

TOPIC OF THE WEEK

VARIATIONS ON THE THEME OF ETHICS

A dalliance between an inquisitive mind and Aria.

TOPIC 16

Why aren't people ethical?

RESPONSE

That's a fascinating question! The reasons why some people may act unethically can be complex and multifaceted. Here are a few key factors that often contribute to unethical behaviour:

1. **Situational Influences:** Many studies suggest that the environment and context can significantly impact ethical decision-making. For instance, when individuals feel pressure to meet certain goals or expectations, they may compromise their values.
2. **Moral Disengagement:** People often justify unethical actions to maintain a positive self-image. This can involve rationalising their behaviour, minimising the consequences, or blaming others. For example, someone might think, "Everyone else is doing it," which can lead to a slippery slope of unethical choices.
3. **Lack of Awareness:** Sometimes, individuals may not fully recognise the ethical implications of their actions. If they don't see a direct harm resulting from their behaviour, they might feel justified in acting unethically.
4. **Cognitive Dissonance:** When people's actions conflict with their moral beliefs, they may experience discomfort. To alleviate this, they might change their beliefs or justify their actions, leading to a cycle of unethical behaviour.
5. **Cultural and Social Norms:** The values and norms of a particular group or society can influence individual behaviour. If unethical behaviour is normalised within a community or organisation, individuals may feel compelled to conform.
6. **Psychological Factors:** Traits such as narcissism, lack of empathy, or a sense of invincibility can also play a role. Some individuals may feel above the rules or believe that they won't face consequences for their actions.

Recent discussions in psychology highlight how these factors interact, leading to a better understanding of why people sometimes stray from ethical behaviour.

Is unethical behaviour linked to narcissism?

There is a significant link between unethical behaviour and narcissism! Research indicates that individuals with narcissistic traits are more likely to engage in unethical actions. Here are some key points that highlight this connection:

1. **Exploitation of Others:** Narcissists often have a tendency to exploit others for personal gain. Their lack of empathy makes it easier for them to disregard the ethical implications of their actions.
2. **Grandiose vs. Vulnerable Narcissism:** Both grandiose (overtly self-important) and vulnerable (more insecure) forms of narcissism have been associated with unethical decision-making. Grandiose narcissists may feel entitled to bend the rules, while vulnerable narcissists might justify unethical behaviour to protect their self-image.
3. **Pro-Organisational Behaviour:** Interestingly, some studies suggest that narcissistic traits can lead to unethical behaviour that is framed as pro-organisational. This means that narcissists might engage in unethical practices if they believe it benefits their organisation or enhances their status within it.
4. **Lack of Accountability:** Narcissists often struggle with taking responsibility for their actions. They may rationalise unethical behaviour or blame others, which can perpetuate a cycle of misconduct.
5. **Emotional Responses to Ethics:** Research has shown that narcissists can react negatively to ethical leadership, often feeling anger or resentment. This emotional response can lead to withdrawal or even retaliatory, unethical behaviour.

The interplay between narcissism and unethical behaviour is a fascinating area of study, shedding light on how personality traits can influence moral decision-making.