

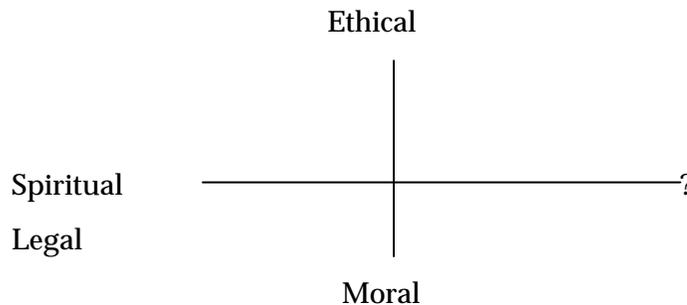
### III-34. Why I Am Not Moral

If not killing is good for your moral well being (health, afterlife, judgment-day), not killing is an ethical act for the well being of slaughtered animal. In the divided universe of self and non-self morals of tribal mores are about how one treats friends. Value from the ethos of life emerges from how one treats strangers and enemies. Tribal (moral, spiritual, legal, medical, business, professional) constructs are the subsets that seek validity within an encompassing ethical framework that facilitates consequence evaluation. In a perverse way tribal constructs deny the conflict between the self and non-self. Since extending the world of self into the worlds of non-self is key to realizing the human potential, such conflicts are addressed as ethical frameworks for behaviors rooted in reality.

Just as there has been history before the word history was invented, suitable words to communicate concerns about extensions of human behaviors continue to be invented. Moral and ethical words are often expressed interchangeably and synonymously to deal with dialectic of right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unfair in issues of life and death. My friends who indulge in such concerns would not call me immoral. Very few would characterize me as amoral because of my deep-rooted concerns for all beings including humans. As for me, there is a lot more that inspires and guides me but lies well beyond the martinet of moral behaviors and concerns. I am not indifferent to the concerns that get the moralists riled up, although often I do

find myself in disagreement with their methods and conclusions. The issue came to a head when I heard Mister Bush's 2004 electoral push for Moral-Values. Apparently, few decades ago he was born-again into such convictions with which millions of voters found affinity. Rest is the presidential history in making. As a footnote, within a year after the election in an opinion poll about the two third rated President Bush as unethical, and neither trustworthy nor honest.

The 2004 US election gave me a pause to think about what it is that I do not like about the word moral. I have not found anything that explains to my satisfaction what a moral-value is, and its behavior consequences. What moral means alone or in association with many other words? What behavior consequences emerge from such associations? Along these lines, over the decades I have often found myself at odds with my religious friends. No matter how I tried to explain my concerns, I have not succeeded beyond the superficiality of the words like moral and ethical, or religion and dharm(a). Most people use these pairs interchangeably and consider them to be synonymous. This was the case until one day I said: "I live by ethical precepts rather than by moral prescriptions or religious dogma of one persuasion or the other." In other words I prefer to be ethical rather than moral or religious.



The polarity of moral versus ethical is orthogonal to the polarity of spiritual versus legal. To begin with spiritual and moral frameworks are based on personal choices, whereas as the legal and ethical concerns are social concerns based on shared knowledge. Moral and legal frameworks are based on the existing values and experiences of the tribe. Such frameworks guide future behaviors, and essentially exclude individuals from the decision-making. As increasingly powerful institutional teeth deal with the miscreants, there is also greater need to dispense legal justice fairly and squarely.

On the other hand, the crux of 'moral versus ethical' is in their utility to guide future behaviors. Spiritual or moral self-realization is not just evaluation of self by some fixed criteria. Consider a dog who thinks that his master is a god because he is so caring, or a cat who thinks of itself as a god because the caretaker is so good. While such rationalizations of our experiences do not facilitate experience of other worlds of which we are a part. I also refrain from going into models, idols and superheroes created to proselytize the innocents. Reader is encouraged to judge and decide the significance of the rest in terms of what creates value.

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Most will agree that acts of infants, imbeciles and insane persons do not have moral or ethical quality because they do know not better. The same applies for coerced actions, including the restrictions of group morality such as: *In a blood feud side with blood kin; intelligent rascals work for the community good (mixed with self-interest); often there is honesty among thieves and gangs; some cut conscience to fit prevailing fashion.* In the same vein, term-papers and SAT essays written for a fee are already accepted more for more than half of the students and parent. Economic forces of clan

stabilize group moral authority to dictate individual behaviors. Such behaviors serve the interest of self via the socially extended-self. Authority in the guise of personal morality hides intentions. It is not an aberration that war affords such opportunities to the unscrupulous. Insidious grab and greed for the resources entrusted to corporate executives is not uncommon. Human history is littered with justified moralities to rationalize and hide baser impulses with high-sounding standards and traditions. Consider justifications for belligerent actions through a conviction of overt or covert moral superiority. The practice has not disappeared with the crusaders, colonialists, mercenaries, and missionaries. Moral quest for the good or right continues to guide major political decisions by the ideologues right to the dawn of the 21st century. It is skillfully, but not too subtly, built into the smoke and mirrors of words of mass deception (WMD).

Depending on what is politically correct, the authority of such *a priori* derives from Omniscience, Grace, Universals, Destiny, Justified-true-belief, and other ad hoc idealizations of past practices. Such platitudes of the higher moral purpose permeate calls for civilizing the barbarians, missionary zeal for rescuing the unwashed and giving salvation to the dead. Manifest Destiny as the Burden of White Men continues in the calls for Human Rights, democratic and market reforms, globalization. In all such cases, consequences are judged, rewarded, pardoned or punished by something external that oversees the higher purpose.

Decisions are lot easier if the consequences are no longer the responsibility of the individual. By drawing a sharp line between self and non-self, morals take out accountability as a concern for behavior. Not surprisingly warring parties invariably justify their actions as moral acts. A bomber pilot is not responsible for the consequence of the sorties if he is ordered to do

so and he merely takes-out the target. Such sinister dimension of Kill-Kill distinguishes morality of face to face beheading, suicide bombing, and surgical strikes by helicopter gun-ships. I am not sure if proponents and perpetrators of war loose sleep over deaths in the ranks of the cannon fodder, let alone mourn the "collateral damage."

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To differing degrees extension of self evokes concerns for right, good, and fair. Behaviors based on such consideration bring about personal and social changes, or at the very least ward off the ugly and unpleasant. In such contexts what distinguishes ethical from moral? Clearly, there are areas of overlap. However, I believe that at a deeper level in human psyche ethical is not perceived to be compatible with moral, and vice versa. For one group of people morality is the motive and drive for ethical behavior, whereas others believe that morality is for those who do not have ethics. Another variation is that morality is for the sinners, and ethics for those who do not want to become sinners. Another dialectic is: *If going to war is a moral obligation, conscientious objection is an ethical act.* If there are similarities of the goals the desirable outcome of such actions and their behavior consequences are often very different.

Even without going into the meaning, significance, and rationality of behaviors, genesis and behavioral consequences of a moral versus ethical frame are different. Most dictionaries do not adequately distinguish moral from ethical: One treats "ethics as the study of morality." Such dictions of denotations are dead abbreviations that often verge on circularity. In any case, a word representation is mere necessary first step for grasping relations through symbols. The concept space of the identical, synonymous, and interchangeably used words evolves through

usage as the distinctions are sharpened through polarized dialectic and derived behaviors.

There is widely recognized social need for viable code of conduct. Over the millennia this need is addressed by traditions captured in religions, dharma, codes of conduct, and laws with differing degrees of authority and judgment for implementation. Such a moral choice is probably best illustrated by words of one of the most enlightened Christian reformer: *What harm would it do, if a man told a good strong lie for the sake of the good and for the Christian church... a lie out of necessity, a useful lie, a helpful lie, such lies would not be against God, he would accept them* (Martin Luther). Possibly for such reasons Christian Churches approve of 'mental reservation' or 'internal disclaimer,' i.e. telling half-truths if the other half is repeated inaudibly in mind. Is this the reason for the common practice of keeping fingers crossed while not telling truth? Such morally justifiable and legally admissible lies are unethical deception.

At another level consider the thought and practices of the followers of theistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and to a lesser extent the Vedic or Brahminical Hinduism). They have differing moral values at odds with themselves and the neighbors. To appreciate the extent of such encroachments on the self consider the moral dilemma that an observant Jewish space traveler would have in finding the direction to face for prayer. Similarly, an Islamic devotee would have a moral conundrum in setting the prayer time on a spacecraft that circles the earth every hour.

The point of a code of conduct based on dharma is to facilitate search of 'the truth of existence' by extending individual self (*atm*) into the non-self. Since the past actions can not be undone and their consequences have to play out, the focus of the

search remains on the future behaviors. Nor can actions be judged (or undone) by some indescribable universal (*Atma, Brahm, Soul, God, Omniscience*). Ethical courage follows from personal stand congruent with the shared knowledge. Here sum total of existence is made up of personal perceptions of the reality of the self and the non-self. Mahatma Gandhi took a lead from these ancient paths: He advised a sectarian killer of the parents to raise the child in the tradition of the other sect. He also convinced the British that their moral (and legal) ways are untenable because they are not ethical.

Privacy and personal behaviors do not exist in a transparent society where all information is public. This was the case in the tribal village, and it increasingly the cases in the global village where snooping is a rule rather than exception. Survival choice in such a society is to either conform to behave *normal*, or to remain beyond reproach.

The distinction between religion and dharma persists at deeper levels of searches of the non-self. Dialectics of moral versus not-moral, or religious (theistic) versus not-religious (not-theistic), raise quite a few antennas. I quizzed many of my friends to articulate the way they distinguish ethical from moral at the gut level. Not surprisingly some believe that there is little difference, whereas others see little overlap. Some believe that the problem is not religion but the creed and dogma that create tyranny of social pressure for morals of dubious value. Origins of morals, and for that matter of organized religions, lie in the *a priori* of mores (Latin) rooted in customs, creed, tribe, tribal elders, ancestors, almighty, supreme, or whatever universal one wishes to invoke, worship, or surrender to. In such cases, a God-Head external to the individual provides inspiration, affirmation and justification

for in the form of prescribed and proscribed behaviors. In a more parochial sense, following their origins in the biblical tribes, the ancient mores verge on dogma of organized religions designed to look after the interests of the tribe of the faithful. As if to increase their count hereafter, even at the dawn of 21st century moral enthusiasts of a certain Church poach the souls of the dead, including the Holocaust victims, who were never the followers of their Church.

Western scholars of ethics have failed to define its scope. Apparently the Greek term *ethos* was coined to consolidate a variety of overlapping attributes. During the Archaic and Presocratic period -800 to -400 (BCE) such attributes included (with approximate translation): *psyche* (soul), *arete* (excellence) and *dike* (justice) controlled by *noos* (insight), *phren* (wisdom, deliberation), *thumos* (awareness of behavior), *logos* (speech and expression) and matters of heart (*kradie, etor, ker*). Following the lead of the *Will of God* the primary concern of Socrates emerged as *ethics of morals* (to guide the mortals). He did not detach ethics from the organized religion that was beginning to take hold on the Eastern shores of Mediterranean. In fact, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle did not dare to go against the prevailing mores as well as the authority of the tribal God of the Hebrews who dictated: *People is to have no other god, and Yahweh is to have no other people*. In their attempt to reach out, the Hellenistic thinkers developed the same role for Zeus as for Yahweh, that is to deliver justice for the past actions. Only fear of punishment by a judgmental god would guide the future behaviors. This encouraged righteousness in public behaviors: A right relation with the god through faith extends the reach of the (god-given) laws to control others. In the image of their God, the Hellenistic thinkers, and their followers

until recently, justify slavery and promote elitist world order. Ideals for select few became the popular ideals to aspire for. Along these lines one hears about moral concerns about decency, right, good, justice, piety, virtue, and nobility and their institutionalized and legalized artifacts. Whether morals transform a religion or a religion raises morals remains debatable.

In any case such concerns are not about the fairness, equity, symmetry and reciprocity in behaviors that lead to integrity and trust as part of the social contract. By the fourth century BCE Hippias the Sophist and Diogenes the Cynic began to emphasize the cosmopolitan ('citizen of the world'). It has now evolved as a nebulous core that guides toward a broader social being with the idea that all human beings, regardless of their political affiliation, belong to a single community to be cultivated. Possibly to further the Greek interest in their colonies this community has been envisioned with differing focus on political institutions, moral norms, shared markets, or forms of cultural expression. The concept appeals to the architects of moral (Universalism), political (World-citizen), and market (Globalization) hegemony because built on uneven playing-field such institutions are tools of exploitation.

Consider the juxtapositions: moral authority, moral standards, moral principles, moral imperative, moral turpitude, or moral superiority. In continuing the ancient Greek thought even the most progressive of the Western thought has not freed itself from influences of ad hoc universals built into the socially decried idealizations, assumptions and goals of inquiry. In the broader context of human society, moral of a particular brand are relativistic. What does it mean to be more or less moral? Who determines? Like the natural and moral laws, idealizations

continually evolve and often swayed with the direction of the political and economic wind (mores).

Yet, most people find it necessary to have a moral code of conduct rather than building an ethical one made by humans for humans. To be moral requires knowledge of what is right and wrong, good and bad. A moral code built on a selective record of the past successes facilitates decision-making by giving an appearance of certainty. It simplifies life to be able to use a moral guideline. It makes one feel good to be obedient or faithful because that does not require justification in itself. Is it enough to be guided by a prescribed code? Is there a need to take charge of ones own affairs or for a personal or social change?

Consider the oxymoron of personal morality. Followers of a moral path often fashion themselves in the images of their ideals. Social pressures undermine the personal choice of acting or not acting. Consider the pressures of the righteousness promoted by the imperial attitudes, or a call for crusade or Jihad, or for the missionary do-good. How many of those driven by such moral certitudes are willing to give the same benefit to objects of their moral tinkering?

Moral certitudes for the social change are fundamentally asymmetrical where the participants can only be guided - presumably because someone else knows better or *what is best* for others. This aspect of moral drive still engages the Western thought: Behaviors for the individuals as well as for the institutions are structured largely on the basis of some ad hoc universal. Consider the moral perch from which pronouncements are made to the unsuspecting millions not only for the religious or political indoctrination, but also to sell human rights, democracy, market reforms and globalization. Consider the moral codes that continue to drive the international policies and behaviors to serve

the interest of a chosen few. As people forge themselves in the image of their ideals, they also mould their gods (values, ideals) to suit their interests. More often than not, moral ideals prey on our desires to be something that we are not. Are such platitudes designed to empower a selected few?

In search of solutions that fit the problem, moral behaviors center on the mores of the land, whereas ethical behaviors driven by ethos or truth of existence. Most people will agree that differences between the moral imperatives of the groups of people far exceed the range of ethical precepts of individuals. To perceive the differences, think of a hypothetical compass one may use in a quest for desirable behaviors. In order of equity and symmetry, ethical behaviors for relating self with the non-self are guided with the polarity of fair or unfair.

Prefixes and suffixes rarely amplify the reach of ethical. Like its origin even the current usage of the word ethical has kinder and gentler connotations. Ethos (Greek) of life through the experience of living finds its way in the ethical codes of conduct without moral imperatives and certainly without judgment. In searching truth of existence (the *is-so* and its potential), dharma derives from the perceptions that enrich experience of living and the ethos of life. In ethical behavior, by taking responsibility for ones own actions and bearing the consequences one wrestles with more difficult and subtle issues of equity, rightness, and fairness, and their symmetry. Such stages in the evolution of the self that bears consequences of actions has been varyingly described as The I, Atm, Mind, and lately the Neuronal Self.

The moral polarity of good or bad, or even right or wrong, encourages righteousness. Moral eminence is about virtuosity and nobility. Proponents of moral behaviors are often all too

happy to enforce their beliefs on the others. They are unlikely to give the same benefit to the others, or even listen to the other side. For sharpening the differences consider how ethical sensitivities and sensibilities diverge from the moral standards applied for stem cell research, or the right to choose abortion for whatever purpose, or to select sex of the fetus. In such debates the problem is forced through templates of moral dictates of only those who speak out. Instead of the social front the ethical focus is on the underlying concerns.

One rarely hears about the ethical values or ethical ideals. Yet ethical considerations provide a general structure for decision-making and consequence evaluation to address specific problems. As a shared quest, the primary ethical concern is for behaviors guided by internally acceptable criteria of fairness, equity, reciprocity, and symmetry. Shared concerns for ethical behaviors are also guided by the shared knowledge. From this starting point bounded rationality is built on collective experience. Within such bounds ethical behaviors are likely to be a personal or group affair with an emphasis on practice and feedback. Ethical conduct is judged in the context of the past consequences, however the emphasis always remains on the perceived future. Since individual actions are guided by perceptions, responsibility for decision-making and consequences of actions also lies with the practitioner.

Ethical choices are to be built in the individual character motivated by the reward of fairness as the right thing to do. In choosing an ethical solution from the matrix of viable alternatives, with the compass of fair and unfair, requires symmetry and reciprocity in the behavior equation. What follows from such perceptions is intriguing. The role of equity and reciprocity in

developing human potential has prepared ground for social contracts for the evolution of organized society. It extends from the traffic rules to the Bill of Rights and Constitution as the statement of principles to aspire for, if not to live with. Through democratic institutions one aspires for democratic ideals, presumably with an *a priori* for fairness and equity for all. Doubt and skepticism motivated by fairness keeps a watch on ulterior motives.

A theory of any kind can not emerge if there is positive belief (bias) for what is right and what is wrong. In the end, concerns to guide future behaviors are not about just thoughts and words. These are concerns about consequences of the chosen course of actions and behaviors. All conduct and behaviors resulting from non-random actions are subject to ethical concerns. Status quo of moral guidance is not satisfactory because morals are about habitual and customary standards, whereas ethical actions and behaviors require consequence evaluation with equitable symmetry and accountability. Specific models and theories of moral sense emphasize the boundary conditions only from dialectical perspectives motivated by *selfish, Kantian, utilitarian, spiritual (reflective), or Natural Law* perspectives. Along these lines religions, as well as some of the alternative constructs, are conservators of group values by upholding the moral standards. Often one needs to outgrow the habitual.

My search for extending the self into the non-self has taken me from a reaction of *Why am I not moral* to a better understanding of *Why I am not moral*. Ethical sensitivity begins where the legal boundaries are not drawn and moral responsibility ends. Here not-moral provides the defining identity to the ethical. In this journey the point is not to pocket the truth but to chase it. It is not just a matter of ethical gesture to give a voice, but it is the ethical

responsibility to move over and let other voices come through and to let others speak for themselves. A need to take charge for one's own actions extends the rational self into non-self by dispensing with authority for consequence evaluation. Conflicts raise ethical concerns, and emerging dialog offer opportunities by challenging the assumptions. Could it be that, in search of solutions that fit the problem at hand, ethical considerations guide through a wider range of structures rather than those can possibly be encapsulated in the mores? At the very least ethical searches are forward looking and allow for midcourse corrections with decisions guided by concerns for equity and fairness rather than the changing perceptions of right or good. Ethical thought requires that we struggle with ambiguity to resolve doubts. Ethical path seems more blurry and difficult yet it is a better guide for more place and times because it is likely to be rooted in reality. It 'feels right' because it is often based on shared-knowledge, and designed to deal with evolving perceptions of potential consequences, their values and significance. There are no easy ways out of making own judgments and living with the consequences and modifying future behaviors.

Tribal constructs are the subsets that seek validity within the ethical framework that facilitates consequence evaluation. As a limited subset, morals are fashioned to deal with concerns of the Self - the personal, familial and tribal. It is not uncommon that such explorations tangled in theological and spiritual a priori turn into moral conundrums of dilemma and paradoxes. Another limitation of such constructs follows from the asymmetry of the assumption that the rest of the universe has no right to be different. In fact such differences are treated as threats. Thus neither moral nor the moral values necessarily create value. On the other hand value can not be created without ethical behaviors.

Such a framework is intrinsic in all dealings of self with the rest. Just as technology begets technology, tangible philosophies create value when thought, decision, action and conflicts are harmonized with behaviors rooted in reality. In the end, if human animal is by nature capable of rational ethical behaviors, it is philosophically human if it does so.

*Acknowledgments:* I am grateful to numerous friends who helped me sharpen the arguments. I also benefited from scores of published books and articles. Two of these (Dewey and Tufts 1932; Sullivan 1995) provide good entry points.

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Dewey, J. and J. H. Tufts (1932). Ethics. New York, Henry Holt and Co.

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Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill.

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### **Provocations for fun and thought**

**Slavery:** Is it Ethos of sufficiency for dependent existence?

**Racism:** Both slavery and racism have been justified as moral.

**Human-sacrifice:** Would you kill another human being if not illegal to do so?

**Animal sacrifice:** Would you eat a cow if you were to kill it? How about other animals? Where do you draw the line?

**Would you hand over a refugee?** What about if the refugee is innocent; or if the conviction is wrong; or if the pursuer is mis-guided? While it may be moral to come to defense of friends who did wrong, it is unethical. Also it is better to keep ethical friends who are less likely to do wrong.

**Jumping a traffic light:** Would you jump a red light if there is no traffic in other directions and there was no police on patrol?

**Justification for use of power:** Which is more compelling: political, economic, potential, general good, higher purpose.

**Abortion:** Is mindless sex justifiable? Is abortion justifiable for the selection of the sex of a baby?

**Group morality:** When is it acceptable? Should we do the “right” thing for the wrong reason or the “wrong” thing for the right reason?

**Situation ethics:** When is it acceptable?

**Justice:** Which one is more acceptable: As the privilege for the person belonging to a group? How about for a person that does not belong to the group that is judging? Is strict law better than natural law? Is jury trial better in such cases? Is it ethical not to charge a person for murder on grounds of temporary insanity? Are shared moral concerns also the shared ethical concerns (Sharia)?

**Geneva convention:** As extension of mores it includes others with the expectation that all will do the same.

**Cheating.** Term paper or SAT essay written for a fee is the current mores or practice among 70% of the students. Such practices are common in cartels, environmental pollution, CFC use, and not signing the international treaty to control green house gases.

**Yoga and meditation.** Yoga and such devices for self-help sensitize the self. Further education and socialization are needed to relate to the vast non-self.

**Finish what is on your plate.** Consider the ploys used for not wasting food that range from people starving in

countries Albania to Zaire, or whatever is politically convenient at the moment. Is it related to indulgence and overfeeding that appears to have caused epidemic of obesity? At the dawn of 21st century, throughout the world more people overeat than are calorie malnourished.

**Legal asymmetries.** Nobody is above the law. Within these limits weight of the legal system ends up with major wrongs. Does the asymmetry of *identify the source* or *go to jail* has ring of what has put many innocents on death row. Charges of unpatriotic treachery are often labeled against those who inoculate people against social and political ills.

**What is good for goose is good for gander:** If you know what is good for you, then you also know what is good for the others.

**In the end:** What is more appealing: Who you are? Or What you are? Can you be either without the social and cultural context?

# Against Gods and Humbug

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