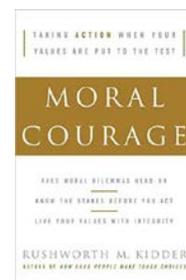


Moral Courage:

Taking Action When Your Values Are Put to the Test

Book's Argument: Based on over a decade of observation of ethical individuals across the spectrum of humanity, Kidder asserts that moral courage doesn't always produce an immediate benefit. For him, standing up for values is the defining feature of moral courage. *Having* values is different from *living by* values. In the defining moments of our lives, values count for little without the willingness to put them into practice.

Key Takeaways: There are three intersecting domains of morally courageous action: a commitment to moral *principles*, an awareness of the *danger* involved in supporting those principles, and a willing *endurance* of that danger. Courage is all about assessing risks and standing up to the hardships they may bring.



Physical Courage Principle-Related	Moral Courage Principle-Driven
Manifests as guts, or valor, to continue an act	Manifests in the service to our values – done to support virtues and sustain core principles
Facing physical challenges	Facing physical and mental challenges
Tangible	Less tangible
Property	Principles
Valuables	Virtues
Physics	Metaphysics
Agreement with momentum	Against the grain, contrary to accepted norm
Risks life and limb	Risks humiliation, ridicule, contempt, unemployment, and loss of social standing (reputation)

Five core moral values include *honesty*, *respect*, *responsibility*, *fairness*, and *compassion*. “The courage to do the right thing” is about as concise a definition of moral courage as you can find. Taxonomy of moral courage may be constructed through motives, inhibitions, and risks. At bottom, moral courage is *the courage to be moral*.

When applying the core values, we move forward from awareness to action through some version of the following three stages:

1. We **focus** on one or two key values.
2. We **dismantle** the right-versus-wrong arguments that might lure us into inaction.
3. We **recognize** that no higher right value ought to draw us into a different course.

All ethical issues arise from one of two sources:

Right versus wrong. Ethical issues emerge when a core moral value has been violated or ignored. When it's clear that honesty is a central, shared value and yet someone is found to be acting dishonestly, we have no qualms about saying, “That’s unethical!” In such cases ethics is (as my dictionary describes it) “the discipline dealing with what is good and bad or right and wrong.”

Right versus right. Ethical issues also emerge when two of our core values come into conflict with each other. When one of our values raises powerful moral arguments for one course of action, while another value raises equally powerful arguments for an opposite course, we find we can't do both. Yet we must act. In such cases, ethics is a matter of right versus right.

Best Quotes: “If humanity is to survive and avoid new catastrophes, then the global political order has to be accompanied by a sincere and mutual respect among the various spheres of civilization, culture, nations, or continents, and by honest efforts on their part to seek and find the values or basic moral imperatives they have in common.” – Vaclav Havel “Courage is a moral quality; it is not a chance gift of nature like an aptitude for games. It is a cold choice between two alternatives, the fixed resolve not to quit; an act of renunciation which must be made not once but many times.” – Charles McMoran Wilson “Without moral courage, our brightest virtues rust from lack of use. With it, we build piece by piece a more ethical world.” “...just as a single candle can destroy a whole closetful of darkness, so a single life, lived in the light of goodness and moral courage, can make an enormous difference in overcoming the reverberating void that calls itself evil, blackness, doubt, cowardice, fright, or mere bravado. If wrong really is, in some fundamental way, the absence rather than the opposite of right, is it any wonder that each one of us – expressing our highest sense of moral courage, living it to the fullest, and passing it along to others – really can change the world?” – Rushworth Kidder

Why It's Important: Those who are morally courageous tend to be so because they trust that if a principle is upheld, right will be done and (hopefully) good will result. More Kantian than utilitarian, they tend to invest themselves in trust not for what it does but for what it is. For them the principle trumps the transaction. They may be trustworthy, but more important they are trustful. The term trust occupies the same orbit as a number of other ethical concepts, including credibility and teamwork. Another term often used as a kind of overarching, umbrella concept is integrity. Each of these interpretations is most germane when attempting to understand how to best develop human beings.

Rushworth Kidder (2005)