

Morality part 4

Morality, Ethicality, and Appropriateness

Not all issues fit into the realm of morality. As you may have noticed from some of the prior examples, morality is rather sharply defined. Yet, many situations cannot be addressed by the moral law. These cases are addressed by other concepts seem feel like they are moral but are addressed at lesser degrees, i.e. ethicality and appropriateness. Understanding the character of these three concepts adds color to the question, how ought I to act?

Morality

Morality is defined by the moral law. Adherence to the moral law indicates a moral action whereas a breach of the moral law indicates an immoral action. If the action is not associated with the moral law, then the action does not fit within the realm of morality. Not all people agree that a moral law exists. For those who claim there is no moral law, no action can be considered immoral. Actions are considered unethical if they do not fit the norms by that culture, time, and place. Morality must have a universal law in order for us to address immoral or moral actions.

The examples of immoral and moral actions are easy; they are a breach of the moral law. Therefore stealing from a bank, killing an innocent person, committing adultery or cheating on a spouse, cheating on an exam, lying to a friend, and bearing false witness at a trial. All of these examples have clear evidence to a standard moral law. Each law that was broken has either a religious tradition that backs it or can conform to reason.

Ethicality

Many actions we perform do not breach the moral law but are still considered wrong. The realm of ethicality deals with actions which do not breach the moral law but are still considered wrong due to the circumstances. Normally unethical actions are wrong because of the conditions around them such as social customs or legal contracts.

Here are some examples:

At my place of employment we have a dress code written in the manual for employees. One day I show up to work not dressed as I ought to for my employment. Since I am bound by the code of conduct written in the employee manual, this action is unethical.

A teacher who strikes a kid or makes an inappropriate comment in a school is considered to have made an ethical violation. Her actions do not violate the moral law but instead violate her position leading to an unethical action.

Appropriateness

The lowest rung of wrong actions is appropriateness. This rung deals with actions that have not breached the moral law, are not bound by a code of ethics, but are still wrong for that place, time, or situation. Although they have the lowest weight for wrong action, inappropriate actions still

have consequences and weight as wrong actions. Most of the situations that deal with inappropriateness are situations of customs or behaviors.

Here are some examples:

I work as a customer service agent at a store. If I am slightly rude to a customer or act aloof, I am not breaching the code of conduct for the store but still not acting as the store intends for my job.

At a birthday party it is customary to give the full attention of the party to the person who is celebrating his/her birthday. To hog the attention or draw it away from the person's birthday is inappropriate.

In Japan it is inappropriate to blow your nose in public. This custom was meant to prevent the spread of germs.

More examples of these three concepts:

I am the CEO of a company. The company's reputation hinges on my actions. If I were to steal money from the company or engage in unlawful stock transactions, this action would breach the moral law. If my company had a code of conduct that prevented insider trading and insider deals and I did some of these, then this would be an ethical violation. If I showed up to a meeting in a swimsuit, this would be considered inappropriate.

I work as a cashier at a grocery store. I have been helping myself to a \$20 bill everyday at work even though no one seems to notice. This action is stealing and therefore immoral. The store has a code of ethics for employees. I am expected to greet each customer and to take care with their items. I am having a bad day and became flippant to customer and careless with their items. This is an ethical breach since it violates the code of ethics for the company. If I chose not to smile at customers and simply focus on my job, these actions are inappropriate since the company cares about customer service and my actions are not in violation of the code of conduct.