

# Nova Magna Moralia

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**PHYSICS-ETHICS-POLITICS:  
NEOCLASSIC CONCEPTS FOR POSTMODERN TIMES**

By

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## **ABSTRACT**

At the dawn of the third millennium, humanity is increasingly aware that its traditional ethnocentric ethic is inadequate for the task of global sustainability. It is by now apparent that the contradictory requirements of physical nature, modern culture and human nurture, demand an evolving and dynamic homeostasis among all three existential realms.

Under the circumstances, traditional morality may seem too restricted in time and place to suffice in the interdependent and interacting world of the present and future. Yet, it is the fundamental axiom of this paper that updating, enlarging and readapting the classic cannon of ethics as a Modern Macro-Morality (**M3**) is the best way of resolving some of our planetary problems. In the Emerging Global Order (**EGO**) of the new millennium, renewed ethics will have to be applied in an ecumenical scale in order to harmonize both the potentiality and responsibility of humanity towards itself and its environment.

Building a holistic ethic can only be done by transcending local particularities and emphasizing global similarities, found in all great philosophies, ideologies and religions. A distillation of the essence of these ideas indicates the shared deontology of our species. These human universals are firmly rooted in the implicate order of things from which they draw their common heritage and to which they eventually return.

The primordial origin of this particular study is classic natural law as the eternal foundation of a renewed cosmopolitan ethic. This latest reinterpretation of ancient wisdom takes into account the recent advances of chaos and quantum theories as they have been worked out by the new paradigm of **Sociophysics**.

Upon this natural infrastructure, the study here adds the social superstructure to form a physics-ethics-politics (**PEP**) hypothesis, explicating the relationship among these three crucial variables. The resulting thesis elaborated here is that a New Cosmic Morality would consist of minimal principles of mutual consideration, applied to a maximal extent consistent with political moderation and natural evolution.

The study undertakes to define the concept, develop the process and decide the practice of ethics by posing nine critical questions and proposing their debatable answers. On the basis of this PEP discussion, a reformed theory of ethics could be elaborated eventually to serve the EGO of the new century.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the dawn of the third millennium, the world is facing a plethora of mega-problems arising from the contraction of geography, the acceleration of history and the globalization of society. This unprecedented critical situation has been brought about primarily by many scientific innovations, whose technological applications revolutionized the world. Most important, behind the tremendous phenomena of political upheaval, economic development and cultural modernization experienced in the last couple of centuries lies the destruction of age-old traditions, including moral standards or ethical principles.

A fundamental prerequisite in trying to understand and resolve these existential problems is to discover the relation between thoughts and things: i.e. find the connection between moral values or ethical ideals and material reality or practical activity. Assuming that ideas or ideals are important to acts or facts, how can they contribute to easing the social transition from one historical era into another? Can moral rethinking now help shape the Emerging Global Order (EGO) of the next century? Could a novel cosmic ethic be built for our EGO?

The definition and function of morality in human affairs has been debated since the dawn of history. Yet, the plethora of contrasting viewpoints boil down to a confrontation between subjective relativists and objective absolutists; the former recognizing different value systems coinciding with social boundaries and the latter abstracting a single underlying ethic for all humanity.

Based on these antecedents, this study attempts a conceptual clarification and practical application of ethics suitable for the EGO by synthesizing the antithetical positions of traditionalism and modernism, realism and idealism. As we see it, the present problem of conflicting and confusing morals demands a reexamination of fundamental principles to discover the common roots of our humanity in the context of an ecumenical ecology.

It is the central thesis of this work that the most feasible development of a modern macro-morality (m3), as the title indicates, must be based on the primordial standards of nature as elaborated by the world's political system. The necessary and sufficient conditions for such ethic require mutual consideration by consultation of the members of EGO, from individuals to nations. If these fundamental principles become acceptable by global consensus, the rest are technical rules to be resolved by the application of the general model in particular cases.

In its simplest terms, the model constructed here operates within the following three parameters: Physics (Nature, Cosmos, Viability); Ethics (Nurture, Logos, Morality); Politics (Culture, Nomos, Civility). This PEP frame trichotomizes our universe of discourse into the realms of physical nature, ethical nurture and political culture, whose fundamental principles are order and life, reason and value, rule and group. As elaborated later in the text, the common areas of these three central concepts represent the post-Aristotelian *nova magna moralia* thesis proposed in this study.

The emphasis of the model is placed upon the trilateral relations of these domains by proposing the optimal application of a modern global morality through a combination of physics, politics and ethics. Physics because nature is the underlying context of global existence, politics because culture is the highest creation of human evolution, and ethics because it provides the conjunction between the other two. Consequently, neo-macro-morals takes into account ecology, ethology and sociology.

To demonstrate this thesis, our method combines the four Aristotelian causes with the W5 (who, what, where, when, why) journalistic questions by reformulating his material, formal, efficient and final causes as what, how, who and why of ethics. To these, for the sake of completeness, we have added five more questions as to where, when, whether, whence and how much. We believe that

by answering these questions as correctly as possible, one can explain a subject matter as completely as possible.

This study then approaches our topic by attempting to answer these key questions in a systemic and systematic way. Each of these intersects and involves our three domains, thereby accentuating their interrelations. The answers should provide the basis for an adequate understanding of the concept, content and context of ethics, its structural-functional dynamics and global strategic applications at the turn of this century.

The study's three chapters elaborate on each of these aspects. The first sets the stage of our inquiry by constructing a working structural definition of ethics. The second follows the natural evolution of value systems and contrasts the philosophical debates on this subject. Finally, the third attempts a strategic application of the results of the previous two by calculating the practical policy implications of neo-ethics for EGO.

## 1. DEFINITION

We begin by defining "ethics" as the code of "considerate human conduct." This working definition forms a conceptual system composed of the following tridimensional framework:

- A set of codes guiding action or behavior in a normative (considerate) manner.
  - A group of (human) subjects capable of acting by following these codes.
  - A stage of activity within which players perform (conduct) their roles.
- These aspects determine the essential traits of ethics as elucidated below.

### 1.1. ACTION

Ethics has been defined as the systematic analysis and validation of value-laden concepts concerning questions of right-wrong, good-evil, permitted-forbidden. Within this range of dual polarities, ethics may be seen as a conceptual system of imperative propositions containing certain guides to action, rules of behavior, or codes of conduct. As such, it is concerned only with interpersonal or inter-group relations

Ethics may be considered as an algorithmic model or cybernetic mechanism that regulates some operations by channeling them within certain predetermined orientations. In that sense, it is a set of principles directing acts in a particular way based on criteria of goodness, righteousness and propriety. Thus, ethical standards distinguish desirable from deplorable behavior and required from forbidden acts.

As a guide, ethics proposes a categorical trinity according to which all moral actions fall within a negative-neutral-positive axis, along which they may be prohibited, condemned, avoided, tolerated, permitted, obliged, or applauded. In this continuum, ethics cannot be an "either-or" proposition, but extends in various degrees between a minimax range of intermediate acceptability. Thus between extremely revolting acts or those supererogated above and beyond the call of duty, there are certain minimal rules of acceptable conduct which form the necessary and sufficient conditions for any ethical code.

It is this *sine qua non* upon which we focus here by formally defining ethics as the "considerate conduct code." The whole corpus of such code is based on the primordial principle of conviviality: i.e. peaceful and pleasant coexistence of interrelated and interacting beings of different opinions and positions. Accordingly, an act is ethical if and only if it takes into consideration those it affects. By consideration is meant the deliberate regard, conscious concern, reflective respect a subject displays when taking into account the object of an act.

This does not mean that consideration need go so far as affection in

order to qualify as ethics. Love is an emotional experience that does not necessarily depend on free will, so it can neither be controlled nor legislated as morality. Thus, acts motivated by love, force or instinct lie beyond the pale of ethics and may be considered amoral.

With this minimalistic content as our basic scenario, it is only necessary to assume the existence of ethic-prone beings who interact in a systemic context. Assuming the existence of a script, the operative requirements for ethics to be performed are capable players and a proper stage. These conditions concerning the actors and areas of ethics will be elaborated in the next two sections.

## 1.2. ACTOR

The existence of ethics as guide of action presumes someone who obeys them. Moreover, it assumes the possibility and actuality of choice by its subjects who must have potential choices, as well as be able to make decisions.

In saying that, we classify all acts or events in three categories: deterministic, voluntaristic and randomistic. According to this taxonomy, ethics falls primarily under the middle category, thus requiring intentional behavior, rather than externally imposed causality or inadvertent chance. This distinction provides the first criterion of exclusivity, leaving out of ethical potentiality all inanimate objects, since their actions are either programmatic or erratic.

That exclusion lets only organisms to be the sole candidates of ethics to the extent that they intend what they do. Ethology extends some degree of intentional behavior in animals, so we must accept a modicum of natural ethics operating in the biosphere. Nature programs certain internal code of ethics or innately considerate behavior in all life and particularly some intentional behavior in higher or rational animals.

Nevertheless, full intentionality is only reached in the human species as the paragon of animals. As such, humans are strictly speaking ethical animals *par excellence* because they are the most self-conscious and hence conscientious creatures. As Aristotle said, men alone possess *ethikai aretai* or moral virtues. If that proposition is accepted, humans are the ethical protagonists who can and do control somewhat their behavior according to given options. Ethics thus apply primarily to adults who can judge and be judged responsible for their choices.

As social animals, humans make decisions both individually and collectively, so ethics applies to all levels of social aggregation. Nations and corporations as well as natural and moral persons are potential principals of ethical conduct. In this sense, societies, states or other groups cannot escape collective responsibility for actions decided by consensus and carried out by their designated agents.

Whether they act on their own or on behalf of others, humans are the ultimate instigators of ethical conduct, so they must be held responsible for all activities involving others. Similarly, when someone else is acting on one's instructions, the principal incurs joint responsibility. Obviously elected politicians or appointed functionaries are mutually responsible along with their electors and appointees for their collective actions.

As a result, and for all practical purposes, only mature humans, severally or collectively, are moral agents who may be evaluated and must be accountable for their actions affecting others. Who those others are then is the next question whose answer depends on another criterion of inclusion.

From what has been said above, that criterion is life. But since organic membership extends from the most primitive to the most sophisticated, realism must allow of several classes of citizenship from the least to the most ethical. On the basis of the principle of reciprocity, the main line of inclusion is hereby drawn around the human species. Since people are the foremost subjects of ethics, it is only fitting that they be its prime objects.

Considerate treatment becomes a fundamental human right as it is a duty, so everyone should not only act morally, but expect to be treated in such way. Thus, our social context radiates outwards from the actor in widening concentric circles, from the most exclusive nuclear family and close kin, to friends and neighbors, comrades and colleagues, cohorts and compatriots, to include the entire human species and even beyond to all forms of life.

This means that people have an obligation to treat all life with some consideration. Although humans are the principal subjects of ethics, they are not its only objects. Non-human life partakes somewhat of ethics and so falls under its scope as well.

The main criterion of ethical involvement to apply here is that of concern. That is to say, an ethical actor is required to be considerate only to those concerned. But since concern is not an either-or proposition but admits of many gradations, it is better to say that the degree of consideration by the subject is proportional to the level of concern by the object. That is why those nearest in time, space and species have priority over those further apart.

### 1.3. ARENA

The question as to who has ethical rights or duties and therefore must perform its obligations or may enjoy its privileges, leads us to the question where does the scope of ethics extend. Obviously those who fall within its domain may partake of ethics, whereas those excluded are beyond it. One thus should be careful where the lines are drawn and who belongs in each class.

Let us here draw the first line of separation around society, defined as an organic system whose members share certain characteristics. Some common traits are necessary to support ethics by providing the context of their operation. In this sense, animal societies may be said to possess some rudimentary ethics, although these do not reach their maturity until humanity.

From this central rule, we derive our basic topological postulate that makes society the primary context of ethics. As a code of conduct, ethics only involves social interactions rather than internal thoughts or isolated acts. Solitary processes, whether mental or material, are thus ethically irrelevant, because they can neither be known by others nor involve them directly.

Identifying society as the central context of morality requires more specificity as to its content. It is well appreciated that there are various kinds of social structures, from small to large and from the simple to the complex. Traditional morality circumscribes its jurisdiction to the extended family, clan or tribe and at most nation. Beyond is the *terra incognita* of nature where the law of the jungle holds sway.

Such precipitous cascade might have been helpful and practicable in the past; but in an increasingly interdependent world, they appear less and less relevant. The EGO presently dismantles boundaries of every kind and thus demands an extension of morality into wider circles embracing all people, if not all life.

But as it broadens the scope, it swallows the depth of ethical commitment. The degree of consideration one gives to others correlates with proximity and propinquity. Obviously, one's closest cohorts and neighbors get more attention and compassion than far away peoples or generations. The strength of ethical concern is proportional to history, geography and genealogy. Such discrimination is unavoidable in an imperfect world of value scarcity, so some ethical selectivity must be accepted as a fact of life.

At this point, it is necessary to clarify our usage of the terms "ethics" and "morals". Although these may be used as equivalent concepts, it is useful to draw a fine distinction between them. On the basis of their etymology, ethics is derived from the Greek natural *ethos* and morals from the Latin social *mores*. As such, the former encloses a larger set because it includes all life forms,

whereas the latter is its sub-set containing merely cultural life unique to humanity. Thus, only human beings are subjects of morality, whereas all living organisms are objects of ethics.

As a cultural artifact --*taxis*--, morality does not exist in a state of natural order --*cosmos*--, but only within human society. This explains the relationship between morality and civility, since the latter is behavior that makes high density living of humans not only tolerable but also desirable. Hence, sociability is akin to urbanity, civility and polity, not only etymologically, but also existentially. For this reason Aristotle praised social morality as the virtue of decency.

Since then, there is a continuing debate as to the distinction between natural and cultural virtues. We herein take a rather Humean position by affirming that although ethics is based on nature, it is largely a human cultivation. In this hypothesis, nature provides the independent parameters upon which culture builds its depend variables, and thus serves to explain them. It is on the basis of genetic and inherent givens that we can develop sentimental and intellectual moral faculties. In human terms, nature is *quod semper, quod ubique, quod omnibus*.

Although human ethics are rooted to their natural sources, they can and often do deviate from them. Morals go a step further by their contextual cultural specificity. As a result, it may be said that morality is a creature of human nurture that synthesizes the contradictions between nature and culture. As such the two terms -ethics and morals- are often used synonymously.

This interpretation means that nature may be ethical but is amoral. Natural facts or events, such as the unequal distribution of energy and material resources, including human talents, need no moral justification. How humans deal with such facts, however, does fall under moral scrutiny. Those things which conform to our natural constitution or character are considered valuable, so advancing them is moral. Morality is thus an artificial construct devised by humans to guide situational behavior within certain mutually acceptable channels. As such, it is somewhat arbitrary because it depends on many cultural differences as well as various environmental distinctions.

With these variables in mind, it may be said that ethics apply in varying degree to all interactions in three levels of increasing aggregation:

- Micro (interpersonal): among individuals, within the same community.
- Meso (international): among different societies and human cultures.
- Macro (interbiological): among living beings, between humanity and other species.

These levels have been recognized since classical times as those of: *jus civilis*, *jus gentium*, and *jus naturalis*. As one moves from the inner circle of exclusive moral jurisdiction to the outer circle of inclusive ethical membership, the strength and depth of normative principles lessens and weakens. The quality of ethics is thus inversely correlated to the quantity of its contents.

It is for that reason that the quantitatively maximal social ethics can only rely on the qualitative minimal natural laws and vice versa. Since nature is all-inclusive, its ethos boils down to the lowest common denominator, whereas culture's exclusivity allows higher variability and complexity. Consequently, a global morality has to and only needs to consist of simple standards in order to ensure an adequate ethical behavior among species, states and peoples.

The above brief exposition of the content, subject and context of ethics has posed the questions of what is it, who practices it, and where it happens. The given answers of consideration, humanity and society, establish our conceptual framework and sets the stage for the next steps which go into its process.

## 2. EVOLUTION

Having completed the relatively static aspects of our ethical system, we now proceed to describe its more dynamic ones. From conceptual structure then, we move to historical process from the past to the present and eventual future of our subject matter, thus answering questions of whence, when and why. Since humans are temporal as well as territorial creatures, we must also cover the time, as we did the space dimension of our reality.

The three sections of this chapter treat issues involving temporal variables, proceeding from the emergence of ethics in human consciousness to its contemporary interpretation and potential function of M3 in EGO.

### 2.1. FOUNDATION

The distinction made above between ethics and morals reflects the dichotomy between natural and cultural standards. So, in order to discover whence ethics arose, we have to revert to its natural origins. Since, we postulated the absence of morals in non-human life and accept the theory of evolution, we must conclude that morality arose somewhere along human development from instinctive to intentional behavior.

The evolutionary tendency for homeostatic centralization and systemic complexification that reached its peak in the corticalization of man, also had as a byproduct the cultural differentiation of the species. According to the criterion of hierarchy, moral responsibility correlates directly with systemic complexity, therefore human evolution has accumulated not only reason and intelligence, but auto-consciousness and etho-conscience.

This ability for introspection and intention evolved *homo sapiens* beyond its singular natural state by creating different cultural systems. As a social animal, man's empathy for community is instinctive and so provides the context for human action as described above. But, as mankind diverged from a common natural origin to separate cultural communities, a natural pan-human ethos was supplemented by several social mores.

These separate cultural developments went on in tandem for millennia, thus solidifying the distinctions among human societies. This gradual expansion and differentiation of the species contributed to a flowering of many distinct cultures, enriching humanity but also creating conflicting standards of morality. These contradictions characterize human cultures, with both their advantages and disadvantages.

We are here concerned mainly with the disadvantages that are becoming increasingly evident as the world becomes more interdependent. When cultures were isolated from each other, their differences could be ignored. But with the break down of space-time barriers by modern modes of transportation and communication, intercultural contacts are fraught with increasing frictions and conflicts.

Presently, as all cultures become subsumed or submerged in the nascent global super culture, their contradictions must be resolved to the extent necessary for peaceful coexistence. Our thesis is that such resolution is to be found in the common sense buried deeply within human nature. That is the only foundation shared by all human cultures. It is therefore upon that rock where a universal ethic can and must be built.

As much as humanity has moved away from nature, its roots always cling in the soil. Since the genesis of human ethics lie buried in the natural ethos of all life, our task is to discover the hidden similarities of cultural morals in natural ethics. Thus, in order to find the ethical commonalities underlying moral particularities, one has to find the singularity of natural infrastructure supporting a plurality of social structures. Searching for the natural origins of ethics has been boosted by the latest scientific theories such as the recent



Astonishing Hypothesis. According to it, both conscience and consciousness are functions of human biology and may be located in a definite area of the brain. In that case, ethics is deeply rooted in the human soul and manifests itself in normal social behavior within every culture.

Similarly, *Lebensphilosophie*, a modern bioethical theory, considers moral codes and religious myths as nature's way of compensating humans for their loss of innocence and instinct. Accordingly, *homo sapiens* is a degenerating species, needing culturally produced moral prosthetics to make up for the degradation of its biological autonomic means of self-defense. Evolutionary progress then is an anti natural process directing humans away from their original autonomic organism towards a contrived artificial mechanism.

Finally, according to the latest theory of sociophysics, human evolution reflects life's negentropic tendency towards innovation and differentiation. History records this as a struggle among competing values such as equality, security, harmony, liberty and individuality. Social morality supplements natural ethics in trying to attenuate this dynamic conflict by channeling it within acceptable and recognizable patterns.

Whether it is social development from primitive tribal moralism to sophisticated cosmopolitan ethics or the mind's spiritual leap from natural selection to self-conscious direction, evolution may be seen as nature's experimental way of increasing our chances of survival. Either way, we are a part of nature, not apart from it. On that basis, man is *primus inter pares* with the rest of creation, carrying the burdens as well as the privileges of that unique role.

## 2.2. CONDITION

Based on the above evolutionary presentation, we are now ready to consider the circumstances under which ethics is practiced. The question is when do moral issues become relevant in human behavior? In order to answer this question, one enters the age-old debate between universal and situational ethics. Those who support the former thesis assert the timelessness, as well as spacelessness, of ethical principles; whereas the latter antithesis counters precisely the contrary.

This philosophical debate began with the Sophist dichotomy between *physis* and *nomos*: the first containing the natural, eternal and universal laws of ethical conduct and the second the cultural, historical and local customs of social morality. The distinction drew the battle lines between the idealists or rationalists and the realists or relativists which goes back to Plato's *episteme* (formal knowledge) versus Aristotle's *phronesis* (practical wisdom). The latter's *ethike arete*, meaning character excellence, becomes virtuous only when it is coupled with the will for *phronesis*, thus it is to be preferred as more realistic than the former's utopian models.

Throughout the various cycles of this debate, the Natural Law school dominated the mainstream classical thought from Stoic cosmopolitanism to the grand medieval Thomistic synthesis and beyond it to Grotian internationalism, until its triumphant proclamation of human rights and liberal constitutionalism in the age of Enlightenment.

This Natural Law tradition is not confined solely to Western culture. It also developed in African, Judaic, Islamic, Hindu, Confucian and Buddhist ideas by distinguishing between absolute, stable, static, universal norms and relative, mutable, dynamic, local laws. Apart from their super structural details, the infrastructural foundations of all these approaches are equivalent and their ethical aphorisms are strikingly similar.

Continuing in the same vein, modern thought emphasized absolute standards of formalism and decontextualized *episteme* without taking into account *doxa*. This Cartesian cosmopolis of modernity lasted 300 years (circa 1650 to 1950).

Searching for a *novus ordo rerum* or *mundo*, as we are, Natural Law thinkers from Thomists to Marxists, all sought and found suprapersonal and super cultural standards to guide human conduct.

Recently however, there has been another return to more traditional thinking along the lines of Pyrrho's skepticism and Erasmus's humanism. Although these thinkers recognized that the human condition depends on *nostre maitre, la nature*, as Montaign put it, they questioned the absolutism of natural law. Going even further, the culturalists like Moore affirmed that basing morals on nature is a naturalistic fallacy: a road to nowhere.

Similarly, Levy-Strauss' anthropological tribalism emphasized traditional superstitions based on time and place as the roots of social morality. In parallel, Sartre concurred that there is no such thing as human nature, everyone is doomed to shape one's own existence. Finally, Foucault rejected a single universal ethic as both unnecessary and undesirable, preferring instead a plurality of cultural morals. As Camus and Merlo-Ponti stressed, human life can never be free of moral ambiguities and absurdities, so there is no point searching for absolute logical standards.

The present transition to post modernity repeats another cycle from fundamentalism to universalism and back again. Accordingly, post modernism denies any general principles and seeks to deconstruct morality in an anti-rationalistic manner. Permanent avant-gardism and meta-existentialism become its new forms of life. This virtual instead of virtuous reality is the vitalistic neo-Nietzschean inspiration of French post-structuralists from Foucault to Leotard, as well as the German hermeneutic neo-Aristotelianism of Wittgenstein and Godamer.

These neopragmatic-metaphoric narrative ethology and moral psychology of communitarianism are like sedentary versions of Enlightenment criticism. Nevertheless, they are well taken as serious attempts to tolerate, if not understand, the human condition. Our intention then is not to accept *in toto* one side or the other, but look for eclectic complementarities in both.

In doing so, we admit Hume's aphorism that value judgments cannot be logically inferred from factual statements and that ethical principles differ from physical laws because morals involve subjective human *liberum arbitrium* that objective laws do not. Yet, whether we like it or not *quaestio iuris* (cognitive or moral validity) cannot be completely divorced from *quaestio facti* (historical or cultural relativity).

If the search for universal objectivity is not to lead to infinite regress or circular tautology, it must rest its Archimedian fulcrum on a given base, be it rational or mystical. In this option, scientific criteria of epistemology are ultimately no better grounded than ethical criteria of axiology. Both truth and right require a metaphysical foundation upon which to stand. The ultimate indeterminacy or human logic must therefore be accepted with equanimity and creativity.

Both transcendental theologies and secular ideologies are such primordial creative human constructs, providing a creed, code and cult as the basis to validate moral values as well as empirical claims. Catholics and communists, utilitarians and libertarians, find general principles reflected in such pithy dicta as the Christian sermon parable, Kantian categorical imperative or the Benthamite felicific calculus. So, scientism, positivism or naturalism may be seen as those ideological beliefs that posit a certain connection between natural laws and moral codes through the evolution of ethics from animal ethos to human morals.

These theories propose that a basic fact of human life is that people hold various values and desire many goods that are mutually exclusive and irreducible, thus clashing with each other at different paces and places. It is under these conditions that people engaged in moral debates. Whenever human actions impinge upon others, ethics enters into the scene along with mutual

concerns and public affairs. Moral considerations thus involve the impact one's actions have on others.

To escape the resulting ethical dilemmas, most people accept an absolute dogma that relieves them of personal responsibility, even at the price of moral mutilation. For that reason, most ethical standards are still culture specific and vary according to time and space: what is acceptable in a particular period or region is not in others. This is especially so in international affairs where problems exist not only from material conflicts of interest but ideological clashes of opinion.

In order to resolve these inter region and inter period differences, philosophers and politicians alike still search for a common basis of pan-human ethics. To this end, International Scholars Annual Dialogue (ISAT) joins Jewish-Christian-Muslim intellectuals in a continuing attempt to determine a global ethic. In the same vein, Universalists and Futurists have undertaken comparative, interdisciplinary studies of the psychology, sociology, ecology and theology of human values and could come up with the basis of a universal ethical code.

Upon such hard rock of general principles of global legitimacy may be found the particular situational or culture bound morals of specific content and limited extent. Whatever these may be, they can hardly support antipathetic and mutually exclusive ways of life in constant friction at the close quarters of the "global village." It is then to be expected that a common morality is bound to emerge as the present convergent trends continue into the foreseeable future.

Disagreements about what is ethical are fairly common wherever people do not share strong bonds of communal traditions. Only tightly knit and homogeneous communities succeed in establishing and maintaining such ethical consensus, resulting from similar opinions.

If the world is by now a single social system: *gesellschaft*, it is by no means a global community: *gemeinschaft*. The galloping economic integration of the planet is now far ahead of its political confederation, let alone cultural homogenization. It is this heterogeneity which presents ethical controversies pitting millions of people against each other.

These ethical confrontations arise from the necessity to build a common social structure without having a single cultural infrastructure. As a result, the global social system is now a hodge-podge of *ad hoc* institutions tenuously interconnected by ties of economic interdependence with few mutual feelings of common interest.

The contemporary global social system is a result of economic and political necessity, rather than of cultural empathy. The different aspects of social life and natural existence are therefore out of step in this uneven process of development. The task is to synthesize and synchronize them before it is too late or too costly.

### 2.3. FUNCTION

We need not enter here into the debate between deontological and teleological ethics in order to determine the whither and why of morality. Rather, we take a functional outlook which assigns utility in the difference ethics make in ordinary life. As form follows function, so morality provides the ideal means serving practical ends. The purpose of ethics is to promote a cooperative coexistence in convivial and congenial community.

As their natural instincts atrophied, humans supplemented genes with memes. These latter contain the collective cumulative memories of their culture and serve as guides to acceptable conduct. Such guides, whether genetic or memetic, are absolutely necessary to avoid random or arbitrary behavior resulting in social chaos. Ethics, like instincts, set common standards of conduct, recognized and followed by socialized people, thus making either

interpersonal or international interactions comparable and predictable.

Beyond the necessary function of social coherence, ethics also promotes social harmony by setting the margins of legitimate behavior to the optimal permissiveness at any particular time or place. Contextual ethics takes into account environmental factors that set the perimeter of social conduct. Ideally, ethics sets the rules for a positive-sum game in which all participants could win something.

Of course, the rewards depend on various factors that do not always favor everyone equally. As such, some people deny or deform the rules thus getting particular advantages and privileges. Unethical behavior can thus pay dividends, as long as it is limited to few covert instances. If immorality becomes widespread and public corruption sets-in the body politic, then the social system decays, as was the case with the decline and fall of so many civilizations.

Seen from an ecological perspective, ethology, like technology, has favored culture at the expense of nature. As humanity dominated the earth, it exploited and extinguished many other organisms. By doing so, however, it undermines its own means of survival. If for no other reason, human sustenance requires some consideration for other life forms whose existence provides the wherewithal for our food. The diminishing returns the overwhelming success story of humanity points out the necessity for new ethic as well as new technic of sustainable development. The function of neoethics is thus to restrain human conduct for its own good, not only toward itself but more important towards all of nature which is indispensable for our life.

Here it is necessary to reemphasize the distinction between fundamental ethics and superficial morals. The former are necessary to any society and are ubiquitous in all cultures, whereas the latter are optional under certain conditions and thus unique to particular ones. Moral relativity corresponds to the latter kind and reflects the situation when what was considered abnormal then or there may become acceptable here or now. In this case we are concerned with fundamental ethics that must necessarily be universal and eternal. These infrastructural principles are neither numerous nor mysterious. As defined above, they are procedural rather than substantive and set the minimal conditions for social relations and civil behaviour.

The neoethics defined here abhors arbitrary and unilateral action which may be permissible in isolated conditions of extra social conduct, but is dysfunctional and destructive under systemic situations of high density where the world finds itself at present. This applies equally to individuals as to states, since the latter are presently becoming as interdependent as the former.

These new conditions now demand as ethical a conduct from nations as from people in order to optimize the mutual benefits derived from stability and reciprocity. Thus the principle of *pacta sunt servanta* is now generally applicable as a moral as well as a legal obligation underlying all conventions which set expectations of reciprocal reliability provided *rebus sic stantibus*.

Beyond interpersonal morality or international legality, the minimax character of neoethics reflects its all-inclusive simplicity. By restraining human actions towards both natural and social environments, it actually promotes sustainable human development. Ecoethics is therefore based on the enlightened self-interest of anthropocentrism rather than on any charitable moralism or idealistic altruism.

With these considerations, we close the discussion on ethical dynamics in its historical, situational and potential components. Having done so, we answered the questions of whence, when, and why of ethics by finding its origins in natural law, its timing in extra personal concerns, and its *raison d'être* in promoting community compassion. These answers allow us to understand the necessity and desirability of "considerate conduct" both towards fellow human beings as well as nature at large.

### 3. APPLICATION

We have now arrived at the final phase of this study by attempting to apply morality in our EGO. To do so, we pose the questions of how to practice ethics, how much it costs, and whether there are any alternatives to it. In these questions, we search for methods, costs, and options to ethical policies, so that we are able to decide if ethics is the optimal means for human survival and progress. The following sections attempt to provide some preliminary answers to these difficult questions.

#### 3.1. METHOD.

As a start, we propose that the essence of ethics is not substantive but procedural. Accordingly, moral conduct is judged not in what it does but by how. This requirement makes form much more relevant than substance: the *modus operandi* or the rules of engagement become crucial to the ethical significance of an act.

It is not the many codes of right and wrong, good and bad, do's and don'ts, but the singular way they are performed, which is constant in all ethical systems. For that reason we don't have to go into the plethora of rules and regulations, so we can concentrate in the simple modality of morality. Ethical universals and perennials remain at the core of life, after moral specifics and temporals are peeled away from its periphery. Thus the general method enunciated here may be considered as the lowest common denominator of several higher nominators.

So much so that ethics itself was herein formally defined in terms of its unique procedure: i.e. "considerate conduct". In that sense, ethical behavior demands that actors take into account those who might be affected by their actions. This primary imperative of consideration means that ethics assumes thinking before acting. Inconsiderate and insensitive acts are therefore at least amoral, if not unethical.

Although a modicum of ethics is genetic in all life, thoughtfulness is a characteristic centered around conscience, therefore it can only be experienced by self-conscious beings. Consequently, we defined ethics as an organic inclusivity and morals as a human exclusivity. As such, unlike ethics, morality is autonomic rather than automatic and excludes accidental or congenital behavior.

Beyond the instinctive level, the question is how does one practice ethics? Common sense tells us that when those involved in social interactions are normal adults, the best way to exercise consideration is by consultation. Moral beings must thus consult with those concerned before they undertake any social activity.

It is the consent of the affected that makes an act explicitly ethical, because it is the sufferer and not the perpetrator, who should judge its morality. Consent is thus the best and simplest way to evaluate the morality of an act. As such, any activity concerning consenting adults is moral *per se*.

Inter human killing, for example, is immoral only if it is done without the prior consent of the victim. But since any organic survival requires some eating, which means killing of other species, it is merely amoral; but ethical nonetheless, as long as it does not deprive others in the food chain by wasting and depleting scarce resources. Obviously, no eater gets consent from its food, but natural ethos is perfectly exhibited in the sustainable life cycle of a balanced ecosystem.

Since consultation and consent among humans requires a dialogue, communication is the operational index measuring consideration. Thanks to their sophisticated linguistic capabilities, people can discuss potential actions before they are undertaken to ensure compliance of others and prevention of

conflicts.

When anyone who cannot be consulted may be affected by some action, the burden of proof still remains with the actor. It is the subjects of ethical actions, who must take into account the position or opinion of their objects, be they social or natural, even if the latter are not able to express it. In these cases, *noblesse oblige* exacts of ourselves a bit more than we expect from others, especially when they, as children or animals, are not in a position to reciprocate.

Of course, being considerate neither means ignoring one's own position nor sacrificing self-interest for the sake of others. Although, ethics cannot be purely egoistic, neither does it have to be entirely altruistic. Rather, it is actually found somewhere between the egoism-altruism continuum as a realistic golden mean that avoids both ideal extremes.

From such equilibrium between moral polarities emerges the notion of equity that evolved into the concept of justice. In this context, ethics is the basic manifestation of equitable behavior and fair dealing because it tries to balance various interests and find their proper place and *just milieu*.

Similarly, ethics manifests itself in responsible conduct to the extent that it is responsive to the needs of others and is thereby accountable for its actions. Ethical responsibility accrues by considered judgment to *bona fide* acts after due deliberation and careful calibration.

Since reciprocity is a fundamental principle of coexistence, mutuality is used here as a basic criterion of social morality. Such reciprocity is reflected both in the Classical, Confucian, and Christian Golden Rule: treat others as you wish to be treated. Yet, adequate as this rule is, one should try to go a step further and treat others as they wish to be treated. Consequently, we may paraphrase the classic imperative as "do unto others what others want done unto them" thereby making it our highest ethical ideal.

### 3.2. COST

Like everything else of value, ethics incur some costs. The benefits of ethical behavior outlined above come with a certain price. So, valuable as ethics is, it must be balanced against other values which often outweigh it. It is by no means our position here that ethics is the *summum bonum* of human ideals, nor does it necessarily place at the top of one's priorities. Like everything else, how much is morality worth depends on the wider context which determines its comparative exchange rate.

In this utility calculus of ethical advantages versus disadvantages, the decision-maker may have to compromise ethics in order to attain some other desirable end. In the real world, such ethical compromises and tradeoffs are understandable and unavoidable phenomena. Often, morality is a luxury that necessity cannot afford, so less than moral behavior where survival is at stake should not be judged too harshly. Nevertheless, it should be recognized as such, so people realize their imperfections and try to minimize them even if it goes against their instinctive reactions.

It is quite evident that some unethical behavior confers certain immediate profit, advancing one's self-interests. As long as immorality is contained within a few whose identity is unknown, they can derive an unfair advantage over the moral masse. The carrying capacity of social systems can normally absorb such exceptional cases and survive. As the famous saying goes: one can fool all the people for some time or some people all time, but not all people all the time!

The opportunism of unethical conduct is therefore ephemeral and eventually exacts a heavy price when reprisals cancel out its temporary advantages. The modicum of ethics as defined here is thus always the general rule that is confirmed even by its unfortunate expedient exceptions.

Endowed with reason and conscience and free to choose good or evil, humans must accept responsibility for their choices. Yet, in spite of what they choose, they should be treated with certain respect and consideration. Human dignity imposes duties and obligations, as well as rights and privileges towards an increasingly inclusive context. This context has now become global in every sense, thus ethics must expand to embrace the whole planet. So, it is our thesis here that as humanity goes forth and multiply its members and powers, it needs to become more ethical and less liberal. As it becomes more potent, it requires greater self-constraint and acquires heavier responsibilities.

Yet, modern morality developed such an extraordinary respect for human life and freedom that its vaulting ambitions expanded into wretched excess. This overemphasis has resulted in unrequited rising expectations and unprecedented population explosions which like a locust is spreading all over the Earth and devours everything in its path. Thus humanity has broken its contract with Gaia by upsetting the *rerum naturae*.

If this human *hubris* does not destroy itself along with its natural environment, a global reformulation of natural ethics is long overdue. Accordingly, neoethics must not overprice human life by undervaluing other forms of existence. As things stand now, the birth of another child is much more costly to the ecosystem, than the death of another animal. It follows that it would be more ethical for a man to plant a tree than to sire a baby.

However, since liberty is proportional to ability, intention and opportunity, ethical freedom of choice depends on many factors, most of which the ordinary person may neither control nor afford. It is because the price of morality is often too high for the average man that it should neither be made unnecessarily expensive nor narrowly exclusive. As such, moderation is the cornerstone of practical morality.

In order to avoid the costly extremities of utopian idealism, a realistic global ethic can only be a simple code of light cost that fits the low moral and material budget of humanity. Such budget must be based on a "balance of principle" which cannot allow any value or ideal, no matter how desirable it may seem, to dominate our normative system.

Since ethics is only one of many human values, morality continuously competes with such rivals as liberty and security for its proper place in the normative pantheon. Since a general value hierarchy is impossible to get universally accepted, ethics cannot claim absolute supremacy over the others. It must therefore accommodate itself with its competitors in a dynamic equilibrium.

Moreover, at this point of human evolution, any moral imperative can only be a moderate one, since the cost of anything more extravagant surpasses the moral sensibilities of most people towards an all-inclusive scope. Since the world is not a community, its moral absorptive capacity is limited, therefore it cannot be overburdened with very high ethical standards.

The minimalist approach of liberal standards fits sufficiently well here to improve the actual situation without unrealistic expectations. Emphasizing the priority of proper means over good ends is eminently moral because it promotes moderation and toleration as the best way to exercise human freedom within necessary limitations. Moreover, it is the only way that civilized life can carry on in a multicultural world where peaceful coexistence is a necessity, if not a reality.

### 3.3. OPTION

From the above discussion, it would seem that although a moral cost-benefit calculation may go either way in particular cases, it is generally favorable to ethics. So, whether morality is worth its price or cost at any particular time and place, depends on the alternatives presented.

As already mentioned, different values open other options. The perennial

human dilemma is having to choose among competing and contradicting values such as liberty versus security. Since these values cannot all be maximized at once, each one can only be increased at the expense of another. Opting to become more ethical inevitably means sacrificing some other values thus foregoing other options.

The criteria of selection depend on one's priorities that may change according to circumstances. For humanity as a whole, however, it seems that ethics must rise in its value hierarchy, if our species is to survive in an increasingly hostile environment. The greater the density of the population, the complexity of the condition, the scarcity of the resources and the danger of the situation; higher the demand for consideration and the narrower the margin for unilateral action.

The implication of this hypothesis means the increasing centrality of morality. Although human nature desires a polyvalent multi-value coexistence, as a result of human actions, it is presently necessary to put greater weight on ethics for the sake of our collective survival.

This does not mean completely negating other vital values. The fundamentalist belief in any single supreme value leads to fanatic and dogmatic behavior, which even if momentarily advantageous, is eventually conflict generating and ultimately catastrophic. Even life itself may not be worth living under any and all circumstances. So, as it happens, attempts to impose one value above all others are not sustainable and eventually fail.

In any case, an immoral society whose members behave egoistically, without any concern for others, does not and cannot exist. A social system, by definition must establish lasting bonds among its values and its members. If these ties are not mutually considerate, they can only be utterly selfish or ideally saintly. Either way, there is no such real system outside heaven or hell.

Although all societies are somewhat corrupt, they do operate on generally accepted moral principles. Apart from ideal utopias or dystopias, actual societies are maintained by some combination of values. The problem is that behavioral decisions are made individually, whereas their cumulative effect affects society collectively. Thus the individual search for survival may lead to collective suicide, as the parable of "the tragedy of the commons" so well illustrates. Similarly, collective survival may demand individual sacrifices, as the present global situation indicates.

Here we introduce politics as the optimal option of individual-collective complementarity. As ethics is a dialogical virtue, politics is a dialectical one. This means that political action tries to resolve social conflicts by mutually compromising and synthesizing opposing views. In doing so it relies on negotiations in good faith between those involved.

As elaborated in the study of sociopolitics, the political process of negotiation and accommodation complements the ethical process of consultation and consensus, As politics modulates impractical moralizing, ethics attenuates unprincipled rationalizing, thus making politics and ethics close relatives of the same social family.

This dilution of ethics with politics makes for the only realistic concoction most appropriate for the human condition. Even in a state of nature where the so-called law of the jungle holds sway, widespread life and death competition is moderated by some group cooperation. Similarly, human societies combine ethics and politics as their unique mixed strategy of optimal survival.

Although macro history may not show such optimality, the world has survived so far: a fact that implies the existence of some ethics in a global scale. Moreover, it also indicates a distinct progress by the increasing and spreading consultation and negotiation activities among formal and informal actors. As a result, the contemporary world ethic abhors unilateral actions and condemns inconsiderate conduct. International relations are now normally and



widely conducted on the basis of this rule.

So much so, that this ethical principle is now enshrined in international law. In this case, legality and morality coincide to a great extent. Whereas laws are instruments of regulating social conduct under threat of sanctions, morals perform a similar function by taking into account implicit motives as well as explicit behavior. Even if all moral norms cannot be legally enforced nor all political laws be morally applauded, the relation of moral to legal conduct remains as strong as the social fabric underpinning it.

Such morality distinguishes between the unattainable *summum bonum* and the practical good enough. Humanity needs ideal models of individual sainthood without aspiring to utopian standards of collective perfection. This apparent contradiction can best be resolved by the *minima moralia* or lowest common denominator of universal values as expressed here. So, in spite of the difficulties and ambiguities of moral life, an agreement for this simple code of civilized conduct of congenial coexistence is presently within the grasp of humanity.

Resolving the conflict between personal and collective duties is possible by recourse to the natural responsibility that underlies both. As such, global neoethics includes ecoethics whose dual value is reverence-responsibility towards nature as well as culture. A new morality is thus needed for human survival because of evolutionary imperatives. We cannot destroy nature without destroying culture as well.

The result reflects a high regard for the values of frugality (grace without waste); diversity (rich complexity of life) and equity (balanced distribution of goods). As Aristotle put it: wealth belongs not only to one who has much, but also to one who needs little. So do ethics, we may add.

Under conditions of uncertainty such as today's, faith in the wisdom of tradition is highly recommended. In this respect even hypocrisy, that great invention of civilization, serves a moral purpose by determining the price that vice pays to virtue. So, social prudence demands a dialectical synthesis of ethics, physics and politics as the optimal combination of existential reality. We must therefore conclude that Aristotelian *phronesis* along with logical *taxis* and rational *praxis* are jointly the best criterion of neoethics.

This ends the discussion on the application of ethics in the contemporary world. The conclusion that politics is the most civilized way to practice morality in a social setting should not be surprising, given the close affinity between the two activities. Similarly, our cost-benefit calculus showed the optimal value of ethics, given the alternatives.

## CONCLUSION

It should be evident by now that this study presented a general reformulation of ethics by defining, elaborating and applying the various aspects of this concept, thus showing the possibility, necessity and desirability of morality in human affairs. This immense task was managed by an abstract methodology by which the two antithetic views of ethics that have confronted each other throughout history were merged.

As a succinct summary to the preceding discussion, the tabulation of the nine questions posed and the answers given here is presented below. The table serves as a synoptic index of the study itemizing the main concepts employed in the text as well as their topology and typology.

## SYNOPTIC INDEX

### NINE ETHICAL PARAMETERS

QUESTIONS	ASPECTS	ANSWERS
What is the essence?	Action Content	Considerate Conduct
Who is the subject?	Principal Actors	Human Beings
Where is it found?	Scope Context	Organic Society
Whence it arises?	Genetic Origin	Conscientious Intent
When appropriate?	Operative Conditions	Mutual Concern
Why desirable?	Functional Purpose	Sustainable Coexistence
How is performed?	Model Method	Dialogical Consultation
How much it costs?	Price Worth	Value Moderation
Whether necessary?	Alternative Options	Political Compromise

On the basis of this outline, we can now draw the final conclusion emerging from the dialectical synthesis reflected in the PEP hypothesis which may be reformulated as:  $M3 = f(P, E, p)$ ; meaning that Modern Macro Morality is a function of Physics, Ethics and politics. That is to say: the quality of EGO depends on the degree of ethical consideration-consultation of ego-alter, plus on the life-death, order-chaos parameters of nature and the proper combination of control-creativity, reason-power which human culture can inject into the whole system.

Consequently, the cosmic order of physics overlaps with the legal domain of politics and the logical code of ethics to form the neomorals of EGO. Of course, the operationalization of such complex function requires much more study than was possible here, since it is quite probable that we deal with indeterminate correlations that have neither definite nor definitive solutions. In spite of that inconclusiveness, a more rigorous treatment of the subject such as that attempted here is possible.

This treatment combines both traditional relativism and post-modern contextualism with neoclassical naturalism. As the thesis contends that ethics attains its practical context only within individual and collective experience, the antithesis counters with an ethical rationalism of general and eternal principles. Accordingly, it contrasts particularism (tribalism, nationalism, culturalism, collectivism) with universalism (constitutionalism, cosmopolitanism, humanism, individualism).

The reemergence of instinctive traditionalism is a reaction to isolating individualism and standardizing cosmopolitanism by raising concerns for rehabilitating moral sensitivity, strengthening group attachment and rejecting ethical atomism. As such, they are understandable sentiments that must be taken into account in any search for global supracultural ideals.

Beyond ideals, autonomous individuals or nations are motivated to cooperate when they perceive their interdependence and realize the potential for mutual benefit as a result of collaboration. For this reason, the neoethic of enlightened realism accepts the present critical situation of both the physical earth and the political world. As a result, it promotes a global morality as the only way to guarantee human survival and sustainable development by bringing civil law into harmony with natural law. Thus the classical "social contract" should be supplemented by a global "natural contract."

It is by now evident that political systems established specifically to define and maintain morality have been dismal failures. We must then conclude that ethics cannot be arbitrarily legislated or authoritatively enforced, but rather developed by tradition and imposed by necessity. Our more modest goals should therefore be to improve the acceptable rules of conflict-resolution in interpersonal and intergroup relations, thus promoting a sustainable social order within the evolving natural environment.

In summary, the emerging neoethic is characterized by general principles of universal application; simple minimal standards of practical operation; and flexible rules of contextual calibration. Such ecocentric bioethic improves upon the golden rule by proposing to do unto others what they want done unto them. This maxim of enlightened self-interest takes into consideration the *alter* as well as the *ego* by balancing egoistic and altruistic motives, thereby giving due weight to both individual as well as collective rights and duties.

The merging of ethical nurture, political culture, and physical nature performed here correlates consultation, negotiation and conservation as the means of balancing cooperation, accommodation and competition in these overlapping realms. Only such trilateral PEP balance respects morality, civility and ecology, a combination of which is indispensable to sustainable human development in the EGO of this new century.

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