Ethics: "Ethical" or "Moral" Thought and Decision Making

A General Overview in Terms of

History, Neurophysiology, Psychology, Philosophy, Religion, Modern Standards, and Education

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Helmut Schwab

Princeton

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Abstract:

Ethics (morality) varies through history and between cultures. Common is a genetic base in caring for offspring and close relatives, reciprocity in caring with selected clan members, and readiness for sacrifice for the clan's benefit. Learning augments the inclusion of others. Mental focus facilitates a weighing process in decision making. Extreme focus leads to heroism or obsession. Three philosophies compete; the ethics of maximum benefit, of individual protection, or of social balance. Modern ethics include human rights and environmental concerns.

(80)

1. Etymology and Definition:

1.1. Etymology of "ethics":

Historic word meanings:

In early Greek: "Ethos" = Customs

In early Roman Latin: Mores = Customs

In German: Sitten (Gebräuche) = Customs

1.2. Definition of "ethics":

Customs: Webster: Common use or practice, established manner.

Duden (Sitten):   ..valid, ...customary ... habits

Ethical: Webster: relating to morals, containing precepts of morality

Moral: Webster: relating to right and wrong ... as determined by duty

Ethics: Encyclopedia Britannica:

The discipline of philosophy concerned with what is morally good and bad, right and wrong; also system or theory of moral values or principles.

Duden: Norms that form the base of responsible attitudes

Morality: Encyclopedia Britannica:

(no commentary)

Webster: The doctrine of moral duties

The quality of an action as estimated by a standard of right and wrong

Duden: Ethical norms and values regulating the interhuman behavior

Personal observations:

Historical changes have occurred in the meaning and coverage area of "ethics" and, more so, in the height or strictness of moral standards. In early cultures, ethics really meant customs only -- customary behavior, as in communal life, dress code, cults, or war. The discussion of virtues in Aristotelian Athens referred not only to our sphere of "good" and "bad", but also to courage, justice, temperance, and other qualifications of character. Later, in the Middle Ages, much of ethics was covered by religious or church-issued commandments and rules. "Moral" matters were no longer "customs" or aspects of character, but became specifically matters of "right" or "wrong". Beginning with the scholastic thinkers, "ethics" became an intellectual pursuit, a discipline of philosophy. In a parallel part of society, the knights and nobility retained or revived rules of "honor". The importance of these rules continued through WWII, especially for the nobility and the military. Their ethical "values" reflected upon the value of a person in society. With the rise of the middle class and, more so, with increasing industry and commerce, "ethics in business" arose as a concern, with emphasis on trust and fairness. (Interestingly, the Ten Commandments do not address predatory business behavior). Since the late 18th century, in a combination of enlightenment and romanticism, "humanistic" values became important and still, to a certain extent, dominate the ethical thinking of the world today.

Western democracy promotes "freedom, brotherhood, and equality" - the ideals of the French Revolution, the American Bill of Rights, and the Civil Rights movement in all its forms. Democracy also brought questions of "ethics in government", putting emphasis on integrity. Modern intellectuality (rationality, scientific thinking, and liberal thought) brought new movement into the interpretation and limits of acceptable ethical behavior. Much of what was unacceptable in times past is quite acceptable today.

Moral strictness varies in history, in an oscillation between periods of materialistic or rational lasciviousness and religious or idealistic strictness, one being the reaction to the exaggeration of the other.

In the past, "ethics" and "morality" have covered the following areas:

Criminal behavior (see the Ten Commandments) and related punishment

Religious behavior (Christian saintliness, Jewish righteousness)

Human caring and compassion, humanistic values

Fairness and trust (beyond the law) in interhuman relations

Behavior of courtesy

Sexuality

Dress codes

also:

Personal and military honor

Ethics in business

Ethics in government (sense of duty vs. corruption)

Large areas of "customs" are by now relegated to criminal and civil law, others to more or less liberal habits (new meaning of "customs") without an ethical connotation.

In today's use of our language, "ethical" or "moral" refers only to a few remaining concerns, defined by a combination of human (humane, humanistic) emotions and culturally recognized values:

Human caring and compassion, humanistic values

Fairness and trust (beyond the law) in interhuman relations

Ethics in the professions (beyond the law) as in business, medicine, law, etc.

Ethics in government (sense of duty and integrity)

Besides the above mentioned ideals of humanistic democracy ("Freedom, Brotherhood, and Equality", etc.), there is also an obvious correlation between "humanistic values" and

the legislative recognition of what constitutes a crime

and the assessment of suitable punishment

(Is abortion a crime? Is the death penalty ever appropriate?)

the concern over abuse of religious followers by religious leaders

(Specifically in exotic sects)

the concern over sexual abuse of dependents or minors

the human interpretation of business ethics
the human interpretation of government ethics

Ethics, through the centuries, has always related to the behavior of individuals. In our times, there is an increasing call for ethical behavior of organizations (as in business) and of nations (as in international aide).

In sum:

Ethical behavior, in its process, its results, and as a model, shall avoid disadvantage or dismay and shall bring practical or emotional benefit to the other party, whether this is an individual, a group, or society at large.

Ethical behavior may, in a rather ill defined way, relate to animals and nature at large.

Therefore, ethical behavior is carried by an attitude of caring and respect.

Since so much of ethics is a matter of cultural evolution, environment and learning, judgment of others must be restrained.

2. Evolutionary Biology:

Through evolution, nature has provided initially only one, and later three basic categories of behavior that we humans, in retrospect (after having attained human emotions and thought concepts), can perceive as "ethical".

The caring for or defense of offspring among animals is a very early behavior in animal evolution. The loss of offspring (or mates when paired) is a traumatic emotional experience for most higher animals. While this behavior appears as an expression of unselfish love and is humanly touching to observe, it is based totally on genetically transmitted general controls. Interestingly, the specifics of that behavior are learned, as in the recognition of family members by appearance, smell, or specific calls. Modification of that learning can lead to caring for additional individuals.

In higher animals and with the formation of packs or larger family groups, more behavior categories relating to "ethics", in human terms, can be observed:

Caring for and defense of not only offspring, but for those individuals who are next of kin,

> inversely proportional to genetic distance, with a tilt forward in the generation sequence.

Reciprocity

> in services (as in grooming)
> in food sharing
> in assistance in fighting

Loyalty to the group, to the point of self-sacrifice for the group.

Among animals and, more so, among humans, the reverse of ethical behavior can appear in the forms of cheating, abuse, and revenge for cheating and abuse among animals is mainly based on superior rank or power. It sometimes occurs secretly, sometimes even openly. If discovered, such behavior is often (but not always) dealt with by fight, subordination, or withdrawal of reciprocal service, and occasionally even more harshly. Revenge appears among animals in the form of remembered hostility, leading to reverse attack when the opportunity occurs. Expectation of revenge appears, to the human observer, as a feeling of guilt in animals. Revenge is not as developed among animals as among humans. The reason may be found in the shorter memory and the lack of higher forms of combinatory thinking and planning among animals as compared to humans. Also, animals are more dominated and controlled by the immediate importance of food search and propagation.

In higher animals, the various behavior patterns listed above may show a varying degree of genetically based controls and an increasing amount of learning. Statistical distribution is seen in both genetically based controls and in learning. However, it is not within the reach of animal thought to rationally question or innovate in a focused manner any of those areas of "ethical" behavior (in our terms).

The animal world is one of Darwinian selection, also regarding the emergence of "ethics". A new approach to the study of ethics was proposed some time ago, along the lines of "Evolutionary Ethics", investigating the correlation between ethical behavior and natural selection (Edward O.

Wilson: "Sociobiology", 1975, and "On Human Nature", 1978). Ethical behavior beyond the attempt to prevail in the struggle for life and propagation is a luxury in the breeding sequence, and is eliminated when conditions become tight. Thus, animal caring and related emotions can be interpreted as being conducive to survival and propagation. Yet, even animals show emotions beyond the useful, such as great sadness or despair upon losing a mate (observed among some birds, more often among some mammals).

Among humans, all ethical behavior beyond the three basic animalistic behavior patterns listed above is largely a result of experience (what works best), thought (including religious inspiration and priestly meditation), learning in a social context, or simple habit. The diversity of acceptable behavior between various cultures confirms this (human sacrifices, treatment of captives, treatment of women, sexual behavior, cannibalism, courtesy concepts, fairness/treacherousness, religious ideals, social assistance, etc.).

It is important to note that humans recognize the feelings of "right" and "wrong", commonly related to the concept of "conscience". Everything else being equal, most humans feel generally better when doing "right" and worse when doing "wrong". Therefore, for humans, ethical behavior is not only a matter of logical thought but of emotional preference. However, it is also true that these feelings of "right" and "wrong" are not the same among all individuals and cultures. To a large degree, these feelings can be influenced by social context, learning, habit, or personal thought(!).

Human ethics, especially as presented by the great religions, has led far beyond the struggle for survival and propagation. The great religions do more than teach how to make the world a pleasant place to live. The emotional aspects of compassion, love, and forgiving go beyond that, as do the Asian spiritual pursuits of enlightenment, harmony and calm. These emotional considerations are the basis of the highest "values" in our society. They indicate to us what is worth living and striving for, but they are not necessarily anchored in nature's needs, and do not necessarily occur naturally by themselves.

It is interesting to note that the ethical teachings of the great religions have survived Darwinian elimination in difficult times. This was accomplished by the suffering of people in the hope for a better world later on Earth, or in a promised existence after death. Yet, it is questionable whether our present high standards of ethics, already shaken in many trouble spots on Earth, will survive an unchecked population explosion (or migration) and consequent Darwinian crunch of the returning raw forces of nature. It is equally scary to observe that countries, which lose their established ethical over-all structure of society, can collapse to a very low level of Darwinian behavior (the Middle East, Somalia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia .... and some parts of our own big cities).

In sum:

Nature has given human emotions a base in three areas -- caring for next-of-kin, reciprocity, and group loyalty.

The strength of these emotions or emotional needs varies widely in a statistical distribution.

Experience, intuition, reason, and habit have added further evolution and differentiation to this emotional base of ethical behavior.

Therefore, a certain variety of ethical standards can be found beyond the common human base.

The desire to have peace and be helped is often not in balance with being peaceful and providing help to others.

The loyalty to a narrow group affiliation, while being seen as ethical, is often in conflict with loyalty to a larger group or society at large, to a point of being unethical.

3. Brain physiology

For centuries, philosophers have argued and disagreed whether ethical behavior is and should be based on rational thought, or whether it is based on emotions; whether there are absolute, nature-given standards of ethical behavior, or whether all ethical behavior is relative and results from conditioning by circumstances and learning.

Behavior, thoughts, emotions, and learning are all brain processes. An understanding of these physiological processes and their interconnections should help in the philosophical discussion of ethics. A recent philosophical perspective, the "Physiology of Ethics", may open new approaches for the discussion and exploration of ethics.

Certain behavior patterns are controlled by genetically given capabilities of the animal or human brain through predetermined nerval structures and functions. In such cases, certain sensory stimuli trigger specific basic behavior patterns. Sensory stimuli are recognized by sensor specific brain areas (visual, acoustic, olfactory, etc.). As these areas recognize a stimulus, they project this fact by way of nerval connections to other parts of the brain for response behavior. The most basic response behavior patterns are feeding, aggression, flight, mating, and kin protection (mainly offspring). The essential parts of these basic behavior patterns are genetically given with some learning of specific identifying details (specific visual patterns, smell, call, etc.). To the degree that learning sets in, behavior patterns become more complex and less predetermined.

There may be contradictions when sensory stimuli evoke contradictory behaviors (e.g. in a situation of danger: flight vs. protection of offspring). Animals can postpone decisions in uncertainty, can follow priorities between different motivations, and can also balance different signal intensities of different stimuli (distance, smell, etc.) or different memories. Is that thought? It is based on brain processes separate from the sensory areas, specifically in those areas that then evolved into the forebrain in humans. Indications are that the strongest signals prevail in the brain, with different weight being given to different stimuli or memories under different conditions in the perceived environment or in the body.

Behavior patterns can also be triggered by signals originating in the mid-brain, as in connection with natural desires or urges (hunger, sex, and also parental caring, nursing). The hypothalamus is the part of the mid-brain that controls the processing and projecting of natural desires or urges. Nerval projections from there lead to parts of the frontal lobes of the brain which strategize and initiate actions, or change the weight of other motivations occupying the mind. Thereby, such projections of desires or urges substantially influence thought and behavior in the direction of satisfying the originating urges. There is a strong connection between the mid-brain, body chemistry, and the frontal lobes where "reason" resides (via the endocrine system, hormones, neurotransmitters, etc.).

Sensory perceptions result in the activation of all nerves and nerval connection associated with those perceptions. Thoughts are sequences of visualizations of sensory perceptions, including words. A visualization in thought can be understood as the activation of all neurons related to a

perception without an originating sensory stimulus. There is only one thought in conscious presence (foreground of thought) at any one time. The progression of the thought process never stands still. As one visualization fades away (as any nerval activation does), another mentally associated one is freshly activated. This occurs through nerval connections (synapses) that, once activated, result in retrievable "memory". In an endless linear sequence, one visualization follows the other. Most visualizations have many related associations. However, the linear thought sequence only follows the strongest, the most often used, or the most highly valued association; the others most likely are suppressed by the one that does become activated. This is one reason why thought evolution is similar to biological evolution. Sequences are interrupted by sensory inputs with greater signal strength than the thought sequence. Thereby, such new sensory inputs enter consciousness, often resulting in new thought sequences.

Some sequences taper off into the subconscious. Others surface out of the subconscious, appearing as sudden "intuition".

What is "consciousness"? Possibly nothing more than the fact that prior thought is remembered. This allows the brain to piece together an understanding of the world around it, of the individual doing the thinking, and of the brain itself. Such understanding of the world and itself is as good as the thought capability, the memory, the past experiences, and the learning of the individual brain doing the thinking (whether animal or human).

"Awareness" is the present existence of a conscious thought (or conscious sensory impression), accomplished by short-term memorization of the present thought. Thoughts must have been in awareness to be remembered and, thereby, to become part of consciousness. Thoughts (or sensory impressions) have to exceed a certain threshold signal strength to enter awareness. Therefore, most thoughts in the course of a day are never in awareness and, hence, do not reach consciousness. We remember only a very small fraction of what we experienced and thought.

Thought can be focused. An important thought, e.g. an open problem or a strong and surprising sensory impression, can serve as a "focus" to guide following thought sequences. The focus is a visualization that is kept in a state of activation (temporary memory) in such a way that any following element of a thought sequence is put in reference to this "focus". Thoughts which meaningfully relate to a given focus gain additional signal strength, possibly enough to reach awareness, or enough to serve as link to the next thought (visualization), thereby eliminating thought sequences which are unrelated to the "focus". Often, several focus thoughts are retained in memory with varying strength. Therefore, "intuition" can occur at a much later time when a chance thought, possibly in the subconscious, provides an important link to an earlier focus and the resulting signal strength allows penetration to awareness.

Referencing of subsequent thought or sensory impressions to an earlier established focus allows the formation of new associative links and new visualizations in the brain, possibly progressing from simple components to increasingly complex structures. Thus, the mechanism of focused thought is the other reason why thought evolution is similar to biological evolution.

Consequently, the human brain can only "think" in associative sequences of visualization elements which it already possesses, or which it receives through sensory perception (learning) from the outside and values highly enough to retain in memory. However, as elsewhere in nature, the human brain can form ever more complex associative structures out of the elements it contains and processes. Since associative links are strengthened through either high valuation or repetitive use, it takes a certain quantity of personal thought and personal value judgments to form reliable thought sequences in the brain and subsequent behavior patterns. (Watching TV or just listening to a teacher talking is not enough).

Emotions (sometimes called feelings) are different from thoughts. Thoughts are brain processes in the forebrain and are visualizations of sensory images, including words. Emotions, however, are not visualizations (corresponding to images, sounds, words, fragrances, etc.) and, therefore, are abstract phenomena in the brain. As such, emotions are not describable or measurable in physical terms (only through their symptoms), and are fuzzy in nature. Emotions express themselves as often unlocalized feelings of positive or negative well being (e.g. joy, sorrow). Emotions can originate in the mid-brain or limbic system. Through nerval projections, as from the amygdala, they can stimulate thought responses (and subsequent behavior) in the forebrain. Thereby, emotions have an effect on signal strength in associative links and, consequently, thought sequences. Depending on such relative signal strength, thought sequences continue unaltered or become guided or derailed by emotions. The associative signal strength, as discussed before, can be modified by learning, repetitive usage, and personal thought.

Emotions can be memorized as valuations of memory elements or thought associations by means of connections with the limbic system of the brain, specifically the amygdala. It is important to note that emotions come in a variety of different dimensions (flavors), including:

warmth vs. coldness (love or compassion vs. fear or hate, as to children, enemies, adversaries)

joy vs. sorrow (related to gain vs. loss, especially when human)

good vs. bad (as when doing right vs. wrong), also including guilt, shame

satisfaction vs. anger (calm vs. disturbance)

humor: a class by itself

and more?

As in all biological parameters, there is a statistical distribution of brain structures and brain nuclei sizes among humans and of asymmetries between brain halves. Therefore, it is not surprising that the strength of urges or emotional impact on brain functions and (frontal lobe) thought varies between individuals. It is common knowledge that some individuals are more emotional than others; some are more poetic than others. Consequentially, the emotional versus rational assessment of ethical concerns varies between individuals. Beyond that, there are the learned variations in response to emotions, some on the cultural level of societies.

All emotions (except possibly humor) are related to, or are the base of "ethical" concerns and vice-versa. That is what sets ethical judgment apart from logical or practical thought and measurable cost/benefit considerations.

The mid-brain influences the "sympathetic" nervous system. Generally recognized is the impact that this specialized nervous system has on the stomach, the heart, and the blood vessels (e.g. stomach cramps, heart beat, vasal dilatation). Thus, ancient thinking placed important emotions in the heart, and our language indicates that "disgusting" emotions make people feel sick while good deeds give them a warm feeling. Vice-versa, heart trouble and the lack of oxygen can lead to emotions of anxiety. A pleasantly warm environment can lead to the same emotions that, in turn, can cause the body to relax and generate generous circulation. Symptoms and causes (well-being and emotions) in these loops are sometimes interchangeable. The emotions' impact on decision making and some actions' impact on emotions are also reversible.

While the "heart" was thought to play a role in ethical concerns regarding love (compassion/hate), the "conscience" was thought to play a role in ethical concerns regarding good/bad (right/wrong). "Conscience" has been a key concept in ethics as a discipline of philosophy from Plato's times to our days of modern philosophy and theology. However, there is no indication in brain physiology of any structure or function in neurological terms corresponding to conscience.

The virtual phenomenon of conscience may arise out of holistic thinking, closely related to the right side of the brain, in complex situations. In those situations, thought occurs largely subconsciously with solutions appearing unexpectedly in awareness in a not analytically retraceable way. However, there is a different interpretation to be considered for the explanation of conscience:

"Conscience" appears specifically in conflict resolutions between deeper urges and learned behavior, or when realizing alternate priorities with divergent rank in culturally learned acceptance or "value" scales (love ranks higher than joy, joy ranks higher than physical pleasure or gain).

It is important to note that the relative weight of emotions and, hence, judgment and ethical behavior can change in the course of an individual's life. A child's priority of security can be followed by a young man's enjoyment of adventure (even a fight), possibly followed by the next age's enjoyment of pleasures. These shifts possibly emanate through varying signal strength from the mid-brain (hypothalamus etc.) and may be related to body chemistry, including neurotransmitters.

As in all conflicting situations, one can possibly regret not having followed the other course when one has decided on a specific course at one time, resulting in feelings of regret, guilt or shame. In other words, most people have learned what the culturally acceptable solution should be when in conflict with one's own momentary decisions. Humans respond to the same methods used in animal training in order to improve their ethical decision-making capability (reward/punishment, physical or abstract, or impact on the nervous system with neurochemicals in pathological cases).

One should note that some decisions by "conscience" are influenced by what is learned as the culturally accepted value scale. However, this scale changes in the history of cultures. Patriotism and honor, in first place in the value scale before WWII, is now replaced in primary position of importance by the goals of tolerance and equality in ethnic, gender, and social matters. Thus, decisions of generations past cannot be fairly adjudicated by our generation. Will the value scale change further in future times? In what direction? The great leaders of mankind often sensed the needs of people in their times and formed their societies accordingly.

Many ethical decisions are made as a matter of habit. In habit, behavior patterns are followed without evaluation of alternatives in thought. This is accomplished through strongly formed synaptic connections providing a preference path for thought associations. As a matter of fact, most people in any society behave ethically (or unethically) out of habit. Following habit without any thought does not provide any emotional reward, except in secondarily derived experiences.

One should be aware of the fact that ethical decisions are not yet ethical actions. The translation of judgment into action is a major problem for many individuals -- the dreamers, the phlegmatics, the procrastinators, and those who have to "find themselves" first. Action initiation, while often seen as genetically preconditioned, is somewhat related to mid-brain functions and the endocrine system (e.g. adrenalin, possibly also the pituitary and thyroid glands). Thus, it can be influenced by thought (including faith), learning (habit), diet, pharmaceutical products, drugs, exercise, and other environmental factors.

And where is the "soul"? This word has also gone through some change of meaning through the times and different cultures. For the Greeks and Romans, the soul (Greek: "psyche", Latin: "animus") was the total spiritual essence of the human being -- thought, emotion, and personality -- continuing after the death of the body. With philosophical scrutiny, the "logic" thought or "reason" (Greek: "logos", Latin: "ratio") was separated and polarized from the intuitive and emotional soul. In our post-Victorian, post-romantic, humanistically educated times, soul is the seat of emotions and spontaneous (not reasoned) value judgments (in contrast to cost/benefit considerations). However, the brain does not show any structure or nucleus where the soul would be concentrated. The hypothalamus projects natural drives and urges from the midbrain to the forebrain. The amygdala contributes valuation to thought associations. Memory of what was previously thought or learned is widely distributed in the forebrain. It is there that connections are established for any kind of thought, preference ranking, and action. Consequently, the soul is another virtual phenomenon (as consciousness and conscience) of the brain's capability to realize and rank visualization and action alternatives with a strong connection to emotions (and the sympathetic nervous system).

Stradivarius understood the structure and function of violins. But he could not explain the mysterious force music exerts on our minds. We may be close to understanding the physiology of the human brain, but we do not understand and can only admire the vague mystery of the force that allows neural signals in the brain to let our "souls" arise in our minds.

Learning, the remembering of experience sequences and their outcome, plays a role in behavior initiation, specifically when prior experiences were associated with pleasure or suffering. Such "valuation" (value giving) of experiences is remembered together with their visualization. The amygdala is the part of the brain that is associated with valuation. The hippocampal area in the brain is related to memory formation. The remembering of valuation may be accomplished through proportional formation in the synaptic connection of memorized associations and their connection to the amygdala. This results in different signal strength of such associative connections when called upon. Thus, when there are several associations of different value (signal strength), the brain can arrive at a "learned" preference selection and a consequent decision.

Learning can change the intensity or priority of responses through a change of valuation in memory. When praise or punishment immediately follows some established behavior, the new valuation may lead to different thought sequences next time and, consequently, to different behavior. If reward or punishment follows much later in an action sequence, the memorization of such a sequence becomes important. It may be that criminals lack the capability to remember or pursue sequences sufficiently to arrive at corresponding evaluation of the consequential value of actions. Sequential steps, like larger distances, bring fast fading of consequences and weaken "reasoned" responses.

The social environment leads to learning when a behavior results in reward or retribution by other individuals in the social unit and, consequently, to valuation of associations in thought sequence.

Habits -- repetitive behavior under similar circumstances without supporting thought processes -- are the result of learning. Habits are initiated by a stimulus. Habits in the sense of motor skills are located in the cerebellum. However, established thought patterns should be understood as synaptic connections in the forebrain, leading to more strongly developed connections through multiple uses. Therefore, as such connections provide stronger signal connections, they lead to preferred thought sequences later on.

The combination of focused thoughts as initiators and subsequent pursuits of habit sequences can lead to the capability to pursue different behaviors under different environmental conditions (focus). This can extend into the ethical realm. Like an actor playing different roles at different times through focusing on role models in his mind, the same person can be compassionate and caring under one set of circumstances and cruel or selfish under another. An employee of a large organization can behave at work in accordance with the organization's perceived expectations and can behave differently at home or among his or her friends. An adolescent can learn everything about ethical behavior in school or at home and quickly switch back to the norms of a gang of his or her peers in the street. There is hardly a person who has the freedom and strength to be individually consistent with one set of learned or chosen standards unless held in that role by a peer-group, congregation, or culture he or she lives in.

This leads to the significance of approaching a person with the suitable signals to evoke the desired behavior. It also leads to not judging a person (for

the better or worse) on the basis of one behavior pattern demonstrated at one time. One should consider that person's total set of behavior patterns under all possible circumstances (or one should not judge at all). In other words, there are limits of trust, expectation, criticism, fear and rejection. There is great importance in maintaining environments that favor positively valued behavior (also in an ethical sense).

Contradictions occur if different behavior initiators occur simultaneously. Decision postponement or priority resolution occurs in the brain of animals or humans, sometimes to the dismay of the animal holders, parents, or fellow humans. The attempt is often made to enforce desirable behavior selection through a relative increase in the subject's desired learning loop (strengthening of those associations) by way of more reward or punishment. (The only other approach would be to chemically or physically alter the functioning of the hypothalamus or the amygdala and their nerval projections to the forebrain).

In humans, the reward or punishment associated with actions does not have to be of physical nature. The capability for abstract thought and learning from visualization allows behavior development through communication of visualizations and thought. The reward or punishment does not have to be physical since humans can receive gratification from abstract conclusions (e.g. honor or shame), or from attaining abstract objectives established by prior thought (e.g. to be a valuable human being or to emulate a role model). This is accomplished through pattern recognition of visualizations in the forebrain and, thereby, closing of association links previously established as being desirable by focused thought (as in doing a puzzle or in trying to make one's own life emulate a role model).

Can ethics be taught or, better formulated, can ethical behavior be ascertained through learning? The thought associations leading to ethical decisions can certainly be learned, leading to the possibility of corresponding focused thought or role playing when called upon. However, when this thought process competes with other thought sequences, emotions, or natural drives, then it is a matter of relative signal strength or valuation. This signal strength varies substantially between individuals, as indicated before, and with circumstances, even with age. Parameters for influencing ethical thought are: impressing of high learned value through personal thought on ethical thought associations, retaining a cultural or social environment supporting the ethical role, ascertaining that consequences are perceived as being preferable in the ethical direction (including exposure to punishment if not pursued). Even then, some individuals are overwhelmed by their drives or emotions, especially when they feel unobserved or alone in certain situations, have seen others get away with it, or cannot develop speculative associative links through several thought steps (neural signal dampening or deterioration, as in many low-intelligence or drugged criminals) to perceive the consequences of punishment.

Out of barbarian eons, the Greeks evolved ideals for the human being, "kallos kai agathos" (beautiful and good) and "maeden agan" (never too much), in terms of their classic virtues. These ideals were superseded by Christian values of love, compassion, and forgiving, then by romantic images

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of goodness and nobility. We now pride ourselves on secularized humanistic concepts of global equality, justice and well-being. However, in the background lurk again the basic Darwinian pressures for individual or group prevailing. Our minds are able to switch between behavior patterns and value scales under the influence of thought, learning and prevailing conditions. Isn't it the most noble capability of human nature that it can improve its ethical behavior, maintain roles of high ethical standards, and recover from a fall to re-acquire those roles through own thought (including determination) and learning. It is up to us to think, to learn, to teach, and to positively form the conditions in our own lives and in our society to bring about what we aspire to.

In sum:

Our brain (in its frontal lobes) pursues strategies as driven by stimuli, urges, emotions, and reasoning in a way as established by genetic structures, learning, thought, or habit.

The brain, if not following genetically given pathways (as in caring for off-spring), can only "think" in associations of previously perceived memory elements as resulting from external inputs or thought.

The brain pursues general well-being, balance, or calm in conflicting situations in accordance with a value scale (signal strength in associative linkages) of emotions and thoughts, which is not only given by nature but largely influenced by individual thought, cultural development, learning, and the environment.

Thought sequence follows associative signal strength. Thus, in one case "reason" prevails over "emotion", suppressing the inclination to unacceptable pursuits. In another case it may be the opposite, with reason serving emotion, justifying and pursuing what one wants.

The conflict resolution in cases between the desire for short term benefit, learned value priorities, and reasoned consequences depends upon momentary relative signal strength. This signal strength varies widely among individuals. Emotional make-up, environment, habit, past learning experience, and learning and reasoning capability all contribute to such conflict resolution.

The mechanism of focused thought allows role-playing or behavior along alternative priorities, expectations, or habits. Thought, learning, environment, and habit can give preference value to any such alternative thought and action patterns.

Focus strength varies statistically between individuals. Given a strong focus, maintenance or introduction of an alternative focus is more difficult.

4. Psychology of ethical behavior

4.1. Conflict resolution.

The psychology of ethical behavior is rather basic in healthy individuals facing single-issue situations. The combination of natural and learned responses guides them. Behavior can be modified through additional learning, and also from personal thought (including intuition) and societal pressures. (The subject of learning of ethical behavior has been discussed in detail in Chapter 3. on Brain Physiology).

The situation becomes more complicated when several issues are involved at the same time, as the interest of different parties (including oneself), or different value dimensions (e.g. compassion and honor). Usually, an attempt is made to compromise. The degree of compromise is given by the relative ranking of the different issues or values in the individual's mind at the given time. Here, natural and learned responses may be in conflict and value ranking may be influenced by learning or personal thought.

4.2. Focus, activism, and obsession.

Some unique psychological effects occur when ethical thought or certain ethical issues have exceptional importance in an individual's mind (possibly based on variations in brain structure, body chemistry, or learning as indicated in the previous chapter). In the milder form, self-righteousness and pride can occur in the positive, or increasing feelings of guilt or allocation of guilt in the negative. Some developments in Jewish and Christian thought point in that direction (a world divided into spheres of self-righteousness and guilt). In the extreme, self-righteousness and pride can become as dangerous as feelings of guilt or allocation of guilt to others. Whole societies can move in such directions. As in most cases of extreme focus fixation, the human mind does not admit an alternative focus and closes itself against alternative views.

As shown elsewhere, thought follows focus, supported by selective observation. If relaxation does not work, then only the introduction of a new focus, through learning or experience, can resolve the pursuit of an existing focus. In some cases, such learning or experience must be traumatic to have effect. In some cases, even traumatic experiences are selectively evaluated as supporting the given focus. History is full of such examples, and new ones are occurring in our times.

Saints and "do-gooders" present another form of elevated ethical behavior. Both are well accepted when pursuing one's own values, religion, and interests. They are seen in a more critical light when pursuing foreign religions or negatively valued issues. It is typical for saints and do-gooders to actively proselytize and to condemn people who are not supportive or are critical.

A further increase in ethical emphasis leads to being an "activist" who sacrifices his own resources for his cause. The activist of one's own conviction is a hero. The activist of opposed values is a dangerously unbalanced threat. Activists can have an exhibitionist urge to present themselves and their cause, even in suffering.

In the extreme, ethical pursuits approach obsession. Obsession is possibly mankind's most devastating mental affliction, whether in the form of

religious, political, nationalistic, or racist obsession and persecution. Often, the secondarily arising counterforces are equally obsessed and devastating. Obsession occurs when a single focus totally dominates thought to the point of not permitting value balancing any longer. Some individuals are prone to fall into obsessions. Others are obsessed as from a spasm and can return to balanced thought once the spasm is resolved. In religious and political obsessions, only elimination of the lead figure can possibly resolve the obsessionary movement (unless a successor appears). Persecution of such movements intensifies the obsession (but acceptance does not resolve it either). A follower of an obsession may lose the obsession after lengthy separation, relaxation, and exposure to an alternative mental focus.

4.3. Natural behavior, historic development, and retarding aspects in ethics.

As indicated earlier (Chapter 2. Evolutionary Biology), the psychology of ethics can be roughly associated with the three natural categories of:

Caring for and defense of not only offspring, but for those individuals who are next of kin,

> inversely proportional to genetic distance, with a tilt forward in the generation sequence.

Reciprocity

> in services (as in grooming)
> in food sharing
> in assistance in fighting

Loyalty to the group, to the point of self-sacrifice

As pointed out elsewhere (Chapter 3. Brain Physiology), associative learning or personal thought can bring an individual to accept a newly introduced individual as being next of kin with consequent caring for that individual. Christian teaching attempts to do that. The historic growth of structures of societies has accomplished or was facilitated by this (from family units to towns, nations, and continents as in Europe). However, if reciprocity is lacking, this caring may disappear. If advantage is taken of the situation, caring may revert into hostility. This is an important consideration in America's struggle for ethnic harmony.

It is very "natural" that people care for their families first and their own ethnic groups next (whether Catholic Irish, Afro-American, Jewish, or Chinese). They may be praised as heroes by their own groups for such caring. This relates back to historical times when social structure was on a smaller scale and groups where set against each other. It is not sufficient in our times, not ethically "good" enough, because it is retarding the development of a harmonious larger society, whether in the United States or on a global level. In this development, it may be counterproductive if certain ethnic groups seek or achieve advantages for themselves (or their home countries) at the expense of others. However, striving for individual equal opportunity, fairness, and, where indicated, help to the weak, is certainly ethically indicated. Ethical advances by one group towards the other have to be reciprocated reliably. Domination and exploitation of other groups has to be avoided by all those

groups who want to be part of that harmony. More thinking and learning has to be done.

4.4. Ethics in organizations.

Something should be said about the behavior of individuals as members of organizations. Industrial organizations and practical interest groups are not "ethical" in the human sense. They exist to maximize benefit for the participants. Competition ascertains that no resources are squandered on anything else. Employees who do not perform must be fired. Consequently, individuals play the roles that they perceive as being expected of them. Even humanly "warm" individuals will attempt to play a "tough" role in a business context. This may be a totally different role from the one they play when not working for the organization. Even an otherwise "ethical" president and CEO are severely restrained in what he can have his organization do in ethical terms. Only the law (and threat of punishment or image loss) or perceived benefits from public relations can ascertain desired ethical responses by people identifying themselves with organizations. The recent testimony of tobacco executives to the non-addictiveness of nicotine were sad examples. Only a few individuals have a sufficiently sovereign personality and enough self-assurance to carry their own ethical convictions into their business world beyond organizational pressures. However, there are both older and newer American and European corporations that address a surprising amount of human concerns. This often perpetuates an owner's or founder's philosophy.

5. Philosophy

5.1. The historic roots of ethical thought.

In the East, philosophy evolved in conjunction with religious thought or as part of wisdom teaching and literature. The Vedas (ca 1500 BC) attempted to dissolve the conflict between religious teaching and rational thought by personifying truth and reality as gods. Knowledge of the universe was expected to yield ethical truth. Who can hope for any better approach, if valid results can be expected? The Vedic approach through "enlightenment" with the results then propagated by the Veda do not satisfy modern intellectual thought and, in some regards, Western culture (e.g. the conclusion of the Upanisads resulting in the caste system). In the West, however, the shaken trust in science as a guide towards a better world and Darwinian observations of nature (and the Book of Job) let us equally hesitate to use the understanding of the world as a guide for human ethics. Only the belief in a new phase of Creation with the emergence of ethical values can overcome this problem. But then, the observation of the prior phases of nature does not help any longer.

Another result of Vedic thinking, leading from non-violence to Janaism and to Buddha's teaching, is a more important forerunner of modern ethical thought. While Buddha refused to follow abstract theological speculation, he did preach compassion and brotherhood (around 500 BC). Was there a connection to the Essenes and Galilee via the trade routes?

In China, the two great philosophers, Lao-tse and Confucius, related to ethics only in passing -- the one in pursuing inner peace, the other in attempting to create an orderly society. Thus, kindness to adversaries (in Taoism) and caring for the elderly and poor (in Confucianism) appear in rather practical terms, without religious or analytical deduction. Yet, those thoughts seem to indicate a commonality of human ethical needs, rather than an unbridgeable diversity between cultures as in so many other practical rules of behavior and value judgment. Confucius, when asked about the essence of his ethical thoughts, formulated much the same as Biblical teaching: "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others". Mencius, about one hundred years after Confucius, postulated a natural base for the human desire to do right and to be good. Hsün-tse, however, postulated later that only education makes humans good -- they are by nature bad and selfish.

In the West, the Greeks introduced the search for intellectual truth as an independent, secular endeavour of the mind. The questions of the absolute or relative value of "right" and "wrong" and the mysteries of conscience were already discussed in their times. All this was swept away with the Dark Ages and the dominance of religious fervor in the early Middle Ages. Scholastic thought reintroduced a degree of intellectual inquiry, also in matters of ethics, establishing this inquiry as a separate discipline of philosophy.

5.2. The structure of ethical inquiry.

Further development resulted in the subdivision of three branches of ethics: Normative ethics, applied ethics and meta-ethics,

Attempts to establish absolutely valid ethical values as facts of nature or creation, almost provable and measurable as the facts in the natural sciences,

have failed. Ethics has remained an inquiry into values that "should" be valid, that should be accepted, for whatever the various reasons might be. This is the field of "normative ethics".

There was an immediate second-level question in this pursuit. Should one judge an action solely by its results (the teleological, consequentialist approach) or are there ethical norms one has to follow in arriving at the results (the deontological position). Can one steal from the rich in order to save a starving child? Can one bomb enemy civilians in order to save one's own country? Can one evict an ethnic group in order to make room for one's own ethnic group, under whatever historic pretext? Can one violate any of the Ten Commandments or other ethical rules in order to arrive at some more important ethical results? Can one, out of compassion, help another to break US immigration laws? There is no consensus in answering these questions. Many situations are in a gray zone, where black or white would be easy to judge, but an often necessary compromise is left to personal judgment.

"Applied ethics" is specifically the undertaking to apply ethical theory to practical problems, whether in areas of professional ethics, civil rights, abortion, gene technology or any other of our modern concerns. Needless to say, there is seldom a consensus in the resolution of those questions. The personal focus is often provided by emotion. Subsequently, focused selective observation and selective argumentation put the intellectual exercise into the service of the original emotion. Therefore, rationality alone does not solve complex emotional problems. One would first have to know how to sort out contradictory emotions and priorities. Furthermore, one does not deal only with individual situations but with cultural value trends in society. The entertainment industry and the media play an important role in these developments.

Meta-ethics is concerned with the clarification of the base of ethics (as in reason or emotions) and the validity of ethical concepts (even specific words), and statements. This ties into the analysis of thought as a natural or metaphysical phenomenon and into some normative questions as to whether ethical statements can be universally valid, or have to be seen in relation to individual and cultural circumstances.

5.3. The development of ethical thought in history.

Historically, the origin of formulated ethical rules was presented to the people by the priests and the rulers of their times as a gift and directive by the gods. Interestingly, there was little distinction between administrative, criminal, civil, and ethical laws. Since then, ethics has remained a mainstay of religious thought and teaching, mostly derived from a single historical canon or scripture, not from an evolving study or understanding of God, or some other transcendent essence of creation. However, the diversity in religious teachings of ethics leaves the individual with either: a personal decision of "faith"; the requirement for complex inquiry into a personal selection of standards; a chance following of the surrounding laws and habits; or with getting away with anything while not being caught.

The Ten Commandments are little more than the basic rules for civil order in a balanced community, not referring to emotional "values" such as fairness and compassion (except by later forced exegetic interpretation). The Golden

Rule, "Love thy neighbor as thyself" (with the fine distinctions of being worded either positively or negatively), without exegetic amplification, is not much more than the original natural rule of reciprocity. However, the code of Hammurabi and early Egyptian hieroglyphs already contain elements of fairness and compassion, without any religious or philosophical explanation. This is important to notice since our thinking sees criminal and civil laws not resting in themselves, but rather as an outgrowth of deeper ethical principles, which require prior thought and formulation. These ethical principles generally relate to fairness and compassion, if not Christian "love", restrained by practicality.

Plato questioned the divine arbitrariness in issuing moral directives and postulated absolutely valid norms in nature. He began and pursued the intellectual search for these norms. (Actually, the Sophists and Socrates thought about the relativity or validity of ethical values before). Only a couple of hundred years later, Christ, rooted in the great Jewish prophetic tradition, presented a new holistic interpretation of God, the rules for human life, and the directive for inter-human relations based on "love" (the Greek "agape", not "eros"), an ethical emotion, thereby tying ethics further to religion. Both pursuits of ethics became intertwined in European and American development of thought. The intellectual direction, more result oriented, tended to favor ethical goals that would bring the greatest benefit to the largest number of people. The emotional direction generally favored individual goodness over reaching results. Yet, both directions and any of their combinations allowed for horrendous aberrations, as in religious wars, the inquisition, or the crimes of Himmler under the "national-socialist workers party" and Kaganovich under the "communist workers and peasants party". On the other side, it is thanks to a favorable combination of reason and emotions that the US Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the Geneva Conventions came to be developed and generally appreciated.

In a more detailed observation of the historic development of "ethics" as a division of Philosophy, it is amazing to see the circuitous route of ever-new schools of thought following each other.

Plato formalized the contradiction between the Sophist's relativistic position and Socrates' belief in an ultimately existing valid "idea" of goodness, and proceeded with the inquiry into the latter. He formulated that being good adds to personal happiness. But even Plato saw the contradictions between rationality, emotions, and bodily desires and accepted the notion of compensation in the next life for god-pleasing behavior in this life. Aristotle, while being preoccupied with the supremacy of reason, postulated that a thorough understanding of human nature would reveal what makes a good human being, somewhat akin to the Vedic position. An analysis of human virtues led him to propose the Golden Mean between extremes of too much or too little (e.g. courage between cowardice and foolhardiness), not unlike Buddha's Middle Path. The later Stoics postulated that reason leads to wisdom and virtue, rejecting passion, unaffected by the course of life, permitting the path of suicide if necessary. Since all humans share the capacity for reason, and since one should primarily seek the company of

rational beings, all humans can be seen as common citizens of the world, resulting in a global moral law (thereby rejecting relativism).

The discussion of Greek and Roman ethics was centered on the validity of ethical laws and the process of inquiry. However, the definition of a proposed code of ethics and practical methods of implementation were not sufficiently pursued (not going much beyond the reciprocal Golden Rule). Questions important to our times, such as fairness in business, integrity in government, compassion in social matters, were not defined or seen as paramount virtues. As in our times, the Greeks and Romans saw virtues related to individual behavior. However, relations between groups or between city-states appear to have been little controlled by ethics (as in our business and international world). There were extensive class wars between the plebeians and the wealthy nobility ravaging the Greek cities. Athens was accused of taking advantage of its allies and treated opposing cities quite cruelly. There were wars between cities, culminating into the Peloponnesian War.

Christianism regarded all human beings as children of God, hence of equal value. This led to the abolition of abortion, slavery, and suicide, (but not of killing enemies in a "just" war!). Faith now dominated reason and the new virtues were Christian "love" ("agape") as in peace-making, a clean heart, meekness, and suffering from injustice. While this change from the antique thinking was seen by some as an exercise in relativity of ethics, the believer saw it as finally having found the true base of all human ethics.

The intellectual discussion of ethics resumed only with the Scholastics in the 12th century (Abelard). Aquinas, based on the Aristotelian texts rediscovered at that time (by way of the Arab and Jewish thinkers in the Arab world), attempted to reconcile Christian doctrine with Aristotle. While stipulating the love of God as the highest goal and leading to heaven, Aquinas saw virtue as the base of limited happiness here on Earth. The notion of "natural law" can be traced to Aquinas. Thereby, right is what corresponds to the human nature and is suitable to the purpose of human existence (e.g. homosexuality, contraception, and abortion are unnatural and, therefore, wrong).

The Vedas, Plato, and Aquinas searched for ethical clarification in the understanding of nature (or human nature). This approach was possible only before Wallace and Darwin. Since then, our view of nature makes us shudder, thinking that mankind could one day again accept a code of ethics based on the struggle for prevailing and preferential propagation. We still very much belong to the more basic nature as our national internal conflicts and some sad international conflicts prove every day. The population explosion threatens again all of us. However, we hope that humans strive for something different. We hope that we have the potential for a more "ethical" life, unprecedented and little observable in nature.

With the Renaissance (and with Protestantism weakening the dominance of the Roman church), the human world began to be looked at independently of theology. Humanism began. A totally sophistic Machiavelli could be published (Il Principe, 1513). Diversity of religious thought surfaced. Thomas Hobbes was the first to present a new, humanistic concept of morality (the

Laviathan, 1651). From there, a sequence of moral philosophers arose in England and Scotland, independent of the development in continental Europe.

Hobbes saw self-pleasure, individually different from one individual to another, as the only motivation of man, including the pleasure derived from making other people happy. A rationally derived "social contract" allows people to live together in society by establishing a sovereign (in whatever format) to maintain peace and security.

In opposition, the following "intuitionist" postulated that an absolute, generally valid truth in ethics can be found through rational intuition, somewhat like Plato's ideas (Cudworth, More, Clarke). Some results where the demand for maximizing the benefit for the most as the most ethical strategy, and the reformulation of the Golden Rule based not on love, but on what is "judged reasonable".

In questioning the centrality of personal pleasure and rationalism, the "moral sense" school of thought postulated that man also possesses natural altruism as expressed in compassion, generosity, and dedication to the public interest. This "moral sense" of virtue is opposed to selfish desires (Shaftesbury). These virtues rank higher than the fulfillment of desires in an enlightened pursuit of happiness. Butler, as a forerunner of Kant, introduced the concept of conscience as a more important moral guide than enlightened self-interest. In the 18th century, Hutcheson reiterated the significance of "moral sense" (used to define conscience) and the ethical objective to maximize happiness for the most.

David Hume (1711-1776) warned that reason is too often the servant of our desires. Thus, morality results from the proper desires and feelings. However, there is the dilemma that feelings vary between individuals. Hume also postulated that morality be practical, by resulting in action.

Hume also pointed out, in what is now called "Hume's Law", that the transition between observation of what is and the postulation what therefore should be is often made too easily, reflecting too easily the inner disposition or prejudice. In our times, it is not so much the study of nature but the study of history, which is mandated to teach ethics and prevent future catastrophes. But one should not forget that Marx arrived at Communism from his study of history, and Hitler arrived at anti-Semitism from his distorted observations.

For the British philosophers, Hume left the dilemma that one cannot know what to do by simply observing feelings about right or wrong (who's?). The three-sided argument between "intuitionists" (that ethical truth can be found through intuition by reason), the "moral sense" school (that feelings and conscience can guide man), and Humes Law (that you cannot just observe reality to know what is right for whom) remained unresolved.

With "utilitarianism" (Bentham, 1748-1832), the discussion turned toward asking what actions would be ethical -- an approach of normative ethics. Again, the conclusion was that ethics meant maximizing "pleasure" and reducing "pain" for all concerned, including slaves and animals. Later, a qualitative ranking of pleasures and pains was introduced (by Mill, 1861). Sidgwick (1838-1900) investigated what was commonly being accepted as ethical, pointing out conflicts between various moral principles. The conflict between selfishness and interest for the common good appeared rationally

insurmountable to him. The British sequence of philosophers concluded with Sidgwick's statement that a rational approach to morality would not work.

On the European continent, after Erasmus (1466-1536), Spinoza 1632-1677) became the most important moral philosopher. In contrast to Hobbes (who lived at the same time), Spinoza postulated that natural desires are a burden on the freedom of the mind and, therefore, must be controlled by reason. He perceived a positive essence in all mankind due to its participation in a pantheist world. Thus, reason is not the servant of desires (Hume), but their master. Leibniz (1646-17-16) continued rationalist thought mixed with religious fervor.

Rousseau (1712-1778) depicted the ideal of the "noble savage", who became corrupted by possession of land and material goods. He proposed to recapture the ideal state through a rule of society by "general will". This could be found in following reason rather than personal desires, thereby leading to a civilized society.

Kant (1724-1804) followed Spinoza's and Rousseau's expectation of a common good. He postulated that only those actions, which are taken to do what is good in fulfilling moral "duty" (and not merely to reach personal happiness or in following benevolent feelings), possess ethical value. While the "hypothetical imperative" tells you to be good for some personal reason (your own happiness, recognition, compensation in heaven), the "categorical imperative" tells you to do what is good, equally valid to all people, irrespective of any personal feelings or expectations. The moral law, to be found by reason, he formulated as: "Act such that the maxim of your action could be the base for a general law". Further thought about deriving specific decisions from the "categorical imperative" ran into contradictory examples. Further thought about the ultimate motivation for following the "categorical imperative" ran into the same old cycle between reason and emotions. In normative questions, Kant took position against a teleological valuation of actions (only by their results, consequentialist approach) and in favor of a deontological position (in that one has to follow ethical norms in arriving at conclusions).

Hegel (1770-1831), influenced by Schiller, developed a concept that history shows a development toward freedom of the mind, overcoming the division between conscience and self-interest, between reason and feelings, arriving at harmonious communal life. As human nature is formed by the society in which one lives, those desires will then be brought forth that are in the interest of society (a forerunner of communist education attempts). Individuals would then feel as parts of the community. Thus, the conflict between morality and self-interest is a problem of inadequate societies. Moral actions are those that fulfill one's position and task in society (worker, administrator, merchant, etc.).

Marx (1880-1883), a student of Hegel, explained all ideas, whether religious or ethical, as a result of the economic stage a society had reached in its historic development. Thus, loyalty and obedience were ethical values of feudalism. Freedom became an expression of capitalism. Thereby, Marx returned to some thoughts of the Greek sophists before Plato indicating that those in power determine the laws. In the Communist Manifesto he described

morality, law, and religion as bourgeois prejudices while, at the same time, lecturing in moralistic terms about the misery of the capitalist system. Engels (1820-1895) was a co-author of the "Manifesto" and of the "Kapital".

Modern philosophers reverted to a concept of relative ethics, based on the conditions of an individual's existence. Existentialism, thoroughly atheist, denied any purpose in human existence and, hence, any universally valid ethical standards. However, the horrors of WWII, the Holocaust, and the Nuremberg trials led again to the call for a common base in ethics for all people. At one time, the United Nations attempted to draft a code of ethics for international corporations operating in the Third World. Meanwhile, the philosopher's argumentation about relativity or possible universality of moral values, of emotions and desires or the use of rational thinking in ethical inquiry continue unabated, 2400 years after the Sophists and Plato.

A new perspective of thought came from evolutionary biology. Edward O. Wilson's "New Synthesis" (1975) and "On Human Nature" (1978) suggested that Darwinian evolutionary biology favors certain values leading to the propagation of genetic substance. He also postulated that nature justifies universal human rights. Other philosophers after Wilson deducted a justification of human inequality. However, one is reminded of Hume's Law -- that the translations from observations to normative statements reflect the translators' own prejudices.

In the recent focus on normative ethics, the dichotomy between consequentialist concepts (judging ethical actions by their consequences) and deontological concepts (requiring ethical actions to follow ethical rules) appear in the foreground again. Our system of law is largely deontological in judging behavior and not consequences (e.g. condemning the stealing from the rich to give to the poor). However, our governments, with their secret service and military operations, are largely consequentialists. In deontological ethics, there is the additional problem of conflicting ethical obligations (e.g. in the application of disposable resources or in telling the truth vs. not hurting a person by one's statements).

Utilitarian consequentialism sees the goal of all ethical actions in optimizing the universal balance of pleasure and pain (the most pleasure for the most people) or, in different wording, to optimize the satisfaction of preferences, or what the preferences would be if people were fully informed. Rule-Utilitarianism would apply the consequentialist judgment to the application of any ethical rule (thus disallowing stealing from the rich to give to the poor, since general stealing would destroy society). Thereby, Rule-Utilitarianism unites consequential and deontological thinking. Simple Utilitarianism would eliminate the protection of the weak and of minorities. The Maximin theory assumes that if people do not know where they or their family members will end up in life, they will not attempt to maximize benefit for the most, but to minimize disadvantage for the least fortunate in society, a theory applied to our welfare state.

This leads to the common discussion of and appeal to basic rights of individuals within the society, as those in the US Bill of Rights (the first ten amendments to the US Constitution). The question arises immediately whether rights should be based on and can be questioned by ethical judgment,

or are "absolute" rights (e.g. whether the right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness is limited or unlimited). In the latter case, ethical judgment must be derived from those rights. Obviously, there are some limits somewhere. This leads to the attempted definition of basic (and vague) principles of ethics such as justice, equal respect, and concern for all individuals in society. This also leads to the postulation of basic natural goods (e.g. life), in continuation of the natural law ethics of Aquinas and the Catholic Church. Also here, limitations arise out of conflicting situations.

Unrelated to all philosophical thought, ethics has found an interesting supplement in the teaching of the Theory of Games to the business community -- an approach to optimizing economic benefit. A number of situations in this Macchiavellian art are not unlike the age-old approach to ethics by reason.

The millennia of inquiry into meta-ethics and normative ethics may appear quite ineffective. Yet, applied ethics was pursued vigorously at all times, partially because each new philosopher thought he had found the answer to the philosophical riddle and could teach the world. Therefore, no consistent code of ethics resulted from these efforts (except those based on a single doctrine or belief at any one time).

5.4. Ethics and larger issues of society and nature.

In our times, ethics no longer applies to individual behavior only. A number of larger issues of society and nature are also seen in an ethical perspective.

The American Civil Rights Movement became a specific issue for the intellectual discussion of applied ethics in equality, human rights, and justice. While the condemnation of racial discrimination was universal, reverse discrimination is still an item of discussion in our times.

The abolition of gender discrimination led to the still-open question of the role of the mother and, consequently, gender differences. The discovery (or confirmation) of physiological gender differences in the brain will extend and exacerbate this discussion.

The beginning understanding of brain physiology contributes to the discussion about ethics versus animals. However, the ethical aspect of environmental protection, of stewardship of nature, has not proceeded beyond utilitarian concepts for humanity.

The issues of nuclear armament, just wars, population control, immigration (legal and illegal), abortion, euthanasia, bio-ethics, genetic engineering, rationing of medical resources, and other issues of ethics in medicine, public policy, and global cooperation rise and fade in the attention of the public and of moral philosophers, their resolution remaining elusive.

6. Religion

6.1. Historic evolution of ethics in religion.

Human societies were first ruled by patriarchs of clans. It is interesting to note that later in their development, most were ruled by a combination of political rulers and priests. The political rulers were men of action and in charge of practical matters: public works, taxation, services, and warfare. The priests were magicians and thinkers, and addressed the mysterious.

God is the spiritual essence behind or above the phenomena of existence. Hence, when the phenomenon of insight or enlightenment occurred to the minds of the searching priests, it came or was thought to come from God. (The "Holy Ghost" is still a base of the Christian faith, though the least explained and understood). Reference to God gave the priests' wishes and utterances power. Thus, the religions of most early societies postulated that the truths and rules pronounced by the priests were given to them by their Gods.

Early societies were mostly concerned with aversion of famine, disease, enemies, and death. This led to the desire for assistance from the gods who ruled destiny. What could the individual do to avert calamities and be favored by destiny? The priests offered two avenues: either sacrifices to the gods and ritual, or a conduct of life that pleased the gods, not offended them. This established a correlation between personal conduct and destiny. It is important to notice that all religions addressing these concerns considered ethical conduct as God-pleasing (though with differences regarding the content of what was "ethical").

As societies grew, they required guidance for their internal order. Such order reflected the ethical values of the constituting individuals, whether they were powerful rulers, a priestly class, or groups of people in a form of democracy. Today, these concerns are on a global scale. We strive to build a globally "human" or "humane" society.

The human mind tries to build unified systems of thought. After all, there is only one universe. Consequently, a unified religion would address the structure of nature, the ethical teachings for the individual, the order of society, and the meaning or purpose in existence in one system of thought or belief. This turned out to be difficult.

6.2. The remaining share of ethics in religion.

The understanding of nature and the fight against famine, disease, enemies, and death was taken over by the sciences and technology, often in conflict with the priests. But did the sciences and pursuit of technology remain outside the ethical realm? Certainly not. Scientists, doctors, industry, and governments face innumerable ethical problems as their policies and actions relate to human concerns and are expected to be "humane".

The political, practical order of society, and the formulation and enforcement of criminal and civil laws became the domain of the political leadership in the course of history. Do they address only practical matters, without reference to ethics? Certainly not. In early Mesopotamia already, there were political rulers proclaiming themselves the protectors of widows and orphans (several of Hammurabi's 282 mostly practical or "cruel" laws

are based on ethical judgment to protect the weak). And in our times, is abiding by the laws all there is to proper conduct in life as a citizen? Are not our laws being changed and added to all the time? What guides us in creating new laws or modifying old ones? Are we not most concerned with fairness (to the point of compassion) and, more so, with caring for the "underprivileged"? Where do we derive this judgment from?

Philosophy appeared quite early in history as another endeavor of the human mind in addition to political order, religion, and science. Philosophy is the pursuit of thought and the search for truth without recourse to religion. "Ethics" became a discipline of philosophy, concentrating on the search for an understanding of and possibly a rational base for ethical judgment, with little success so far. As a matter of fact, some of that rational thinking turned into absolute catastrophes, not only Plato's "Politeia"-experiment, but much more so Marx', Engels', and Lenin's teachings. Therefore, philosophy has not taken over from religion in the human quest for ethical clarification and guidance.

One should not forget the important personalities in history who provided role models of ethical conduct. They contributed more by their exemplary lives than most philosophers through the centuries who tried to rationalize ethics. But exemplary lives are not a school of thought, until somebody teaches about them.

Therefore, the formulation and teaching of rules of ethics remained the realm of religions, their priests and their saints. The great founders of the important religions established high ethical standards for human society. Their followers often implemented these rules in an exemplary way. However, following hierarchies, sometimes adapted capably to the needs of later times, often corrupted these directions.

6.3. Basic structures in religious ethics.

Most religions found that the expected correlation between good behavior and favorable destiny did not hold. Therefore, they resorted to what I call "mechanisms" of "this-for-that" as motivation for the ethical behavior of their followers. These "mechanisms" provide certain connections between merit and reward, failure and punishment, life in this world and the state of the individual after death. Purification rituals, baptisms, doing good deeds for admission to a better after-life, Christ's death for the forgiveness of mankind's sins, and rebirth according to merit are all such "mechanisms". Do we still believe in these "mechanisms" of reward? Can and must ethics not stand on its own?

We now approach the times of a global society. This leads to the need for commonly, globally acceptable ethical standards (code of ethics). The problem in defining such a code lies in the diversity of the religious teachings and the divergence of scientific, practical, political, philosophical, and theological thought. The theologian Hans Küng, Tübingen, attempted to unify all ethical teachings of the major religions for the most important areas of concern to human society. He did so by searching for the area of commonality among these religions ("Projekt Weltethos", Piper, München & Zürich, 1992). In his conclusions, he found the humanitarian teachings, the "Humanum", as the most important common base for a world standard of

ethics. The value and dignity of the human individual is at the center of such consideration in a mixture of intellectual enlightenment and the voice of the heart. Further thought leads to human rights and brotherhood, a vision of a humane world. Obviously, as predicted by "Hume's Law", Küng's conclusions were influenced by his own provenience from western humanistic thought and the presently prevailing ideals in that phase of our societies.

In more detail, the basic human ethical requirements common to the major religions in our times and requested by most people are:

the establishment of some human protection against abuse (security and fairness)

a degree of support for the unfortunate (compassion, social thinking and action)

a degree of respect, civility, dignity allowing retention of self-esteem in all dealings between people

the formulation of some "human rights" in the system of the official laws of society

the abiding by those laws (and their enforcement)

the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means (in fairness, with compassion, in dignity/civility).

Most people on Earth hope that "human rights" will bring them security, codified and enforceable protection against abuse by the powerful, and practical improvement to their lives. In western formulation, the "human rights" are expected to protect life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in equality under the law and in equality of opportunity. However, it is important to notice that the equality of obligations is usually not mentioned.

6.4. New areas of ethical concerns.

Traditional religious teaching relates to individual conduct only, not to the conduct of organizations, whole nations, or societies. Religious history applies the same judgment to nations or society at large as to individuals only in exceptional cases, but even then only on account of individual behavior (e.g. the "great flood" stories).

Mankind's obligations toward other species or toward the environment are increasingly being mentioned. However, this is mostly in the form of an obligation to maintain the present state of the world at any one time (!) for later generations of mankind to enjoy. Thus, ethics looks like a set of rules established by the dominant species on Earth (humanity) to maximize its own well-being and to mitigate the misery of those worst off.

The frequent conflicts between the human rights of an individual and society's interests at large lead to deeper questions of ethics. People may be expropriated for the construction of a highway, but human lives and freedom (the remaining part of it) are protected.

6.5. Some fundamental concerns.

In sum, one wonders whether the religious conclusions arrived at by Küng and the political conclusions arrived at by international commissions are only a rewording of all the intellectually analytical and philosophical conclusions for ethics as they attempt to maximize benefit in a utilitarian way. Is ethics

nothing else than another exercise in cost/benefit analysis? Is there no intrinsic value in ethics?

Our Christian religion also has a utilitarian perspective -- do not do to your neighbor what you do not want done to yourself. However, in today's prevalent form, the Christian attitude is not only one of fairness, but one of caring for your fellow human being. Christian love and compassion are the guiding principles. Christ is the teacher and example, as are many of his followers. The sanctity of Christ gives this teaching its religious base. Christ's teaching of a God-image as "father" is further religious ground for caring and love among humans. This moves Christian ethics clearly away from the logic of calculating benefit and moves it into the area of the emotions of the soul. This teaching would be cleaner yet if it were not burdened with the scheme of reaping personal benefit in the final judgment for admission to paradise -- if Christian love was the right value just because it was right. It would be cleaner if it were not preached for its usefulness and possible material benefit. It would be cleaner if Christian ethics were preached as the right understanding of God's Creation and of mankind's role in that Creation -- if ethics was understood as a gift and mandate to mankind, and nothing else.

The Christian vision of Creation allows for a pure vision of ethics in its own right. In this vision, Creation is a spiritual phenomenon, originating from and penetrated by the spirituality of God. After all, what is the appearance of energy in the original Big Bang? Electromagnetic and gravitational fields in the vacuum, a totally abstract, spiritual phenomenon, forces appearing in emptiness. What is material matter? A form of energy, hence, as abstract as fields in the vacuum. Radiation and matter follow precise rules, as discovered by physics -- a spiritual order of abstract phenomena. And what is life, what is thought, what are values? Again, abstract, spiritual phenomena, in coherence with the phenomena of energy and matter in an all-comprising concept. The deterministic orderliness of some areas of Creation is interwoven with other areas of random distribution, as the distribution of waves on the ocean, or of trees in the forest. The modern "chaos"-theory shows how the minutest differences in a random appearance can lead to the most substantial consequences later on. The believing mind sees God's action being as subtle as such minute occurrences at the right time. Thus progressed Creation. In sum, what is faith? Faith is a spiritual vision of the universe. This vision includes an understanding of mankind's place in Creation and indicates a beneficial direction for our lives within Creation. Thus, the religious vision is a unified vision of the universe.

The mind and ethical behavior, both gifts of nature, are the unique qualifications of the human being. In exercising his or her given capabilities, the human individual participates in Creation. This world is not seen as stable. The Christian (and Jewish and Islamic) world expects a better world to come. Ethical human behavior contributes toward such an evolution. Thus, in using his or her mind, and in leading an ethical life, the human individual fulfills his or her existence to the fullest.

What are proper rules of ethics, then? Christian ethics sees every part of creation as a marvel from the hands of God. As humans, we see all other humans as other "children of God" -- our brothers and sisters.

Are there limits to ethical behavior? "Love your neighbor as yourself" was possibly meant as an admonition to love without limits. Practical interpretation (exegeses) has converted it to the opposite -- a limitation of love to "no more than to be in balance with my personal interests". These interests can weigh quite arbitrarily. This leaves us with the most important dilemma in our Christian faith. We are not willing to divide and donate our resources down to the lowest common denominator with all the bums on the street (and there are many!). However, we should and often do feel a very sincere caring for the many unfortunate ones around us -- especially in close chance encounters or close family relations. I still see in my mind the unfortunate lepers sitting on the sidewalk in Ujung Pandang. However, I gave them only a few dollars. At other times, I cannot sleep when something befalls one of my sons. However, in practical terms there is very little I should do without improperly interfering with their own conduct of life.

There are other practical limits to love as set by nature. The experience of abuse and decay in socialism and the welfare state (including the U.S., Germany and Sweden) results in the need to limit the protection and welfare of impoverished individuals. The desire by the wealthy countries to survive leads to limitation of immigration from the poor countries. The population explosion on Earth leads to countermeasures. And regarding other species and the environment? We kill bacteria to survive. We try to eradicate some deadly diseases. We kill mosquitoes and moths. We do not let wolves roam through our suburbs. We establish our vast fields for our crops where wilderness once was. We take the water from rivers to irrigate our fields. Darwinian nature is a fact. We have even reintroduced wolves to nature parks to keep the wild herds in balance. Religion has not provided a clear answer to such situations.

The answer may be in expanding the ethics of caring and help to some ethics of obligations. There must be an ethical obligation to struggle for well-being with one's own resources. There must be an ethical obligation to return to self-support as soon as possible. There must be an ethical obligation not to have children one cannot care for. Only when such ethical obligations are met, and only as long as they are met can the concerned side expect to receive support from the side of the ethics of compassion and help.

Such thoughts may be useful for public policy. However, in the chance encounters of daily life and in family relationships the heart speaks and Christian love is the guide. In a human world, there must be some room for caring beyond logic and calculation of efficiency.

Religions are generally more concerned with problems than opportunities, more with suffering and death than fulfillment of life. As some people enjoy a high standard of living and others learn to find happiness with less, the meaning and fulfillment of life are in the foreground. The thought and teaching of the major religions (and of moral philosophy) is little developed in this perspective. The striving for success, position in society, and pleasurable entertainment, all so much promoted in our society and yet so transitory, cannot be all there is to life. Are growth in mind and character, service to others and society, and the partaking in the many enjoyable offerings of our various cultures not more meaningful and fulfilling endeavors for our lives?

7. What are the ethical standards of our times, descriptively and prescriptively? Priorities?

There is some common ground regarding acceptance of universal ethical standards between

the common teachings of the major religions (but not all in all points)

the actual ideals of most people (to the extent that they are informed)

the present teachings of secular normative ethics (not counting aberrations – but who decides?).

This common ground can result in the formulation of the following goals for universal ethical standards:

the establishment of some human protection against abuse (physical security and fairness in all dealings, where fairness has to be better defined)

a degree of support for the unfortunate (compassion, social thinking and social action), provided that adequate effort for self-help is forthcoming from those concerned

a degree of respect, civility, and dignity allowing retention of self-esteem in all dealings between all people

opportunities to improve one's life for all (including some equality of opportunities if equality of skills, intellectual capabilities, and character qualifications are given)

a degree of freedom to pursue one's own preferences in life (without becoming a nuisance to others or abusive of the environment)

the formulation of some "human rights" in the system of the official laws of society and the abiding by those laws (their enforcement)

the resolution of conflicts by peaceful means (in fairness, with compassion, in dignity/civility).

an environment that is ecologically safe and aesthetically attractive, if not beautiful.

Is there a specifically American set of ethical values? How about the famous John D. Rockefeller's statements on the marble table in the center of the Rockefeller Center?

"I BELIEVE

IN THE SUPREME WORTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND IN HIS RIGHT TO LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

I BELIEVE

THAT EVERY RIGHT IMPLIES A RESPONSIBILITY; EVERY OPPORTUNITY, AN OBLIGATION; EVERY POSSESSION, A DUTY

I BELIEVE

THAT LAW WAS MADE FOR MAN AND NOT MAN FOR THE LAW; THAT GOVERNMENT IS THE SERVANT OF THE PEOPLE AND NOT THEIR MASTER

I BELIEVE

IN THE DIGNITY OF LABOR, WHETHER WITH HEAD OR HAND; THAT THE WORLD OWES NO MAN A LIVING BUT THAT IT OWES EVERY MAN AN OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE A LIVING

I BELIEVE

THAT THRIFT IS ESSENTIAL TO WELL ORDERED LIVING AND THAT ECONOMY IS A PRIME REQUISITE OF A SOUND FINANCIAL

STRUCTURE, WHETHER IN GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS OR PERSONAL AFFAIRS

I BELIEVE

THAT TRUTH AND JUSTICE ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO AN ENDURING SOCIAL ORDER

I BELIEVE

IN THE SACREDNESS OF A PROMISE, THAT A MAN'S WORD SHOULD BE AS GOOD AS HIS BOND; THAT CHARACTER - NOT WEALTH OR POWER OR POSITION - IS OF SUPREME WORTH

I BELIEVE

THAT THE RENDERING OF USEFUL SERVICE IS THE COMMON DUTY OF MANKIND AND THAT ONLY IN THE PURIFYING FIRE OF SACRIFICE IS THE DROSS OF SELFISHNESS CONSUMED AND THE GREATNESS OF THE HUMAN SOUL SET FREE

I BELIEVE

IN AN ALL-WISE AND ALL-LOVING GOD, NAMED BY WHATEVER NAME, AND THAT THE INDIVIDUAL'S HIGHEST FULFILLMENT, GREATEST HAPPINESS, AND WIDEST USEFULNESS ARE TO BE FOUND IN LIVING IN HARMONY WITH HIS WILL

I BELIEVE

THAT LOVE IS THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD; THAT IT ALONE CAN OVERCOME HATE; THAT RIGHT CAN AND WILL TRIUMPH OVER MIGHT.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr."

A specific problem in the definition of global values of ethics lies in their formulation. Shall they be enforceable in court? This would lead to endless disputes of definitions and word content, the constitution, and prior law. Legal experts know such problems very well and lawyers are ready to point out any weaknesses in formulation when called upon by wealthy clients.

A recurring theme in religious and ethical thought and teaching is the looking at the meaning of rules rather than the words. This is the essential meaning of the Sermon on the Mount and of some Muslim teachings. Will that be acceptable in defining global ethical values? How can meaning be expressed other than by words? Who will do the interpreting? Where there not enough examples of dangerous interpretations in the past, including the mediaeval inquisition?

correlation between "values" (a modern term) and "virtues" (a common term in older thinking).

8. Can ethical behavior be influenced, taught, or enforced? What action should be taken?

Why do so many attempts at ethical education fail?

In one's own life (in pursuing goals and objectives)

    priority conflict

    supportive environment

    supervision

    over-reaching (as in sharing with the poor, absolute truth, etc.)

In the family (in raising children)

    peer pressure

    priority conflict

    different priorities from teacher (communication)

    over-reaching

    gray-zone problem subject to intellectual slide

In society (including the American society and its ideals)

    diversity of cultures

    credibility of message

    credibility of leadership

    over-reaching in part, leading to credibility in part, with sliding partition

        gray-zone problem subject to intellectual slide

        sub-culture, real environment, not being supportive

    over-reaching in total, leading to credibility in total

        sub-culture, real environment, not being supportive

        gray-zone problem subject to intellectual slide

Under religious guidance (the church through the centuries)

    same as: Under Ideological and political guidance (recently under communism)

        credibility of message

        credibility of leadership

        over-reaching in part, leading to credibility in part, with sliding partition

        gray-zone problem subject to intellectual slide

        sub-culture, real environment, not being supportive

        over-reaching in total, leading to credibility in total

        sub-culture, real environment, not being supportive

        gray-zone problem subject to intellectual slide

9. Personal conclusions

Limits to ethical behavior:

Are there limits to ethical behavior? "Love your neighbor as yourself" was possibly meant as an admonition to love without limits. Practical interpretation (exegeses) has converted it to the opposite -- a limitation of love to "no more than to be in balance with my personal interests". These interests can weigh quite arbitrarily. This leaves us with the most important dilemma in our Christian faith. We are not willing to divide and donate our resources down to the lowest common denominator with all the bums on the street (and there are many!). However, we should and often do feel a very sincere caring for the many unfortunate ones around us, especially in close chance encounters or close family relations. I still see in my mind the unfortunate lepers sitting on the sidewalk in Ujung Pandang. However, I gave them only a few dollars. At other times, I cannot sleep when something befalls one of my sons. However, in practical terms there is very little I should do without improperly interfering with their own conduct of life.

Darwinian facts. One has to struggle, fight, keep one's ground, progress, ...

Ethics of obligations, not only of rights, ... balance

Practical life: There must be room to have fun, to enjoy life, to build one's fortune

Always ethics only is as sour as Calvin's churches

What do I say about ethics, now that I get older? What counted in my life, what should have counted? What would I rather look back on?

The problem of balance, in a dynamic way, between growing, being strong, joy and compassion, service, sharing, helping, fairness, justice ......

The thoughts return to the first western ethical thinker, Aristotle. He postulated that each virtue is the optimal balance point between two unacceptable extremes (and forced every new dimension of ethics he analytically discovered into this scheme); example: courage between cowardice and foolhardiness. Christian ethics thinks in maximizing virtues (love, unselfishness, ...). We are very much formed by this Christian sentiment about ethics.

Under these circumstances, can we cope with Darwinian reality?

In the practical world, we daily do. In terms of normative ethics, any Aristotelian approach could be devastatingly difficult: who would define the optimal point (as in social justice or international relations)?

True problems with ethics in this world:

1- Revenge thinking

"They have done that to me, now I can do this to them"

I have suffered for so long. Now it is my turn to enjoy a benefit

the "other" my be the government, the public

2- Non reciprocation and mistrust

They owed me this anyway

I do not believe they did that out of the goodness of their hearts

Beware, they must have had a personal interest in this

Beware, he/she is one of those

3- Everybody is doing this (taxes, speeding, ...)

"I would be stupid if I didn't do it, too"

They almost expect people to do this in our society

They allow you to go that much beyond the law

If I did everything right, I may as well close shop

4- Everybody is fighting for their own interest in this world

We have a right to defend ourselves, too

I have a right to live, too

5- My own people come first. I do everything for them

6- They should not be so sensitive about this

7- They have an obligation to take care of this themselves

Tough luck! Why did they do that in the first place

8- This is the real world

"Good guys finish last"

Nature works by Darwinian rules

Do-gooders are idealistic and stupid. In the end, they do more harm than good.

We have a right to defend ourselves, too

9- I do it for a good cause

"My children, my friends, some good people need this"

10- It's so small, it would not make any difference, they would not notice the difference

11- I do not have time for this problem now.

12- There is not enough money available for this

13- This is not my task to resolve.

Somebody else must take care of this.

I have a right to enjoy life, too

14- If I did everything right, I may as well close shop

15- I have a right to enjoy life, too

16- Everybody picks out of this list what he/she likes.

The rest, he/she considers as wrong or stupid.

Personal comments:

In the long run, the discussions and pursuit of ethics become quite unbearable if only restricted to intellectual analysis and the attainment of benefit. Are we making the world a big industrial enterprise? Should not the mitigation of sorrow, the adding of a little warmth and joy be the guiding star?

From a letter I wrote for the Princeton Task Force on Ethics regarding their "Unity Weekend":

"The Princeton Task Force on Ethics serves to encourage honesty, integrity, fairness, and a caring attitude in our community. We will address ethical issues in business, government, and the professions. We work to improve human equality and cooperation beyond recognition of diversity in ethnicity, religion, economic status or gender. We shall care for the civic requirements of the disadvantaged groups in our community. The Task Force concentrates on concerns for the Princeton regional area and may also address matters of general concern from its own perspective.

Our Unity Day project serves specifically to contribute towards building a better community through mutual understanding, appreciation, trust, and cooperation. We still have not finished the task of overcoming all historic inequities within our community. Now, we can all observe the new, increasing diversity in our community. We neither promote nor oppose this development. That is not our task, whatever our personal position may be. Our task is to ascertain a humanely dignified, harmonious, helpful, even enjoyable community development within the given historic parameters. You are called upon to participate.

We believe that human cooperation is best supported when you see the brother or sister in your co-citizen, when you see your own children in theirs, your own parents in theirs, your own ancestors in theirs. Also your ancestors brought cherished ethnic identification with them as they arrived at our shores. Also you and your family are important to us and have the potential for further important contributions to our community.

Join me in looking at who is out there, in meeting them with a friendly handshake, in sharing with them joys, sorrows, and aspirations. In the American way, say "welcome", give them a chance, give them a helping hand where needed."

Now, at the end of this exploration of "Ethics", I am concerned whith what it really all amounts to. What did it help in practical terms in leading my life or what did it help other readers?

The clarification of a subject like this one was an interesting, even exiting, journey in thought. In a previously only vaguely perceived area one can now see structures and grasp the understanding of the functioning of this part of existence. This may be enough of a justification since much of life is about discovery. But I like to be a practical man of action and purpose. Therefore I ask, like returning from other journeys in life, did this journey make me a better person, did it contribute to the direction and conduct of my life. Did it contribute to a better world, even in a small way?

Like often in science, some of the immediate questions can be answered a little better. However, the inquiry revealed new and even larger question, more unanswerable.

Clarified were:

More unanswerable are:

Should one maximize (Christian) or optimize (Aristotelan) ethical behavior?

How can one justify optimizing in the real world (where nobody is ready to do it)

How can one optimize if there are now reliable, humanly and commonly acceptable standards?

Are all people to be treated equally (Christian) or can one give preference to one's own family and clan (the ethics of Nature), even at cost to others.