

MAKING MORAL SENSE

Several months ago, the ad agency J. Walter Thompson sent me an advance copy of a Prentice Hall publication that was released later this spring. *The Day America Told the Truth* reported on in-depth interviews about values with 5000 people across the United States.

- 64 percent (nearly two thirds) agreed with the following statement: “ I will lie When it suits me—as long as it doesn’t cause any real damage.”
- 74 percent agreed that “ I will *steal* from those who won’t really miss it.”
- More to the point , an overwhelming majority (93 percent) said that *they*-and
- Nobody else—determine what is moral and what’s not in their lives.
 - not the church or synagogue
 - not the government not its laws or police
 - not family
 - just me.

Really? Is the determination of right and wrong entirely subjective?

Of course not. Even if 100 percent of the people believe in moral subjectivity and Relativism, there is no strength in *those* numbers.

Consider:

- Acts of senseless violence are wrong—period. Saddam Hussein is not entitled to Another opinion about that. Neither was Ted Bundy or Charlie Manson,
- Taking another’s property by deceit or by force is wrong
- The physical and sexual abuse of children, torture of prisoners, the execution Of innocents—these acts all are wrong.

And they aren’t wrong because we say they are wrong. We say they are wrong because they Are. Man is *not* the measure of all things/ Some ideas, some moral principles, *take our measure*,and not the other way around.

Moral principles are similar to the laws of logic: Nobody *invented* either, rather, humans discover— periodically must rediscover— their validity. The laws of logic merely describe the boundary conditions for making sense: violate the law of self-contradiction and your argument ceases to make sense. Violate moral principles and your life begins not to make sense.

Lie when it suits you? Steal from those who won't really miss it?

Sure, you can *break* the rules, but you don't really get to *make* the rules. They are the boundary conditions for a life that makes sense, a life that is worth living.

For Ethics at Work, this is Gary Edwards.