

Ethical Credo

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5/25/18

From ages three to seven I went to a Seventh Day Adventist Christian school. These were the years of my life I started to learn right from wrong. These were the first influences apart from my parents on morals and ethics. I learned there are two types of people, people who go to hell and people who go to heaven. It was spoon fed to me: good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. Even though I was not a Christian it was easy for my young mind to categorize people into two groups. As I grew up I became more skeptical of heaven and hell ideals, but I stuck to the idea of classifying people as good or bad based on their actions.

These ideals were challenged by Carl Wilkens, when he said there is good in everyone. Carl witnessed arguably the most horrific world event in the past thirty years. After watching people get murdered in the streets, he still saw the good in people. This was a pivotal moment for me. How could I have such a closed mindset about people, when I have never been in a situation near a genocide? If Carl could see the good in people after seeing the worst actions human can produce. I have no excuse for making such harsh categorization.

Labeling people as good and bad was easy. Listening to Carl Wilkins made me reflected on how I labeled someone as a bad person. To me, a bad person was anyone whose made purposeful actions that negatively impacted someone. This could range from a murderer to the guy with road rage that flipped me off. Somehow Carl saw the people I labeled as the worst, as having good in them. Carl contributed his attitude to his Seventh Day Adventist faith. I was baffled because the principle of good and bad (heaven and hell) I was taught during my Seventh Day Adventist education was completely opposite from what he was telling me. This is when I realized I could not simply categorize people as good or bad.

I think I took the easy way out because I never had to spend time understanding why I thought the person was bad. I simply looked at their actions and made a simple decision. This was wrong because can I really be mad if my four-year-old sister got distracted by our dog and spilled her food on my clothes? My sister did not do it on purpose, four-year-old just does not have good spatial awareness. Also, she does not have the capacity to understand why this is a big deal for me, making it wrong for me to say she is a bad person. This proves why I think people's actions are a bad way to judge them because they can be impacted by outside forces like the dog running in the room distracting my sister. Now, before I make judgements about a person's ethics, I have to look at the decision making process before the action. This is their intent and people have control over what this is.

I struggled with understanding what people's intentions really were before I came to SEGL. I saw through my classmates' different types of intentions which correlated with how analytical or emotional they are. It is hard for an emotional classmate to understand an analytical classmate's intentions because it may be so based on data they thought it lacked empathy. The same happened when an emotional classmate was trying to justify their intent to an analytical classmate. Ultimately, both sides needed to realize to understand their differences and realize the other is not wrong it is just an alternative thought process. When people finally understand this then I believe it is okay for them to decide if they actually think they had bad intentions or was it just produced by a different thought process. I am an analyst and I can come across as insensitive when talking with emotional people. Again, I have good intentions they are just coming from a different from a different type of brain. This does not mean I lack empathy it means I have a different idea on how to proceed.

Moving forward how I will lead with ethical intentions in school and in my personal life?

As I move forward as a leader, I must make sure I have the right intentions before I dedicate myself to it. I am in a lot of leadership positions at my sending-school, but there are only a few I am genuinely interested in. I partake in a lot of these clubs purely because I want to stand out as a student. Over the course of my semester at SEGL, I have deemed this as unethical. My intentions are not to make these clubs the best they can be, it is simply to keep them afloat until the next Organization Kid takes it over from me after I graduate. Ultimately, when I lead clubs for the sake of adding more to my resume, I am tarnishing the club for the people in it as well. They deserve more commitment from me. Additionally, this proves intentions speak more than actions because on the outside the club I am leading looks fine. The motivation behind it is off, which makes my work in it unethical. Again, this reiterates my idea of intentions over actions because the action of me leading this club makes me look good. When I am actually not doing the right thing: actually leading the club because I want to promote its mission. Despite me, in my opinion just because my intentions are not in the right place does not mean the others in the club are also unethical. As long as their intentions are sound their work is ethical because they are doing it for more than my selfish reasons. I am going to change this when I return home, I will only partake in activities with a cause I believe in and I want to see prosper.

School is a very small portion of my life. I face most of my ethical dilemmas outside of its walls. Currently, I am grappling with the idea of how I was raised. I strongly disagree with the way my parent's handled their divorce. It was strenuous and strung out because they had to deal with my custody. When people are in stressful situations like my parents were it is easier to have bad intentions because your judgment is clouded. Ultimately, I think one parent had good intent and the other did not. The one with bad intent wanted the other to suffer and pay back what they thought they did wrong in their marriage, while the one with good intent wanted for both of them

to leave cordially. Even though one of my parents had bad intentions about the divorce I do not think they are a bad person. I am allowed to disagree with this parents intentions, but I do not think it is right for me to categorize them as a bad person because they had bad intentions for this one case. Also, both of them did not intend to cause me harm. Now, I have the choice to be mad at my parents or look at their intentions and realize they thought they were doing the right thing. I feel it is okay to disagree with their actions, but they did not mean any pain.

Concrete ways to know if I have good intent

Regardless, if you think you are good or bad, analytical or emotional I think people can adapt to having ethical intentions.

I classify good intent as combining Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mills' philosophies. Kant believed in universalizing your maxim and Mills believed the promotions of the greater good. Now, making judgments based on the person's intentions is how I have adapted Immanuel Kant's universability principle to myself. When deciding what my intent is I must first think if everyone had my intent would they be making positive change? My second consideration when creating my intent is: are the most people possible benefitting from it. Going through these concrete ways helps take pressure off myself if what I had in mind doesn't work out.

I will proceed with characterizing people not as good or bad, but by their intent. Even after analyzing this for four months I still do not have it entirely figured out, which is why I have many unanswered questions. I will continue to use these questions to drive me further to understanding this ethical question.

Unanswered Questions

If a person has only bad intentions are they a bad person?

What if a person's intention only follows half of my "concrete ways" is it only half good?

How are people's intentions influenced?

Why should people take the time to care about intent when looking at people's actions is easier?

What about Hitler, he was really bad?

How do people's intentions differ in different parts of the world?

Is it actually possible for everyone to always have good intentions?

Will I exclusively have good intention after this?

