

Steven D. Reece

From: Steven Reece <reeces@andrews.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, September 25, 2012 17:31
To: Steven Reece
Subject: FA2012-LEAD-645-999: Post # 6: Ethical Considerations in Leadership

[FA2012-LEAD-645-999](#) » [Forums](#) » [POST #6: Ethics promises to guide us. What approach do you think promises most? Why? Can they help us?](#) » [Post # 6: Ethical Considerations in Leadership](#)



Post # 6: Ethical Considerations in Leadership
by [Steven Reece](#) - Tuesday, September 25, 2012, 04:46 PM

I just returned late yesterday from India, so I am a little jet lagged. I went to India in order to speak about mercy as a part of my work and to meet with Dr. Thom Wolf regarding Jewish ethics and transformational leadership.

It was interesting to read Johnson's chapter on General Ethical Perspectives in the context of India, where western standards of ethics simply seem out of place and for the most part do not to apply. The greatest unethical challenge that India faces is inequality expressed through a long standing caste system that divides and isolates people and even creates "out-castes," comprised of non-humans – people who are considered worse than dogs. Many social ills beset India such as poverty, urban pollution, and disease; however, collective effort to speak to these many issues is thwarted by infighting and corruption.

My reason for beginning my post in this way is to highlight the fact that many of the ethical theories put forward by the western academic community and others may seem inappropriate for an Asian or Indian context due to their differing worldviews and the contaminant development of ethical constructs based on Buddhism, Hinduism or Islam. My question is, are there universal values and ethical constructs that are above culture? In other words, in non-western contexts are the ethical values that we have derived in the west from the Judeo-Christian worldview and its ethic universal?

I believe that they do because I think that the Judeo-Christian ethical construct offers a universal value template that is above culture.

The communitarianism ethical theory I believe grows out of the Jewish understanding of social or collective responsibility because "*All Jews are responsible for one another*" (*Babylonian Talmud Shavuot 39a*). We see this ethic expressed by Jews taking care of each other collectively or socially. Communitarianism is seen when members of the community share concern for "their fellow citizens" (Johnson, 2012, p. 164).

I would add to this consideration: "*Do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor*" (Leviticus 19:16), which does not only have in view murder, but social responsibility to act when someone is in need. Jews understand this verse to mean that we should not just stand "idly" by and be observers while something is happening to another person. It is our obligation to act and do something in order to help.

Kant's categorical imperative of doing what is right no matter what, I believe is founded upon the Jewish ethic from Micah 6:8 of "acting justly," which means doing the right thing and at times is costly for us personally when considering our personal interests versus the needs of others. As noted in Johnson (2012, p. 160), some disagree with the universal nature of Kant's argument because he asserts that "there are universal principles that should be followed in every situation."

I think that Kant's ethical strategy is grounded in justice or righteousness (justice – doing what is right) that is required of God. This sort of righteousness demonstrates integrity of character, which I believe is also described

in Micah 6:8 by “walking humbly.” The way we “walk” or live our lives reveals our character. Integrity is best seen by truthfulness in our dealings. When leaders accept bribes, do what is best for them or lie or mislead, we see a lack of integrity. I believe that people universally desire to see right actions in corrupt times.

Lastly when considering altruism or love of neighbor, Johnson (2012) emphasizes this ethical consideration as “the ultimate ethical standard” (p. 170). I agree with his conclusion but I would take into consideration the Jewish view of *tzedakah* (charity) and *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving-kindness).

Tzedakah (charity) is derived from the Hebrew word *tzadik*, “meaning *righteousness, fairness or justice*” and “refers to the religious obligation to perform charity, and philanthropic acts, which Judaism emphasizes, are important parts of living a spiritual life” (Wikipedia, 2012). We see that this ethical consideration is mirrored in altruism.

However, the Jewish concept of *gemilut chasadim* expresses a much deeper concern for those around us through acts of loving-kindness. In the Babylonian Talmud, *Sukkot* 49b we read that “Our Rabbis taught that *gemilut chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) is greater than *tzedakah* (charity) in three ways (Telushkin, 1994, p. 24):

1. Charity is done with one’s money, while loving-kindness may be done with one’s money or with one’s person [e.g., spending time with a sick person].
2. Charity is given only to the poor, while loving-kindness may be given both to the poor and the rich [e.g., consoling one who is in mourning or depressed].
3. Charity is given only to the living, while loving-kindness may be shown to both the living and the dead [e.g., by arranging a proper burial for a person who died indigent].

The major difference as Jews view the difference between charity and acts of loving-kindness rests on the concept of repayment. When considering the burial of the dead *gemilut chasadim* (loving-kindness) it is viewed as “par excellence because it necessarily is done without any hope that the ‘recipient’ will repay the good deed” (Telushkin, 1994, p. 25). Furthermore, Telushkin (1994) indicates that Haffetz Hayyim considered *gemilut chasadim* as “any good deed that one does for another without getting something in return (*Ahavat Chesed*)” (p. 25).

In view of this Jewish understanding, I would say that instead of altruism, I would follow the Jewish ethical concept of *gemilut chasadim* (loving-kindness) as the construct to make ethical decisions in my work of leading and guiding the ethics of The Matzevah Foundation.

References

- Johnson, C. E. (2012). *Meeting the ethical challenges of leadership: Casting light or shadow*. United States of America: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Telushkin, J. (1994). *Jewish wisdom: Ethical, spiritual and historical lessons from the great works and thinkers*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc.
- Wikipedia. (2012). *Tzedakah*, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzedakah>

[See this post in context](#)

[Unsubscribe from this forum](#) [Unsubscribe from all forums](#)