

IOSH Webinar questions and responses

I'd be interested to hear your opinion on pragmatism in a Health and Safety context, and which methodology it would align with.

Thank you for your question. My understanding of philosophical pragmatism is limited but I believe its ethical alignment is debated by different branches of the pragmatist school. Having read your question I took a brief look at the Stanford University Philosophy website which has further information on the subject. I found the relationship between reason and morality interesting, with the section on how choosing the best moral approach could be the one which is most appropriate to the circumstances.

If the idea that telling somebody a lie is stealing from them, how do you feel about today's media slanting some very important stories to their own agenda?

Kant felt telling people lies reduces their ability to make reasoned decisions which he felt was morally unacceptable. As for the media slanting their stories to their own agenda, I must admit my initial response is that behaving in that way is wrong. But after further consideration I feel the ability to be completely unbiased in our options is at best difficult if not impossible. Someone once said to me there are always 3 sides to an argument. Opinion 1, opinion 2 and somewhere in the middle of the two is probably where the truth resides.

To what extent should we push the limits to stay morally right? How do we deal with the stigma of being terminated from a company for being morally right?

Good question. It reminds me of an anecdote I read about Existentialist philosopher John Paul Sartre. Apparently during the Second World War a student came to him and asked Sartre for help with a moral dilemma. Sartre's answer was: "You are free, therefore choose – that is to say, invent. No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do". (Sartre, 1948).

I like to think I would generally behave in a way I could live with. There is more than one job in the world but I have only one conscience.

But the second question was is it morally acceptable to tell a lie now - so the second question was slightly different.

Thanks for the point you raised. Kant would say the question is the same, but the circumstances are different. If you felt that not telling lies was a categorical imperative (absolute duty one which you should never go against) the circumstances that may affect our responses are irrelevant, because according to Kant there are no circumstances where telling lies is acceptable.

You touched on employee contracts or contracts between employees at the end. Could you give us an example of how this could be applied?

Finding moral obligations to follow laws/rules is problematic, with many arguments in favour of moral obligations found to be unsound or at least debatable. The one which

in my opinion is least debatable, is the one which focuses on the notion of express or explicit consent. If a person is free without undue influence to choose to promise to behave in a certain way, then I believe it would be reasonable to expect that person to try and stay true to their promise.

If you openly discuss the terms of the contract and explain that by agreeing to it, the person is consciously agreeing to behave in a certain way or tell you if they cannot behave in that way, is the basis of a mutually beneficial relationship.

For it to be effective, I think they must feel you would fulfil your part of the contract, which would be to respond appropriately if they did tell you that they had an issue with complying with a behaviour they had previously agreed to. I believe this approach would align itself to the concept of a 'Just Culture' where all parties are accountable for their actions. A problem with a standard approach to a 'Just Culture' is that the express agreement to behave in a certain way is rarely sought, so the concept of tacit consent is often taken as consent, which for me is both problematic and uninformed.

Do you see any conflict between some of the 'consent' models and the definitions of negligence?

Firstly, I want to confirm my understanding of your question. I think you are referring to negligence of an employer (sorry if I have misinterpreted your question).

Imagine an employee has expressly consented to work in an unsafe way to benefit the employer and possibly themselves in a particular instance (bonus etc.). A rule utilitarian would say that if a person was put in harm's way to create a greater benefit for the organisation that would be unacceptable. As working for an organisation which would sanction such behaviour in the short term would fail to maximise the benefit for the most people in the long run.

This would be a great training session Simon! Any plans to develop it along those lines?

Thank you for your question, I am hoping to develop a day long course covering different applications of philosophy in a work context. A further short session with operatives is also in the pipeline. In it I would like to facilitate discussions on the concept of a social contract approach to supporting positive workplace behaviours. If anyone would like to talk about how I could design and deliver these sessions for their workplace I'd be happy to discuss it further.

How would you go about discussing moral issues within H&S with Senior Managers?

I've thought about this question many times. I believe a code of ethical behaviour could be agreed within an organisation and the H&S officer could contextualise this code to their role (i.e. if during an accident investigation the H&S officer found root causes which pointed to management failings, the H&S officer MUST complete the investigation honestly, highlighting all the findings and recommendations, irrespective of who may be cited in the report). If IOSH create a code of ethics I believe the H&S person needs to discuss the code with their employer. As part of

this conversation would be an agreed method of discussing issues which would be likely to contravene the agreed code. This would create a framework approach to ethical dilemmas, so if and possibly when, they occur both parties could refer to the framework and hopefully agree on a way forward which maintains their previously agreed behaviours.

Telling the truth is moral behaviour but you could choose to tell a lie and act in an immoral manner, hence maintaining telling the truth is still moral behaviour. Do you agree?

I do agree. If we agreed that telling the truth was a moral behaviour, not telling the truth would be viewed as immoral in relation to the previously agreed standard of morality. Whilst still maintaining the standard of morality we had previously agreed.

**Thank you to everyone who asked a question. I hope I was adequately able to comment on their question and if I misunderstood the question or failed to provide a useful response I'd like to apologise in advance. Keep thinking philosophically.
Simon.**