

TOWARDS THE BROADEST ECUMENICAL ETHIC

Towards an Ethics of Responsibility Or, How To Work Toward a Society of Respect and Compassion

by Olin Beall

1. Strife and war

There has always been a significant trend in the world towards religious warfare. Some despair and say that this is because of human nature. We can see the warlike and destructive and sadistic aspects of human nature clearly with a few glances at history. And we can see that the 20th century was among the most devastating when it comes to humans killing and repressing other humans. This has not been a good historical era for blasé notions about the perfectibility of man.

Trying to be *realistic* can make us pessimistic. But despair may not yet be appropriate. Perhaps if the reader will tolerate my irreverent humor-those who despair are confused about who is confused about what. Most of us can be susceptible to reactive pessimistic thinking. I believe that we should resist this temptation to despair. We have not learned how to fight the right battle yet.

The battle is for greater awareness and clearer consciousness. Many of our leaders and teachers have pointed us in the wrong direction. We have been peering into the past looking for the foundations of some absolute wisdom. There have been many leaders and teachers who have claimed simple access to some kind of absolute wisdom. Some of these have meant well. Some have been self-serving. Many of these have probably been a mixture of both. The issue is not who is guilty of what. There is enough error to go round. Most of us make plenty of errors. Most of us are capable of selfish behavior.

2. Human potential

But the battle can be fought in another direction. The potential of personkind is not exhausted by humanity's capacity for folly and destruction. Military engineering does not exhaust our capacity for talent and creativity. There is a vast but somewhat unexciting track record of cooperation and community building. I believe that we have a vast capacity for compassion as well.

We are not certain about our capacities. We are not certain about the limits to our potential. Human culture shows evidence of great variety and adaptability. Child raising is one of the areas of potential improvement that we have only begun to explore. Who can say for certain what our limits for learning and understanding are, given the powerful new forms of leverage such as the information and knowledge systems that we are now developing. These same kinds of potentials are not necessarily guaranteed to make us more humane. To become more humane or not: that is what the real war is all about for personkind.

3. The ultimate value choice

At this point in human development, we need to accelerate a new perception among all the persons of this planet that there is a binary choice in the realm of values. This choice is between what I call the *might-makes-right* mode of assigning and ranking values and what I call the ethical mode.

I have made a commitment to persuading as many as I can that we need a sort of

Copernican revolution in our perception of the nature of ethics and how to make ethical valuations. Our much needed paradigm shift is metaphorically almost the opposite of Copernicus. It is as if we have to shift from the sun back to the earth. The sun is unearthly: it is 93 million miles "above" the earth. One might say that the sun is transcendent when the point of reference is the earth.

Human beings are our field of immediate reality. People are our primary point of reference. When we go about making value judgements, we would be self-destructive and suicidal to ignore the concerns of earthly persons and shirk our duty to create the best earthly "regime" for our great-grandchildren's great grandchildren. Those of us who have made it into our fifth, sixth, or seventh decade in this life know that a few generations is not such a long time. And those of us who pay attention to the real consequences of human behavior know that our numbers are too great and are growing too fast for us to have the luxury of ignoring the consequences of our choices.

4. Real consequences are real facts

It has been traditional in much of modern thought to assert that there are no facts in ethics-only opinions and feelings and emotional convictions. Sometimes this opinion has been developed along the lines that human reason cannot help us improve our behavior. I will discuss the need to analyze the facts that are the result of real ethical choices made in real, factual situations.

Some say that our improvement is dependent on God. But the absolutist claims of various human beings to know what God wants or what God wills or demands are suspect at best.

Many informed and enlightened people may agree with this description of the ultimate choice readily, without necessarily understanding the full nature of the revolution in perspective that is being supported here. I want to explore both the nature of values as concepts or objects of cognition and the nature of *how we can know how to* assess and rank values.

This calls for a digression on the process of knowing itself and the consideration of the difference between knowledge and the notion of absolute truth.

5. Knowledge processing systems and The critical importance of feedback

I believe that it is important for the further evolution of our cultural consciousness that we get all students to understand the critical role of feedback in all knowledge acquisition and knowledge improvement systems. This is the very essence of science and of real philosophy as well. It is also crucial for technology, management, and government.

A good knowledge processing system uses a dynamic method of observing what is the case-what really happens developing a useful and reliable description of this process proposing explanatory general descriptions that may include the explanation of the system-process under consideration attempting to predict what has not yet been observed.

This last predictive function in a knowledge processing system can also be discussed in terms of the development of what we usually call hypotheses.

In human affairs, as contrasted with some knowledge system like physics, hypotheses are goals. In social knowledge systems these goals can operate in interactive, spiral-like

processes made up of processes within processes.

Every action or event that occurs in a process like politics or economics or religion or cultural change or social evolution occurs in a context with interactions involving other sub-processes.

6. The realm of human potential as the field for the evolution of culture

These days many people have become interested in the satellite weather pictures on TV. Think for a moment of the numbers of ionic/molecular units in the air and the variety of influences on their behavior in any particular volume of a thousand cubic meters. More and more people, if they thought about the extraordinarily large quantities of entities involved, might begin to appreciate something of the difficulty of developing knowledge systems which try to predict the weather.

Think, then, for a moment of the billions of human brains on this planet and the welter of forces influencing their perceptions and the formation of their concepts. This is the field for the evolution of culture. This is the realm of human potential.

7. The infectiousness of viruses

Ideas are virus-like entities which can influence a large number of brains in a short time, especially now, when we have so much more highly efficient communications than in earlier times. Who can know what sorts of concepts we could learn to distinguish and apply and what the limits of the resulting processes might be.

8. A digression to consider relativism before turning to a critique of absolutism

In contrast with the claims of the absolutists, another approach has been to say that everything is simply relative and no way of behaving is necessarily better. This position has always been popular with people who argue against social responsibility or against the validity of any social/humane values at all.

This is a case of the functioning of point of view, perspective, and frame of reference, in my opinion. Looking at human behavior from the perspective of some brightly burning star-a star shining brightly some thousands of light years from our earth, a star with no planets or conscious beings-in such a perspective, human affairs are of no interest.

But from our real-life perspective as humans, human affairs are very much our concern. Perhaps the welfare of humanity should be our concern. Perhaps not. Perhaps it should be our ultimate concern. I believe that the welfare of all human beings, both individually and collectively, should be our ultimate concern.

There has been a resurgence of so-called conservative thinking that asserts that the one-thing-is-just-as-good-as-another kind of analysis has resulted in a hopeless relativism that has undermined human morality. One of the more dramatic examples of this yearning for moral absolutism has been the popularity of Bill Bennet's book on the virtues.

9. Inerrantism and absolutism: The problem of fundamentalism

There are a number of kinds of conservative schools of *virtue* in our world today. Many of the most intense and aggressive schools have been variations on the theme of religious fundamentalism.

The greatest problem with religious fundamentalism from the perspective of the *whole* of

the world's population is that too many religions seem to hold a point of view that would exclude the validity of the point of view of other religions.

Many of these religions hold that their particular revealed truth is an absolute truth. This certainty of knowing an absolute truth leads many to believe that rival perceptions of truth are an abomination, and that their propagation in the world is dangerous and an offense toward God.

People who tend to think this way tend to be tempted to engage in religious wars against those that do not see or believe the way they do. An excellent example is the American political speechwriter turned journalist and then political candidate, Pat Buchanan. He has been overt and explicit in declaring religious war on liberal humanists and others.

10. Certainty about the mind of God: knowing God's will

There are many writers, politicians, religious leaders, and seekers of publicity who take this kind of aggressive stand about their particular version of the *truth*. In the case of the religious ones, it is very strange how often they ignore the most fundamental facts about theology and philosophy. In particular, it is interesting how many of the more primitive thinkers ignore the facts about human limitations and human knowledge. Such absolutists believe that they or their teachers or religion-founders or scripture-writers somehow can know with certainty the mind of God.

They believe-often passionately-that they know what God knows, or what God wills, what God's judgments are, what God permits and requires. Strangely, such people never seem to feel uncomfortable about making such shameless claims. It seems that the psychology of such people requires them to be blind to the unreasonableness and arrogance of their claims. Many such people do not hesitate to declare religious war or to condemn what they call blasphemers or heretics to death.

11. The real blasphemy

I suggest that the real blasphemy is for any human being to claim to be certain what God wills.

As the human capacity for destruction gets greater *and more dispersed and available*, the warring interpreters of "*God's will*" make worse the mutual misunderstanding that has become an increasing threat to peace and well being around the world. It does not help to cite the various religions here and there who are at war with others on a religious basis or who are capable of initiating such war.

What is required is an urgent effort to define an ecumenical approach to ethics. We must help each other learn how to distinguish and classify values. We must learn to analyze our values in terms of their probable fruits if we were to act by them. We must become aware of the ancestor concepts which have had a role in determining the form in which our values have evolved.

The whole social quality of our future depends on our learning to recognize those values which have been generated from might-makes-right principles as distinguished from those which have developed from notions consistent with the value tests of the ethical mode.

Our future depends on our learning to see the ethical mode as the true *realistic* mode. Otherwise we are surrendering to a life dominated by realists of an *anti-ethical* school

who will consider themselves entirely justified when they exploit the mass of humanity and humanity's home ecosystem.

12. The hope for religion

What offers hope to people-of-goodwill-toward-others in this situation is the fact that, within the same religions which have the arrogant and aggressive leaders, there are many practitioners of these very religions who do not fully agree with their unyielding, would-be moral dictators.

I suggest that it is probable that most people-of-goodwill from most religions could come to understand an ecumenical vision of ethics of a simple and clear sort if such a vision could be clearly described in straightforward words-words understandable in their own language.

I further suggest that many people who fear the prejudice of extreme fundamentalists so much that they think they fear religion itself-such people could also embrace a clear ecumenical ethic of the kind I am trying to describe. One can be an agnostic or atheist and still be a person-of-goodwill-towards-others.

So let's get on with the discussion of what an ethic of this kind might be.

13. Goals, orientation, and hypotheses

I think that it is particularly important to make clear and emphasize that the approach to ethics that I am recommending is *goal-oriented*. It is an approach that looks forward. It is an approach that emphasizes our positive potential without underestimating our negative potential.

I believe that we must raise our children to believe that it is worth trying to develop the positive side of human nature. We want them to be aware that there are brutal or violent or uncaring aspects of human nature. But we want them to strive to make real our more humane and harmonious potential.

The needed revolution of perspective, the paradigm shift called for requires shifting from the notion of an authoritative sanction from the past (actuated by the emotions associated with conscience, whether divine or otherwise conceived) to a future potential in the form of a hypothetical goal.

14. Consciousness shift and conscience

Note that as this way of thinking permeates world culture to any significant degree of effectiveness, an increasingly great percentage of children will grow up with a new kind of *conscience*-a conscience that will be more consistently ethical rather than merely a mechanism for handing on customs and traditions.

The results of a hypothesis used in making real choices are real facts. The consequences can be analyzed and interpreted. The results of this inquiry can be communicated. People can cooperate to implement new procedures designed in the light of what has been learned.

These consequences are real facts as a result of hard choices made on the foundations of ethical thinking just as they are with choices made on the foundations of might-makes-right thinking.

On the might-makes-right side, a primitive and superstitious person justifying might-

makes-right may call on a god conceived of first or primarily in power terms. Or a thinker stuck in early modern materialist/atomist paradigms may invoke the reality of the nature of nature-and the so-called natural law, of which there are several competing versions. A more sophisticated recent modern may be less impressed by this approach and might simply propose might-makes-right as the operative base for value judgements in the form of an expectation or hypothesis, a doctrine of human nature. Examples of this are the extreme *laissez faire* free market folk and the Social Darwinists.

The point is that there is a real choice in the basis for value judgements. If we do not know the true nature of these choices, we will probably make the choices from habit and custom or prejudice, not from considered rankings of the relevant values and criteria. Many traditional choices do not look so sensible or wise when we consider clearly how their basis is founded in might-makes-right doctrine. And when we consider what amendments need to be made to conform the choices to our root ethical values, then the choices look even less desirable.

15. Fight the good fight

As sophisticated enemies of might-makes-right as an approach to ranking values in the human predicament, we can use a disciplined process of setting up hypothetical goals to realize our best attempts at designing procedures consistent with our ethical standards and principles. We may be surprised at how we find ourselves abandoning old, earnest identifications of real personal liberty with unqualified property rights. We may have a difficult job of explaining and persuading. It is easier for the power team to recruit allies, for they have huge armies of the more primitive superstitious folk who can be persuaded to fight by couching the battle in religious terms and in traditional shibboleths associated with defense of liberty.

16. Good will, good intentions, and confusing leaders

Our work is harder, because many people-of-good-will are distracted and confused by the failure of many of their religious leaders. These leaders cannot bring themselves to urge their flocks to choose the faith of the ethical model over the faith of the power/strife model. When your leader says that you are a member of an elect who is backed by the ultimate power, when your leader says that your duty is to fight for the side of the elect, you know who they mean. You are to choose the elect who show the signs of their elect status in their economic or power prosperity. This is considered more important than the old traditional ancient and medieval ethic of personal and social relations.

17. Creativity

Some people with whom I have discussed these ideas express fear that I might be pushing the ethical program so hard that I would not have us value the original and the creative and the artistic-let alone have us value the initiative of the entrepreneur and the business leader.

This is not the case. First, I value the creative person or the artist as much as anything other than a human life. Great acts of creativity are in the highest category of value, along with ethical acts.

Second, initiative is very important. Cultivating initiative in all our children is one of societies greatest needs and obligations. This could be a rich source of improvements in our quality of life and solutions for social problems and challenges.

Initiative is very important. So is efficiency, potentially. Efficiency can improve the economic situation in the world. But the fastest way to the most efficient may not be in the best interest of the greatest number of people. One of the dangers in current modern

trends in economic and social thought is the notion that efficiency and its stimulator, competition are more valuable than compassion when one ranks societal values.

18. Using creativity, initiative, and efficiency

It is desirable that improvements in society which *can* be made, be made. What is at issue is the cost. In the last three centuries, those who had power over capital have tended to assume that industrialization was good in itself. But it is one thing to explore new technology with energy and enthusiasm and another to embrace it uncritically and without taking the amelioration of possible-and certainly probable negative consequences as part of the cost.

This is what the concern about capitalism's *creative destruction* is all about. In an ecosystem, dead plants must rot to make way for the new ones and to fertilize-or even generate-the soil. This can be very constructive. But yeast and molds and bacterial rot can also be diseases which destroy healthy, useful plants. *Creative destruction* is not necessarily good in itself. There is the larger ecology of the economy and the society to be considered.

19. Absolutist magic and superstition

The absolutist true believer in *laissez faire* capitalism imagines that the *invisible hand* will magically make everything come out for the best. George Soros has made some interesting comments on this in his article about capitalism and its problems in the Atlantic Magazine of February 1997. Some of his language and rhetoric may be more accessible for those who studied certain mid-twentieth century ideas, but I recommend making an effort to translate his thoughts into a rhetoric you enjoy or respect.

Soros makes a valid critique of the absolutist assumptions of extreme free-marketism and makes a useful suggestion that students of politics and economics consider the importance of what he calls *fallibility* as contrasted with infallible absolutist *principles* and *dogmas*.

I would certainly endorse his preference for fallibility over absolutism. In the case of *reflexivity*, I personally believe that he would have been better off talking about feedback systems, such as servo-mechanical feedback guidance in engineering systems, or the feedback systems at work in the world of information and ideas. He uses the term *reflexivity* for this, and I have found some people put off or confused by this term.

[He may have borrowed this usage, along with the notion of fallibilism from Dewey. I speculate that their choice to use a word with the root *reflex* is grounded in the terminology of the emergence of neurology, psychiatry, and psychology in the period between maybe 1880 and 1930. I would prefer recursiveness or recursivity if one wants an "r" word or something more Latinate. I use *feedback* and *feedback process*.]

20. Laissez faire and extreme free marketism

My quarrel with capitalism up to the dawn of the 21st century is that *laissez faire*-free-marketism theory does not adequately cope with the problem of costs born by non-owners or people without capital in the enterprise. Members of the community who have no real or informed choice in the implementation of an enterprise have real losses when owner/capitalists do not factor real costs into the pricing structure of the enterprise, but rather pass the costs on to society.

The Adam Smith approach to wealth requires that there be benign governments who will

either regulate the capitalist elephants or will clean up behind them and charge them for it.

21. Useful governments in the Adam Smith tradition

Obviously, such governments would have to be powerful enough to get this job done. Freedom, then, does not lie merely in absence of control or regulation. Such an absence when taken very far allows society to drift toward license or anarchy, states of confusion which will be replaced by monopolies, cartels, and oligarchies. Rather, real-life, empirically-evolving freedom lies in an adequate and effective balance of power between the elephants themselves and between government and the elephants, be they capitalist, mercantilist, militarist, religious, etc.

The American Constitution is the most famous attempt to put in words the rules for a political system that aims at achieving a realistic, dynamically changing balance between the sort of powers we are talking about. Its imperfections are notorious, such as its surrendering to the interests of the slave owners. But throughout the document, as amended by the middle of the 20th century, there are phrases and clauses strategically scattered which defend the minority or the individual.

The individual and the small group without sufficient power can only depend on *minoritarian* democracy for protection. I discuss minoritarian democracy below.

Currently, terrorism seems to be perceived by the weak or the outnumbered as the only effective alternative for deterrence and revenge. I find those elephants strange and repulsive who would wish such a world on posterity forever.

22. The Ethical Potential: Goals and hypotheses

Lest we lose track of our current task of trying to describe a revolution in the way we conceive of ethics and ethical goals, I think it may be useful to emphasize the tie-in between goals and hypotheses. Hypotheses are not absolute truths. It is in the very nature of hypotheses in knowledge seeking systems that they are a provisional, temporary, best effort of a certain time and situation.

If we attempt to improve our social procedures in some particular way-or if we design a prototype procedure and test it, we will discover the fruits of our efforts. When these fruits turn out to be inconsistent with our goal, we redesign the procedures. We may have to redesign the statement of our end goal, our major hypothesis or set of hypotheses. We adjust the system. We do not despair.

In the real world, there are often plenty of empirical experiments with social systems being generated spontaneously as well as intentionally, all over the earth.

We only have to identify these sub-processes and their inputs and outputs. This may not be self-evident or easy, but useful knowledge can be gained if we strive to note the nature of point of view and frame of reference as it operates in each context.

23. Paradigms, perspectives, point-of-view/frame-of-reference, and entities

To understand this and to see how the identification of processes for study and analysis is part of the revolution in how to conceptualize ethics, we need to consider more precisely the notion mentioned above-and in the remarks about relativism-about perspectives, viewpoints, and frames. The needed paradigm shift requires shifting from

the notion of an authoritative sanction from the past (actuated by the emotions associated with conscience) to a future potential in the form of a hypothetical goal.

24. A digression on social change, culture, and consciousness.

Hence my concern about consciousness and my concern about teaching children the culture of disciplined knowledge systems. I want people to understand whose side they are on. I want people to have a sense of urgency about changing the current world culture which avoids looking might-makes-right in the eye.

I believe that any society with television and a school system that prepares its children for basic technical classes is in a position to raise its public consciousness. With the right kind of use of media, enormous changes could take place in the quality of ethical thinking among the general citizenry-especially the parents of children.

Religious leaders who are not essentially anti-social in their program could eventually be enlisted to support such cultural change. Ethics oriented to humane goals is hard to make into a monster if people have clear and simple descriptions of what ethics means. We have the media to insure the circulation of such clear notions. We have only to translate notions described in language such as *this* writing into short pamphlets and media messages in straightforward, familiar, and understandable diction. The reader can probably help in this effort.

25. Back to the revolution, to analyzing processes, and to the nature of things

A thing is only a thing from a particular point of view. From another point of view it may be part of something else. Or its parts may be what seem to be the things-i.e., entities-from yet another point of view.

Knowledge only exists in terms of particular frames of reference. This is not bad or good. It is how we know the real.

Modern science has come to recognize that things are events or occasions. So we need to pay attention to our frames of reference on these happenings or we become confused about what we think we are learning.

And we should never deceive ourselves into believing that we can know with the frame of reference of God.

But human beings are blessed with brains that can learn to see from many different frames of reference. Thus we can correct impressions that we gain from one limited frame by looking through another frame. This is how our empirical knowledge has grown and has produced an accelerating technology.

26. Conserving our treasures

But there are two frames of reference, two points of view, that we have to pay much attention to if we are not going to distort our world and damage our social potential.

One point of view that is *sacred*-that is, deserving of respect and honor and tolerance-is the point of view of the individual human. Society's treasure consists of its individuals.

But another treasure which society must conserve is its culture, including society's overall collective knowledge and experience and procedures. This treasure must be protected and developed further. This second perspective is a way of looking at humanity from the perspective of the total pool of individuals: society as a whole.

These two poles of respect define the realm of human social values. There is, of course, a continuum between these poles—a continuum with many social entities. Any given person may be a member of many of these smaller sets at the same time.

27. Minoritarian democracy

Our confused or selfish misperceptions about the good of society can be harmful to our treasured individuals. How can we avoid having that happen? I know of only one approach that seems to show promise. I call it minoritarian democracy.

Whatever democracy may have meant in ancient Greece, the only mode of democracy which I do not fear is one that has real protection for the individual. This real protection must be strong and effective, no matter how weak or unimportant or peculiar that individual may seem to be, from the perspective of the majority or the perspective of the powerful officials of any democratic government. A particularly strong reason for this is the fact that majorities and governments often fear various kinds of minorities whose beliefs or behavior may not suit the taste of the majority.

Therefore I call the *ethical* form of democracy *minoritarian* democracy. I want to emphasize that a minority may consist of one person.

The goal of a minoritarian democracy is to maximize freedom while maximizing harmony.

Our knowledge of the path to a goal of maximizing freedom while maximizing harmony can only be an empirical knowledge.

Absolute knowledge is the goal of absolutists, and absolutists are a subset of the true believing might-makes-right crowd. They may do what they do in the name of God or in the name of their own power or their own perfection. They may believe earnestly that their own special fitness proves that they are members of some elect. Whatever truths they invoke as absolute and infallible, absolutists are a danger to the welfare of humankind. They are the enemy of people-of-goodwill-towards-others *if and when* these absolutists would sacrifice any human being that they or their system chooses to target—in the name of their truth.

28. Shamrocks, trinities, and first principles of ethics

A goal of maximizing freedom while maximizing harmony will be dismissed by some as an absurd contradiction.

First this is a necessary shorthand, a slogan to condense more complex notions. One such sort of notion is a notion of knowledge processes pursuing the construction of social processes in a knowledge domain in which the rules require maintaining rigorously a special respect and honor toward the individual.

This special respect and honor requires that we not rush to control or punish *individual* behavior until it truly threatens *real* harm—not imagined or conceivable harm, but real, super-probable harm to another.

Why does this approach to an ethical knowledge domain require this sort of rigorous rule? What does this have to do with the possibility of an actual evolution of an ethical, minoritarian democracy?

I believe that it is the lynchpin-the keystone for any ethical approach which suspects that might-makes-right is the quintessential value base of the anti-ethical.

I am not prepared to present any devastating philosophical logical justification: I am making this respect and honor statement as an assertion. It is the only tendency toward an absolute that I am prepared to tolerate: I am sensitive to the absurdity of the irony here.

29. Demonstrating the keystone of the principles of ethics

I am uncomfortable that no one seems to have constructed such a demonstration over the years, especially those since Jeremy Bentham and Auguste Comte. The traditional 18th century liberal defense of the inviolable integrity of the individual is based on a wonderful mixture of extreme property theory and Christianity's extreme valuation of the individual. I want to describe an approach to ethics that will be understandable and tenable to someone outside of the Judeo-Christian tradition, whether the outside point of view be religious or not. I believe that people-of-good-will have to assemble the largest possible set of allies to fight for a truly ecumenical ethic.

I may be stuck with positing this respect/honor for the individual principle as a sort of ultimate moral intuition. This may be only a failure of creativity and rhetorical imagination on my part, but I want to pound mercilessly on this point, this keystone principle. Whatever its justification, I have not been able to do without some version of it in four decades of wrestling with the issues of social, political, and economic values.

Perhaps someone will be able to construe some argument to the effect that the opposing principle to a might-makes-right based value system is what ethics *really is*, and that the essence of such opposition requires more than merely the good of society as a whole. That may be a way to summarize everything I am proposing. Meanwhile, to make ethics work, I find it necessary to make this respect/honor requirement our only admissible absolute, our arbitrary and total duty. Until the consciousness of *what ethics really is* has ripened adequately, any person may find it difficult to explain why this is so.

Meanwhile, we can only test it as a keystone goal/hypothesis.

30. The foundation of ethical principle

Therefore, this respect/honor notion becomes our primary axiom and our primary rule. I am making the brash assertion that other notions of freedom which do not include this "*sacred*" honoring of the individual are hypocritical double-talk or self-deception. I believe that the positing of the principle is a necessity for ethical democracy and an ethical understanding of the true nature of freedom and liberty.

This necessary but not sufficient principle is, I believe, tied up with the question of the relations of ends and means, and intention and practice.

There are too many examples of utopian systems crushing people. People of good intentions have run amok over the basic dignity of those they had disapproved of. These kinds of things have repeatedly revealed our human capacity to rationalize sacrificing the human individual on the altars of this or that idol.

31. The polar field of the respect/honor principle

The respect/honor principle has two poles, like magnets and like the very earth itself.

The individual pole seems arbitrary. But I am asserting that until someone does a better job of deriving this principle convincingly from other convincing facts, perhaps we should assert this version of an individualist principle until our contemplation of the interdependence of everything leads us to a more clearly supported understanding. Perhaps the need for arbitrary safety rules for teaching and developing ethical consciousness will yield an *a ha!*, an ethical *eureka!* This iron absolute might be compared to the need to teach a child to obey the rule not to rush out into the street. It needs to be enforced beyond rationalization until it is essentially instinctive.

The other pole, the other aspect of this principle of respect and honor is real concern for the totality of *all* individual humans, the societal super-set.

32. Responsibility and compassion

This respect/honor principle is but the first of three leaves on our ethical principles shamrock. It is easier for people of goodwill to understand the other two leaves of our ethical shamrock's trinity. The next leaf is responsibility and the third is compassion. Respect/honor, responsibility, compassion. I hope that the resonance of the notion of responsibility can be felt throughout this discussion. Those whose training and values are rich with the notion of stewardship will feel immediately at home with this.

Responsibility is one of the prerequisites for minoritarian democracy. Such a democracy depends on the mass of citizens being good stewards for the protection of the weak. To hold the notion of responsibility high includes teaching responsibility for self as well as commitment to the well being of the society and the whole polity which is its form. This is what citizenship is.

Compassion is already broadly recognized as a necessary component of the humane. A particular aspect of this human phenomenon is necessary for ethical consciousness: the capacity to be able to vicariously identify with the suffering of others. [Thanks to Joe Straley for *vicarious identification with the suffering of others.*] There are very large concerns about child raising implicit in this fact.

I am sometimes criticized for being idealistic. In our culture today, the sophisticated-particularly the financially sophisticated-think that being realistic is the same thing as believing in the survival of the fittest as the only form of realism. Noting that the fitter tend to survive better than the less fit can be a useful thing to do. But dwelling on the notion much further than that will lead to absurd thinking. There is an absolutist belief that 18th century *laissez faire* theory and 19th century *social Darwinism* are infallible forms of opinion that must be acknowledged as the supreme form of realistic thinking. This belief is simply wrong.

33. Enlightened self-interest

The enlightened self-interest of every human individual and every benign social group requires that our societal trend be ethical and not simply power determined. I understand that there may be individuals who do not care at all about the needs and concerns of anybody but themselves and will admit this publicly. I do not expect to convince or convert such. I merely want to minimize their portion of the society we live in.

A moderately intelligent person can see this as simple realism when presented with enough of the context. I urge those who find the kind of arguments I am presenting interesting and appealing to help us come up with coolly critiqued perspectives and well articulated descriptions of the appropriate frames of reference.

34. Incremental evolution

I believe that the kind of evolution I am describing can only come step-by step. It requires a kind of *revolutionary* evolution of consciousness. To simplify brutally, it is theoretically possible that a dominating power which is not close to being a proper minoritarian democracy could try to create an ethical society rather than a might-makes-right society. Even if such a power were to make a good start, the society would not have evolved naturally to this point and might well not be capable of sustaining these idealistic reforms after they were initiated by some penitent power. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

35. Empirical pragmatism

This approach to pragmatic programs that are ethically based is not about wishful thinking and not about magic; it is about systematic practical effort and rigorous knowledge seeking.

It is about criticizing procedures and evaluating processes. It is about distinguishing processes within processes.

It is about analyzing the goals of processes and about shaping effects.

It is about analyzing the fruits of processes and reevaluating both our goals and our procedures.

It is about learning and about paying attention to feedback. It is about using feedback to redirect our procedures and our processes.

The evolution of human culture is an increasingly self-conscious process. Becoming mindful of the process should be the goal of human child rearing and education. We must become more and more *effectively* conscious about the fruit of our child rearing, our educating, and our experiments with the social process.

36. Absolutism versus an ultimate

Some "realists" would have us turn into cold rationalists. Some would have us become manipulating social engineers like a Marxist or Leninist or Maoist or a Khmer Rouge or like the Nazi "eugenics" manipulators. Such "social engineering" would make humanity worse than it already is. I am advocating a humane, down to earth approach, not an abstract design followed by coercive implementation.

Nor will it be useful and helpful to humanity to let a blind, magical faith in *laissez faire* be our beacon. Such an absolutist faith in a "best of all possible" economic theory is about as reasonable as Karl Marx's notion that his necessarily-evolving government of the dictatorship of the proletariat would necessarily wither away.

Utopias do not evolve. One reason for this is that they are predefined abstractions, usually set up on either Romantic or absolutist principles, or both.

Open societies might evolve. We should make them our hypothetical goal, but we should never stop reevaluating our goal nor the methodological and procedural goals we use to pursue our ultimate goal.

Notice that the goal is *ultimate*. Our goal is *not* absolute.

What is the ultimate quality of the ethical goal that I am asking that we try to describe? Its ultimateness consists of its general inclusiveness and in its rank as a priority and its rank as a standard for assessing the appropriateness of methods and procedures.

37. The simultaneous ideals

Our goal of a simultaneous maximizing of both freedom and harmony is an ideal but not an absolute. It is a direction in which we point the vessel of civilization like the directions ancient Polynesians used when they set out for islands they had not yet found.

But it is also a value standard. It sets up qualities and criteria as ultimately important. These will be used to evaluate other instrumental goals, goals which we may have set up before recognizing their negative fruits.

Our goal of a more ethical culture is not an idol on which it is acceptable to sacrifice real human beings.

38. The existential quality of our predicament

We must make choices. Each act is a choice. However free we are or however determined, we still act. It is prudent for us to assume that there may be a real element of freedom in our choices and our acts.

Rather like Pascal and his famous bet, I suggest to those of us who would have ourselves be persons-of-goodwill: Do not give up! Do not resign! We cannot be certain that there are determining limits that guarantee victory to the might-makes-right crowd.

Let us act as if there may be the potential for improvement. Let us behave as if human culture might evolve in some democratic way that increases both individual freedom and social harmony. We cannot know with certainty the ultimate parameters and perimeters.

I suggest that we accept the responsibility of stewardship and work to maximize both freedom and harmony in society. If we do not, we are choosing to let the bullies win unopposed. Our task is working towards a more ethical culture. Let us get on with it.

Appendix 1. On the battle hero versus the ethical hero

Human culture goes way back before our written records, but our earliest such records are full of tales of battle and tales of heroes. Very few of these heroes are first and foremost ethical heroes. Our history is chock full of kings and generals whose authority and whose might were legendary. Being great was a matter of being powerful and successful in battle or a matter of success in ruling tribes, peoples, or empires. The Greeks had heroes of strength like Heracles and Achilles. They had kings like Menelaus, Agamemnon, and Oedipus. Greek heroes, Semitic heroes, Mesopotamian heroes, Indic heroes, Persian heroes, Icelandic heroes, Medieval heroes—all these and more had epic tales spun about them. A great many of these tales make up the literary base of the great majority of the people of the modern world. In one famous epic, the operative god instructs the operative warrior to suppress his humane instincts and proceed with the slaughter. I submit that this is an example of how our heritage is part of the problem. There is another variation on the hero that we can find in Homer: the wily man who lives by his wits and who outwits his adversaries as he wanders the world.

This hero is somewhat more like our contemporary commercial heroes. Heroes like Siddhartha Gautama and Jesus are much rarer. The ethical hero is a rarity in epics and chronicles of greatness. This is part of the story of the evolution of consciousness. We are still in very dark

ages, for all our science. This is not necessarily so, not predestined or predetermined. Humanity is capable of learning and of advancing its consciousness. I want to see it change faster than before. I suspect that I am too impatient, but this sort of exhortation comes to me and Coleridge's Ancient Mariner as a normal and compelling duty.

Appendix 2. On omniscience and absolute truth

Many traditional approaches to theology posit several limitless or absolute qualities or properties to the concept of God. The usual ones are the quality of being all-powerful (omnipotence), the quality of being everywhere (omnipresence), and the quality of being all-knowing (omniscience).

Omniscience (*omni* meaning all and *scio* meaning know) is a very interesting concept. One might argue that it is a concept that can be posited but cannot actually be *imagined* we cannot make an image of it. Another way of saying this is that I challenge anyone to make a proper model of omniscience. I challenge anyone to make a computer simulation model or a model using any or all of the modes of human perception.

Logic is full of cognitive categories or logical sets that become problematical when one tries to make them serve too many purposes. Consider Russell's Paradox and Gödel's Proof for a couple of the most imminent cases of brilliant mathematicians wrestling with the arbitrary possibilities of metacategories posited by humans.

Omniscience is one such verbal/cognitive category. To be omniscient, one has to be a *knowing thing (or entity)* that can know simultaneously from every possible perspective and frame of reference. The nature of such a thing has necessarily got to be a complete mystery to a merely human consciousness or even unconsciousness. How to be certain of such a thing's will is even more mysterious.

The notion of knowing absolute truth is very similar. Except in the case of logico-mathematical calculuses [calculi?], absolute truth would have to be some system of knowable notions that described all possible events and entities under all possible conditions and from all possible perspectives. This is an interesting concept to posit, but it is an impossible one to imagine or to model, much less state in any form of valid human proposition or even set of propositions. The proof that a human proposition correctly describes what is the case is either a matter of definition, as in the rules and axioms of a logical calculus, or a matter of inductive verification using the methodology of empirical knowledge systems.

I use this phrase empirical knowledge systems advisedly. To some people, science can be a sort of dirty word, invoking images of rigid minds that will not consider all the evidence when the evidence does not fit the paradigms of the particular science invoked.

In fact, real science is nothing more than the rigorous and disciplined pursuit of knowledge. *Scio* means to know in Latin and *scientia* is knowledge. There are false prophets, false priests, and false knowledge-claimers all about us. But the search for knowledge goes on in spite of them.

Appendix 3. Pascal's wager

Pascal suggests that because we cannot be certain whether or not God exists, it might be prudent for us to bet that he does. Perhaps because Pascal was living in a Christian culture not so separated from the medieval days as we are, he may have been more awed by the specter of a jealous and judgmental god condemning one to hell if one did not believe in him or live by

his rules. Pascal sees this wager as harmless enough. He is assuming that if there is no such God, he will merely die and be done with existence. He sees little to lose.

I assert something very different in spirit. Pascal looks to me like someone who took a perspective on the world that saw it in the spirit of Ingmar Bergman's *Seventh Seal*. I could easily imagine the Pascal of the wager being played by Max von Sydow. The point of view of Pascal's wager seems excessively selfish and unconcerned.

The issue is what is best for posterity, not what is best for Pascal. And I submit that he took too seriously the opinions of others about what a God might want from him and might do to him if he displeased Him.

My wager is quite different. If there is a God and this God advocates that our behavior be guided by precepts like love and charity, forgiveness and mercy, then such a God knows that a reasonable person cannot know for certain what God wills. Such a God would, in turn, be merciful to people who do as well as they can, according to their lights. And on the other hand, if God is a malicious white whale, then perhaps it would be nobler to oppose it.

So I bet on an open ethical society. I commit myself to the pursuit of the maximum freedom for all, in a context of a harmonious society. If I am wrong and the prize really goes to the evil empire, I still think that an open minoritarian democracy is the preferable ally and well worth fighting for.