

Transcript for Ethics Video

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Say what?

Dear robot ethicist,

Mr. Anderson pays me six dollars an hour to mow his lawn. It usually takes me two hours, but last week I got it done 30 minutes faster. He already paid me in advance. Is it ethical for me to keep the money?

From, Amber

You're the paper's new ethics columnist? [Robot makes sound] Okay...let's see your response.

Dear Amber,

Ethical, shmethical, just live in the moment!

Best, Moby

Do you even know what ethics is?

What is Ethics

[Sigh] All right, how should I begin? If you've ever watched a nature video you may have noticed that animals behave a little selfishly. They act on their urges without much regard for other creatures. People are a little different. We care about how our actions will affect others, but we are part of the animal kingdom, so we still struggle with selfish urges. We want stuff for ourselves whether it's food and money or more complex things like love and popularity.

Can you imagine what would happen if everyone acted on these desires? Yep, total breakdown in society. Fortunately, we've evolved a sense of morality, or right and wrong. This sense guides us to believe in certain values, lying is wrong, kindness is good, that sort of thing. Values in turn help us make ethical decisions, choices that we feel good about. So, you can think of Ethics as a set of guidelines for behaving morally. [Robot makes sound]

Well, let's take this first letter of yours. If you take twelve dollars for mowing the lawn in 90 minutes your wage will be eight dollars an hour. That's deceptive because you agreed to work for six dollars an hour and lying is morally wrong. [Robot makes sound] Why? Well, our inner moral sense tells us it is. That's why so many ethical systems forbid it. Most religions and philosophies frown on dishonesty, and our legal codes prohibit certain kinds of lying too. It's a crime to make false statements to the police or in a court of law, and if you're in business it's illegal to make false claims to the public.

False Claims

It might help Amber to imagine herself in Mr. Anderson's place. No one likes being lied to. Mr. Anderson might not trust her to mow his lawn again if he finds out. Amber should admit that it only took 90 minutes to mow the lawn and offer to give three dollars back. She might lose a couple bucks but her reputation is more important than money. Anyway that was an easy one. What else have you got? [Robot makes sound]

Cheating

Dear Robot Ethicist,

Yesterday, I caught my friend Steve cheating off my test. He's never done it before and he begged me to keep it secret. If his parents find out he'll be grounded for weeks. What should I do?

From, Anthony

Hmm, this one's a bit trickier. We know that cheating is wrong and every school has rules against it. On the other hand, friendship carries its own ethical obligations. Friends should be loyal and try to help each other out. By telling your teacher you'd be betraying Steve. [Robot makes sound] Yep, it looks like we've got an ethical dilemma. A situation with no clear-cut right answer. It may seem silly but making a list of arguments for each action can be super helpful. The school code prohibits cheating and you can get in trouble if your teacher finds out, but your friend will fail the test and get grounded if you say something. Still, friendship cuts both ways. It wasn't fair for Steve to put you in this position. Hmm, there are definitely more reasons to speak up than stay quiet. [Robot makes sound] Unfortunately, there is no formula for acting ethically you have to judge by the individual situation. Ask yourself what solution is fairest to all the people involved. Maybe you and Steve could go to your teacher together and tell her about the situation. Steve could ask for a makeup test or promise to do extra credit to keep his grades up. That way he won't get away with cheating and you won't betray his trust.

Conclusion

[Robot makes sound] Nope, I was happy to help but it wouldn't be ethical for me to answer all your letters. You're going to have to rely on your own moral compass for the rest of these.

[Robot makes sound] This explains so many things.

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