

Morality, Ethics, and Gifted Minds

Don Ambrose • Tracy Cross
Editors

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 Springer

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Contents

Author Bios ix

Part I Launching the Exploration

1 Connecting Ethics with High Ability: An Interdisciplinary Approach 3
Don Ambrose and Tracy L. Cross

Part II Ethical Leadership

2 Reflections on Ethical Leadership 19
Robert J. Sternberg

3 Moral Leadership, Effective Leadership, and Intellectual Giftedness: Problems, Parallels, and Possibilities 29
Mary-Elaine Jacobsen

Part III Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ethics

4 Morality and High Ability: Navigating a Landscape of Altruism and Malevolence 49
Don Ambrose

5 Identity, Moral Choice, and the Moral Imagination: Is There a Neuroscientific Foundation for Altruism? 73
Adam Martin and Kristen Renwick Monroe

6 The Efficient Drowning of a Nation: Is Economics Education Warping Gifted Minds and Eroding Human Prospects? 89
Tom L. Green

7	The Continuous Nature of Moral Creativity	105
	Mark A. Runco	
8	Critical Thinking, Creativity, Ethical Reasoning: A Unity of Opposites	117
	Richard Paul and Linda Elder	
9	Quantum Creativity in Business	133
	Amit Goswami	
10	What Cognitive Science Brings to Ethics	147
	Mark Johnson	
11	Constructing Selves	151
	Meir Dan-Cohen	
12	Reflections on the Philosophy of Nonviolence and Peace Studies	155
	Laurence F. Bove	
Part IV Emotion, Affect, and the Inner Journey		
13	Moral Sensitivity in Young Gifted Children	161
	Deirdre V. Lovecky	
14	The Inner World of the Young and Bright	177
	Michael M. Piechowski	
15	Depth Psychology and Integrity	195
	F. Christopher Reynolds and Jane Piirto	
Part V Recognizing and Guiding Ethical High Ability		
16	Morality, Ethics and Good Work: Young People's Respectful and Ethical Minds	209
	Scott Seider, Katie Davis, and Howard Gardner	
17	Gifted Minds and Cultural Differences: Facts vs. Values	223
	David A. White	
18	Eastern Perspectives: Moral and Volitional Education of Gifted Students	241
	Chua Tee Teo and Yuanshan Cheng	

19 Giftedness and Moral Promise	251
Annemarie Roper and Linda Kreger Silverman	
20 Self-Actualization and Morality of the Gifted: Environmental, Familial, and Personal Factors	265
Deborah Ruf	
21 Teaching for Intellectual and Emotional Learning (TIEL): Bringing Thinking and Moral-Ethical Learning into Classrooms	285
Christy Folsom	
22 Moral Development in Preparing Gifted Students for Global Citizenship	301
Kay L. Gibson and Marjorie Landwehr-Brown	
23 Growing Up Smart and Criminal	313
Maureen Neihart	
24 Character Problems: Justifications of Character Education Programs, Compulsory Schooling, and Gifted Education	327
Barry Grant	
Part VI Where We've Been and Where We're Going	
25 Capitalizing on Cognitive Diversity in Explorations of Ethical High Ability	347
Don Ambrose	
Author Index	363
Subject Index	371

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Amit Goswami, Ph.D. is professor emeritus of physics at the University of Oregon. As a pioneer of a new paradigm of science (science within consciousness) he explained the implications of this paradigm and solved the quantum measurement problem elucidating the famous observer effect in his seminal book, *The Self-Aware Universe*. He has written six other popular books based on his research on quantum physics and consciousness. These include *The Visionary Window*, *Physics of the Soul*, *Quantum Creativity*, *The Quantum Doctor*, *Creative Evolution*, and *God Is Not Dead*. Goswami also was featured in the films *What the Bleep Do We Know?* its sequel *Down the Rabbit Hole* and in the documentary *Dalai Lama Renaissance*.

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Tom L. Green is an ecological economist who studied briefly with Herman Daly, earned his masters in ecological economics from the University of Victoria and is now at the University of British Columbia, Canada, working on an interdisciplinary Ph.D. focused on greening undergraduate economics education. From 2003–2007, he was the director of socio-economics for a coalition of environmental groups working to protect human and ecosystem wellbeing in British Columbia's Great Bear Rainforest. He remains hopeful that mainstream economics education will come to terms with the fact that humanity is constrained by ecological limits and that human wellbeing is not enhanced by ever increasing consumption.

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Maureen Neihart, Psy.D. is a licensed clinical child psychologist with more than 25 years' experience working with high ability children. She is author of *Peak Performance for Smart Kids* and co-editor of the text, *The Social and Emotional Development of Gifted Children: What Do We Know?* Dr. Neihart is former member of the board of directors of the National Association for Gifted Children (US) and serves on the editorial boards of *Gifted Child Quarterly*, *Roeper Review*, and *Journal of Education for the Gifted*. She is associate professor and deputy head of Psychological Studies at the National Institute of Education, Singapore.

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Part I
Launching the Exploration

Chapter 1

Connecting Ethics with High Ability: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Don Ambrose and Tracy L. Cross

Abstract This book builds interdisciplinary bridges between two very broad inquiry domains: ethics and high ability. Studies of ethics delve into conceptions of right conduct and the nuances of moral behavior. Studies of high ability scrutinize the nature and dynamics of giftedness, talent development, creativity, and intelligence. First, this chapter provides some justification for connecting these very complex, divergent bodies of knowledge. Second, it employs a variety of theories and research findings to illustrate the complexity, longevity, and interdisciplinary nature of the body of inquiry pertaining to ethics and morality. Third, it outlines a set of questions that underlie most of the work of the contributing authors. Finally, it provides an overview of the chapters in the volume.

Those of extraordinary ability can use their gifts and talents for good or ill (Tannenbaum 2000) so exceptional intelligence, talents, and creativity represent opportunities for both improvement and corrosion of the human condition. In recognition of these opportunities and dangers, prominent thinkers frequently have been attracted to explorations of the nature and nuances of morality. This book is an attempt to expand and clarify our conceptions of morality and ethics while connecting them with high ability (i.e., any blend of intelligence, giftedness, talent, and creativity) by bringing together varying insights from leading minds in diverse disciplines. Some contributors are from high-ability fields (e.g., gifted education; creative studies). Others contribute insights from “outside” disciplines in the social sciences, humanities, and natural sciences. Bringing the ideas of outsiders

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together with the work in high-ability fields generates some rich, creative, idea combinations. It also augments some important theoretical, philosophical, and research-based insights with practical ideas about how to nurture the development of positive ethical dispositions in those of high ability.

Such a collaborative, interdisciplinary effort is particularly important in today's world because current trends and issues bring forth considerable immoral behavior on the part of many gifted leaders and innovators. Educators, counselors, and mentors who work closely with today's brightest young minds must be aware of the ethical dimensions of high ability because they should be nudging the development of impressive talent toward positive purposes. If they are unaware of the ethical influences they exert, they could be pushing their bright protégés toward morally reprehensible future actions.

While the twentieth century arguably was the most brutal in human history featuring numerous mass genocides and the creation and use of weapons of mass destruction (Glover 2000), the twenty-first century seems to be starting out not much different. Ethical problems abound, including the following:

The persistence of ethnic and religious conflicts based on warped, superficial understanding of others (see Chirot and McCauley 2006; Madsen and Strong 2003). The serious erosion of democracy in some developed, Western nations once thought to epitomize the most just and participatory forms of governance (see Hacker and Pierson 2005; Wolin 2008).

Deterioration of the media, which generates excessive ideological spin and mind-numbing entertainment while abdicating its responsibility for providing objective, investigative journalism – the lifeblood of democracy (Belsey 1998; Gans 2003; Lance et al. 2007).

Hegemonic globalized capitalism, which has degenerated from its original ideal of providing opportunity for all to become a large-scale system for concentrating wealth and power in the hands of a few while exploiting the deprived (McMurtry 1999, 2002; Wolin 2008).

These are a few of many large-scale problems that derive from the misapplication of gifted minds. Fortunately, there are many examples of gifted people traveling along more positive ethical paths. For example, members of the nongovernmental organization, Doctors Without Borders, selflessly serve the powerless and downtrodden in some of the most dangerous regions of the world (Leyton 1998); the heroic activist, Aung San Su Kyi, provides inspiration to millions around the world through her leadership of nonviolent resistance to the totalitarian regime in Myanmar (Victor, 1998); and journalist, Amy Goodman, tenaciously digs into the essence of complex news stories and societal issues to reveal hidden corruption (see Holbrook 2006). These impressive altruists follow the lead of their historical antecedents such as William Wilberforce, the activist who worked diligently to eradicate the British slave trade in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Metaxas 2007); and Mahatma Gandhi who catalyzed the nonviolent overthrow of British colonial oppression in early-mid-twentieth century India (Gardner 1997; Wolpert 2002).

These examples of issues, groups, and individuals, both positive and pernicious, accentuate the importance of blending ethics with high ability. For the purposes of this introduction, we distinguish between ethics and morality as similar to distinctions between theory and practice. The term ethics denotes theories of right conduct whereas the term morality denotes the actual practice of right conduct (see Sahakian and Sahakian 1966).

Keywords Altruism · Cognitive diversity · Creativity · Doctors without borders · Giftedness · Intelligence · Interdisciplinary · Metaphor · Morality · Religion · Self-interest

1.1 Sampling the Breadth and Complexity of Morality and Ethics

Contemplation of ethics and morality has a long and distinguished history, which is too rich to describe here in depth. Nevertheless, the following limited and oversimplified set of examples suggests the remarkable range and diversity of this exploration.

1.1.1 The Golden Mean

Stretching back well over two millennia, we come to Aristotle's (350 B.C.E./1908) notion of the golden mean, which identified virtuous action as artful navigation between behavioral extremes. A specific sample from his framework is a portrayal of righteous indignation as a virtuous midpoint between maliciousness, the vice of deficiency, and envy, the vice of excess.

1.1.2 Moral Intuition and the Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant (1781/1988) argued that people are more prone to wickedness if they are unimaginative. In order to become more ethical we must have the capacity to imagine what would happen if our decision rules became universal requiring everyone to follow them.

1.1.3 Stages of Moral Development

Some scholars discerned stages of moral development ranging from low-level egocentrism to levels at which the individual reflexively follows the dictates of

external authority, to the highest levels of universal altruism (e.g., Kohlberg 1984). Development to higher levels is not guaranteed because large numbers of people remain stunted at the low levels of moral functioning.

1.1.4 Particularist and Universalist Morality

Other investigators delved into the interesting phenomenon of moral particularism in which an individual or group confines altruistic actions within the borders of a particular, favored, ethnic, religious, or regional identity group while feeling little or no compunction about denigrating or even seriously harming outsiders (e.g., Gewirth 1998; Koonz 2003; Moore 2000; Pérez 2006). In contrast, universalist morality denotes the tendency of some individuals to transcend self and ethnicity, launching themselves into altruistic action in service of those far outside their identity group because their senses of selfhood force them to view themselves as inextricably intertwined with the whole of humanity (see Gewirth 1998; Martin 1997; Monroe 1996, 2004).

1.1.5 Religious Perspectives and Their Influences on Ethics

Moore (2000) and Stark (2003) showed how monotheistic religion can provide strong bases for the establishment of group identity and positive, altruistic action; however, it also can portray outsiders as impure and deserving of punishment because they do not follow the teachings of the one true God. Consequently, vicious mass persecutions can occur when a monotheistic religion generates a perceived monopoly on virtue among its insiders and labels outsiders as immoral heretics. In addition, major religious traditions show some intriguing, deep-seated commonalities while also representing widely divergent teachings on particular rules for action (see Banner 2002; Hanafi 2002; Madsen 2002; Stone 2002). Based on these analyses we can suggest that surface-level religious beliefs can lead to both good and evil action while deeper spirituality, where the altruistic commonalities reside, more often leads to positive, moral effects.

1.1.6 Cognition as Metaphorical

Contrary to assumptions that our minds are amenable to our own rational-analytic scrutiny, developments in cognitive science reveal that the mind is much deeper and more complex: a Gordian knot resistant to logical scrutiny such as that attempted by analytic philosophy and much of psychology. The abstractions commonly dealt with by intelligent minds are mostly metaphorical and deeply rooted in our bodily

experiences (Lakoff 1993, 2002; Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999). Considerations of morality and ethics rely on such deep, metaphorical abstractions.

1.1.7 Large-Scale Sociocontextual Influences on Morality

Some investigators have attempted to reveal various dimensions of the large-scale, sociopolitical, economic, or cultural contexts that influence moral behavior. Lakoff (2002) revealed metaphorical cognitive processes underpinning some extreme behaviors that emerge from dynamic tensions between right- and left-wing ideologies. Ambrose (2002, 2003, 2008) discussed the influences of deprivation and privilege on the moral aspects of high ability, and revealed the ethical dangers of widespread utopian thinking (2008).

1.1.8 Altruism as a Product of Genetics and Evolutionary Processes

Sociobiology and related fields highlight biological and evolutionary bases for human nature including its moral dimensions (see Dawkins 2006; Wilson 1975, 1978). De Waal (2006) argued that primate behaviors reveal evolutionary continuity between animals and humans, which highlight altruism as an aspect of our essential natures. He attacked veneer theory, which portrays altruism as a thin, culturally induced layer of civilization over our baser, brutish natures.

1.1.9 Resisting Self-Interest as a Basis for Morality

Some have been challenging the dominance of evolutionary psychology as well as rational choice theory in the social sciences, which portray self-interest as dominant in the motivational aspects of human behavior. These challenges make moral behavior seem less self-centered (see Mansbridge 1990; Martin 1997; McKinnon 2005; Monroe 1996, 2004).

1.1.10 Postmodern Skepticism About Grand Explanations

Postmodern theorists add even more uncertainty to arguments about ethics by warning that prominent theories of human behavior often are excessively ambitious, overarching explanations prone to oversimplification and overgeneralization (see Cahoon 1996). They argue that exploitation and evil can come from too much trust in modernist grand narratives.

1.1.11 Ethical Absences or Opposites

Some thinkers have sought to reveal dimensions of morality by exploring the ways in which moral vacuums or serious moral transgressions occur in human experience. For example, the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, (1651/1985) argued that we need a strong social contract entailing legal agreements that impose order. Without such a system our rational but wicked essential nature would doom us to solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short lives. Midgley (1988) reinforced this idea that vile actions are ubiquitous in the human experience. McLaren (1993, 1999) described the great harm done by some creative people. Hare (1963) argued that psychopathology is more widespread and pernicious than commonly believed. Consequently, we must be wary of people who seem normal on the surface but are self-centered, cunning, exploitative, and remorseless in many of their interactions with others.

1.2 Driving Questions for This Interdisciplinary Exploration

As with any vigorous inquiry into a complex, multidimensional issue, the search for deeper and broader understanding of morality and ethics springs from a set of key questions. The following are some questions that underpin the chapters in this volume:

What key concepts should we consider in explorations of morality and ethics (e.g., selfishness, generosity, greed, exploitation, identity, dogmatism, among others)?

Which concepts, issues, or concerns reside at the core of conflicts over ethics?

What dynamic tensions exist between moral principles and the laws established in particular societal contexts?

How far can ethical frameworks extend toward either absolutist sets of incontrovertible laws for behavior or relativistic acceptance of widely divergent practices?

Who, if anyone, has the right to impose a set of moral principles on others in a society, and how far does this right extend?

Are there aspects of human nature that predispose us toward certain moral behaviors? If yes, are some of these aspects rooted in our biology?

Which moral behaviors are most conducive to shaping, magnification, or suppression by our socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts?

Is moral behavior responsive to algorithmic, rule-bound thinking or does it require more nuanced, nonalgorithmic, intuitive cognitive processing?

What roles do spirituality and religion play in moral thought and action? What are the differences between spirituality and religion and what are the ethical implications of these differences?

If an individual is highly intelligent, talented, or creative, does he or she carry additional, or different, moral responsibility than less-gifted peers?

Are certain kinds of intelligence, giftedness, talent, or creativity more bound up in ethical concerns than other kinds of high ability?

Is it possible to teach young people to behave in morally responsible ways? If so, what are the most effective strategies for instruction and mentorship?

Of course this list is not exhaustive. Although it emerges from a very broad, interdisciplinary project encompassing a collection of scholars from very diverse fields, a collaborative brainstorming by knowledgeable investigators beyond this volume likely would extend the list somewhat. Including ideas from other major thinkers from the past, and from diverse cultures, might expand it even more. Suffice it to say that these questions hint at the enormous breadth and deep complexity of the topic.

1.3 Exploiting Interdisciplinary Cognitive Diversity

Complex human issues often require interdisciplinary collaboration because their multiple dimensions usually stretch beyond the borders of a single discipline (Ambrose 2005; Nicolescu 1996). Ethics and high ability are two very complex areas of study, and each entails many, diverse subcategories. Bringing them together into a common forum adds even more complexity because the combination of remotely associated ideas can produce unpredictable, creative insights (Koestler 1964; Mednick 1976). In addition, according to analyses of *cognitive diversity*, diverse groups of thinkers bring varied conceptual frameworks and problem-solving heuristics into play, and the resulting idea mixtures produce better results in complex problem solving than would the collective contributions of a homogenous group (Page 2007). The nuances and benefits of our cognitive diversity are explored in more detail in Chapter 25.

For all of these reasons, we thought it wise to assemble a diverse, interdisciplinary group of leading minds for this large-scale attempt to bridge ethics and high ability. Our authors include scholars of high ability who spend their time researching aspects of giftedness, talent, intelligence, or creativity. Some study the theoretical or philosophical dimensions of high ability. Others attend to practical applications such as mentoring and instructional methodologies. But our group extends beyond high-ability scholars to include investigators from the social sciences, the humanities, and the natural sciences whose work pertains to ethics but has not before been applied to giftedness, talent development, intelligence, or creativity in systematic ways. In short, they are outsiders to high-ability disciplines, and they enrich our cognitive diversity considerably. Our outsiders include representatives of psychology, ethical philosophy, peace studies, political philosophy, neuroscience, biology, economics, legal theory, critical thinking, and theoretical physics.

1.4 Perspectives on Morality, Ethics, and High Ability in This Volume

The contributions of our authors fit into some interesting patterns represented generally in the structure of the sections to come, which align as follows: ethical leadership; a diverse collection of insights from the outside disciplines; a set of probings into the ethical aspects of the inner experience of bright, young people; a collection of advice about how to guide the behavior and moral development of the gifted and creative; and finally we address other promising cross-disciplinary connections in our final chapter while inviting you to look for more.

In Part II, experts from creative-intelligence fields provide key ideas about leadership and its fit with high ability and ethics. Starting the discussion of leadership, Robert Sternberg illustrates why behaving ethically often is a difficult path to follow. In Chapter 2, he develops a multi-step model for ethical behavior, which reveals a number of pitfalls that can subvert ethical decision making. Deviating from notions of moral giftedness, he suggests his model can help virtually all individuals develop stronger moral fiber.

In Chapter 3, Mary-Elaine Jacobsen looks into what it takes to become an effective, ethical leader while recognizing a worldwide shortage of leadership talent, especially a lack of ethical leadership in view of proliferating scandals in private-sector and governmental organizations. Significant parallels exist between intellectual ability and leadership. With suitable opportunities for learning, intellectual gifts can be aligned with effective leadership skills and moral principles.

The interdisciplinary insights in Part III begin with a big-picture framework. In Chapter 4, Don Ambrose develops a theoretic model of moral impact to assist thinking about the connection between ethics and high ability. Suggesting that bright individuals navigate a metaphorical landscape that undulates between the extremes of several continua (high to low influence and ability; benevolence to malevolence, high to low impact on the world) the model provides a lens for analysis of other conceptions of ethics and giftedness, talent, or creativity.

In Chapter 5, Adam Martin and Kristen Renwick Monroe synthesize insights from moral psychology and neuroscience and delve deeply into identity formation, connecting it with the moral imagination. They also employ findings about the morally admirable behavior of altruistic rescuers – those who risk themselves to help others, their analysis reveals how identity serves as a cognitive menu constraining the moral choices individuals make, and inclining them toward or away from self-transcending, altruistic behavior.

Tom Green investigates an important paradox in Chapter 6. He analyzes a globe-spanning incongruity that influences moral behavior throughout modern societies. Asking why intelligent economists can be so thickheaded, he concludes that economics education derives from short-sighted models with narrow perceptual frames. Such education encourages otherwise bright people to act in morally vacuous, or even morally pernicious, and environmentally destructive ways.

In Chapter 7, Mark Runco connects creativity with giftedness and ethics, showing how these important elements of human thought and action interact, constrain,

and support one another. Creativity is an interesting ingredient here because it gives the individual a larger range of options for moral action. Thoughts and actions must be original and useful to be creative but creativity does not necessarily dovetail with morality. Runco argues that restructuring our thought to make room for creative options can improve our chances for morally positive outcomes.

Richard Paul and Lauren Elder look at the ethical opportunities that effective thinking can generate as well as some serious problems often produced by ineffective thinking. In Chapter 8, they build bridges connecting critical thinking, creative thinking, and ethical reasoning, which are commonly and errantly portrayed as separate. While illuminating these important connections, they explore a variety of intellectual virtues along with pernicious thought processes that counterfeit for ethical reasoning. Their analysis ranges broadly, addressing religious beliefs, social conventions, ideology, law, and other aspects of the human experience.

Amit Goswami takes us in a different direction in Chapter 9. He employs some insights from a new philosophy of science, which derives from the strange paradoxes of quantum physics, to posit a grand opportunity for turning business models toward morally positive, environmentally sustainable, more spiritually attuned processes. Overall, this opportunity represents a logical outcome of a global shift in consciousness away from the mechanistic, technocratic thinking of the past.

Contributors from outside disciplines had the option of providing brief synopses of key ideas from their work or longer analyses, and our next three authors in this interdisciplinary subsection chose mini-chapters as the appropriate venues for their contributions. Mark Johnson provides an overview of some cognitive science research and theory in Chapter 10. Illustrating how abstract moral concepts are grounded metaphorically and viscerally in our bodily experiences and emotions, he portrays moral reasoning as a problem-solving process amenable to imaginative thought. Such a process seems ideally suited to the creative propensities of gifted individuals. Meier Dan-Cohen, in Chapter 11, argues that the nature of individual identity in a society has great bearing on ethical issues. The values and legal frameworks that dominate a society influence the development of personal identity. Consequently, the socially constructed self is at the core of moral action in the world because inner motivation and external, societal compulsions are inextricably intertwined in considerations of ethics. In Chapter 12, Laurence Bove provides some insights from ethical philosophy and the interdisciplinary field of peace studies by revealing some ethical aspects of power and domination in societies. He suggests ways in which intelligent individuals can employ conceptual framing and storytelling to move us toward peace through nonviolence. There are strong implications for gifted young people who must grapple with the complexities of an unjust world.

Part IV includes works that study the inner experiences of the individual. In Chapter 13, Deirdre Lovecky explores pathways to the precocious development of empathy and compassion in young people while additionally delving into the more rule-based structures of moral reasoning. In addition, she analyses some of the substantial problems that early awareness of moral difficulties often brings to gifted young people. Environmental, familial, and personal factors that affect the self-actualization and moral development of the highly gifted are scrutinized. The effects

of intensity and sensitivity are considered within the framework of a type of asynchrony between what the young child feels and what he or she is able to do.

In Chapter 14, Michael Piechowski highlights the inner, emotional lives of the gifted as crucial to their advanced development, and to their moral behavior. Portraying giftedness as deriving from higher levels of energy, emotional tension, overexcitability, and sensitivity, among other phenomena, he also shows how Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration can illuminate the phenomenon of positive maladjustment as well as connections between morality and emotional development.

Christopher Reynolds and Jane Piirto give us a glimpse of the emerging field of depth psychology in Chapter 15. They note that this field focuses on the psyche, emphasizing the unconscious rather than ego consciousness, which is an area of study that they believe has received too much attention. They include topics that are uncommon to the literature in the field of gifted studies such as the collective unconscious, the presence and importance of archetypes, and the darker side of human nature.

While still generating some important theoretical and philosophical insights, Part V also moves us toward practical implications. In Chapter 16, Scott Seider, Katie Davis, and Howard Gardner question the prevalent assumption that high ability equates with moral awareness and posit that intelligence and reasoning ability are neither moral nor immoral. Based on research from the Good Work Project, they share several key findings that have emerged regarding the ethical dilemmas and pitfalls often faced by adolescents and young adults as well as some of the supports that increase the likelihood of young people doing good work.

David White employs philosophical analysis in Chapter 17 to grapple with the nettlesome ethical problem of cultural and personal values. He articulates differences between facts and values, while delineating variations in the latter, and then clarifies the nebulous nature of cultures. He also provides a framework for dealing with cross-cultural differences in values.

Chua Tee Teo and Yuanshan Cheng provide an international, comparative perspective to the discussion of moral education. In Chapter 18, they use empirical evidence to examine the philosophical underpinnings and practical interventions that characterize moral education for bright young people in Singapore, China, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand. The patterns of similarity and difference between nations, and between East and West, are informative.

In Chapter 19, Annemarie Roeper and Linda Silverman detail the great cognitive ability, powers of observation, sensitivity, and intuitive capacities that enable gifted youth to develop an unerring sense of morality and justice. At the same time, they note that experiential and cognitive distortions can lead them astray. Roeper and Silverman employ positive and negative examples such as Adolf Hitler and Nelson Mandela to illustrate the dynamics of these developmental processes.

In Chapter 20, Deborah Ruf addresses the question, "Does being smart necessarily lead to being emotionally mature and wise?" Through analyses of the self-actualization of highly gifted individuals, she reveals great diversity in their moral development. They spread over the entire range of a moral-development

continuum rather than clustering at the highly virtuous end. She explores environmental effects and considers how family, school, and social background may contribute to self-actualization and advanced moral reasoning among people with gifts and talents.

Recognizing that many gifted individuals possess high degrees of ethical sensibility while others use their intellectual ability to override ethical behavior for selfish purposes, Christy Folsom presents and explains a curriculum model that brings together the intellectual and ethical aspects of learning in Chapter 21. The Teaching for Intellectual and Emotional Learning (TIEL) model helps young people advance both intellectually and ethically from an early age by developing a balance of intellectual skills and strong qualities of character. Folsom claims that the TIEL model successfully connects cognitive and affective components of learning for teaching students about moral-ethical issues.

Kay Gibson and Marjorie Landwehr-Brown argue that gifted young people have the potential to become the leaders of the world. Consequently, adults in positions of influence are responsible for helping them develop into ethical and moral leaders. In Chapter 22, based on the fact that the world is both interconnected and interdependent, they examine ways that global learning in schools will prepare the gifted to display high ethical standards and moral behavior.

In one of the most provocative arguments, Maureen Neihart describes ways in which bright minds can devolve toward criminality. In Chapter 23, she draws on syllogism, research, and other forms of analysis to illustrate a pattern of thinking that she describes as criminal logic. Prior research revealing common characteristics of students with high abilities are considered in light of the characteristics of those who engage in unethical acts. The chapter shows the critical need to help those prone to criminal thinking to develop more positive ethical patterns of thought and behavior.

In Chapter 24, Barry Grant critiques character-education (CE) initiatives, showing how they can derive from superficial thinking. While analyzing various values frameworks, he illustrates inconsistencies between the moral values often established as goals for CE programs and the values actually taught in compulsory schooling. Finally, he urges educators to pry deeper into justifications for CE programs, and to question assumptions underpinning compulsory education *per se*.

Finally, Part VI returns to the large-scale patterns in the book. In Chapter 25, Don Ambrose attempts an embryonic synthesis of the contributions in the volume. Employing the concept of cognitive diversity; which reveals the benefits of combining diverse, interdisciplinary insights in complex problem solving; he calls for more interdisciplinary bridging between ethics and high ability while drawing some interconnections among the chapters in this collection. He also points out some areas of disagreement, which may represent some opportunities for unforeseen progress.

We hope the varied insights provided here will prompt you to generate your own inquiries into the nature of morality and ethics. If the perspectives represented in this volume induce you to think beyond current wisdom about morality and its manifestations in the most creatively intelligent minds, this exploration will have been well worthwhile.

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Part II
Ethical Leadership

Chapter 2

Reflections on Ethical Leadership

Robert J. Sternberg

Abstract This chapter discusses why ethical behavior is more of a challenge than it would first appear to be. In particular, ethical behavior requires a person to (1) recognize that there is an event to which to react; (2) define the event as having an ethical dimension; (3) decide that the ethical dimension is significant; (4) take responsibility for generating an ethical solution to the problem; (5) figure out what abstract ethical rule(s) might apply to the problem; (6) decide how these abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem so as to suggest a concrete solution; (7) enact the ethical solution, meanwhile possibly counteracting contextual forces that might lead one not to act in an ethical manner; (8) deal with possible repercussions of having acted in what one considers an ethical manner. In some ways, therefore, behaving ethically is nontrivial in the same ways as is bystander intervention, itself an ethical challenge. The challenges are put in the context of a theory of ethical leadership.

“I am very proud of myself,” I told the 17 students in my seminar, Psychology 60, The Nature of Leadership. I had just returned from a trip and was about to fill out the reimbursement forms when I discovered that I could actually get reimbursed twice. The first reimbursement would come from the organization that had invited me, and required me merely to fill out a form listing my expenses. The second reimbursement would come from my university, Tufts, upon my submitting the receipts from the trip. I explained to the class that I had worked really hard on the trip speaking about ethical leadership, and so I was pleased that by getting reimbursed twice, I could justify to myself the amount of work I had put into the trip.

I waited for the firestorm. Would the class – which had already studied leadership for several months – rise up in a mass protest against what I had done? Or would only a half-dozen brave souls raise their hands and roundly criticize me for what was obviously patently unethical behavior? I waited, and waited, and waited.

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Nothing happened. I then decided to move on to the main topic of the day – I do not even remember what it was. All the time I was speaking about that main topic, I expected some of the students to raise their hands and demand to return to the topic of my double reimbursement. It didn't happen.

Finally, I stopped talking about whatever the topic was, and flat-out asked the class why no one had challenged me. I figured that they would, to a person, be embarrassed for not having challenged me. Quite a few of them were embarrassed. Others thought I must be kidding. What I did not expect, though – especially after having taught them for several months about ethical leadership – was that some of the students would commend me on my clever idea and argue that, if I could get away with it, I was entitled to receive the money.

This experience reminded me of how hard it is to translate theories of ethics, and even case studies, into one's own practice. The students had read about ethics in leadership, heard about ethics in leadership from a variety of real-world leaders, discussed ethics in leadership, and then apparently totally failed to recognize unethical behavior when it stared them in the face. (Full disclosure: I did *not* really seek double reimbursement!) Why is it so hard to translate theory into practice, even after one has studied ethical leadership for several months?

I was reminded of the work of Latané and Darley (1970), which showed that divinity students who were about to lecture on the parable of *The Good Samaritan* were no more likely than other bystanders to help a person in distress who was in need of – a good Samaritan! Drawing upon their model of bystander intervention, I here propose a model of ethical behavior that would seem to apply to a variety of ethical problems.

The model is also grounded in a theory I have proposed of good and effective leadership, called WICS. WICS is an acronym for wisdom, intelligence, and creativity, synthesized (Sternberg 2003a, b, 2005, 2008). The basic idea is that gifted leaders excel in having a creative vision for where they wish to lead people; in being able to analyze whether the vision is a good one (analytical intelligence); in being able practically to implement the vision and persuade others of its value (practical intelligence); and in ensuring that the vision wisely helps lead stakeholders toward a common good.

Keywords Balance · Common good · Ethics · Extrapersonal interests · Intrapersonal interests · Interpersonal interests · WICS · Wisdom

2.1 A Model for Ethical Behavior

According to the proposed model, enacting ethical behavior is much harder than it would appear to be because it involves multiple, largely sequential, steps. To behave ethically, the individual has to:

- Recognize that there is an event to which to react.
- Define the event as having an ethical dimension.
- Decide that the ethical dimension is significant.

Take responsibility for generating an ethical solution to the problem.

Figure out what abstract ethical rule(s) might apply to the problem.

Decide how these abstract ethical rules actually apply to the problem so as to suggest a concrete solution.

Enact the ethical solution, meanwhile possibly counteracting contextual forces that might lead one not to act in an ethical manner.

Deal with possible repercussions of having acted in what one considers an ethical manner.

Seen from this standpoint, it is rather challenging to respond to problems in an ethical manner. Consider the example of the supposed double reimbursement.

2.1.1 Recognize That There Is an Event to Which To React

The students were sitting in a class on leadership, expecting to be educated by an expert on leadership about leadership. In this case, I did not present the problem as one to which I expected them to react. I was simply telling them about something I had done. They had no a priori reason to expect that this was something for which an authority figure would require any particular kind of reaction, perhaps, except for taking notes. So for some students, the whole narrative may have been a nonevent.

This, of course, is a problem that extends beyond this mere classroom situation. When people hear their political, educational, or religious leaders talk, they may not believe there is any reason to question what they hear. After all, they are listening to authority figures. In this way, leaders, including cynical and corrupt leaders, may lead their flocks to accept and even commit unethical acts.

2.1.2 Define the Event as Having an Ethical Dimension

Not all students in the class defined the problem as an ethical one. It became clear in the discussion that some students saw the problem as utilitarian: I had worked hard, had been underpaid, and was trying to figure out a way to attain adequate compensation for my hard work. In this definition of the problem, I had come up with a clever way to make the compensation better fit the work I had done.

Cynical leaders may flaunt their unethical behavior – one is reminded today of Robert Mugabe, but there are other world leaders who might equally be relevant here. When Mugabe and his henchmen seized the farms of white farmers, the seizure was presented as one of compensating alleged war heroes for their accomplishments. Why should it be unethical to compensate war heroes?

As I write, the Chinese government is attempting to manipulate media to downplay the dimensions of an event with a huge ethical component (Atlas 2008). On May 12, 2008, an earthquake in Sichuan province killed an estimated ten thousand school children. But there was an irregularity in the buildings that imploded during