
SIMPLE ETHICAL SKILLS

FOR USE IN A MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY

**By
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SIMPLE ETHICAL SKILLS FOR A MULTI-CULTURAL SOCIETY

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Purpose - This book has been written to offer all those working with young people in a multi-cultural society, a consistent system of ethical reasoning, based not on the teachings of any specific religion, but on the wisdom of the past and reason for today. Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher considered that what was needed to underpin a good state was passionless reason. I don't know that it is possible for a writer to be completely passionless, but the philosophy here is based on reason and experience, rather than a passion for any specific ideology.

ISBN 978-0-473-20836-3

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PROLOGUE

LETTER TO MY GRANDSON

Dear Matthew,

It was great to see everyone together again at our recent family celebration I wish I had had more time to talk to you on our own, but now I am writing because there is so much more I wanted to say to you. You told me that you wanted to be an honest and “upright” man, but I can see that it is not easy for you to understand exactly what that entails. All your life you have been influenced by the general standards of the people around you, and until now you have accepted “what other people are doing” as the ethical standard by which you could measure your own actions. If a good proportion of other people were doing it, you thought it must be O.K., but now you are not quite so sure and you want to improve your own standards. That is the first step. Much as I love you, I have to say that there is some room for improvement - not that I am perfect myself, mind you, but if we really want to improve, we need to be able to recognise where we fall short.

For example, the other day, I heard that you had made an arrangement that meant you had put your mother to extra trouble in order to save yourself some hassle. You had added to her stress in order to lessen your own. I’m sure you had not looked at the situation from her point of view, only from your own. Did you stop to ask yourself if it was really necessary to involve her? Could you have made a little extra effort yourself rather than add to her burdens? Maybe she had made arrangements with others who would then have had to alter their plans – and so on and so on. If I had been able to point that out to you at the time, I’m sure you would have changed the arrangement because you are a very kind person at heart. The problem is that you have never really bothered to think carefully about the effect of your actions on other people, and this is the essence of ethics. Our actions are like the ripples that result when you throw a stone in a pond. They spread out affecting more and more people. It is easy enough to see the effects on those closest to us, but as they spread out they can affect our homes and family, our workplaces, our communities, our nation and even globally. Old people like me have lived long enough to have seen the effects of many casual, selfish or thoughtless actions. Disasters of all kinds have resulted from small actions or the lack of action when it was needed.

When I was young, we learned a poem at school that was meant to teach us how important just a small action can be. It was called “All for the want of a horse-shoe nail.” I can’t remember all the words now, but it was about a messenger being sent on horse-back to warn of an approaching enemy army. He had noticed earlier in the day that a nail was missing from one of his horse’s shoes but had said to himself, “I’ll fix that later,” but now there was no time. You can guess the result.

“For the want of a nail a shoe was lost
For the want of a shoe a horse was lost.
For the want of a horse a battle was lost.
For the want of a battle a kingdom was lost,
And all for the want of a horse-shoe nail.”

In today’s world aeroplanes have crashed because of a moment of carelessness by a person in a position of responsibility. We can’t have rules or laws that will cover all our actions, but we do need some consistent ethical guidelines when we make decisions that will affect other people.

Lots of experts and philosophers over thousands of years have produced ethical theories, but I can tell you that the simplest way to decide whether an action is ethical or not, is by considering its effects or likely effects on other people and the environment. Even in the middle of the last century, the effects of our actions on the environment would probably not have figured highly in a discussion of ethics, and I mention it here because it has become obvious now, that actions that

have an effect on the environment also affect people, and will go on doing so through all the generations to come. Any ethical formula therefore, if it is based on reason and not merely on tradition or religion, must include effects on the environment, so even though I may not specifically mention this at times, just remember that it is always there as part of any check as to whether our actions are going to make for a better world – in our homes – our workplaces – our communities – our countries and finally globally. As the philosopher Goethe said, if we all swept in front of our own doorsteps, the whole world would be clean.

In the middle of the twentieth century also, there did not seem to be any need for me to be writing this for my own children. They were being brought up on the same ethical diet that I had been – and so were most of their peers. You however, being of mixed race, and living in a multi-cultural society now, are sometimes torn between the values and traditions of both sides of your family. It can be very difficult for you at times and I know there can be pressure for you to choose one side or the other. That is why you came to me, and why I am trying to explain a way forward that should be helpful to you. After the second world war most of the children of this community went to Sunday School, and even if they didn't, the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule were the basic standards of ethical behaviour in a mainly Christian, colonial society. From the 1960s however, as they grew up and still there were wars – in spite of the nuclear bomb and all the devastation of World Wars 1 and 2 – many became disillusioned with the ethical standards of their parents and went their own ways. There was “flower power” and “Make love not war” – hippies and self-supporting communes, but in the end most of those young people settled down into making a living for their own families.

Communes split up because the human vices of selfishness, greed, envy, laziness, or the desire for power that religions had condemned but had not eliminated in themselves, were still around as temptations. It was no longer acceptable though to talk about vices or guilt, and so the vices were able to thrive in places where there was nothing to counter them. Even though they may have rejected them, the “baby boomer” generation of children born after World War 2, still had the background knowledge of the ethical standards with which they were brought up. You can perhaps see it as ethical capital which some believed was worth holding on to and passing on to the next generation, but others saw no use in because they believed it was holding them back in their aspirations. They let it waste away and had nothing else to pass on in its place. In the past, even state schools here, though we had a secular education system, were also reinforcing the so-called “Christian” ethical standards of the parents, and so throughout our fairly egalitarian society, most people had reasonably common values of what was right and what was wrong. Our acceptable “morals” had been based on religion, but now even religion was under attack. Catholics and Protestants were killing each other in Ireland, and Palestinians and Jews were blowing each other up in the Middle East. Marx had seen religion as the “opiate of the people,” allowing them to accept oppression and not fight against it, and yet even when religion was suppressed under Communism, the people were still oppressed in other ways and more people had died under Communism than had ever done in wars caused by religion, seventy million it has been reported in China alone under Mao.

I had thought when I began a study of ethics at University around the turn of the twenty-first century, that I was going to learn how to distinguish right from wrong and good from evil, but I soon discovered that an academic study of ethics meant a study of ethical theories – that no-one had yet produced a theory that was generally accepted, and that it was not considered likely that this would ever happen. The aim of academic ethical argument seemed to be to demolish the other person's argument, rather than to find some simple principles on which most people could agree and which the ordinary people in the multi-ethnic societies that were evolving could use in their everyday lives. I had stated in one of my assignments that The Golden Rule i.e. treat other

people in the way you would like them to treat you, was a reasonable measure for ethical actions. I had been brought up on the Golden Rule. My mother had not been particularly religious. We were not very regular church-goers, but her usual question for me when I had done something to someone else that triggered her displeasure was, "How would you like it if someone did that to you?" After all, the Golden Rule is not just a Christian teaching, but it appears in slightly different words in most of the major religions and is also accepted by humanists as a fair measure for behaviour towards our fellow humans. It is reasonable. It makes us think about the consequences of our actions.

The person who marked my ethics assignment however, gave me a D = failed, and wrote a comment in red ink that "the Golden Rule allows too much room for sado-masochism." When I had checked the meaning of that word in my dictionary, I decided that there weren't too many people who would take pleasure in inflicting pain upon themselves and even less who would want to copy them. However I did learn from that course of ethics, that "Divine Command Ethics" – that is. ethics based on the teachings of religions, would no longer be acceptable in a society that did not believe in a Divine being and Divine standards for righteousness. Any ethical teaching, to be generally acceptable, would in future have to be based on reason alone.

Once I had absorbed that message, I really enjoyed learning about the ethical theories that have influenced western society over the last few thousand years – influenced our laws, our political systems and our dealings with each other. I studied world religions also, including your father's, not looking for differences in customs and ceremonies, but looking for similarities in ethical teachings. I found that the ethical principles that I had accepted without thinking too much about it, were common to most of the major religions, and this would be important in multi-ethnic or multi-cultural communities where people were going to have to learn to get along with each other in their everyday lives. It seemed that wise people over thousands of years had come to similar conclusions as to what actions would work for good in a community and what would cause harm. That is probably why ethical reasoning often coincides with the teachings of religion, so just try to keep an open mind here. Only bigots have closed minds and you are not a bigot. The biggest problem for religions is that followers often don't put their ethical teachings into action. Most religions have some form of teaching about virtues and vices - but though some of the virtues have been emphasised in the last few years, the vices have been largely ignored - and some virtues carried to extremes can become vices,

Tolerance for instance can become an excuse for apathy or a lack of courage. Tolerance has been widely promoted as a virtue, but to me there seemed to be a question of exactly how tolerant we should be when customs that had been reasonable in a past and different society were now sometimes being used for selfish reasons, and affecting the lives of newer generations in a harmful way. What if the values or traditions of a particular group of people include cruelty to other people or to animals? What if they involve giving preference to family members over others, in situations where public money or position is concerned? What if they involve the gaining of great personal wealth at the expense of weaker people or the environment? Should we still respect their right to hold such values, and see tolerance of their traditions as a virtue? It seemed to me that the emphasis on the positive rather than the negative has meant that there has been much less discussion surrounding vices, e.g. selfishness, greed, envy, cruelty and laziness and their effect on other people and ourselves. If we ignore the vices we allow them power to grow. If we look at the causes for the amount of violence in our society today, we will see that nothing much has changed as far as human behaviour is concerned. Envy and greed are behind a great deal of crime, especially white-collar crime. Selfishness, laziness and drunkenness are behind much of the family violence.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle saw a virtue as the middle way between extremes but sometimes it can be difficult to find the middle way. An excess of honesty can result in people making cruel unnecessary remarks. “No offence intended – but” can often end with a hurtful comment, and an honest inquiry into the speaker’s motive may reveal that it was less than virtuous. Historically of course, different groups have imposed their own versions of “the good” on others with the exclusion of concern for individuals, e.g. The Christian Spanish Inquisition and atheistic Communism. Neither had much concern for the suffering of the individual. Even virtues need to conform to ethical principles.

My own opinions on basic ethical principles were reinforced by one ethicist who had written that the present emphasis on ethical relativism i.e. accepting that different groups have a right to do things their own way, is misleading because it draws attention away from widespread agreement on the things that matter most in our lives and to the society around us.¹ Virtues are important of course, but if we examine virtues individually we find that most of them are really based on simple ethical principles. I have been told that there are at least fifty-two virtues, but really we can narrow their message down to just a few principles - and it is easier to remember a few principles than fifty two virtues when we are considering a choice of action. For example, one modern ethicist has said that “trust” is the glue that holds society together,² but what is the basis for trust? If you jumped trustingly into your father’s arms from a high branch but he didn’t bother to catch you, would you do it again? If we ask ourselves why we trust some people more than others we soon find that it is because they have never let us down. They have always been fair to us. They have never intentionally deceived us. They have never been unkind to us or used us for their own ends. This leads us to the ethical principles that have endured over thousands of years –

Wisdom – Considering the likely consequences of actions in order to maximise the good and minimise the harm.

Justice – Treating all people equally and showing favour to none without good cause.

Truth – Basing evidence on fact not emotion or prejudice. Being honest with other people and yourself. Not deceiving people in any way.

Love – Treating all people with respect and caring about their welfare. Not *using* them for your own ends.

One of the popular modern ethical theories that really intrigued me was called “*ethical egoism*.” An ethics text-book tells me that it is inspired by libertarianism³. It means that we should not help others at the expense of our own interests. If you do that you are putting a lower value on yourself. The hero in Ayn Rand’s novel was an “upright” man who lived up to his own principles, and so at first sight there seemed to be a certain logic in the theory, but what about a society where ethical principles are not so important? Certainly each individual is valuable, but the individual usually has to live in a community. One of the questions that it is always relevant to ask about any action is, “What would happen if everybody did that?” If it is all right for one person to always put his/her own interests first, what would happen if everyone put their own interests first? It seemed to me that ethical egoism would only work for the individual if he/she lived in a society where the majority were **not** ethical egoists. In a society where all people put their own interests first, the result would be the law of the jungle – the survival of the fittest – and if Darwin had it right, the ethical would not survive. On the other hand, in an ethical society where most people put the well-being of others before their own, the individual would come off very well because while you were being concerned about other people, they would be being equally concerned about you. Of course in time the ethical egoist would undoubtedly learn that it

¹ Brandt, R. (1998). 2nd ed. Relativism and Ultimate Disagreements about ethical principles. P45 in T. Beauchamp, *Philosophical ethics: An introduction to moral philosophy*. U.S.A. : McGraw Hill inc. p 49

² Baier, A. (1998) in L.M. Hinman, *Ethics : A pluralistic approach to moral theory*. p368.

³ Hinman, L. (1998) *Ethics: A pluralistic approach to moral theory*. 2nd ed. U.S.A. : Harcourt Brace. P 161

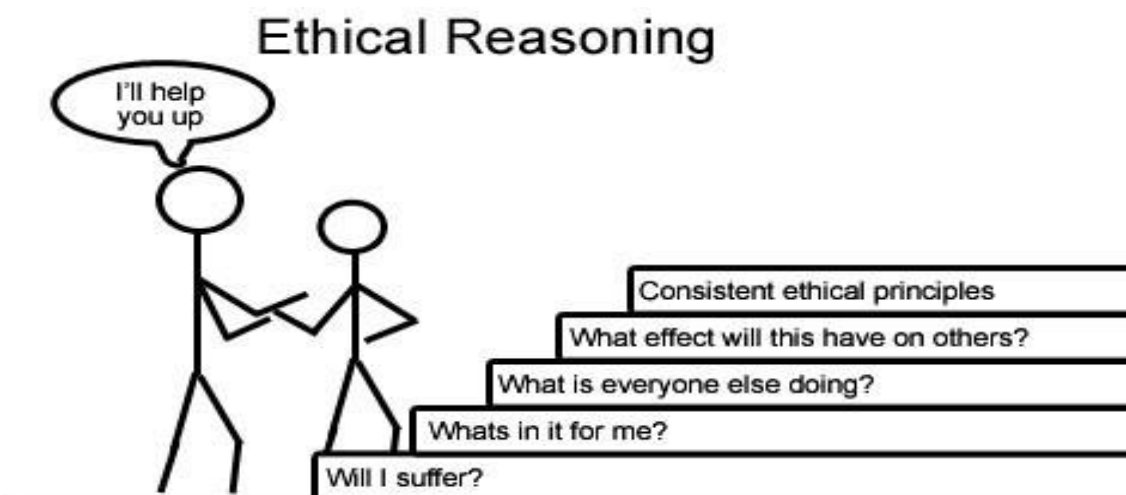
was not really in his best interests to be completely selfish, but by that time a great deal of damage would have been done to other people and to his relationships with them. The long-term consequence of selfishness can be loneliness.

I can't give you one simple ethical theory to cover all the situations you will meet in your life. No ethical theory has ever been universally accepted on its own, and we can't reach ethical conclusions by using any ethical principle on its own. The four I am giving you need to be used in conjunction with each other, and then the conclusion you have reached needs to be weighed by two checks to see that you have got it right.

1. The Golden Rule that makes us feel for others – How would you feel if that happened to you? and
2. The Goal of a better world. Will this action make a better world – at home – in your work-places – your community – your nation – globally.

There is a lot more detail I could give you. Lots of background knowledge that would be useful in your understanding of the place these simple principles held in past history and why they still have a place today, but that is enough for now. Don't text me. I'm not into texting. E-mail I can handle, so whenever you have a question I'll be happy to answer it – as long as I'm around. Don't forget I am past my use-by date. In the meantime, I will set to work while I am still able to write down more information for you. Perhaps I'll write a book. Lots of love from Grandma.

P.S. I will write a book. I will try to make it simple and clear enough for young people and speakers of English as a second language to understand. I will try to give background information that will be useful in understanding how we got to be the society we are, and information on using ethical principles in making ethical decisions. Not everyone will agree with everything I say, but these are my opinions based on my own education and experience. Take from them what you will.



1. INTRODUCTION

So now I am offering you a simple method of using ethical principles as a basis for decision making in any situation where our actions may affect other people. This method could also be useful to parents and others in any multi-cultural community where the values of one group may conflict with the values of others. We all need to recognise that any decision we make that has an effect on other people or on our environment has an ethical content.

1. Ethical and non-ethical issues.

Not all values are ethical values. Career criminals have values. Even Hitler had values, so if we are to take the values of other ethnic or cultural groups into consideration it is necessary to be able to distinguish between ethical and non-ethical values. The simplest way to do this is to accept that values that have an effect on other people or the environment have an ethical content. What if the values of a particular group of people include cruelty to other humans or animals, or involve the gaining of great personal wealth at the expense of other people or the environment? Should we still respect their rights to hold those values and act on them?

Also, there is little educational value in examining or clarifying purely personal values, in art or music for instance, though there would be an ethical content in the sound level at which music should be played if it was affecting other people.

Values clarification and exploration became a fashionable method of discussion in schools back in the 1970s. It became popular because it was seen as being non-judgemental., but though it may be perfectly adequate for non-ethical values, these methods are not adequate for education where ethical values are concerned. In this area we need stated principles by which to measure values. Values “clarification” has been criticized as “inadequate, ineffective, and possibly even dangerous because of its basic moral relativism,” and also that “some create an illusion --- that can lead one to think that more is happening than is really happening.”⁴ It is doubtful if educational time spent in examining or clarifying non-ethical values could be considered “cost-effective.” There is little educational return on time spent in clarifying personal preferences if they do not affect other people, though it can help in understanding people and their actions..

2. Our present situation – Multiculturalism.

One of the biggest problems facing the world today is how to integrate people from ethnic minority groups into the existing culture of a country, whilst still enabling them to preserve their own identity.

People are moving around the world now, either by choice or as refugees trying to get away from conditions in their homeland. Countries are trying to find the best solution to the problem of an influx of immigrants of differing nationalities, and it is recognized that schools have a major part to play in establishing tolerance and understanding. Even amongst a new generation born in the new country there are clashes between groups of different origins. We can celebrate diversity in many ways but not in ethical values, nor in the interpretation of democracy and legal systems.

As more and more immigrant groups arrive, and as those already born in a country cling to their own established cultures, the potential for problems is growing rapidly.

Using ethical principles to examine values, perspectives and current issues as required within the social sciences in schools, adds an ethical perspective to our reasoning about the decisions we have to make in our everyday lives, especially when values of different groups conflict. Over the years, traditional rules or values and customs of any group change, or may no longer be relevant, and if the society in which young people are now growing up does not provide a more relevant set of rules and customs, young people are left in an ethical vacuum. The use of consistent ethical principles aims to fill that vacuum. Ethical principles provide consistency in examining

⁴ Stewart,J. (1976) in D.Purpel & K.Ryan, (Eds). *Moral education:It comes with the territory*. Pp136-151

all values - traditional values as well as those held by new immigrants who have come to a country from places with different cultures, and often from societies where democracy has been unknown.

3. Our choices as a multicultural country.

We have three choices, segregation, assimilation or integration.

Segregation of ethnic groups in different localities, or with their own schools and their own teachers, can lead to separation and conflict. It can also lead to the perpetuation of values that are not acceptable in a democracy.

Assimilation means that individuals from minority groups lose their own identity and are assimilated into the major culture, which remains relatively unchanged.

Integration means allowing individuals to maintain their own identity whilst still fitting into the overall culture of the country. In the process all cultures need to adapt and make compromises. If all the people involved are prepared to recognize the good ideas from other cultures and reject those of their own which do not contribute to a better way of life for all, a country which has the courage to follow the course of integration can become richer and stronger, and united instead of divided.

Our common lives.

No matter what our ethnic origins, if we choose to live in a particular country we are going to have to face the future alongside the others who live there. We can do nothing to change the past, and the rules and customs of the past may no longer be relevant in a changing world.

We all live under the same legal system, within the same economy, and exposed to the same media forces. We all face some of the same types of pressures and problems that come with family, work-place and everyday lives. We have to make choices, and we need to learn to accept compromise at times.

Older members of ethnic groups however, often want to cling to their own ways, and this can bring conflict with the younger members of their groups who have only known, and want to be part of, a different world. Children of mixed race can experience similar tensions.

Often the young cast aside the old customs and rules, and then find themselves in an ethical vacuum because their new country does not give them any other consistent and valid set of principles by which they can live. Suicides by some young people are caused by this tension between young and old. The same problem can also arise when some view a knowledge of their own culture as a status symbol and a requirement for acceptance within a group, while others who do not have that knowledge, are excluded from full acceptance.

Values and citizenship education can provide an answer.

The ultimate goal of education is to develop a student's autonomy – to enable him/her to reason well and to make responsible choices for his/her own future.

Each student is an individual and that individuality should be respected, but we also live in communities, and we need to understand the values that are common to us, and the principles of behaviour that are necessary to allow people to live peacefully together in communities. We have rules of the road that are generally accepted and allow us to use our roads safely. Break them and someone gets hurt. We need generally accepted principles for ethical behaviour to allow us to live peacefully within our communities for the same reason.

As I write about these things I am constantly reminding myself that in a society that is now a mix of ethnic groups, I may be writing for some people for whom English is not a first language. I have to be very careful that meanings of words are perfectly clear. When dealing with issues that relate to principles, laws, rules or customs, the meanings of the words “principles”, “rules” and “customs” need to be clarified so that there will be no confusion.

- A **principle** is a generally accepted basic or fundamental standard on which further reasoning can be based. E.g. justice.
- A **rule** or a **law** is a direction imposed by some authority in a specific situation and for a specific purpose, E.g. school rules, or laws passed by representative governments in a democracy. Hopefully these rules will accord with the principle of justice.
- A **custom** is a long-established tradition or habit of a particular group, introduced in the past for reasons that were relevant then, but which may not be relevant in the present – and may even be unacceptable, or even dangerous in a different society. It is possible that some customs will not comply with the principle of justice.

Rules, laws and customs can be changed, according to the changing needs of society, and by the people who make or hold to them. The ethical principles which can be used to examine them and which work for the common good of society, do not change.

Principles to examine values

Educationists recognize that certain basic moral rules, which all agree to uphold give a stability to life essential for the feeling of security that both children and adults need,⁵ but school rules and the promotion of values in schools are not enough. School rules can be left behind at the school gate. If we are to raise the level of ethical reasoning in our society from “What’s in it for me?” to “How are my actions going to affect other people,” we need basic ethical principles to use as standards. If we can educate the children of all ethnic groups in this way through our schools we will be taking a major step towards tolerance and understanding for all.

Multi-ethnicity in our country can become either a threat to stability, or it can be a valuable contribution to our own evolving identity. How we handle the situation now will decide our future. We have time if we start with the children of today.

If Hitler and Mao-Tse-Tung could indoctrinate a generation for political reasons, we can educate other generations to reason clearly and ethically in a hope that they will choose to make a better world.

Who educates in this field?

1. Parents – Parents should be the first teachers. If parents have accepted their responsibility in this field, children will enter school well equipped to take advantage of the next step in their education.

2. Teachers – Good teachers “educate”. There are children whose lives have been turned around by teachers who have inspired them and believed in them. As teachers, we like to feel we can do this for all our pupils and many experienced teachers win more than they lose, but many younger teachers have been handicapped themselves by being taught they should be neutral on the subject of values – that there is no right or wrong - and therefore they are unwilling to express definite opinions for fear of being accused of indoctrination.

3. Society – Parents and teachers are not the only influence on children and their values. All around them their families, their friends, pop culture, T.V., Internet, and mass media are all promoting values, and many of these are more attractive at first sight than the values that may be promoted in schools.

Over time, society changes some of its values through exposure to these powerful influences. The values promoted in school curricula may not now be the values by which some of the parents live. Children need to be educated to reason ethically for themselves and to make reasoned choices, and a common education programme is needed to counter the common experiences gained through the mass media. Values and citizenship *education* does not just reflect the values of society; it gives principles and guidelines by which pupils can make their

⁵ Berenson, F., (1990). in *Philosophy and the teacher*, D.Lloyd ed. p126

own judgements on the present values of society, and it should give them the motivation to make a better world

Just as we need consistent road rules for safety on our roads, so we need consistent and generally accepted guidelines for those actions that affect the well-being of people, their communities and their environment. What would happen on the road roundabouts if we all did our own thing? What happens in a country where we drive on the left-hand side of the road, when tourists used to driving on the right side of the road act instinctively in an emergency and swerve to the right? Reasoning ethically needs to become a habit started in early childhood years. Young people need to learn to think for themselves, but if they have learned to reason well, they will immediately see that going against the traffic rules can have disastrous consequences for themselves and for other people. It is sensible to keep to the rules of the road and it is sensible to use consistent ethical principles in our dealings with other people.

Stable ethical principles v. excessive individualism

In the United States, a recent synthesis of research in the field of citizenship, has shown that stable principles and a sense of connection to others have been the common factors influencing young people who are active in their communities.⁶ The excessive individualism that had dominated U.S. culture actually separated young people from a larger sense of meaning⁷, but those who based their actions on strong and stable moral principles were more open to new ideas, less dogmatic and less tied to ideologies. (ibid p61). Other researchers had found that schools had often championed rights at the expense of responsibilities, and self-esteem at the expense of self-discipline.⁸ The research also showed that for any citizenship education to be successful, isolated programmes were not enough. The teaching would need to be consistent throughout all schools in a community and preferably all schools in a country.

The use of generally accepted ethical principles throughout the whole range of social science disciplines, in cross curricula learning, and in all schools, could provide the cohesion that will be needed in the future to hold a multicultural society together. It would enable us to find answers to the problems of everyday living in a changing society. It could mean that our transient school population and all ethnic groups, including new immigrants, would be receiving the same guidelines for ethical living. This would avoid problems caused by misunderstanding each other's values and customs. It is generally accepted that no-one has as yet produced a moral system that has commanded universal assent, and it seems unlikely that anyone will do so in the foreseeable future.⁹ The ethicist Beauchamp however claims that a theory is pragmatically justified if it gets you there more often than not,¹⁰ and this simple method of ethical reasoning that I am suggesting here will do that.

“It is people that matter.”

If we throw a stone in a pond we see how the ripples move outward, each one affecting another, and how wide they spread. People are like that. All our lives we affect and are affected by other people. From the time a baby is born, it starts to affect the lives of those around it. Though at first it does not know much about the world into which it has been born, it soon realizes that by its actions it can produce responses from other people. If it cries loudly and long enough, someone will pick it up, feed it and attend to its needs. It doesn't reason about how much

⁶ Berman, S., (1997). *Children's social consciousness and the development of social responsibility*. P16

⁷ Berman, S. (1997) p 66

⁸ Ryan, K. & Bohlin, K., (1999). *Building character in schools*. P190

⁹ Hinman, L., (1998.) p37.

¹⁰ Beauchamp, T., (1991) *Philosophical ethics: an introduction to moral philosophy*. (2nd ed.) p 89.

inconvenience it is causing to other people by its crying. It is only its own comfort that matters, and for the first few years of its life that is all that matters. Some people will go through their whole lives like this, not raising their level of ethical reasoning above “What’s in it for me?” An emphasis on individualism and rights in our education does not help, because the hidden ingredient in these concepts is selfishness.

Aristotle

In contrast to the modern emphasis on individualism, Aristotle considered ethics as a matter of the relationship we have to society when we act, whether our actions are good or bad for society.¹¹ He looked for a theory that would allow a place for ethical values as well as scientific truths, and it had to be concrete and practical.¹² From my point of view, many years of experience - of growing up in a solo-parent family, training and working as a teacher, rearing a family, working in business, running a farm, working with young people in sports and educational groups, and being involved with local and national government - have shown that the most important issue in ethics is the effect of our actions on other people and our environment. We do not have to worry about our own ethical development because if we get the principles of dealing with other people right, we will become ethical people without even thinking about ourselves. I have been told that my reasoning is too simplistic, but in a multi-cultural society we need to be able to use simple language that all can understand. Over the years a few simple points have become obvious –

- Those actions, which help people and their environment, can be considered right or good.
- Those actions that harm people and their environment can be considered wrong or bad.

Aristotle’s common sense is vital in the use of these principles, and to provide a balance when making ethical decisions. The ethical principles that are used in this method are simplified as - **Wisdom** - i.e. Common sense in reasoning in order to maximise the good and minimise the harm.

Justice – i.e. Fairness and equity. Not showing favour to any particular person or group without just cause..

Truth – i.e. Honesty in personal lives and in inquiry.

Love – i.e. Respect and care for other people and the environment.

Ancient proverbs have told us and recent research has shown that it is important to start learning to reason ethically at a very young age so, simplified even further to meet the needs of young students and those for whom English is a second language, the meanings of the principles can be reduced to –

Wisdom – we should be sensible

Justice – we should be fair

Truth – we should be honest

Love – we should be kind.

These ethical principles can be used as a basis for discussion at every age level, but they should not just be used in an abstract way. They are applied to situations that are relevant and of interest to each age group, expanding questioning to suit the level of understanding. There are often items in the news that can be discussed or a film or popular book. For my own classes, I wrote plays like a T.V. serial where my students discussed the actions of a family and their neighbours.

¹¹ Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. U.K.: Cambridge University Press. P 55

¹² Dictionary of Philosophy p 41

In this way they were able to discuss situations that could be relevant to them without any personal connection being made.

The same principles can be used for discussion within families when decisions are being made.

Wisdom – Is this action reasonable? Will it work? What are the long-term consequences likely to be? On yourself? Family? School? Community? Country? The world? The aim is to maximise the good and minimise the harm.

Justice -- Is any person or group being given preference over others? Is any person or group being treated worse than any others? Yourself? Your family? etc. Would giving you what *you* see as justice, result in injustice to anyone else? What would be a fair compromise?

Truth – Do we have all the evidence here? Is it based on fact? Who has supplied the evidence? What are their motives? Can we trust everyone to tell the truth? What is their past record? Is anyone pushing a particular idea at the expense of truth? Have you examined your own motives and actions?

Love -- Is anyone being harmed? Are we treating each human being with respect and caring about what happens to him/her? Is any person or any group using any other person or group for their own ends? Do you think any person or group deserves special treatment? Should an exception be made in that case?

Checks and balances.

Because it is not always possible to achieve a perfect solution to the ethical problems we face in life, the two checks and balances help in judging the results of our reasoning.

The Golden Rule – How would you feel if someone did that to you? Would it make you happy or sad? How do you think these people will be feeling? The use of the Golden Rule to encourage feeling for others adds the emotion which some felt was missing in Kohlberg's original research. This is an essential part of raising the level of ethical reasoning, as it has been found that many young criminals do not have any feeling for their victims. It is argued that if they were consistently made to think about the consequences of actions and about other people's feelings, this could help to counteract the violence that is accepted as a normal part of their TV viewing and video games.

The goal- a better world. Is this going to make the world a better place? - Is it going to make other people happier - where you live, -in your school, - in your community, in the world? Is it going to improve or help destroy the environment?

The overall system involves finding a balance that produces as much good as possible, i.e. to maximise the good and minimise the bad results. It equates with common sense – the “practical wisdom” of Aristotle, and the middle way between extremes.

Through the use of these principles people of different ages cultures and ethnic backgrounds should be able to carry on an informed discussion, express an ethical viewpoint and be open to reasoned argument.

One ethical philosopher states that for a moral code to have currency in a society two things must be true

1. A high proportion of the adults in the society must subscribe to the principles and

2. A high proportion of the adults in the society would believe that others also subscribed to the same principles.¹³

It is fairly reasonable to believe that in democratic countries like our own, most people would subscribe to these principles – in theory if not always in practice.

What *should* we do?

In a multi-cultural society it is not just a matter of maintaining the values of specific groups.

Anne Colby, writing in the nineteen seventies when values clarification was becoming so fashionable, and comparing it with Kohlberg's work on stages of ethical reasoning, claimed that advocates of values clarification did not want to ask children "why" questions. They felt it would be detrimental to student's self-esteem because it questioned their assertions and put them on the defensive. "Values clarification," said Colby, "asks, 'What *would* you do?' but Kohlberg, wanting to raise the level of ethical reasoning, asks, 'What *should* you do?'"¹⁴ Kohlberg's theory plays an important part in the method of social inquiry and ethical reasoning proposed here, as it aims to raise the level of children's (and adults) reasoning from "What's in it for me?" to "How are my actions going to affect other people?"

Socratic questioning –

Socrates taught the young people of Athens to reason well by asking them questions that led them to the point where they saw the answer for themselves. Socratic questioning is still a very effective way of teaching. In the course of discussions young people should always be required to consider the probable consequences of different lines of action so that they get practice in ethical reasoning.

- Asking questions based on ethical principles makes sure there is an ethical content to reasoning, and that ethical reasoning is not just a matter of "How can I get the best deal for myself or my mates?"

Open-ended discussion has been popular in schools over recent years because no conclusion has to be reached, and so no-one's reasoning appears better than any one else's. No-one is right or wrong. This type of discussion may be adequate for non-ethical values, but it is not adequate where the aim is to be able "to make ethical decisions and act on them,," especially in a multi-cultural society. Open-ended discussion helps us see the other person's point of view – but --

In real life we have to make decisions, and often there is no perfect answer. We have to make choices and we need to consider consequences. Research has shown however that considering consequences does not have a high priority with young people, and part of the reasoning process involved here will require that considering consequences is an essential part of ethical reasoning. In real life we need to consider other people and their needs. If we are unwilling to make compromises occasionally, we have little chance of being able to live peacefully and happily with other people for any length of time. There is often a place for compromise in details that are purely personal, but not in the ethical principles on which we base our choices. Practice in making wise choices and knowing when to compromise is essential if young people are to become informed and responsible citizens of a democracy. In a multi-cultural democracy it is even more important because there will be a temptation to favour one's own ethnic or cultural group. Asking questions such as, "Is that fair to everyone involved?" "Is that argument based on fact or emotion?" or "Who wins or loses if we go down that path?" can make us see a situation more clearly.

¹³ Richard Brandt in *Philosophical Ethics: An introduction to moral philosophy*. (2nd E. 1991) by Tom Beauchamp. U.S.A.: McGraw-Hill. p151

¹⁴ Colby, A., (1976). Chapter 17 in *moral education: It comes with the territory*. Pp 284-286

2 KOHLBERG'S THEORY OF MORAL REASONING

Note that Kohlberg talks about “moral” reasoning while I use the word “ethical” The word “moral,” meaning the distinction a society makes between right and wrong, has been associated in the past with the teachings of religions. “Ethics” is separated from religion and is defined as a conscious reflection on our moral beliefs with the aim of improving, extending or refining those beliefs in some way.¹⁵

Kohlberg identified his approach to “moral” reasoning, as Cognitive-developmental.

Cognitive – because it recognises that moral education, like any education, has its basis in stimulating the active thinking of the child.

Developmental – because it sees the aims of moral education as movement and improvement through moral stages.¹⁶

The theory that children’s ethical reasoning develops through stages relates to the work of Dewey and Piaget who saw that each new step in learning was based on previous experience and the assistance of others who operated at a more advanced stage. As far as I know there is nothing proved about this next concept, but it is reasonable to believe that children who spend the larger proportion of their time interacting with others of their own age, in day-care centres for instance, would not advance in their ethical thinking as much as children who spent more time with adults who encouraged them to think ethically. And of course some children could be better off in day-care centres if the adults in their lives are not concerned about their well-being or with raising their level of reasoning

Outline of the theory -

Kohlberg believed that at every moral stage there is a concern for justice, and that central to justice are the demands of *liberty*, *equality* and *reciprocity*.

Stage 1 The child understands punishment. Actions that bring pain or personal discomfort are to be avoided. (Also applies to adults at this stage of ethical reasoning.)

Stage 2- The child is oriented towards seeking his/her own pleasure. What will produce rewards is good. There is an element of reciprocity, “You scratch my back I’ll scratch yours.”¹⁷ (this also applies to adults)

Stage 3. The child desires approval. “Good boy!” “ Good girl!” works, even though the child does not see any personal advantage, e.g. in sharing with others.

Stage 4. Accepting set standards and conforming to conventional norms of behaviour.

Stage 5. The beginning of personal morality. It is recognized that rules and laws flow from justice, from a social contract between the governors and the governed. It is a contract which is designed to protect the equal rights of all.

Stage 6. The person develops a conscience and personally chosen moral principles based on justice. He/she acts on these by personal choice and for his/her own self-respect.

Kohlberg accepted that many adults did not advance beyond stages 3 and 4. He believed that the stages were the same in any culture regardless of different social norms. He also concluded that maturity of moral judgement is not highly correlated with I.Q. or verbal intelligence, which probably accounts for the amount of white-collar crime and successful criminals – or the bright student who uses intelligence to the detriment of others.

¹⁵ Hinman, p 5

¹⁶ Kohlberg, L., (1976). Moral education. In D. Purpel and K. Ryan (eds) *Moral education: It comes with the territory*. P 183.

¹⁷ Hinman, p371

Kohlberg was researching and writing in the 1960s and 70s at a time when many of the authoritative texts on “moral” education were being written. Since then, there has been criticism of his work, but no real success in producing anything better. Forty years later we are still waiting for the perfect theory. In the meantime we can examine the criticisms and where they seem to have been justified we can try to find ways to improve on them.

One criticism is that Kohlberg, like Piaget, is weak on the emotion side: that there is not enough concern for people.

Emphasis on the principle of “Love” in this programme should deal with that. Also the check of the Golden Rule. By asking the question “How would you feel if that was happening to you?” teachers can help children feel the emotions of other people, and what it would be like if they were in the same situation. They have to think about what they would like to happen if it was happening to them personally. A modern ethicist Rawls suggests that rules should be made from behind a “veil of ignorance” as to what position in society or a democracy the rule maker would personally occupy, for example, would people vote for slavery if they did not know if they were to be master or slave? At senior levels, this can be a useful tool in class discussions on making rules. Employers and employees can also apply the question to the way they treat each other.

Another criticism is that Kohlberg believed morality must be based on justice, but that justice is not a universally held and admired concept today.

Though some ethical theorists may be able to show that justice is not universally admired today, the exceptions in a civilized society would probably be few. Justice has always been one of the most admired and required concepts in any stable society. If justice does not hold that position in today’s society, it is a reflection on our society and its mores, not on justice itself. The whole point in teaching young people to reason ethically is that they will be able to reason for themselves about such issues as whether justice should be an admired concept if people are going to live peacefully together.

Criticism also questions the belief that a higher stage of reasoning is better morally than lower stage reasoning and therefore whether there is any point in helping children to move up through the stages. It is suggested that it is better to concentrate on getting most children to stage 4, (which is - accepting the rules of society) than to worry about getting some children to a higher level. The aim here is to get *all* children to reason at a higher level.

Even if Kohlberg’s research was only done with males, it was done over a variety of cultures and ethnic groups with the same results as far as levels of reasoning were concerned, so it is appropriate to use his work when considering ethical reasoning in a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic society. And as far as I am concerned, the reasoning applies to females just as much as males. I see no valid reason why there should be different ethical standards for any particular group.

The work done by Berman in synthesizing the major research in the field of children’s social consciousness done over the last half century, showed that most of the criticism of Kohlberg had come from theorists with ideologies of their own to push, feminists because Kohlberg’s research was done only with males, and activists because Kohlberg put most emphasis on justice rather than activism. Kohlberg’s argument was that if the general level of reasoning were raised to the point where the majority of people recognised ethical principles and acted on them, social justice would be an automatic result.

A final criticism of Kohlberg’s work was that his emphasis was not so much on morality, but on making good citizens of the United States. Since the aim of social studies in our country has always been to produce good citizens, then Kohlberg’s theory is very relevant and useful. As Berman himself concluded, “The consistency across numerous studies leads Those who teach or advise do not have to be experts in recognising stages of reasoning. They probably see it for themselves without building a theory around it. They are probably already trying to teach young

people to think beyond benefits to themselves, and to consider the wider implications of their actions. In the process they will have found that some children respond more readily to the idea that they need to consider the effects of their actions on others, and these are the children whose parents have already been teaching them the same concepts.

Conventional morality –

Stages 3 and 4 are considered to be “conventional morality.”

At the time Kohlberg was writing, Stage 4 was “a morality of law and order,” that is, “obeying authority and doing one’s duty is what is right.”

The conventional level today appears to be “doing what everyone else is doing,” and doing what is acceptable in the society in which one moves. For teenagers it is joining in with groups of peers and being accepted. For adults it is much the same. Normally it means staying within the letter of the law, and in some cases, if the current law does not agree, then changing the law to suit the standards of the time. For some there is a desire to “push boundaries,” and if we look carefully at the motives behind these actions we can often see reasoning at the lowest level, that is, “What’s in it for me?” It may be personal publicity – to make one’s self noticed. It may be to sell more of a personal product – ideas, writings or goods.

All such behaviour is not necessarily ethical, and so merely getting reasoning to Stage 4 is not ethical *education*. It is merely accepting the status quo. and ethical relativity. To *educate* children (and adults) in this field it is necessary to raise their level of reasoning to the post-conventional level, where at Stage 5 they accept the morality of contracts, other people’s interests and democratic law, and at Stage 6 have ethical principles and a conscience that involves self-respect.

The beginning of self-control

Much emphasis has been placed on the value of praise in improving child behaviour and according to Kohlberg, this happens at stage 2 in his stages of ethical reasoning. For those who reason at the lowest level, i.e. “What’s in it for me?” praise on its own is not enough to change anti-social behaviour. This applies to adults as well as small children. If we ignore the negative, it does not necessarily go away. It merely gets stronger. There need to be unpleasant consequences from negative behaviour – from being bad. Bad behaviour should not just be ignored, though ignoring the child itself is an unpleasant consequence from which it will learn. It needs to be quite clear about why it is being ignored. If there are consistent unpleasant consequences from a certain form of bad behaviour, then the child has to make a choice and learn to exercise self-control. Will the pleasure it receives from the bad behaviour outweigh the unpleasant consequences that are certain to follow? Children need to start learning self-control. Experiencing consistent unpleasant consequences from bad behaviour as well, can be more effective for some children than just praise for being good.

The gap between moral reasoning and action

Though Kohlberg accepted that maturity of moral reasoning is only one factor in moral behaviour, he saw it as the single most influential factor – and the only moral factor. Even when we have reasoned ethically and know what we should do, we don’t always do it. Other factors like situations, pressures, motives, emotions and strength of will all play a part in how we decide to act.¹⁸ These will be discussed later, under the heading of “temptation.”

¹⁸ Kohlberg, L., (1976) The cognitive-developmental approach to moral education. Ch 12 in Purpel and Ryan, *Moral education, it comes with the territory*. Pp 176-195. (p181)

3 THE MISUSE OF POWER

Why do Justice systems do not always arrive at what the ordinary person would see as a just result? In his book, "Making social science matter"¹⁹ Bent Flyvbjerg, Professor of planning at Aalborg University, Denmark, quotes Michel Foucault and Jurgen Habermas as philosophers with opposing solutions, but agreeing that rationalization and the misuse of power are among the most important problems of our time. Reason alone without the addition of ethical principles can result in individualism, selfishness and self-interest. The only thing seen to be important is oneself.

Self-interest and the use of power in different situations could be dealt with by applying the principles of wisdom, justice, truth and love in the usual way, but since the misuse of power is usually covered up and not obvious on the surface, it needs to be given special recognition on its own. In schools however, this would not be until senior years when students would be able to reason well and would be familiar with the backgrounds of political action and economics, in which fields the ethical reasoning of some intelligent adults is still at stage 1 "What's in it for me or my group?" - and where self-interest and misuse of power often occur. As Kohlberg discovered, and many investors have learned to their cost over recent years, a high I.Q. and good education does not necessarily result in a high level of ethical reasoning.

The question of power is often relevant and should be added to the usual questions that come under the headings of truth and justice. Democracy does not always produce democratic decisions. The justice system does not always produce a just result because one party or another may have had more power to influence what was seen as the truth, or to influence how people voted.

Theoretically, power is in the hands of those who make the rules and enforce them, but behind the scenes, power can be exercised by pressure groups whose effect on the democratic process makes the process less than democratic. To counteract this power, we need an informed public who are not apathetic, but who are contributing to the process of democracy themselves, and who are also aware of what may be happening behind the scenes to prevent the process from working.

Where discussion is related to what is actually happening at the moment, or has happened in the past, the questions, "Who gains and who loses? By what process do they gain and lose?"²⁰ will add important information to the social inquiry process. Where future decisions need to be made, then the questions "Who will gain and who will lose if we go down that path?" "How will they be able to exercise power?" "What can the ordinary individual do to see that a fair and honest result is arrived at?" can be added to the questions surrounding truth and justice, and to the decision-making process.

When Flyvbjerg himself discovered that the result of his research was being negated by the power of a pressure group he decided that the decisive aspect of decision-making was not whether one interpretation of the research or another was more correct, but which party could put the greatest power behind their interpretation. (p152) Over the years interpretation can be followed by a "better" interpretation, then a "better" interpretation, and the group that can place most power behind their argument will determine what interpretation will be accepted as knowledge for the general public. In his own experience the power relations were of a pre-modern kind that could

¹⁹ Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. U.K.: Cambridge University Press. P107.

²⁰ Flyvbjerg, B., (2001). *Making social science matter: Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. Cambridge University Press. P145

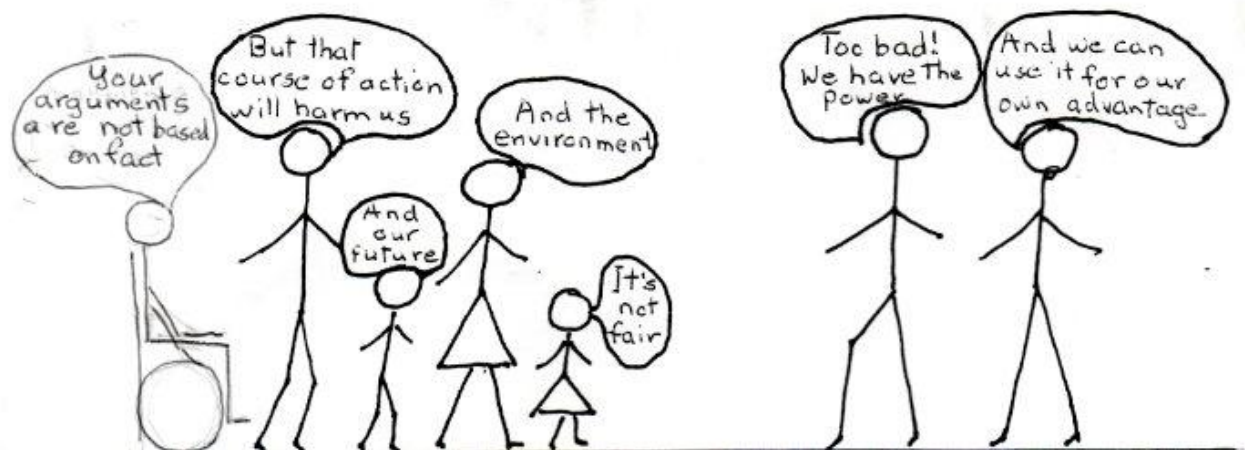
not be defended publicly by standards of modern democracy, but their participation was affecting the outcomes of representative democracy.²¹ To counteract that power he decided that if the decisions were not publicly justifiable, then he could also exercise power by bringing public attention to the results.(p156.) By doing this he -

1. Brought other groups into the dialogue.
2. Ensured that the information reached the relevant target groups.
3. Overcame apathy and drew attention, even if some was for and some against.
4. Had to be very sure that his own reasoning was correct, because it would also be under scrutiny of the public. (p158)

In countries that are now multi-cultural it is not always comfortable to ask questions such as, “Which group used power at certain times in the past ? What kind of power and for what purpose?”

“Is any group using power today? What kind of power and for what purpose?” But if the questioners are genuinely looking for the truth, the answers to such questions can be very revealing and helpful in finding just answers.

Though the system of principles and guidelines for ethical reasoning offered here is more concerned about reasoning for the future, than criticizing people of the past, it is necessary to understand what has happened in the past in order to do better in the future. The need for ethical principles in the use of power is particularly important for senior students who will be going on to enter professions where they will be in a position to either use power for the public good or to abuse it for individual benefit.



²¹ Flyvbjerg, B, (2001). *Making Social Science Matter: why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*. U.K.: Cambridge University Press. P 148.

4 THE PRINCIPLE OF WISDOM

The principle of wisdom is based on the human ability to reason, but it goes much further than reason. Reason alone can promote self-interest. Much of our present moral relativism is based on self-interest of some kind. Reason alone can be cold and unfeeling.

Wisdom involves human psychology, knowledge of how people react in certain circumstances, how people can be motivated to act and what consequences are likely to result. Wisdom has been respected throughout the ages in all religions and philosophies. The shamans and elders of primitive tribes understood human psychology. Wisdom includes knowledge of human weaknesses and people's likely response to temptation.

Wisdom involves experience as much as academic learning. There is much knowledge that cannot be learned out of books. It is possible to have wisdom - Aristotle's "phronesis" – prudence or practical common sense - without having a university degree. It is possible to have a university degree without having wisdom.

Many young adults of the 1970s judged their parents' values and found them wanting. They wanted freedom and the right to make their own choices. Now the results of their own values are under scrutiny, and another generation must use their reason to make further choices. They need to understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom in order to choose well. The advent of so much technology has not necessarily meant an increase in wisdom. Sitting for hours in front of a computer screen does not result in an increase in the skills of getting along with other people face to face.. Long- term consequences need to be considered as well as short term satisfaction. Logical reasoning and common sense are necessary for mature ethical judgement.

As an example, one of the contemporary era's most potent political forces is said to be the revival of tribalism in thinking and politics. At first sight that seems reasonable, and yet, this demand by ethnic groups to have sole governance over their affairs is possibly the biggest single cause of bloodshed in the world today. "It has produced the charnel-house politics of Northern Ireland, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, Central Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans."²² Theories based on cultural relativism are of no help in deciding issues that arise between people of different cultures who live in the same country. As Windschuttle says, "All the relativist can do is take sides based on ethnic preference, or assert that each side has its own legitimate point of view," (ibid p 309) neither of which positions helps to provide answers to problems that need to be solved if we are to live peacefully together in a multi-cultural society. Wisdom is one of the ethical principles needed as more of these situations arise.

In earlier times the elders of tribes were respected for their experience and the understanding of human nature that they had acquired in their lifetimes. They made the rules to suit the conditions in which they lived, but tradition often set the rules in stone and often it is the older people who are reluctant to accept change. "We have always done things that way." "We must always do things that way or we will offend the gods or the ancestors." Over the last fifty years, there has been a rapid advance in technology. It is understandable that the young who are brought up in an age of technology feel that their elders are inadequate because they are not so proficient in those fields. Science has given us the ability to do many things that would never have been imagined fifty years ago, and who knows what it will be able to do in the future? In today's world however, it is not enough to ask, "Can we do this?" The question the young will need to be able to answer is "Is it wise to do this?"

They need to be given the tools they will require to find the answers.

²² windschuttle, K. (1996) *The killing of history: How literary critics and social theorists are murdering our past.* Australia:Macleay Press. P 308.

5 THE PRINCIPLE OF JUSTICE

“It’s not fair,” is one of the most common cries of childhood.

This common complaint does not change in the adult world.

The concept of justice used here is that we should not favour one person over another and that we should not treat anyone worse than anyone else. If there is any justifiable reason why any person or group should receive special treatment, the principles of truth and love will add balance, but the principle of truth may also show the real cause of their problems. They may not want to accept it though.

“Justice” does not mean that the outcomes of actions must be equal. Outcomes of actions often depend as much on the recipient as the perpetrator.

If we give each child in a group, a slice of chocolate cake, but one throws his slice on the floor because he does not like chocolate cake, justice will have been done. The outcome will not be equal but it is not the giver’s fault if one child goes without cake. It would not be fair to others to provide one child with something different without justified reason e.g. an allergy to chocolate. Perhaps others would rather have had something different, but had not behaved so badly. In that case the giver would have rewarded bad behaviour.

On the other hand, if the cake had been accidentally knocked out of a child’s hand, the principle of love would have to be added to the equation and another piece of cake found for him.

If outcomes are not equal, “truth” has to be added to the equation as we discover the reason for the boy’s having no cake.

Philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80) would say that people are responsible for what they make of themselves, no matter what the circumstances. Wisdom and common sense tell us that people have different capacities for reasoning. People have different levels of abilities in different fields, and young people need to learn that though they may not all have great academic ability, the world needs people who can do other things as well. We make the most of the talents we have. People have different levels of self-confidence. People have different backgrounds that may or may not have inspired children to reason clearly. Children may have been taught that it is always someone else’s fault if they do not get what they want. If equal treatment of unequal people is not seen to be just, then we need to look at the reasons why people are unequal.

Sometimes people are unequal because of the choices they have made. If one group is less well off than another, or has more prison inmates than others, it is not necessarily because of unequal treatment. They may have had equal opportunities, but if the leaders of a group have taught their followers that it is always someone else’s fault they are in that position, they will not make any effort to change.

Ethical reasoning aims to teach students that they are responsible for their own lives, no matter what their background. We cannot change our past but we can influence our future. Students need to be inspired to aim for realistic goals, and then encouraged to aim higher.

Modern Philosophers.

The philosopher John Rawls states that any moral principle,

1. Must apply to all persons.
2. Must ensure equal opportunities.
3. Must maximise liberty of all persons,
4. Must seek justice for all persons.

If we are offered equal opportunities, then it is up to us what we do with them, but some people may be better equipped to take advantage of them or have more courage to try. Physical disabilities can sometimes be a handicap in the race and so in that case, the principle of love

needs to be added to the equation to help overcome the handicap in some way. On the other hand some people with physical disabilities do not want any allowances to be made for them and that is their choice.

Carol Gilligan, a modern ethicist, sees a separate feminist ethic of care, and that women have a different moral voice from men. I see no difference in the moral principles required from men and women. Many men can be just as caring as women, and women can be just as ruthless in business situations today as men.

In the case of women working in fields that have traditionally been men's, often the reason for the tradition is that women are not physically as strong as men - and women have babies. The question would be, "Are they equally able to do the particular job or do special allowances have to be made for them because of their sex?" _ Women on active service in wartime have proved their worth, but if a woman is not as physically able then it would be unfair if they added to the burden of the men with whom they were working. Other skills used in a different way could balance the equation. Maybe one of the reasons there are not so many women in directorships of big companies as men is that only a proportion of women choose to make a career the priority in their lives. Nothing can alter the fact that it is women who bear children and often career women decide later in their careers that they do want to have children as well. In trying to equalise things for these women by giving them paid maternity leave or special conditions, there is a possibility of being unfair to others who have to pick up the load. Today, with the knowledge that it is more difficult for older women to conceive, it could be unjust for those who have given up careers and large salaries at a younger age, to be taxed to pay for in-vitro fertilization for women who have chosen a different path.

If we are to treat people fairly, common sense is required.. Impartiality is required, but there is a time and a place for everything. I would not give my neighbour's child as expensive a Christmas present as I would give my own grandchild, but if they were playing together in my garden, I would give them an equal number of sweets.

Social Justice

It has been argued that social justice should be at the heart of a "values" programme for schools, so what exactly *is* "social justice?" It can be claimed that teaching children to share is social justice. That is hardly controversial, unless one child has worked hard for some reward and is expected to share equally with another who has merely sat around watching.

The principle of Love would require that we would not allow another to suffer unduly, but there have to be consequences that actually hurt, or those reasoning at a low ethical level will never learn to do their share also. One person's view of social justice may not be the same as another person's view. Is social justice the Robin Hood version of "robbing the rich to give to the poor," or is it that within society all people should be treated equally and have equal opportunities in life?

Social justice to me does not include equality of outcome for reasons that have already been shown. All society can be expected to do is to treat people fairly, help those who really need help, and respect the right of individuals to make their own choices – even if they seem to be foolish ones. If we cannot persuade them to consider consequences, they may have to learn the painful way by experiencing consequences. If we educate young people in the skill of ethical reasoning, hopefully they will consider the long-term consequences of their actions and acquire the self-discipline required to make reasoned choices.

Controversial issues

An issue is controversial when there are at least two opposing points of view, each with valid arguments to support them.

In the colonial society of my country there was an unwritten law that politics and religion were not subjects to be discussed in the groups and clubs that had been formed. Common sense ordained that groups organized to bring a diverse mix of people together to promote a spirit of community were not the place for controversial argument, and so it is with the subject of social justice in schools. Controversial subjects are not suitable for discussion in junior years. Unless it is desired to indoctrinate children with one particular point of view or ideology, the harm that could be done to relationships within the classroom, and the community, could outweigh any good that might result.

If we can raise young peoples' level of reasoning through their years in school, with concepts widening as they become more experienced in ethical reasoning and are able to access more information, it is reasonable to expect that by the time they reach the age where they are facing the responsibility of casting their first vote, that they should be able to discuss controversial social and political matters in a reasoned manner. By then they should be able to investigate government policies and varying ideologies, and measure them by ethical principles. They should also be able to see whether their teachers are doing the same, or whether they are promoting ideologies of their own. As Kohlberg claimed, if people reason at a higher level, social justice should be the result anyway.

Education should aim to produce people who can go out into society, taking with them the ability to reason well, and to put ethical principles into action in every part of their lives. They should be allowed the autonomy of thinking for themselves on specific matters of social justice.

Hidden curriculum

Those of us who are teachers need to watch ourselves carefully. In our efforts to promote social justice in general, and self-esteem in the individual, we should not overlook the way in which the things we do, or the things we do not do, can teach more than was intended. Suppose that in a group activity such as a team project, a few students do most of the work, while others, though they have had equal opportunity and have equal ability, choose to do very little. Is it fairness and social justice that everyone in the group should receive an equal reward? Even though it was not the intent of the exercise, what would the students have actually learned from this? Social justice should not mean equal rewards for unequal work - provided there had been equal opportunity to work.

6 FREEDOM

Two of the fastest growing ethical concepts over the last fifty years have been “freedom” and “rights.” These also come under the principle of “Justice,” so a short reference to each is required here.

Freedom has been deliberately *not* included as an ethical principle. Younger children interpret “freedom” as the ability to do as they choose. Immigrants, for whom English is a second language may also get the same impression, but unless we live on our own, and not in a community of some kind, we cannot have freedom to do exactly as we choose – unless of course we choose to obey the rules of the community. At higher levels the concept of “autonomy” can be brought into discussions, but not until students can appreciate the difference between “freedom” and “autonomy.” At every level however, one person’s freedom could interfere with another person’s freedom. One person’s rights could interfere with another person’s rights. Along with freedom and rights there always has to be justice and respect for others. Claims to freedom and rights should be examined to see whether they conform to the principles of wisdom, justice, truth and love.

Are they sensible? Are they fair? Are they based on the truth? What is the motive of the claimant? Is anyone going to be harmed by what is claimed?

John Stuart Mill (1806 – 73) is often quoted and used as an authority on freedom, but he is often quoted selectively, and his words need to be viewed against the background of his own times. Mill believed that the individual should make his own decisions, and not be “unduly submissive to control by social customs,” but he went on to say that the individual should use reason in making decisions, and “place his desires and impulses under the government of a strong will.”²³ Just because we want to do something and have the ability to do it, it does not necessarily follow that we should allow ourselves to do it. Though Mill believed that people should not be bound by custom, he did not reject custom altogether. He believed people could choose to follow social customs that they saw as beneficial. Some customs have evolved for a reason and are worth holding on to.

Mill put limits on freedom, and added this comment to his remarks on autonomy, “This doctrine applies to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. It does not apply to children or young people below what the law may fix as manhood or womanhood – they must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury.”²⁴

Mill saw self-control as a vital addition to freedom, and self-control needs to be learned as well as self-esteem

Many experienced educationists believe that children should not have complete freedom where their own education is concerned. Like Mill they believe that children should be protected from themselves. We cannot expect to have old heads on young shoulders. Cleife in *Philosophy and the teacher* (1990)²⁵ stated “It is impossible for them to discover for themselves all they need to know to become mature and rational human beings.” (p.135). In the same book, Berenson issued a warning about democracy in the classroom. “Democratic decisions can to a significant degree, be taken by the children themselves --- but what must be remembered is that the range of alternatives will be restricted, because children will be ignorant of their full range, or will not be able to see the value of certain activities and will not choose them for themselves.” (p123) “A child does not have the breadth of knowledge which allows his choices to be informed, and thus we have no right to impose the enormous responsibility of choosing his education, his way of

²³ Beauchamp, *Philosophical ethics*. p390

²⁴ Mill, J. in Beauchamp, T. (1991) *Philosophical ethic: An introduction to moral philosophy*. (2nd ed) U.S.A.: McGraw Hill. p 394.

²⁵ Cleife in Lloyd, D., (ed). (1976, reprinted 1990). *Philosophy and the teacher*.

being educated, on the child. This would in fact be a gross interference with his freedom.”
(p122).

For teachers, or anyone else involved with the young, this means that children should not be required to make judgements that are beyond their range of knowledge or their reasoning abilities. The choices that are to be made should be choices that they are qualified to make at each level, and can broaden as their knowledge and ability to reason increase.

7 RIGHTS –

John Locke's work on human rights influenced the American Declaration of Independence. At the same time (1789), the French Declaration of the Rights of Man was produced.

Rights have no basis in antiquity. There was no word for rights in any European language before the 14th century.²⁶ A civilized society can choose to establish legal rights for its citizens, and those rights are seen to be a contract freely and rationally entered into by the members of the society. These are social contract rights, and in a democracy, should have been passed by majority decision. For thousands of years democracy has been based on majority decisions. Today it has become a fashion for those in a minority to claim their own rights and talk about "the tyranny of the majority." This can lead in turn to a "tyranny of the minority."

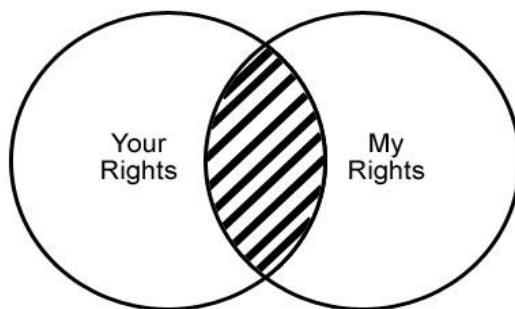
In an ethical society there would be no tyranny of any kind, but an educated and ethical majority would treat the minority view with respect and justice. A minority should have the opportunity to try to change the views of the majority but not to impose its view on them. Unlimited time is rarely available, decisions have to be made and democracy has so far been accepted as the fairest way to do this.

Rights can be seen as a minimum standard below which a fair and caring society should not go in its treatment of any individual, but *rights are not an ethical principle*. Some ethicists claim that "rights" are confrontational – that they stress individualism at the expense of community and that a focus on rights is out of place in caring relationships.

Where rights are accepted by the majority as a contract however, they should not be separated from responsibilities, because where there is a right taker there has to be a right giver who also has rights. Philosophers and educators have argued that "rights without obligations make for irresponsibility, just as obligations without rights make for servility." Edmund Burke claimed that an absence of obligation means a diminution of humanity, because it signifies a condition of permanent immaturity.²⁷ We are not helping people to "grow up" if we do not expect responsibility in return for rights.

Some modern ethicists (e.g. Dworkin) claim that "rights" trump any other argument, and they are often being used in this way in many controversial issues today. The claim that "rights are trumps" is only a claim, and one that in itself should have to be justified. Arguments cannot be based merely on claims to rights unless those rights have been passed into law. In social inquiry, claims to rights should be measured by ethical principles and reasoned argument. The rights of one person or group should always be considered in relation to the rights of any others who are affected. Justice for one should not result in injustice to others.

- **In the area where claims to rights overlap, ethical principles can be used to negotiate, reconcile, and work for justice and the common good.**



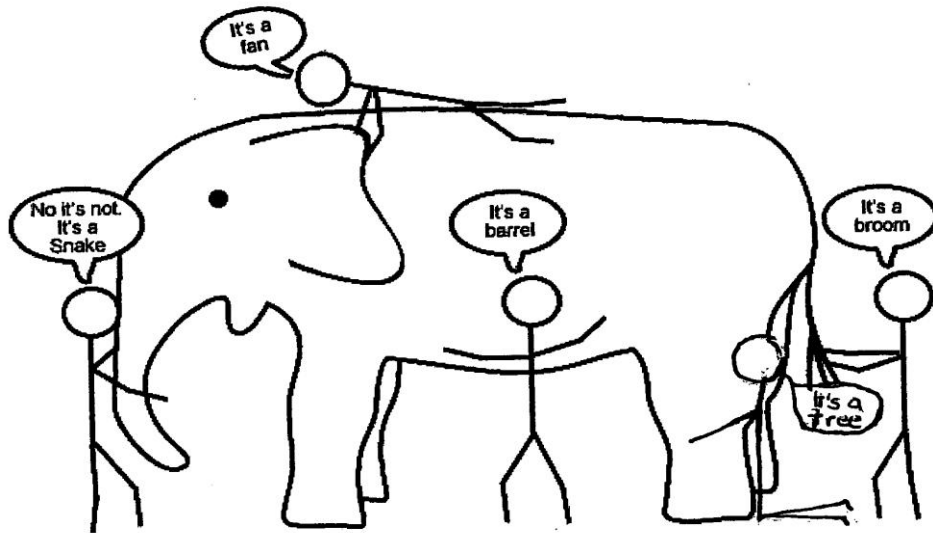
²⁶ Hinman.L., p279.

²⁷ Kristol.I. Moral and ethical development in a democratic society. Ch 23 in D.Purpel and K.Ryan, (eds) *Moral education :It comes with the territory.* p378

8 THE PRINCIPLE OF TRUTH

If it were possible to choose between the four principles and say one was more important than the others, that one would have to be “truth.” All reasoning depends on having its foundations on truth. Truth is emphasized by all ancient religions and philosophies. Plato stressed the difference between opinion and truth.

Opinion is what we believe to be true based on our own experience, but **truth** is based on wider experience and proven fact. Buddha’s story of the blind men examining an elephant is relevant here. Each was quite certain he was right because he had hold of only part of the truth.



Until recently ethical argument has been based around the concept of “Demolish the other person’s argument,” rather than being a shared search for truth. Now a different approach to ethical argument is emerging²⁸ but it takes a long time for new convictions to make an impression on old ideologies.

What is truth?

Just because there can be argument over ultimate truth, there is no justification in ordinary life for saying there is no truth. The fashion over recent years to claim that there is no truth can be confusing to young people, so the definition of truth used here will be based on the theory offered by David Hume (1711-76) in relation to the word “good.”

“Good is roughly what every informed and impartial spectator would approve of --- when we rid ourselves of partiality and try to work out what is right.”

Truth for our purposes will be what any reasonable person who had no particular position to guard would consider to be the truth. He/she would have reached that decision after considering all the available evidence, its sources and the motives of those producing the evidence. Truth is like a photograph of a certain event at a certain moment in time. The event can be seen from different angles and different points of view, but a photo of a person standing beside a chair cannot truthfully be shown as a person sitting in a chair. A mistake has been made, either unintentionally or deliberately. If deliberately, then there has been an attempt to deceive, and an examination of the motives of the person claiming the photo to be the truth may expose the reason. In basic ethical reasoning we can accept truth for what it is to most people. It is the absence of deception, and it is based on factual evidence.

²⁸ Hinman, (1998). *Ethics : A pluralistic approach to moral theory*.p311

Deception –

People can deceive without telling lies.
They can deceive by not telling the whole truth.
They can deceive by bodily or facial expression.
They can deceive by emphasising one point of view and glossing over another.

Any coach knows that you don't begin teaching a sport by demonstrating difficult shots. You begin with simple skills and when these are mastered you can move on to the more scientific aspects of the game. It is the same with ethical skills. Intricate or ambiguous situations should not be used with students at lower levels. Most young people are not able to reason well in the abstract until around puberty. New immigrants may not understand the subtleties of the English language. We need to start with basic principles, not Einstein's theories. Even Einstein had to start somewhere. Young people need practice in simple ethical reasoning before they move on to controversial issues. They need to learn to walk before they face the hurdle race of real life. Practice in simple ethical reasoning will equip them to make ethical decisions automatically later in life by using the same principles. It is the same for people to whom English is a second language. There is no room for subtleties. The reasoning needs to be clear and simple. Reasoning can be as logical as mathematics, even if it is not quite so precise. Experience shows us that if we do (a) and then (b,) there is a very strong likelihood that the effect will be (c.) The maxim "As you sow, so shall you reap," appears in most philosophies and religions simply because it is usually true. There is a possibility that other unknown circumstances may alter the results at times, but truth is vital. Truth is vital to every ethical decision. Scientific laws work in the same way, but a mathematical calculation based on an incorrect measurement cannot give a correct answer. It is the same in ethical reasoning or examining and analysing values or perspectives. Reasoning must be based on fact or there will not be a valid answer.

Dishonesty –

We are trying to help students "see" why they should be honest. Telling lies and breaking promises are wrong because of their effects on other people. Stealing is wrong for the same reason and there are many forms of stealing in everyday life. "Perks" at work can be stealing if they are taken without permission. Borrowing a book and not returning it is stealing. Cheating in exams or at sport is stealing because in all these cases we are taking something that belongs to some-one else, without their permission. In recent years, people who have lost their life-savings have become very conscious of the ways in which directors of large organisation have been able to steal from them.

It is fairly safe to assume that a good proportion of adults in society would accept truth and honesty as a vital principle in a moral code, and would believe that most others felt the same way. We think that we are being honest but sometimes we are looking at events from a narrow point of view. When we look from different angles we may see a picture more clearly.

Sometimes today, we see an attitude creeping in that "Anything is O.K. as long as we can get away with it," and yet when people are caught out and don't "get away with it" there is loud condemnation. Some of the actions that we do without really thinking may be seen to be less ethical than we realised if they are examined by ethical principles.

The first issue we have to face is "How willing are we to accept the truth about ourselves and our own motives?" Motives can have a considerable influence on whether an action is ethical or not. There is a difference between a genuine mistake and a deliberate lie with the intention to deceive and to profit from the deception in some way.

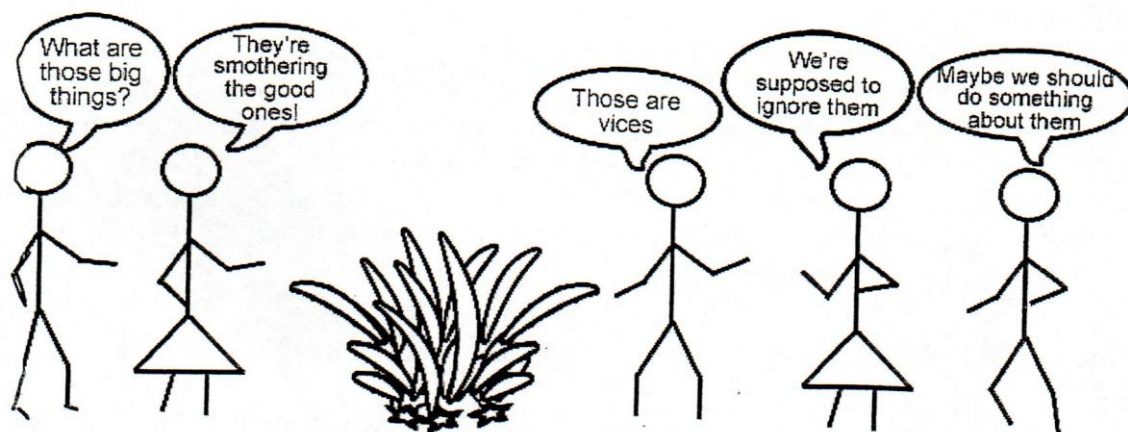
Vices and virtues

The first step towards ethical action is in accepting the truth about ourselves and it is also necessary to learn about vices – call them by whatever name is acceptable – even "human

weaknesses.” These are also facts of life, and to ignore them allows them to grow without check. Envy and greed are behind a great deal of crime –especially white-collar crime. Selfishness, laziness, cruelty, and drunkenness are behind a great deal of domestic violence. Vices are important because of their effects on other people, and finally in the longer term upon ourselves. To young children vices and virtues can be taught as good fruit and spoilt fruit, showing that what could have been beautiful fruit, have been spoilt by the ugly caterpillars of the vices. Examples can be given of situations relative to the age group, and showing the consequences at home and at school.

From the middle years of school and upwards the same vices can be related to relevant situations, and laziness includes apathy. To physical laziness is added mental laziness. What are the long-term consequences of mental laziness? On ourselves? On others? What are the long term consequences of greed – in our personal lives – in the environment? What can be the consequences of envy?

For adults, apathy also involves lack of interest in the democratic process which relies on an educated and interested public. We need principled people in government. Selfishness is also related to sexuality and a sustainable economic system, while envy of others plays a part in waste and misuse of resources in the environment. There is a price to pay for keeping up with the Jones Unless the truth about human weaknesses and their consequences are included along with virtues, pupils are receiving only part of the truth.



9 THE PRINCIPLE OF LOVE

Love as caring and respect means goodwill towards and concern for other individuals. It is shown in a slightly different way by the philosopher Emmanuel Kant in his maxim that people should be respected for their rationality and autonomy. People should be seen as important in themselves and not as a means to an end. In other words, we should not “use” people for our own ends. We may not like people because of the way they act, but we should be concerned for them and help them if they are in need. We should not use them in the pursuit of our own ends, or take advantage of those who are not as able as ourselves. We should respect them, be concerned about the effect of our actions on them, and treat them honestly and fairly.

The concept of “loving your neighbour” is a counsel of perfection.

Few of us ordinary mortals can love a neighbour if that neighbour is a constant aggravation to us. What the principle of love means is that, in spite of his/her faults, we should not turn our backs on him if he is in need. To turn our backs on a fellow human being who needs our help makes us less than human ourselves. We should care about him as one day we could hope that others would care about us if we were in need.

- **There can be a difference between caring love and sexual desire that is called “love.”**
- **Saying, “I love you” is easy, but caring love is the proof.**

One of the most familiar descriptions of caring love is the one given in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, by the apostle Paul in his first letter to the people of the church at Corinth, and which is often read at weddings.²⁹ It can just as easily be applied to our relationships with other human beings in friendships, sport, and working lives. His description covers the realities of life, the day to day living that decides whether relationships survive the ups and downs that no lives seem to escape.

“Love is kind,” he said. “It does not envy others. It is not full of pride, is not violent, and is not selfish. It is good-tempered, does not easily take offence or bear grudges. It is not dishonest but rejoices in the truth. It is not complaining, it is loyal; it thinks the best of people and is always optimistic. There is no limit to its endurance. True love never fails.”

A few verses later he makes another statement that helps to explain the whole passage, “When I was a child I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.”

Young people need to understand that “growing up” means putting away childish things and facing responsibilities.

“Love” means facing responsibilities, respecting the fact that other people also have rights and responsibilities, and that we should not add to other people’s burdens by using them to lessen our own.

There will always be temptations, but “growing up” means being responsible for our own actions, and not grabbing childishly for dangerous toys. Teenage years are for gathering knowledge of people, their actions and reactions towards each other, and for gaining an understanding of the likely consequences of those actions. If we look closely at the stress that is becoming such a part of our lives today, we will see that most of it is caused by the actions of other people. Selfishness, laziness, carelessness, dishonesty or lack of consideration – all these things add stress to the lives of other people. If we care about other people and treat them with respect, and they do the same for us all our lives will be happier.

²⁹ Corinthians 1. Ch 13. From the New Testament of the Christian Bible.

10 LOVE AND MARRIAGE

As I watched a wedding taking place in a public area recently, I was reminded how customs had changed, but principles had not.

The couple had been living together for several years. They had children who were involved in a ceremony that had been planned to be a spectacular event. The weddings of sixty years ago as I remembered my own and those of our contemporaries, also involved a great deal of planning, but the main point of the day to us was that we made promises and signed documents that allowed us to live together officially and openly as man and wife.

The purpose of marriage

Most major religions have their own traditional forms of marriage, and most have the same intent. A civil ceremony or official documents are also required by the laws of most countries.

The words of the Christian marriage service spell out the traditional purposes of marriage, though few people today use it in its old form,

Firstly, it was ordained for the procreation and nurture of children.

Secondly, it was ordained so that people would have a legitimate means of sexual satisfaction.

Thirdly, it was ordained for the mutual company, help and comfort that each should have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity throughout their lives.

The couple then promised faithfulness and support for each other, to love, comfort, honour and keep each other – for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health - as long as they both should live.

The majority of the early colonial couples who went to a new country to settle, would have made these vows or similar ones.

For better or for worse they went together into the unknown.

The vows that were made were meant to be permanent and most of them were. Divorce was possible, but was frowned upon socially and by the Christian church. From the middle of the twentieth century however contraception became generally available and ideas changed. The fact that some marriages previously had not been happy - even though the couples stayed together, was used as an argument against the necessity for legalising cohabitation. Splitting up was justified on the grounds that it is better for a child to grow up in a home with one parent than with two who are continually arguing.

Describing the wedding ceremony to a grand-daughter a few weeks later, we discussed whether making promises in front of a crowd of people, made it any more likely that a couple would keep those promises. The argument about unhappy marriages was brought up, and of course it is true, but it is not the whole truth. It is better still for parents to stop arguing, sort out their differences and make a happy home for their children as many couples in the past managed to do.

Society today, has got used to “relationships” in place of “marriage” and “partners” instead of “husbands” and “wives,” but the purpose of marriage and the principles in any form of union where children are involved do not change. Couples who split up rarely remain on their own. More harm is done to children by successive partners than by their own parents..

Couples often split up because there is no caring love, or one or the other is “having an affair.” Before we get used to seeing “having an affair” as a normal part of modern life, it is interesting to examine the effects of “having an affair” by ethical principles.

Wisdom – what are the long- term consequences likely to be?

Justice – Is anyone being unfair to another person?

Truth – Is anyone deliberately deceiving anyone else?

Love – Is anyone hurting anyone else or using them for their own ends?

And the Golden Rule – How would I like it if someone did that to me?

11 RESPECT

In the course of a conversation with the principal of a junior school recently, I heard the story of the difficulty in explaining to a six year old why, when he punched another child on the nose and made his nose bleed, he was not respecting his victim. Perhaps others also have difficulty with the concept of “respect” which is being used a great deal today, in and out of schools – often by children who seem to be struggling a little with its meaning. It could be simpler for children and speakers of English as a second language, if we use the words “Treat people with respect, and treat the environment with respect.” Differences in the interpretation of the meanings of words can have unforeseen effects further down the track.

Subtle differences in meaning resulting from the way in which the same word is used, may not always be obvious to those to whom English is a second language, or to the young whose vocabulary is limited.

The six year old, in one sense of the word “respect” was actually respecting the other child’s ability and determination. In answer to the question, “Why did you hit him?” his reply was, “He was going to hit me, so I hit him first.” It is easy to visualise a grand-father’s advice to his grandson with regards to known bullies, “They are actually cowards, so if you stand up to them, they will respect you and leave you alone.” But in grand-father’s days there were also the unwritten laws, “Two onto one is not fair, and “Never hit a chap when he is down or not looking.” Laws of chivalry are not universal laws today.

Continuing the theme of respect, the next question from the principal was, “In what way were you not respecting him when you hit him?” This was obviously foreign territory for a six year old, though he had heard plenty about respecting other people, so the bar was lowered and plainer language used. “Why do you think it was a bad thing to hit him?” The concept that it might be a bad thing because he had hurt the other boy, also seemed to be something that had not occurred to him. Self-preservation had been the basis of his ethical reasoning and it is unlikely that any abstract reasoning would have changed his mind. The worst of our young criminals today however, are those who have no feeling for their victims, and recent research has shown – not that common sense had not already shown us – that children decide in their early primary years, if not earlier, whether they will be rule-keepers or rule-breakers - and that it is harder to change their attitude as they get older.³⁰

In one way of looking at the word “respect,” the six year old **was** respecting his opponent. In another way he was not.

It is claimed that young people are usually not able to reason in the abstract until around their early teens, and that their developing brains do not consider consequences until much later. This does not mean however, that they are unable to consider consequences before then. It just means that we have to make things simpler for them, and to relate abstract concepts like “respect” to real actions with which they are familiar. We also need to raise their level of ethical reasoning from, “How does this affect me?” to “How are my actions going to affect other people?”

“Treating with respect” involves action.

- **Even young children can understand, “treat with respect” if it is related to actions with which they are familiar.**

“The relevant general meaning of the word ‘respect’ is ‘esteeming, valuing or prizing so as to treat with consideration, deference or non-interference, - however morality does not require us to respect actions that are opposed to morality.’”³¹ This would mean that we would need to “treat

³⁰ Adolescent Reputation and Risk, by J.Hattie and others. *N.Z.Herald*

³¹ Beauchamp,T.,(1991). *Philosophical ethics: An introduction to moral philosophy*. P 197.

with respect” another’s person, dignity and property, (and our own) but not necessarily “respect” that person’s actions or beliefs if they were not ethical, or if they harmed other people. People who are respected in their communities would normally be people whose actions have helped not harmed the community, and not people who instil fear or harm others. In the past people had standing because they had earned the respect of their communities through admirable deeds or qualities.

- **It is important for children to learn that true respect is earned and given for virtuous actions, not for harmful ones.**

However, though we might not respect people because of the way they choose to act, we should still treat them with respect by being concerned for them and helping them if they are in need. We should be concerned about the effect of our actions on other people, and treat them honestly, fairly and kindly. We can treat with respect in this way, the individual who is “staunch,” but we do not respect staunchness that involves dishonesty, injustice or cruelty. As well as respecting others, the school curriculum in this country states that students will be encouraged to respect themselves.

If we substitute the words “treat with respect” here also, it can be easily understood that we are not treating our bodies and minds with respect if we abuse them by the use of alcohol or drugs, or if we do not make the best of our talents.

As for self-respect, this comes from knowing we have done our best, mentally, physically and ethically. No-one else may know whether we have done this, but we will know. Nor should we deceive ourselves about this. When we have messed up in some way, the natural reaction is to say, “It wasn’t my fault!” and we come up with excuses as to why it was not our fault. We can always blame someone else or “pass the buck.” In any ethical reasoning, using the principle of truth, it is always beneficial to ask, “How much of this was my own fault?”



Hopefully the six-year old will now accept that it is not treating another person with respect to punch him on the nose - because he will hurt him. A principal would probably know by the past histories of the perpetrator and the victim whether the victim was really a bully in search of a prey, and would make his decisions accordingly.

It takes the wisdom of Solomon to be a principal of a school in to-days multi-cultural society, especially with all the forces outside the school-grounds influencing the decision-making of those who will grow up to be leaders for good or harm in the communities of tomorrow. We need to teach students at a young age to respect what is good and helpful - to respect people who make the world around them a better place and not a worse one, and to treat all people and their environment with respect.

12 THE GOLDEN RULE

Though the “Golden Rule” comes directly from the teaching of Jesus Christ, most humanists also consider it an acceptable standard in ethical reasoning.

“Treat other people the way you would like them to treat you” is not just a Christian teaching. This precept is also found in the teachings of most religions and philosophies, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam and the teachings of Confucius and Socrates.

Western ethicists who wished to offer the same concept as the Golden Rule, but without religious connotations, explained it in different ways.

Immanuel Kant offered his “Categorical Imperative” of “What is fair for one is fair for all.” I.e. “An action is morally correct if it can be willed as a universal law.”³²

Since this means that anyone and everyone could be on the receiving end of such an action, one would have to decide if one would personally like to be a receiver. In ethical reasoning it helps to see more clearly if we ask, “What would happen if everyone did that?” For example, what would happen if everyone decided to lie to everyone else? What would happen if everyone decided they were not obliged to keep promises?

John Rawls, a modern ethicist puts the same concept another way. Laws should be made by people who are “behind a veil of ignorance” as to what position in society they were going to hold themselves.³³ Not knowing what their own position would be, they would have to consider the effects on every person, not just themselves in their present situation, because if a law was not fair, they might be the ones adversely affected.

Adding feeling to reason

The Golden Rule, used as a criteria to evaluate ethical positions, gives the opportunity to add feeling to reason. Reason on its own is not always enough to influence or motivate action, but asking children to imagine how they would feel if they were the ones involved, helps them to think about the feelings of other people. In a questionnaire on ethics, 97% of those questioned felt that a moral person shows genuine concern about the rights and welfare of others,³⁴ so we need to give children the opportunity and encouragement to develop such concern. Many of our young criminals have little concern for the effect of their actions on other people because they have never been taught to do so.

John Stuart Mill, back in the nineteenth century, argued that all human beings have a basic moral sensitiveness to the needs of others, and a desire for unity and harmony with their fellow human beings.³⁵ He saw that the purpose of morality was to promote those natural sympathies. By imagining ourselves in the other person’s position we are doing that. It is argued by some ethicists that on its own, the Golden Rule is relatively powerless as a means for assessing desirable or appropriate behaviour. Using a bit of Aristotle’s common sense however, most of us can recognise what is likely to harm or upset other people. There will be problems in a newly multi-cultural society unless there is education about different religious beliefs and customs, but even there, the aim will be to treat all people and their beliefs with respect. We just need to know more about what is important to other people.

Used in conjunction with the four principles, the Golden Rule is a good check as to whether our decisions and actions are ethical. It is a matter of what any reasonable person would think in the same circumstances.

³² Hinman, L. (1998) p 210.

³³ Hinman, L. p 368.

³⁴ Purpel and Ryan, (1976). *Moral education: It comes with the territory*. P 405

³⁵ Beauchamp, T., (1991) p131

13 THE GOAL FOR HUMANKIND – A BETTER WORLD

In a community where there is voluntary work to be done, we often hear the comment, “It’s the same ones who turn up every time and do all the work.” My reply to that is usually, “Yes, and without those people what sort of a place would it be?” Those people are the “salt of the earth” and their communities are always better off for their presence, but how much easier it would be if more people felt as they do.. We are told that as individuals we should have goals and work towards them. Perhaps mankind needs to have an acknowledged goal and work towards that. Whether we believe that human beings were put on this earth by a Divine creator, or whether we believe that humans evolved accidentally as the result of an original “big bang,” we can agree that as individuals we have free will and contribute to our own destinies.

In the same way, mankind as a whole also has the ability to choose a goal for itself and work towards it, but as autonomous human beings, we also need the will and ability to put our plans into action.

If the individual chooses to make the world a better place just where he/she lives, starting at home and moving out into the community, he/she has the opportunity to do it, but motivation is required. If we want a happy home we have to work at it. We see that basic moral sensitiveness to the needs of others, of which Mill wrote, in action nearly every day. When a T.V. programme shows someone in real need there is a rush of people wanting to help, but “moralistic” has become a derogatory term, and at times people seem to think they have to apologise for saying something that could be seen as “moralistic.” It has become fashionable in some quarters over recent years to scoff at stories with a message like “Pollyanna.”³⁶ Was it that she was too good to be true, or was it really that her actions stirred consciences? Pollyanna changed an elderly bed-ridden woman who was bad-tempered and miserable because she felt that she could do nothing, by showing her that she could make those around her happier just by trying to be more cheerful herself. Surely that is more praiseworthy than making other people’s lives a misery. We should not be ashamed of our better instincts. If every individual makes his/her own environment a better place, the country and then the world can become better places for the next generations. “If we are not part of the solution we are part of the problem.”

Our little bit

The philosopher Goethe, said that if every person swept in front of his own doorstep the whole world would be clean.

If teachers can encourage every pupil to act just a little bit more sensibly, a little bit more fairly, a little bit more honestly and a little bit more kindly in their everyday lives, they will be making life a great deal better for all those around them.

If every person decides to do a little bit better, their country will start to improve.

People may say, “Even if our own country improves, that will make no difference to the world,” but if many countries were to improve it would make a great difference to the world.

In the meantime, as individuals we can choose for ourselves. Nobody is perfect. Nobody *will* be perfect, but each person can make a difference. In the end it is a team game and the buck stops with each of us. The goal is a better world and as individuals we choose whether we do more good than harm in our lives – whether we make other people happier or whether we add to their burdens. We cannot just sit on the sidelines and watch. We are part of the game whether we want to accept the fact or not.

³⁶ Porter, E.H., Circa 1925, *Pollyanna*. London: George G. Harrap and Co.

14 **TEMPTATION – THE GAP BETWEEN KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION** **MAKING ETHICAL CHOICES**

Through the use of ethical principles, we can make ethical decisions, but if we have reasoned what would be the right thing to do, why do we not always do it?

The answer of course is temptation. That little voice in our heads that says, “Yes, O.K., I know I should go and get some exercise, but there’s a good programme on the box that I want to see.”

Or “Yes, I know I need to save money, but there’s a new CD I really want.”

“Yes, I really should stop and help that person, but I want to get to the football match. Someone else is sure to stop.”

- **The challenge of temptation is that it makes present rewards sound much more attractive than long-term rewards or consequences.**

Young people particularly are not inclined to consider long- term consequences when there is excitement in the present on offer. With consistent practice in ethical decision-making, consideration of consequences could become a habit.

But real life requires us to make choices. This is the next step between knowledge and action.

We consider all the consequences. We examine the situation by ethical principles. Are we being fair? Are we being honest about our motives? Is anyone going to be harmed by our choice of action? We try to make the best choice we can under the circumstances. We try to maximise the good and minimise the harm. We resist the temptation to take the easy option, and we act on our decision. We do our best as we see it at the time.

Usually there will be a good result from our choice of action, but what if, in the end, it turns out that owing to some unexpected or unforeseen circumstance, a different choice might have had better results? We should not allow ourselves to feel discouraged or guilty. If we did the best we could at the time, that is all that matters. Perhaps we have learned a bit more by experience, but we should not wallow in regrets. If we go through our lives doing the best we can, in the end we will have done more good than harm, and we will have made the world a better place for our having lived in it. We will however, if we are honest with ourselves, know if we have really done our best, or whether there was something we could have done differently.

Guilt

Did I mention the word “Guilt?” Isn’t that an unacceptable word in today’s world? Some religions went to excess in this area, but once again, Aristotle seems to have had it right - the middle way between extremes. Excess guilt is harmful, but if we never feel a little guilt about things we have done that harmed other people, either intentionally or unintentionally, or if we have turned the other way when we could have done more good, for other people or for our environment, we may never try to do better, or to put things right. Young criminals who do not feel guilt about the effect of their actions on others have little chance of changing. Feeling a little bit of guilt, though uncomfortable, is probably good for us.

15 THE “UPRIGHT” MAN AND “UPRIGHT” WOMAN

Most of the great philosophical traditions and religions have a concept of a virtuous or an “upright” man.

Two and a half thousand years B.C. the chief official of Egypt wrote instructing his son in the basic virtues required for successful human relations. Honesty and justice were recommended as the best policies, along with self-control, kindness, truthfulness, discretion, humility and generosity.

The God of the ancient prophets of the Jewish religion, and through them Christianity and Islam, required righteousness from His people.

The Heroes of the ancient sacred Indian epics were role models of virtuous behaviour with emphasis on justice and truth

The ten Precepts. of Buddhism illustrate the Middle Way between asceticism and self-indulgence.³⁷

Confucius, the great philosopher of ancient China, taught that in all things a man should be a “Chuntzu.” This word, translated into western idiom closely relates to a “gentleman,” or more closely to an “upright” man, because it did not depend on birth or wealth. A “Chuntzu” would be an honest man who always kept his promises, and was scrupulously fair and self-controlled. A “Chuntzu” would take as much trouble to find out what was right, as other men would take to find out what would pay.

Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, was primarily concerned with developing the individual character, and examining the vices and virtues that affected character. He saw the virtue in an object as that quality that enabled it to function well, for instance, the virtue in a knife is that it should be sharp.³⁸ Aristotle’s “upright” man was a man of practical wisdom who functioned with reason and ethics. The sensible man would choose the middle way between extremes. He would do what was ethically practical.

What about the “upright” woman?

The women of the past had their own place in the scheme of things. Few figured largely in history because the course of nature meant that women’s priority was usually the care of children. Though less likely to be written into history, the mothers and wives of famous men had considerable influence. An article describing an “excellent wife,” dating from between the tenth and sixth century B.C., appears in the book of Proverbs in the Bible, and shows that the capable woman of the day bought and sold land, engaged in business, ran her household efficiently and was generous to the needy. She spoke with wisdom. Her husband loved and trusted her and her children “rose up and called her blessed.” She sounds very much like the “super woman” of today.

It is said that Aristotle’s virtues were the manly virtues of his day, but though some feminist ethicists differentiate, and see a female ethic of care, there is no need for any separate ethics or virtues when using ethical principles as a basis for critical analysis. Men can be just as “caring” as women, and women can be just as hard in business today as men. People of all races care about their children and want the best for them. The principle of Love and the Golden Rule cover “caring.”

The concept of an honourable man, a straight person, a man who accepted his responsibilities and whose word was his bond, was still around last century. With consistent use of ethical principles in ethical reasoning and social decision making throughout school curricula, the aim could be to produce the “upright” men and “upright” women who will be needed to lead a country into a changing world.

³⁷ Noss, D. and Noss, J. ((1994) *A history of the world’s religions*. (9th ed. U.S.: MacMillan . p.185

³⁸ Hinman, L. (1998). *Ethics: A pluralistic approach to moral theory*. (2nd ed). P 355.

Neutrality or education?

Schools are not neutral on the subject of values. Many curricula mention abstract concepts that students are to be encouraged to value. In the New Zealand 2007 curriculum, students are encouraged to value “Excellence, inquiry and innovation, diversity, equity, community and participation, ecological sustainability and integrity which involves being honest, responsible, accountable and acting ethically.” Society outside schools however also infects children with values, and unless students learn principles with which to analyse all values, the competition is very one-sided. Critical analysis that is based on ethical principles, and discussion that leads to ethical decision-making, help counteract outside influences that may be attractive, but may have negative consequences in the long-term.

- **The role of a teacher is to help students to think clearly, analytically and critically so that they can make rational decisions for themselves.**

If after considering the probable consequences of a course of action the majority of a class decides that one particular course of action would have better results than another, and that is the course that should be followed, that is not indoctrination. That is common sense and practical wisdom. The best defence against indoctrination is to teach students to reason well.

- **There are three positions a teacher of any kind can take in discussions.**

1.- **Neutral** – This means refusing to take any stance and allowing discussion to take place freely without making any comment apart from keeping order.

If a teacher is neutral the students are left unsatisfied. Forceful speakers may have dominated. Popular students may have had their views unchallenged. Some may have said what they believed the teacher wanted to hear. The teacher may have had evidence that was not available to the students. At the very least the teacher would have had more experience of life. Worst of all, no conclusion has been reached or decision made.

It is said that often, more trouble has been caused by not making any decision than by making the wrong one. Frequently there will be no perfect answer, but as it is in real life, we have to make the best choice we can, based on the information that is available at the time, and then cope with the consequences. We do not want to spend our lives burdened with regrets. Students need to learn this before they come up against real problems in their lives. Neutrality does not provide values *education*. Education in ethical reasoning aims to teach people to add an ethical element to their reasoning, and to encourage them to act on their reasoning.

2.- **Authoritarian** – This is a form of indoctrination. What the teacher says and believes is right simply because he/she says so. Some individual teachers may be like this. Some parents or leaders may be like this. In situations associated with specific religions, cultures or philosophies, a teacher may be required by a higher authority to teach in this way, without producing evidence or allowing free discussion. That is outside the area that is being described here. In discussion, where the aim is to raise the level of ethical reasoning, a good teacher does not merely impose his/her own views on the students. A teacher should be prepared to have his/her own opinions justified by evidence and reasonable discussion.

3.- **Impartial** – The teacher is not neutral. He/she chairs the discussion but also takes a part in supervising the debate, adding questions that will ensure that consideration has been given to ethical principles, and keeping the objective in view. Flyvbjerg has set out five requirements for

ethical debate.³⁹ These rules for ethical debate are just as relevant in any community situation, and the chairperson will have the same responsibilities and the same problems with those who are not prepared to accept evidence that does not suit them.

1. No party affected by the debate should be excluded.
2. All participants should have equal opportunity to produce evidence and question the validity of claims.
3. Participants must be willing and able to see the other party's point of view.
4. Power differences between parties should be neutralized so they will not influence decisions.
5. Participants must be open about their goals and intentions.

Flyvbjerg adds an ideal of unlimited time, but this is rarely practicable in a classroom.

The requirement for the teacher in classroom discussion is to point out where argument is based on emotion rather than on reason; to insist that evidence must be factual and that reasoning must be logical: - to make sure a wide variety of views has been presented; to ask questions that will make students think deeply and feel for others. Finally - to arrive at a conclusion as to the likely consequences of various courses of actions and reach a decision or a compromise on which course would have the best results overall. "We have to do something. What should we do that will maximise the good and minimise the harm?"

The teacher should be prepared to give his/her own opinion if requested and to allow that opinion to be analysed in the same way as others. The emphasis is always on the justification of ethical argument. Being impartial is the position required for any teacher chairing discussion in critical analysis.

Teachers should not expect their own stage of reasoning to be the norm for their pupils, though by senior years many pupils may have arrived there or have even passed the teacher.

They should not require or encourage pupils to discuss personal situations in class.

They should not use methods that may embarrass pupils, or methods that require pupils for example to line up in order of preference for a particular argument. This may pressurise pupils to conceal their own opinions or to opt for the popular cause. It is a brave child, or adult even, who will stand alone, even if critical analysis may finally show that he/she had reasoned more ethically than others. Teachers with children of their own have probably already developed skills in supervising discussions in their own homes. Above all, the teacher him/herself should be seen to be reasonable, fair, honest and kind in all classroom matters.

If classes in ethical reasoning or "situation ethics" are to be held in schools, half an hour a week from social studies time would provide practice in ethical reasoning – and like in any sport, practice is essential. Situations discussed need to be relevant to the age group and the same applies to reinforcing activities. For junior classes, pictures, songs and games will repeat the principles – Games that allow children to change places can help them to feel for others. For older students, drawing cartoons to illustrate the point that has been discussed is enjoyed and helps in understanding the point made.

Older students will also benefit from the introduction of relevant quotations from well-known philosophers showing how wisdom of the past can still be applied to situations today. A good book of quotations will help here. This age group will also be interested in the experiences of well-known personalities of the sports, T.V. and musical worlds.

Senior students will be specialising in separate subjects, but history, geography and economics all provide opportunity to include ethical principles in discussion of various issues. No study of

³⁹Flyvbjerg, B. *Making social science matter*. p 91

economics is complete without the addition of an ethical dimension. As Kohlberg's research discovered, a high I.Q. does not necessarily mean a high level of ethical reasoning. White-collar crime is proof of this. Those with high I.Qs need to be motivated to use their talents for the good of society as a whole, and not just in their own interests.

Teachers of values and citizenship in a multi-cultural society, whether they are parents, school teachers, sports or group leaders of any kind, do not require advanced theoretical knowledge, but they require experience of life and broad general knowledge. They need to endeavour to remove personal bias and to encourage disinterested examination of issues. In this type of inquiry, it is possible for a teacher to influence what will be seen as knowledge, just as much by the questions that are *not* asked as by the questions that are. It is not easy, especially in community affairs, to tackle controversial issues with an open mind, knowing that as a teacher you may offend people on either side of an argument - people who will see willingness to uncover and face facts as bias towards the other side. In time however, if the majority of people accept the need for consistent ethical principles in a multi-cultural society, life could be much happier for everyone.

17 VOCABULARY

In a T.V. programme recently a counsellor was telling a woman who had a history of violence towards children, “You are a good person, but your actions are ****” . I wondered if the counsellor had told the children who had been so cruelly treated that the woman was really a good person - and if so, how confusing would that have been to them. Young children judge people by their deeds. Subtleties are lost on them.

“Without a moral vocabulary no form of moral education can even begin.”⁴⁰

If there is to be discussion on values or ethics, there has to be a common vocabulary, simple enough that all the people involved can understand exactly what is meant.

In the past, because accepted standards of conduct within a community were usually set by tradition and religion, a person who kept to the rules set by those standards was seen as being “moral” or a “good” person. A person who flouted the rules was seen as being “immoral” or a “bad” person. The words “moral” and “morals” were seen as a judgement of people’s behaviour. Of recent times it has been considered to be more correct to avoid the religious or judgemental connections of the word “moral.” We could not have moral education in state schools. It would now be “values” education. “Moralistic” has been given a negative connotation.

The meaning of the word “Ethics” is different from the words “morals” or “values.”

- **“Ethics” involves a conscious analysing of standards of behaviour with the aim of improving them in some way for the good of society.**

Writers of the 1970s, many of whom are still authorities in this area, used the words “moral education” where in this country we are now using “values education,” and therefore when those writers are quoted here, in most cases “moral education” can be equated with “values education” as it is intended today. Though the word “values” is used to describe the pattern of basic rules or standards accepted by a society, there is still a connotation of “good” with the word “values,” even though there is not a stated aim of improving them for the good of society.

Right and wrong – There can also be controversy over the use of the word, “truth.” The post-modernist theory that truth is a matter of opinion is a waning force in intellectual life overseas⁴¹ and that theory is now claimed to be an entirely inappropriate teaching tool in an era of information excess. “We should not confuse a justifiable desire to avoid imposing one point of view on others, with a rejection of the idea of truth,” says Slattery. He argues that Post-modern theory is a tool that should be handled only by those already steeped in the intellectual tradition, and that to introduce the ideas of writers like Michel Foucault at school level is asking students to run a hurdle race before they can walk. The argument that there is no “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong” as such, is therefore becoming out-dated. It is confusing to those who are learning basic ethical reasoning.

Good and Bad

In any discussion or education about values or making ethical decisions, teachers must be able to use words that children will understand.

- “Good” and “right” can be taken to mean, “that which helps people or their environment.”
- “Bad” and “wrong” can be taken to mean, “That which harms people or their environment.”

⁴⁰ Snook,I., (1973). Moral education. P63.

⁴¹ Luke Slattery, (2005). Fading theory has no place in schools. *The Australian*, July 23. ‘05. p9.

- **“Truth”** can mean, “that which can be shown to be factual to any reasonable person who does not have a particular theory of his/her own to guard.”

It is the opposite of “deception,” any form of which is designed to make people believe something that is not true.

There will still be those who will insist there is no “good” or “bad,” “right” or “wrong”, and that we cannot know “truth.” Ideologies are often handed down from University lecturers to students who become teachers, and who then hand them on in their turn to a new generation. Unless they are challenged, these ideologies persist within the system. In the ethical dimension of social inquiry, such views should be left until discussions with the most senior classes by which time the pupils will be able to engage in discussion with teachers on equal terms, without being intimidated by the teacher’s position of authority..

The aim of discussion is to help children learn to reason ethically, and to raise their level of ethical reasoning, not to confuse them.

Are people good or bad?

We try not to say that a *person* is good or bad – only actions are to be judged and they are judged to be so because of their effects on others, but fellow humans do judge actions because they are affected by them. We cannot always understand the reasons why people act the way they do, and though we should try to understand and make allowances for them where they are justified, people have free will. They make their own choices. Few are forced to act in a way that harms others. If, through upbringing, laziness, greed, envy or any other human weakness, they choose to do what is harmful to others they must expect to be judged.

At junior levels it is difficult for a child to reason in the abstract and to separate the deed from the person. Children, who complain that nobody likes them at school, are not helped by parents or other adults who try to make excuses for their behaviour. As soon as they begin to make their own choices, they are old enough to take responsibility for their actions, and they need to know the words “right” and “wrong.” They also need to be shown by the use of ethical principles and guidelines how their actions affect others, and therefore *why* a particular action is right or wrong. It is not enough just to condemn an action without explaining the reason.

At senior levels, Ethical reasoning builds on what has already been learned. Now they can begin to understand that every human being should be treated with respect or they lower their own standing as human beings. They also need to understand that true respect belongs to people who make the world a better place, not those who harm it. Should we respect people in sport who cheat or deliberately injure others? Should we respect people in business who have made a great deal of money by cheating, by taking advantage of those weaker than they are, or by harming the environment? The victims certainly see such actions as right or wrong and would have difficulty accepting that the perpetrators are good people.

In discussion, we need to be able to use the words “good,” “bad,” “right”, “wrong” and “truth” as long as their meanings are made clear and have been understood.

“She’ll be right.”

Because of the technological age in which we live, it appears that the majority of people have faith that technology will be able to solve future environmental problems. We feel that we should probably do our bit with regard to recycling, a few wind farms here and there should solve energy problems without adding to global warming, and we should buy environmentally friendly consumer goods when we can – and if they are not too expensive. Apart from that, we have done our bit, and anyway, Greenies are impractical extremists who want everybody to go out and hug trees and therefore do not need to be taken too seriously. This extreme image is unfortunate because there is a great deal of truth that we all need to accept. Everything is *not* well with our world. International conferences have agreed that there are key issues of concern that should be addressed globally. These are 1. Global population explosion. 2. Food and agriculture. 3. Tropical deforestation. 4. Extinction of biological species. 5. Desertification and drought. 6. Fresh water. 7. Degradation of marine resources. 8. Energy. 9. Atmosphere and climate. 10. Managing waste. 11. Management of hazardous materials. 12. Global security. 13. Unsustainable development and the limit to the ability of nature to recover after use.⁴²

There is on-going argument as to what should be done, but one authority in this field, Joseph Des Jardins,⁴³ concludes that there are at least some points on which a strong consensus does exist.

- **We should not allow consumer demand to decide environmental policy.**
- **There is a limit to the capacity of natural ecosystems to produce the essentials of clean air, water and food.**
- **There is a limit to the capacity of nature to assimilate wastes and pollution and to rebound from destruction.**

Environmental theorists, he says, are beginning to accept that one theory will never be right, and he refers to Aristotle, “Practical reason is required.”

The 1987 World Commission on Education and Development, (WCED) stated that “Environmental education should be included in, and should run throughout the other disciplines of the formal education curriculum at all levels.”⁴⁴

Much good work is being done in schools today to make younger students environmentally conscious. In many junior schools, teachers are laying a foundation that will allow children to become familiar with, and to be concerned about our environment, but more is needed than protecting our own environment. There needs to be an ethical content, based on reason, not just emotion. Excessive “greenness” can be off-putting to the general public. Emphasis on social justice and bringing third world countries up to the standard of living of industrialised Western countries will not solve the problem. It will result in using up the world’s resources at a faster rate. If the citizens of China and India, for instance, in the near future, came to own as many cars per head of population as citizens of western industrialised countries, the consequences for the world’s resources would be disastrous. The west arrived at this standard first, but it is not sustainable for the rest of the world, however unfair that may be. Making people equal by having more is not the answer.

⁴² Palmer, J. (1998). *Environmental education in the 21st century: Theory, practice, progress and promise*. London: Routledge.

⁴³ Des Jardins, J. (1997). *Environmental ethics : an introduction to environmental philosophy*. (2nd ed.) pp251-253.

⁴⁴ Palmer, J., (1998). *Environmental education in the 21st century: Theory, practice, progress and promise*. London: Routledge. P 78. WCED = World Commission on Education and development.

- **Those who have more now may have to consider making do with less.**

Westernised society needs to become a conserver society, rather than a consumer society. We need to change the attitude where we measure success in life by the amount we spend on new cars, larger houses and new technology, and we need to start now.

Practical reason tells us that our actions today affect the people of the future and therefore what helps our environment is good. What harms our environment is bad. A definite ethical content needs to be included in any reasoning about the environment.,

If we use ethical principles in judging our actions, once again there should be no difference for gender, culture or age. The arm that throws the MacDonald's carton out of the window of a car is just as likely to be white, brown, yellow or polka dotted. Undersized fish or excessive hauls of shell fish can end up in multicultural frying pans, and overflowing rubbish bins are just as likely to be seen in poor as well as affluent suburbs.

An example of how ethical principles can be used in environmental education in schools is given here in relation to mobile phones which most students either have, or will be looking forward to having.

Sample lesson

Background information - A newspaper article states that an international convention in Geneva will try to tackle the latest toxic waste crisis - mobile phones. The cadmium in a single battery from an old phone could seriously contaminate 600,000 litres of water. Lead in the solder used for wiring can damage immune and nervous systems. In New Zealand 2.8 million people have mobile phones and update them about every two years. In Europe 105 million handsets are discarded each year, and many old phones are exported to third world countries for use or recycling in rudimentary conditions.

Social inquiry, ethical reasoning and social decision-making will centre around these ethical principles –

Examples of questioning on Socratic lines leading to an ethical view of the situation.

Wisdom – What are the environmental consequences of updating our phones so often?

Justice – Is it fair that richer countries should use poorer countries to get rid of their dangerous waste?

Truth – Is this information reliable? What will influence you most in your decision to update your own phone? Is it a necessity? Is it a status symbol? Is it wise as far as the environment is concerned? An honest answer please?

Love - Is concern for other people being shown? Are we using other people for our own ends? Do we care about future generations?

Golden Rule – How would we feel if we were on the receiving end of this toxic waste? How will your descendants feel about the environment we have left for them?

A better world – Is updating our phones as soon as a new model comes on the market helping to make a better world? What should we do?

Sustainable economics

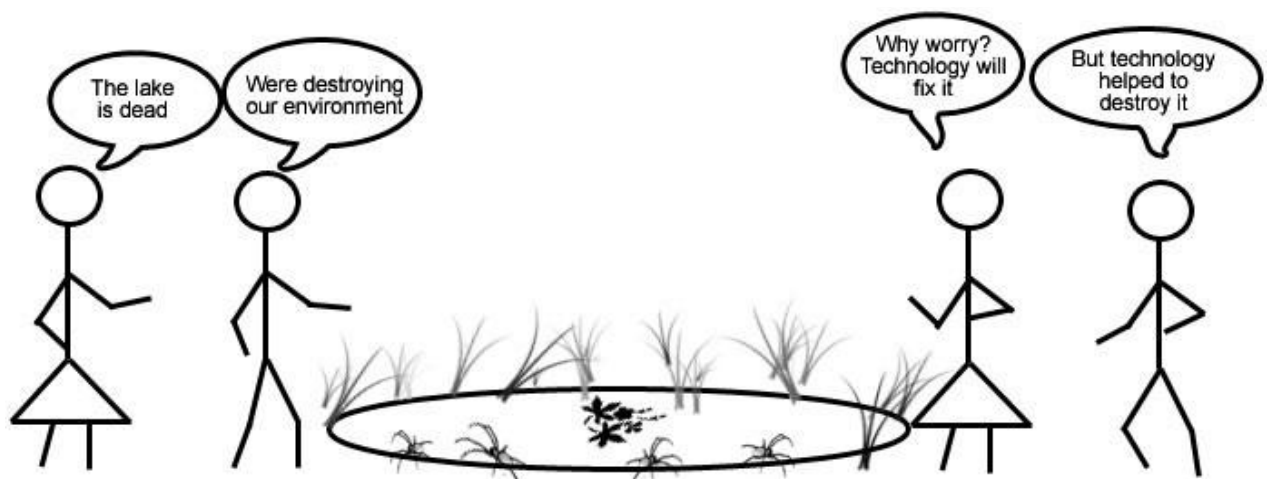
In recent decades an alternative theory of economics has emerged, and this could be added to all economics courses as well as to social studies. This theory includes our environmental challenges and means that we should not use up our natural resources faster than they can renew themselves, or faster than we can recycle, reuse, or develop alternatives. We need to create an economic system that can provide for the world's population without destroying the environment

in the process. We should not allocate resources to meet the demands of the market place, but we should regulate the speed at which resources flow through the economy.⁴⁵ Relating this to our own situation we could ask for example, “Should we export so much of our coal?” In the future, technology may find a way for us to use it without pollution, and future generations here may need it.

The WCED definition of the goal of “Sustainable development” is to meet the “needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Economist Herman Daly, a champion of sustainable economics points out that development does not necessarily mean growth.⁴⁶ Development can mean improvement. The only source of resources that we have, is the earth itself. The economy must eventually stop growing, but it can continue to improve in efficiency and sustainability.

To ethical inquiry we can also add the question of power. How is power being used to influence economic and environmental decisions? Who uses it and why? Who wins and who loses? How do environmentalists use power to influence governmental decisions? How does the commercial world use power to influence governmental decisions? How can major international corporations use power to influence governmental decisions? In a democracy, government decisions are meant to be based on the will of the people. Are the people using their power? How could they use it?

Environmental education need not produce fanatics, but it does need to make people aware of the problems facing us, make them think about what should be done, encourage them to accept the necessity for doing it, and inspire them to do their part.



⁴⁵ Des Jardins, J. *Environmental ethics*, p 59

⁴⁶ Des Jardins, p59

19 THE ECONOMIC WORLD

Most of us start our lives in the economic world by working for someone else. Whether it is children working at home for pocket money, or teenagers working after school in shops for extra spending money, and finally moving full-time into the working world, we are selling our time and effort to someone who is prepared to pay for it. Private employers will pay for it so that they can make a profit from it. Governments pay public servants from the money they gather in taxes, in order to provide services for the citizens of the country. In countries like Australia and New Zealand where European colonists arrived in the 19th century, most public services belonged to the people and were run by the government. They had been countries with no roads, railways, hospitals, schools, postal services, electric power or telephones. In most cases these services were financed by the taxes people had paid, or by money that had been borrowed. Taxes had to be used to pay interest on this money and to repay the capital. The systems were run, not specifically to make a profit, but to provide a necessary service. Public services in many newly settled countries began in the same way, though some major railways in the United States for instance were financed by private companies..

Many people worked for governments as public servants, and in this country, the government had instituted an exam for third year secondary school students called Public Service Entrance. Those who did not want to, or who could not afford to sit the University Entrance exam and go on to a profession, could pass P.S.E., obtain work in government departments and work their way up. Usually they had a job for life.

We work to eat.

“By the sweat of your brow you shall earn your bread.” The work ethic of the colonial settler was based on this statement from Genesis, the first book of the Christian Bible. Today we still work so that we can eat, and as a civilized society we also willingly accept the responsibility of caring for the young, the old and the infirm.

The right to work is one of the common values found by Alan Webster in his 1998 Survey of New Zealand values. In bad economic times there is not always enough paying work for those who wish to work, and so in a democracy, society expects the government it elects to provide enough money to ensure that all people are able to eat. Whether recipients are expected to work for that money is a matter decided by the people themselves through those governments. Before many government services were privatised, it was possible for a government to balance the expense of employing people, against the cost of providing money for those who had no work, and so they aimed to keep people in employment.

Private enterprise does not have the direct responsibility of paying to keep people in work, so the less people that are needed to operate a business, the more profit there can be. The government will still have to find the money to provide for the unemployed and this comes from the taxes that all the people pay.

In early societies with a communal way of life every person worked for the survival of the group. It was easier to survive as a group than as an individual. In today's world most people work as individuals for their own survival.

To understand the complexities of the economic world it is easier to start by looking at the simple life. Farmers are among the few who have the opportunity to live and work close to nature as primitive people did, but even farmers today are highly mechanized and operate on a large scale. They do however operate in the traditional way. They produce more food than they need for themselves and they barter or trade the surplus to obtain other things they need but do not produce. Most people today barter their abilities or produce in some way to obtain money, which they then trade for food or other necessities of life. As most ordinary people see it, the major aim of education is to enable people to get a job – and then a better job. The more

education, either academic or practical skills that an individual has, the more money employers in general will pay the individual for his work.

Selling yourself –

Young people need to know that when they enter the world of work they must have something to sell to an employer. The most basic requirements are the ability to read, write and do simple maths. An employee who cannot read instructions or fill in a time sheet can cost an employer money, rather than make it for him.

As well as the labour or skill they have to offer, there are qualities of character that are valued by an employer. Employees need to be reliable and honest. An unreliable employee is a liability to a business, and an employer will not willingly employ someone he/she has cause to believe is not going to be reliable. Employees need qualities of character that will enable them to work in harmony with others. Prospective employees also need to package themselves in a way that will be an asset to an employer. They may believe they have a right to dress or act as they please, but the employer has a right to employ whom he pleases, and he is unlikely to choose to employ someone who will not be a good advertisement for his business.

Starting a business -

An employee who has become expert in his line of work, and who has the courage, initiative and enough finance to do so, can start his own business. As his/her business grows he can become an employer himself, and buy skilled or unskilled labour to increase the supply of his product. He no longer has the security of the steady wage that he used to enjoy. He also has the responsibility to pay a steady wage to his employees, but he has the opportunity to make a profit.

Profit is not a dirty word.

If the employer does not make a profit his business will fail, and he and those working for him will lose their opportunity to work. Other people to whom he owes money will also be affected. If we are going to apply ethical reasoning to the business world, one of the main ethical questions to be considered is how much profit should a person or business be able to make, and what standards should be used in estimating what is a fair profit?

In China in the late 1980s, when private enterprise was being allowed to re-enter the communist system, people were prosecuted for allowing themselves too much profit on items that were required for general use in their own country.⁴⁷ In western democracies, where the people themselves make the rules, there is rarely any limit placed on profit, but the government establishes levels of taxes that people pay on their profit, just as those who are employed pay on their wages.

One particular problem area, involves corporations, shareholders and CEOs. (Chief Executive Officer) A person who owns his/her own business or farm is there for the long haul. The farmer cares for the land and wants to keep it productive. The business owner knows that the best advertisement is a satisfied customer and therefore wishes to protect his/her good name. The CEO of a large corporation however is answerable to anonymous shareholders, who will hold the CEO responsible for the size of their profits. A CEO who can produce large profits is often headhunted by other large organisations and can move on. The more profit he/she has made in a previous position, the higher his/her asking price can be. The shareholders are happy with their profits and do not feel responsible for whatever has happened to produce them. The CEO has moved on and it is hard to find anyone who can ultimately be held responsible.

Another problem area involving large multinational organizations, is that they can move their operations from one country to another if they know they can make more profit there. They have the ability to pressurise governments who want to keep work for their people, into allowing them

⁴⁷ Ma Zhiping, (1989, May 13). New price tags help customers and markets. *China Daily*. P. 3.

conditions that are not environmentally or socially friendly. They can shift work from countries where good working conditions and wages are expected, to other countries where neither the environment nor working conditions for the people are so important, and so they can make more profit. They can claim that they need to do this so that they can compete against others who have low productivity costs.

Many businesses are now finding that it can be profitable to be seen as being environmentally friendly, but we need shareholders, directors and CEOs who reason ethically, and can be prepared to take less profit if that profit is going to be made at the expense of other workers or the environment.

Adam Smith and the free market

Though Adam Smith saw social benefit and economic order resulting from the self-interested actions of individuals, he also saw his theories operating in a moral society and by men of principle. “In the race for wealth, honours and preferments --- a man may run as hard as he can and strain every nerve and muscle in order to outstrip his competitors, but to jostle or throw down one of them ---- is a violation of fair play which cannot be allowed.” “Justice,” he wrote, “Is the main pillar that upholds the whole edifice. If it is removed, the great, the immense fabric of human society --- must in a moment crumble into atoms.”⁴⁸ He was professor of philosophy at the University of Glasgow and taught the elements of economics against a background of philosophy and ethics. He recognised the need for principles and conscience, for general rules of morality and standards by which actions could be judged. He would have considered the teaching of economics to be incomplete without an accompaniment of ethics.

- **A free market will only work in an ethical society.**



Children need to learn about the economic world from an early age, but they also need to have an ethical element added to their education in this field.

Wisdom - Even young children have pocket money and can understand the wisdom of budgeting so that they will have money to spend on important things, rather than being tempted to spend it all at once on things that will not last.

Justice – They can learn to appreciate justice. Their parents need to work to earn the money they give them, so it is fair that they should help their parents in return. Would it be fair if one child received the same amount of pocket money as another, but did not do a fair share of the work that needed to be done?

⁴⁸ Adam Smith, 1723-1790. *The wealth of Nations*. (II.ii.2.1) and (II .ii. 3.4)

Truth – What is their own attitude to money? Do they understand all the things that their parents have to pay for? Do they make a fuss if they can't have the latest toy or gear they see advertised on T.V.?

Love – Children in some countries are very poor, and often do not have enough to eat or enough clothes. How can they help? Have a project of some kind.

Older Students

At higher levels the same principles can be used and the same themes emphasised with examples relevant and of interest to each age group.

Wisdom – The need to budget income and the advantages of saving a certain amount. At each age – what special thing could you be saving for? What could be the consequences of spending without budgeting for essential items?

Justice – If you are working for money do you treat your employer and your workmates fairly? Do you do your fair share of the work? Does your employer treat you fairly?

Truth – Are you a good worker? Do you make the most of your talents? What will you have to sell an employer when you enter the workforce?

Love – Do you care about other people or do you use them for your own ends? How could you help other people less talented or experienced than yourself?

Handling money

Whether a person is an employer or employee, future success and happiness will depend on his/her ability to manage money.

“Budgeting” at senior levels can be related to earning a wage and living within their means. It involves working out how much money you receive, how much essential items like housing and transport are going to cost, and how much is left to spend on other items. Food is an essential item and so are clothes, but such costs are variable depending on how you choose to live. If you spend less than your income you will be able to save money for future expenses.

If you use credit cards you may pay highly for using someone else's money. The use of credit cards within a tight budget can only be justified if the purchase is absolutely essential, or the amount can be repaid within a set time without incurring interest.

- *Interest rates on credit card debt is very high.*
- *If you have no self-discipline you should not have a credit card.*

Sensible use of credit cards requires wisdom and self-discipline. It requires a constant check on the cash flow.

Budgeting is required for those who start a business also. Many small businesses are set up with the use of borrowed money. The cost of that money plus a minimum wage for the person who sets up the business has to be included in the budget. Many small businesses that could have succeeded have failed because the owner did not impose self-discipline on unnecessary spending.

Using ethical principles in the world of work

Wisdom – The factors we have been examining so far come under the heading of wisdom. We need to look beyond short-term attractions and examine long-term consequences.

Justice – “A fair day's work for a fair day's pay,” used to be the standard. Treat your employer or employees fairly. Do your fair share of the work that needs to be done.

Truth – The long-term consequences of being dishonest rarely contribute to happiness. Both employer and employee need to be honest.

Love – Love can be translated as respect for individuals and concern for their welfare.

Employers and employees need each other, therefore they should treat each other with respect, trying to understand each others' problems and helping each other through difficulties.

The golden rule – People could ask themselves how they would feel if they were in the other's shoes. Their level of reasoning needs to be higher than, "What's in it for me?" or "That would not be to my advantage."

A better world – Ask yourselves, does the work I am doing, or am planning to do in my life, help to make the world a better place – at home, in my community, in my country and globally?

For senior students

In social studies, history, geography and economics, the question of use and misuse of power can be added to the previous ethical considerations. How power is used by groups within a country to influence decisions for their own ends, and how power can be used by multinational companies to obtain economic and environmental conditions that harm others. How citizens in a democracy can use their own power to counteract other sources of power, and make ethical decisions. If students obtain positions of power in their future lives, are they going to be the principled "upright" men and women that Adam Smith envisaged would be needed if the free market were to operate fairly, or will they allow the misuse of power in their field of work? If they become CEOs of large or small enterprises, will they put profit before the well-being of people or the environment? Will the work they choose to do in their lives help or harm people or their environment?

Conclusion

When making decisions as to the work we want to do in our lives, we need to ask the question, "Will this work make the world a better place?" The measure of the real worth of any person's work is not only personal satisfaction, but depends on how far the work contributes to the well-being of the society in which it is done. Work can be boring and monotonous, but whatever work we have to do, we can gain satisfaction from doing as good a job as possible. Whether we work on a rubbish cart or as a surgeon performing intricate operations, if we do our work cheerfully and to the best of our ability, we have the satisfaction of knowing that we have not carelessly left a trail of rubbish or misery behind us, or added to other peoples' burdens. Those who operate businesses have the same responsibility to ensure that the business does not make its profit by trading on human weaknesses or contributing to human misery, and that the environment is no worse for its having operated here.

Are you a worker or a leaner?



Too many people leaning on others and the whole system will collapse.

20 GOVERNMENT SPENDING

Just as ordinary people need to balance their household budgets, so a government in a democracy has to balance the budget of the country as a whole. Before every election it has been customary for political parties to produce a statement telling the people what they intend to do if elected, and where they are going to get the money from to pay for their promises. Most responsible governments of a democratic country produce an annual budget as well, to explain to the people where money has been spent and where it is proposed to be spent in the next year. One of the main reasons for the rebellion of the colonists of the United States of America against British rule was the question of taxation imposed on them without the colonists having any say in the matter. “No taxation without representation,” was the principle for which they fought.

- *The government has no money of its own and must get it from the people through taxes of some kind.*

The money a government intends to spend is taken from the people by direct and indirect taxes. **Direct taxes** are like our income tax, PAYE (Pay as you earn) and ACC (Accident Compensation) - levies that are charged directly on income.

Indirect taxes are taxes that are included in the price of things we buy like petrol, tobacco, and the GST or VAT that is included in the price of other goods and services. Theoretically, the people, through electing representatives to parliament, have agreed to this, and must be prepared to pay it.

Into the pot

It is as though all this money goes into one big pot as it is taken from the people, and then, with a big ladle the government takes it out again and decides who gets how much. Unlike the ordinary person on wages or a salary, who is usually limited in his/her spending by the amount his employer pays him, if a government finds it does not have enough in the pot to fill all the plates that are waiting to be filled, and it wants to spend more, it has choices.

1. It can take more money in taxes from the ordinary people.
2. It can decide that some of the waiting plates are only going to be half-filled, or –
3. It can take another look at where the money is going, see if any is being wasted, and do something about it.

If there is not enough money to go around, health services and education might not get the amount they need. Since the people in a democracy elect their governments the people should be able to decide what laws are to be made. Earlier last century in this country, the majority of the people decided that it was important for them to be able to buy their own homes and for young people to have cheap access to tertiary education, and so they elected governments that would make the appropriate laws. During the world wars, where the people were united in the aim of defeating the enemy, party politics were often put aside and coalition governments were formed with the most qualified people from the various parties chosen to make the decisions. If people are apathetic however, and do not hold political parties to account for their actions, a political party may allow its desire for votes, or its own particular ideologies, to affect the way in which it collects the money that goes into the pot, as well as how and to whom, it ladles out the contents of the pot.

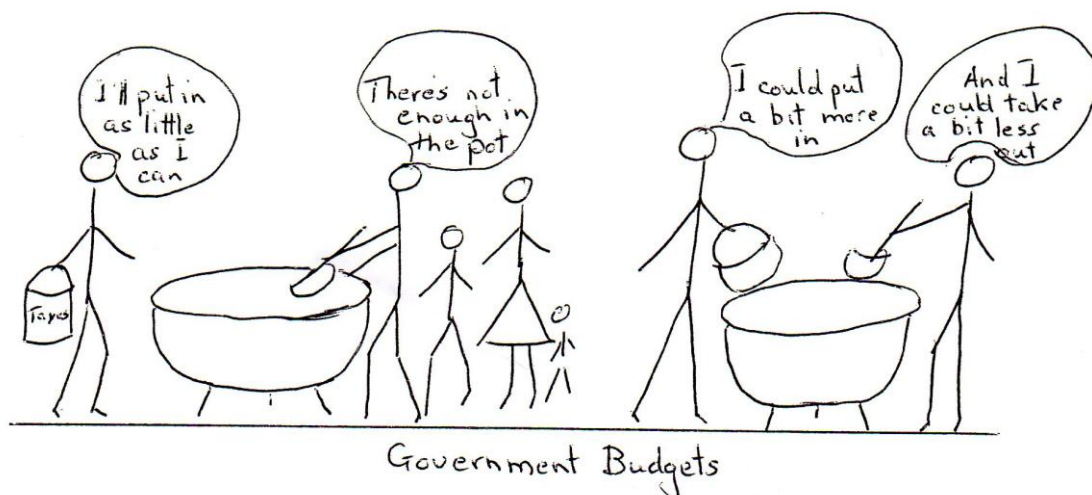
The ordinary citizen can make a difference

Apart from electing politicians to make the laws we want them to make, we, the people, have a certain amount of influence as to how much goes into the pot and how much comes out – and whether there is enough to fill all the bowls.

- *We could agree to put a little more in and take a little less out.*

If everyone is completely honest and fair there should be enough for all our needs. It is understandable that most people try to pay as little tax as they can while remaining within the law, but if we evade paying the tax we that we ought to pay we are actually stealing from others who will have to pay more tax to make up the deficit. Some people devise schemes for getting around the law, or for taking their profits out of the country by some means or another and these are usually people with high IQs and low levels of ethical reasoning.

Trying to be fair, we can understand why people will be tempted to do this. Apart from trying to keep as much money as they can for themselves, they may believe that many of those who are holding out their plates are also trying to get as much as they can out of the pot. People or organizations who develop schemes to avoid paying income tax are just as guilty as people who for instance, avoid paying maintenance for the children they have brought into the world, or get benefits or other payments to which they are not really entitled. If every person and every organization paid their fair share in, and only took out what was an honest need, there would probably be enough in the pot to finance our schools, hospitals and people who are really in need through no fault of their own. There might even be some left over for discretionary spending or savings for the future.



21 DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT

From the time people came to live together in communities they saw the need for rules of some kind if they were to live together peacefully and profitably. Someone had to set the rules and in time systems arose for doing this. There could be one ruler such as the chief of a tribe, or in larger areas there could be several chiefs and one supreme ruler or king. These positions could be hereditary or could be taken by the people who had the most power.

In this country, we live in what is called a democracy, where theoretically the people themselves have the power to make the rules and see they are enforced.

The settlers who came to new colonies from Britain brought with them a democratic system that had evolved over 2000 years. After the Romans who had invaded Britain in 55B.C., had left to defend their own land, Britain was again invaded, this time by the Jutes, Angles and Saxons from Denmark and Germany, people who brought their own system of government. Under their system, all freemen in the small villages met to make rules and settle disputes. As the population expanded, the chief men of villages met to make wider laws and levy taxes, and to decide in their parliament, the Witenagemote, who should be the ruler of England.

When the Normans invaded Britain in 1066, William the Conqueror granted large areas of English land to his own followers. The “freemen” living on such land became the property of the landowners, and so they lost their freedom and no longer had a share in government. This was the beginning of the “class” system. The Normans however instituted the beginnings of our jury system where twelve men from an accused’s own district were called to witness to the truth before a judge.

The Magna Carta

The king had supreme power until 1215 when the barons, the church, and the people united to force King John to sign an agreement called the Magna Carta (Great Charter). This document gave supreme power back to the parliament of the people, and expressed four principles which have been handed down to us.

1. No taxation without the consent of parliament.
2. No freeman to be punished without trial in accordance with the law.
3. Trial by jury.
4. No individual, no matter how rich or important, to be above the law. Even Queen Elizabeth 1 (1558-1603) had to give way to Parliament over her attempts to gain money by granting monopolies to traders.

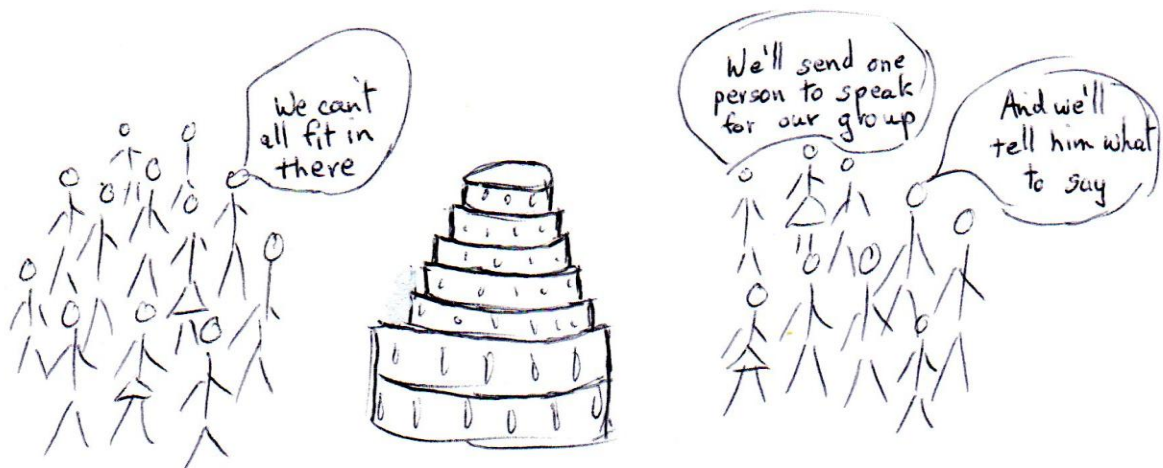
The Stuart kings who followed Elizabeth clashed with Parliament. They claimed that their right to rule was a Divine right given by God, and therefore they were set above parliament. Right from Anglo-Saxon times however, Parliament had always claimed the right of electing or deposing the king. A civil war followed, and in 1649 Parliament deposed King Charles 1 by beheading him. After a period of austerity and a form of dictatorship by Oliver Cromwell who had led the opposition forces, Parliament invited Charles 2 to resume the monarchy, provided he accepted that Parliament had supreme power.

Our form of democracy also goes back to Athens and ancient Greece where all the citizens gathered in one place to discuss laws and make decisions, and where each citizen had one vote. Each had a right to speak and try to influence the group, then a vote would be taken and the majority won.

In Athens, the auditorium had enough space for every citizen to attend and cast his own vote, but as populations expanded all the citizens in a country could not fit into one place and vote in person. Most democratic countries then chose to divide themselves into areas of roughly equal

numbers of voters and vote for one person to go to Parliament to represent the people of that area.

In a democratic system of government, the representative is elected to express the opinion of the people in his/her electorate. He is not sent as a delegate to think for them in an unknown situation. He/she is not elected to make decisions on their behalf without their agreement. An interesting situation here is where members of Parliament have what is called a conscience vote, that is, they are not required to vote along party lines, but in accordance with conscience. But whose conscience? Within their electorates there will be people of differing opinions who may not think along the same lines as their representative. In a democracy as it is meant to work, the Member of Parliament is representing all the people of his/her electorate, not just his own party or himself. It seems logical today that an M.P. would need to go back to the electorate and vote the way the majority required, though Edmund Burke, who is well known for his comment that all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing, is also recorded as saying to the electors of Bristol in 1774, "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgement; and he betrays instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." Educated voters of today, under a one person one vote system might feel that they are as qualified as their M.P.s to make ethical decisions..



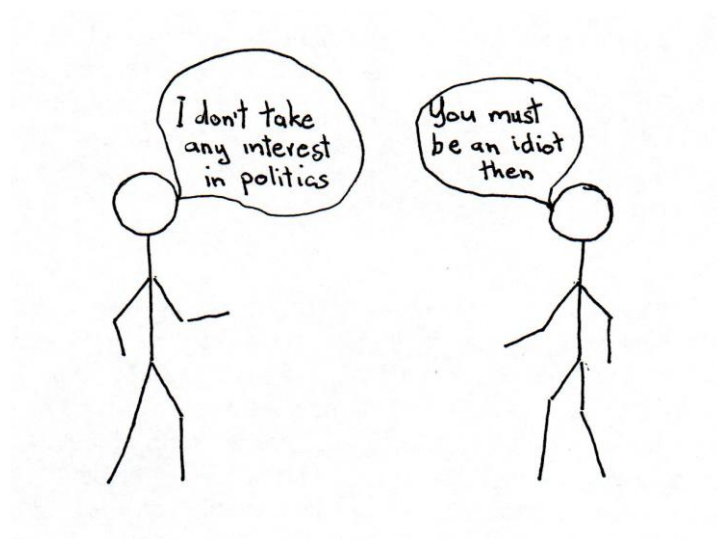
Though party politics have come to be accepted as the norm in many democracies, they can act to remove the power from the people. People who think alike on a number of matters find they have more power and finance if they act as a group, and so they join together to form a political party that is given a name or a logo. Citizens who approve of that particular way of thinking, may vote at an election for the candidate put forward by that party and not necessarily because they believe that person is the most capable or trustworthy

Democracy is not perfect. It depends on the education and the ethical standards of all those involved, but it is still the best and fairest system of government available today. Some people talk about the tyranny of the majority, but a tyranny of a minority would be worse.

- **For democracy to work as it should the people need to be reasonably educated. They need to take an interest in the process of government, and they need to have a high level of ethical reasoning.**

The writings of the founders of the constitution of the United States are filled with warnings that the new republic must make education a high priority because the form of government they were adopting was essentially a moral compact among people.⁴⁹ In Benjamin Franklin's words, "When the people consider only their own personal well-being, they can no longer be depended upon to act in the best interest of their nation – only a virtuous people are capable of freedom."

Going back to ancient Greece it is interesting to note that the word "idiot" comes from the notion of citizenship originally formulated by Aristotle who suggested that those who lacked political knowledge should be labelled as "idions." The saying, "Democracy has within itself the seeds of its own destruction," is very relevant in any country that has a system of representative democracy. Once they are elected, politicians are free to make the laws, but they are answerable to the people at the next election. People are free to take an interest in politics and demand that their politicians represent the wishes of the people, or they are free to be apathetic and gullible and hand over their power to what then becomes a form of dictatorship. As Secondary School students in this country were taught in their Civics lessons during the great Depression of the 1930s, "If the people, through ignorance or apathy, lose their control, they have nobody to blame but themselves."⁵⁰



⁴⁹ Ryan, K. and Bohlin, K. (1999) *Building character in Schools*. P 20 and Preface P x.

⁵⁰ Coad, N. (circa 1930) *The Dominion Civics*. (2nd ed.) New Zealand: Whitcombe and Tombs.

A covenant is an agreement between two or more parties entered into freely and lasting until both parties agree that it is no longer required. Laws are made by the government of a country, and in a democracy they can be changed if enough people decide they are no longer required, or are no longer suitable in a changing environment. Socrates, in Plato's *Crito* has been said to have given us one of the finest statements ever of the theory of government which is the basis of most western political theory. Some sort of social agreement or compact, he claimed is at the foundation of any political system. By living under the protection and privileges of the law, the citizen has entered an agreement to live within the law.

Babies born in a particular country, to parents who are citizens of that country are required to be registered, and are normally accepted as citizens also. When immigrants apply to become citizens of a new country, they make an agreement with the government, which is the representative of the rest of the people in the country, that they will obey the laws of their new country. If they break the laws they have broken the covenant they have freely entered into. People who have been born and registered here do not have to sign a special agreement, but because they are citizens, they are automatically subject to all the laws that have been made on their behalf.

A citizen of a country has rights and privileges that non-citizens do not have, and is entitled to the protection and the services that the government provides. When we travel overseas we have pass-ports to show which country we belong to, and in most overseas countries there is an office or a representative of some kind to whom we can go if we have problems. We can expect our government, through that office, to provide us with information or help. One of the duties of the government of a country is the protection of its citizens.

Our covenant

As well as having rights and privileges however, a citizen also has responsibilities, and the foremost is to obey the laws that the majority of the citizens have decided upon. That is the covenant into which we have been born as citizens, or have accepted as immigrants. By accepting the rights and privileges we also accept the responsibilities. This covenant is made with the rest of the people in the country. If people accept any form of money, service or protection from the government (that is acting on behalf of all the people in the country) they have shown that they are willing parties to the covenant, whether they signed it personally or not. The people have provided, in the form of taxes, the money that is used to provide protection and services, therefore to keep our side of the agreement we must obey the law as it is. If enough people think that the law is not wise or fair, they should, in a democracy, be able to change it.

The social contract basis to our system of democracy is very relevant in today's world. If we agree with the argument that when we accept the rights and privileges of citizenship, we must also obey the laws, then disobedience to force a government to agree to our demands can not be right. The right to protest should not over-ride the right of other people to go about their lawful business. It cannot be ethically justifiable for a group of people to be able to persuade a government to change a law, simply by breaking it in order to get their own way. Using force, defying the legitimate agents of the law, and inconveniencing other citizens, does not appear to be a reasonable part of our contract, no matter how strong our views. This would be setting ourselves above the law. It would seem that a government in a democracy should obey the will of the majority of the people, not be swayed by a particular group using unlawful methods. A minority has the right to try to persuade the majority, but not the right to force its will on them. The government, through the police force and the legal system, has the contractual responsibility to enforce the law until the law is changed by majority decision. In an efficient democracy, where the majority of the people take an interest in their political system, respect ethical

principles, and elect politicians who put ethical principles before political expediency, just laws should be passed. There should then be no excuse for civil disobedience.

The government's part.

In the interest of justice, any agreement between the government (as representative of all the citizens,) and individual citizens or groups of citizens, should treat all citizens fairly. An example is where what is decided to be a public good, affects the rights of individuals, or where private property is taken, or restrictions put on private property for the public good. It is accepted that private property should not be taken for the public good without compensation, but it is doubtful if any compensation would be sufficient in some cases. A currently relevant example would be that of a person who has been told that for the good of the majority of the people who live in the city, a power pylon must be placed on his/her property. The ethical questions to be answered are whether the people who will use the power should find other sources of power supply even if they have to pay extra. Should only one group suffer so that others will not? Should *anyone* have to suffer, or could there be a better and fairer way?

In situations like this, political parties may make decisions on the basis of the number of votes that are going to be affected, rather than on justice to all involved. Minority groups could appeal to the rest of the citizens on compassionate grounds for special treatment, but the result would depend on the quality of their argument, and once again on the ethical principles of the majority of the citizens. Is it wise and fair to do this? Is any group using any other person or group for their own ends? Is anyone in a position of power using that power in their own interest? Are the arguments based on the truth? How would I like it if I were the one affected? What solution would maximise the good and minimise the harm to all concerned?

Asking questions in this way, may seem repetitive and possibly tedious, but to learn any skill we need to practice it over and over. The tradesman teaching an apprentice, or the coach teaching a sport knows that the only way to improve our skill is to practice, practice practice. To develop our skills in ethical reasoning we need practice in answering such questions and in trying to reach an ethical decision.

23 CIVIC RESPONSIBILITIES

When early European settlers came to this country there were no roads, railways, schools, hospitals, libraries, electric power, town water supplies or mail systems. Forms of central and local government were organized, money had to be raised through taxes or borrowing, and the people set to work to provide all the services that we have today.

Before long, services were operating, and small communities were preparing and building the schools, churches, sports fields, local halls, tennis courts, swimming pools and libraries that the people felt they needed. Money was raised locally, and voluntary work saw whole communities working together to provide these amenities. We take all these things for granted today because they have been there most of our lives, and we do not often think about who paid for them and who owns them. In this country, before the 1980s, the answer would have been that the people paid for most of these amenities with their work or taxes and the people own them. We all had a stake in most of our public services and amenities.

Privatisation

New political ideas emerging in the 1980s saw major political parties in various governments, selling to private enterprise, many of the assets that belonged to all the people. The argument was that it cost a great deal of money for a government to run services like the railways, and that private companies would do it better. The free market was the theory behind these changes, but it should not be forgotten that Adam Smith saw the free market working in an ethical society, where business was operated by people of ethical principles. Arguments still abound that there was a mistake in thinking in the 80s, because while a private enterprise could dismiss a large number of people in order to make a profit, the unemployed still had to receive an income from the rest of the people, and so the overall effect was that private enterprise received the profit, but the country as a whole paid for the unemployment. Whether the theory was right or not is open to argument. The people however still own public buildings like Town Halls and libraries, police stations, courts, playing fields etc. that have not been sold off.

Who pays?

The people pay for the upkeep of the property they own through their rates that are paid to local bodies, like City or County Councils, or Regional Authorities, and through the taxes they pay to the central government. If the buildings or facilities that belong to the public are damaged, destroyed or abused in any way, the rest of the people will have to pay for the repairs. This means that a person who vandalises or damages public property in any way is actually stealing from the rest of the people in the area because they will have to pay for the repairs. Money that could have been used in a better way has been wasted.

Voluntary work

Just as the early settlers worked for no pay to provide many of the amenities that are used in our communities today, there are still people who give their work freely to keep these amenities available to the public. Eventually most young people will become taxpayers and it will be their turn to provide the money and work that is needed to maintain public property. Public property belongs to the people, not to some political party in a distant government. It is never too early for young people to start thinking about what they can personally do to make a contribution to their community – to be a valuable part of it and not a burden on it. Those who use the facilities of their towns, have a responsibility to help protect and maintain them.

24 A WRITTEN CONSTITUTION

The men who wrote the constitution for the United States of America were starting from scratch. They were “upright” men who were dedicated to democracy and the rights of the ordinary man – even though some saw slaves as “private property,” rather than as human beings in their own right

But who would we trust to write or amend a constitution for a country today?

Under many present education systems, and without specific emphasis on Civics, it is debatable in a democratic society whether people are educated enough about the factual histories of their countries to make informed decisions. In recent years more and more people rely on newspaper and T.V. headlines or blogs on the internet for information.

We have freedom, but that includes the freedom to be ignorant, or the freedom to push a particular ideology.

It is more difficult to change a written constitution than to change laws or to change governments. If at any time in the future it is decided to write or amend a constitution, the people will need to ensure it is written by “upright” people who have the good of the whole country at heart – philosophers and people of common sense who can be trusted and who will use ethical principles in their reasoning. Even judges and lawyers can be influenced by their political leanings, by ideologies of the times in which they live, or by ideas that are fashionable at a particular time in history..

These people who will have such power to frame a constitution will need -

Wisdom – To consider the consequences of going down different paths. To endeavour to maximise the good and minimise the harm.

Justice – To see that no person or group is favoured over others or treated worse than others. To ask questions -

Is anyone using power for their own ends? Who gains and who loses if we go down that particular path, and through what kind of use of power? Does seeking justice for one group result in injustice to others?

Truth – To base their reasoning on the truth as far as it can be discovered. Source documents and factual materials rather than later interpretations.

Love – To be concerned for the welfare of all citizens, now and in the future.

The Golden Rule – To consider in their reasoning how they would feel if they were in other peoples’ shoes

To have as their goal, - a better future for all citizens and their environment.

We have to accept the fact that multiculturalism is here to stay. People are moving from country to country. Many of the older generation are trying to move into new cultures without making changes to their own attitudes or customs. Most of the younger generation want to fit in with the culture of their new land, but often there is no one specified culture. Those who have been in a country for generations want to hold on to their own traditions, and new arrivals also want to hold on to their past.

If one criticizes another it is easier to cry “racist” than to examine the criticism for its validity. No-one likes to be called a “red neck,” and therefore few people care to stand up against the “politically correct” view of the time, and so obvious untruths or injustices go unquestioned building up problems for later generations. Quoting Edmund Burke again, “There is however a limit at which forbearance ceases to be a virtue.”⁵¹ We need to face such issues before they escalate. We can value diversity in such fields as food, music, clothing and celebrations, but any action that affects others has an ethical content and we can use ethical principles to examine customs and claims.

What is racism?

It is not simply a matter of blind prejudice. The origins of racism are scientific and religious.⁵² The word “race” was originally used in the sense of “category.” Linnaeus, the Swedish scientist who organized the known species of plants into categories (1751) used it as a term to classify broad sub-species of human beings.

Earlier in the 15th century there had been arguments for the justification of slavery on the grounds that people who were not Christians were like beasts. Conquest and slavery could save their souls. The hierarchy of human beings was established and at the top were Christians who lived civilized European lives. Since most slaves came out of Africa, the colour black was associated with the lowest strata in the hierarchy.

Darwin’s theory of evolution caused a major upsurge of interest in the human race.

Darwin’s theory claimed that humans were not a special creation of God, but had evolved by natural selection and superior races had survived. By interbreeding, the “higher more advanced races” were threatened with degeneration.

The word “eugenics” emerged as the study of methods of improving the quality of the human race, especially by selective breeding and preventing cross-racial breeding.

Darwinism and eugenics had provided the scientific proof that conquered races were inferior, and since most conquered races were dark-skinned, then, to the people of that day, white races were obviously superior.

Even the Caucasian race of Europeans was divided into a series of sub-species, and the idea of the Aryan race as superior was generated. Hitler was able to use the idea of Germans as the master race in his conquests of Europe and his treatment of the Jews.

Racism as we know it today has emerged from the concepts created by both religion and science. It was constructed by intellectuals and accepted by colonists who used these ideas to justify their treatment of indigenous people who were mainly dark skinned.

The slaves who were imported to the United States were viewed in this way – not as people in their own right, but as property to be owned, bred and sold.

Aboriginals in Australia were seen as “living fossils.” Since only the fittest races would survive, natural law would prevail and aboriginals were seen as a dying race.

⁵¹ Burke, E. *Observations on the present state of the nation.*

⁵² Moore, B. (1991). *Religion Education: Issues and methods in curriculum design.* South Australia : University texts in humanities. pp 138-141

However there was a problem in the case of children of mixed race. Because they were half of the superior race there was a possibility that they were half human and could be educated. These children of half white blood could not be left to perish with a dying race. The people who removed these children from their families and put them in institutions where they could learn to speak English and possibly be educated, did so with the best of intentions.

Religion and science share the responsibility, but at least religion believed that by being converted to Christianity dark skinned people could become equally human. For the scientists there was no question but that in the case of “the survival of the fittest,” it was the white who would survive.

An examination of the origins of racism shows today that no race is inherently superior to another. The limiting factor for individuals are their family background, their cultural capital - their own attitudes to life and what they want from it, the restrictions placed on them by the expectations of those of their own ethnicity, and the prejudice of others in the society in which they now live.

Since this inherited racial prejudice is now frowned upon socially and legally in most countries, the limiting factors become more and more an individual and family thing. The individual has to make choices and often they are not easy choices. The number of suicides among young people of minority cultures could indicate that a great deal of the pressure comes from being torn between two sets of beliefs and customs. Those of their elders who for their own sake, want to see their traditions perpetuated, can conflict with those of the multi-cultural society in which the young people have to live. In *Spiral of Values*, Webster explains the multiple cultures and sub-cultures that exist in New Zealand now. “It is a very damaging concept for people to assume that their own culture is beyond evolution ---There is no logical argument that evolution of culture has stopped with us.”(pp181-2)

Wisdom literature from different cultures says that if you wish to keep something, you must first set it free. Young people are the future leaders of any country. Their education needs to set them free to examine their various backgrounds with respect, love and sympathy. Then they will be able to choose for themselves what beliefs and customs they believe are worth holding on to. If the beliefs and customs of their ancestors measure up to the principles by which they are examined, their families have nothing to fear. If they do not, some customs or beliefs may need to be adapted or discarded if we are to reach the goal of a better world. The cultural differences in any multi-cultural country today, are the results of the different experiences along the different pathways that have brought us to this place. If a country now has different needs and has had new experiences, together a new culture will evolve.

All settlers who came to countries like New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States of America were hoping to leave behind the crowded conditions, the class distinctions or religious prejudices that had evolved over many centuries in their homelands. The majority of settlers then and now have one thing in common. They were brave enough to take a step into the unknown and begin a new life in a new country. We do not need to lose sight of our roots as we create great countries together. Our previous homelands and their traditions have contributed a great deal to our systems and society as it is today. We should not be afraid to recognise and appreciate these different cultures. There were earlier settlers in all colonised countries and they are now being respected in a way that could not earlier have been imagined – but they have also changed. European settlers brought our democratic system of government, our legal and public education systems, our first school- teachers, doctors, Christian churches and their ethical teachings on which the colonial ethic of hard work and care for our neighbour was founded. Other ethnic groups brought their own cultures with them, and wherever this can add to the good of society, we can accept the good. It can all help to fertilise the soil in which newer crops of citizens will grow. Intermarriage and the contribution of different cultures can produce the hybrid vigour that a country needs, but to make the most of our possibilities we need to accept the best from each culture and discard anything that works against the common good and against a better world. Children and schools are where we come together and where we can influence the future.

Since the rise of Nazism, many people have been suspicious of nationalism, yet most people have a natural pride in the country where they were born. Their new country however also needs a national identity. People living in a new country need to feel that they belong there, and that they are welcome there or they will not be good citizens. They need to remember why they left their home- lands and why they came to this particular country. In a free and democratic country people are able to speak their own languages in their own homes and communities, but a common language is needed for us to be able to communicate with each other and English is now recognised as the main international language. The celebrations, food and music of different ethnic groups add much to the diversity of life. People are free to keep up their own traditions and religions as long as they are within the law of the country and do not adversely affect other people or the environment. Immigrants themselves will never forget their roots, but their children born in a new country will belong to that country and will want to fit in.

Given time, it will not be their race by which different ethnic groups will be judged, but individuals will be judged by their own efforts. A particular race may already have labels attached to it because of the actions of many of the individuals that belong to that race. It is hard to live down such labels once they have been attached, but those of a new generation have the opportunity to create their own traditions. People who come to a new country with a genuine desire to integrate and make a better life for their children, contributing to society and asking no favours will be welcome. People who come merely to **use** a country while it suits them, and then move on, will be less welcome

We may be global citizens, but this country is where we have our homes. This is where we have a voice in making the laws, and this is where we would like to live peacefully together, protecting our environment and the future of our children. We have to accept that what happens to our country is our responsibility. It is not a case of “What’s in it for me or my group” alone. We need to work together for the good of our own country and globally as well, but as in everything else we do, we need wisdom or common sense. Extremes can lead to fanaticism, and a small number of fanatics can cause a great deal of harm. As Peter Donovan concluded in “Religions of New Zealanders,” “minority groups of zealous people with ideals and lifestyles

very different from an apathetic majority, could exercise social and political influence well in excess of their numbers.”⁵³ The majority need to take an interest in the political process of a democratic country or they could lose control. They need to be educated enough to think wisely and fairly. They need to be ethical people.

Nationalism does not mean that we should be apathetic and think, “My country, right or wrong.” Rather we should think, “My country, and if something is wrong we can fix it.” All countries have their own special traditions. New Zealand soldiers in the world wars were noted for being able to fix anything with a piece of number eight wire. If we have not lost that spirit we should be able to fix the things we see wrong in our country now, and do our part towards making a better world. We cannot fix things overnight, but for a start, as individuals, we can do our part to make sure they get no worse. In all countries people can do the same. It has been suggested that this is a very simplistic way of looking at things.. So what’s wrong with “simple?” It must be easier than “complex” “difficult” or “impossible.” Either we get started or we ignore things while they get worse. It is our children and grandchildren who will pay for what we do now.

The fighting spirit and egalitarian beliefs of all who made the voyage to other countries to start a new life for themselves and their descendants are still a part of our evolving cultures.

- **We do our share of the work. We give people a fair go. We help those who are in genuine need, but we do not take kindly to being used.**

Most countries that are a mix of earlier people and later colonisation have their own problems. In New Zealand, different interpretations of the Treaty of Waitangi are a hindrance to a national identity. By going back to source documents instead of later interpretations, it is possible to understand what an agreement made between the British crown and individual tribes meant to the people at the time. Asking questions based on ethical principles can help in making ethical decisions.

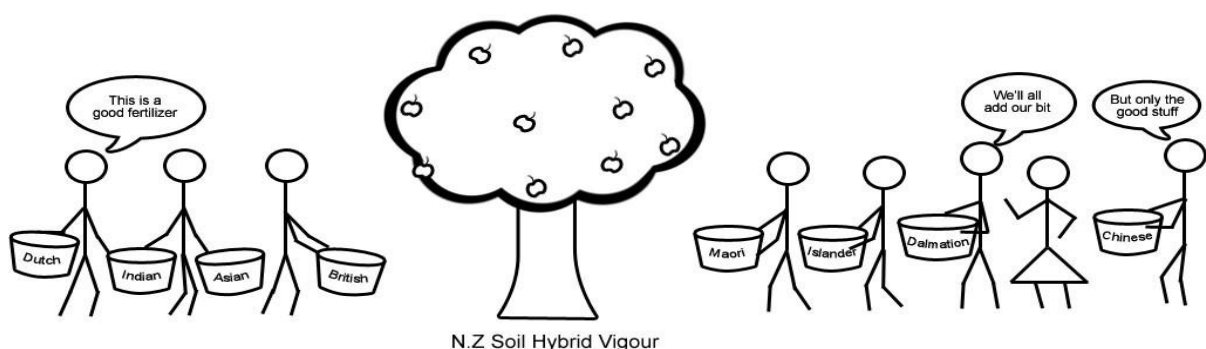
Wisdom – What could be the long- term consequences of going down different paths?

Justice – Is any one person or group being treated better than any other? Is anyone using power for their own ends?

Truth – Is evidence factual or interpretation? Do we have all the available factual evidence?

Love – Is everyone’s view being treated with respect?

Nationalism can be a good thing if it means we are proud of our country, and that in spite of our different backgrounds and the different paths we have travelled to get here, we are working together to make it a better place where the next generations will also want to live.



⁵³ Donovan,P. (1996) *Religions of New Zealanders*, (2nd ed.) p 267. Peter Donovan was Professor of Religious Studies at Massey University.

For thousands of years, philosophers have realised that democracy will not work as it should without an educated public, so where do we get that education today? From homes, from schools and for adults it is news media of some kind that brings us the information on which we base our opinions on current affairs.

We receive our news by daily newspapers, radio, T.V. and weekly newspapers, but people have less and less time to read through newspapers, and so the use of daily newspapers is declining. By the time people get home from work, the morning news is not fresh any more so they watch the T.V. news and many form their opinions from that. Forming opinions on the basis of T.V. news is not sufficient because the news is censored several times before it reaches the screens, and much depends on the ethical principles of the people through whose hands it passes.

Firstly it is censored by the reporter and camera-person who decide what to film and what to leave out. Secondly, it is censored by the editors of the T.V. news, who decide what remaining bits will be shown to the public. Finally, the presenters can add their own bias by facial expression, body language and comments that were not in the script.

We need to understand how the system works. Those who control the finances of a T.V. channel or a newspaper ultimately decide what information the public will receive. They need to attract viewers or readers, and so they aim to interest and entertain, and are not primarily motivated to educate. There are constant attacks on our money and our minds. Someone has to pay for the production of T.V. and newspapers, and much of the money required comes from advertising. People who are paying for the advertising are doing so in order to sell more of their product, services or ideas, and consequently to make more profit, therefore they will advertise in a media that reaches the largest number of people.

In order to attract a large number of people, the different forms of media have to offer headlines or a product that will attract attention. The ordinary person going about an ordinary life - doing good things and living within the law - is not sensational, and will not attract attention, sell papers, or be worth headlines on T.V., and so the media concentrates on the extremes of human behaviour. Much of the extreme behaviour reported in the media is negative rather than uplifting. In reality T.V. shows it seems that producers believe the viewers enjoy seeing others being humiliated or hurt. If the negative and depressing is considered to be what people are more willing to pay for, rather than the cheerful and uplifting, that is a reflection on society as well as on the media.

Often a newspaper or T.V. will claim that it is in the public interest to run a certain story, although the motive may really be that the public will be interested in another person's downfall or embarrassment, and will be willing to pay to read about it. The freedom of the press to keep the public informed can be the personal benefit of the press, and little to do with the public's "need to know." A case of "What's in it for me?"

The British Code of Ethics for newspapers considers the "public interest" to include

1. Detecting or exposing crime or a serious misdemeanour.
2. Protecting public health and safety, and
3. Preventing the public being misled by some statement of an individual or organisation, and the Code is expected "to be honoured, not only to the letter, but in the full spirit."

A Code of ethics is not a law passed by a government, and is only as effective as the ethical standards of the people involved allow it to be. Where there is no legal Code of Ethics, in many newspapers the only ethic is said to be, "Could they sue us if we publish this?" On Kohlberg's scale, this level of ethical reasoning would be the lowest, i.e. Stage one, where the person only responds to punishment that hurts.

The tone of a newspaper is set by those who own the paper and pay the journalists, so a great deal depends on their ethical principles and political leanings, but in large newspapers these people are at a distance from the public and usually unknown to them personally.

The journalists and editors of newspapers in smaller towns are less likely to reason at the lowest level as they are known personally to many people in the community. They are more likely to be influenced by the need for the approval of their readers, and therefore they will work at the levels of Stages 2 and 3, i.e. what makes life more pleasant for themselves, and the “Good boy, Good girl” of approval of their good works. If the local paper however, is owned by a distant consortium of owners, the editor is responsible to them for his position, and this may compete with his ethical responsibilities to his/her readers.

Information Technology has reached another milestone with the Internet. It is fast becoming a quick source of news, but there is little accountability for the material that can be found on web-sites. At a “media ethics” seminar back in 1998 it was said that, “Material could be put out by adolescent skin-heads full of hate,” with the result that “The lunatic fringe” can use it and believe it.

In our dealings with all the media sources today, we do not want to be part of the “lunatic fringe.” We need to understand the system and we cannot afford to be apathetic. Public relations experts know how to persuade us to a particular way of thinking. Even if a government decides to have a referendum on a particular issue, those P.R. experts may have put a lot of time and money into the wording to ensure that a particular course of action looks more attractive. In the long term there will be consequences for our children and grandchildren.

In a democracy the public need to be able to trust the media as a source of information Those working within the media, and those accepting their product as a source of information, need to use ethical principles in making decisions on what to produce and what to consume. They need to ask not just “How many papers will this sell?”, but -

Wisdom – What are the consequences of this action likely to be?

Justice – Are all those involved being treated fairly?

Truth – Do we have all the facts, and have they been verified? What are the motives of the people supplying the information? Is anyone using power for their own ends? Who wins and who loses if we accept this?

Love – Is anyone going to be hurt or harmed by this? Is everyone being treated with respect?

Golden Rule – How would I feel if I were personally affected?

A better world? – Is this going to have negative or positive results on the future of this country or on our environment?

“No-one can understand mankind without understanding the faiths of humanity.”⁵⁴

If their religion or spirituality is important to our neighbours, then it is important for other citizens in a multi-cultural society to understand why, and how it affects their actions and outlook on life. Religion is an important part of the lives of many people. Whether we agree with or approve of it or not, people with open minds cannot ignore its importance.

Secular Education –

Settlers in their new countries had come mainly from different areas of Britain or Europe where specific religions had majority standing: Catholics from Southern Ireland or Spain, Anglicans from England, Presbyterians from Scotland. Lutherans from various European countries. Thrown together in a new land, they argued over the various rights of their own Christian denominations within the education system.

In many countries, the parliamentary leaders of the time, in an effort to forge common bonds that would hold the new country together, decided that there would be no specific religions within state schools. The leaders were not anti-religion, but they were against the opportunity for friction between the Christian denominations. Catholics then often chose to opt out of the state system and had their own school systems. Some Protestant church schools survived, though many are now integrated into state systems for funding and supervision, as are Catholic schools, though they usually maintain a certain amount of autonomy.

Governments were not anti-religion as their ceremonies often show. Their settlers had often come for freedom of religion, and so it had been decided that no particular religion should have preference.

In New Zealand state schools can be officially closed for half an hour a week to allow for religious instruction or “Bible in School.” This is organised by the “Church Education Commission,” made up of most of the Christian Churches of the country..

In Australia - Brian Hill of Murdoch University, Western Australia⁵⁵ writes of the “Wyndham Report” and the 1961 Education Act that included “spiritual values” in the eight components of a well-rounded education, but has fallen short by being too vaguely defined. It was found that a simple word count analysis of the Australian 1993 National Curriculum showed that religion was not mentioned in any of the references to the eight Key Learning Areas.(p32)

In Britain, Religious Education is recognised as a crucial part of the total education of the child and is a compulsory subject in state schools. The ability to teach the subject no longer depends on the teacher’s own convictions. He/she may be a Christian, a humanist or a member of another faith. The content of the syllabus is controlled by members of local religious groups, who decide together what is to be taught. The result is increasing tolerance and understanding amongst those who have been educated in this way.

Many European countries have similar systems, though most accept that more time is to be spent on the religion of the majority, which is usually some form of Christianity.

⁵⁴ Ninian Smart in *The religious experience of mankind*. 1969.

⁵⁵ Hill,B., (2000). Can state schools teach values? End games in public Education. In *Delta* 52 (1), pp 27-44.

In Islamic education it is believed that physical, mental and spiritual aspects are all required to cover the basic needs of human nature,⁵⁶ a philosophy that is similar to the western idea of a “sound mind in a sound body.”

Other religions encompass similar philosophies. These are examples of the common values we find, and that should bring people together and not divide them into compartments of any kind.

Most religions, including humanist philosophies, have special ideas and ethical standards to offer. By understanding what it would be like to be a follower of different religions or philosophies, young people have the opportunity to choose the best from all of them, and develop their own beliefs and philosophies accordingly.

The object of teaching *about* spirituality and religions is to increase tolerance and understanding. Respect for other people should mean that we will not deliberately offend them. It is also to show children what other people believe so that they will have open minds in forming their own beliefs. In state schools however, beliefs should never be taught as facts, no matter what the teacher him/herself may believe. “Christians believe – Moslems believe – Humanists believe,” is the way to speak.

Similarities –

There are many similarities between religions of all kinds. From the Zoroastrianism of ancient Persia (Iran) to the present day, most emphasize the conflict between darkness and light, between good and evil. Most have special people, special places, special writings, special art, special stories, special celebrations, special ceremonies and rituals, special rules and codes of conduct, and special traditions about the beginning of the world. In most religions there are special ceremonies associated with birth, marriage and death. For young people there are usually rites of passage that mark the step from childhood to becoming an adult and assuming the responsibilities of an adult within the group.

Criticism of religions –

1. Religion has been used and is still being used as an excuse for power struggles in the world.
2. Marx called religion “the opiate of the people,” because it encouraged them to accept their place in life and not fight to change the system that was oppressing them.
3. In some cases, the institutions and traditions that have grown up around the original teachings of religions, appear to have become more important than the teachings themselves, and have obscured the original teachings of their prophets..

Though these criticisms appear valid, this does not justify excluding teaching *about* religions from a school curriculum. In the case of Marx’s beliefs, removing religion from the equation did not bring the result he expected. One form of control of the people was only exchanged for another. Greed, envy, selfishness and apathy are common factors inside or outside religions. Greed for money and power is not confined to any one group of people, religious, agnostic or atheistic, brown or white.

Science and Religion –

By inventing weapons like swords and gunpowder and modern methods of mass destruction, science has brought as much suffering into the world as religion, but it has also brought much good.

Through the course of history religion has also brought good to millions of people, but like science, if used unwisely, it has brought pain and suffering also. Secular faiths like communism have brought more deaths than religion, 70 million it is claimed in China under Mao.

Science has learned a great deal over the last hundred years, but it still may have hold of only part of the truth. New technology abounds and who can foresee what will be available in the

⁵⁶ Rahman,A. (1992). Islamic education, *Al Muslim*. 1992 issue. Pp 13-15.

future. Spiritually, there may still be more to learn about an unseen force which so many people believe has communicated with humankind and which they believe, tries to guide it onward and upward. Science may find new ways of doing things, but to the question, “Can we do this?” spirituality may help to emphasise the ethical question, “Should we do this?”

By excluding knowledge of spirituality from education in schools, we may be closing a door that needs to remain open. Religion has been a powerful force for good in the world. It has given people strength and hope in their darkest hours. The retreat from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain spring to mind, and research today has found that people with religious beliefs are less stressed by misfortune. In extreme danger, even the non-religious often pray. Religion has inspired some of the world’s greatest art and literature. It has provided ethical codes that have been the basis for stable communities and many of our laws. If we understand more about the religions of others we will not be so easily led into fighting over them. The enemies are ignorance and minds that are closed to anything except their own ideologies.

Understanding religious beliefs and traditions helps in the understanding of other fields of education such as history, literature and art: why people wrote and painted as they did: why people were and are prepared to fight and die for their cause. Education *about* religions can show students what spirituality and religion mean to others, but such education should leave them free to choose for themselves the beliefs and values on which they will build their own lives.

Brian Hill, of Murdoch University, Western Australia, an acknowledged authority in the field of values education, states ‘Education may be seen to achieve its highest end to the degree that it enhances the fully human potential of learners --- For education to rise above mere indoctrination, the development of a personal value-complex, *must* include the study of the religious and other value traditions to which one’s culture and upbringing have been indebted.’⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Hill, B. (2000).*Delta* p42

The Future

We need hope for the future, and “Where there is a will there is always a way.”

Our cultures, like sandstone cliffs are eternally changing before the force of the storms and tides of the centuries, but the granite of underlying principles does not change. The same ethical principles for human behaviour that were recognised four or five thousand years ago, have the same effects on human lives today and are mathematical in their consistency.

The principle of cause and effect is no less true, whether it is connected to religion, “As you sow, so shall you reap,” or in science, as in “action and reaction are equal and opposite.” (Newton) Unless we choose to live on our own on a desert island, every day the things we choose to do affect other people. “Do what feels right to you at the time,” is one of the concepts of morality that is so appealing to many of the young today. Immediate pleasure seems more important than the possibility of unpleasant consequences at some later stage of life. After all, the unpleasant consequences might never happen. Consequences however are as reliable as mathematics, and though those personally involved at the time, may not be the ones to suffer, someone always pays. We only need to look at our environment and the pollution we have been causing, to see that it will be future generations who will pay. Are we really prepared to sacrifice our children and grandchildren on the altars of our own self-indulgence?

Sir Thomas Huxley, a champion of Darwin’s theory of evolution, claimed that though humans may have emerged from the same source as animal life, a human being alone possesses intelligible and rational speech, and remembers and learns from the past. That is not completely true. Animals remember the shock they receive from an electric fence – even elephants will avoid a single wire, but the young have to learn again for themselves. Humans learned to read and write and have access to the written evidence of the past. We should be able to learn from it. Huxley claimed that the fact that humans had come so far from lowly origins, was the “best evidence of the splendour” of human capacities and gave ground for faith in an even nobler future.⁵⁸ Darwin himself had the same views and also had hope for the future. “Looking to future generations, there is no cause to fear that the social instincts will grow weaker, and we may expect that virtuous habits will grow stronger, becoming perhaps fixed by inheritance.”⁵⁹ Huxley however also insisted that human society gave rise to moral insights that conflict with the “survival of the fittest,” and believed that ethical principles and social activities should be encouraged.

We have come a long way. We seem to be less racist, less chauvinistic where females are concerned, and less bigoted than we were a hundred years ago, but so far, there is no evidence that virtuous habits have become fixed by inheritance, though we know they can be instilled by example and by teaching children from a young age. As individuals, we all make mistakes in our lives, but we are not usually so foolish that we make the same mistake over and over again. A great deal depends on whether we have suffered personally from making the mistake and know that we will suffer again if we repeat our actions. With the extra knowledge and extra information available by now, with opportunities for travel and multicultural communities, mankind should really have reached the heights of its ethical reasoning also, but there seems to be more dishonesty and more violence. Adult crimes are being committed by younger and younger children. High I.Qs and low levels of ethical reasoning lead to more sophisticated methods of crime. The internet offers a new range of opportunities. If each new generation ignores the experience of the past and will only learn from its own mistakes, no progress will take place.

⁵⁸ From Huxley’s *Man’s place in nature*, (1863) in *Critical issues in modern religion*. (2nd ed) P 69

⁵⁹ From Darwin’s *Descent of man*, (1871) in *Critical issues in modern religion*. (2nd ed) P73.

Social studies education in our schools is intended to enable students to participate in a changing society as informed, confident and responsible citizens. New immigrants who plan to settle in a democratic country also need to become informed, confident and responsible citizens, but as Flyvbjerg has pointed out, bureaucracy and pressure groups have the power to decide what interpretation of events, or what knowledge, is considered to be important. Ideologies are passed on. It is difficult for new immigrants to comprehend the subtleties of complicated issues, but as Flyvbjerg points out, it can be dangerous for individuals, groups and societies when their capacity for value-rational deliberation is eroded - and he believes that today the erosion of such capacity seems to many to be rapidly taking place.⁶⁰

The consistent addition of ethical principles to the social inquiry process in schools could be very important to our future. New immigrants need to understand the simple ethical principles that have underpinned our society in the past. We should not lose sight of the principles that helped to make us a country to be proud of. "Pushing boundaries" is fine as long as they are being pushed in a direction that will make for a happier and more peaceful society, but "pushing boundaries" in directions that will cause harm to others needs to be questioned, not admired. Younger students need to be able to recognise the actions that work for good or harm in everyday living, and senior students need to go on from there to understand "the system" and how to include ethical principles in decision making in the work they will do, in the process of democracy, and in the treatment of the environment..

In examining existing values, customs or traditions it is important not to criticize or condemn any group. We cannot alter the past, but we can have an effect on the future. No person or race is perfect and nobody *will* be perfect, but most of us could do better in our lives, and try to leave the world a better place for our having been here and not a worse one. Love and good-will are like perennial plants just waiting for the right conditions in which to grow and flourish. In emergencies or disasters people are quick to help others in need. We just need to recognise the weeds that harm other people and add to their stress, and we need to do our best to clear them away. If children can be taught from a young age that they need to think about the effect of their actions on other people, that they need to be fair, to be honest and to be kind, society must benefit in the long run. In a country with many ethnic groups and new immigrants, some of the values and traditions of all our pasts may need to be left behind as we move into a multi-cultural future.

It is hoped that this simple method of using ethical principles in the process of social inquiry and in our everyday lives will give teachers confidence and consistency in the ethical dimension of the social sciences. It is hoped that it will also be of use to parents and members of our multi-cultural community in understanding how ethical decisions can consistently be made. No one ethical theory will satisfy every ethicist, but this pluralistic method of ethical reasoning has been used in the classroom and found to be simple and effective. It evolved from issues that arose in the classroom and the community. It was designed to be pupil friendly, teacher friendly, parent friendly, and a method worth teaching. As the ethicist Beauchamp said, "A theory is pragmatically justified if it gets you there more often than not"⁶¹ and that is what the use of ethical principles will do.

⁶⁰ Flyvbjerg, B. (2001). *Making Social Science Matter.* p 168

⁶¹ Beauchamp, T., (1991). *Philosophical Ethics*, (p89.)

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The sacred writings of the major religions have also been used for reference and information.

OTHER TITLES BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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