

What Are Ethics Anyway?

Editor's Pick. Written by Justin Nafziger.

I have observed that people confuse various adjacent terms and ideas as equivalent.

Belief and conviction for example, while they may overlap are not one and the same. Another oft misconstrued association is mixing morality, integrity and ethics. To be sure, they do interact heavily, but one and the same they are not (my personal definitions follow, but while the terms are subjective the concepts I think, are solid. "A rose by any other name...")

Morality is a broad strokes sense of things. "Do unto others as you would have done unto you" or "an ye harm none, do what ye will."

Ethics are the weights and measures of morality faced with the tribulations of practicality. What do you do when everyone, or no one, in a situation is in the right/wrong? For example, when two parties are equally ethical but their well-being is in opposition?

Integrity, simply put, is the resilience of will to consistently act upon the resolutions of ones own morality and ethics.

The "devil" is in the dogma (to retool a phrase). Dogmatic systems of belief fail, a key example of that is they choose to prescribe all three of these aspects forging them into one rigid code of conduct, which in it's rigidity contradicts itself when applied to reality rather than the abstract. They prescribe moral considerations within largely binary systems and seek to use punitive means combined with intimidation and occasional emotional bribery to constrain adherence. (For those keeping score, organized religions are far from the only dogmatic institutions present in contemporary society and the secular bodies aren't exempt from this analysis either).

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