

Ethics in Six Not-So-Easy Lessons¹

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Revised May 2005

Ethics is as intellectually challenging as anything we encounter in life. This is why the following lessons in ethics are not particularly easy. They presuppose no knowledge of the field, but neither do they shield the reader from its subtlety.

There is a widespread view that mathematics and science are precise and rational, whereas ethics is inconclusive and based on gut feeling. It is true that ethical issues often lack conclusive resolution, but this not because they are beyond rational treatment. It is because they are hard. Close reasoning is even more important in ethics than in science, because mathematical theories are not available to help us think clearly.

The Western ethical tradition has evolved theories that attempt to organize our thinking. They all rest on basic distinctions between fact and value and between means and ends, which are discussed in Lessons 1 and 2. Lessons 3 through 5 then present three of the most influential theories: utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, and Aristotelian ethics. Lesson 6 concludes with a glimpse of how ethics can be radically different in non-Western cultures.

A Case Study

The following case study will be used as an example that threads through all six lessons.

While interviewing for jobs, Jennifer learned from a classmate that Pacific Esolutions was looking at the possibility of opening up a branch in Seoul. Jennifer spent her junior year of high school as an exchange student in Korea and learned to speak Korean with remarkable fluency. Partly as a result, she made a number of close friends with whom she had maintained contact, and she longed to return to the country. She got an interview with Pacific Esolutions and learned, to her delight, that the new office would have a position that suited her perfectly. Esolutions told her that, due to her unique qualifications, she would probably be hired for the job if the office did in fact open. However, the necessary Korean permits had not yet been obtained.

In the meantime Jennifer interviewed for other positions and received a couple of acceptable but less desirable offers. It seemed that negotiations between Esolutions and Korean officials had bogged down, and the company was not optimistic. Jennifer tried to keep her options open, but graduation was near, and her classmates were talking about the great jobs they had gotten. She could probably get another offer after graduation through some family contacts, but her classmates would have gone their separate ways. Her best friend Heather urged her to get real and accept a job. Finally,

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when her offers were about to expire, she signed with Midwest Consulting in Cleveland, Ohio.

About two weeks later Jennifer received an email from Esolutions telling her about a breakthrough in the Korean negotiations. Her employment contract was ready to sign. Distraught, Jennifer told Heather about her rotten luck. Heather's reply was, "What's the problem? Just tell Midwest that an unexpected opportunity came up. People do it all the time. Employers understand that these things happen. They don't want to hire someone who really wants to work somewhere else, anyway. Who knows, they may have run across someone they wish they had hired instead of you."

Lesson 1: Facts and Values

The first step in analyzing an ethical dilemma is to distinguish questions of fact from value questions. This may appear easy, but the distinction can be surprisingly subtle. It is nonetheless fundamental, because an issue of fact can be settled only by gathering information. Value questions must be settled in other ways, to be discussed below.

If you fail to make the fact/value distinction, you may address the problem the wrong way and get nowhere. People sometimes brood endlessly over a dilemma when it really turns on a question of fact. No amount of worry and discussion can resolve the issue, when a little investigation might clear everything up.

Conversely, people sometimes waste time chasing down facts when the ethical issues do not turn on them anyway. A little thought experiment can work wonders: when a factual claim is in doubt, ask yourself whether your decision would be different if the claim were false. If not, you can save yourself time and energy.

In the Pacific Esolutions case, Heather makes several factual claims that may or may not bear on Jennifer's decision. Consider for example the claim that "everybody does it." The only way to know whether it is true is to find out what "everybody" does. No amount of talk or contemplation will, by itself, resolve the issue. In any event, it is unclear why we must know what "everybody" does. What exactly follows from it?

The Is-Ought Gap

There is one thing we can say for certain: *no* ethical statement follows from the single premise that "everybody does it," because it is purely a statement of fact. This is the *is-ought gap*: one cannot infer what *ought to* happen simply from what *is* happening.

To infer what Jennifer should do from the supposed fact that "everybody does it," one must appeal to an additional premise of an ethical nature. One might use the premise, "it is OK to do what 'everybody' does," and infer that it is OK to break the contract. But this is a strong premise that seems questionable. It may turn out that nothing much follows from the fact that a certain number of people break their agreements, in which case there is no need to waste time trying to find out how many do.

To take another example, suppose Jennifer decides to call Midwest and ask if it would be convenient to let her out of her employment contract. Yet her friends warn her against it. There was a similar case two years ago in which the company not only insisted that a student keep his contract but apparently regarded him as untrustworthy because he asked to be released. He was passed over for a promotion that comparable employees were getting. It therefore seems *imprudent* for Jennifer to bring up the issue. But whether it is prudent is not the same as whether it is right. Whether one will get in trouble for doing something is not the same issue as whether one should do it. What *is* prudent is a question of fact. Whether one *should be* prudent is a value question.

On the other hand, the prudence of an act may be *one consideration* in determining whether it is right. One might combine it with the ethical premise that one should ordinarily be prudent in order to preserve one's ability to do good things. However, it seems unlikely that any reasonable principle would be so simple.

We are beginning to see that ethical decision making is far more than a gut reaction. It is a skill that must be honed over a lifetime. We human beings are largely distinguished from other organisms by our ability (and the necessity) to make conscious choices. It should be no surprise that doing so would become one of our primary occupations in life.

Lesson 2: Means and Ends

There may seem to be something odd about the statement that ethical reasoning is one of our primary occupations. Granted, many people are constantly occupied with making conscious choices, particularly professionals. They spend their careers honing their decision-making skills. But most of these choices do not seem to be ethical in nature. In fact, ethical dilemmas seem to arise only now and then. Are ethical choices being defined too broadly?

The Practical Syllogism

We may not realize it, but we make ethical choices constantly. Let's suppose a business manager, Joe, decides to remove green ketchup from his company's product line. The decision is based on demand projections, production costs, logistics, shelf space, etc. Where is the ethics?

The ethics enters when one takes a second look at the basis for the decision. Suppose the reason is lack of demand for green ketchup. Why is this reason to cut a product? Presumably because the company would lose money. Why should Joe care if the company loses money? Because people might lose their jobs. Why is this a problem? Because they would be less happy in some sense. So? Well, they *should* be happy! Here is the ethical premise. It is the *end* to which the rest is a *means*. In a nutshell the reasoning goes something like this:

Discontinuing green ketchup would make the company's employees happier.
The company's employees should be happy.
Therefore, Joe should discontinue green ketchup.

This is one form of a *practical syllogism*. The first premise is a statement of fact, and the second is an ethical principle. The first premise provides the means, and the second the end. All choices are basically like this. Ethical principles are always involved in choices, because a practical syllogism always involves an ethical premise.

The End Justifies the Means

Another way to put this is that “the end justifies the means.” You may be wary of this principle. People who think this way are said to go to any extreme to accomplish their goals. For example, what is to prevent Joe from paying kickbacks or running a protection racket if it would keep company employees happy?

What prevents this is that the end is normally multifaceted. People should be happy *and* avoid corruption. Bribery is not a means to the end when the end is properly understood. The end does indeed justify the means (nothing else can), but one must make sure the end is completely stated. Fanatics who sacrifice everything to a single goal err by defining their ends too narrowly, not by letting the end justify the means.

(You may prefer to say that promoting happiness and avoiding corruption are at root the same end, because avoiding corruption makes people happier in the long run. It is overall happiness that matters. This view is a form of utilitarianism and is discussed below.)

Ethics and Self Interest

The analysis just presented may yet seem to overstate the role of ethics in everyday choices. You may protest that Joe drops green ketchup from the product line because he wants to keep *his* job; *he* wants to be happy. So the true syllogism is

Discontinuing green ketchup would make Joe happier.
Joe wants to be happy.
Therefore, Joe should discontinue green ketchup.

Again, where is the ethics? It is not simply a matter of self-interest?

No, because the conclusion of the syllogism is a *non sequitur*. The premises establish at most that discontinuing green ketchup would be prudent for Joe, which does not show that he should do it. One needs some such ethical principle as, “One should be prudent,” or “One should be happy.” After all, people sometimes choose to sacrifice their happiness or well being for some higher end. If you or I do not make such a sacrifice, this is a choice, and only an ethical principle can ultimately justify this choice.

When Ethical Reasoning becomes Conscious

The lesson here is that every action implies an ethical judgment. True, the reasoning is very similar in many of our actions, and it can become habitual and unconscious. But once we reflect on why we do things, we must invoke ethical principles. (In fact, Immanuel Kant claimed that one truly acts only when one consciously deliberates about how to act; more on this later.) We normally become aware of ethics only if our ends come into obvious conflict, and we have to reconsider them. This is why it seems that ethical issues arise only now and then.

The Esolutions case is one of those unusual situations. Jennifer presumably attends professional school, studies hard, and interviews with firms in order to obtain a “good job.” She determined at some point that a good job is important enough to spend a great deal of her time and energy pursuing it. Once this was settled, there was not much to think about ethically from day to day. But now her goal conflicts with another end she believes to be important: acting in good faith. She must rethink how she determined that a good job is important, and whether her reasons override the importance of honor. She may discover that she was not so clear after all on why a good job is important. She may be obliged in effect to clarify and restructure the practical syllogisms that lie behind her actions. It is at such junctures that we become more mature and reflective persons. (Kant would say we become more fully human.)

Lesson 3: Utilitarianism

It is time at last to ask the big question: how does one know which ends are worthy of pursuit? The neatest answer is to say that they all boil down to one thing, such as happiness (as suggested above). *Utilitarianism* states more generally that the end of any act should be to maximize utility across the general population, where utility might be defined as happiness or some other desirable condition.

Utilitarianism and Criminal Penalties

Perhaps the best way to understand utilitarianism is to recall the situation it tried to address, namely the criminal justice system of eighteenth-century England. At the time, punishment was based on the ancient idea of retribution, or literally, paying back. The state should exact revenge on the criminal. Jeremy Bentham, however, believed that criminal justice should be rooted in reason rather than primal emotion. Policies should be dispassionately designed to maximize the overall welfare of society. Criminal penalties in particular should aim to deter crime rather than make the criminal suffer. In fact, the criminal’s agony counts against punishment and must be offset by greater evil that would result if crimes went unpunished.

The underlying ethical philosophy is that one should make up one’s mind what is good (well being, happiness, etc.) and try to maximize it, without being distracted by such concerns as a desire for retribution. A utilitarian would favor a South Sea vacation for

convicted criminals if it were shown to rehabilitate them and reduce crime, a view that a retributist finds repulsive. The issue remains unresolved in the public mind to this day.

What is Utility?

Utilitarians differ on what kind of good (utility) should be maximized.. Bentham equated utility with pleasure and disutility with pain (*hedonistic* utilitarianism). John Stuart Mill, another famous utilitarian, suggested that some pleasures are better than others (e.g., listening to a Brahms symphony versus eating greasy French fries). But the main point is that one should be *consistent*. One should decide what is important and stick to it. If several things are important, such as several kinds of pleasure, one must be able to measure the utility of each so that total utility can be calculated.

You may find fault with utilitarianism because nobody knows how to quantify such things as happiness or pleasure. True enough, but it is nonetheless possible to have more or less of them. Patrons of a fine restaurant experience more pleasure than prisoners eating rotten meat. The impossibility of measuring either does not overcome this fact. The utilitarian can insist that, in many cases, one action clearly results in more pleasure than others and is therefore preferable. In other cases, we are bound by no clear obligation.

Utilitarian analysis relies heavily on factual knowledge, since one must predict the consequences of various actions. In the Esolutions case, the consequences are uncertain, but one might reason as follows. If Jennifer breaks her agreement with a large firm like Midwest Consulting, the effect on the company and its clients is marginal. They will scarcely notice it and quickly forget. The benefit to herself, however, is substantial and could have lasting effects. Clearly her happiness outweighs their slight inconvenience. Heather also seems to be making a utilitarian argument when she says that companies prefer not to hire people who want to work elsewhere. That is, the company will actually benefit if it hires someone other than Jennifer. The utilitarian choice is still clearer if Midwest has already found a preferable candidate.

When Utilitarianism Fails

Utilitarianism can prescribe actions that seem clearly wrong. If I fail to vote in the next national election, there is an infinitesimal chance, if any chance at all, that this will affect the outcome. (Even if my vote would make a difference, it is far from clear that I vote wisely!) Furthermore, it is inconvenient for me to travel to the polls, and I may even suffer an accident on the way. Unless I take pleasure in the act of voting, which we may suppose I do not, the utilitarian choice is to stay home.

Students sometimes makes a utilitarian calculation when tempted to cheat on examinations. Suppose for the sake of argument that grades do not depend on the distribution of scores, so that one person's dishonesty has no effect on the welfare of others and boosts his own. The utilitarian act is therefore to cheat. The calculus may change if the cheater is demoralized by his act or is propelled into a career for which he is

unqualified. But it is unclear that the utilitarian choice is correct even if these eventualities could be avoided.

The missing element is fairness. The reason I should vote is that if no one voted, democracy would give way to despotism. It seems unfair for me to be a free rider; that is, to shirk my duty and let others bear the burden of supporting a system from which I benefit. The reason a student should not cheat is that if everyone cheated, grades would be a worthless indication of ability. The cheater gets a free ride by benefiting from a grade whose value depends on the fact that most people are honest.

The Esolutions case is similar. Perhaps the only reason Midwest Consulting was willing to promise Jennifer a job upon graduation is that they took her word that she would in fact accept the job. They took her word only because most students keep their promises. The only reason Jennifer could secure a job with Midwest, or with Esolutions for that matter, is that most students act in good faith. By breaking her promise to Midwest, she becomes a free rider. The utilitarian analysis seems to overlook this.

Rule Utilitarianism

One historical attempt to fix this problem has been to use *rule utilitarianism*. It asks one to follow the rule of conduct that would maximize utility if everyone followed it. The rule, "Do not vote if voting is inconvenient," is clearly less than optimal, because it leads to the collapse of democracy. Even the opposite rule, "Vote if you are eligible," seems suboptimal, because it asks the seriously ill to drag themselves to the polls. Democracy will not suffer if a few sick persons stay home. Perhaps an optimal voting rule might be constructed as follows. Order all eligible voters according to how much pain or pleasure voting entails. Persons at the lower extreme can vote only by risking life and limb, and those at the upper extreme find voting easy and enjoyable. Now divide the continuum into two parts, and make exceptions for those in the lower part; they are not obligated to vote, and the remainder are so obligated. The cut point can now be located so as to maximize overall utility.

An optimal rule might also be designed for employment contracts. Perhaps utility is maximized when persons act in good faith and keep their commitments, except in certain cases where keeping the commitment would be needlessly harmful. Some reasonable rules might be: (a) sign for a job only after allowing a reasonable time to hear from other firms with whom you interviewed; (b) stop job hunting after you sign, and (c) keep your commitment, unless you are offered a job for which you applied earlier, and the advantage of taking the offer outweighs the harm. This would allow Jennifer to break her agreement.

The problem with rule utilitarianism is that it ignores the status quo and is therefore often inappropriate for individual decision making. Suppose that organized crime has taken over the country. Few people vote anymore because voters are attacked by the mob. Perhaps people in general should defy the mob and vote en masse, but the issue is

whether I in particular should vote. The rule utilitarian cheerfully advises me to do so, even though the act is futile and perhaps suicidal.

The Esolutions case could be similar. Even if a few people can break agreements in an ideal world, it is possible that in the real world, employers take offense. Perhaps they blacklist people who break job contracts and make sure nobody hires them. In this environment the rule utilitarian's advice is perverse.

Utilitarianism as a Policy Tool

Perhaps the best way to apply utilitarianism is the way it was originally applied: to the formulation of enforceable *policy*, such as criminal justice policy. If a government wishes to enact a mandatory voting law (as is done in Australia), the rule utilitarian's policy formulated above may be optimal. If college career centers and employers wish to collaborate on a policy for employment contracts, they make arrive at the policy just described.

Thus utilitarianism seems best conceived as rule utilitarianism, but as a theory for policy making as opposed to individual decision making. As such it remains quite useful, because individuals often find themselves in positions of authority where they must make policy for an organization.

Utilitarianism and Justice

Even when utilitarianism is restricted to policy making, it may not always provide a just solution. It is true that there is already a strong principle of justice in utilitarianism simply because everyone's utility is given equal weight in the calculation. One cannot (arbitrarily) give greater weight to members of the upper class or of a certain race, for instance. But utilitarian calculations may nonetheless endorse a highly unequal and apparently unjust distribution of utility. They may determine that the well-born should receive the lion's share of resources because they are best equipped to use them productively.

The utilitarian recognizes that inequality can be unjust but insists that it is unjust only because it results in disutility. Inequality can breed resentment, crime and even rebellion, or else it can require an oppressive government to maintain control. Furthermore, as Bentham himself pointed out, utilitarian solutions give at least some weight to equality because of the principle of decreasing marginal utility. As one acquires more resources, their utility rises at a decreasing rate. A fixed amount of resources may therefore bring more utility when they are distributed widely rather than concentrated in a few persons. This introduces a bias in favor of more equal distributions.²

² Bentham would approve of a mathematical analysis like the following. Let the utility that results from giving x units of some resource to person i be $c_i x^p$. The exponent p is less than 1 when there are decreasing marginal returns. The coefficient c_i indicates the person's ability to use the resources; c_i is presumably larger for persons who are intelligent, well positioned in society, or advantaged in other ways. The goal is to maximize $\sum_i c_i x_i^p$ subject to $\sum_i x_i = R$, where x_i is the amount of resource allocated person i and R is the total amount of resource available. If $p = 1$ (i.e., marginal utility is constant), then the most advantaged

But even if the utilitarian were right in saying that inequality is unjust only when it is disutilitarian, this may only be a matter of empirical fact. Perhaps an unequal distribution can at least in principle be unjust even when it results in greater utility.

This is no mere academic dispute. It is often maintained that overall wealth and therefore presumably utility is maximized by reducing taxes on the wealthy, by paying exorbitant salaries to chief executives, by reducing the minimum wage, and so forth. If this is true, then it must be decided whether the utilitarian criterion is the only one, or a further criterion of distributive justice must be applied.

Which Facts Are Relevant?

Returning again to the Esolutions case, we are now in a position to decide which facts are relevant to a utilitarian analysis. Actually, none are directly relevant. The utilitarian wants to know the consequences of various policies, not what is happening now. However, the current state of affairs is indirectly relevant insofar as it can provide insight into how people would behave under various scenarios.

Lesson 4: Kantian Ethics

Utilitarianism advises us to decide what we want and to design policies to obtain it. It does not directly address individual choices, and it may not ensure distributive justice. We need a theory that analyzes individual duty and fairness.

Acting for Reasons

Some of the most astute theories of this kind derive from the thought of the eighteenth-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant. He begins with the simple premise that one should always act for a reason. There should be something that one takes to justify the action. For example, if I choose not to vote, there must be some reason I so choose. Perhaps it is because voting is inconvenient.

Another way to put this is that every action must be backed up by a practical syllogism, such as:

person gets all of the resources. Otherwise the problem can be solved by associating Lagrange multiplier λ with the constraint. The optimal solution satisfies the Lagrangian equations $p c_i x_i^{p-1} = \lambda$ for each i and $\sum_i x_i = R$. It is therefore

$$x_i = R \frac{c_i^{1/(1-p)}}{\sum_j c_j^{1/(1-p)}}$$

This gives more resources to the more gifted persons but no longer gives everything to the most gifted. As the exponent p drops to 0, the allocation becomes proportional to c_i . So the most nearly equal distribution that a utilitarian can endorse is to give each person resources in proportion to that person's ability to use them.

Staying home from the polls is convenient;
I should do what is convenient.
Therefore, I should stay home from the polls.

Kant obtains enormous leverage from the seemingly innocuous assumption that one must act for reasons. He begins by pointing out that I must regard my reason for not voting as a reason for anyone's not voting. I might protest that my reason does not work for people who enjoy voting. Then I really have two reasons for not voting: it is inconvenient, and I do not enjoy it. If these are really my reasons, then I am committed to saying that they are reasons for anyone else. In reality there are probably many factors I take into account when deciding not to vote; they are my reasons.

So far there is nothing wrong with my decision not to vote. But suppose there is another reason involved in my choice, which there very likely is: most others will vote even if I do not, and democracy will be preserved. If it were otherwise, I would be first in line at the polls. So part of my reason for not voting is the assumption that although most eligible voters have these same reasons not to vote, most of them will vote nonetheless. I accept these reasons as good enough for me, but I am unwilling to let them be good reasons for others. But this is irrational and inconsistent. If these are good reasons for me, I must regard them as good reasons for anyone. This is sometimes called the *generalization test*, although it is really a rationality test. For Kant, failure of the generalization test is the tipoff that my intention is immoral. Kantian ethics, like utilitarianism, is at root a call to rationality.

It is not my failure to vote that is wrong, on Kant's view. I might fail to vote for perfectly honorable reasons, such as a mishap that prevents me from reaching the polls. What is wrong is my inconsistent will. The intention matters, not its actual consequences.

A similar analysis applies to cheating. The student mentioned earlier cheats presumably because it will improve his grade and career prospects. But it will improve his career prospects only if most people are honest enough for grades to be meaningful, despite the fact that they have the same reasons to cheat. So part of the student's reasons for cheating is the assumption that other students will not cheat even though they have the same reasons to cheat. The student accepts these reasons as sufficient to justify his own dishonesty but is unwilling to let them justify the dishonesty of others. This is irrational and inconsistent and therefore immoral.

Categorical Imperative

Kant tried to summarize his view in a *categorical imperative*, which instructs one to act only according to a maxim that one can at the same time will to become universal law. For Kant, acting according to a maxim is acting for reasons; my maxim for voting is, "don't vote if it is inconvenient, unenjoyable, and most eligible voters will vote even though it is usually inconvenient." By willing my maxim to be universal law I recognize that if my reasons justify the action in my case, they justify the action in anyone's case.

(Again, the generalization test.) It is impossible that everyone follow my voting maxim, because if they did, the condition that most people will vote despite the inconvenience could not be satisfied. The maxim therefore violates the categorical imperative.

The categorical imperative is “categorical” in the sense that it is not hypothetical; it is not an imperative that depends on desires, such as, “if you want to be healthy, eat well.” It applies to anyone who acts, even beings from another planet.

Why Acts Must Have Reasons

This whole affair is based on the premise that anyone who acts must act according to reasons that are taken to justify the action. Why is this so? Kant’s answer was strikingly original and has not been fully absorbed even to this day. The key, he said, is to think about how free action can be distinguished from mere behavior. If a mosquito bites me, this is mere behavior. I do not judge the mosquito morally, because it did not “freely choose” to bite. The bite was merely the result of chemical reactions and whatnot in the mosquito’s body. Yet human actions are also the result of chemical reactions and whatnot. What allows us to say that some of them are free actions rather than mere behavior?

Kant’s answer is that there are two kinds of “reason” one can give for an action. One kind of reason is a *cause*, such as the chemistry of a mosquito’s body. The other kind of reason is sort we have already talked about: it is the explanation you get when you ask, “Why did you do that?” It is the practical syllogism that justifies the behavior in the agent’s mind. For Kant, behavior is free action *when it can be reasonably explained as the outcome of conscious deliberation based on a practical syllogism*. It makes no sense to say that the mosquito bit because she thought to herself, “Biting that human is a means to nourishment; I should be nourished; therefore, I should bite.” However, it is often very reasonable to explain human actions in this way.

Free agency is not so much an objective property of an event as its susceptibility to a certain kind of explanation. In principle the behavior of computers and robots could someday be more easily explained as the result of the machine’s own deliberation than as the outcome of an algorithm. Kant therefore gives us a principled way to tell when we should regard computers as agents with rights and duties.

It is not quite correct to say, as above, that my failure to vote is unethical because my intention is inconsistent. My behavior is not an ethical act because it is not an act: there is no reasonable and consistent explanation for why I chose it. If I try to say that I stayed home because voting is inconvenient and others will vote anyway despite the inconvenience, this is not a reasonable and convincing explanation. It portrays me as acting for reasons that obviously contradict each other. If they were sufficient reasons for me to stay home, they would be sufficient reasons for everyone. But they cannot be sufficient reasons for everyone because one of them is that most people *will* vote, despite the inconvenience. Contradictory reasons cannot form a rationale for anything and therefore cannot explain my behavior.

You may protest that a failure to vote can in fact be given a reasonable explanation if one is clever enough. For example, one can explain Joe Smith's failure to vote as based on the maxim, "don't vote if it is inconvenient, unenjoyable, most others will vote anyway despite the inconvenience, and your name is Joe Smith." There is no contradiction here, because most people are not named Joe Smith. If Joe's name is really one of the reasons he declines to vote, then fine, he is acting ethically. But this implies that if he discovered that his name were really Joe Jones, he would be off to the polls. Since this seems very unlikely, the proposed maxim is not a reasonable explanation for his behavior after all.

On the other hand, a decision not to vote in a state ruled by organized crime can be reasonably explained. One's reason for staying home does not include the premise that most people will vote anyway despite the danger.

A voter who stays home due to illness is also likely to be ethical. The maxim is presumably that one should stay home if (a) one is ill, and (b) the majority of people are not ill and can therefore vote without endangering their health. There is no inconsistency here.

Note that Kant does not say that an action *should be* based on reasons. He says that an action *must be* explicable as based on reasons, because otherwise it is mere behavior. So my failure to vote due to inconvenience is not, strictly speaking, an unethical act. It is not an act at all. The categorical imperative is essentially a definition of action.

Back to Esolutions

Kantian ethics may be illustrated in the Esolutions case. Jennifer is actually faced with two decisions. She decided to accept the Midwest Consulting offer, and she now must decide whether to sign with Esolutions.

Jennifer's acceptance of the Midwest offer may not be an act at all in the Kantian sense. She was under pressure from her peers to get a job and brag about it. If one were to examine the decision, one would see a struggle to reconcile the importance of a good job with the importance of good faith. It might be hard to construct a rationale for Jennifer's eventual acceptance of the offer. Perhaps only a psychological reason, a *cause*, could explain it: she gave in to peer pressure without thinking matters through clearly. If so, her choice was not an ethical act because it was not an act at all.

As for the Esolutions offer, let us suppose that Jennifer decides to take it. The key question is, what are the reasons? The job is better suited for her, and she wants it much more than the Midwest Consulting job. Are these reasons enough? Clearly not, because Jennifer's decision to break her commitment implies the possibility of making a commitment in the first place. If students abandoned their commitments whenever they got a better offer, commitments would be meaningless and companies would disregard them. It makes no sense to explain Jennifer's decision by saying that she broke her

commitment because it was convenient. Her ability to break a commitment presupposes that students do not break commitments for mere convenience.

This reading of the case, however, does not do justice to Jennifer's situation. She acted in good faith all along. The offer from Esolutions was unexpected. Making exceptions in such cases may be consistent with the practices that make commitments possible. Perhaps a fuller accounting of her reasons would pass the generalization test: (a) the Esolutions job is better suited for her, (b) she stopped hunting after signing with Midwest, and (c) the offer from Esolutions was unexpected.

On reflection, however, this seems unlikely to be generalizable. Imagine what this would be like. You could interview for a number of jobs. Then if one of the companies offers you a job, you can say, "Sure, I'll take the job—until someone offers me a better one, of course." Since companies receive no commitment, they would have no incentive to offer one. So when you interview with a company, the interviewer could say, "We are happy to hire you—until we interview someone better than you, of course." Obviously in this regime there are no meaningful commitments.

There may be another way for Jennifer to escape from the commitment. Students in this predicament often point out that employment contracts generally allow the employee to resign after giving notice, perhaps two weeks. Perhaps Jennifer could simply tell Midwest she is giving them her two-week notice. This is perfectly legal.

Actually it has been assumed along that any option Jennifer chooses is legal. Breaking the law is ungeneralizable, because if people routinely broke the law for mere convenience, there would be no laws to break. Although breach of contract is not a crime, it is a tort, which is a violation of civil law. So it is granted that there is some way to renege on the commitment to Midwest legally. The question is whether it can be done ethically.

One might argue that what is legal is ethical in this case. According to the contract, Jennifer only *promised* to work until giving a two-week notice. But she clearly promised more than this, whatever the contract may say. Everyone recognizes that a change in life circumstances may require a change of job, such as marriage, children, or unexpected financial problems. Or after working at a company for a while, one may be ready to move on to another position. In such cases, giving notice is reasonable and expected. But barring unforeseen circumstances, Jennifer promised to work for Midwest *for the time being*. Similarly, Midwest promised to employ here *for the time being*, unless there is an unexpected change of circumstances, such as a serious financial setback, or Jennifer's failure to do the work.

Having said all this, there still seems to be something special about Jennifer's case. She not only waited a long time before signing with Midwest, but the offer from Esolutions was delayed due to bureaucratic complications. Esolutions wanted to hire Jennifer all along. They were simply waiting until they could make a firm commitment, much as Jennifer was waiting to make a firm commitment to Midwest. Jennifer got caught up in a

tangle of timing and uncertainty that the job hunting process sometimes creates. Now that the bureaucratic issues are resolved, the rational course of action is clear: Esolutions should hire the person they wanted all along, and Midwest should hire someone who *wants* to work for them. If ethics prevents working things out in a reasonable fashion, then there is something wrong with ethics.

A rational course of action is precisely what ethics wants to achieve. As analyzed here, to be ethical *is* precisely to have a coherent rationale for one's behavior. Jennifer can take advantage of this. She has no desire to do something that would undermine the system of commitments if generally practiced, but would actually strengthen it by providing a mechanism for getting out of tangles such as this one. If she can formulate this mechanism and satisfy herself that it is generalizable, then it is ethical for her to break her commitment to Midwest.

As this case illustrates, Kantian ethics can be hard work. One must in effect design a whole system of institutions and practices in order to test the generalizability of a single action. Kant was well aware of this. As he put it, to act is to legislate: to formulate *policy* as though one were a parliament making law for everyone.

This is reminiscent of finding a utilitarian policy, but there are two differences. One is that, to satisfy Kant, Jennifer's policy need not maximize utility. But the most basic difference is that Jennifer need not be *correct* in her belief that her rationale is generalizable; she need not know what would *actually* happen if it were generally applied. She is required only to be internally consistent. Her belief about what would happen need only be consistent with her knowledge and beliefs about how the world operates in general.

Second Thoughts

Suppose Jennifer asks Midwest to release her from her contract, on the grounds just discussed, and Midwest obliges—but only reluctantly. The people at Midwest tell Jennifer that they will have to delay some projects until they can recruit a replacement, and this will cost money. They ask Jennifer whether she thinks it is ethical to break her word this way. This makes Jennifer feel guilty. She rehearses in her mind the Kantian argument just presented, but it does not allay her uneasiness about double-crossing the company.

Guilt is an emotional response that, in some cultures, helps to enforce behavioral norms. There is no reason to suppose that guilt is an infallible judge of right and wrong. Although human beings cannot live by reason alone, we can use reason as a corrective to emotions, just as emotions can help us correct false reasoning. We must be prepared to act occasionally in ways that make us feel guilty.

Yet even when Jennifer gets past misleading emotion, she is unsure about the Kantian analysis. She feels that she cannot be ethical unless she can convince Midwest to see it her way. If she could convince Midwest that the rational course of action is to let her

work for Esolutions and hire someone better suited to Midwest, this would confirm her judgment. But there is nothing more Kantian than this. Reasons for an action must be universal; they must justify the action for Jennifer, for Midwest, or anyone else.

The Veil of Ignorance

The philosopher John Rawls proposed a vivid way of understanding the universality of reasons. On his view, Jennifer must make her decision *without knowing who she is*. She could be Jennifer, she could be a manager at Midwest, or she could be another student. As Rawls put it, she must decide behind a “veil of ignorance” as to her station in life. She will find out who she is only after she makes the decision. Her reasons must be sufficient for her choice no matter who she turns out to be, which is again is the heart and soul of Kantian ethics.

It is easy to misinterpret this criterion. It does not mean that one should figure the probabilities and maximize the expected outcome. A business executive, for example, might decide it is a good bet to lay off some older workers to make a company more profitable. This would be a disaster for her if she were one of the workers terminated, but there is a much greater chance she would be someone who benefits from the layoff. She is willing to take her chances. Rawls says this is not enough. She must construct a justification for the layoff that she would find equally convincing if she were transported into the body of one of the redundant workers.

Distributive Justice

Rawls used his idea of the veil of ignorance to analyze distributive justice. Kantian ethics addresses justice at the individual level by prohibiting free riders and the like, but perhaps it can be extended to provide a criterion for just policies. This is what Rawls tried to do. He derivation relies on social contract theory and is too involved to review here, but he arrived at two principles:

- (a) A policy must result in the greatest basic liberty for everyone.
- (b) Policy must never improve the lot of those who are better off at the expense of those who are worse off.

Principle (b) pertains to distributive justice. Suppose, for example, that the government is making economic policy that can redistribute wealth. The legislators must deliberate behind a veil of ignorance. As Rawls sees it, each legislator must therefore assume that he or she will be assigned to the lowest class. The resulting distribution must therefore maximize the well being of the poorest class. This yields a kind of utilitarianism, but it optimizes a different objective function: a minimax criterion. A slightly more sophisticated form would first maximize the well being of the lowest class, then, while holding its wealth fixed, maximize the well being of the second lowest class, and so forth. This is a form of pre-emptive goal programming that in effect maximizes a

“lexicographic” objective function. It permits one class to have advantages over another only for the purpose of improving the lot of the lower class.

Rawls’ argument is perhaps not airtight. It may be as difficult to derive a criterion for policy making from Kantian ethics as to derive a rule for individual choices from utilitarianism. Nonetheless Rawls provides a powerful conceptual tool for thinking about distributive justice.

Which Facts Are Relevant?

We conclude this section by examining which facts in the Esolutions case are relevant to the Kantian analysis. As in the utilitarian case, none are directly relevant, because the Kantian analysis is interested in the how Jennifer justifies her action, not what actually occurs. However, all are indirectly relevant. When one reconstructs an explanation for why Jennifer acts as she does, it is necessary to consider what she knows and believes.

Lesson 5: Aristotelian Ethics

Aristotelian ethics is much older than utilitarian and Kantian ethics, because it dates back to ancient Greece. It is too old to reflect the Judeo-Christian ethical sensibilities that inform most Western thought. Yet it is very much alive in Western culture, and it reflects the same drive to consistency that inspires the other two systems. It can also be understood as proposing specific ends for human action, rather than merely laying down formal conditions for rational action.

Aristotle’s ethics is about how to live the good life. For him, a human life is good or bad in basically the same way that a tool is good or bad. A good tool is one that performs its function well. It has a sharp blade, is well-balanced, durable, safe, etc. A good life is one that performs its function well.

Teleological Explanation

This of course presupposes that one can make sense of the notion that a human life has a function. This makes sense for tools because the tool’s maker or user stipulates as to its function. Aristotle believed, however, that assigning functions to things, even human beings, is an integral part of how we understand the world. Western science now tends to emphasize causal explanation, but Aristotle had a larger conception of explanation that seems more adequate. The scientific explanation of the human body, for example, makes reference to chemical reactions that transform nutrients to acetyl coenzyme A, which initiates the Krebs cycle, which produces adenosine triphosphate (ATP), etc. Causal explanation is legitimate and necessary, but the complexity of the human body would be unintelligible if we did not give it a teleological or functional explanation as well. The function of the heart is to pump blood, the function of the lungs is to provide oxygen to the blood, and so on. The molecular biologists who tell us about the chain of reactions in

respiration gained their first understanding of the body when their kindergarten teachers told them about the heart and the lungs.

Aristotle wanted to make sense of human life, and so he gave it a function. How did he do this? The modern understanding of function tends to emphasize the role of things in a system. The heart's function is to pump blood because the circulatory system needs a pump and the heart fills this role. Aristotle tends to identify a thing's function as the activity for which it is best and uniquely suited. On this view the heart's function is to pump blood because it is best and uniquely suited for this activity among the organs of the body. (The very notion of a bodily organ of course reflects teleological thinking.) Similarly, human beings are uniquely suited to certain kinds of activity. They are rational beings. They can apprehend beauty. They are capable of trust, loyalty, friendship, honor and courage in a self-conscious way that apparently characterizes no other creature. These, then, become human virtues.

A good human life is one of excellence, one that realizes its full potential. Humans are also uniquely capable of monstrous cruelty, and one may wonder why this would not also be a virtue on Aristotle's view. A satisfactory answer seems to require a return to systems thinking. No organ of the body can kill like the heart; a slight electrical disturbance will do the trick. Yet the heart's pumping behavior, not its ability to kill, helps us to understand how the body works. Similarly, cruelty does not help us explain human existence; it makes that existence even harder to explain. Rather, it is by regarding human beings as the world's source of rationality, aesthetic sensibility, trust, loyalty, honor, friendship and courage that we are able to make some sense of our predicament.

As originally presented Aristotle's scheme can be interpreted as purely naturalistic. It simply states facts: the purpose of a human being is to do and be such-and-such. If we are to obtain guidance from it, however, we must assume that a human being *should* do and be these things. We will take these to be proper ends of human action, as seen by Aristotle.

The Aristotelian Life

Aristotle works out the consequences of his theory in great detail. He is well known for his view that virtue consists of a middle position between extremes. Courage, for example, is midway between cowardice and foolhardiness. This is a reflection of a characteristically Greek idea that reason is closely connected with balance and harmony. The good life is therefore a life of balance and proportion, a life that appreciates beauty, a life that realizes the best of human virtues.

One can easily imagine an Aristotelian profile in our age. She is well educated, makes a comfortable living as a nuclear physicist in Boulder, Colorado, and plays Mozart in the evenings. She designed her own elegant country home, which is tastefully appointed with her art works and outfitted with a large window facing the Rockies. She is thin, attractive, maintains a healthy diet, and exercises regularly. She is loyal to her family.

She enjoys a circle of good friends whom she defends in the hour of need, despite a reasonable amount of risk to herself.

One can also imagine an Aristotelian anti-hero. Before completing college she took a vow of poverty and joined a Christian base community somewhere in rural El Salvador. She inhabits a hut infested with vermin and suffers the effects of contaminated food and water. She lives in constant fear of both police and guerrillas and was in fact violated by someone in a military uniform. So far, little seems to have come from her efforts, but she feels an obligation to live in solidarity with the poor. In the Christian tradition hers is a life of faith and noble sacrifice. To an Aristotelian it is disgusting and perverse.

The Ethics of Employment

The Esolutions case should be considered in the context of an Aristotelian approach to employment in general. One's employment should clearly allow for the full development of one's abilities, an Aristotelian principle to which our individualistic society enthusiastically subscribes. Even military recruiting posters state, "Be all you can be." But Aristotle would also want life on the job to nurture the other virtues, such a loyalty.

It is unclear how often this happens in our business culture. A white-collar or managerial employee tends to be a free agent who moves from one firm to another in pursuit of better salary offers and advancement opportunities. The employee feels free to depart for greener pastures in the middle of a company project, and the firm feels free to terminate the employee in mid-career. Workers who share a commitment to a common project and to each other arguably live fuller lives than those linked only by transitory economic incentives, if only because they can develop their capacity for loyalty.

One could enlarge this theme to encompass other Aristotelian virtues. The commonly voiced complaint that life in a capitalistic society is somehow debased, despite its affluence, may derive partly from the realization that it stunts our growth. Cooperation, friendship and mutual support help to nurture a side of human personality that shrivels up in a competitive setting. Aristotle, because of his concern for excellence, would not want to carry this so far as to tolerate sloth and shoddy work for the sake of maintaining the group. One must, in classic Aristotelian fashion, look for the happy medium.

Back to Esolutions

An Aristotelian perspective would strongly argue for Jennifer's accepting a job in which she could develop her unique abilities, such as the Esolutions job. Walking away from Midwest Consulting is perhaps not a breach of loyalty, either, because no relationship has really been established.

There are complications, however. A breach of agreement would compromise Jennifer's honor and integrity. Integrity is perhaps the fundamental virtue, because it involves being true to who one is. This is exactly what Aristotle wants us to do: to act consistently with who we are. (Note how consistency again surfaces as the underlying principle.)

Honor is part of integrity, because it is part of who we are. Life is a senseless farce unless redeemed by honor, courage, loyalty and the other uniquely human virtues.

Aristotle also emphasized the importance of habit. If Jennifer compromises her honor this time, it will be harder to play it straight the next time. Before she knows it, she will be on a slippery slope to being less than she could have been.

How does Jennifer resolve this seeming conflict of virtues? By achieving a proper balance. It is a mistake to be career-minded at the expense of human relations, and likewise a mistake to be touchy-feely at the expense of technical expertise. In borderline cases, however, Aristotle provides no theory to guide our choice. This is probably a deliberate omission. Aristotle would probably say that good practical judgment is *sui generis* and irreducible to any kind of theory. In fact it is a virtue in its own right, one that the Greeks called *sophrosyne* (a word for which there is no English translation).

In the end Jennifer must make a choice that least alienates her from her essence, from the best she can be as a total human being.

Lesson 6: International Ethics

Westerners tend to see their ethical principles as universal. Deviations from these norms in other countries are attributed to corruption or lack of development. Bribery, cronyism and nepotism, for example, are invariably denounced as corruption. Even the United Nations, heavily influenced by its Western members, promulgates a “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” based on Western norms.

The reason for this attitude is a deeply embedded tendency toward universalizing rationality in Western culture. There is an urge to find rational and consistent theories that explain everything. They must be universal because they adopt the rational solution. The West therefore judges world science by Western norms (as with Nobel prizes), pushes economies toward Western-style markets (a function of the IMF and World Bank), encourages Western-style democracy, and dispatches missionaries to convert the world to Western religion.

The three Western ethical theories presented above are good examples of this phenomenon. They try to make ethical thinking consistent and rational. They view themselves as valid for the entire human species, as they must, because they appeal to universal canons of reason.

To understand ethics around the world, however, it is necessary to set aside the premise that Western norms are the only possible ones. Corruption provides a good example.

Understanding Corruption

Corruption exists around the world, but different systems are corrupted in different ways. What is nepotism or cronyism in Europe may be mainstream and functional behavior in China. What is a routine lawsuit in the United States may be destructive anti-social behavior in Japan.

Corruption is a practice that either (a) *undermines* a functioning system, or (b) represents a system *out of control*. China, for example, relies heavily on personal relationships (*guanxi*) that are based on mutual obligation. The obligations grow out of a history of doing favors for each other. The favors are not quid-pro-quo but cement a stable and trusting relationship, and these relationships become an important basis for trade and negotiation. Sometimes, however, people try to create an obligation quickly by offering or demanding a bribe. A system based on this kind of quid-pro-quo would lack the stability and trust that is necessary for a complex civilization. Bribery therefore undermines the system and is a form of corruption in China. It is often illegal as well.

Bribery is also corrupting in the West, but for a very different reason. Western culture is based on rules that are widely observed because people view them as legitimate. The stability of society rests largely on the perception that the rules are fair and are justly enforced. People trust each other to the extent they do because it is assumed that most people play by the rules. However, if people bypass the rules in exchange for bribes, the perception of legitimacy vanishes, trust evaporates, and the society is in danger of disintegration. Again bribery undermines and therefore corrupts.

In other settings a certain amount of bribery can be functional. South Korean businesses routinely make side payments to government officials (often through third parties) in order to obtain permits and the like. The payments represent an investment in a relationship with a government official. These investments provide incentives for business people to follow government regulations, because no one wants to sacrifice a costly relationship. Thus by accepting bribes, government officials gain some control over the country. The practice seems to work so long as it remains limited, which perhaps explains why one can lose face by being exposed in bribery. Excessive bribery would be corrupting, because it would represent a system out of control.

Another system out of control is legalism in the United States. The rule of law is fundamental in this country, and yet it has become common practice to file nuisance lawsuits that have little or no legal merit. The defendant will pay off to settle the case and avoid further legal expenses. People who suffer a mishap instinctively sue anyone in sight, as though an accident is by definition somebody else's fault. These practices are no less corrupting than bribery in China and at least as prevalent.

Lawsuits are corrupting in Japan not because they represent a legitimate practice out of control, but because they undermine a system based on courtesy, deference and group harmony. Someone who mismanages a business apologizes profusely to employees, perhaps even with tears in eyes. He may be guilty of breaking Western-style regulations,

but this is not the main point (legal rules and guilt are ideas that are foreign to Japan). The apology would be necessary even if his predecessor had done the damage. It is meant to restore group harmony, not to acknowledge guilt.

Cronyism and Nepotism

The Chinese institution of *guanxi* is an instance of cronyism that works. The difference between functional and dysfunctional cronyism can be clearly seen in the typical case of the purchasing agent. In a Western country, the agent is supposed to look at bids, investigate companies, and choose the best deal. The system is based on rules and transparency. Annual reports, accounting statements and the like are expected to reveal the facts about the supplier. If the purchaser favors an old friend instead, the system is undermined. The purchaser is said to have a conflict of interest, because company interests and his friend's interest may not coincide.

In a different kind of system, business relationships are personal. Rather than doing business with a company, one does business with a person, who happens to work for a certain company. The relationship is based on mutual trust, which may be built over a long period. Transparency is unnecessary, because the purchaser trusts his friends not to sabotage a valuable relationship with dishonesty. Far from undermining the system, cronyism makes it work. Because it is in the company's interest for purchasers to deal with trusted suppliers, there is no conflict of interest.

Nepotism is also standard practice in parts of the world where hiring relatives, or relatives of friends, has advantages. Some relatives may be incompetent, but in any case the boss knows their strengths and weaknesses better than those of other employees, and he can assign them duties accordingly. This is possible because employees are more likely to be managed directly by the boss than assigned to a fixed job description. Also in some cultures, an older relative tends to carry great authority. This can enable the boss to obtain a level of effort and devotion that would not be forthcoming from more competent but unrelated employees.

The main reason for nepotism, however, is the primacy of the family, which is a foundation of many cultures. From this point of view, Western societies, with their broken and troubled families, are dysfunctional and inefficient.

Justice, Care and Worldview

Westerners, whose societies are based partly on justice (real or otherwise), often find a lack of justice elsewhere. For example, it is common in India to make "facilitating payments" to government functionaries in order to accomplish routine tasks. Indians may point out that bureaucrats need these payments to supplement inadequate salaries, and in any case, it is merely an alternate way to finance government. Westerners may respond that the system is unjust, because poorer people cannot get the government services to which they are entitled by law. Similarly, in China the business person with the better

connections gets the contract, rather than another who offers higher quality for a lower price. Westerners see this as unfair.

Non-Western cultures, on the other hand, are likely to see Westerners as selfish and uncaring. Westerners talk loftily about preserving human rights and the environment in some distant country, but they have little concern for the feelings of people in the same room. Courtesy, respect, and saving face are alien concepts. Westerners divorce their spouses, abandon their elders to institutions, and provide weak discipline for their children. No ethical norm is more fundamental than caring for the human beings around oneself, and yet Westerners get so caught up in legalistic abstractions that they forget the fundamentals.

It is unclear that there are many outright contradictions between ethical viewpoints around the world. The difference is usually one of emphasis. Chinese could grant the consistency arguments behind Kantian justice principles, for example, and simply say that they are not concerned about this particular kind of consistency. There are more important things in life. (Socrates noted that the one position a philosopher can never refute is lack of interest.) Westerners could grant that they are often rude and individualistic but insist that being right is more important than being nice.

There are also differences in worldview. Westerners tend to see human beings as autonomous individuals that deserve equal rights in some sense. They therefore like to see equal access to government services and a level playing field in business. Outsiders, meanwhile, may find justice to be high flown theory that gets little real implementation.

Indians, by contrast, subscribe implicitly to a cosmic scheme that unites what appear to be individuals in a single universal consciousness (*atman*). Individual autonomy and equality make no sense in this framework, although Westerners may find the whole thing woolly and metaphysical.

It is unclear whether these competing worldviews are actually in contradiction to each other. They may simply be incommensurate. They may be alternate interpretations of life that admit no direct comparison, because neither can be fully understood in terms of the other.

When in Rome...

What is one to do when visiting a country whose practices violate the one's own norms? When in Rome, should one do as the Romans do?

Some rough guidelines are given here, but in reality the answer must be different for every country. There is no substitute for understanding the culture in some depth. Only then can the remarks below can be adapted to that country's situation. (See <http://web.tepper.cmu.edu/jnh/culture> for an extensive cultural bibliography for professionals, indexed by country.)

The first step is to take into account the very different customs and institutions of the host country. One's own ethical norms may be consistent with its practices when the different circumstances are considered with proper perspective and wisdom. Cronyism, for example, makes sense in China when it would be suspect in Europe.

In fact, one might venture the generalization that when a culture is "functional" in some sense, most of its practices are likely to be consistent with a visitor's norms, at least when the norms are applied with sensitivity and breadth of vision. This is because a functional culture is likely to have evolved a way for people to live together in a reasonable fashion. A "functional" culture might be characterized as one that has reached an equilibrium without undue disruption from external sources, such as famine or natural disaster, military invasion or civil war, overbearing colonialism, or excessive interference by the global economic system.

A functional culture may not have the democratic institutions, women's rights, or environmental policies that some visitors may prefer to see, but even if these are flaws, one must remember that all cultures have serious flaws, even by their own reckoning. It is hard for a culture to solve all of life's problems at once. We all find ourselves in complicity with regrettable social practices at home, because it is difficult to live in a culture without supporting its practices in some way. We should expect nothing else when transported to another culture.

On the other hand, some cultures are clearly under duress. Massive corruption or instability has set in. Extreme examples include Cambodia, Columbia, Congo, East Timor, Russia and Somalia. There are many other less extreme examples. These countries have usually experienced a severe disruption, or an unnatural admixture of two cultures (one of them often Western) that makes both dysfunctional. Such countries are likely to have practices that many outsiders, not to mention natives, find objectionable. In such cases the only satisfactory solution may be disengagement, unless by participating in the culture one can help move it closer to a functioning equilibrium.

Pacific Esolutions

Returning for a last time to the Esolutions case study, it is clearly predicated on a Western situation. A hiring system in which companies collect resumes from strangers, interview some of them, and pick the best candidate is alien to most of the world. It is not hard to imagine objections to this system. An applicant can put anything on a resume. It is true that the company can check references, but the references are usually strangers. Why should one trust them?

In most countries Jennifer would probably get her job through a relative or mutual friend, someone who has a trust relationship with someone in the hiring company. The boss may himself (it is usually a him, not a her) be an older relative or friend of the family. Assuming that Jennifer landed her job at Midwest this way, leaving that job would obviously have repercussions for the people that got her the job. It could cause embarrassment or loss of face. When one relative loses face, the entire family may

suffer. It is impossible to be specific here, because practices vary so much around the world. Suffice it to say that Jennifer cannot make the decision as an individual in a culture in which individualism is not a way of life. She must consider an entire network of people on whom she relies.