

Section 2

Principles for a Meaningful Life

ANDREW WILSON

CHARACTER IS NOT A SKILL ONE LEARNS, NOT A BEHAVIOR ONE chooses to do in a particular situation, but is an aspect of one's very self. Built up through experience, education and self-authorship, character only grows to the extent that a person lives out his or her values and ideals. It is linked to a sense of personal meaning and purpose—which in this context can be summarized as three basic life goals: personal maturity, loving relationships and family, and contribution to society.

At the same time, the fruitful pursuit of these goals is not arbitrary. While human beings are to a large extent the architects of their own character and destiny, attaining mature character and a satisfying, productive life requires conscious effort tempered by wisdom. One aspect of wisdom is understanding the universal principles operative at the root of human existence as individuals and as social beings. Disregard for them leads to frustration and isolation. Respecting them leads to fulfillment, personal integrity and a positive outlook on life.

Likewise, satisfying and lasting relationships do not happen automatically. Wisdom about the principles of good relationships can guide people in general, and especially parents and educators who are responsible to raise young people to find happiness in their relationships with others. The capacity for caring and the competencies to get along well with others are cultivated in the family, which is called the "school of love," as well as in the larger worlds of school, work and community. By

the same token, the life objective of making a social contribution requires understanding ethical norms; these can make the difference between a genuine contribution and mere self-seeking.

Adherence to universal principles is not to be confused with simple rule-following. Having focused on love as the core motivating force of moral development, it is understood that principles function mainly as guidelines for the realization of an individual's fullest potential as a moral person, a loving person, and a productive member of society.

6

Universal Principles

The laws governing human behavior are not invented by us or by society; they are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and human organizations.... These principles are woven into the fabric of every civilized society and constitute the roots of every family and institution that has endured and prospered.

—Stephen Covey¹

IN HIS BOOK *PRINCIPLE-CENTERED LEADERSHIP*, STEPHEN COVEY examines the moral principles that undergird every successful and enduring human institution. He criticizes the modern fashion of re-inventing society based on the “improved” values advocated by the latest social theory. Such social engineering inevitably fails, he believes, because it ignores the fact that human life is grounded in unchangeable principles; principles as inexorable as the laws of nature.² A baby’s need for love and affection from her parents is as unchangeable a reality of life as the law of gravity.

Natural law—the idea that the principles governing nature trace out the way for people to live in accordance with their own inherent nature—has guided philosophers and thinkers East and West. (See Chapter 3) The neo-Confucian philosopher Chu Hsi wrote, “If we wish to carry our knowledge [of how to cultivate the self] to the utmost, we must investigate the principles of all things we encounter, for there is not a single thing that lacks an inherent principle.”³

Humans, as rational beings, are not strictly determined by the laws of matter. They are not impelled by brute instinct, as animals are when they feed and mate. Humans have free will. Speaking of love, for example, psychologist M. Scott Peck said, "True love is not a feeling by which we are overwhelmed. It is a committed, thoughtful decision."⁴

Nevertheless, nature and its governing principles provide the background and context for human decisions. For example, the human body is constituted by nature to need protection from the cold. Someone may choose to work outdoors on a frigid winter day without wearing an overcoat, but as a consequence he is likely to become sick. A healthy lifestyle is not instinctive; mothers teach their children about the habits of good health.

By the same token, there are natural and universal principles governing a person's pursuit of a meaningful and moral life and satisfying relationships with others. These principles lie at the root of human existence as individuals and as social beings. Disregard for them leads to frustration and isolation. Respecting them leads to personal fulfillment and lasting love. As natural as these principles are, understanding and applying them does not come naturally to people. Education helps people exercise their uniquely human freedom and responsibility to do so.

Seven Universal Principles and Their Application to the Human Condition

(These are discussed at length in the following chapters.)

Growth

Natural Principle

Entities develop in stages from a seed to their mature form. With favorable conditions—ample sunshine, water and good soil—a seed, which contains the plant's genetic blueprint, sprouts into a seedling and grows into a fruit-bearing plant. The grown plant manifests the full potential latent in the seed.

Application

There are predictable stages in the growth of character and in the development of a person's capacity to love. With love and the proper education, a child's innate potential for goodness can blossom into mature character.

Complementarity

Natural Principle

All entities in nature exist as a paired structure, and each attracts its complement to form paired relationships. Examples include anions and cations, male and female, stamen and pistil. Nature is replete with complementary opposites—hot and cold, light and darkness, high and low, etc. Things also are composed of external and internal dimensions, as an animal and its instinct, a computer and its program, an atom and its quantum state.

Application

The complementarity between male and female is evident in the universal human tendency to form families. Moreover, individual human existence deals with two dimensions—mind (consciousness) and body (material existence)—that generally reflect one another.

Interaction

Natural Principle

Two entities form a relationship and solidify it through giving and receiving elements of themselves. Through interaction, the entities unite and produce the forces needed to exist and act. In physics, electromagnetic forces are produced through the interaction of photons.

Application

The Golden Rule, "Treat others as you would wish others to treat you," is a moral principle underlying lasting and harmonious relationships. Training in reflective listening and other communication skills that facilitate good giving and receiving improves relationships of all kinds. Economies thrive through the fair exchanges of goods and services.

Distinct Roles

Natural Principle

Relative and distinct positions are established in the course of any interaction. Animal communities establish distinct roles: the queen bee, drones and worker bees; the alpha male in the wolf pack and subordinate males, to give two examples. Conflict is avoided as long as each animal keeps its position.

Application

Negotiating roles and keeping to them is a critical, if under-appreciated, factor in maintaining harmonious relationships. Good etiquette recognizes the role of each person in a relationship. Effective managers clarify the responsibility of each member of an organization and respect those positions.

Situatedness in Time and Space

Natural Principle

A being is situated in three dimensions—horizontally among other entities on its own plane, and vertically with respect to time and the succession of cause and effect. A tree, for example, is situated within a forest that is in a centuries-long process of succession from scrubland to mature forest. At the same time, each year the tree provides nesting-sites and shade for the fauna and flora of the forest community.

Application

The norms of a “vertical” relationship between parent and child are different from those of a “horizontal” relationship between friends the same age. Moreover, each person exists not only as an individual within a society of his peers but also as a link in a historical lineage extending from the distant past to the future.

Purpose

Natural Principle

Entities manifest purpose, and their interactions are founded upon a common purpose. Most animal behavior is purposeful: for survival and propagation of the species. Only in human beings does purpose become a conscious choice.

Application

A moral life is strengthened by a sense of meaning and purpose. One factor in the strength of relationships, such as a family, is the depth of a shared purpose.

Hierarchy

Natural Principle

Individual beings uphold interdependent hierarchies of existence and are sustained within them. Examples include the hierarchy of cells, tissues and organs in the human body, and the hierarchy of living things, from soil microorganisms to dominant predators in an ecosystem.

Application

Humans are members of a social hierarchy. Participation in the social order adds a greater dimension of meaning and value to life. The values of patriotism and charity are rooted in a benevolent social order. So is the value of work well done.

7

The Path to Personal Maturity

GLORIA WORKED AS A WAITRESS IN A COFFEE SHOP IN RALEIGH, North Carolina. On the surface of it, hers was a nondescript, unremarkable life. She had not even finished high school. But when she died suddenly, over two hundred people attended her funeral. Her step-daughter gave the eulogy, recalling how her mother had accepted and nurtured her when she was a rebellious teenager and had changed her life. The mailman spoke up, remembering the cookies she had baked for him. The people who turned out for Gloria's funeral in such numbers were all people whose lives had been touched by this simple woman with a generous heart, who was ever reaching out to make life better for others.

Kevin Ryan uses the metaphor that character is engraved on the self, like a sculptor shaping and polishing a stone to reveal its innate beauty and create a fine statue.¹ A person's very life becomes a work of art as he or she consciously practices good habits that deepen the mind and beautify the heart. Gloria had cultivated her character through thousands of small acts of giving and helping, until giving and helping became an ingrained habit. In the same vein, Abraham Maslow spoke of life as a process of "self-actualization." Confucius termed it "self-cultivation."

Aristotle defined good character as the inner disposition conducive to right conduct. This definition is particularly cogent, because it defines

character as an inner property of personhood. This means that character is not a skill one learns, not a behavior one chooses to do in a particular situation, but is an aspect of one's very self. Character begins with innate capacities and is built up through experience and training. It grows to the extent that a person lives out his or her professed values. Character is self-embodied knowledge. A good or integrated character—in which the person's subconscious habits and conscious ideals are somehow aligned—may bring wisdom and a deep sense of personal meaning and purpose.

Character and Personality

There is a significant distinction between "character" and "personality." Personality is unique. It varies from person to person, as do talents, gifts and abilities. Character, on the other hand, refers specifically to moral qualities, and these are universal. All people can embody the virtues to the extent that they make effort to practice them.

Ethicist Steven Tigner illustrates this distinction using the Seven Dwarfs in the Disney movie *Snow White* as an example. Each dwarf illustrated a distinct personality type. In the old-fashioned language of the four "humors," Grumpy is choleric, Happy is sanguine, Sleepy is phlegmatic and Bashful is melancholic. Doc is gifted, Dopey is mentally slow and Sneezly is constantly sick. Yet despite their different personalities, all seven dwarfs were unified in character. They were hardworking, reliable, loyal, cooperative, tolerant, compassionate and brave. They sang together, worked together, and fought together to protect the special guest whom they graciously welcomed into their house.²

People of limited moral development tend to select their friends on the basis of personality. A morally aware person prefers friends of good character.

Pathways of Character Development

The human body forms as an embryo in the womb, grows through the childhood years and eventually matures physically into an adult. As with animals and plants generally, the body's growth is automatic.

A seed germinates and becomes a sprout, a growing sapling, and finally becomes a mature tree yielding fruit. The design of the mature tree lies latent within the seed. As long as the proper nutrients are supplied—sunlight, water, clean air and rich soil—growth follows according to the seed's innate design and the laws of nature. Animals likewise grow to maturity and bear offspring according to the innate pattern written into their genes and unfolding in their instinctive drives.

The inner aspect of a human being—character—also possesses innate tendencies that guide its development. The love of parents and the guidance of good teachers are input for the growth of the young person internally, just as food, water and air nourish the body externally. As he or she grows, the response to this input becomes more and more a matter of choice and will. Therefore, unlike the body, character does not grow automatically. Observing the great disparity in people's character, it is evident that moral development is not obtained except by making conscious effort and investment.

Psychology describes an optimal developmental pathway for moral development through a sequence of stages.³ Yet how far a person progresses on this pathway is variable, depending on upbringing, education, and the person's own efforts. Every person is endowed with a heart and conscience, providing a natural orientation towards morality and goodness. When the heart is nurtured in its aspiration for genuine love, and the conscience is supported by good choices in daily life, these moral faculties grow into the organizing center of a confident moral self with a strong sense of life's responsibilities. Psychologists Anne Colby and William Damon describe this process as the "progressive formation of a sense of self around a moral center."⁴ On the other hand, without proper rearing and upright living, a person's moral development may take one of the many "sub-optimal paths" which lead to stagnation.⁵

Tom, a well-educated and respected businessman and father of twin boys six-year-old, would fly into a rage every time the boys would not listen to him. Scared for their children's welfare, Tom's wife insisted he go for help. Through time and effort, Tom was able to change and learn how to

process his anger and frustration in healthier ways. In therapy, Tom realized that his behavior had always been like this from childhood. When he could not get his way, he would act irrationally because as a child that was the only way he could get attention from his parents. Although Tom had received two college degrees and was very successful financially, this aspect of character remained “stuck” at an immature stage.

Examples abound of adults like Tom whose character has not grown past that of a child. Therapists routinely find that patients deal with unresolved conflicts that are a direct result of difficulties experienced in childhood. They are held back by immature emotional needs that were never outgrown, even though their bodies reached adulthood. (See Chapters 14 and 17)

Much of character development is about people expanding their awareness of others’ needs. It involves enlarging their sense of self from a limited bodily sphere to encompass family, friends and others in society. This process begins in early childhood. Babies are inherently self-centered. Their world revolves around their bodily needs. As they grow, so does their consciousness of the world around them. They begin to have relationships with others, and in so doing they learn responsibilities and codes of behavior. They learn to respect others. They learn to share.

The importance of parental values and nurturing early in life for later character development cannot be overstated. When parents and teachers cultivate the hearts of their children and students by their warm care and nurture, they enhance their capacity for caring and compassion. The child’s conscience develops first through following parental rules; later these rules become internalized as a personal moral code. Over time, the child identifies her personal goals with moral ones and expands her sphere of concerns and relationships.

Responsibility and Character

In adolescence and in adulthood, character development focuses more and more upon fulfilling responsibility. Indeed, responsibility is the key distinction between the growth of the body and the growth of character. Responsibility is as inexorable and immutable as any law of nature. Jean Paul Sartre once said, “Man is responsible for everything except his responsibility.”

Responsibility is defined as being answerable for one's actions. To whom is a person answerable? There are obligations to parents, spouse, children, friends and neighbors, and to self. To encourage teenagers to realize that their every action and even their attitudes have consequences for the lives of others, one character education text offers the following exercise:

Look at any situation you're in as if it were a stage play, with you as one of the actors. Every one of your actions and attitudes helps write the script for that play, whether you see it or not and whether you like it or not. If what you contribute to the script is anger, blame, cynicism, fear or hopelessness, then you push the final act of the play in that direction. On the other hand, if the behavior and attitudes you bring to that situation are caring, courageous and hopeful, you'll influence events in that direction.⁶

An individual's ability to fulfill responsibilities depends upon preparation and training. Even highly motivated and naturally gifted people cannot fully express their talents without rigorous training and practice. A musician is responsible to himself, his audience and his art to allow sufficient time for practice and prepare himself mentally before each performance. Likewise, Aristotle compared learning moral uprightness to learning a skill. "We learn by doing, e.g., men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre, so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts." He points out that people can equally well learn bad habits by repeatedly doing acts that are unjust, cowardly, ill-tempered or self-indulgent. He concludes, "Whether we form habits of one kind or another from our very youth... makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference."⁷

Purpose of Responsibility

What is the purpose of responsibility? Raymond is exercising responsibility in order to complete a job. So is Carmen when she is resolving a personal problem or caring for another person. In either case, the exercise of responsibility enables the person to demonstrate his or her intrinsic value.

Indeed, responsibility is a special privilege of human beings. Animals are driven by instinct; only humans are faced with moral choices. Human beings are unique among all of nature in that they exercise responsibility in the course of their development. In so doing, they become the architects of their own character. Thus, responsibility is essential to the full flowering of a person's humanity.

Responsibility is also a qualification for enjoying rights and privileges. Doctors, for example, earn the right to practice medicine only after they have fulfilled their responsibility to gain a medical degree and professional license. Wealthy parents who want to leave a sizeable inheritance to their children look for evidence of responsible character lest the fruits of their hard work be squandered or mishandled.⁸ Thus, fulfilling responsibility is the means to gain authority, rights, privileges and the freedoms that go with them.

Freedom: Opportunity for Responsibility

Indeed, freedom and responsibility are tightly interconnected. Just as responsibility earns freedom, so freedom is a prerequisite for responsibility. In law, a judgment of responsibility assumes freedom as a moral agent; thus Francesca is not legally responsible for hurting her neighbor if she is pushed and knocked into him. Likewise in moral development, freedom is the context for practicing responsibility.

A child's moral development requires a measured amount of freedom to provide opportunities for responsibility. Young people need freedom to practice what they have been taught, to test boundaries and learn from experience. An effective math teacher welcomes wrong answers and employs them in lessons to encourage creative problem solving. An ineffective teacher, on the other hand, might inspire fear in students that would inhibit them from suggesting an incorrect answer. These students may turn in accurate work in terms of content but may not understand the implications and applicability of math in real life. They have not learned creative and independent thinking. From this standpoint, it can be said that without freedom, a young person's potential—moral and otherwise—cannot be realized.

However, with too much freedom, a child may fail to learn responsibility and stray into destructive pursuits.⁹ It is useful to distinguish genuine freedom from irresponsible freedom or license. It is obvious that if people took the license to ignore traffic laws, fatal accidents would

become commonplace. In the same way, indulging the young can lead to bad habits, exploitative relationships and high-risk behaviors.

The great challenge parents and teachers face is to give young people sufficient freedom within proper boundaries. Thus, they welcome their children's use of the wide-ranging, educational explorations possible on the Internet, but at the same time they would like to block out pornographic and violent websites. It is the right balance of obligations and opportunities that is most conducive to responsible choices and sound character development.

Setting Priorities

The proper exercising of responsibility demands not only discerning right from wrong but also the better of two rights. In other words, deciding priorities is a perennial challenge. Practical necessities and emergencies—making dinner, repairing the car, tending a sick child—tend to make a dominant claim on an individual's sense of responsibility. However, these are what personal development coaches like Anthony Robbins call "urgent but not important." The secret to ultimately fulfilling life's responsibilities is to attend to those matters that are "important but not urgent," what Covey calls "sharpening the saw."¹⁰ This includes such things as regular exercise, time set aside for reflection, and thoughtful gestures towards spouse, family and friends. These activities maintain the personal and relational resources needed to realize cherished long-term goals as well as to better deal with problems as they develop. People pressed by the urgent affairs of the day may put these matters off, only to find weeks or months later that they are faced with serious health problems, relationship difficulties or other crises of major proportions.

Rafael, a middle-aged technician, had not seen what happened; he awoke in a hospital bed Saturday afternoon. The nurse told him of the accident—a car had run the red light as he crossed the street. He would need to spend weeks in bed. Rafael suddenly thought of his aging mother who lived with him. Who brought her food last night? What about his cat? The deadline at work? When he found the strength he called his house. The neighbor downstairs answered his phone. After updating her about his prognosis, he asked about his mother. "Oh, don't worry, Rafael. I'm visiting with her right now, after I heard what happened. I'll check in with her every day and make sure she is fed, and the cat, too.

I'm just returning the favor you did for me when I had to stay three extra weeks in Brazil two years ago, remember? Don't worry." At work his co-workers were willing to cover for him; he had done it for them many times. Rafael was a proactive person. He took care of the "important but not urgent" moments when other people needed him, and thus prepared forces to come to his aid when he faced his own "important and urgent" dilemma. Likewise, it takes daily diligence and self-discipline to resist the seemingly expedient and to give matters of character and love the priority they deserve.

Self-Control

A fundamental responsibility and essential element in the development of mature character is self-control. The moral will to delay gratification, resist unhealthy attractions, and suppress the body's impulses is crucial to optimal life development.¹¹

In a revealing study, preschoolers were given a choice of eating one marshmallow right away or holding out for fifteen minutes in order to get two marshmallows. Some youngsters ate the treat right away. Others distracted themselves—looked away, buried their heads on their desks or counted fingers—to control their bodies from grabbing the treat. They were duly rewarded with two marshmallows. A follow-up study when the children graduated from high school found that those who delayed gratification grew up to be more confident, persevering, trustworthy, and had better social competencies; while the grabbers were more troubled, resentful, jealous, anxious and easily upset.¹²

People with a developed moral sense tend to follow their conscience and endeavor to act in the interests of others and for the sake of causes beyond themselves. In the process, they place long-term goals ahead of immediate gratification and channel their impulses toward constructive ends. Conversely, those with weak character favor selfish needs ahead of obligations to others. With conscience weakened from lack of use, they may develop a negative belief system that rationalizes this behavior. As one 14-year-old juvenile delinquent said, "I was born with the idea that I'd do what I wanted. I always felt that rules and regulations were not for me."¹³

Most people fall somewhere between these two poles. Sometimes they are generous and kind; at other times they are self-absorbed and

uncaring. A mother who cares the world for her children may suddenly erupt in anger at the slightest provocation after a long day. Under the stress of losing a key account, a usually kind and friendly boss may take out his frustration on his employees.

The human experience is that people do many things they know they should not do and immediately regret them. In the deepest part of themselves they wish to take the long view and seek what is truthful and just, but this innate good sense can be overwhelmed by negative passions and desires. James Q. Wilson remarks,

Our selfish desires and moral capacities are at war with one another, and often the former triumphs over the latter. However great this war may be and no matter how often we submerge our better instincts in favor of our baser ones, we are almost always able, in our calm and disinterested moments, to feel the tug of our better nature.¹⁴

To win this inner war requires the habit of self-discipline. The power of the conscience is strengthened through education to a greater vision of the self; its muscle is exercised through continual practice of good deeds. At the same time, self-centered desires are curbed and controlled. William Bennett writes, "In self-discipline one makes a 'disciple' of oneself. One is one's own teacher, trainer, coach and 'disciplinarian.'"¹⁵ Extensive research reveals that adolescents who have learned self-discipline enjoy increased self-confidence, affording them greater resistance to the appeal of negative peer groups. These teenagers are less likely to cut classes or abuse drugs or alcohol. They have less anxiety and depression and perform better in school.¹⁶ A positive attitude toward discipline leads to respect for legitimate social institutions and civil laws.

The Mind-Body Dynamic

The source of this struggle lies in the dynamic relationship between a person's mind and body through which character is forged. The body is an integral part of the self; it has legitimate needs and desires. Still, it plays a supportive role to the human mind, which guides it in purposeful activity. The challenge of character development is to set up the appropriate order between mind and body, so that both can function optimally.

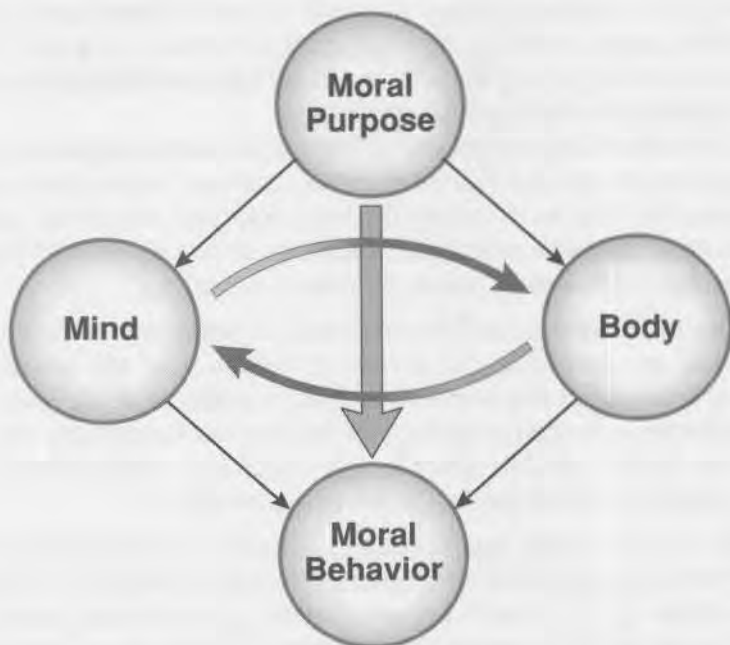


Figure 4: The Mind-Body Dynamic

In a person of mature character, the inner self—the heart and conscience—directs the outer person—the body and its behavior. They work in partnership, inner and outer, the mind seeking value and the body realizing value. The focus of their partnership is the higher purpose toward which they move.

Attaining that mature state requires training in self-control in order to establish the correct relationship between these two dimensions of the self. Particularly in adolescence, the body's impulses can rage out of control. They can be overpowering to a young and impulsive mind that does not have a sense of higher purpose or vision of life's goals. This is one reason why young people need activities that can focus and channel their bodies' overflowing energy towards worthy goals, whether they be sports, academic achievement, putting on musical or dramatic performances, community service projects or entrepreneurial enterprises.

Inner and Outer Self

The mind-body dynamic in human beings is an instance of a more general duality of inner and outer natures that characterizes all beings. Aristotle termed these two dimensions *eidos* (idea) and *hylē* (matter). Indian philosophy calls them *purusha* (spirit) and *prakriti* (matter-energy). The inner nature of a being endows it with purpose and direction and commands its outer form. Animals move their bodies in a purposive manner as directed by their instinctive mind. Plants likewise exhibit sensitivity and responsiveness to their environment by virtue of the invisible life within them.

Inner and outer natures are not incommensurate substances; each contains an aspect of the other. Otherwise, they could not interact.¹⁷ The body has emotion and volition just as the mind does, only at a lower level. The mind possesses inner sight and intuition that complement the body's five senses. The Chinese yin-yang symbol pictures this duality well: within the yin is a spot of yang, and within the yang is a spot of yin, showing that they inhere in each other.

The mental and physical aspects of animals are in natural harmony, with the mind's instinctive impulses directing the body's behavior towards purposeful action. Humans ideally exhibit this same dynamic; but unlike animals, it is not obtained automatically. People need to practice self-control to achieve a beautifully ordered mind-body dynamic.

Worthwhile and achievable goals provide the motivation needed to maintain a healthy mind-body dynamic. Consider Florence Chadwick, who in 1952 attempted to be the first woman to swim from Catalina Island to the California coast. She had been swimming for sixteen hours in a fog so dense she could hardly see her support boats. She struggled on, hour after hour, against the frigid grip of the sea. Alongside her in one of the boats her mother and trainer offered encouragement, telling her that land wasn't far off. But all she could see was fog. With only a half mile to go, she asked to be pulled out.

Still thawing out her chilled body several hours later, Florence told a reporter, "Look, I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen land I might have made it." It was not fatigue or the cold water that defeated her, but her inability to see her goal. Two months later, she tried again. This time, despite the same dense fog, she swam with her goal clearly pictured in her mind. This time she succeeded, beating the men's record by two hours.¹⁸ People can mobilize tremendous powers of self-discipline when they can sustain the vision of reaching a meaningful goal.

Meaning and Maturity

As the example of the swimmer illustrates, possessing a clear goal and meaningful purpose supports the development of self-control. In fact, purpose and meaning are important factors in their own right for character development. Psychologist Erik Erikson taught that attaining maturity required satisfying the self's natural proclivity for meaning.¹⁹ Empirical research confirms this.²⁰ A strong sense of meaning in life has been found to correlate positively with self-esteem and self-control,²¹ extraversion,²² and general psychological well-being.²³ A study of unusually altruistic adults found that they stood out from the general population in seeing a greater meaning for their lives than personal happiness, achievement or gain.²⁴

Many people are by nature task-oriented and achieve little in life without setting goals and making priorities. Educator Deb Brown believes that people who set down their goals in writing achieve 50 to 100 times more than those without goals do.²⁵ Goals and motivation are closely related,²⁶ especially in academic and personal matters. Studies show the clearer the goal, the greater the motivation for achievement.²⁷ Many people set tangible goals in terms of career development and financial security and then labor hard to achieve them. However, when they accomplish these things, they may recognize that their ladder of success is "leaning up against the wrong wall."²⁸

A clear sense of meaning and purpose is a constant guide on life's path. It can motivate praiseworthy and even heroic behavior, or impart the inner strength needed to overcome adversity.²⁹ Victor Frankl, a psychologist who spent years in a Nazi concentration camp, reported, "Whether the inmate had the courage to live or became sick and tired

of life always depended just upon whether the person could see meaning in his personal life...meaning had to be deep enough to embrace not only life but suffering and even death."³⁰

In adolescence, the question of meaning in life becomes a major concern. The activity of making meaning can become an idealistic quest for truth and principles of justice, or a choice to live for mundane ends like the pursuit of wealth. Effective parents and teachers recognize this search for meaning and channel it in positive directions, towards significant life goals. They can ask teenagers to look around at people they know and ask, "Are they leading meaningful lives?" John Graham, director of the Giraffe Project, believes that this question is important for adolescents to consider because, "We want to be able to look at ourselves in the mirror and know that who we are and what we're doing matters, that we're not just marking time. We want to feel a purpose for our lives that fulfills our yearning for meaning and makes us feel totally alive."³¹

Balanced Character

Mature character is balanced character. According to Thomas Lickona, character has three primary components: moral feeling, moral knowing, and moral action.³² In a person of mature character, these three moral faculties are well developed and balanced. Moral feeling, moral knowing and moral action operate together in the expression of altruistic love. An individual's ability to act with genuine caring is only as strong as the weakest trait among these three components.

Consider the scene that confronted 39-year-old Brent Burkett as he was out driving with his family. Two teenagers were frantically waving from the roadside, pointing to a rubber raft caught under a concrete bridge and yelling that a woman was trapped beneath it. Burkett stopped his car and assessed the situation; then he borrowed a hunting knife and swam out into the cold water. "Don't drop the knife, don't drop the knife," he told himself as he slashed underwater to puncture the raft and liberate its occupant. For his heroism he received a medal, and he made a friend for life.³³

Brent's heart mind, and will worked together to effect the rescue. Consider what might have happened if he had lacked in one of these three faculties. If he had little empathy for others, then most likely he

would have driven on, considering it someone else's problem. What if he had the heart to help, but lacked the will to drive himself into the cold water? What if he rushed to the rescue but could not keep his head enough to procure the all-important knife? If any of these factors had been missing, the woman would not have survived. Therefore, on the path to maturity, consideration is given to developing and honing each of these three faculties.

Moral Feeling

Moral feeling means moral emotional sensibility. At the core of emotional awareness is empathy: the ability to feel another's heart, understand another's situation, and care about another's welfare.

Empathy is one of the fundamental moral emotions;³⁴ it is basic to the definition of being human. A person with empathy takes the reality of other persons seriously, their inner lives and emotions as well as their external circumstances. Empathy is necessarily linked with compassion, caring and altruism.³⁵ It generates fellowship and sharing. A person with empathy sees in his neighbor another person like himself.

In the aftermath of the devastating 1995 earthquake in Kobe, Japan, an American reporter met a local woman who had set up a makeshift store out of boxes and was selling flashlights and batteries. The reporter asked why she wasn't selling these essential items for more than the regular price. The woman answered, "Why would I want to profit from someone else's suffering?"³⁶

A second aspect of moral feeling is an innate sense of righteousness: loving the good and rejecting the bad. This moral sense produces a visceral reaction to injustice as one would react to a foul odor or a repugnant sight. This quality of moral feeling is often poorly developed, however. A high school teacher in Bristol, Connecticut asked his class whether cheating is right or wrong, and everyone agreed, "It is wrong." But when he polled them, "How many of you have cheated in the last four years?" the majority raised their hands. Although they believed that cheating is wrong, it seemed that they didn't feel its wrongfulness deep inside. They lacked a strong love of goodness—or indignation at its absence. Developed moral feeling fuels the motivation to act morally—with heartfelt concern, sincerity and zeal.

Moral Knowing

Moral knowing refers to the use of the intellect for moral discernment. It encompasses the virtues of wisdom, honesty, prudence and self-reflection. On the simplest level, moral knowing is the ability to discern right from wrong. More developed, it includes honesty to face oneself and others squarely, in order to make an accurate assessment of one's inner and outer situation. Aristotle wrote, "Anyone can get angry—that is easy—or to give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right aim, and in the right way, that is not for every one, nor is it easy."³⁷ This life wisdom is quite different from the type of intelligence measured by IQ tests.

Part of moral knowing is prudence in dealing with others. For example, moral knowing aids Kevin, age 10, who had just moved into a new neighborhood, to discern who might be a good friend. Tex invited Kevin to join in playing a prank on the biology teacher. Kevin began to fidget as he listened to the plan to soap up the teacher's new car. "Well, it's just soap," he thought, "It's not like it's slashing tires or breaking glass." But then he remembered how proud his Dad was when he bought his new car and imagined how upset he would have been to find it smeared with soap. Dad was always talking about respecting others' property, too. Tex and his friends seemed to accept Kevin into the group, and Kevin knew that he would risk their friendship if he backed out of the prank. "Uh...my Dad would ground me for a month if he found out about this, and besides I have something else to do." Kevin left and walked slowly home, telling himself that there are other ways to make friends.

Moral Action

Moral action means the moral directing of the will. It is the capacity to pursue goodness even under difficult circumstances. Its virtues include integrity, self-control, courage and endurance. Courage is "a settled disposition to stand one's ground, to advance or retreat as wisdom dictates...facing fears and taking stands."³⁸

In order to find and maintain courage to do what is right, a person can remind himself of the meaning of the event. Keeping focused on the goal can enable a person to face his fears. Brent Burkett clearly demonstrated courage when he risked his own life to save the woman trapped under the raft in the flooded river. Another kind of courage involves

taking social risks—losing face with peers, for example—to maintain a principled stand. Kevin showed that kind of courage when he walked away from Tex and his gang.

Moral fiber, like muscle fiber, is built up by daily habit, by the constant small choices to do the right thing despite fear, pain or fatigue. In this regard, wise parents and educators give their children challenges and allow them to encounter adversity as occasions to toughen their moral fiber and develop inner strength of will. (See Chapters 11 and 22)

Personal Maturity — The First Basic Life Goal

Attaining a mature and admirable character requires conscious, informed effort. This is a human being's unique responsibility—to be the architect of his or her own destiny. The inner thrust toward attaining personal maturity is such that it may be called one of life's basic goals. Why is it a goal worth striving for?

First, achieving personal maturity satisfies an innate drive—the drive for meaning, wholeness, poise and self-worth. Lingering feelings of anxiety, dissatisfaction and meaninglessness can plague those who fail to achieve it. Thus, it is deeply rewarding in itself.

But there is an even better reason to strive for personal maturity: it is the best foundation for success in all areas of life. People who have cultivated integrity and the habit of responsibility in their personal affairs are well equipped to deal with family issues and social responsibilities. Neither wealth nor power nor technical skill can replace the essential personal asset of good character. Stephen Covey remarks:

Creating the unity necessary to run an effective business or a family or a marriage requires great personal strength and courage. No amount of technical administrative skill in laboring for the masses can make up for lack of nobility or personal character.... It is at a very essential, one-on-one level that we live the primary laws of love and life. A sense of purpose, empathy, self-control, courage and other assets of mature character are needed to master the[se] challenges.³⁹

8

Dynamics of Loving Relationships

How far you go in life depends on you being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these.

—George Washington Carver

LOVING AND BEING LOVED IS A BASIC HUMAN NEED. PEOPLE THRIVE on the joy that comes from loving relationships of all kinds: the warm concern of a mother's love, the camaraderie of siblings, close friends who can share their deepest secrets, and the special intimacy of conjugal love in marriage. Loving relationships are a basic life goal; they are essential to realizing our value and true humanity. Take away love, and life's journey loses vitality. Yet satisfying and lasting relationships do not happen automatically.

It was mentioned that the family is the primary school of love, where the capacity for warmth, caring and commitment is cultivated. Parents are in a position to nurture the seeds of goodness in their children by giving them affirmation, support, protection and encouragement. With warm affection balanced with moral discipline, they impart

the values and habits that make for success in forming good relationships. (See Chapter 22)

Schools can helpfully supplement parents' efforts through a comprehensive character education program that creates a caring home-like atmosphere in the classroom and throughout the school. (See Chapter 12) Family connectedness—a feeling of closeness to parents and of being loved—and school connectedness—a school with a family ethos—are two factors shown to be protective of teens becoming involved in high-risk behaviors.¹ Young people who experience a caring and loving environment at home and at school accumulate valuable character assets for forming healthy relationships throughout life.

In addition, there are objective rules that can be applied to forming good relationships. As Eric Fromm says, there is an art to loving. Making and maintaining loving relationships requires the skillful practice of ethical principles.

Relationships Build upon Ethics

Most people understand that love is the key to good relationships; nevertheless, the word "love" is frequently misunderstood. It is commonly equated with the passionate feelings of romance. Pursuing "love" is thought to mean acting as prompted by the affections. Yet on further reflection, it is evident that lasting love cannot result from passions that blow hot and cold or emotions that rise and fall. To impart a coherent understanding of love necessitates dispelling the common misconceptions promulgated by music, television and movies. "True love" defines an ideal that can focus the discussion of relationships on their ethical foundations.

True love is firstly a moral ideal. (See Chapter 4) Its practice lies in living to be of service to the other. It is an attitude of the heart accompanied by altruistic acts that engender trust, respect, intimacy and harmony.

Love in this sense is not solely or primarily experienced in romantic liaisons. It has many forms and varied expressions. Love includes the attachment of children to parents, the loyalty and solidarity among friends, the sacrificial investment by parents to provide a brighter future for their children, the caring that is characteristic of the helping professions, and more.

Such relationships where love blossoms and thrives are cultivated with effort, care and investment. Success in forming and keeping them requires observing certain norms—such as fulfilling obligations, living up to commitments, and observing proper manners.

At the same time, people hope that their siblings, friends and spouses will not only be loyal and dependable, but also interesting and fun. Ethical principles are like the skeleton upon which warm-hearted relationships grow. In turn, a rewarding friendship takes on a life of its own and becomes the natural inducement to fairness: "I wouldn't lie to him; he's my friend!" Yet take away ethics, and even the closest friendship would be strained.

It can be concluded that the very purpose of ethics is to foster love and harmony between people. It begins with the norms of family life and extends to relationships of all kinds. All loving relationships display certain basic characteristics. The qualities that make for a vibrant and lasting relationship are not arbitrary; they are grounded in universal principles.

To Be of Service to Others

A loving relationship begins with the attitudes the two people bring to it. At the most basic level, loving relationships are about living to be of service to others. This means each person approaches the other with an attitude of respect and care, recognizing how they need one another and how deeply intertwined the benefit of one is with the other.

Although people have varying abilities and talents, in a loving relationship they complement and offset one another's strengths and weaknesses. Elder siblings use their superior strength and maturity to protect younger siblings, while younger siblings' vulnerability nurtures the elder's sense of compassion. A father who at work is a no-nonsense manager transforms into a jovial playmate in front of his growing toddler. Love creates balance between high and low, strong and weak.

This balance characteristic of loving relationships has its basis in nature. It is an expression of *complementarity*—a principle running throughout all existence. Eastern philosophy explains that the universe is replete with complementary dualities: male and female, high and low, large and small, hard and soft, light and dark. The harmony of

opposites fills the universe with energy, structure, life, beauty and joy. Male and female eagles join claws and turn cartwheels in the sky. The peacock carries around his heavy tail feathers to make the colorful display that will attract a peahen, who will in turn bear his young. Frosty mountain peaks overlook green, verdant valleys. A large, muscular lioness picks up her tiny cub gently between sharp teeth that previously tore at the side of a zebra. An electron weighs less than a thousandth of a proton, yet in an atom they precisely balance. The harmony and balance among complementary opposites occurs because the elements exist for one another. Paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin observed in nature an internal "propensity to unite, even at a prodigiously rudimentary level—indeed in the molecule itself."² Even a corpuscle, he maintained, "can only be defined by virtue of its influence on all around it."³ In other words, things in nature exist in symbiotic relationships as a matter of course: they exist for one another.

Humans, too, feel incomplete without a counterpart. Man yearns for woman and woman yearns for man. Children need their parents, and parents find joy in their children. It is natural for people to seek one another out, form relationships and support one another; loneliness and isolation are known to be unhealthy. When people make "living to be of service to others" a priority, their relationships exhibit the qualities of caring, respect and commitment and reflect the harmony and balance of nature itself.

Caring

Healthy relationships involve caring. Good friends are attentive to each other's feelings, moods and needs. They do not take each other for granted. If one is troubled, the other will come to his aid.

Jackie Robinson made history as the first black major league baseball player when he joined the Brooklyn Dodgers. Branch Rickey, owner of the Dodgers at that time, told Robinson, "It'll be tough. You're going to take abuse you never dreamed of. But if you're willing to try, I'll back you all the way." Sure enough, Robinson endured constant taunts and racial slurs from the crowd, from opponents, and even from members of his own team.

One day Robinson was struggling, unable to get on base, and the crowd was booing loudly. Then Pee Wee Reese, the team captain and Dodger shortstop, walked onto the field and put his arm around him as

a gesture of friendship and solidarity. "That may have saved my career," Robinson reflected later. "Pee Wee made me feel that I belonged."⁴ Pee Wee didn't mind that he might take some flak for his gesture in a time of tense race relations. He only saw his friend in trouble, and he cared enough to help him.

Respect

Respect is about valuing one another. In loving relationships, people encourage each other to be the best that they can be. Parents are proud if their children even surpass them. A loving husband is supportive of his wife, valuing her as his "better half"—and vice-versa. Respecting and edifying one another, a family advances together.

The rule and courtesy of respect is maintained when family members temper their criticism with acknowledgement of each other's good points. Making a habit of recalling the good points in a spouse can be a great marriage-saver. (See Chapter 21) Sometimes what looks like a weak point may from another perspective be a strength. "I used to be annoyed by my wife Nadia's constant yakking on the phone, talking with all the neighbors," said Martin, of Toronto. "But when our son got really sick and needed lots of blood donors, it wasn't me who was able to drum up 30 volunteers. My wife did, because she had kept up with so many friends." Likewise, praising a teenager for chores well done or a good grade on a test can go a long way towards maintaining respectful and smooth communication during a phase of life when scolding and tussles over privileges are all too common. By respecting each other as unique individuals, family members give each other room to change and yet maintain their closeness.

Commitment

Commitment denotes constancy and security of loving relationships. It means to be constant and loyal in difficult times as well as in good times. Committed love is not satisfied with halfway measures, nor can it be at one's convenience. For example, when Violeta from the Bronx was teaching her five-year-old son to ride a bicycle, she was determined to see it through, no matter how long it might take. "I got hot and tired and I wondered if and when he would ever get it. But he wanted so much to learn, I determined that I'd run up and down the block a thousand times if I had to. The funny thing was, as soon as I

made that determination, he took off on the bike all on his own! I was so thrilled!"

Family relationships, being permanent, are the primary context for exercising commitment. Good parents never stop feeling responsible to help their children, nor do children ever stop caring for their parents. People may change their friends, but they cannot change their parents or children or brothers or sisters. For this reason, family relationships are the model for understanding commitments of all kinds.

Principles of Good Interaction

In establishing and maintaining loving human relationships, good interaction is essential. Many of the strategies for character education, effective parenting and building strong marriages that are discussed in subsequent chapters are basically about improving the quality of interaction.

Traditional maxims encourage people to promote fair and harmonious interactions in their social relationships. This is the function of the Golden Rule, "Treat others as you would wish to be treated yourself,"⁵ as well as maxims like: "As a man sows, so shall he reap,"⁶ and "Those who act kindly in the world will have kindness."⁷

Interaction is a universal phenomenon in nature; it is the process by which any two entities form a relationship and solidify it through giving and receiving elements of themselves. Interaction produces the energy that powers nature, from the nuclear reactions in the heart of the sun to the biochemical reactions in the living cell. Interaction is the source of power to unite, act, grow and multiply. It is what invigorates a friendship and animates a classroom lesson. It is the pulse of the city and the lifeblood of an economy.

As productive interaction includes giving and receiving, five characteristics stand out: 1) truthfulness, 2) giving first, 3) receiving well, 4) giving continually, and 5) observing norms and roles. These characteristics apply to all kinds of relationships—among friends, in business and in school.

Truthfulness

A constructive interaction is truthful in two ways. First, it is honest and without guile. The interaction is not conducted with an ulterior

motive, to manipulate for some personal advantage. Second, it is grounded in universal principles.

Kant's famous Categorical Imperative states that one should treat all persons not as "means" to their own ends but as "ends" in themselves. This means to respect them as people—their views, their values, their personalities and their desires. In most situations, this dictum is a sound guide to truthful relationships. Nevertheless, the truth stands higher than individual desires and values. For example, if a fellow student is routinely stealing the work of other students and presenting it as his own, the right course of action is to stop him, even though it does not seem to respect his purposes and desires. In this case, the cheater has already violated the moral law by treating other students as a means, and so has forfeited his right to be respected as an end. Thwarting the cheating maintains the moral order—a higher truth—even while denying the will of the cheater. At the same time, it can be argued that this action represents a deeper respect for the more honorable potential of the cheating student.⁸

To always have authentic and honest interactions, of course, is not easy. Some people hesitate out of shyness or timidity; some are afraid of hurting others' feelings; some are not skilled in making appropriate statements. Being truthful may sometimes cost a friendship. Yet more often than not, truthful sharing in a respectful and sensitive manner works to enhance a relationship.

Laurie, a 28-year-old mother of two, was concerned that her children watched scary videos at their friend's house. She did not want to seem like a prude, but she was troubled that some of the videos were R-rated for violence. Hannah, the mother of the children's friend, sensed how evasive Laurie was about the children getting together at her home. When she asked Laurie what was wrong, Laurie plunged ahead and truthfully shared her feelings about scary, violent movies and children. Hannah was surprised but relieved at Laurie's honesty. "I didn't know all that," she said, when Laurie cited statistics about media and real life violence. The two had a long, fruitful discussion about standards and values. Laurie agreed that her children could continue to visit sometimes, with the proviso that there be no scary videos. The truthfulness of this interaction between these mothers, based on concern for the quality of their children's friendship, deepened the bond between them and engendered greater trust.

Giving First

The second principle of productive interactions is to give first. Human relationships flourish when there is a generous attitude and practice of initiating service—when participants are more interested in what they can give to each other than what they will receive. Jonica enjoys compiling funny stories to send to her friend; Desmond delights in surprising his son with baseball cards for his collection.

Educators have come up with creative ways to teach this principle. Mr. Mastriano, an eighth-grade teacher in New Jersey, noticed a wide deviation in the test scores of his students. He created a buddy system, whereby the students who were doing well were paired off with those who were doing poorly. He told the students that from now on they were responsible for their buddy's grades as well as their own, and instructed students with higher grades to tutor and help those with lower grades. At first it was a bit awkward, because the better students felt they alone earned their grades, but in a short time there was a miraculous transition. The students who were doing well became so involved in helping their buddies improve that their own grades shot up. Their partners' grades also improved in a short period of time through their mentors' help. In the end, the whole class learned a lesson about how helping their fellow student also meant helping themselves. In other words, giving leads to receiving.⁹

A giving attitude is a key to business success. Winning companies stand out by going "the extra mile" to serve customers' needs—the furniture store with the supervised playground so parents can shop in a relaxed way, the shopkeeper who lets his shoppers buy food on credit between paychecks, the department store offering wheelchairs for the disabled. Customers then buy often and recommend their products and services to others. Stanley and Danko's study of American millionaires found that most of them made their fortunes through offering their customers a genuine service and quality products. It debunked the vulgar notion that success in business requires taking advantage of people or cheating them.¹⁰

Receiving Well

The other side of the interaction is receptivity. Being able to receive well—gracefully and appreciatively—inspires the giver to want to give again. At the same time, it renews the recipient's capacity to be able to

give in return. Receiving well does not mean always looking to receive, so as to become indebted to others. Nevertheless, sometimes people who are great at giving have difficulty receiving. Gladys, widowed at 45, had thrown herself into community service, running a food program for house-bound seniors and working at the local homeless shelter. Then she contracted an illness that weakened her for months. It was her turn to receive from others. "I don't need charity! I can take care of myself," she grumbled. She was not used to seeing herself so needy, and was uncomfortable with all the attention. "How can I let them see me like that?" she thought through her fear and loneliness. Gladys found herself avoiding others, seeking solace on a park bench.

One evening Francis, a frequent visitor to the homeless shelter, noticed her sitting there. "Why don't you just tell me what's on your mind?" she said. "You know, folks care about you whether you're doin' for us or not." Gladys looked up at Francis; at that moment she understood: letting those she had cared for take care of her gave them dignity, and she could open herself to experience the joy of receiving.¹¹

Continuing to Give

At the outset of any relationship, giving is fairly easy and there is a ready supply of good will. The initial excitement and pleasure of a new relationship lend impetus to striving to please the other person in creative and relationship-enhancing ways. As time goes by, however, people tend to take one another for granted and get lazy about continuing to invest in the relationship. Relationships can atrophy and even turn sour as each wonders why the other is not giving anymore.

Good relationships require that the people involved be committed to continual investment in one another and in the relationship. This means going beyond a "tit for tat" mentality: "I did this for you, so you do this for me." Indeed, it is impossible and counter-productive to "keep score" in relationships. Relationships flourish when the parties decide to give without keeping a tab and without expecting anything in return except the pleasure and benefit of the other. In this way they are able to turn a blind eye to the times when the giving is uneven. Even if one party is giving considerably more than the other, continuing to give without expectation of return can spark consciousness in the other to do likewise.

The ethic of giving continually can overcome the inevitable complaints and slights that plague all relationships from time to time. “I don’t even know what prompted me to pick up the phone,” Zoë recalls, of her contacting her former best friend. They had become estranged when her friend had not repaid a sizeable loan. “I was thinking of her and I dialed her number before I could talk myself out of it. She was so happy to hear from me and she had wanted to call me and apologize but just couldn’t. Honestly, I was surprised how much I missed her voice. I felt so relieved to have that old connection back.”

Principles of Interaction

- Truthful relationship
- Giving precedes receiving
- Norms and roles
- Shared purpose

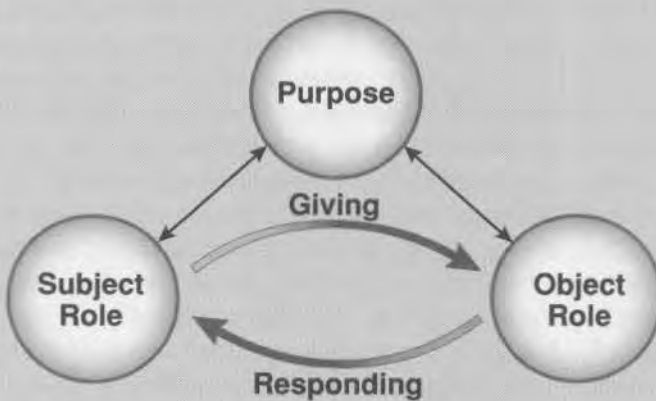


Figure 5: Interaction with Order and Purpose

Norms and Roles

The art of fostering harmonious relationships with others includes observing etiquette and manners, using appropriate language, and knowing what is expected of oneself and others. These are collectively called norms.

Norms are not ends in themselves; rather, they exist for the sake of facilitating congenial relationships and civil peace. Just as travel by automobile can be safe and rapid only when people obey the rules of the road, so social relationships are harmonious and loving when rules and manners are understood and observed. Rules direct the interaction into fruitful channels, promoting cooperation and good will. A person well educated in norms can relate well even with people who are difficult to like.

Today there is a growing dissatisfaction with the anything-goes casualness that has become commonplace in our culture. School administrators are re-instituting school uniforms and policies to curb unruly behavior and offensive language. Companies nervous about how their salesmen will behave when meeting a client at a business lunch are sending them to etiquette classes.¹² There is renewed appreciation of the advantages of practicing good manners.

One purpose of the rules of etiquette is to establish clear roles. At a party, for instance, it is proper for the host to introduce the guests to one another, and it is expected that a guest will ask the host's permission to use the telephone or take food from the refrigerator. If the host neglects to introduce a guest, or if a guest forgets to thank the host, the social flow is interrupted and everyone feels vaguely uncomfortable. When people practice good manners, they honor roles and set up a structure that facilitates warm feelings and prevents anxiety and uncertainty.

Traditional ethics upholds distinctions between different roles and teaches people to honor these roles. The idea is that where there is order, it is possible for harmony to come; where there is harmonious interaction, care and concern will flow. Therefore, as with norms, the purpose of respecting different roles is to facilitate the flow of love. The value of roles and structure in interaction is an important but often poorly understood aspect of relationships.

Distinctions of Roles

In any relationship there are two essential roles: one initiates and the other responds; one sets a direction and the other enlarges upon it. Using terminology from grammar, these two roles in their most general sense may be distinguished as the *subject role* and the *object role*.¹³ At the party mentioned above, the host has the subject role; she sets the tone of the party and welcomes the guests, who are in the object role. The host is responsible to put on the party, while the guests provide its sparkle and fun. The party would not be a success without both. Thus, subject and object roles have equal value. (These roles are *relative* positions that will be different for each relationship; thus among the guests at the party are those who have subject and object roles within their own circles.)

Subject and object roles are ubiquitous in nature. The sun and planets in the solar system are in subject and object roles, respectively; so are the nucleus and cytoplasm in a cell, the brain and limbs in an animal, the nucleus and electrons in an atom. In addition to these permanent roles, there are countless temporary and alternating subject-object relationships: between bees and flowers, flexor and extensor muscles, cations and anions, xylem and phloem.

In human interactions, as in nature, the roles of subject and object can be either permanent or changing. In a classroom, the teacher has the permanent subject role, being the responsible center of the classroom in terms of conveying knowledge and establishing discipline. Yet from time to time for the sake of facilitating learning, a teacher may adopt a changing subject and object role by letting students report or even teach, and by setting up small groups where they can collaborate.¹⁴ A common example of an interaction with changing subject and object roles is a conversation. At any moment, one person is talking and the other is listening; but at the next moment the roles switch. Whether permanent or changing, subject and object roles constitute a partnership in which each side is essential to the other. A teacher cannot teach without students. Students do not learn without a teacher. A speaker has no purpose in talking if no one is listening.

Respecting the roles of subject and object makes for fruitful interaction. That is why in polite conversation one does not interrupt the speaker and talk out of turn. In the classroom, most teachers have experienced trying to teach a wise-guy student who always insists on his ideas and thinks he knows more than the teacher. He sets himself up in

the role of a subject in opposition to the teacher. Just as two positive charges repel each other, two subjects cannot generate effective interaction. In such a case, little interaction or learning takes place.

Roles Facilitate Communication and Harmony

In any relationship, it helps if people are aware of whether they are in the subject role or the object role. Observing these roles clarifies the terms of the relationship, thus facilitating communication and interaction. People in the subject role may provide leadership or impart knowledge. Those in the object role may offer support or receive instruction. At the same time, those who are most effective in the subject role are good listeners who are concerned about issues raised by their subordinates. Likewise, a valued person in the object role aims to stimulate the one in the subject role with helpful ideas and initiatives. On the foundation of mutual respect, these roles establish mutual obligations: leadership and obedience, protection and loyalty, benevolence and gratitude.

In Asia, the distinction between elder and younger is codified in the norms of culture and impressed upon the young from an early age. Alice and Rory invited the family of a co-worker, David Vinh Deng, to dinner at their house one Saturday night. The Vinh Dengs were originally from Viet Nam, a country with a tradition of well-demarcated elder-younger relations. When dinner was ready, Alice said to Lisa, the Vinh Deng's twelve-year-old daughter who was helping her serve, "We have two big pans full of chicken. The children are going to eat here in the kitchen, so why don't you pick out what piece you want for your plate." The girl hesitated and then said softly, "I would prefer it if the elders chose their food first." Lisa respectfully helped Alice serve the food and then took her place with the younger children for dinner, apart from the adults. Throughout the dinner, she could be heard gently admonishing her younger brother, "Don't be so noisy," or "Don't bang your plate with your fork." Yet Lisa also joined in merrily as the children joked and teased one another, giving herself over completely to the joys of being a child. This young Asian girl knew that as a child she should defer to her elders, and as the eldest child she should guide her juniors. Her understanding of what behavior each role called for made the evening go more pleasantly for everyone.

It cannot be overemphasized that the purpose of observing subject and object roles is to facilitate good interaction, not to establish

rank or status for its own sake. In the safety training of airline pilots, the cautionary tale of Melburn McBroom is told as a way of letting pilot trainees know the importance of open communication between captain and crew. McBroom was a competent but irascible pilot, given to outbursts of temper. One day in 1978, he was about to land in Portland, Oregon when a problem developed with the landing gear. He put the plane into a holding pattern while he struggled to correct the problem. So absorbed was he, he did not notice that the plane's fuel was almost depleted. His copilot noticed, but was afraid to say anything for fear of one of his pilot's famous outbursts. The plane crashed, claiming ten lives. Although McBroom had all the skills of a pilot, there was a fatal defect in his character—unwillingness to accept advice from his crew. The copilot, who lacked the courage to "take the heat" of McBroom's anger, was likewise at fault.¹⁵

Unfortunately, there have always been people who abuse their position to dominate others, suppressing their individuality. Thus misused, traditional roles can become strictures preventing people from blossoming to their full potential. They can poison communication, as in the above example, or even engender rebellion. Hence, the modern trend is to do away with distinctions of order and position in the name of absolute equality.

The lowered expectations and relaxed collegiality of peer relations has its appeal and it no doubt drives some of the contemporary tendency to level relationships. Nevertheless, there is much wisdom in the norms of traditional societies the world over, which honor the natural distinctions among roles. Having a sense of automatic respect and support for those in the senior position as well as a heart of concern to help those in the junior position promote tolerance and patience in human relations.

In fact, these distinctions among roles become a cause for complaint only when genuine love is lacking. Love is the great equalizer and harmonizer. When there is care and respect, there is no sense of diminution or deprivation. People in every position are satisfied. Parents' downward benevolence and affection for their children induces obedience and genuine respect in return, and encourages them to be more caring towards one another as well. The star athlete on a baseball team tutors and encourages the rookies, creating solidarity and team spirit among all the players. When these roles are fulfilled with a loving heart, they facilitate harmony among people in every position.

The Dimensions of Order

Broadly speaking, the order of roles in the family has three dimensions. There is a *vertical order* from elder to younger, a *horizontal order* among peers, and an *individual order* by which individuals govern themselves. In the family, vertical order refers to relations between generations: between children and their parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Horizontal order refers to relations between people of the same generation: brothers and sisters, cousins, husband and wife. Individual order, by analogy, refers to the priorities and values by which a person organizes his or her life.

The richness and beauty of family life arises from the integration of these dimensions of order. Parents and children form a vertical relationship. Brothers and sisters form horizontal relationships—though there can be a vertical dimension, as among younger and elder siblings. The dynamic of these relationships differs accordingly.

For example, in a family with small children, the vertical love between mother and child stabilizes, nurtures and harmonizes the developing horizontal relations between the child and his siblings and peers. On a rainy Saturday afternoon, Erica's 8-year-old son Tim and a friend were playing with Lego blocks. Tim was rambunctious with pent-up energy, and in a dispute over a coveted piece he tore apart his friend's construction. Erica realized that her child needed to calm down, but just telling him to do so would not help. Instead, she took him aside and spent a few minutes alone with him. The rowdiness and aggression then ceased. Tim needed that connection to the soothing steadfastness of his mother's heart.

An apt metaphor for these types of order is the arrangement of the planets in the solar system. The Sun is at the center of the solar system, the Earth revolves around the Sun, and the Moon revolves around the earth. Furthermore, the whole solar system revolves around the center of the galaxy. This hierarchical relationship among the centers of revolution—the Moon, the Earth, the Sun, and the galactic center—comprises a vertical order. Horizontal order refers to the mutual relationship among those entities that relate to the same vertical center. In the solar system, the planets Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, etc., revolve around the same center, the Sun. Their "peer" relationship to one another is an instance of horizontal order. At the same time, each planet rotates on its own axis to establish its individual order. The Earth's rotation on its axis establishes a far-reaching order within itself: the 24-

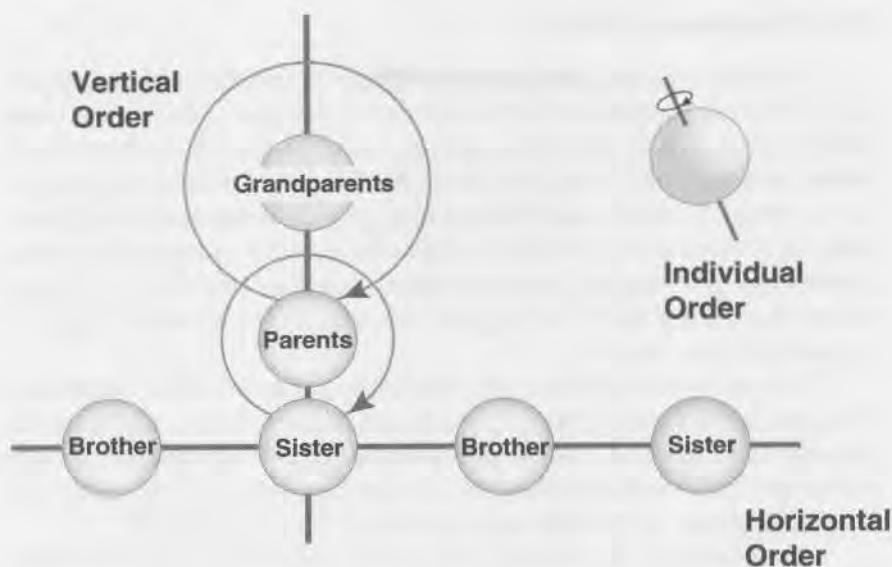


Figure 6: Types of Order and Position in the Family

hour cycle of day and night, the ebb and flow of the tides, the direction of the prevailing winds, and all the activities of nature that depend upon this daily rhythm.

The natural order of the solar system is only a metaphor for human life, which is lived in freedom. Being free to set up their own order, people are responsible to rationally regulate their lives in a manner that is consistent within the order of the universe. The rewards of doing so are families and societies functioning as harmoniously as the movement of the spheres. Describing a healthy family, psychologist John Rosemond said, "The marriage was the nucleus of the family, the children were satellites that revolved around the nucleus like planets to a sun."¹⁶

When people neglect to maintain ordered relationships, their family life can become chaotic. Imagine what would happen to life on Earth if the planet changed its axis from day to day—some days north-south, some days east-west, or if it suddenly changed its center of revolution from the Sun to Jupiter! In the same way, a person who frequently changes his values, disregards his parents or betrays his friends would naturally find his life in disarray.

Expressions of Order in the East and West

Eastern cultures tend to emphasize vertical order, while people in the West pay more attention to horizontal order. Thus, Confucian ethics stresses obedience to one's parents and loyalty to legitimate authority. It ascribes levels of respect even in horizontal relationships among siblings, based on age.

When Asians greet each other, the junior bows to the senior, connoting vertical respect. Far beyond "sir" and "ma'am," the Japanese and Korean languages have elaborate distinctions among the forms of address to be used with people of different ages, even in intimate speech. When meeting a stranger, a Korean frequently asks about his age. Though it may seem impolite to Westerners, he is seeking to know whether it is proper to address him as an elder or a younger. In the Asian way of thinking, establishing vertical order is the prerequisite for social harmony.

On the other hand, the Western way of greeting—a handshake—connotes equality. At school and at work, superiors and subordinates often address each by their first names as a sign of camaraderie and solidarity. Western families usually make little distinction between the first-born son and his younger siblings. In the spirit of democracy, equality is the norm.

Both Eastern and Western culture beautifully express a different aspect of the natural order. Each has its insights and is incomplete without the other. The West offers lessons on equality and freedom that are correctives to the abuses of the rigid hierarchical systems of the past. The Asian sensibility for vertical order helps avoid the chaos and excessive competition so prevalent in Western society. In fact, Eastern and Western ways of thinking are complementary. When each culture inherits the strength of the other, a more complete picture of healthy human relationships emerges.

Orienting Towards Meaning and Purpose

It is a natural trait of human beings that they strive for truth, beauty, goodness and love—in short, to find meaning in life. The pursuit of meaning leads beyond the self to relationships and the greater sense of value that they can provide. Thus, when two people engage in a relationship, a new intention comes to the fore beyond that of the individuals involved: the purposes they share in common. Shared values and mutual interests create the enduring foundation for a relationship to thrive.

Aristotle recognized “sharing a common conception and pursuit of a good” as one of the two central features of friendship—or any relationship. Emotional attachments and feelings of mutual satisfaction are quite secondary, in his understanding, to this crucial basis of relationship. Sharing a common purpose for the good, friends want good things for each another and act for one another’s benefit. The satisfying feelings that people sometimes take to be the defining feature of friendship are rather a byproduct of this more fundamental bond.¹⁷

In marriage, too, a shared commitment, a shared history, and a shared sense of what is worthwhile in life are crucial pillars for a lasting love.¹⁸ A shared sense of purpose keeps Margaret and Tom’s family together, even though they are often hundreds of miles apart. Tom drives trucks cross-country for a living and is on the road for weeks at a time. When they first married he had a regular desk job in Wichita, and just hated it. Having grown up on a farm, he longed for open spaces. When Tom saw an opening to become a truck driver, Margaret didn’t hesitate to support him, knowing full well that caring for her three young children for weeks by herself would require quite an adjustment. She reminded herself that the purpose of their relationship was to create a happy family. That goal, she knew, required a husband who was at least content at what he did for a living. When Tom is home, he cares for the children and gives his wife a break from the daily routine. He also stays in regular contact while on the road. Margaret remarks, “I think it works because we want the same thing: a family that cares for each other and is flexible about who does what. We share tasks and are equally responsible for making the family system work for all involved.”

Equality under a Common Purpose

In a harmonious and lasting relationship, the purpose is impartial, not favoring one person over the other, but guiding both towards a larger vision and objective. Since shared purpose and meaning encompasses the interests of both parties, it is a natural starting point for cooperation and synergy.

In organizations, generally speaking, the CEO and management craft the vision and establish the general direction for the company in order to effectively compete, while hopefully the employees are motivated to execute that vision. Subordinates submit to a leader because their common mission or cause is greater than all of them. They cooperate in the roles of subject and object because they know this enables them to accomplish more. The apparent inequality of positions conceals a more fundamental equality that bonds people together to realize a shared purpose.

A wise leader knows not to exploit his position for personal gain. He knows that skewing the purpose to make it favor himself would only cause resentment and spoil organizational unity. Instead, he willingly sacrifices more, takes on greater responsibilities and works harder than his subordinates do. He maintains his leadership because he acts to benefit the greater purpose of the group. "Every time I wanted to get mad at my coach because of the insane practice schedule," recalls Barry of his high school basketball days, "I realized he was there longer than I was and he really cared about us winning the championship. He was doing it for me, the team, the school. What could I say?"

Noble Purpose

Purpose is the invisible center of any relationship, and good relationships are established around good purposes. A noble purpose, higher than the personal interests of the parties, calls them to a greater vision of themselves. As in Tom and Margaret's family, it can call forth sacrifice. A higher goal has the power to transform a relationship, setting it within an unlimited universe of potential for growth and affection.

The higher the shared objective, potentially the deeper the bonds. Drinking partners can't expect much resilience in their relationship. Conversely, war buddies who once protected each other from death on the battlefield while fighting for their country share a bond that may last forever. "I belong to them and they to me; we all share the same fear and the same life, we are nearer than lovers, in a simpler, harder way"—these are the sentiments of a soldier for his comrades.¹⁹ From love of country to love of the environment, public-spirited concern inspires all manner of close and rewarding relationships with like-minded people.

Family counselor Ross Campbell states that all the strong and happy families he has met have some sort of moral or spiritual ideal that binds them together.²⁰ In any case, all families revolve around some value or purpose. If it is a lesser purpose such as money, social status or leisure activities, the family may find that it is not truly satisfied, even if it achieves and enjoys these ends. The happiest families are those that cherish and practice altruistic love.

Joe and Judy moved from Atlanta to an economically depressed area in Alabama. Although they had little money, they wanted to do something for their new community. As both had experience in the theater, they decided to initiate a community play. They couldn't afford to buy costumes, so they showed their children how to make them from scraps. Judy coached local people in their parts, while Joe organized others to make the sets. The play was a great success. In no time, their family went from strangers to respected members of the community. Joe was elected to several civic boards. The whole family felt pride and a sense of belonging.

Model of a Purposeful, Harmonious Family

The family is the primary locus of loving relationships and the starting-point for gaining competencies in relationships of all kinds. The relational principles discussed above suggest a model of family that can be helpful for understanding relationships and organizations in general.

A loving family is an integrated unit, harmonious and purposeful. The parent-child and husband-wife relationships support each other synergistically, invigorated by the love flowing through them. This can be diagrammed as a dynamically interacting structure with four positions.

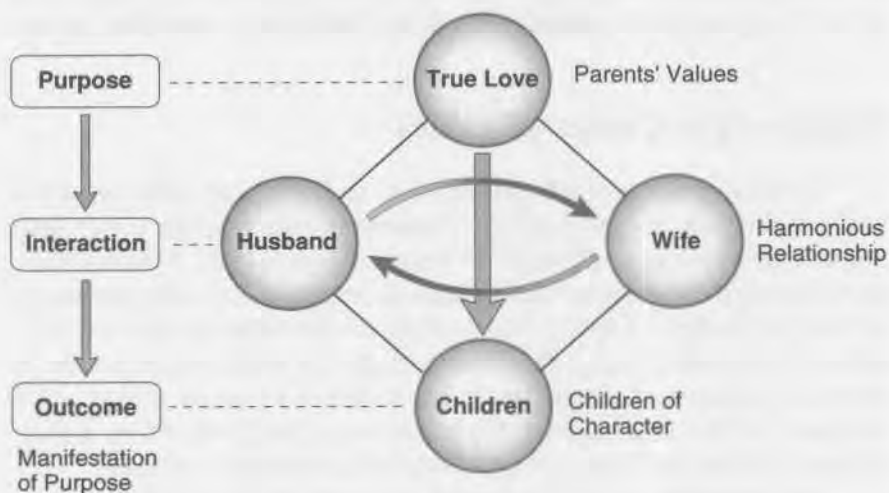


Figure 7: Dynamics of a Purposeful, Harmonious Family

Thus, when a husband and wife relate to each other based on a noble purpose and commitment to true love, they create a whole that is greater than both of them together. This outcome includes the enhanced quality of affection between them and children who feel loved and cared for. It can extend to neighbors and the community that is enriched by the family's presence.

Older parents and grandparents who embody the wisdom and traditions of the past are usually the primary source of the couple's values. Their marriage is a model for the couple's marriage; their way of parenting likewise is a model for the couple's parenting. Children are the fruits of a marriage; as they grow in character they come to reflect their parents' values. Family values are thus passed on vertically from generation to generation. (See Section Four)

On the horizontal axis is the interaction itself. Naturally, every husband and wife wants to enjoy a pleasurable and congenial relationship with each other and with their children. Therefore, each makes effort to invest in the relationship, guided by a vision of true love and shared values. Their interaction generates the commitment and affection that animates the family. Their relationship is further strengthened when they practice the principles of good interaction described above.

Family—The Center of Ethics

If the purpose of ethics is ultimately to realize true love, then the family is the primary standard and measure of ethics. While the growth of individual character remains an essential moral goal, it is nevertheless shortsighted to regard individuals as autonomous units, abstracted from the matrix of family. Personal character development is a relational enterprise that is cultivated through the affectionate bonds of child and parent and culminates in the ability of a mature adult to give altruistic, other-centered love. Participation in family life is thus a minimum condition for a person to realize his or her full humanity.

The proposition that the fundamental unit of ethics is the family—not the individual or the society—is not self-evident in the present culture. In the last century there were attempts to eliminate the family unit altogether, replacing it with communal or collective living arrangements. These largely failed. Still, the diversity of contemporary living arrangements makes the notion of the traditional two-parent family seem almost antique.

A contemporary trend is to replace the ethic of binding marriage—the traditional linchpin of stable families—with an individualistic ethic that regards all relationships, even marriage, as contracts between autonomous individuals. Yet relations in the family are established by love and strengthened through years of caring and living for each other.

To pretend that family members are autonomous individuals who can break cleanly with a divorce is to ignore the ensuing emotional devastation for the adults and especially the children involved.

Reaffirming the centrality of the family requires an updated understanding of its meaning, purpose and function. Social theorist Amitai Etzioni admits that the traditional family deserved criticism; yet he argues, "The trouble is that no new concept of the family—of responsibility to children, of intimacy and of commitment to one another—has emerged to replace the traditional form.... It is time to reconstruct, in the full sense of the term—not to return to the traditional, but to return to a moral affirmation, reconstructed but firmly held."²¹

Therefore, when reaffirming the importance of the family, it is important to examine the values upon which it is based. The strongest families are those imbued with sound moral values, higher purpose and a vision of true love. They feature healthy interactions and a clear distinction of roles. Such families have vitality and freshness; their love is ever growing; they have the strength to weather any storm.

The family is the primary school of loving relationships of all kinds. Since family bonds are permanent, they require special care and continued investment to maintain. Then, on the foundation of these primary relationships in the family, people can get along well at work, at school and in the community by engaging in temporary and less demanding relationships with peers, superiors and juniors. James Q. Wilson states, "We learn to cope with the people of this world because we learn to cope with the members of our family."²²

There are many other rewarding relationships—with teachers and caregivers, employers, co-workers and friends—wherein people also learn the ways of effective interactions and catch glimpses of the ideal of true love. They also provide needed moral and psychological assets for surmounting life's challenges—and even bettering their families. The ability to form good relationships is an essential quality and an important life skill, one that benefits a person when learned from an early age.

9

Making a Meaningful Contribution

LOIS GIBBS' CHILDREN WERE SICK, AS WERE MANY OF THE OTHER children in her Love Canal neighborhood in Niagara Falls, New York. She found out why: her neighborhood was built on a toxic waste dump. When she first set out to notify her neighbors, she was unsure of herself; but remembering that lives were at stake, she started knocking on doors. People ridiculed her, calling her "that hysterical housewife." Experts told her that she was unqualified. Still she pressed on, convincing others not to yield to the government officials who claimed nothing was wrong. Eventually, the effort she started got all 900 families in Love Canal relocated.

Gibbs understood that to safeguard her own family, she had to work to protect other families, too. She went to Congress and pushed for the creation of the Superfund Law to clean up these toxic dumping grounds. She founded the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Wastes, which helps polluted communities all over America. This formerly shy homemaker became a national leader on an issue of vital importance.¹ She found meaning in life through helping people avoid the illnesses caused by chemical poisons.

Helping others is a fundamental human need; it brings its own inner sense of satisfaction. In general, a person's sense of value is derived not only from a sense of personal integrity and the affection of loved ones, but also from having "objective worth," a value that comes

from benefiting the public good.² As Eleanor Roosevelt once said of citizenship, "When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die."

Most often, people give to society through their work. Employing their labor, intelligence and artistry, they produce products and provide services that benefit the communities in which they live. Their industry and creativity both enriches them and adds to the general prosperity. Individuals also make meaningful social contributions through hobbies and interests outside of their employment: leading a scouting troop, organizing a community picnic, planting flowers in the park, helping a destitute stranger, or just being a good neighbor. Simply cleaning up a trash-strewn yard is the sort of small effort, multiplied many times over, that helps care for the environment and improves the appearance of a neighborhood.

Education has long been concerned about providing the requisite skills to prepare students for work and participation in a democratic society. Character education adds an emphasis on the inherent moral component in these activities. There are ethical norms involved that can make the difference between a genuine contribution and mere self-seeking. These norms are often discussed in terms of business ethics, professional ethics, medical ethics, etc. First, however, there are foundational issues to be considered, such as: Why should a person want to contribute to society? What constitutes a social contribution? What are the principles for achieving this life goal?

Serving the Greater Good

Just as the essence of true love is living to be of service to others, the core of social ethics is to benefit the greater good. Mature moral consciousness in adults requires self-transcendence. A person who grows in the capacity for altruistic love is able to go beyond conventional obligations to relate to progressively greater frames of reference—to his or her family, community, country and world. This capacity redounds to the person's own worth and meaning—as one who makes a difference. Character education teaches that it is in a student's enlightened self-interest to contribute to these greater goods.

Learning to Contribute

Children first learn the ethic of making a contribution concretely through respecting and obeying parents, teachers and elders. Parents' wishes are usually not arbitrary or self-serving; they have the maturity and perspective to put the family's welfare first. Therefore, by respecting and obeying their parents, children naturally are placing the benefit of the family above their own personal interests. Regular chores around the house engender a sense of participating in the family and teach basic lessons about giving priority to public duties.

A family is not an island to itself; it participates in the life of the community. Therefore, wise parents also raise their children to think beyond the family's well being and to want to give social service. As children grow, they learn to extend the ethic of making a contribution to the classroom, the football team—any greater good. Thus, the ethic of serving the greater good that begins with respect and obedience to parents extends to every level: citizens serving the community, patriots serving the nation, and humanitarians serving the world.

Schools reinforce this lesson. Lisa, a student in Grace Tahana's elementary school class on Long Island, was frightened when her father was called to go to the Middle East to fight in the Gulf War, for what would be a four-month absence. The teacher involved her class and eventually the whole school in supporting Lisa. The students wrote letters to Lisa's father and the other soldiers and sent them food and gifts. They composed stories about love and courage. They discussed the meaning of serving and protecting one's country. This teacher had turned a difficult experience into a teaching opportunity about caring, courage and patriotism.³

Everyday Heroism

When people think of heroism, they usually think of soldiers, generals and patriots whose exploits are praised in history books. Yet just as great are the countless small and unrecognized things that ordinary people do for the sake of others. The poet Wordsworth wrote:

The best portion of a good man's life,
His little nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and love.

A social worker related the story of Tommy, a young man who suffered from a disability and struggled to talk and walk. Yet he was always doing something for someone else. Tommy found out that a group home for retarded men was ignored at Christmas time. With his faltering gait and halting speech, he personally went door to door to every business in town and collected donations. Then he spent days on end putting together the best Christmas they could ever imagine.⁴ Such small acts of caring and service by everyday citizens are the glue that binds society together and builds its moral strength.

The Flow of the Social Order

At the root of the ethic of social contribution lies a natural principle. Human beings are situated within a social hierarchy, a ladder that begins with the individual and extends to the family, community, nation and world. A social hierarchy is but a special case of the hierarchical structure of nature generally. From the organization of cells and organs in the human body to the ecological web of life, there is a natural circulation of energy through these interdependent hierarchies, from bottom to top and then back down to the bottom.

Recall that in relationships generally, the interacting participants take on a subject role and an object role. (See Chapter 8) There is a distinction among roles, yet the roles are of equal value, as one cannot function without the other. A mother cannot be a mother without her child; a teacher cannot teach without students. Likewise, in any hierarchy, the higher and lower positions are interdependent. An individual finds value in contributing to a larger social unit. The larger social unit depends upon the individuals that support it; therefore, it in turn protects and enriches them and provides them with opportunities to enrich themselves. This fundamental synergy is behind all systems that thrive.

Complementary Public and Private Purposes

People thus have individual goals and social goals, complementary purposes that should be in balance. The innate desire to find value through contributing to a greater good is called the *whole purpose*, and the desire to maintain and benefit the self is called the *individual purpose*. Families, communities, nations, and indeed all beings likewise have

dual purposes: to contribute to a larger whole and to benefit themselves. The ethical issue is the balance between them.

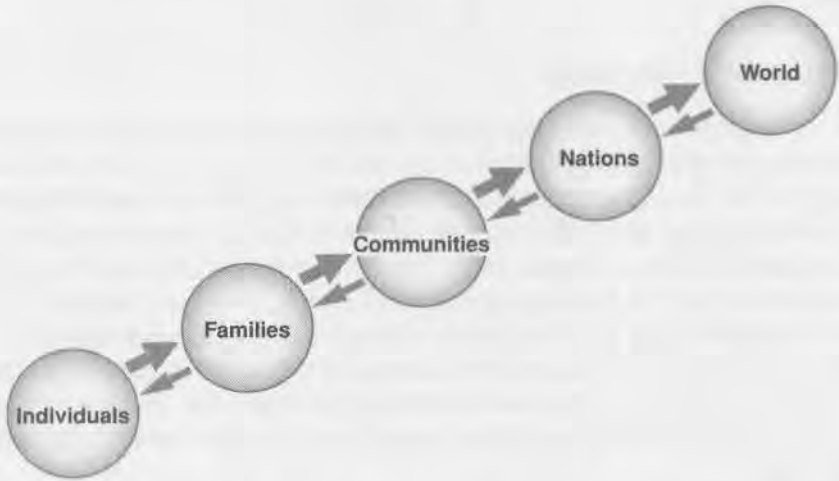


Figure 8: Interdependent Social Hierarchy

The human body provides a ready illustration of the complementarity of public and private purposes. Cells, organs and systems form an interdependent hierarchy with ascending purposes. Cells work to establish the function of organs. An organ, the stomach, supports the functioning of the digestive system, and the digestive system provides nourishment for the entire body. At the same time, the body cannot be healthy unless all its cells and organs function well and manage their own needs. Thus, whole purpose and individual purpose are synergistic. When the whole body is healthy, the individual cells and organs are nourished and protected. Conversely, the individual cells and organs maintain themselves for the sake of the whole body.

Cancer is a disease in which the tumor cells cease to honor the greater purpose of the body. Cancer cells stop responding to the signals coming from their organ system. Instead, they divide uncontrollably. The tumor is parasitic, feeding on the body for the sake of its own growth. Eventually the cancer saps the body of its vitality, and the body dies. This is analogous to what happens in a society when greedy individuals pursue private gain while disregarding the public good.

Amitai Etzioni said, "To take and not to give is an amoral, self-centered predisposition that ultimately no society can tolerate."⁵ Like a cancer, excessive selfishness can sap a society of its strength and cohesion.

A Healthy Social Order

A social hierarchy functions like a human body. In a healthy society, people give priority to the collective purpose and receive support for their particular contributions. Workers who are diligent about their craft aim to produce quality products for consumers, products that will sell well and make profits for their industry. Retailers who are honest and provide good service build customer loyalty. This give-and-take builds and sustains a thriving and civilized social order. Henry Ford once remarked, "No society of nations, no people within a nation, no family can benefit through mutual aid...unless we all see and act as though the other person's welfare determines our own welfare."⁶

The synergy within the social order benefits everyone. Workers labor for their company, and the company rewards workers in the form of higher wages, bonuses and stock options. Citizens give of themselves for the sake of their country's development, creating the capital that eventually results in a higher standard of living. Thus, the whole supports the welfare of the individual, and prosperous individuals are better able to contribute to the whole—a virtuous cycle in which both are winners.

Enlightened businesses find that they can facilitate their employees' natural desire to make a contribution to the whole by helping them better meet their individual needs. When Baxter International, a manufacturer of medical supplies, found that conflicts between work and home were affecting morale, it began offering flexible work schedules, allowing employees to work at home or fulfill their hours in four days instead of five. Harry is one of the more than 2,000 employees who take advantage of this program. He can be home by 4 p.m. to practice baseball with his children; then after 10 p.m. he takes care of business with e-mail and voice mail. The company seems to have profited from this investment in its workers' welfare, with increased productivity and sales volume doubling in the last six years.⁷

Relating to Authority and Being in Authority

Structures of authority are pervasive in human life. Beginning with the family and school, children learn to deal with people in positions of authority. These lessons are the key to developing good professional relationships in the workplace later in life.

Character education can help foster healthy attitudes towards authority. Virtues such as respect, obedience, patience, empathy, tolerance and self-respect are valuable assets when dealing with a difficult boss or a capricious manager. Instead of being quick to criticize and complain, a wise subordinate maintains respect. She works diligently and takes care of matters her boss may have overlooked. At the right time and place, she offers constructive advice. She helps to build a trusting and respectful atmosphere among all the members of the organization. Eventually, by winning everyone's respect, a subordinate with such a mature attitude may gain an unspoken, informal authority of her own.

Likewise, all people at one time or another find themselves in a position of authority over others. They may be parents or elder siblings, or mentors to younger classmates. They may be teachers or coaches or camp counselors. They may be a government official who oversees a county or a businessman who runs a company with a hundred employees. They are ordinary people with no official position who take the responsibility to do a tough job when no one else will.

A person may fulfill multiple roles of authority, perhaps as a parent, a teacher and a leader at the same time. Indeed, the self-same individual may be both in a position of authority and subject to authority; this is the case for the vast majority of people. For example, Fred works as an assistant production manager in a Connecticut aerospace company. He is the father of three children. He spends his Saturdays as a Boy Scout troop leader, teaching a group of boys about camping, teamwork and character. One of the children in the troop happens to be his boss' son. When this boy was having difficulties, the father, Fred's boss, came to Fred for help and advice.

Positions of authority are little more than roles to be assumed or relinquished as the situation requires. Thus, it is a mistake to judge the value of a person mainly by his or her social role—or to evaluate oneself in that way. The real worth of a person is internal—a matter of character. That worth shines forth in how well he fulfills the responsi-

bilities that his position entails. Not dependent on recognition, wealth or status, the virtuous person “finds himself in no situation in life in which he is not master of himself.”⁸

Ethics of Legitimate Authority

People are grateful for good parents, good teachers and good leaders. How can those who find themselves in positions of authority fulfill their roles well, meeting the challenges of public responsibility? In general, it depends on developing mature character and cultivating the capacity to give love.

Lacking these inner qualities, even the best performers in subordinate roles may be challenged beyond their capacity when given a leadership responsibility. Doug was the star running back on his high-school football team when his coach took sick and asked him to fill in and lead the team in the biggest game of the season. Doug was well liked and respected by his teammates, and many were his friends. But as a coach, he favored his friends over the other players, giving them more playing time. The others began to grumble, and they did not play their best. As the team fell behind and the pressure mounted, he began cursing and berating his players. The game did not turn out well. Although Doug had the athletic ability to be a good player and the social skills to be a good friend, he had not yet acquired the necessary qualities of character to meet the challenge of bearing authority.

The Good Parent

The inner qualities that come with personal maturity and genuine love are apparent in outstanding parents, teachers and leaders. Good parents nurture their children with a deep, abiding love. They are always available to give them guidance and support. They enforce rules and discipline with the children’s character and growth potential foremost in mind. They are known for their compassion, fairness and generosity. In these and other ways, they inspire respect and devotion on the part of their children. They become exemplary authority figures to them.

Indeed, among all the types of authority the role of parent is primary and archetypical. This is because the heart that a parent brings to raising his or her own children extends naturally to the approach of a caring teacher and an effective leader. (See Chapter 18) A parent’s heart

is naturally oriented to investing for the sake of the children. Teachers who bring a parental heart into the classroom give their students the personal attention that can spark learning. Their experiences raising children give them better insights into the challenges their students may be facing. Likewise, leaders who bring a parental heart and a parent's experience to the task of managing people have a more mature perspective on life and more versatility in dealing with their subordinates' diverse situations. Celeste became a successful CEO of a large food company after returning to work in her late 40s. When asked how she was able to do it, she replied, "Raising five kids taught me the basics: listen to people and make them feel appreciated, encourage and reward them a lot and rein them in when necessary." For those who are not parents, practicing parental-type roles as an elder sibling, uncle, mentor or coach is also good preparation for leadership.

The Good Teacher

An effective teacher guides her students to bring out their personal best. She cares for each student individually. The scope of the education she gives is not only the specific subject matter but encompasses the whole human being. Many people cherish the memory of a good teacher they had, one who cared about them and regarded nothing as more important than developing in them wisdom, compassion and self-confidence.

One teacher who brings a parental heart to her teaching is "Mama Hawk" Hawkins, who works with difficult inner-city children in Chicago. She teaches them in a room she has furnished herself as a home-like setting. She sews clothes for them, haunts bargain stores for them and raises donations for school supplies. She doesn't hesitate to hug and affirm them. Her philosophy is that "Every child is gifted," no matter how buried those gifts may seem. One of her young boys was often seen dealing drugs; his addicted mother left him alone for days at a time. School personnel had labeled him a future criminal, and he fit the profile. But Mama Hawk believed in him. Noticing that he was good at talking his way in and out of situations, Mama Hawk encouraged him to use this gift in a useful way. He eventually earned a scholarship to a Midwestern university to study law, a profession where today he uses his rhetorical gifts to help others. He still helps Mama Hawk in his spare time by tutoring her students.⁹

The Good Leader

A good leader takes responsibility for the organization's overall mission while leading his people to be successful in their individual tasks. He sets the example by investing more and working harder than anyone else. He motivates his workers and staff to great efforts for the sake of the organization's purpose, while caring for their personal welfare. He treats them with respect and kindness and, ever mindful of morale, fosters a spirit of cooperation.

As president of Sony's Online Entertainment unit, Lisa Simpson has to find ways to motivate her talented and highly paid staff. Internet businesses must deal with some sensitive staff issues: an increasingly blurred line between work and home, a hectic work schedule, and creative young people who don't take well to being bossed around. Simpson finds that one of her most valuable skills is to know how to listen. "There's a certain finesse to maintaining authority but doing it in a way where people can openly challenge your thinking," she says. With her attentive attitude, "people aren't afraid to tell me that they don't know how to do something, or don't know enough to make something happen. They don't think that I will punish them or take away their assignment if they raise a red flag."¹⁰

Unequal power relations are ubiquitous and inevitable in social organizations, from families on up. Problems arise, however, when there is disharmony between the leader and those below him. A leader may be arrogant, or simply fail to understand the needs and desires of his subordinates. Yet each person, regardless of his or her position, has the same value. A leader who treats his employees with care and respect affirms their dignity and humanity. In the long run, an organization prospers when all its members feel needed and valued.

Work and Wealth

Work is the way most people make a contribution to the public good. Society advances on the shoulders of working people: farmers, artists, scientists and engineers, laborers, teachers, business people and civil servants. Their labors, large and small, affect the lives of others and bring innumerable benefits to society.

People measure the value of their employment not only by the size of their paychecks, but also by the inner satisfaction they derive from

having helped others or from creating something of utility or beauty. The assembly-line worker who builds cars, the mechanic who repairs cars, and the dealer who sells cars are each helping many people have the satisfaction of owning and driving quality automobiles. The wage they are paid is in some sense a measure of how much other people value the work they do. Work well done is thus a source of dignity and self-worth.

Most people are concerned about the meaning of their work. Job satisfaction rises considerably when an employee is able to see how his or her effort contributes to overall productivity and a greater social good. William Bennett remarks, "The most satisfying work involves directing our efforts towards achieving ends that we ourselves endorse as worthy expressions of our talent and character."¹¹

The Work Ethic

The values that make for productive workers, sometimes called the "work ethic," are rooted in and inseparable from moral values. These values include perseverance, diligence, thrift, initiative, resourcefulness, cooperation, teamwork and pride in one's craft. General Colin Powell once said, "Success is the result of perfection, hard work, learning from failure, loyalty and persistence." There are many aphorisms, traditional and new, that support the work ethic. Schools have many avenues for inculcating the work ethic, including ample homework and high academic standards.

In a study of America's millionaires, Thomas Stanley and William Danko found, surprisingly, that these wealthy men often have less education and poorer mastery of their chosen occupation than do many of the people who work for them. Yet typically they are hardworking, frugal, sacrificial and self-disciplined. They are moral in both their private lives and their business dealings. They do not make their money through dishonest means; they do not spend their money on high profile luxuries but save it for their children and their children's children. Most of them have been married to the same woman for more than 20 years. In short, they are honest people who excel in the work ethic.¹²

A cardinal virtue of the work ethic is service. Successful businesses live by the motto, "The customer is king." They make it their aim to anticipate and meet the needs of the buying public. The case of the American auto industry in the 1980s is instructive. Up until the

1970s, Detroit took the consumer for granted. Operating under the doctrine of planned obsolescence, they produced mediocre vehicles and made frequent model changes so the public would be enticed to buy a new car every few years. The workmanship was shoddy; the corporate culture was lazy. Moreover, American cars guzzled gasoline at a time when the price of oil was increasing dramatically. Meanwhile, Japanese automobile companies concentrated on quality. They schooled their workers to take pride in their workmanship. The American consumer liked a superior automobile, so while Detroit was sleeping, Japanese companies grabbed one-third of the American market.

The Pursuit of Wealth

Today there is a gold rush to the Internet and e-commerce. All around the world, people with opportunity and privilege are scrambling to accumulate riches. Certainly wealth creation is a vital part of economic development. Yet whether this abundance adds to the public welfare depends on how it is used and distributed.

There is a danger that excessive wealth may have negative effects on the wealthy individuals themselves. The old adage, "Money cannot buy happiness," is confirmed by numerous studies. Psychologists Richard Ryan and Tim Kasser have concluded independently that people for whom affluence is the number one priority in life tend to experience an unusual degree of anxiety and depression as well as a lower overall level of well being. "Americans are encouraged to try to strike it rich," says Ryan, but "the more we seek satisfactions in material goods, the less we find them there. The satisfaction has a short half-life; it's very fleeting." Kasser and his associates collected data from 13 countries, including Germany, Russia and India. They found that in every culture they studied, pursuing wealth is psychologically unhelpful and often destructive. Pursuing goals that reflect genuine human needs—such as fostering caring relationships and helping others—turns out to promote more of a sense of well-being than trying to impress others or accumulating trendy clothes, cars, gadgets and the money needed to buy them.¹³

Philanthropy

People with means testify that they find more lasting satisfaction from using their wealth for socially beneficial purposes. Hospitality to guests, helping needy relatives, kindness to strangers, volunteering for

charitable community work, philanthropy—these are activities that make constructive use of affluence. When people with means practice charity to help those who are less fortunate, they facilitate the circulation of wealth throughout society.

An under-appreciated secret of America's broad-based economic prosperity is its tradition of public responsibility and philanthropy among its wealthiest businessmen. Steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie established the first charitable foundation in 1911, with an initial donation of \$135 million; it funded hundreds of libraries and concert halls throughout the country. Carnegie wrote in *The Gospel of Wealth* that any riches above and beyond what people need for their family should be regarded as a public trust, to be managed and then expended to benefit the ordinary citizen. Philanthropy has been the social norm among America's wealthy class ever since, as the generosity of many CEOs of today's largest companies attests.

Making a Difference with Money

Henry Ford, the father of the American automobile industry, shocked the business world in 1914 when he began paying his workers five dollars a day—nearly double the average wage. Ford detested hand-outs, but he believed people needed opportunities for work to maintain their self-respect and be productive. He funded educational programs for his workers, and hired blind, deaf and crippled men that other companies refused. By paying his workers above-subsistence wages, he enabled them to become consumers who could buy his mass-produced Model-T automobiles. His generosity laid the foundations of America's consumer-driven economy, while at the same time opening up a huge market for his cars.

Ford showed that it could be good business to invest in one's employees, affording them benefits and paying them more than the prevailing wage. Bill Ford, a descendant of Henry Ford and the current chairman of the company, continues this tradition. He recently initiated a program to empower his employees by providing all of them with a computer, printer and Internet usage at home for a nominal fee. Sometimes the human factor can be as decisive as the financial side for determining business success.

The ethical issues around the use of wealth become more pressing as social prosperity increases. Business owners must decide how

much of their profits to plow back into building their business and how much to distribute to their employees in the form of higher wages. People who have money confront choices about how to use it: whether to spend it on personal luxuries, invest it in their family's future, or give it away to charities that help the less fortunate. These economic choices are also moral decisions that bring greater or lesser benefit to society, as well as to the individuals concerned.

Environmental Conservation

Making a social contribution includes caring for and preserving the natural environment. Although wealth may be acquired by harvesting the elements of nature, exploiting nature and extracting its resources faster than they are regenerated is in effect stealing from the future. The environment is a fragile resource.

According to the United Nations Environmental Program, "A new ethic, embracing plants and animals as well as people, is required for human societies to live in harmony with the natural world on which they depend for survival and well-being."¹⁴ What might be a family-based environmental ethic? If people regard the planet Earth as the great Mother who provides all the elements that nourish their bodies and keep them alive, they will care for her with gratitude, just as children show gratitude to their elderly parents.

The natural world forms a wider "society" that is responsive to human beings and deserving of their care. People sense their kinship with other living creatures, feel empathy towards them, and want to protect them. Even mechanical things, like automobiles, are tinged with a mysterious sensibility, seeming to respond to their owner's care. Computers have been known to go haywire when their users are frustrated or furious. A well-kept house will sparkle with warmth and comfort if it is cared for with love.

Nature has a natural balance; it is marvelously harmonious and fecund. When nature is exploited, the resulting devastation—poisoned air, filthy water and littered land—is only too obvious. Thus, the condition of the environment is a transparent indicator of human moral standards. For this reason, environmental education is a helpful complement to character education.

Environmental education helps integrate the various areas of

human awareness on the way to becoming a complete human being. It combines the folklore and wisdom of native peoples with the latest findings of science. It serves to reunite the facts of the scientific worldview with the spiritual and moral values that guide humans in their responsibility to be caretakers of the natural world. Moreover, the same sensitivity and care that is required to establish a balanced relationship with the earth is desirable for building well-balanced relationships with one another.¹⁵

For example, Catherine Sneed, a counselor at the San Francisco County Jail, created an organic garden on land adjoining the jail for use in the rehabilitation of inmates. Gardening teaches life lessons. Prisoners with drug problems see how well the plants grow without chemicals. Many of them had lived on junk food; now they discover the natural taste of fresh vegetables as they enjoy the garden's bounty. They see that harvests cannot be cheated on or rushed; they receive based only on what they give. Small farm animals give them experience in nurturing; planning the garden shows the benefits of long-term thinking. But the most powerful lesson is that mistakes in life, like those in the garden, can be corrected. The recidivism rate of the gardeners is only one-fourth that of other inmates.¹⁶

Whether in regards to leadership, work, money or the environment, the governing ethical principles of contributing to society are simple: live for the benefit of others, serve the greater good, and care for others with a parental heart. An enlightened restaurant owner handles all his patrons as if they were kin and offers them a relaxing and satisfying time. An auto worker who takes pride in his work puts care into every weld and rivet, wanting his product to carry a family with safety and reliability. A conscientious veterinarian treats all the animals she tends to with the same care and concern as if they were her own pets. True love is the motive for service and giving. It is the essential quality for leadership in any field.

All social ethics, then, whether applied to business, law, medicine or the environment, is founded upon an altruistic heart, mature personal character and the norms of family life. As Confucius wrote in *The Great Learning*:

When the heart is set right, the personal life will be cultivated; when the personal life is cultivated, the family will be regulated; when the family is regulated, the nation will be in order; and when the nation is in order, there will be peace in the world.¹⁷