the standard of ethics different from the standard of etiquette?
2. What is the difference between the standard of ethics and the standard of law?
3. Provide an example of a time when you had to make a difficult ethical decision. How did the concept of the ethical standard apply to your situation?

This chapter has provided a framework for thinking through ethical dilemmas. The following scenarios are your chance to apply the ideas to a new situation. Answer the questions that follow each scenario, and be prepared to respectfully argue for your point of view in class. The two most valuable things about an ethics course are these:

- The chance to learn new ways of thinking through problems
- The exchange of ideas with other people—learning from and influencing your classmates

Main Issue and Options

Issue: The question presented in these scenarios is simple: When, if ever, is lying *good*?

Options: In both scenarios, the actors may be truthful or deceptive.

Intentional Deception: When (If Ever) Is It Ethically Justified?

Background

We are taught from an early age that we must tell the truth to our parents, teachers, and others. Usually, honesty is clearly the best policy. The consequences of lying can be severe: children are grounded, students are suspended, employees are fired, and witnesses are convicted of perjury. Sometimes the problems are more subtle but still significant: a loss of trust or a loss of opportunities.

In some specific circumstances, however, intentional deception is tolerated and even admired. In sports, for example, athletes spend countless hours perfecting techniques designed to trick opponents. If Peyton Manning looks one way and throws the other, no one is upset even though his intention is to deceive the defensive backs.

The first scenario focuses on D-Day, the turning point of World War II. Until the 1944 invasion of Normandy by the Allies, the Nazis had spent the last several years imposing their will on much of Europe. Eleven months after D-Day, the Nazis surrendered, and the war in Europe was effectively over.

The invasion's success was due largely to the fact that the Nazis were fooled about where it would take place. Adolf Hitler expected a massive invasion at the Pas-de-Calais, and he kept 19 of his Panzer divisions there. An enormous number of tanks were far from Normandy and were useless to the Nazis. Hitler didn't simply blunder on his own, however. He was led to believe that the invasion would be at the Pas-de-Calais by an elaborate deception called Operation Fortitude.

Dover, England: February 1944

The corporal opened the tent's flap. "The new man is here, Major."

Major Cole looked up from a stack of papers. "Excellent. Send him in, Corporal."

"Yes, sir." The corporal was soon replaced by an officer, who offered Cole a crisp salute. "Lieutenant Thatcher, 55th Infantry, Lancashire, reporting, sir."

"At ease, Lieutenant," Cole said, returning the salute. "Have a seat," he added.

"Thank you, sir."

Cole smiled. "I imagine you are full of questions."

"Yes, sir. I, ah, was not briefed on the, ah . . ."

"Nature of this operation?" Cole's grin widened.

"Correct. Sir. I was told only to bring my men here to rendezvous with the 58th Infantry and await further instructions."

Cole laughed. "Hmm, yes (*snort*)—the 58th."

"Sir?"

Cole got his chuckling under control, but a gleam remained in his eye. "There's no such thing as the 58th, Lieutenant," he said.

"I, ah . . . I'm not surprised, sir. After what I've seen around the camp so far."

"Yes. I apologize for laughing—not very sporting of me. Everyone who comes here reacts the same way in the beginning. Shall I fill you in on Operation Fortitude?"

"Yes, sir. Please."

"You've probably seen the tanks."

"Yes, sir. Are they . . . inflatable? Like . . . giant toys?"

"Indeed they are. We have about 500 blown up now, but some of your boys will be helping us inflate another 10,000 over the next few months."

"Ten thousand rubber tanks?"

"Just so. You'll also be building thousands of artillery pieces from plywood."

"Plywood?"

"Yes. Life-sized and painted to look like the real thing. The people we need most, though, are your communication specialists. We're going to set up several radio tents around the perimeter of this base, and we're going to broadcast false orders around the clock. We'll encrypt them, but we'll be using an easy-to-break code. So, Lieutenant . . . can you guess what we're up to here?"

"We're . . ." Lieutenant Thatcher trailed off. Then his eyes sharpened and he said tentatively, "We're, ah, we're

creating a fake invasion force . . . to . . . mask a real invasion force somewhere else?"

"Excellent, Lieutenant! Spot on!" Lieutenant Thatcher smiled at the praise. Major Cole continued. "Our orders are to make it look as if 150,000 men are massing for an invasion. When German spy planes fly high overhead, we want them to see and report back on a growing number of barracks, tanks, artillery, landing vessels, and the like. And when they listen to the airwaves, we want them to get the amount of radio traffic you'd expect with a force of that size."

"Outstanding."

"Indeed. And word is that next month General Patton will be joining us on a regular basis for photo ops. He's been deemed the most widely recognized Allied commander. We'll be staging a lot of photos in front of a few of the real tanks and so forth that we'll have scattered around so the newspapers can run stories like, 'General Patton Inspects Troops at Dover,' that kind of thing. Meanwhile, General Eisenhower will be gearing up for the real thing 'somewhere else,' as you say."

"That's brilliant."

"Just so. While the Nazis are cooling their heels and waiting for us at the Pas-de-Calais, we'll land somewhere else. And once we have secure supply lines open, we can beat Adolf back to Berlin and bloody well go home. Be nice to get back to my wife."

"Yes, sir."

"And to get the football league going again. I bloody miss football. I'd give a week's pay to listen to an Arsenal match on the wireless. And a month's pay to see a game at Highbury. Who are you for, Lieutenant?"

"Blackburn, sir."

"Ah, the Rovers. Well, one day soon if we all do our jobs, then, what?"

"Yes, sir. One day soon."

What Do You Think?

- How, specifically, can Operation Fortitude be justified as a "good lie"? Use ideas from the chapter to support your answer.
 - To protect life or the physical safety of people
 - To protect a job
 - To protect another person's feelings
 - To gain an advantage
 - To get out of trouble
 - When others expect it and may do the same (war, poker, football)
- Speaking generally now, when is making a misrepresentation acceptable? (Check all that apply.)

Greentown, Illinois: Present Day

Harold finished his explanation to his brother. "There's just no other way to do it," he said.

"You can't be serious," replied Harold's brother Tom. "You're just going to walk in there."

"Yes."

"And hand off a file of fake documents? And walk out with a \$100,000 loan you can't get without lying?"

"I am."

"You're nuts."

"As I said, it's the only way."

"Harold," Tom paused and rubbed his eyes. "Man, you've done some dumb things in your life, but this is just . . . what if you get caught?"

"I won't get caught. I'm only exaggerating the numbers a little, and I've never fudged a single thing in 15 years of banking with them. They won't look too closely."

"You're nuts."

"I won't miss payroll, Tom. I have 20 employees with families to support who are counting on me to make it work. I'm going to make it work."

"Harold . . ."

"It's not as if the bank is going to lose its money. Orders are already picking up, and they'll return to normal, just as they did in the last two recessions. I'll pay the bank every penny back—with interest—this time next year. Who gets hurt?"

"You get hurt if you're wrong about anything you just told me."

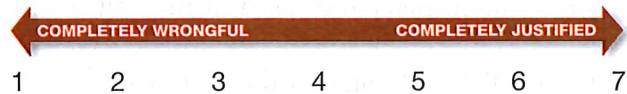
"I'm a big boy, Tom. It might go badly, but I don't think so. Besides, I'm willing to chance it."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"I know you do. But you've always worked for somebody else, Tom. You don't know what it's like to be on the other side, to have good people depending on you. It'll be fine. You'll see."

What Do You Think?

3. Rate Harold's plan to lie to his bank to secure the \$100,000 loan to pay his employees.



4. Assume a year passes and business picks up for Harold's company. He repays the loan. No one is laid off or misses a paycheck, and Harold's lie is never caught. Is your rating the same with the benefit of

hindsight? Do the ends at least partially justify the means?



5. Describe the reasons for your ratings in Questions 3 and 4. Use ideas from the chapter to support your response.

Summary

Ethical principles are general guidelines for how people should live. They often lie behind a person's actions, thoughts, and beliefs. Some of these principles are widely shared.

Two arguments critical of the existence of moral right and wrong are relativism and legalism. Both are controversial. Legalism is the idea that laws dictate what is right and wrong, and relativism argues against the existence of universal principles.

While people's ethical beliefs come from a variety of sources, they tend to be based on one or more of the following sources: authority, culture, intuition, and reason. The standard of law is based on authority. In contrast, the standard of ethics is based on reason and logical thinking.

Key Terms and Concepts

Match each definition with a key term or concept.

- a. authority
- b. culture
- c. ethical principles
- d. intuition
- e. legalism
- f. morality
- g. reason
- h. relativism
- i. standard of ethics
- j. standard of etiquette
- k. standard of law

- _____ 1. A source of ethical beliefs holding that principles of right and wrong have been built into a person's conscience
- _____ 2. A source of ethical beliefs holding that an action is right or wrong because someone important said so
- _____ 3. The belief that because there are laws and policies to cover issues of right and wrong, ethics is irrelevant
- _____ 4. The belief that because ethical values vary widely, there can be no universal ethical principles that apply to everyone
- _____ 5. A source of ethical beliefs holding that consistent, logical thinking should be the primary tool used in making ethical decisions
- _____ 6. A source of ethical beliefs holding that the morality of an action depends on the beliefs of one's culture or nation
- _____ 7. Refers to rules of behavior imposed on people by governments
- _____ 8. Refers to social expectations concerning manners or social graces
- _____ 9. Refers to social expectations of people's moral behavior
- _____ 10. Ideas that act as guides for behaving ethically
- _____ 11. The part of human conduct that can be evaluated in terms of right and wrong

Review

1. Name three common ethical principles.
2. True or false: Legalism is the idea that because ethical concepts vary so widely, there can be no universal ethical principles that apply to everyone.
3. Describe the four sources of ethical principles discussed in the chapter in your own words.
4. If a behavior is evaluated as right or wrong by asking “According to whom?” the standard of _____ is being applied.
 - a. etiquette
 - b. law
 - c. ethics

Critical Thinking

5. Sometimes ethical principles conflict. For example, keeping an old promise might not be the best way to be fair, or being honest might not be the best way to help others. Consider the ethical principles described at the start of this chapter. When you find yourself in situations in which satisfying some principles will mean violating others, how should you proceed?

Applications

6. Ziba works part-time helping to take care of an elderly neighbor, Miss Chura, who suffers from early-stage Alzheimer’s disease. She buys Miss Chura’s groceries, drives her to appointments, and sometimes cooks and cleans. Ziba knows that Miss Chura has a drawer full of cash in her dresser. She is considering borrowing \$100 from the drawer without asking permission. She intends to repay the \$100 as soon as she receives her next paycheck.
 - a. How is the standard of law relevant to Ziba’s plan?

- b. How does the standard of ethics apply?
- c. List three ethical principles Ziba might consider when she is reasoning about what she should do.
7. Terri is applying for a job. The employment application asks for her college grade point average. Terri's overall GPA was 2.91, but in her major, her GPA was 3.35. She decides to enter the major GPA, and while she is at it, she rounds it up to 3.4.
- a. How is the standard of law relevant to Terri's plan?
- b. How does the standard of ethics apply?
- c. List three ethical principles Terri might consider when she is reasoning about what she should do.

Digging Deeper

8. Seven universal ethical principles are listed early in this chapter. Go online and enter "universal ethical principles" in a search engine. Find at least two ideas that are not outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Do you find either of your new ideas more useful or compelling than the seven included here? Why or why not?

The Bottom Line

9. The one ethical principle that I find most important is . . .
10. The one source of ethical principles that influences me most is . . .