

Ethical Consistency, Does it Really Matter?

We see or hear it all the time. Whether we're on social media or having a conversation with a friend or family member, you may hear or read something like this, your redneck coworker may say, "We just need to turn the middle east into a sheet of glass!" Meanwhile, your progressive, career college student cousin may say something like, "We need someone like Bernie in the white house so we can finally get universal health care!"

More often than not these examples are due to the lack of something I consider invaluable as a Voluntarist... *ethical consistently*.

To the best of my understanding, the lack of ethical consistency in today's culture has led, and continues to lead people toward further social, economic, and foreign policy disasters. For this reason, I wanted to go over the concept of ethical consistency as I see it, the definition of the term, and some examples of how it's applied in real world scenarios.

Consistency—the absence of contradictions—has sometimes been called the hallmark of ethics. Ethics is supposed to provide us with a guide for moral living, and to do so it must be rational, and to be rational it must be free of contradictions. If a person said, "Open the window but don't open the window," we would be at a loss as to what to do; the command is contradictory and thus irrational. In the same way, if our ethical principles and practices lack consistency, we, as rational people, will find ourselves at a loss as to what we ought to do and divided about how we ought to live. Ethics require consistency in the sense that our moral standards, actions, and values should not be contradictory. Examining our lives to uncover inconsistencies and then modifying our moral standards and behaviors so that they are consistent is an important part of moral development.

-Consistency and Ethics, from the center of applied ethics at Santa Clara University.

I've observed that, especially in the realm of political opinion, being ethically consistent seems to be a real challenge. And as I wrote earlier, this leads to a lot of confusion, controversy, and conflict.

In order to further explain, I've provided five scenarios along with an explanation of how ethical consistency applies.

Scenario #1

-Murder is considered illegal or unethical.

-Accidentally killing civilians with drone strikes is collateral damage and therefore justified.

In this example, it should be fairly obvious that killing is inherently unethical, whether intentionally or by accident, however some people believe there is an exception to this universally accepted rule when it comes to war...or so they've convinced themselves. In a way, I can't blame them. They've spent a lifetime inundated with nationalism, from reciting the pledge of allegiance in public school every morning to social media and network news filling them with pride for country and military worship.

And that's the problem. The programming has been incredibly successful, so successful some people have lost their ability to discern between murder and accidentally killing innocent people.

Scenario #2

-Robbing someone of the cash in their wallet is considered illegal or unethical.

-Taking money from someone through the act of taxation is justified.

Think back to when were a child, do you remember when one of your siblings or playmates took your favorite toy from you? I'm not sure I can remember that far back either, but if you have children, nieces or nephews, you've witnessed this drama firsthand.

The recognition of personal property is innate in human beings, we know what is ours.

As we mature, we begin to understand the benefits of sharing, whether it's the desire to connect with others or more selfish reasons. For example, some may share their candy with classmates in order to be seen as likeable and some may do so in order to garner social status and the benefits involved with being popular.

Although we've come to find sharing as a virtuous thing to do, we choose so voluntarily. We choose to donate money, our time, or make charitable donations of items because we receive some type of psychological reward.

In the case of the mugger stealing the cash in your wallet, we know this is inherently unethical. In the case of taking someone's money via taxes, we know that this act is also inherently unethical. Why? Because, unlike charitable donations, the money is being taken from you. Some may say that they're happy to pay taxes and that's great! You make your charitable donations to the state and I'll spend my money supporting alternatives to such coercive systems.

Scenario #3

-A group of neighbors come to your house and forcefully abducted you for smoking a plant in your living room is considered illegal or unethical.

-The police come to your house and forcefully abducting you for smoking a plant in your living room is justified.

Do you own yourself? Is your body, your self considered personal property? Are you responsible for actions taken? Do you have a sense of personal agency?

I would answer 'yes' to each of those questions, therefore my body and my actions are mine. If I were to eat a fatty steak and wash it down with a double Old Fashioned, does that affect anyone else? Of course not, but if I were to get in my car intoxicated and hit someone else, that would be violating their person, their self.

Whether it's eating a steak while drinking bourbon, smoking weed, or doing meth, it's my body. As long as I do so without affecting anyone, it's my decision alone.

The act of being abducted by your neighbors simply because they made a "No Weed" rule between them is inherently immoral. The same thing applies to being abducted by the police. In addition to your neighbors, strangers helped make the rules restricting the rights of others to do what they choose with their bodies. The police enforce these rules, although they call them laws instead. Whether rule or law, a person's self ownership precedes both.

Scenario #4

-A group of people mandating your children attend church is considered unethical.

-The state mandating your children attend school is justified.

My explanation of scenario number three applies here as well. However, in this case it's not your person, it's your child's person.

What separates adults from children is the adults sense of personal agency and responsibility. Since children lack this understanding, their parents, other immediate family members, or other types of surrogate caregivers have the responsibility of taking care of them.

Now this part is going to sound insensitive and simplistic, but hear me out. Your child is your possession. Until they also have a sense of personal agency and responsibility, you are as responsible for them as you are for yourself. Therefore, you have the final say when it comes to their person.

By mandate or law, forcing a child to attend anything without the consent of the parent is inherently unethical.