

A Brief Self-Assessment: My Ethical Views

What I value above all else is “the Good” in a Platonic sense. I value what is the Highest Good for both self and other, for “the All.” I place value on virtues: truth, love, goodwill, knowledge, creativity, beauty, wisdom, patience, kindness, love, tolerance, freedom from want, generosity, courage. Unfortunately, life is full of various vices which emanate from ignorance of the Ultimate Truth. The systems which have been built are led and powered by individuals who, for the most part, have narcissistic needs. Because systems simply mirror the virtues or vices of the people who power and maintain them, we have situations where people are constantly required to compromise their values. It is not whether or not values are compromised, rather, until every person on the planet comes to understand Ultimate Reality and until all world systems function under this understanding, it will always be a matter of *how often* and *to what degree*.

“Right,” “wrong,” “good,” and “bad” are all relative terms at the relative level of existence. It is absolutely impossible to consider these terms outside of their relativity if we talk about the profane level of existence. “Absolute Good” is unutterable and beyond thought. It neither exists nor does not exist. It cannot be known through Aristotelian logic, rather it can only be “known” through intuition, or divine revelation. However, once it is “known,” there is a transcendent nature and function which lies at the undertow of all moral and ethical dilemmas.

The *minimum argument* or core argument as it pertains to morals and ethics is: 1. whether or not the act of commission or omission creates harm for self and/or others, 2. whether an act of commission or omission creates a situation where a person is favored unjustly in relation to others, either in the present or in the future, and 3. the degree of intrapsychic conflict (i.e., guilt, remorse) from the act of omission or commission. This correlates to the three (3) axes of the Psyche: 1. self versus other, 2. self versus Higher Self and 3. *anima/animus* (or

masculine/feminine consciousness orientation or rational/personal or objective/subjective orientation). All moral and ethical decisions are made in consideration of these axes. In addition, they are made: 1. within the context of a person's cultural and contextual framework, 2. based upon a person's psychological maturation and 3. based upon an individual's level of consciousness as it pertains to evolution of the lower self versus the Higher Self. This precludes a one-size-fits-all moral prescription for *all* human acts, or a flow chart for various acts, because all moral and ethical acts are considered from these trajectories which vary depending upon gender, culture, biological age, psychological maturity and a transcendent quotient. Which is correct: the ethical rationalists or ethical emotivists? Both are. Which is correct: the ethical relativists or ethical absolutists? Both are. Are the ethical egoists or ethical altruists correct? Both are. It is dependent upon which trajectories are dominant and recessive.

There has existed a bias in the masculine consciousness for five millennia that has created a niggardly paradigm that devalues quality and esteems only quantity, rejects uncertainty and demands predictability, and has dismissed mystery in its dogged pursuit for validation through empirical means. This masculine epistemological hegemony is, itself, a pathology that must be transformed into a healthy acceptance of some uncertainty, mystery and intuition if the planet is ever to survive the noxious *hegemony* of masculine analytical thought or what Scott-Baumann (2003) refers to as "the tyranny of method" and the "hegemony of analyzing" as she calls for "a rapprochement between hermeneutical and rational thought" so as to move away from "the confusing moral maze drawn by so-called postmodern thinking." She argues, as did Heidegger, for the field of philosophy to return to its original roots of ontological concerns. Ontology is the summation, or culmination, of the harmonic androgynous balance between phenomenology and epistemology, or what could be referred to as the Mind/Heart consciousness. When moral

philosophy can attain this more evolved way of “knowing” through both mind and heart, intellect and intuition, as existed with Plato and Socrates, then the discipline of moral philosophy will have reached the adolescent stage of development.

In the attitude of silence, the soul finds a path in a clearer light. And what is elusive and deceptive resolves itself into crystal clearness. Our life is a long and arduous quest after Truth. -----Mahatma Gandhi

What does it mean to be ethical or unethical?
Is there a crisis in moral values today and, if so, what are the
dimensions of, and reasons, for this crisis?

The debate surrounding ethics and morality is as old as time itself and has been discussed for at least twenty four centuries by Western philosophers. Chong (1992) tells us that there are no easy answers to the question of the nature of morality and Nelson (1967) duly notes that there is no “uncontroversial Archimedean point from which ethics can be characterized, for the nature and proper office of ethics is itself a hotly disputed philosophical problem.”

Ethics is a branch of moral philosophy, of philosophical thinking about morality, moral problems and moral judgments (Frankena, 1963) or, defined another way, ethics is a branch of philosophy that defines morality and determines the meaning and rational justification of the right way to live, the correct values, and the correct way in which to treat others. (Grcic, 1989) Some writers (Frankena, 1972; Rokeach, 1973; Mitchell, 1989) expound on “values” as a subset of ethics and morality with Frankena (1972) stating that the ancient headings of the good, the end, the right, obligation, virtue, moral judgment, aesthetic judgment, the beautiful, truth and validity are all values in the sense that humankind gives them some meaning or weights them with significance. Grcic (1989) tells us that morals are universalizable, override all other rules of conduct and self-interest, and concern the welfare of others.

Ethics is generally divided into two philosophical theories of value: normative and non-normative theories (Grcic, 1989) Normative theories make value judgments by stating what has value and what does not; what is good, bad, right or wrong. They can be categorized as either teleological or deontological. Teleological morality is determined by its outcome or consequences, hence, an action is moral if it is a means to the goal of “good” or “right.” Mill’s (Mill, 1991) utilitarianism philosophy supports teleological morality because it focuses on what

is the best moral outcome for the greater good and Aristotle's moral goal allowed us to live a life of happiness (Grcic, 1989). To be unethical, according to Mill, would be to do that which is against the greater good and, for Aristotle, those actions which do not contribute to our greater happiness.

A deontological ethicist holds that there are certain intrinsic features of morality such that a person should emphasize their moral duty or concentrate on the intention and motive of the moral act, regardless of the consequences. (Grcic, 1989) Locke's ethical beliefs fall into these categories as he believed that it was the duty to be moral to others because every person has inalienable God given rights such as liberty and health. For Locke, to avoid this ethical duty is to be unethical. Kant (Hill, 2003) argued that there is a basic, self-evident principle of duty based upon reason called the "categorical imperative." A categorical imperative compels us to right action without respect to pleasure or satisfying desire. For example, he says to treat people as an end, and never as a means to an end. He believed that all right actions result if this single principle of duty is used. For Kant, treating people simply as means to ends is unethical.

All moral theories focus on obligatory and prohibited actions, thus, ethicists discuss the acts which must be done and also those acts which must be avoided in order to be ethical and moral. (Grcic, 1989) The minimal standard of ethics that all moral philosophers agree upon is to do no harm to others.

Non-normative theories are further divided in two: metaethics and descriptive ethics. (Grcic, 1989) Metaethics, which avoids stating what is actually good or bad, analyzes the definitions of good, bad, right and wrong, etc., (Frankena, 1972; Nielsen, 1967) and descriptive ethics deals with the actual behaviors of people, not with evaluating whether they are right or wrong. (Grcic, 1989) Metaethics involves either an absolutist or relativist view. Ethicists who

hold the view that moral values are eternal truths that exist independent of human conventions and that they are absolute, or eternal, are immutable, and universal insofar as they are applicable to all of humankind. No new truths or morals can be discovered, rather universal, eternal truths are accessed. Plato and Aristotle were recognized as absolutists as were Kant and Hegel. Each would argue, although defined differently and positioned from a different standpoint, that only by accessing these eternal, immutable internal truths can a person be authentically ethical.

Those ethicists who reject the eternal, immutable nature of morals and argue that morals are merely human inventions which are meant to change based upon the current time and culture are ethical skeptics and moral relativists. Cultural relativism is the belief that people develop morals in parallel with the desire for societal approval.

Epistemological skepticism argues that, even if we were to know conclusively what is right and wrong, what would compel us to always do what is right? (Nielsen, 1989) The ethical egoism of Hobbes (MacIntyre, 1966) argues that humans have an innate proclivity toward satisfying selfish desires. He believed that, even when we engage in ethical behavior, our motive, at root, is selfish. In contrast, some ethicists argue that people also have a moral benevolence, a desire toward altruism. This group would argue that to act only out of selfish motives is unethical.

While some ethical philosophers believed that reason motivated our moral actions, others such as Hume (Nielsen, 1989) believed that, essentially, our emotions compel us to be moral. Kant, in stark contrast to Hume the emotivist, or subjectivist, believed that reason was our ultimate motivator for true morals. Chong (1992) argues from a feminist perspective stating that most Western philosophers, being male, have focused on the masculine analytic, rational

approach to ethics which has ignored a feminine approach, the personal, relational and caring expressions of morality and ethics. She states that “knowing the Good is not a calculus.”

Socrates and Plato were intuitionists (Frankena, 1967), largely relying on an inner wisdom, what Socrates referred to as his “daemon” for wisdom and guidance, believing that the value of the Platonic Forms existed independently from whether humankind valued them or not. Eastern philosophers such as Lao Tzu, Sankara and Sri Ramana Maharshi, could also be defined as intuitionists since knowledge of ethical behavior was not through the rational mind rather through the realization of Tao or *Nirguna* Brahman, the Self. Taoism understands ethics to derive from the realization of the Tao, the nameless, eternal principle which neither exists nor not exists. Hindu ethics is inseparable from the realization of the Truth, of Brahman, captured in the saying, *Ayam Atma Brahma*, “the Self is Brahman.” Once this is realized on an intuitive level, right thinking and right action derive from it. Buddhist ethics derive from the realization of Nirvana, the Ultimate Truth, the Emptiness of Reality. The Eight Fold Path is the path of right thinking and actions emanating from the realization of Ultimate Truth, Ultimate Reality. All Eastern ethics flow from, and are inseparable from, an antecedent inner, intuitive realization of Ultimate Truth and Ultimate Reality. The path to this realization is through meditation and contemplation, not through reason and intellectual exercises alone.

In Eastern philosophy, Lao Tzu tells us in the *Tao Te Ching* that, the Tao is a primal presence and a nameless simplicity that is discovered through the process of self-transformation which, in turn, calms desires and results in peace and harmony with the self (Walker, 1995, p. 32, 37). Lao Tzu (Walker, 1995) tells us to “discard morality and righteousness and people will return to natural love.” He tells us that those who cannot trust themselves from within will grow

to depend upon external sources, i.e., authority, for truth and guidance (Mitchell, 1988, p. 72) as opposed to cultivating what is within. (Walker, 1995, p. 12)

Lao Tzu attempted to instruct humankind to live from within, that there is a “true nature” that is within us all which, if discovered, will allow thought to “stay deep in the heart” (Walker, 1995). When people are centered in the Tao, then evil will have no power. Paradoxically, much like Socrates, he teaches that “not-knowing is true knowledge” and that the “ancient masters didn’t try to educate people, but kindly taught them to not-know” (Mitchell, 1995, p. 65). He states that through intellect, you will never know the Tao which is beyond *is* and *is not* (Mitchell, 1995, p. 21). The only way we will know to behave ethically is through the heart. (Mitchell, 1995). The Eastern philosopher tells us that “people who know [the Tao] aren’t full of facts” and “people who are full of facts don’t know [the Tao]” (Walker, 1995, p. 81) making it an interesting juxtaposition against Western ethicists who have analyzed *ad infinitum* in attempts to intellectually articulate what is good and bad, right and wrong, and the prescriptions necessary to “know” them so as to act upon them. This five thousand year old Eastern paradigm of gaining internal wisdom and knowledge through contemplation and meditation is in contradistinction to the hundred year old Western mental health paradigm which teaches that through reason, logic or emotions, people learn to be moral.

These Eastern thoughts on the innate knowledge that is realized which, in turn, creates a phenomenological and epistemological certainty as it pertains to “right” action are parallel with the Western intuitionist philosophy of Plato when he describes the Socratic source of inner wisdom: the “daemon.” Grcic (1989) tells us that the Platonic idea of a moral person was someone who had inner harmony, an inner wisdom, which, by virtue of having this inner wisdom, would know how to act morally and ethically. To Socrates, if one came to know “the Good,”

then he would do “the Good.” Plato was referring to “the Good” here in terms of the correlate of “knowing God” on a very intuitive, nonrational, non-analytical level much as the avatars, sages, mystics, and seers have referred to God throughout the ages. “The Good” is not understood in terms of relativistic or moral terms when Plato writes of it through the voice of Socrates. Like “knowing God,” to know “the Good” is to comprehend it on this non-analytical level that only the Third Eye can grasp. Thus, for Plato, those who are unable to connect to this inner “Daemon,” who are unable to know the noble Platonic Forms, are unable to be guided by true ethical and moral principles.

Are we in a moral crisis today? Most would agree the West, if not the world, is under siege of a critical moral crisis. Pellegrino (1989) tells us that our current moral crisis began in the 1960s in the West when two divergent worldviews surfaced. That tension is between traditionalists who are convinced that values should derive from a theistic perspective and the secularists who advocate for more liberal values based upon a rational, anthropocentric perspective. While Pellegrino writes from an educative stance, i.e., how we teach values, many people perceive morality multi-dimensionally and interdependently including through educational, political, economic, religious, cultural, social, community, familial and individual lens. Within a democratic society where, in theory, a pluralistic value system is intended to be politically prized, the tension between what has come to be understood in political terms as conservatives versus liberals has, at its root, the paradoxical ethical struggle of how to define specific universal values which everyone should hold versus those divergent values which a democratic society fosters. This, more than any other, seems to be the most important ethical and cultural tension existing today which, if addressed and resolved, should result in an evolutionary win, however, if inadequately understood and approached, seems destined to

manifest in cultural, social, political and religious revolutions whose outcome is most certainly to be a certain amount of destruction.

The argument Singer (1995) makes in his book, *How Are We to Live? Ethics in an Age of Self-Interest*, that speaks to the “narrow, accumulative and competitive pursuit of self-interest that...has come to dominate the West” is that “ethics cannot be reduced to a simple set of rules” and that people, in order to act ethically, must think of the consequences on others who will be impacted by one’s decision. He argues that “to think ethically is to think about things beyond one’s own interests.” Disagreeing with Kant who believes moral duty is our beacon to act ethically, Singer refers to this as “moral fraud” and, even more dangerously, could lead to fanaticism that was characteristic of Nazis who committed heinous crimes against humanity all in the name of “ethical duty” to the state. Singer denounces the Western ideal that we are to spend substantial time and money in psychotherapy looking within the self and, instead, writes in favor of people experiencing life and giving back to others, to living a life in service to something larger than “the self”. He accurately mentions Buddhist ethics and its teachings of meditating to find one’s inner nature of goodness in order to find the true source of ethical and moral behavior. For Singer, the answer seems implicitly to be: Westerners should learn from what the Eastern sages have taught for five thousand millennia.

For this writer, I largely agree with Singer. People have lost the capacity to seek answers from within the heart/mind connection. Every major religion, every avatar, sage, mystic and seer that has ever lived has taught the truth of inner wisdom. Not one transcendent Master has ever attained a transcendent consciousness through psychotherapy or external sources. Every one of them has gained wisdom from meditation and contemplation and finding their own inner nature where all truth resides. Having said that, there are, as Wilber has instructed us, different levels,

lines, states and domains from which humankind perceives their world. This means simplistically speaking that, different people are at varying levels of enlightenment on the spectrum of consciousness from unevolved to evolved. As such, the ethical pessimists such as Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Sartre, Hobbes, Bentham and Sidgwick, who argue from a hedonistic view of humankind are as correct as the moral optimists such as Lao Tzu, Socrates, Plato, the Buddha, Butler, Hume, who argue from an altruistic view of human nature. The pessimists argue an either/or view positing that human nature can only act ethically when done from their innate, self-interested nature or they cannot act at all. The optimists argue a both/and view stating that, at lower levels of evolutionary consciousness, people can, and do, act out of selfish motives, but, if they find their true, higher inner nature, this transcendent consciousness produces actions which are toward interests that will not only benefit the self, but will be for the greater good for the all. This is parallel with Nagarjuna's Four Fold Negation: 1. it is, 2. it is not, 3. it both is and is not, and 4. it neither is nor is not. Steps one and two are understood to be Aristotelian logic which is necessary at relative levels of existence and for lesser evolved consciousnesses. Step three is a more evolved consciousness which has re-discovered her/his inner nature and begins to perceive the world through Heraclitean lens. At the level of Ultimate Reality, nothing neither is nor is not and, quite literally, nothing can be articulated because it is the level of Reality at which concepts, ideas, thoughts, perceptions and senses *do not reside, therefore, it cannot be discussed, rather only realized silently and internally..* It has been referred to as *Ein Sof*, *Nirguna* Brahman, Nirvana, God, Absolute Spirit, Absolute Being, Beyond Being, Tao, the Good, the One, the All, *Ekam Sat*, That Which, Isness, Nothingness, Emptiness, the Void, the Godhead, the Great Mystery and a host of other names throughout time. All disagreements and arguments are, at root and bar none, a failure to realize Ultimate and

Absolute Reality and Truth. All moral philosophical disagreements are a result of people who are arguing from positions of different levels of evolutionary consciousness and from different schematic domains of which there are, generally speaking, four, thus, it is quite understandable that they will disagree with one another. Understood from this lens, everyone is “right” in her/his argument depending upon which level or domain you are arguing from. It is my deepest conviction that, until an individual comes to understand these two levels of reality/Reality, no authentic social justice will exist on the planet. And social justice is antecedent to peace on earth.

As I look around me, I am deeply troubled by the profound amount of deceit, dishonesty, corruption, malfeasance, chicanery, hate, anger, violence and oppression that is escalating to unwieldy proportions. With the rise of corporate scandals such as the Enron debacle, the escalating compensation packages of senior corporate executives while more and more jobs are shipped overseas, the unrelenting violence in South Africa, the highly alarming domestic abuses of political and legal power, the malignant avarice underpinning the schism between the rich and poor, the pathological denial of the impending global warming and its dire consequences for humankind, and the burgeoning hatred and terrorism spawned by an unlawfully initiated Middle East War, the evidence is overwhelming that the planet is headed toward a cataclysmic destruction or, at minimum, another historical social revolution. Traditionalists would argue the former; Hegelians or Marxists would argue the latter. The level of ignorance within the immature Collective Psyche has reached epic proportions and, more importantly, in masculine world leadership. As the Psyche begins its reparation in healing and uniting the *anima/animus*, mature masculine/mature feminine, mind/heart consciousness, which is the next major shift in human evolutionary consciousness, I am reminded of a glass of water which, if shaken, will result in a violent back and forth rhythm of tension until it reaches homeostasis. It only reaches

homeostasis after much turbulence. So it will be with the next evolution of human consciousness.

I am reminded by a Great Soul:

When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of this. Always. ---Mahatma Gandhi

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