

Chapter 2

Embodied Ethics for Our Interdependent World: How Our Micro-Level Choices Lead to Macro-Level Impacts

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ABSTRACT

This chapter poses timely questions for us as global citizens regarding our capacities for ethical choice in a complex, interdependent world, and offers the multi-discipline perspective of “embodied ethics” for expanding our conscious capacities. Today more than ever – in business, in government, in education, in our daily lives - we need to recognize how our micro-level choices lead to macro-level impacts. Research across neurology, biology, quantum physics, and other fields indicates we human beings are multi-dimensional: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual – simultaneously – and therefore have greater capacities than we consciously use. “Embodied ethics” is a synthesis which explains why and how we physically experience our interconnectivity as human beings, from which ethical choices arise, and why we may listen to our own body, or “emotional intelligence” and heart - or not - in the midst of an ethical decision process. Six stories are offered which illustrate these dynamics: three stories reveal the ways individuals felt their own interconnectivity with others, giving rise to ethical choices with positive global impacts, and three stories reveal the ways individuals denied their own interconnectivity with others, giving rise to unethical choices with negative global impacts. Specific methods, such as conscious breathing and heart awareness, are explained so readers can practice aspects of these dynamics and recognize how their own micro-level choices may lead to macro-level impacts. Emphasis is placed on the inherent human design to expand from self-awareness to group awareness to global awareness as we wake up to our own and others hearts. Hope for all of life lives here.

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INTRODUCTION AND INVITATION

“Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to propose a model of “embodied ethics” - based on my experiences, others’ experiences, and cross-disciplinary research - which offers an applied, physically-anchored means of and rationale for expanding our individual ethical capacities as global citizens. My claim is it is imperative for our world that we do this: get into our bodies in the present moment *in order to become* globally ethical. The secondary purpose of this chapter is to advocate for more research on this specific subject by posing links across varied theories normatively viewed as improbably connected, and rarely connected to ethics. Researchers who have posed related links across diverse disciplines include Ferguson (1987), Frattaroli (2001), Hubbard (1998), Korten (2006), Lipton & Bhaerman (2009), Pearce (2002), Scharmer (2007), Wilber (1996) and Zukav (1979). My intention is to link their diverse ideas more directly to the realm of ethics as anchored in our body’s and brain’s neural capacity for feelings, such as grief and empathy (Goleman, 2006; Greenspan, 2004; Straub, 2000), and propose that we have inherent capacities to make globally ethical choices – capacities which we generally do not use but *can learn* to use (Pearce, 2002; Servan-Schreiber, 2004).

However this proposal may sound, you as the reader are invited to do two things – (1) keep in mind this chapter is intentionally attempting to connect ideas with ethical practices up to the global scale which may not yet have sufficient research data to satisfy you as the reader, and (2) be aware that your own “lens”, including your physical responses as you read, will shape the way you interpret the content. This invitation is not an excuse for whatever flaws may exist

in this chapter, but intended to support a central question at the root of this proposal: if we may have defenses up while simply reading an article in the privacy of our own room, how can we use awareness of our defenses to further develop our capacities as ethical global citizens? My suggestion is: let’s start now.

My motive for writing this chapter is to offer an actionable way for us as individuals to embrace: (1) our social and environmental responsibility for our daily choices, (2) how our micro-level choices lead to macro-level impacts on a global scale, and (3) why it is both individually possible and globally imperative for us to develop an expanded capacity for ethical choices.

WHAT GLOBAL IMPERATIVE FOR EXPANDED ETHICS?

Many voices have warned us of climate change, species extinction and the potential for irreversible ecological destruction if we do not change (Brown, 2003; Gore, 2009; Hartmann, 2004; Hawken, 2003). Jeremy Rifkin also pronounced a dire warning in a talk on March 18, 2010:

My sense is ... that we may be at a pivotal turning point for the history of our young species – may be. We’re the youngest species in the evolutionary neighborhood. Human beings have only been here 175,000 years. We’re the youngsters. But I suspect we may be seeing the extinction of our species sometime in the next century. It’s difficult to say this. There have been so many prophetic, apocalyptic visions over history and they’ve all turned out to be wrong – pretty much. But I’m going to share a little statistic with you, and you make the judgment call...

The real economy is photosynthesis. The sun’s energy bathes the earth. We pick up photosynthesis in our plants, and all the rest of the economic activity for all fellow creatures and our species is

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