G. S. IV: ETHICS, INTEGRITY AND APTITUDE

Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, Determinants and Consequences of Ethics in Human Actions;

Dimensions of Ethics; Ethics in Private and Public Relationships

Preface

The purpose of this material is to provide guidance to our students to deal with problems in General Studies IV of the Civil Services Main Examination that includes Ethics, Integrity and Aptitude. The questions in the Main Examination can be expected to be of a nature where theory meets practice and ethics gain meaning.

Since professionals in the civil services navigate ambiguous ethical situations, while interacting not only with other organs of the state but the general populace as well, an understanding in ethics gains meaning and relevance. This material has thus been designed for candidates preparing for the civil services examination, who can henceforth expect to be tested on the right thing to do in sticky situations. This material seeks to help the candidate to get a fairly good idea of the challenges that lie ahead and possible recourse to the problems that they are likely to face in the examination.

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Ethics and Human Interface

Introduction

The protagonist in the epic film, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, Chief Judge *Dan Haywood* was faced with a strange predicament. He presided over a tribunal that was going into the trial of four judges of Germany. The charge was that these four had used their offices to conduct Nazi sterilization and cleansing policies. But, the Cold War was heating up and no one wanted any more trials in Germany. Moreover, there were arguments that since judges and civil servants do not make laws, but only carry out the laws of their country, they should not be punished. So it was being expected that the tribunal would free the judges without sentencing them to imprisonment. However, the dilemma that the tribunal faced was whether it was right to forget the past and let it be. This was a question that the tribunal and particularly Chief Judge *Dan Haywood* had to decide.

Similar must have been the predicament of *Benjamin Esposito* in *El Secreto de Sus Ojos.* Having seen a man unlawfully confine a criminal who had brutally raped and murdered his wife and got away far too easily through the aid of his political masters, what was *Esposito* supposed to do. Does he report to the authorities that he knows to be corrupt and have the man charged for wrongfully confining the criminal or does he let it go unreported because justice is being served, albeit in a different way?

Coming closer home to our own Hindi cinema, we get the case of a certain *Vikram Malhotra* in the critically acclaimed *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*. He comes to know that his bete noire *Siddharth Tyabji* is in trouble. He reluctantly goes to help him and instead lands in much bigger trouble, which leaves him paralyzed. Should he have taken the pains to help the person he disliked or instead rejoiced over the fact that the thorn in the flesh to his goals and motives will be gone soon?

These instances from World as well as Hindi cinema have been cited to stress the fact that ethical dilemmas are essentially faced by people all across the world. While their form and content may differ from place to place and time to time, they are as relevant for a civil servant and a judge in India as they are for a stock broker and a doctor in Canada.

Ethics and Human Interface

Ethics, or morality, is a system of principles that helps us tell right from wrong, good from bad. But, this definition, by itself, tells us nothing about the standard by which we establish or measure right and wrong. Though there have been many different approaches to ethics; none seem to be satisfactory. The terms 'ethics', and even more so, 'morality' carries heavy emotional baggage. Traditional approaches to morality are mostly confused and contradictory. While supposedly telling us what is 'right' or 'good' for us, they variously imply sacrificing our lives to some greater good, restrict beneficial individualistic conduct, oppose our legitimate desire for personal happiness or offer supposedly ideal, but impractical solutions.

These views of ethics and morals are more like distortions of what they really have to offer - giving a rational approach. Ethics should and can give real and practical guidance to our lives - our best rational interests - without sacrificing others. It can serve as a personal guide to acquiring virtues that promote optimal living, both for the individual as well as the society.

The most basic need for ethics lies in the fact that we do not automatically know what will benefit our lives, and what will be detrimental. We constantly face choices that affect the length and quality of our lives. We must choose our values: where to live, how to spend our time, whom to associate with, whom to believe. We must choose what to think about, and how to go about achieving our goals. Which character traits to acquire, and which to eliminate. Which of our emotional responses are beneficial, and which detrimental. By what criteria to judge others, and on what basis to interact with them. We must pro-actively think about these issues and deliberately direct our lives. To the extent that we default on this, we are at the mercy of social and emotional factors that may be far from optimal.

We can say that ethics is about the choices that we make - or fail to make. We are aware of our conscious thoughts and of our ability to make informed, intelligent choices - that is what we call free will. We are aware that the choices that we make have consequences, both for ourselves and for others. We are aware of the responsibility that we have for our actions. But, we do not have reliable inherent knowledge or instincts that will automatically promote our survival and flourishing. We may have an inherent emotional desire to survive and avoid pain, but we do not have innate knowledge about how to achieve those objectives. A rational, non-contradictory ethic can help us make better choices regarding our lives as well as social well-being.

Essence, Determinants and Consequences of Ethics

A useful way to deal with ethics is seeing it as an active process of design, an ongoing process that occurs whenever circumstances force us to deal with conflict, tension, uncertainty and risk. As individuals define the boundaries and content of their responsibility in resolving specific ethical dilemmas both great and small, we create for ourselves an ethical identity and form character traits. Often this is done without consistent, intentional and systematic reflection, but that need not always be the case.

Skill in addressing ethical issues can be learned and cultivated if we recognize the importance of doing so. The requirement is that we view our treatment of ethical problems as an ongoing process of designing the best courses of action for specific situations we face. This demands that we are able to establish a framework for understanding ethics in dynamic rather than static terms.

Essence of Ethics

In this section we will study the problem of defining an abstract concept like ethics, its difference with morality, how it is related to values and laws as well as role and responsibility. We also analyze the different approaches to study ethics.

How can we define the concept of Ethics?

Ethics has been defined in various ways, some more technical and precise than others. Few definitions of ethics are as follows:

- The attempt to state and evaluate principles by which ethical problems may be solved
- The normative standards of conduct derived from the philosophical and religious traditions of society
- The task of careful reflection several steps removed from the actual conduct of men
- Concerned about what is right, fair, just or good; about what we ought to do, not just about what is the case or what is most acceptable or expedient
- Moral philosophy, which includes four main goals or interests: clarification of moral concepts; critical evaluation of moral claims focused on “testing their truth, justification and adequacy”; constructing an inclusive perspective by elucidating the interconnections among moral ideas and values; and providing moral guidance through improving practical judgment.
- As an active enterprise, ethics seek to clarify the logic and adequacy of the values that shape the world; it assesses the moral possibilities which are projected and betrayed in the social give-and-take. Anyone engaged in ethical reflection takes on the task of analyzing and evaluating the principles embodied in various alternatives for conduct and social order.
- The study of moral conduct and moral status

Is there any difference between the concepts of Ethics and Morality

Though ethics and morality are often used interchangeably, but here we make a subtle distinction between them. Morality assumes some accepted modes of behaviour that are given by a religious tradition, a culture (including an organizational culture), a social class, a community, or a family. It involves expected courses of conduct that are rooted in both formal rules and informal norms. It is expressed through such precepts as “decent young people do not engage in premarital sex”, “family comes first”, “one should not conspicuously

display one's wealth", "guests in one's home must always be treated with respect", "never drive under influence", "a day's pay requires a day's work", "follow the orders of those above you in the organization" and similar expectations. Sometimes these expectations are written out in codes of conduct or rules, but at other times they are assumed and taken for granted. Typically they are asserted by a tradition, culture, religion, community, organization, or family as simply what is right.

Ethics, on the other hand, is one step removed from action. It involves the examination and analysis of the logic, values, beliefs and principles that are used to justify morality in its various forms. It considers what is meant by principles such as justice, veracity, or the public interest; their implications for conduct in particular situations; and how one might argue for one principle over another as determinative in a particular decision. Ethics takes what is given or prescribed and asks what is meant and why. So ethics as related to conduct is critical reflection on morality toward grounding moral conduct in systemic reflection. Ethical reflection also involves an effective element because it often evokes emotive response of comfort or discomfort, resolution or quandary, and affirmation or antagonism.

Ethics also deals with the moral status of entities such as families, organizations, communities and societies. Here ethical reasoning is focused on how the characteristics associated with the good family, the good organization, or the good society are grounded in certain principles, values, beliefs and logical argument. Ethics weighs the adequacy of these attributes and analyzes how they are justified.

How are Ethics, Values and Laws related?

Doing ethics, involves thinking more systematically about the values and principles that are embedded in our choices than we do when we make choices on practical or political grounds alone. As we reflect on these implicit values, we ask ourselves how they are consistent with our duties and toward what ends and consequences they lead. Keeping in mind the obligations and goals of the roles we occupy, we seek to rank-order them for each particular ethical decision we confront in the course of carrying out a specific role.

The relationship between law and ethics often comes up in the discussion of specific cases. The fact is, however that law specifies the moral minimum. It is the minimum level of conduct that we as a society agree to impose on all of us through the threat of force and sanctions. Ethical considerations are often involved in deliberations about proposed legislations, but once crystallized into law, the conduct prescribed is assumed to be backed up by the coercive power of government. However, from an ethicist's point of view, law must always stand under the judgment of ethics. Sometimes laws may be deemed unjust and therefore unethical. Those who believe so may challenge those laws in the courts as inconsistent with the human rights, or they may engage in civil disobedience, even to the point of being arrested and going to jail. Sometimes laws need to be challenged on ethical grounds. In the long tradition of civil disobedience exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., the key proviso is that one must be willing to accept the consequences of one's actions in order to demonstrate commitment to ethical principles over what are considered unjust laws. That is, one must be willing to suffer fines and imprisonment in order to evoke a response from the larger society to bring about change in the laws in question.

Ethics, Responsibility and Role

The terms role and responsibility are peculiarly modern in connotation. Both suggest a worldview in which the power of tradition is broken and human beings are left to construct a world of their own making. Roles must be devised and responsibility defined as ways of reestablishing obligations in our modern, pluralistic, technological society. Technology is applied not only to production but also to society itself.

Responsibility is a relatively new term in the ethical vocabulary, appearing in the nineteenth century with a somewhat ambiguous meaning. The term evaluates action and attributes it to an agent; it does so in lieu of cosmic or natural structures of obligation. The historical awareness of the nineteenth century, the scientific and technological revolutions, and the collapse of metaphysical systems had undermined fixed notions of obligations. The term 'responsibility' was a way of filling this gap by defining the scope of accountability and obligation in context of law and common culture.

It has also been argued that when constitutional government was vastly extended, in scope of operation and in spread among nations, as a result of contacts of cultures and people, the concept of responsibility became increasingly significant as a way of defining a common set of values among people of divergent cultures and traditions.

The concept of role then becomes a convenient way to package expectations and obligations associated with the modern world. As we cease to view social functions as received intact from the past and see them instead as manipulated and created anew, we take upon ourselves bounded obligation in the form of various roles. People exercise responsibility and are held responsible in society when they accept and carry out an array of more or less well-defined roles: employee, parent, citizen, group member. The most problematic roles are those not clearly defined, usually because there is little agreement about the boundaries of responsibility associated with them. What does it mean to be a responsible parent in the second decade of the twenty-first century? Or a responsible spouse, responsible citizen, responsible politician, or a responsible civil servant?

The problem is that although civil servants are responsible for certain duties (those that constitute the professional role), they sometimes believe they are obligated to act otherwise. This occurs because civil servants, along with everyone else in modern society, maintain an array of roles related to family, community, and society, each carrying a set of obligations and vested with personal interests. The quite common result is conflict among roles as these competing forces push and pull in opposite directions. The effects of these conflicts are compounded by the range of discretion civil servants must exercise. The intent of legislation is frequently stated in broad language, leaving the specifics to civil servants. Consequently, ethical standards and sensitivity are crucial to the responsible use of this discretion.

Principles and Virtues

Why live by principles? Why not just make the 'right' rational decision as we go along? Aren't principles limiting and, in any case, old-fashioned? Disregarding the fashionability of principles, let's look at two major advantages of living by principles:

Firstly, the scope of our knowledge and cognitive abilities is always limited. We are never fully aware of all the factors influencing the outcome of any given choice, and thus make our decisions based on limited information. In addition, our reasoning ability is limited both in time and complexity in any given situation. Principles - generalized rules that have wide applicability - help us make better decisions in complex situations; the best decision 'all other things being equal'. Principles can give us useful guidance in a wide range of situations.

Secondly, generalized principles can be automatized. Consistently living by rational, non-contradictory principles will tend to make principled thought and behavior habitual: Principles give birth to positive character traits - virtues. This subconscious assimilation leads to automatic emotional responses that are in harmony with our explicit conscious values. Our virtues mobilize our emotions to encourage moral choices, judgments and actions. Furthermore, our virtue-based subconscious evaluations help us make better complex, split-second decisions.

Automatic and instantaneous guidance can be immensely beneficial if - and this is a big if - we learn and automatize the correct principles. If we, for example, automatize self-hatred, superstition or a victim-mentality, then this is surely detrimental. If, on the other hand, we acquire the virtuous habit of seeking self-knowledge, then automatic internal warning bells are likely to alert us to any attempts of evading or disowning our actual emotions or actions.

What are the different approaches to study Ethics?

Ethics may be dealt with either descriptively or normatively.

- Descriptively, ethics attempts to reveal underlying assumptions and how they are connected to conduct.
- Normatively, ethics attempts to construct viable and defensible arguments for particular courses of conduct as being better than others in specific situations.

Ethics may also be viewed from either or both of two major orientations: deontological or teleological.

- Deontological approaches to ethics focus on one's duty to certain ethical principles, such as justice, freedom, or veracity, without regards for the consequences of one's actions.

- Teleological ethics, in contrast, involves a concern for the ends or consequences of one's conduct. This is the position most notably associated with utilitarianism and its calculus of the greatest good for the greatest number.

Most of us, however, undertake decisions using both of these perspectives most of the time. That is, we consider principles that are important to us in a concrete situation and then ask ourselves what the consequences of acting on those principles are likely to be.

Determinants of Ethics

Traditional Sources of Ethics

How do we determine right and wrong?

Most popular determinants of ethics comprise a mix of four separate, but interrelated sources:

- Social rules or customs that are either agreed on by the majority or enforced by some kind of law.
- Some authority, usually claimed to be 'divinely inspired', that establishes an absolute dogma.
- Intuitive, emotional 'knowledge' of what is right and wrong - a personal moral compass.
- Rational or common sense rules and principles aimed at achieving a given objective.

Let's explore each of these sources in some detail:

Social Rules or Customs

Social rules and customs are, in themselves, a mix of religious or philosophical dogma, 'what feels right', and common sense. They evolve by various random forces impinging on them: an influential philosopher, a charismatic spiritual leader, economic factors, disease, wars, immigration, and art. The resulting morality is usually recognized as being relativist - its subjectivity being rather obvious. For example, one society believes that having more than one child is immoral, while another sees contraception as depraved. Unfortunately, this relativism does not usually prevent people from trying to force their views on others, even killing and dying for it in its name.

Divinely Inspired Authority

Religious, spiritual or cultish ethic claims to possess absolute knowledge - divinely inspired - and therefore not subjective. From an outsiders point of view its relativism is apparent. Who has the direct line to God or to some platonic Eternal Wisdom? How would we know? Conflicting claims of authenticity cannot be resolved rationally. Opponents are 'persuaded' either emotionally or physically. 'Divine' morality is frequently used by religious and cult leaders - alone or cahoots with kings and governments - to control people. Claiming a preferential relationship with Divinity, they can trade 'salvation', 'absolution' and 'godly knowledge' for their followers' obedience and sacrifice. Many wars and vast amounts of human suffering have their roots in this kind of 'morality'; though, granted, many systems are not consciously malevolent.

Intuitive, Emotional Knowledge

We all judge morality intuitively to some extent - we have deep emotional convictions about the immorality of, say, murdering an innocent victim, about aborting a female foetus, or regarding child abuse. Some philosophers believe that intuition is the only valid source to knowing right from wrong. Many people today reject religious and social morality and rely primarily on their own personal moral compass. In one sense, this is exactly what we have to - automatized principles are essential for coping with the myriad of complex decisions we face. However, without explicit, conscious selection of the principles that we internalize, our emotions are unguided missiles. Casteism, communalism or treating women as second class citizens may feel very right - as it has, and still does,

to many people. Intuition is no guarantee of morality. Our moral compass needs to be calibrated and checked to ensure that our intuition guides us to desired destinations.

What we need is an explicit system of ethics to serve as a reference to the programming of our subconscious values. Without this reference, intuitive morality remains a hodgepodge of various religious, social and rational ideas picked up during a lifetime: a persuasive idea gathered here, a powerful emotional lesson retained there, added to the comfortable social and religious norms of our childhood. The overwhelming preponderance of adults retaining their own parents' social and religious values is proof of these influences. However, the fact that many of us do break away from our childhood influences attests to the possibility of reprogramming ourselves. We do have free will - we can choose to review and change deeply held beliefs.

Rational Rules and Principles

Everyone uses reason, the fourth source of moral knowledge, to some extent. Even the most narrow-minded, emotional or dogmatic person occasionally uses reason to try to resolve moral conflicts - and the traditional approaches certainly provide plenty of contradictions and conflict: Communists reason about the practical contradictions in communal ownership and personal motivation. Catholics decide to use birth-control as they realize the folly of that restriction. Entrenched racists often go color-blind with people they personally know well. Reality eventually impinges upon irrational beliefs. But we can go much further in utilizing rationality to establish principles for living - we can pro-actively seek to systematically eliminate contradictions, detrimental beliefs and inappropriate emotional responses. But is there really such a thing as objective knowledge - and especially with regard to moral issues?

Reason is the mental faculty that integrates our perception of reality while eliminating contradictions. Reason seeks to obtain as accurate a representation of reality as possible. Reasoning consists of conscious and subconscious processes. For example, intuition and induction, which are partly subconscious, are used in integration and conceptualization. Information obtained by these subconscious means must be double-checked by conscious processes to establish its accuracy. Because of limits in our cognitive ability (we are not infallible or omniscient), we need to systematically test our data and reasoning against other minds (explain, debate, learn) and against reality (gathering empirical evidence to test our conclusions).

Reason does not provide absolute, acontextual certainty. All objective knowledge - knowledge of reality obtained by rational means - is subject to context and subject to future revision and clarification. Some objective knowledge is beyond doubt; we have no reason to doubt it. That knowledge we call 'certain'. It is certain within the context of our experience, knowledge and cognitive ability. Some of the things that we can be certain of: I exist and am conscious; the Moon is smaller than the Earth; improved self-esteem improves personal well-being. Each of these statements assumes a context of knowledge and meaning; they are certain only within that context. Conceivably, at some stage additional knowledge or a changed context may render them false - but we currently have no evidence to doubt their certainty. Detailed analysis of the nature of knowledge and certainty is the philosophical field of epistemology - a prerequisite for all knowledge and thus also for ethics.

Objective, or rational, ethics provides principles that will practically achieve a desired purpose. A given principle's truth is measured by its effectiveness. We call a principle 'good' if it's good at accomplishing its goal. In this sense we can call this a scientific approach to ethics. Rational morality is an integrated, non-contradictory, reality-based system of goals and principles. But how do we establish the ultimate goal - the standard of what constitutes good and bad, right and wrong, true and false principles?

Good and Bad

Two crucial questions represent the key to understanding the moral meaning of good and bad. Yet, moral philosophers have frequently ignored these questions, or have grossly underestimated their importance. Some prominent philosophers don't even seem to be aware of them: Good for whom? Good to what end?

For some reason, we have come to accept that there exists some independent Platonic 'Good' - some absolute meaning of good not related to any other standard. We will say 'it is good to speak the truth', meaning, somehow, good in itself - not because of some beneficial consequence. Were we to ask 'why?' we would get a

paternal 'because... because you should'. Ethics is rife with this meaningless categorical imperative 'should'. 'Should' only has meaning in the context of 'should in order to...'. An ethics is only as rational as its standard of value is - its standard of good and bad.

Good to what end? The purpose of ethics is to help us make decisions, to help us define and achieve our goals. If we have multiple goals, then ethics must also help us reconcile and prioritize these. Some claimed objectives of ethics are: 'getting to heaven', 'doing our duty', 'clearing our karma', 'filling our evolutionary purpose', 'pleasing others', 'achieving wealth', 'maximizing our own pleasure' or 'living a full and healthy life'. Having concluded that a rational approach to ethics is the only meaningful and practical one, we can eliminate all the irrational options - goals that are not reality based. On the other hand, money or pleasures, by themselves, are not sufficiently comprehensive long-term goals. Anyone who seeks life-long guidance - and moral principles and virtues are by their very nature not quick fixes - needs to cast his moral net wider.

In the most general form, our goal comes down to defining and achieving a good life: Physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health - a fulfilled life. There are objective measures of health: Physical - living a full life-span (within the limits of current medical knowledge) as free as possible from physical impairments; Emotionally - generally free from depression and emotional conflicts, high self-esteem and the ability to experience joy; Mentally - cognitive competence including intelligence, memory and creativity; Spiritually - the ability to enjoy literature, art, friendships and love. This list is not exhaustive and is open to debate, but few people would argue about the importance of these basic qualities of human life. The particular manifestations of a good life - the specific level and choices of health, relationship, productive work, artistic enjoyment - will vary from person to person and from time to time. This general description of the good life we can call 'Optimal Living' and take as the standard of good and bad, right and wrong.

Good for whom? Living optimally requires holding certain moral values, setting and pursuing personal goals, and acquiring rational virtues. None of these can be done for someone else. We cannot make others think rationally, make them have a pro-active or optimistic outlook, or give them self-esteem. We may encourage others to think and act morally, but we can really only make those choices for ourselves. We can take most responsibility for our own lives because we have most control over it. We also have maximum motivation for expending the effort to live a principled, moral life when we are the primary beneficiary. In short, we cannot live someone else's life for them.

This does not mean that what is good for us is necessarily detrimental to others - life is not a zero-sum game. Fortunately, many rational moral principles benefit both us and others. Examples of these virtues are rationality, productiveness, integrity.

Consequences of Ethics

The consequences of ethics in human action can be traced at different levels. This is because while in a broad sense, ethics has to do with concepts such as good, right, and ought, but in the arena of everyday life, considering the practical meanings of these abstract concepts causes us to deal with them at different levels of seriousness and systematic reflection. Often we simply express emotion about what is good or what someone ought to do. Less frequently we face ethical questions that force us to reflect long and hard about our fundamental worldview – even the meaning of life itself. We can identify four distinct levels at which ethical concerns can be experienced in human action.

The Expressive Level

Many times every day we find ourselves simply venting our feelings about something, whether it is a corrupt clerk we encounter in a government department or getting caught between our family and official responsibilities. During such instances, we may very well respond first at the expressive level: “That clerk is a thief”, “What did I do to deserve being caught in this bind between my spouse and my organization?”

These spontaneous, unreflective expressions of emotion are perhaps the most common forms of value judgment. They neither invite a reply nor attempt to persuade others. They provide neither evidence nor

detailed descriptions of a state of affairs. However, depending on who utters them and how intensely, they may be followed by a more rational and systematic treatment of the problem.

The Moral Rules Level

The level of moral rules is the first level at which serious questions are raised and serious answers are given. We address the problem of appropriate conduct and begin to assess alternatives and consequences. We consider these courses of action and their anticipated outcomes in the light of certain rules, maxims, and proverbs that we hold as moral guides. For example:

- "Always be a good team player."
- "Loyalty to your clients comes first."
- "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."
- "Honesty is the best policy."
- "Truth will win out."
- "My country, right or wrong."
- "Never fight a battle you can't win."
- "The public should be trusted."
- "Love your neighbour as yourself."
- "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."
- "Don't air dirty linen outside the organization."
- "It is easier to ask forgiveness than to ask permission."
- "It is better to be safe than sorry."
- "Go along to get along."
- "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

These are examples of moral rules we acquire through the socialization process from our families, religious affiliations, education, and professional experiences. For better or worse, they provide rules of thumb for appraising a situation and deciding what ought to be done.

Most of the ethical problems are resolved at this level. As we review the facts of the case, the alternatives for action, and their likely consequences on the one hand, and associate them with our stock of relevant moral rules on the other, the field of alternatives begins to narrow and one or two rules emerge as crucial. We move towards a decision, with the practical consequences and the moral justification related in some way that is acceptable to us.

Our decisions are not necessarily consistent from case to case. At the level of moral rules, which is where most practical administrative decisions are made, rationality and systematic reflection are involved but only in a limited, piecemeal fashion. Most of the time we are ad hoc problem solvers, not comprehensive moral philosophers. However, on occasion we are driven to the next level of generality and abstraction, usually because we are unable to reach a decision by applying our available repertoire of practical moral rules.

The Ethical Analysis Level

When the available moral rules prove ineffective in a particular case, when they conflict with each other, or when the actions they seem to prescribe do not feel right, a fundamental reconsideration of our moral code may be required. In the normal routine we do not usually undertake this kind of basic reassessment. However, sometimes an issue is so unique, so complex, or so profound in the consequences of its resolution that we have no choice but to reexamine the ethical principles that are implicit in our routine norms for conduct.

A brief but adequate definition of 'principle' is "a general law or rule that provides a guide for action." An 'ethical principle' is a statement concerning the conduct or state of being that is required for the fulfillment of a value; it explicitly links a value with a general mode of action. For example, justice may be considered a significant value, but the term itself does not tell us what rule for conduct or what state of society would follow if we included justice in our value system. We would need a principle of justice to show us what pattern of action would reflect justice as a value. A common form of the justice principle is "Treat equals equally and unequals unequally." We

might interpret this principle as meaning that if all adult citizens are politically equal, they should all have the same political rights and obligations. If one has the vote, all must have it.

Or if we look at another value, truth, we might start with a general principle to indicate its meaning for conduct and then develop more specific statements for particular conditions. Generally, we might support this principle: "Always tell the truth." But when faced with a particular situation, we might revise the principle: "Always tell the truth unless third parties would be seriously harmed."

Defining the ethical dimensions of a problem may require teasing out not only the values that are in conflict but also the unarticulated principles that indicate the mutually exclusive kinds of conduct those values dictate. Otherwise, values can be too vague to have much meaning in ethical analysis. To say we believe in freedom or liberty conveys meaning of only the most general sort. If, however, we identify and elaborate principles about liberty, the meaning becomes more specific and ethically useful. We might, for example, indicate that if we value liberty, we ought not to interfere, without social justification, in the chosen course of any rational being or impose on him conditions that will prevent him from pursuing his chosen courses of action. Although this statement does not prescribe precisely what should be done in every situation, it does provide some conditions and qualifications for the range of conduct that falls under liberty.

The Postethical Level

The considerations at the final, postethical level are exemplified by the question: "Why should I be moral?" Most of us would seldom reach this fundamental philosophical level of reflection. Only when pushed by a particularly persistent or cynical adversary or under the sway of a deeply disillusioning experience or confronting a profound personal crisis are we likely to function at this level. Here the struggle is to find some basis for valuing those things that were identified at the level of ethical analysis. Why is integrity important? Or truth? Or security? Or loyalty? Or the well-being of others? At this level we begin to question our worldview – our views of human nature, how we know anything to be true, and the meaning of life. Resolution at this level is achieved only when practical indecision has been removed. It may require developing or confirming a worldview grounded in philosophical or religious perspectives. When we have discovered an adequate motive to allow ourselves to "play the moral game," this level is resolved.

The framework as we have elaborated above is highly dynamic. It is only in theory that people can move logically through these decision-making steps. In real life we move both up and down through the levels as we grapple with what is good or what we ought to do, and work within the constraints of time and context. We may first engage a problem expressively as we react spontaneously with our immediate feelings, but then we may move rather quickly to problem solving at the level of moral rules. As we get new information and the situation becomes more complex, we may move back to the expressive level. Then, having vented our irritation and frustration, we may move back again to the search for appropriate moral rules.

This movement among the various levels, although it may be intentional, is usually not a matter of conscious choice. The transitions occur because we need to solve a problem, not necessarily because we consciously think about which level is appropriate. In an concrete situation, as we attempt to integrate known facts with unknown but possible consequences of action, feelings and values, we find ourselves moving through these stages with varying degrees of rational reflection and abstraction.

If we want to become more systematic in handling ethical issues, we need to examine carefully what takes place at the level where rational reflection is most critical: the level of ethical analysis. This is where skill in decision making can be cultivated. Here we attempt to think about what we should do; there is intentionality and some degree of systematic treatment of the problem. At the expressive level only emotion is involved; it is not that emotion is bad, but it is only one element of ethical decision making. At the level of moral rules we are largely reflecting our socialization, which can amount to a set of blinders that limits our critical thinking. At the postethical level the considerations are too abstract, too personal, and in modern pluralistic societies, too varied to be susceptible to any generalized approach. People holding radically different philosophies and theologies are not likely to reach agreement at this level, although they may do so at the second and third levels. Also, public accountability in a heterogeneous society requires reasoned application of ethical principles rather the metaphysical assertions.

It is at the level of ethical analysis, the, that we are most likely to be able to account for our conduct most convincingly. If we proceed with reasoned justification, linking the consequences of our decisions with a tradition of ethical principles, then our conduct is reviewable and our deliberations and deeds are accessible for debate and logical assessment.

Dimensions of Ethics

The following can be considered as the dimensions of ethics:

- First, ethical decisions can be made on the basis of one of several schools of ethics or ethical traditions — that is, sets of basic and necessarily quite general substantive principles.
- Second, ethical decisions can be made at a variety of levels, ranging from the individual to the societal and even the trans-national.
- Third, ethical decisions can be made based on standards that are specific to a particular domain of human activity, such as business or education.

Major Schools of Ethics

There are numerous schools of ethics, or ethical traditions. Some of them are as follows:

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism holds that the ethically best decision, or in some variants of utilitarianism the best rule for making decisions, is the one that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number. Utilitarianism is the most familiar example of a general approach to ethics that is called **consequentialist**, because it judges the ethical acceptability of actions or policies based on their consequences. However, the approach taken to consequences can be much broader; the consequences that are considered to be of ethical importance can be environmental, social or even spiritual. It is important to be clear in any form of consequentialist argument about the values that define what counts as a benefit or as a harm. What is the greatest good, and how do we measure it? An influential variant of utilitarianism that is sometimes applied to public policy is cost-benefit analysis, which tries to identify the greatest good and ease the problem of comparing different people's conceptions of the good (what philosophers call the problem of interpersonal comparisons of utility) by attaching dollar values to all the consequences of a particular policy choice; the preferred policy option is simply the one showing the highest ratio of benefits to costs.

Kantian

Kantian or obligation-based ethics, named after the philosopher Immanuel Kant, with whom it is most closely associated, holds that the ethically acceptable decision is one that conforms to certain fundamental principles. For Kant, the most important of these principles was the "categorical imperative," which has two formulations. In the first, to be ethically acceptable, one should conduct oneself according to principles that one could wish to see universally applied to everyone. In other words, before deciding to commit fraud or make promises we have no intention of keeping, we must ask whether it even makes sense to think about a society in which everyone acted as we propose to act. The second formulation requires that we avoid treating other people exclusively as means to an end, rather than as ends in themselves. Kantian ethics is the most familiar example of a more general category of ethics known as **deontological** ethics, whose key characteristic is that some actions are held to be inherently or intrinsically right or wrong — that is to say, right or wrong independent of their consequences.

A particularly influential form of Kantian argument is John Rawls's attempt to define principles of distributive justice based on an intriguing application of the categorical imperative: asking how we would want the society to be organized if we had to make that choice from behind a "veil of ignorance" that prevented us from knowing in advance whether we were to be born rich or poor, male or female, athletic or physically disabled. Paradoxically, the Rawlsian approach to distributive justice shows that many Kantian ethical judgments cannot be easily isolated from consideration of their consequences.

Rights-based

Rights-based ethics, familiar because of Anglo-American legal systems' recent emphasis on individual liberty and their much older tradition of the primacy of property rights, is organized around a set of claims (such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and the ownership of private property) that individuals are presumed to have with respect to one another and to society. Rights-based ethics is embodied in the reference to "protection life and personal liberty" in the Fundamental Rights that is an integral part of the Indian Constitution.

The question "where do rights come from?" can be answered in different ways. Sometimes, as in the case of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, rights are held to be "self-evident"; at other times, they are justified with reference to more basic principles such as respect for persons, or to the idea of a contract among members of the society. In the latter respect rights-based and Kantian ethics overlap.

Contractarian

The idea of a contract is central to what many philosophers regard as a distinct school of ethics:

Contractarian ethics, which tries to derive principles of morality from the idea of a (hypothetical) contract entered into by members of a society. Implied consent to the terms of such a contract becomes the source of both rights and duties. Some variants of contractarian ethics have strongly Kantian elements: Rawls, for example, bases his analysis on the kind of contract individuals (actually, heads of households) would rationally enter into from behind the veil of ignorance. Both rights-based and contractarian ethics are characterized by what might be called intense individualism. In direct contrast, **communitarian** ethics, which is often defended partly with reference to limitations of the idea of rights, focusses less on individuals' rights than on the importance to individual well-being and fulfilment of membership in a community. In the words of one of the leading contemporary communitarians, "if we are partly defined by the communities we inhabit, then we must also be implicated in the purposes and ends characteristic of those communities . . . the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity."

It may be possible to define a middle ground between the intense individualism associated with the idea of a contract and the relative unconcern with the individual that is associated with many statements of communitarianism. At least one author has explored the idea of a covenant among individuals as the defining basis for moral obligations; unlike a contract, a covenant is not motivated primarily by considerations of self-interest, and can include a notion of obligation arising from sources other than individual human will or consent. A rather awkward neologism **covenantial ethics** has been coined to describe this middle ground.

Ethics of Care

The ethics of care, which according to many accounts originated with psychologist Carol Gilligan's efforts to describe women's orientation to ethical decision making as "in a different voice," resembles communitarian ethics in that rather than starting from a conception of human beings as isolated individuals, it emphasizes their relationships with one another. However, the ethics of care tend to be suspicious of claims about the welfare of the community, partly because such claims have often been used to justify women's inferior status within a society. It is strongly egalitarian in its conception of how people ought to treat one another, and is especially sensitive to inequalities of power. At the same time, writers in this school or tradition emphasize the limitations of rights-based or contractual conceptions of an ethical point of view toward others, pointing out that in many situations just leaving people alone is not enough, and that in some relationships (like those between mothers and children) a strictly rights-based conceptions of respect for others make no sense.

As its description implies, character ethics, or the ethics of virtue, focusses on the character of those making ethical decisions. Virtuous people (that is, those who act according to such motives as generosity, compassion or fidelity to their obligations) are those most likely to make ethically acceptable decisions. Ethical acceptability is thus determined at least in part by one's motives for acting in a certain way, as well as by principles and consequences. Ethical acts are not necessarily those carried out by following rules, but from motives like doing good or fulfilling obligations. This formulation is especially attractive in situations where people are faced with a set of choices imposed by circumstances outside their control, all of which are ethically repugnant in different

ways, or when the consequences of a particular action simply cannot be known. This school sometimes carries out ethical analysis starting with the premise that people have a right to fulfill their obligations to others, for instance, parents to decide for their young children on medical treatment.

Casuistry

Casuistry is an ethical tradition or style holding that we are too concerned with principles. For the casuist, ethical decisions can be made only on a case-by-case basis, although the decisions made in previous cases can provide a source of wisdom to draw upon; indeed, ethical judgments can be made when there are no principles to draw upon, or when disagreement on principles is profound. An appropriate analogy may be with the operation of precedent in the legal system. Particularly in biomedical ethics, which often have to focus on individual cases in a clinical setting, there has recently been a revival of interest in casuistry as a response to what is viewed as excessive preoccupation with abstract principles in that field.

The preceding schools of ethics deal primarily with the relationships among human beings. Although many people are concerned about problems like pollution primarily because of their effects on human beings, it is also possible to argue that **environmental ethics** is now a distinct school of ethics, because many variants explicitly hold that human beings have duties and obligations not only to each other, but also to non-human beings and to the natural environment as a whole. One line of thought in environmental ethics, for instance, holds that preservation of "ecological integrity" is a principle that should take precedence over all others.

Key Points about the Differences among Schools of Ethics

This listing of schools of ethics is not a comprehensive one, and may even be termed as oversimplifications. In addition, there is considerable overlap between many of the schools, which are not mutually exclusive approaches separated by clear boundaries. For example, the overlap between rights-based and Kantian ethics, and environmental ethics may be deontological, consequentialist or a combination of both.

We can think of the different schools of ethics as various prisms or conceptual lenses through which a decision or situation can be viewed. When the situation looks similar through all the prisms or lenses, governments are likely to find their choice relatively simple to make. However, different schools of ethics will often want to treat a situation quite differently. For instance the issue of contract pregnancy (or as it is more often but less accurately called, surrogate motherhood) looks quite different through the prisms of a rights-based ethics and of the ethic of care. Choices about how thoroughly to treat industrial pollutants that may threaten human health, or about where to locate hazardous waste landfills, look quite different through a Kantian or Rawlsian prism than they do when made on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis. Philosopher Will Kymlicka has observed that: "Moral philosophers have not yet discovered a knockout argument for or against these different theories." When making choices about the ethical acceptability of courses of action or of public policies, we normally and appropriately incorporate elements from several schools of ethics, rather than relying exclusively on a single one. For instance, particular policies might be acceptable on strictly utilitarian grounds, but be judged ethically unacceptable because they would harm certain vulnerable members of the community — an invocation of justice, of the ethics of care, or perhaps even of communitarian ethics (a community's fabric is threatened when it harms its most vulnerable members). Conversely, various infringements of rights are justified, in ethics, with reference to the good of the community, or the protection of certain kinds of valued relationships. The tradeoff between equity and efficiency in economic policy is another commonly mentioned example.

In response to the possibility of disagreement among schools of ethics, one approach is to seek what has been called "mid-level principles" to govern decision making. It has four "clusters of principles": respect for autonomy, non-maleficence (not doing harm), beneficence (doing good), and justice. These are now widely applied in both research and clinical settings, largely because people who disagree about whether (for instance) utilitarianism or rights-based ethics is ultimately more defensible may nevertheless be able to agree on these principles as the basis for ethical decision making. This does not mean ethical decision making in such settings has thereby become easy or routine; far from it. None of the four principles can be regarded as binding in all cases; since situations in which applicable principles conflict are relatively common, the best that can be done is to treat each principle only as *prima facie* binding — in other words, binding in the absence of more compelling moral considerations involving a competing principle. In addition, the four principles illustrate that any principle broad

enough to cover the spectrum of relevant cases will remain abstract enough so that judgment and interpretation on the part of the relevant decision maker(s) will invariably be involved, most notably about what is ethically relevant to decisions in a particular case.

Micro, Meso, Macro and Megaethics

In ethics we sometimes do an analysis at three different levels. It's very simple: micro-level, meso-level — which is institutional or group level — and macro-level, which is governmental or societal level.

The micro level refers to interactions between individuals, whether they are members of families, strangers or people whose roles carry a particular institutional meaning (for example, doctor and patient). The meso level involves ethics within the group, institution or organization (such as a hospital, university or government department). The macro level involves ethics at the society-wide level, for example, as reflected in the decisions of provincial or national governments about domestic policy. To this list, we can add mega-ethics, which refers to ethics at the transnational or cross-cultural level. Human rights is an illustration of a mega-ethical concept, although it has applications at other levels and indeed is probably most meaningful when applied to specific policy situations at the micro, meso or macro-levels.

Table 1 illustrates these four levels as they play out in analyzing various issues related to medicine and health care, and suggests the interplay among different levels of analysis. It may be useful to take a single example — access to costly and therefore scarce therapy —and to work through the issues and tensions, in a way that is necessarily a bit dogmatic.

Table 1. Levels of Analysis — Illustrations from Medicine and Health Care

Level of analysis	Kinds of issues that arise
Micro (individual)	• Should a patient who faces the possibility of progressively more serious disability and more intense pain from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) be granted her request for medical assistance in committing suicide once her pain has become unbearable? • Should physicians inform patients about the possible benefits and risks of all available treatments? • Should physicians always try to seek organ transplants or bypass surgery for patients who might benefit? • How should physicians decide which of two potential recipients is to receive an organ transplant, when only one organ or donor is available? • How should physicians decide which of two patients should be placed in the one available intensive care bed?
Meso (group or institutional)	• What policies should a hospital adopt with respect to DNR (do not resuscitate) orders for terminally ill patients? • As a group or profession, what are physicians' obligations in cases where patients are in extreme pain and who will not regain normal functioning — for example, because of ALS? • Should health maintenance organizations (HMOs) prohibit physicians from informing patients about the existence and possible benefits of treatments whose costs the HMO will not cover? • What principles or codes should transplant centres adopt for prioritizing transplant recipients when available organs are scarce? • How should hospitals allocate available intensive care beds? How should they allocate their budgets between various functions such as emergency medicine, chronic care and specialized surgical units (e.g. for coronary bypasses)? • Does an institutional policy of giving priority for coronary bypass surgery to patients younger than a certain age violate human rights, by amounting to impermissible discrimination based on age?

Macro (society-wide)	• What is society's interest in the issue of physician-assisted suicide? What values are at stake? How should the criminal law treat physician-assisted suicide? • What is society's interest in the disclosure by psychiatrists or psychotherapists in cases where patients are likely to do harm to themselves or others? • Should Parliament legalize physician-assisted suicide? Should the courts treat existing prohibitions as deprivations of fundamental rights? • How should health care be financed? • Is there a right to a basic minimum of health care? If so, what constitutes the basic minimum, and how should its provision be financed? • Does a policy of not providing insurance coverage for coronary bypass surgery on patients above a certain age violate human rights, by amounting to impermissible discrimination based on age? • Is health care a human right? Why, or why not?
Mega (across societies)	• Is health care a human right? Why, or why not? • If so, how does the content of that right differ as between rich and poor societies — say, those with GNP per capita of $1 000 and of $20 000-plus?

Source: Making Ethically Acceptable Policy Decisions by Ted Schrecker

At the micro level, not only is it entirely appropriate for a physician to seek the best treatment for his or her patient, but on many accounts the physician is obliged to do so, and for him or her to make decisions about treatment options based on other priorities, like cost containment, is almost certainly unethical. At the meso level, however, an institution confronted with scarce resources must organize a basis for making such choices as which candidates will receive transplant organs or bypass surgery, or for that matter whether priority should be given to expanding the transplant unit, the cardiac surgery unit or the provision of some other service. The institution cannot get away from these choices; as in many other situations, making no decision is a decision in itself. Such choices can be and have been made in a variety of ways and more than one principle for doing so (including the apparent non-principle of first-come, first-served, which is really a variant of the lottery principle) may be ethically defensible. What is probably not defensible is leaving the decisions to be made on the basis of whichever patient has the most effective, most persistent or loudest advocate in the form of his or her physician.

Also not defensible, however, are meso level policies that interfere with the physician-patient relationship and the ability of the physician to act as an advocate for the patient, for instance by prohibiting physicians under contract to a particular health management organization (HMO) from telling patients about treatments that the HMO will not cover. A basic macro level choice, which exists in every country and affects the choices available at all the other levels, is how the health care system should be financed, and how access will be governed. A number of resource allocations may all be ethically acceptable, but there will probably also be some clearly unacceptable ones — for example, locating a new unit in a remote area where utilization rates will be low, but which happens to elect a member of Cabinet. As suggested in the Table resource allocations that have the effect, even if not the intent, of discriminating on the basis of age should probably also be judged ethically unacceptable.

Domains of Ethical Analysis

Ethical analysis takes place at multiple levels; it also takes place within various "domains" of human activity. Human beings interact with one another in a variety of capacities, and many of those interactions carry with them a distinctive and specialized set of expectations and obligations, often as a matter of law as well as matter of ethics. Physicians and lawyers thus have certain obligations to maintain confidentiality with respect to information about their patients and clients. Fiduciary duties and respect for trade secrecy are required in a variety of business settings. It has been argued that distinctive sets of ethical principles are appropriate to govern the conduct of scientists and environmental professionals. The principles that are appropriate for guiding the relationships between family members are clearly distinct from any of these and widely understood, although until recently no one would have thought of codifying them.

An author who has promoted the idea of “domain-sensitive” ethical standards argues that:

“Roughly, each domain is characterized by a set of socially recognized goals or purposes and by a set of “structures.” . . . Unless they can be shown to be unreasonable, these goals count as justificatory values for their respective domains. And moral standards that obtain in a domain are justified in relation to them (as well as in relation to other values)”

This approach is acceptable, and indeed necessary, to a point. However, the idea of domain-sensitive ethics leaves a key question unanswered. What values, if any, can we rely on as the basis for concluding that certain goals or purposes of a specific domain are unreasonable? What happens when the goals and purposes of two domains, such as business and medicine, come into conflict? This is not merely an academic issue. The argument is often made that business should be assessed based on standards related to human rights or environmental performance — in other words, that it should be ethically accountable to stakeholders other than its shareholders and customers. This argument might be rejected after careful consideration, but cannot be dismissed out of hand, or by reference solely to the goals of business.

For example, one surgeon regarded a lab test to confirm that tumors removed from a patient’s scalp were benign as a routine precaution, but the patient’s HMO refused reimbursement. He decided to pay for the procedure out of his own pocket, but the HMO subsequently assigned him a negative “practice pattern” rating for having ordered the test. This apparently had much less to do with protecting patient interests than with protecting the profits of the HMO. In this case, the physician’s course of action is not a viable response to the HMO’s exercise of financial power on a routine basis: in other situations the costs (for instance, of additional days in an intensive care unit) might be ruinous.

Engineers, research scientists and a variety of other professionals may find themselves working in settings (such as a private firm or a government department) where the “management culture” emphasizes the values and purposes of the organization. These may not be compatible with the ethical standards distinctive to the profession, such as full disclosure of all findings in the case of scientists, or with more general obligations to protect public health or environmental quality. In such situations, when does the legitimate reach of organizational goals end? When, for example, are life-shortening decisions about the allocation of health care resources justified by the goals of the business world, or with reference to politically mandated cost containment objectives? Who decides?

So while acknowledging the value of standards of ethical acceptability, such as professional codes of ethics, which address the distinctive ethical challenges in a particular domain, governments must recognize that actions or policies are not necessarily ethically acceptable simply because they meet certain standards that are specific to a given domain. Domain-sensitive standards of ethical acceptability are not enough. Those standards must themselves be justified, and must stand up to critical examination. If we regard politics, or government, as a domain with its own standards of ethical acceptability, the same is true: there may be practices that are acceptable according to the norms or standards of that domain, but which fail to stand up to a more general and demanding form of ethical scrutiny.

Ethics in Private and Public Relationships

At the heart of ethics is a concern about something or someone other than ourselves and our own desires and self-interest. Ethics is concerned with other people's interests, with the interests of society, with God's interests, with "ultimate goods", and so on. So when a person 'thinks ethically' they are giving at least some thought to something beyond themselves.

One problem with ethics is the way it's often used as a weapon. If a group believes that a particular activity is "wrong" it can then use morality as the justification for attacking those who practice that activity. When people do this, they often see those who they regard as immoral as in some way less human or deserving of respect than themselves; sometimes with tragic consequences.

Ethics is not only about the morality of particular courses of action, but it's also about the goodness of individuals and what it means to live a good life. Virtue Ethics is particularly concerned with the moral character of human beings. At times in the past some people thought that ethical problems could be solved in one of two ways:

- by discovering what God wanted people to do
- by thinking rigorously about moral principles and problems

If a person did this properly they would be led to the right conclusion.

But now even philosophers are less sure that it's possible to devise a satisfactory and complete theory of ethics - at least not one that leads to conclusions. Modern thinkers often teach that ethics leads people not to conclusions but to 'decisions'. In this view, the role of ethics is limited to clarifying 'what's at stake' in particular ethical problems.

Philosophy can help identify the range of ethical methods, conversations and value systems that can be applied to a particular problem. But after these things have been made clear, each person must make their own individual decision as to what to do, and then react appropriately to the consequences.

The Importance of Relationships

Optimal living is impossible without harmonious human relationships. Successful social interactions are an integral part of our lives and flourishing - from the most fundamental act of our conception to the glorious interplay of a romantic union. We benefit from others' intellect by testing our reasoning against theirs; we vastly extend our knowledge, skills and productiveness by the physical and mental division of labor; we experience immense pleasure from a variety of intimate friendships; we are inspired by great artist, scientists and entrepreneurs. Effective relationships are of great benefit to us; a fact that a rational ethic must encompass.

What principles and virtues foster beneficial human interactions? The basic personal virtues of rationality, awareness, self-knowing, honesty, productiveness and integrity form a solid basis for reaping benefits from other - as they benefit from us. We prefer to deal with moral, principled people because they are productive and dependable. They represent a value, not a threat.

A uniquely social principle is that of voluntary, mutually beneficial interaction. It recognizes the merit of individuals trading value for value; not giving or taking undeservedly; not squandering value on others or defrauding them. This has elegantly been termed the Trader Principle. The principle recognizes the value of personal self-responsibility, authority and autonomy. People are individuals and can ultimately only successfully define and achieve their own goals. We cannot think for the irrational, be optimistic for the pessimist or satisfied for the discontented. We can also not make someone else feel genuine self-esteem. Yes, we can encourage others in these endeavors, but each individual must ultimately think their own thoughts, feel their own feelings, make their own decisions - live their own lives.

The Trader Principle rejects the notion that human interaction is a zero-sum game. Interactions can, and should be profitable to all parties. Exchanges that are voluntary are inherently deemed beneficial to all concerned, otherwise they would not engage in them. This is true not only for commercial transactions, but equally - and possibly even more importantly - for primarily emotional, psychological trades: friendships.

A healthy friendship is a mutually beneficial exchange of value - values such as positive character traits, skills, knowledge, intelligence, beauty and emotional support. We don't keep literal scorecards of these values traded, but once they become substantially lop-sided, the relationship suffers. One person sacrifices, the other loses independence - both undermine their self-esteem.

Understanding the potential and actual value of interacting with others on the basis of the Trader Principle encourages such virtues as justice, respect, tolerance and benevolence. Achieving successful relationships, both casual and long-term, is further enhanced by good psychological knowledge, as well as communication and social skills.

This morality encourages social virtues not as 'a price to be paid' for personal security or simply 'because one should', but as a direct extension of personal virtues. Moral social interaction cannot be based on self-sacrifice - sacrifice to family, society or nation. They must be based on the individuals' rational self-interest. Rational social principles foster our own optimal living - as well as that of others. It also advances diversity; yet it reduces social conflicts by providing a means of resolving them. A shared rational personal ethic forms the basis of social conduct, law and politics - conflicts are resolved using reason, not force.

Ethics in Relationships

Theoretical Aspects

Relationship management has become the focus of research in recent years. While some scholars conceive of relationships as subjective realities, others view them as objective. Still others see relationships as a combination of subjective perceptions and objective qualities of relationships independent of participants.

It has been pointed out that relationships should be a multidimensional notion. Further, six dimensions of relationship state have been proposed by some: reciprocity, trust, mutual legitimacy, openness, mutual satisfaction, and mutual understanding. Others have presented five dimensions: trust, openness, involvement, investment, and commitment. However, atleast four dimensions have been widely supported: trust, commitment, satisfaction, and control mutuality

The relational dimension trust refers to “one [relational] party’s level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party”. Trust has three sub dimensions: integrity, dependability, and competence. Integrity shows one party’s belief of consistency and fairness in the other’s behaviors. Dependability describes the consistency between one’s words and behaviors. Competence indicates the extent to which one party believes the other has the ability to do what it says it will do.

The relational dimension commitment reflects “the extent to which one feels that the relationship is worth spending time and energy to maintain”. Commitment has two sub- dimensions—continuance and affective commitment. Continuance commitment relates to behavior, whereas affective commitment concerns emotions.

The relational dimension satisfaction is defined as “the extent to which one [relational] party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced”. From the social exchange theory’s perspective, both relational parties (e.g., a public and its organization) are satisfied with their relationship when they achieve a balance of rewards and costs. Satisfaction measures the favorable feelings expressed by relational parties.

Control mutuality refers to “the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another”. Power imbalance is an important issue in control mutuality. However, power does not have to be equally distributed to maintain a stable relationship.

Personal Ethics and Professional Relationships

Professional ethics is mostly played out in the daily interactions that one has with other people. What matters most to people is the honesty of the person standing right in front of them; rather than that of Satyam Computers or Enron. How you treat the people during your regular workday sets the stage for whether or not you will crash when the inevitable personal ethical crisis comes. Your core values must match what you say to others. Here, we're not just talking about the ethical no-brainers such as lying to coworkers or stealing company funds. We're talking about whether your everyday treatment of people, from poorest person to the richest reflects the ethical values that you hold dear. In a nutshell, do you treat people right?

Why don't you sexually harass your coworker? Because you respect him or her as a person and it would be unthinkable to drag that person through the pain and torment that harassment brings. What's stopping you from taking credit for someone else's work? Because you would not want the same thing to happen to you. Why

don't you take advantage of a customer's ignorance to cash in on a sale? It's because you understand that this destroys relationships and trust, which is what true success in business is built upon.

We are used to hearing about ethics from a punishment/consequences angle. Prison is not the primary reason you don't swindle your colleagues, tell casteist jokes, or wield power over weaker individuals. The reason is that there's a right and a wrong way to treat people. It's not about you, it's about them. And you don't need a corporate code of conduct to tell you.

You may wonder why a coworker becomes a heartless dictator after a promotion. Why does a normal person behave like a sexual predator when around certain people? The reason is that he or she lacks or has lost a healthy perspective on human value and dignity. Respect is what compels us to treat people right whether or not they deserve it.

Consider a situation where one human says or does something cruel to another. You may wonder how a person can do such horrible things to another person. You figure that the individual is hardened and must have no feeling or regard for others. That may be the case, or possibly the abuser was just a normal person like you who lost perspective. Sometimes we get so caught up in ourselves that we forget who we are talking to.

What the workplace sexual harasser and someone on trial for war crimes have in common is that they both dehumanized others. They see the object of their harassment as less than human - as "beneath" them. The act of dehumanizing others strips away another person's intrinsic value and worth. Even in a small amount, this leads to a slippery slope. Once this kind of attitude is allowed a little room to grow it can lead down a path that may "justify" the mistreatment of others.

Everyone has feelings. Everyone has hopes, dreams, ambitions, and passions. We need to view others in a spiritual dimension that goes deeper than what they look like or how much they know. There is something deeper within all of us that begs for respect and honor no matter who we are. We should treat each other as priceless human beings who have the same capacity and potential we do.

There's no reason why the person on the other side of the sales counter or the person who speaks another language isn't deserving of the same honor that you expect to have. Becoming an ethical person starts with your honest interactions with everyone. The root ethical failures in the huge things are no different from the small matters we deal with every day.

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