Entrepreneurial Ethics

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INTRODUCTION

Living the Best Possible Life

The practice of philosophy in the Western cultural tradition has always been concerned with the achievement of excellence in living. Since first being configured by ancient Greek sages like Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Pythagoras, Epictetus, and many others, the practice of philosophy has been understood to involve a commitment to a certain *way of life* oriented to the successful achievement of practical life goals. The idea that philosophy is somehow detached from real life is a misunderstanding. Fact is, from the very start, philosophy was born out of an intense existential interest in how you should go about living the best possible life. That interest came to be called "Ethics." And the very nature of that practice is entrepreneurial.

Every rational person wants to live the best possible life. Of course, that doesn't mean that I know what the best possible life is for you or for anyone. We each must figure that out for ourselves. But, for all of us, creating and living the best possible life certainly involves an active, focused, everyday practice of cultivating personal moral value development. That is exactly what those first philosophers spent a good bit of time trying to understand, articulate and actualize in their lives. This text follows their lead.

The various abstract, rational, and speculative discourses that arose among the ancient philosophical schools—conversations, dialogues and reflections reaching out to every area of knowledge—were not pursued purely for their own sake (enjoyable as that might be), but for the sake of cultivating the moral growth and development of the students who engaged in those conversations and exercises. As Pierre Hadot puts it in *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, the early Greek philosophers understood the study of philosophy as "the training of human beings, as the slow and difficult education of the character, as the harmonious development of the entire human person, and finally as a way of life, intended to 'ensure…a good life and thereby the 'salvation' of the soul." [1]

The ideas that were examined in the discourses of the philosophical schools were put into practice through various forms of 'exercises' that were intended to broaden the moral horizons and bring about actual moral value upgrades and reconfigurations in the person of the practitioner.

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[1] Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2002) 65.

These exercises formed steps along the path of living the best possible life. The reflective discourses clarified the practical exercises theoretically, while the practical exercises concretized the theoretical ideas in the immediate certitude of lived experience. These mental and practical exercises, along with reflective philosophical training, were thus meant to bring about an expansion and enlightenment of moral consciousness and create an increase in personal moral growth and development for the individual philosopher; an increase in personal moral power.

Personal moral power

Personal moral power is your practical ability to achieve living the best possible life. Moral values guide our actions, and actions, in the final analysis, are what morality is all about. Talking about ethics won't produce moral power any more than talking about sit-ups will produce flat abs. It is the hands-on, actual practice of philosophical exercises that is necessary to develop the musculature of moral power. In the ancient Greek schools, these exercises constituted a way of life that had the goal of creating a well-rounded person of excellence in every regard, ready to face moral challenges in private life, business and public service.

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Entrepreneurial Ethics takes its basic orientation, purpose, and structure from the ancient understanding of moral philosophy as an entrepreneurial practice aimed at cultivating the personal moral growth and development of the practitioner. Philosophical training was understood to be the most effective preparation for achieving success in life because of the unparalleled way in which the study of philosophy broadens and deepens the cognitive, affective, intuitive-perceptual and pre-conceptual horizons of the practitioner. This hands-on, practical approach to moral growth and development can still be effectively used today to develop your personal moral power to its fullest so that you can thereby achieve living the best possible life here and now in a world with others.

Taking charge of your morality

Because of the personal development orientation of *Entrepreneurial Ethics*, the subject matter presented in this text is, to a certain extent, less important in itself than the experiential practice of working with what is revealed by that subject matter and the exercises that are designed to lead to an expansion or deepening of your moral consciousness in relation to it. Abstract ideas are of no practical value until they are enacted or embodied in your everyday situated engagements. As Aristotle said, "What good is the study of ethics if you don't put it into practice?" Everyday life is the only place where morality happens. Yet, despite the ever-present nature of morality in everyday life, there is often a curious lack of awareness about the perpetual play of moral values infusing the motivational sources of our actions and our desires.

Morality is mostly invisible in everyday life. We act morally without realizing fully how we are doing so, and, often, even that we are doing so. This invisibility is because your morality

was learned (or shaped through reinforcement), starting from when you were a young child, in much the same way as your native language and basic social skills were learned, and at about the same time. Cognitive, social, and moral development overlap and all share the same functional invisibility.

We learn to speak our native language without learning grammar or syntax first. For example, most of us are readily capable of using the subjunctive mood, more or less correctly, and we may do so many times a day. Yet, we do this without consciously and reflectively knowing what the subjunctive mood is, the rules for when and where it should be used, etc. This is because we all learn our native language tacitly and imitatively, and then use it intuitively, by a kind of subjective 'feel' for the correct usage in a situation that will convey what we mean effectively to others; a feel for when our articulation fulfills our intuition; i.e., when what we say equals what we mean or want to say. This natural intuitive use of language is then socially structured into meaningful speech through the recognition of what we say by others. Such intuitively driven, social use of language is different than learning a rule for the use of the subjunctive mood and then consciously trying to apply the rule in appropriate circumstances, as beginners often do when learning a second language. Morality works similarly.

Most people make many moral judgments every day without knowing reflectively what a moral judgment is or how it might be distinguished from an aesthetic judgment, say, or a judgment of taste. In fact, if you ask most people on the street what a moral judgment is you will undoubtedly get the same quizzical response you would get if you asked them to explain the use and abuse of the subjunctive. Just as you can use language effectively without knowing the rules that you are following, you can also act morally without reflectively knowing how you are doing so. You have a clear intuitive 'feel' for what is morally acceptable or not, and a 'feel' for when your actions align with your moral values and when they don't. But asked what moral principles are in play or how conflicts of principle should be resolved, and everyday people go blank.

Morality remains mostly invisible for most adults. It stays in the background of their mostly moral actions until problematic circumstances or moral value conflicts bring it to the foreground. Generally, this invisibility of morality is not a problem, as long as your unconscious, morally-driven actions conform more or less to conventionally accepted norms and standards. Ignorance of syntax won't necessarily be fatal to a sales pitch. But the potential problem with conventional morality is that it allows of no way to think critically about itself or beyond itself or when it is confronted by a moral dilemma. It has no perspective from which to even see its own moral value orientation clearly. Conventional morality remains stuck in conventional thinking. And that will make cultivation, change, growth and development of your moral power difficult if not impossible.

Conventional morality effectively reduces you to the position of being an unconsciously willing slave to the moral value orientation that was inculcated or programmed into you as a child and which continues to be reinforced by conventional culture. This may not be all bad, of course, especially if your moral values were inculcated by benevolent sources. But, even so, conventional morality is too often narrow and limiting, and can become rigid, brittle and ineffective. It is surely insufficient for a more enlightened, fluid, entrepreneurial consciousness aiming at excellence and success in life. This would be a person who aspires toward living the best possible life rather than merely going along with the middling morality of the crowd. For this entrepreneurial moral consciousness, something more is needed. Not an applied ethics of entrepreneurship, but a genuine *Entrepreneurial Ethics.*

The practical purpose of this text

From the entrepreneurial perspective of personal moral growth and development, then, the purpose of this text is to provide you with numerous moral ideas, principles, conceptual frameworks and a series of exercises that will effectively raise or expand your moral consciousness and thereby put you fully and reflectively in charge of your moral value orientation, its configuration and deployment in your everyday life, and your actions that flow from it. Since it is your moral value orientation that structures all of your life commitments, judgments, attitudes, actions and accomplishments, it will be much to your benefit to be in the moral driver's seat rather than to be driven along by unseen conventional moral forces.

The purpose of this text is not to make you be more moral. No text and nobody can do that for you. Your morality is *entirely* up to you. The purpose of this text is to make you more reflectively, critically, and strategically conscious of how it is that you already are making moral judgments so that you can then decide consciously whether you want to upgrade your moral value orientation or not, according to how *you* see fit from *your* study of the moral theories, principles and perspectives presented in this text and your reflection on your own personal experience. It will then be fully up to you to decide how much and in what ways you might want to tinker with and make changes to your moral value orientation.

Perhaps the chief purpose of this text, then, is to put you fully in charge of your personal moral value 'database' in its complex, dynamic, everyday configuration and deployment. This is easier said than done. I believe, ultimately, that it is not so much a task that can be completed by merely reading a book or taking a course in ethics. Rather, it requires a personal commitment on your part to achieving excellence as a way of life. This is a commitment that you should adopt *for life*, starting right now—if you haven't already. Here is why I think you should do that. Ultimately, your morality is the way that you configure the values that construct your sense of self. These moral values constitute, construct or configure your whole life and all your personal and professional engagements in the world. In this way, moral values are geared to living the best possible life. I think that it is best not to leave our desire for success in life to chance or blind allegiance to half-conscious moral values.

How the entrepreneurial practice works

Current states of consciousness are raised by being challenged and disrupted. You may find that you have some resistance to engage such challenges to your moral values. Resistance to change is normal, even when it is you changing yourself. Disrupting your own moral status quo can be uncomfortable because your moral status quo is your comfort place, the old rocking chair on the front porch of your moral psyche. But the potential moral power that can be created from challenging and disrupting your comfortable moral status quo now will be justified by a large margin down the road. Guaranteed.

In fact, I guarantee you that there will be a practical payoff in personal growth and development for you from your effort of engagement with this text—proportionate to your investment, of course, as with any endeavor. This is your chance for a principled upgrade to your conventional moral value orientation. But a passive download won't work. Ideas alone are not enough. Knowing what justice is doesn't guarantee that justice will appear in your everyday life. Ideas must be enacted, embodied and brought to life through practice. Seeds must be planted to grow. Thoughts blossom.

Ideas, beliefs and values are configured from experience while recursively configuring the very experience from which they are themselves configured, in a perpetual feedback loop. Thus, ideas themselves cannot be meaningfully understood apart from the field of worldly, intentional action and experience illuminated by them for perception and reflection. And, so it is that your

personal experience within your very personal moral life will be the living field in which the ideas and exercises in this text are played out and their practical worth determined.

The structure of the text

The nine chapters of *Entrepreneurial Ethics – Perspectives* present the basic tools that you will need for the practical investigation of your moral value world. These tools will open-up your ethical understanding of how morality works in practice. They are meant to help you make possible your determination of what you want your personal moral value orientation to look like and how you want it to function in the world.

The tools presented in these nine chapters are both conceptual and practical tools. Conceptual tools are the various moral theories, the ideas underlying them, and the principles and perspectives derived from the theories that the chapters investigate. There are also practical tools in the form of strategic ideas and concrete perspectives that can be deployed pragmatically to reconfigure and refine your moral value orientation toward the achievement of the greatest possible success in life. The basic Stoic principle of action presented in Chapter 6, for example, is just such a tool.

At the end of each chapter there is a section focused on putting the ideas presented in the chapter into reflective practice. The Practice section includes a list of terms you should know how to explain to an intelligent friend; a set of study questions to help you secure your understanding of the particular ideas and concepts presented in the chapter; reflection questions intended to take your thinking beyond the specific ideas presented in the chapter; and, finally, scenario exercises in the form of real-life situations designed to target the development of empathy and genuine affective moral response as you imaginatively determine what you would do if you were the character in the scenario.

Chapter 1 reviews some of the basic ideas from the history of moral philosophy in the Western tradition that are pertinent to the overall goals of the text. The basic idea is to show how ethics, understood as the reflective study of morality aimed at living the best possible life, first emerged and was developed within a practical philosophical context, and how this context has informed the approach to ethics that is reflected in *Entrepreneurial Ethics*. The distinction between ethics and morality is investigated. Challenges to a purely rational ethics are considered; a "relational relativism" is proposed; and moral pluralism is described.

Chapter 2 focuses on contributions to Ethics from the field of Moral Psychology. Again, the intent of this chapter is focused practically. Moral Psychology is shown to be particularly helpful in demonstrating how non-rational aspects of human functioning can impact moral consciousness and moral actions. Social Psychology research has shown that cognitive and perceptual biases, situational factors, emotions, and emotional intelligence all play a crucial role in your moral life and influence your moral judgments.

Bringing the insights from Chapters 1 and 2 together, Chapter 3 opens a mini reflection on human nature understood as *subjectivity*. It investigates the moral subjectivity that is necessarily presumed in any ethical consideration and addresses the question of whether this moral subjectivity can be cultivated and developed. The developmental moral stage theory of psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg is presented as representative of the rationality-focused *Ethics of Justice*, while a counterpoint to this liberal, modernist orientation is presented by Carol Gilligan from a feminist point of view in the context of an affectively-focused *Ethics of Care*. The Ethics of Justice and
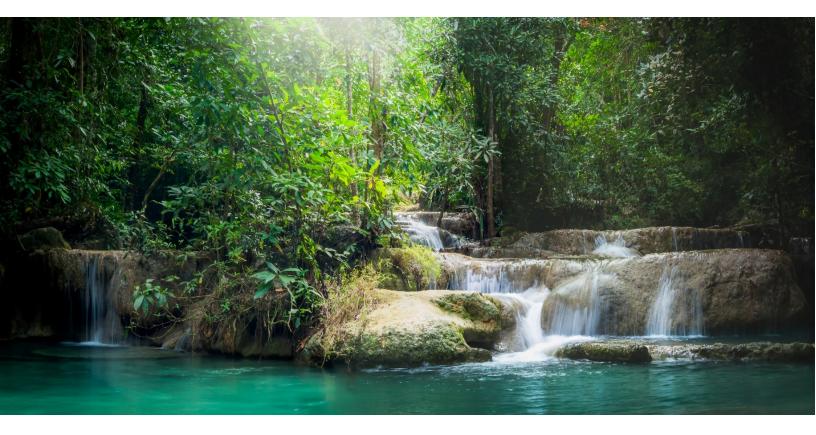
the Ethics of Care are broad, and, therefore, not precisely defined, moral value delineations or perspectives. These two moral outlooks will weave their way through the entire extent of *Entrepreneurial Ethics*. Sometimes they will be sharply defined across a moral chasm, with justice in conflict with care; and sometimes they will be deeply entwined and mutually reinforcing, as is the case with volunteerism and strategic philanthropy.

Continuing the investigation into the existential situation of the moral subject, Chapter 4 looks at various theoretical orientations and perspectives from within the general context of the Ethics of Care. These moral theories and perspectives are specifically geared to your personal moral growth and development. They are naturally oriented toward putting you in charge of your morality. Virtue Ethics, Self-actualization theory, Phenomenology, and Existentialism are presented collectively as both a general approach or 'method' for actually "doing philosophy" (rather than merely talking about it) and as a justification of that 'method' as well. This chapter is all about the everyday process of creating your moral self; how to do it and why you should.

Whereas Chapter 4 looks at moral theories that inform a personal growth and development approach to Ethics, Chapter 5 approaches morality from the perspective of the theoretical orientations that inform an exclusively rational moral decision-making approach, along with its own justification. Deontological theory or duty ethics is contrasted with the teleological theory of Utilitarianism. How these two theoretical perspectives are deployed in practice is explained and demonstrated. These rational theories are naturally oriented to an Ethics of Justice. Since these moral frameworks are so embedded in Western culture, you will undoubtedly find them to be intuitively familiar. Yet they can be tricky to manage in practice in several ways, especially because of how emotion will inevitably figure into the process. The impact of emotion on your deontological and teleological moral value judgments will be investigated using the Runaway Trolley 'thought experiment' to reveal where you stand.

Chapter 6 returns directly to the question of your personal moral power. This question is taken up within the context of the philosophy of Stoicism and the psychotherapeutic treatment program that was somewhat derived from it called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT). Stoicism, it is argued, is well-suited for dealing with moral life and business in the twenty-first century. In fact, Stoic moral values are very much alive and well today, as you will see. This chapter presents a concrete, practical Stoic program for moral self-development that is geared toward your achieving the best possible life in the world, both in your personal life and your professional business career. How we can lose our personal moral power, how we can unconsciously give it away and the consequences of this is contrasted with how we can 'take back' our personal moral power—although this may be challenging to accomplish. The benefits of this practice, however, are shown to be clearly connected to success in both business and life generally.

Yet, there are limits to our personal moral power. Various social science experiments, such as Milgram's obedience study, Darley & Batson's Good Samaritan studies and the Stanford prison experiment-gone-bad seem to suggest that our process of moral deliberation, judgment and action is impacted, influenced and limited by unconscious situational factors. We supposedly control our moral life, but to what extent? Should we be held morally responsible for decisions we make that were not completely under our control? To what extent are you or are you not in control of your moral life? These questions will be investigated in Chapter 7 through a reflection on whether moral character—if it exists at all—is capable of withstanding the situational influences of

corporate culture, or whether we are, morally speaking, "victims of circumstances." Sam Sommers, author of *Situations Matter,* will help to decide this question from the perspective of what he calls the "flexible self."

The first seven chapters of the text focus on your individual personal moral value orientation, cultivation and development. But we are not merely isolated, separate individuals functioning autonomously from one another. We are also thoroughly social beings. In fact, we may be more essentially social than individual, despite appearances. Chapter 8 looks at the relation of the individual to the social world from a rational Ethics of Justice perspective reflected in Social Contract and Distributive Justice theories and the question of the relation between morality and legality.

Chapter 9 continues to investigate the social dimension of your everyday, existential moral situation in the world, but more from the perspective of an Ethics of Care and the question of your personal moral growth and development in relation to others. The theory of Moral Egoism is presented from both positive and critical perspectives and is contrasted with the idea of altruism. It is shown how the egoism/altruism continuum is reflected in both the theory of Moral Cosmopolitanism and Human Rights theory—moral perspectives linking the individual to the social world. Consideration of egoism and altruism also raises the important question of strategic philanthropy. Your personal stance in regard to these moral perspectives can be determined from a reflection upon philosopher Peter Singer's classic thought experiment about the Drowning Child presented in this final chapter of *Entrepreneurial Ethics - Perspectives*.

Let's get started!