

What is Wrong?



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"One Voluntarist's Perspective" is an original column appearing most Mondays at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OVP-only RSS feed available [here](#).

"Wrong" is one of these terms that have several meanings. A dictionary lookup tells me that wrong, as an adjective, means, "1) not correct or true, 2) unjust, dishonest, or immoral." Here's a little commentary on that, and then a list of the things I consider wrong.

Not Correct or True

Wrong as in "not correct or true" either means that what someone says or thinks is a fact is not (it does not accurately describe things as they really are; it is false), or that certain means the utilization of which will not help a person achieve their desired ends. Wrong in the latter sense can be defined as "foolish." One does wrong when they utilize the wrong means to achieve their desired ends.

Unjust

Wrong as in "unjust" means that what a person is doing is "not based on or behaving according to what is morally right or fair." "Morally right" means something objective, which I'll cover under "immoral", but the meaning of "fair" is mostly relative and sometimes subjective. It's relative in the sense that "rules and standards" vary from association to association. One group of people may have a standard between them, say to not use swear words, while another does not. It would be "unfair", and so "unjust", to expect the former group to maintain association with a person who insists on using swear words. Such a standard may even be an acknowledged and agreed upon rule of association. If the rule is broken, the penalty applied could not be considered "unjust" if they are in accordance with the standards and rules of the association.

"Fair" can be subjective in the sense that different people may have a different understanding of the standards and rules of the same association. Following our example of swearing, what constitutes swearing may not be clearly defined, and so after a person says "shit", and is subsequently penalized, some may consider the penalty just, and others consider it unjust. One does wrong when they behave unjustly toward others, either initially

or in retaliation.

Dishonest

Wrong as in “dishonest” has a subjective qualification, I think. Dishonesty is “deceitfulness shown in someone’s character or behavior.” If someone is being dishonest in order to acquire something that isn’t theirs, then I consider that wrong. However, if someone is being dishonest in order to acquire something that is theirs, something that was stolen from them, then I don’t consider that wrong. One is being dishonest in either case, but I think one’s dishonesty in the latter is only wrong if it is foolish as a strategy for reacquiring what was stolen from them. One does wrong when they are using dishonesty to benefit at the expense of others.

Immoral

Wrong as in “immoral” means that one’s behavior is “improper for a person in society,” improper in the sense that society (community and fraternity), whether between two people or millions, can’t be maintained. Behavior that damages society is immoral, and we can figure out using reason and experience what sorts of behaviors are properly deemed immoral. But, whether or not someone values society – desire to create it or maintain it – is a subjective determination. It’s reasonable enough to make assumptions about the people we encounter on whether they value society. If they are participating in society, unless they’re being dishonest, they likely value it. In which case, it would not be unjust to call their improper behavior, immoral. One does wrong when they are behaving immorally.

What I Consider Wrong

And so there it is, all of that which makes for something to be wrong. Having clearly, I hope, defined what wrong means, here’s a list of some of the practices and behaviors that I consider wrong:

- Consuming anything harmful to your body. *Foolish*, possibly *Immoral*
- Violent self-talk and disrespectful inner dialogue. *Foolish*, possibly *Immoral*
- Hiding, or ignoring (out of fear), from contrary beliefs and ideas. *Foolish*
- Not practicing both open-mindedness and skepticism. *Foolish*
- Not practicing humility toward intellectual argumentation. *Foolish*
- Using violent communication with others, child or adult. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Immoral*
- Disrespecting your children. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Dishonest*, *Immoral*
- Shaming your children. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Dishonest*, *Immoral*
- Spanking, or otherwise punishing your children. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Immoral*
- Forcing your children to associate with others. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Immoral*
- Forcing your children to learn things against their will. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Immoral*
- Forcing your children to eat things against their will. *Foolish*, *Unjust*, *Immoral*

- Lying to your children about things like Santa Claus. *Foolish, Unjust, Immoral*
- Telling your children that your belief or opinion is factually true. *Foolish, Unjust, Immoral*
- Lying to others in order to benefit at their expense. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Stealing from others, child or adult, eg. theft, robbery, taxation. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Battering others, child or adult. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Raping others, child or adult. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Enslaving others, child or adult, eg. chattel slavery, military conscription. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Blackmailing others, child or adult. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Murdering others, child or adult. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Aborting your unwanted pregnancy. *Foolish, Unjust, Immoral*
- Forcibly preventing someone from aborting their unwanted pregnancy. *Foolish, Unjust, Immoral*
- Forcibly preventing a clear-minded adult from intentionally hurting or killing themselves. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Forcibly preventing an adult from using drugs and alcohol, eg. the War on Drugs. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Forcibly interfering in the mutual trade of others, eg. economic and monetary regulations. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Forcibly preventing non-contracting others from making and dealing their own copies of the creative works or inventions of others. *Foolish, Immoral*
- Forcibly monopolizing the provision of law and order, ie. statism. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Forcing others to bear the costs of your actions and/or your mistakes, eg. taxation, war, corporate bailouts, government welfare. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*
- Participating in statist electoral processes. *Foolish, possibly Unjust, possibly Immoral*
- Using either physical or social coercion against others, child or adult. *Foolish, Unjust, Dishonest, Immoral*

Final Thoughts

All of these things (and more) I consider wrong for one or several reasons. All of them are at least foolish, and most are unjust and immoral. As such, these are things that I consider wrong in the world and hope through my efforts – raising my children, writing, podcasting, discussion with others – to change. My primary focus, of course, is in keeping myself from doing wrong. Some of it's easy, as I have no desire to rape or murder anyone, but some of it's more difficult, like not disrespecting or lying to my children, or not engaging in violent self-talk. Everyday brings me new opportunities to practice doing right by myself and others. I'm grateful for that, and grateful for others who have helped me understand right

from wrong along the way.

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