

## Seeking Community in a Divided World

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### **Abstract:**

*Seeking Community in a Divided World* seeks a common moral vision amongst values diversity. It recognizes the value confusion and conflicts burdening our lives but asks for dialogical conversation based on such principles, as human integrity and dignity, decency, fairness, responsibility, and equality. These common, but uncommon values are a framework for building moral communities. We acknowledge that our lives are a web of relationships and that ethical bonds are needed for building strong moral communities, nations, and the protection of the environment. Although this article provides no absolutes, it is tasked with presenting a moral ecology of persons grounded in moral human relationships. The time has come for a renewed conversation about the values that sustain a free people.

**Keywords:** American exceptionalism, Beliefs, Bill of Rights, Common good, Community, Core values, Deep ecology, Democracy, Ethics, Ethnocentrism, Open society, Pluralism, Shared morality, Values.

### **Seeking a Common Moral Vision**

“As with all other commons, the moral commons require constant vigilance to maintain. Aristotle sounded that warning. ‘That which is common to the greatest number,’ he wrote, ‘has the least care bestowed upon it. Everyone thinks chiefly of his own, hardly at all of the common interest; and only when he is himself concerned as an individual. For besides other considerations, everybody is more inclined to neglect the duty which he expects another to fulfill’.” (Rushworth M. Kidder 2009)

Practical, there is both good and evil in the world. By good is meant behaviors that enhance human well-being and by evil, behaviors that do not. This is not a theoretical conclusion only, but one based on experience. Thus, it is of little consequence to debate one moral theory over another or argue over the sources of either good or evil. What is needed is a dedicated effort for bringing together those who espouse good in a mutual seeking of a common or shared morality. Obviously, we are all ethnocentric<sup>1</sup> (Hester and Killian 1975) and view the world from our nicely furrowed beliefs and lifestyles, but our innate ethnocentrism is no argument for neglecting this task or for building fences around our values. Fences not only keep others out, they also keep us in, enslaved to a narrow provincialism blocking all efforts for dialogical discussion.

Most humans share a common, but uncommon, moral vision. As history shows, we value freedom and equality, respect and integrity; importantly we value fair-treatment and responsibility. From third world countries to the most affluent, these values are prized. In December 1948 and within the ephemeral glow of WWII, these values were embodied in a Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly. Articulating the values in this declaration was perhaps a pragmatic assessment coming from the worldwide devastation that had passed, yet, ethicists – secular and religious – remain divided on their foundation, a division revealed historically in the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and more recently, in the treatment of immigrants coming into this country. Philosophically, this debate continues chiefly among those espousing a secular basis for ethics (pragmatists) and those (the religious) finding ethics based on the authority of an ancient faith, although both leading to similar conclusions. (Rorty 1999, 148-167) In order to move ahead with moral national and world repair, in our seeking necessitates we put away such insignificant arguing and fully comprehend the world around us, including the consequences of our actions, both secular and religious.

Notably, our beliefs and assumptions are revealed in the language we use and in the language we choose. This is an intuitive, normative insight revealed in the culture wars (See Hunter 1990; Wuthnow 1989) of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Of course, religious controversy is nothing new in America. Perhaps, this is the price we pay for living in an open, democratic society. As the faith-based initiatives of the Bush administration were rolled out, Albert J. Raboteau<sup>2</sup> (2005) noted that American democracy offers religion an opportunity and American pluralism provides it with a challenge: to respect the differences found in others and to show tolerance and understanding for their ideas and values. Ideally, seeking values-unity in a divided world rejects flagrant values relativism, understanding that there is something within our moral principles common to all. Pluralism challenges Americans to experience its religious values and with tolerance, to respect the secular values embodied in the US Constitution and the freedoms it exemplifies. Here, hopefully, common ground in ethics will be found.

For example, the three major Biblical faiths that dominate the American religious scene – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – have an underlying ethic that, when exposed to critical inquiry, have within their creeds common moral ideals also accentuated by secular ethicists. (Hester 2003, 27-53; 77-98) Regrettably, since 9/11/01, the divide between East and West has widened with many Evangelical Christians pushing to “reclaim America for God.” Religious intolerance reveals a moral deficit and a source of unending conflict dividing the religious, as well as the religious and secularists. With these claims garnering the headlines, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century many secular ethicists have once again begun to rail against Evangelical Christianity with the force of logic and scientific certitude. (See Wright 1995; Dawkins 2006; Harris 2011)

A shared morality<sup>3</sup> calls for no absolutes but strongly recommends giving consideration to human rights, dignity, and integrity with diminished emphasis on faith or the lack thereof. Our values are revealed in our actions and without personal integrity and decency, respectability and

civility, there seems to be no morality at all. In their teacher sourcebook, “Learning to Live Together in Peace and Harmony” UNESCO-APNIEVE said,

Learning to live together in peace and harmony is a dynamic, holistic and lifelong process through which mutual respect, understanding, caring and sharing, compassion, social’ responsibility, solidarity, acceptance and tolerance of diversity among individuals and groups (ethnic, social, cultural, religious, national and regional) are internalized and practiced together to solve problems and to work towards a just and free, peaceful and democratic society. This process begins with the development of inner peace in the minds and hearts of individuals engaged in the search for truth, knowledge and understanding of each other’s cultures, and the appreciation of shared common values to achieve a better future. Learning to live together in peace and harmony requires that quality of relationships at all levels is committed to peace, human rights, democracy and social justice in an ecologically sustainable environment.<sup>4</sup>

We live in a democratic nation that influences the political and economic welfare of many other nations. Thus, understanding personal and national values is both common sense and necessary. Without this understanding, ethical behaviors will be lost in a cultural pluralism that has no moral foundation. Awareness is perhaps the first step we take this understanding. Also, when we voluntarily use our beliefs and values in the public forum to support our views, the behaviors they recommend require public scrutiny and reconsideration.<sup>5</sup> (See Dacey 2008) As gun violence has today seeped into our society, becoming an unusual norm, accepted by many “as just the way things are,” maybe it is time to revisit the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution and give it serious reconsideration. Given over 200 years have passed since their writing, our Bill of Rights could possibly require reshaping as the 21<sup>st</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries are vastly different.

Perhaps we naively assume that America remains an open society, but the 2016 political debates revealed an inherent close-mindedness and ethical ethnocentrism closing many doors to reason and dialectical conversation. Ideally, in an open society, when personal values are exposed publically, they are released to the assessment of others. This is the scaffolding upon which objectivity and impartiality are built. We should not forget the importance of a free press. A free press opens society to an impartial forum for individual expression, but when compromised, instills values confusion making moral appraisal difficult. We are daily faced with extending our moral applications to include cultural, gender, ethnic, and religious diversity acknowledging their importance in the makeup of a democratic culture. A shared morality is needed with the implied consequences of a decrease in violence in the world, living in peace and harmony with one another, examining the conditions of our physical environment, and above all else, openly re-thinking the values we have inherited from past generations. A live-and-let-live attitude – taking our rights and freedoms for granted – is unable to sustain a moral democracy. More is required of us and this doesn’t mean we should just observe and blame others, but take a careful assessment of our own attitudes and cherished values as well, identifying those that promote community and civility and

discarding those that do not. As Arthur Schopenhauer reminded, “The nature of the eye is to look not at itself but at other things; and therefore to observe and blame faults in another is a very suitable way of becoming conscious of one’s own. We require a looking-glass for the due dressing of our morals.” (Schopenhauer 1995, 70)

Understandably, all societies have core values they call the “common good.” But, in promoting civility, we are faced with acknowledging the core values of others. This will be difficult and dangerous as self-evaluation is more often than not a biased unearthing of the values lying at the core of our lives. As James Christian (1986, 88ff; 174ff) warns us, “We never see the real world. We see only fragments of life, never the whole.” We are often blinded by present circumstances; the past invariably sneaks in coloring what we say, the decisions we make, and the dreams we share. Removing the chinks, shards, and often unrecognized biases preventing us from uniting with others in peace and with security is a pressing need. Thus, comprehending the moral depth of democracy necessitates our acknowledging, seeking community in a divided world, a moral activity involving us all.

Taking in the values, traditions, and cultures of others and learning from them is a daily task. For democracy to survive as a moral ideal, we must seek out and articulate the shared values that support our diversity, pluralism, and democratic standards. This is, of course, a moral ideal of utmost importance and represents a 21<sup>st</sup>-century crisis. It’s a bridge-building attitude that doesn’t divide and separate, seeks ways to keep families together, doesn’t lump all people, particularly immigrants, into the same negative and unlawful categories, and is able to bring nations together in harmony rather than with violence and war. It seeks ways of holding on to immigrants, especially, giving them the opportunities our nation provides. We want them to learn from us, to enjoy, and live in the peace and the opportunities democracy brings. This, I believe, is being faithful to our core values—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It goes without saying that our conversations with others will be meaningful to the extent they are infused with dignity and mutual respect. When they (whoever they are) join the conversation with the same attitudes, we are optimistic that a shared ethical vision can be found; this is our social hope. Richard Rorty expressed this when he wrote, “Hope—the ability to believe that the future will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the past—is the condition of growth.” (Rorty 1999, 120) There are many who tend to ignore the recognized facts and common values enabling moral growth. Encased in their own narcissism, they barely see beyond their own needs and wants. This is disabling to those seeking a wider, more inclusive ethic. To have a common vision in no way negates individuality or particular viewpoints. A common vision is able to bring unity to our perceived diversity, seeking areas where agreement is possible. Even the hate-mongers demonstrating in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017 drew on their shared democratic rights to support their protesting. But, “What matters,” says Rorty “is the ability to experience overpowering hope, or faith, or love (or, sometimes rage).” (Rorty 1999, 161) Hopefully, we can all agree on this.

Thus, included within our common vision will be the franchised and disenfranchised, the powerful and those who lack political and economic power. Without apologizing, we should avoid coercing values into a preconceived shape unsupported by reason, yet heralded by our ethnocentric propensities, hidden values, or suspect information. Facts, especially, are not always what they appear to be and bear the weight of personal interpretation. Also, we should avoid radical individualism espousing a personal “morality” only. What is needed is a sensible pluralism that recognizes the integrity and dignity of a shared humanity. The word “humanity” includes a host of moral indicators, including care, dignity, and benevolence. To many, this may seem a rather liberal and disconcerting idea, but we should give it some thought. We are the heirs of a democratic experience and are still learning how people with differences can live together with some degree of comity.

### **Civility, Engaging the Moral Community**

“Indeed, community is built and maintained through value-connections and personal relationships the loss of which, whatever the compensations gained economically or elsewhere, is a genuine loss and threatens [its] fabric.” - Richard N. Goodwin<sup>6</sup>

As we seek community in a divided world, we understand that community is built on relationships. A moral community is thus inclusive, emphasizing human rights and dignity for all people, respectful of diversity, the environment, and consequence-sensitive. This doesn't mean that morality is simply about ends only, about consequences and results, and it doesn't deny the consequences of our behavior as morally important. From a moral point of view, both the intentions and consequences of behavior are significant.

Our seeking will be a dialogue among differences, but in time we learn that our lives are largely built on a scaffolding of relationships. Understanding this takes many years, as most of us learn this lesson late in life. Relationships - good and bad - create the web of our lives. Finding purpose in our web is difficult, for much that happens to us is either incidental or accidental. Purpose is intentional and when we discover our moral purpose, we are able to maneuver through life in more productive ways. By the way we conduct our lives, it is important we find our moral center, consistently articulating and living it daily.

Human relationship-building can be an *untidy business* but it is within the arena of human attachments where we find more about whom we are and the importance of dignity, equality, and fairness. As emotions intensify, we should perhaps underscore the commonsensical suggestion of J.S. Mill<sup>7</sup> (1979) who urged that good things are to be promoted and bad things minimized and that the appropriateness of our actions depends on the extent to which they succeed in bringing this about. Mill noted that an open society with an inclusive education for its youth, based on a culture of conversation and respect, cannot survive the toleration of intolerance, intimidation, and violence. The change we wish to see in the world must begin with each of us.

This untidiness is often revealed in our actions and the reasons for our actions, as we find ends and means are always and constantly related; sometimes in conflict. Even in times of war the violation of the rights of prisoners, especially by a nation espousing human rights, draws our condemnation. Also, an important signal of the moral veracity of a nation is how it treats “the least among us.” The “least” includes the poor and disenfranchised, children, the elderly, the handicapped, and immigrants and, above all, those who are called “Dreamers”. Casting America as a democratic and moral nation we can ask, “What measures can be taken to enhance our moral character and what activities block our moral veracity?” Our personal and shared values will constitute the ground floor of this dialogue.

Morally deviant behavior is a fact of life, a fact indicating our moral compass may point in many directions, revealing the relativity of values. Brian Orchard (2008) believes we all have moral capacity and this capacity is tempered by time, place, and circumstance; thus, he believes that morality and moral values just may be relative with no hope of finding any common ground; yet, given our moral capacity, we hope that we can. This may sound idealistic, but we believe it remains both a pragmatic and normative necessity in an otherwise morally confused and disjointed world. It was John Rawls (2001, 151) who expressed hope for an overlapping consensus of all major political and religious ideologies for a reasonable moral pluralism supported by public reason. Rawls defined “reason” as that which people with different ideas and beliefs could agree upon and that we would be able to endorse by asking whether this (whatever action is being debated) is something that we can live with, given the difficulties of judgment, the pluralities of society, and its resulting political culture. But saying this doesn’t make it so; diligence and commitment are required.

We may have our doubts, but these should be relieved and our hope strengthened by the involvement of our youth with their demonstrations and discussions of gun control and general violence in our society. This is uplifting and signals a change in American politics from political expediency to that of moral reconsideration, even moral recovery. To the degree that societies are “open” is the degree to which their citizens are willing to talk and negotiate what it means to be a morally-based culture. “Openness” doesn’t imply moral fence-sitting or a willing acceptance of all values, or particular values espousing violence and hate – values that are an antithesis to democracy. In accepting any value or of all values, we generally become a “valueless” society. Openness challenges our critical understanding and welcomes dialogue and discussion, a genuine seeking of shared values. (See Bloom 1997) Implied is a critical reassessment of personal values and, in general, the values definitive of American national life. A willingness to reassess is possibly the only hope we have for some kind of moral objectivity.

In 2008, John Ragozzine (2008) expressed his views about moral education, He wrote,

As our nation emerges from several decades of determinedly values-neutral education; efforts to weave ethics and integrity into the fabric of education still meet skepticism. The arguments against it are as varied as they are trite. Aren’t we already doing this? Isn’t all ethics relative anyway? Are you

saying my child is unethical? Are you trying to impose your values on my family? Whose values are you trying to teach, anyway?

Ragozzine concludes,

Ours is an age of inordinate moral confusion. Every day's headlines report big-picture dilemmas with no clear solution: international terrorism, regional warfare, global warming, energy shortages, corporate scandals, nuclear proliferation, and endemic corruption. At a more granular level, this bewilderment appears in a litany of national and local ethical lapses, where values are subverted, integrity is abandoned, and moral courage is given short shrift. ...little wonder, then, that parents are searching for schools where character matters, where values are in focus, and where moral reasoning and ethical behavior are central to the educational culture. Parents often find those qualities in the nation's private schools, so many of which are deliberately trying to achieve a culture of responsibility, respect, honesty, fairness. A central aspect of the appeal of private education—a key reason that parents willingly pay for an alternative to what, in North America, is available free in every community—lies in the commitment of private education to developing students of character.

Obviously, a significant part of education is to help students achieve moral clarity. To accomplish this task, we must place personal values in a larger context of a shared morality with the goal of developing more civil families, institutions, and communities. This goal is what some call a narrow, but important role of ethics. A wider view extends this conversation culturally and inter-culturally into the moral commons of the global community. A person who is committed to inter-cultural communication recognizes the importance of keeping culture-specific ideas and beliefs in perspective. Understanding and respect will provide a foundation for moral reasoning encouraging discussion and dialogue about what is deemed important in one's life, nation, and the world.

Ronald C. Arnett (2006, 315-338) supports this ideal and makes a pragmatic case for civility as a conversation for negotiating personal, institutional, and national differences. He says, "We live in a time in which ethical standpoints that traditionally have undergirded discourse are in contrast, dispute, and disruption. Dialogic civility is an interpersonal metaphor grounded in the public domain and in a pragmatic commitment to keeping the conversation going in a time of narrative confusion and virtue fragmentation." This is a pressing need.

Concentrating on ethical problem-solving is a constant reminder that we live in a globally shared world that at times can be violent, confusing and disruptive. A global ethic will involve an extension of our personal and community norms concerning how nations ought to function in relation to each other, to global politics, society, and the economy. Such discussions will also entail how nations treat their citizens, especially racial and religious minorities and the economically disenfranchised, and how they treat immigrants fleeing war and devastation. In America and without, we should not underestimate the quest for power, especially the promotion of American "exceptionalism" with its concomitant disregard for others who are culturally, religiously,

ethnically, and sexually different. Unrestrained power can have a corrupting and negative effect, pushing the marginalized among us to the back edges of hope, and, as it fences others out, it has the tendency to fence us in - into a narrow and radical provincialism that shrinks our moral horizon. To break down the barriers that separate us from others, attention should be given to the following:

1. Ethics and Values – The emphasis on ethics isn't superficial or intermittent, but is significant to the everyday life and to learning. In our families, schools, and communities we should develop a clear appreciation for the role of ethics and values in building strong, positive democratic civil groups and governments.

2. Thinking Critically and Logically – Critical thinking is a key component in life, as it is in learning. It values independent thought and standards for clear and conscientious reasoning. We don't always have to agree, but we have to figure out what we believe and articulate our beliefs clearly and consistently.

3. Learning the Importance of Relationships and Civility – A key to building relationships and civility is the ability to trust each other. This will come slowly, as personal values often blind us to the acceptance of the worth and dignity of others.

### **Awareness is Our Greatest Ally**

“The moral faculties are generally esteemed, and with justice, as of higher value than the intellectual powers. But we should always bear in mind that the activity of the mind in vividly recalling past impressions is one of the fundamental though secondary bases of conscience. This fact affords the strongest argument for educating and stimulating in all possible ways the intellectual faculties of every human being” - (Charles Darwin 2011, 393)

We acknowledge and accept value shifts and recognize variations in moral views. And we generally acknowledge on-going human conflict as irresolvable differences in the human moral spirit. We have been unable to find a shared moral ground with all nations and all people. Most accept this as normal and some say we never will, admitting that provincial values are personal, community, or cultural absolutes. We react and often discriminate against others whom we perceive are hostile to our values and beliefs. These perceived threats come from different religions, powerful nations, aggressive attacks within and outside our national borders, people with political differences than our own, from different ethnic groups inhabiting our national borders, and from religious groups who espouse gender inequality. These are some of the barriers to sustaining civil communities and nations. Awareness is important and we should understand the importance of the many values compromising our lives.

And we can learn from our youth – perhaps more than their parents they are accepting of individual differences, less critical and more tolerant. We all need (mental and physical) room, a forum, in which we can explore different ideas and courses of action, and express our opinions in a non-coercive and non-intimidating setting. We need a place to examine our beliefs and values and

practice civility in the give-and-take of argument and the rational interchange of ideas. There aren't many places like this left; hopefully, the school classroom will emerge as such a place.

When we willingly engage in this conversation we will naturally find connections to our cultural histories. These connections will add ethical perspective in a world beset with mixed value-messages. We are faced with clarifying our own ideas about significant contemporary issues and problems. Perhaps our most cherished beliefs and values will be put to the test through interaction with others. In part, to build a better world, we must think and think seriously about our values and behaviors and apply our rational and human instincts for the creation of consistent moral standards for living.

Opening our minds to all modes of thinking and to views different from our own is important for understanding value diversity. This is an inner moral task and should be an ongoing dialogue between us and others. The challenge is difficult, but the need is great. One person who caught this moral vision is Dr. Lewis Zirkle, who created SIGN, Surgical Implant Generation Network. The mission of SIGN is to promote equality of fracture care throughout the world by providing free orthopedic implants to poor patients in developing countries. SIGN and Dr. Zirkle not only provide free orthopedic implants but takes them to these countries and teaches surgeons there how to use them. Both professionals and nonprofessionals have opportunities for moral leadership and it is important we search for them, follow-up on our moral commitments, and demonstrate our service-leadership capacity.

Having grown up with Lew Zirkle, when he said, "This is just the right thing to do," I was not surprised. He has dedicated his time, energy and much of his own money to this project. Moral insight is necessary; more importantly is moral commitment and putting our values into practice for the service of others.<sup>8</sup> (Foltz 2009) Through his trust, time, and teaching, Dr. Lewis Zirkle has created a worldwide community of surgeons, engineers, and volunteers that is ongoing and compliments his moral vision of serving poor people around the world with his time and talents. Morally important is our effort to capture this vision and act upon it.

### **Conversations That Matter**

"We live in a time in which ethical standpoints that traditionally have undergirded discourse are in contrast, dispute, and disruption. Dialogic civility is an interpersonal metaphor grounded in the public domain and in a pragmatic commitment to keeping the conversation going in a time of narrative confusion and virtue fragmentation" - (Ronald C. Arnett 2006)

How to act under conditions of incomplete information is the highest and most urgent human pursuit.<sup>9</sup> As T. S. Eliot wrote, "Words, strain, crack, and sometimes break, under the burden."<sup>10</sup> When cultures interconnect economically, socially, and religiously, these circumstances often leave us in a hopeless morass of confusing and often conflicting opinions. Knowledge is important and so are facts, but both bear the stain of individual, political, and religious interpretation.<sup>11</sup> Pointing to the randomness of human behavior many think a commonly shared

ethic is impossible to achieve. This is often used as a reason for protecting and expressing traditional, habitual values as moral absolutes. A willingness to engage in dialectical discussions about our values, about searching for a common ethic, is one of the greatest challenges of the modern world.

Three kinds of overlapping conversations will energize our discussion of values. These are ground floor discussions foundationally needed to reach the ceiling of a moral human ecology our ideals project:

First: we begin by examining our basic value assumptions and the principles that guide our lives. We will be tested to put our values in a broader context of American identity and then, in the context of global pluralism. With the emergence of Islamic terrorism and acknowledging America as a nation of immigrants, thoughtful consideration, as well as action, is needed. Also, with the political climate of 2017 sending mixed value messages, perhaps we too are confused. Examining and identifying our fundamental value commitments are important. We then need to rank our values in degrees of personal, community, and even national importance and highlight those values we share with others. This is one step leading to moral consensus in a globally shared world.

Several strategies guide this conversation:

- 1) We will be confronted with clarifying, explaining, and supporting our assumptions and provide reasons for their acceptance by others.
- 2) Also, the requirements of tolerance and civility obligate us not to attack or critique the sources (family, church, beliefs etc.) of another's values, only to judge their means, intent, and consequences as they shape human behavior.
- 3) Once we use our values publically, we unhinge them from our private world and provide an open forum for discussion and reflective consideration by others. An attitude of openness and respect for diversity will enable us to move forward in becoming identifiable ethical communities.
- 4) Finally, verbal clarity is important. Words used in their cultural context often vary in meaning. Seeking a shared ground for understanding values and morals entails an honest dialogue between persons, organizations, and nations. Following this prescription will be challenging, but without it, a shared moral vision cannot take root and flourish.

Second: we move forward by articulating the moral principles generated from our shared values. Our discussions will involve searching not only for moral principles but for moral consistency as well. Moral principles will include the following and much more:

- 1) Principle: We should strive to be people of good character.
- 2) Principle: Because we are all different, we should have a right to hold and express our personal values.
- 3) Principle: We should care for one another.
- 4) Principle: We should always treat others with dignity and appreciation.
- 5) Principle: Love your neighbor as yourself.

6) Principle: We ought not to discriminate against others but value their individual rights and personal dignity.

7) Principle: All humans have the same inalienable rights; namely, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

8) Principle: We ought to promote the greatest good for the greatest number.

9) Principle: We ought to always try to understand the views of others and be more tolerant of human diversity and differences.

Third: the application of our moral beliefs usually occurs in a rule-making form, sometimes in law. Our families have rules and so do our schools; we are a nation of laws and embedded in law are many unarticulated moral ideals. Discovering or recognizing these moral principles is important for they provide both guidance and sanctions helping to stabilize communities. In our families, schools, and workplaces moral principles become the ethical rules by which we live. They should be identified and discussed for they are used to judge behavior as good or bad, right or wrong. Consistency is important. A lack of consistency renders personal, social or institutional moral judgments arbitrary, without foundation or merit. These rules will have a personal flavor but encouraged by our moral vision, we are encouraged to discover values we share in common, values having community-building and world-building power.

### **A Life of Civility**

“Dialogic civility calls us to public respect as we work to co-constitutively discover the minimal communication background assumptions necessary to permit persons of difference to shape together the communicative terrain of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dialogic civility is ultimately a reminder that life is best lived with concern for self, others, and sensitive implementation with the historical moment, while consistently reminding us that our communicative actions have public consequences that shape the communicative lives of many people.” (Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson 1999, 277)

Our purpose is normative, recommending moral civility in our treatment of others and understanding the normative nature of our living environment. Nature, our physical environment, is often perceived as a fact, but it’s actually a value that undergirds our physical survival. Treating nature as a value means treating nature as we wish to be treated. It is better to be inclusive in our definition of morality and civility than narrow and exclusive. Courtesy, politeness, manners, and civility are all forms of other-awareness. Being civil means weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the fabric of this perception. Civility is a form of gracious goodness toward others and the environment that sustains our living. Ideally, civility is the actualization of morality within and between persons, communities, societies, cultures, and nature. It requires vigilance to maintain and is not an unconscious process.

Thus, seeking a shared morality, a common moral point of view among uncommon values, entails the extension of civility to a much wider humanity than just our own society and nation. It

also entails a moral ecology of persons, all persons, based on positive moral relationships. Yet, we should understand our values will be communicated with personal, cultural and self-referential speech. And we will be biased but must work to overcome our prejudices. In our inferences about others are hidden assumptions calling out to be exhumed and clarified. This will be difficult and more difficult for those entrenched in narrow beliefs they are unwilling to appraise.

Moral objectivity is, of course, unattainable if we do not commit ourselves to this purpose. Yet, it remains a goal to which we should aim. We are not asking others to be neutral, only open-minded and tolerant. We are summarily challenged to cleanse our cultural lenses of their biases, rethink our most cherished beliefs, and act morally. We know this will be difficult, but we must try. We are compelled by our own humanity to search for values emphasizing human rights, integrity, respect for persons, and human dignity. Being moral and civil and making a commitment to protect our natural environment are demanding behaviors to consistently maintain.

That human beings should communicate and come together in moral unification seems a natural predilection, but when social cohesion and civility are eroded, trust and social isolation are often the results. But, be aware; social isolation and social fragmentation can be destructive.<sup>12</sup> (See Caccioppo and Patrick 2008) They come at the price of losing our identity as persons, our self-worth. Being alone, either as persons or isolated as nations, is destructive to moral health. National-isolation, like self-Isolation, usually ends up in finger pointing and attitudes of superiority. Feelings of national or religious exceptionalism, more often than not, negate our moral vision. This can happen personally and nationally. A disconnect from others means we must work hard to consciously and deliberately build stronger human bonds. We should never miss an opportunity to do this. Yet, many believe a dialogical discussion of ethics with the purpose of reaching a common (shared) moral point of view will mean giving up a part of who they are. The strain of individualism has a strong hold on us and this makes self-evaluation difficult. Lorenz Sells (2013) comments:

When the attributes of our identity are externalized, those attributes control us. Our sense of self worth becomes dependent on external considerations. We must have enough money, means, and status in order to consider ourselves happy. In pursuit of maintaining this false sense of happiness, we cling all the more strongly to external identifiers because so much self worth emanates from them. It can take losing these things, losing our identity, to see our true nature outside of them. (...) We choose the people we hang out with, the things we do, and the stuff we buy. That choice comes from somewhere. The source of that choice is much closer to our identity than the product. To understand our choices we must examine why we do the things that we do.

In experiencing my loss of identity, I could see that many of my actions were motivated by a desire for external recognition. I was either trying to impress others or worried about how they would judge me. However, any situation where myself expression is contingent upon the validation of others is bound to limit me from being myself. And if I'm not being myself, how can I possibly be happy?

True identity is being true to oneself. For me this is cultivating genuine self respect and a willingness to be vulnerable. This makes for a more flexible identity that is based on how I feel about my actions

rather than the outcome of my actions. If I feel good then I know my behavior is aligned with values that bring me real happiness.

No one is exempt from this malady. The tragedy of this fear is twofold: first is the pain and loss of freedom and belonging, coming from trying to hide who we are, masking our true selves. The other is a loss of those effective relationships necessary to resolving everyday moral dilemmas. These losses make an honest discussion of values virtually impossible. They also limit our ability to reach across familial or social boundaries with respect, compassion, and benevolence. They make ineffective our voice in the moral commons. But people see how we live and this always colors what we say. The difficulties in self-disclosure are apparent as are the difficulties in living this message. This will not be a popular nor easy road to follow. Today we are challenged to bring forth and orchestrate all the rhythms of human awakening that have ever been in our search for what we can become.

### **In Conclusion: Relationships Define Our Values**

“Deep ecology does not separate humans – or anything else – from the natural environment. It sees the world not as a collection of isolated objects, but as a network of phenomena that are fundamentally interconnected and interdependent. Deep ecology recognizes the intrinsic value of all living being and views humans as just a particular strand in the web of life.” – (Fritjof Capra 1996, 5)

There are hidden connections – connections and relationships that define who we are and how we respond to others. After all, we are not merely influenced by things, but our thoughts about things. (Schopenhauer 1995, 25) Our hidden values can be revealed by reason and by introspection, but reason is not their source. They lie much deeper in our cultural background. Often what is of importance to us as sacred and eternal is blocked from us by our cultural beliefs, habits of the mind, and hurried activities. (See Wittgenstein 1984) Indeed, seeking community in a divided world projects a precarious vision. About this vision I lament: Assumptions gathered like a blanket they cover a mind that queries, a voice that speaks Courage mustered, troops ready for battle Self-affirmation perhaps the goal I seek.

Our cultural, beliefs and assumptions are revealed in the language we use and in the language we choose. So, care must be taken when discussing our values. What is it that we assume as true that others do not? Do these assumptions prevent effective dialogue; do they stop communication before it actually begins? Is truth only personal, a standard we project in our social lives for judging our values and those of others? So, we hope. “Hope” is a metaphor implying the intrinsic nature of human commitment and motivation – the real that is hidden behind what appears to be. And hope doesn’t imply just wishing for something better to happen. Hope is not merely a future projection but implies an ethic that is internalized and activated in every moment of life as our present decisions are the antecedent properties of the hope we project. Indeed, as Hume

noted, the mind does have a “great propensity to spread itself on external objects.”<sup>13</sup> In this pursuit, honesty in self-inspection and awareness of the values of others is our greatest ally.

There is little that is uniform and structured about an inquiring mind. Much about us - religious, political, philosophical etc. - falls into the well of the unexamined. Immanuel Kant commented in a moment of insight, “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made.”<sup>14</sup> So, Kant gave us a “purely” rational rule to follow – to help make us straight. We are reminded by Isaiah Berlin “To force people into the neat uniforms demanded by dogmatically believed-in schemes [moral or otherwise] is almost always the road to inhumanity. We can do only what we can, but that we must do against difficulties.” (Berlin 1998, 16) Culture and the presuppositions and values it holds will always maintain a normative sway over our lives pushing us toward a unified, integrated, way of life, a life without deficiency, but this can be deceptive for, as we are aware, incognizant and unrestrictive cultural habits are often discombobulated and divisive. Yet, there remains a social hope for ethical unity and for a universal moral human community. And this hope is an assumption driving ethics, both secular and religious.

As Emerson so aptly wrote, “Every man takes care that his neighbor shall not cheat him. But a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbor. Then all goes well. He has changed his market cart into a chariot of the sun. What a day dawns, when we have taken to heart the doctrine of faith! to prefer, as a better investment, being to doing; being to seeming; logic to rhythm and to display; the year to the day; the life to the year; character to performance; and now have come to know, that justice will be done us; and if our genius is slow, the term will be long”<sup>15</sup>

Mitch Album said it this way, “The way you get meaning into your life is to devote yourself to loving others, devote yourself to your community around you, and devote yourself to creating something that gives you purpose and meaning.” (Album 2011, 43) On the other hand, people whose values are restricted to the immediate, with little knowledge of the past, and who maintain a shallow outlook of the future have limited moral growth. They live their lives on the surface and give little thought to issues that have moral meaning and purpose. Teachers, ministers, politicians, and civic leaders should begin discussions of morality, ethics, and civility. We should also give serious thought to what we value in ourselves and what we value in others. We are faced with an enormous task of articulating a moral ecology of persons grounded in moral human relationships. We are indeed, seekers of community in a divided world.

### **Endnotes**

1. The argument here is that humans are naturally ethnocentric and this is reflected in their values and the justification of their values, and is something that potentially prevents objectivity, but something we should work to overcome.
2. Albert J. Raboteau, “American salvation, the place of Christianity in public life” (Boston Review, April/May 2005). <http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR30.2/raboteau.php>. Raboteau says, “If American democracy offers religion an opportunity, American pluralism offers it a challenge. Pluralism challenges us to experience religion as more than a cultural identity. Pluralism means encountering the values and attitudes and beliefs of others with

- respect for those who hold them. Pluralism, when taken seriously as respect for difference, rejects relativism for avoiding the hard truth that we do indeed differ. It is the difficult road we walk to achieve a mature understanding of the truth and the opportunity to share that truth with others who are seeking it. It challenges us to appropriate, internalize, and live out the religious identity passed to us by family and society. It creates an opportunity to discuss and to argue for one's own position."
3. "Moral Human Ecology": a holistic ethic that will include persons, nations, and the physical environment based on the idea of "deep ecology," enriching the perception that our lives are a network of fundamentally interconnected and interdependent relationships.
  4. *Learning to live together in peace and harmony; values education for peace, human rights, democracy and sustainable development for the Asia-Pacific region: a UNESCO-APNIE VE sourcebook for teacher education and tertiary level education*, p. 4 (Bangkok: UNESCO PROAP, 1998). <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001143/114357eo.pdf>.
  5. In this book Dacey makes a case for the public assessment of our values.
  6. Goodwin, Richard N., "Reflections: The American condition," *New Yorker*, 21 and 28 January & 4 February, 1974; I, 35-60; II, 36-68; III, 48-91.
  7. For clarification, see: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "John Stuart Mill." <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/utilitarianism-history/>.
  8. I did not know about Lew's work until a mutual friend loaned me Foltz's book. I was not surprised when I read it
  9. Taleb, Nassim, *Philosophy now, a magazine of ideas*. In this interview Taleb says, "My idea concerns decision-making under conditions of uncertainty, dealing with incomplete information, and living in a world that has a more complicated ecology than we tend to think. This question about justifiable responses to the unknown goes way beyond the conventionally-phrased 'problem of induction' and what people call 'scepticism'. These classifications are a little too tidy for real life. Alas, the texture of real life is more sophisticated and more demanding than analytical philosophy can apparently handle. The point is to avoid 'being the turkey'. [There is a philosophical parable about a turkey who on the basis of daily observations concludes that he's always fed at 9am. On Christmas Eve he discovers this was an overhasty generalisation - Ed.] To do so you have to stand some concepts on their head - like your concept of the use of beliefs in decision making." [https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Nassim\\_Nicholas\\_Taleb](https://philosophynow.org/issues/69/Nassim_Nicholas_Taleb).
  10. Eliot, T. S., Four Quartets, Lines 152-155 (<http://www.davidgorman.com/4Quartets/1-norton.htm>).
  11. Nietzsche, Friedrich: "There are no facts, only interpretations." A quote commonly attributed to Friedrich Nietzsche.
  12. The American Psychological Associations says, "Cacioppo's findings also show that prolonged loneliness can be as harmful to your health as smoking or obesity. On the flip side, they demonstrate the therapeutic power of social connection and point the way toward making that healing balm available to everyone." See also, <http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2008-07755-000>.
  13. David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* (London: John Noon, 1739) as quoted and analyzed by Daniel C. Dennett (2017, 354-370).
  14. In an English translation of original 1784 article: "Idea of a Universal History on a Cosmo-Political Plan" in the *London Magazine*, pp. 335-393.
  15. Emerson, R. W., quoted in the *Friends' Intelligencer*, Vol. 72, p. 401.

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