Chapter 4
Morality and High Ability: Navigating a Landscape of Altruism and Malevolence

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Abstract This wide-ranging exploration of theory and research from ethical philosophy, political science, economics, psychology, primatology, and other disciplines extends beyond current perspectives on morality and giftedness in high-ability fields such as gifted education and creative studies. Morality largely derives from identity formation and maps along three dimensions on a new theoretic model of moral-ethical impact: from pure altruism through malevolence, from local to global impact, and from minimal to exceptional ability and influence. Providing a framework for synthesis of diverse conceptions of morality, the model incorporates various forms of moral behavior such as universalist and particularist morality, amorality, quasi-altruism, immorality, moral atomism, and reciprocal altruism. The nature and dynamics of these and other forms of morality are explored along with some important sociocontextual influences on individuals' identity formation and actions in the world. The influence of globalized, neoliberal ideology provides a specific example of the model's dynamics. Implications for the moral development of bright young people are discussed.

Keywords Altruism · Creativity · Ethics · Giftedness · Identity formation · Interdisciplinary · Morality · Neoliberal ideology · Rational choice theory · Self-interest · Veneer theory

When individuals of high ability (broadly defined here as any combination of giftedness, talent, creativity, and intelligence) follow their aspirations and exercise their talents in the world their actions can have considerable moral impact. Understanding this impact requires an interdisciplinary search for insights because the nuances of high ability are too complex to be captured within the confines of one

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or a few disciplines (Ambrose 2005a, in press). The wide-ranging analysis in this chapter draws from multiple disciplines and generates a new conceptual model of moral-ethical impact.

Many of the research studies and theories in the analysis are little known in fields such as gifted education and creative studies, yet they have strong relevance to high ability. For example, much current theorizing about morality emerges from rational-choice theory in the social sciences and similar theory in evolutionary biology. These theories often imply that moral behavior derives from reciprocal altruism – doing something for others with the expectation of payback in the future. These explanations can elucidate cases of low-level altruism but they do not explain the more impressive acts of relational-altruistic, universalist morality, which come from perceptions of self as integrated with humanity as a whole as opposed to self as atomistic individual, or as part of an insular group (for elaboration, see Gewirth 1998; Monroe 1996, 2004). Considered together, discoveries from multiple disciplines provide more complete explanations of the more remarkable forms of altruism.

4.1 Global Conditions Magnify the Importance of the Ethics-Giftedness Nexus

As of this writing, America was embroiled in chaotic, disastrous Middle-Eastern wars. Meanwhile, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007), representing an overwhelming consensus of climate scientists, was announcing the latest strong confirmation of human responsibility for the looming catastrophe of global warming. Both of these enormous, nettlesome macroproblems have been aggravated by an elemental lack of ethical wisdom on the part of many influential leaders and citizens. Magnification of the moral-ethical dimensions of high ability has never been more important or urgent.

Not that we've been without forewarning. Scholars in the fields of creative studies and gifted education often highlight the nature and importance of the moral dimensions of high ability (see Ambrose 2000, 2008, in press; Csikszentmihalyi 1993; Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura 2007; Derryberry et al. 2005; Dabrowski 1964; Dabrowski and Piechowski 1977; Damon 2008; Damon and Colby 1996; Folsom 1998; Gardner 1991, 2007; Gibson et al. 2008; Gardner et al. 2001; Grant 1995; Gruber 1989, 1993; Hague 1998; Lee and Olszewski-Kubilius 2006; Lovecky 1997; Michaelson 2001; Piechowski 2003; Piirto 2005; Runco and Nemiro 2003; Roeper 2008; Silverman 1993; Spreacker 2001; Sriraman and Adrian 2005; Sternberg 2001, 2005; Tannenbaum 2000; Tirri and Nokelainen 2007; Tolan 1998). For example, Gruber (1993) urged us to apply creativity to moral issues in the late twentieth century, which was rocked by rapid social and technological change and multiple global crises. World civilization as presently constituted is committed to policies entailing unregulated economic growth and the amoral or immoral exploitation of resources and populations. Such conditions affect moral issues of fairness, justice, caring for others, and even truth.

Early in the twenty-first century our socioeconomic, political, and cultural contexts demand ever more attention to the moral dimensions of human experience. The unpredictable, nebulous, and rapidly evolving phenomenon of economic and cultural globalization is threatening international stability by making political and economic boundaries more porous (Rosenau 2003; Singer 2002; Xiang 2007). Enhanced global interconnections bring diverse economic and cultural groups into tighter juxtaposition and magnify their differences, thus creating dynamic tensions between desires to maintain local traditions and the wish to capitalize on foreign ideas (Rosenau). Such dynamic tensions can generate serious conflicts requiring wise, ethical leadership for their mitigation. Instability makes more room for creative and clever but morally hollow people to engage in unethical behavior such as economic exploitation and political-military conquest. Moreover, the rapid pace of technological progress in today's world spawns high-impact, rapid-fire innovations in burgeoning domains such as biotechnology and information technology, which generate novel prospects for substantial progress along with opportunities for the immoral exploitation of others and possibilities for environmental disasters (Launis et al. 1999). The problem of global warming may be the most prominent, widespread, and potentially devastating result of our technological progress unfettered by ethical guidance (see Flannery 2006; Hansen 2005).

4.2 Human Nature and Identity as Key Aspects of Morality and Ethics

Although many perspectives on human nature and morality are worthy of note, I have selected several here for special attention. First, de Waal's (2006) employment of primate observation and evolutionary analysis to deconstruct veneer theory enables some escape from the amoral rational-choice theory that dominates the social sciences, not to mention the ideological context of the globalized sociopolitical environment. Second, Monroe's work (1996, 2004), which includes analyses of altruistic rescuers who put their own lives on the line to help strangers, reveals the powerful influence of identity on moral behavior while contributing to the escape from rational-choice theory.

4.2.1 Breaking Down Veneer Theory

According to psychologist/primatologist Frans de Waal (2006), some prominent moral theorists have headed down the wrong path in their beliefs that humans are innately asocial or antisocial and brutish (e.g., philosopher Thomas Hobbes 1651/1985) or extremely selfish (e.g., evolutionary biologists such as Trivers 1971; Wilson 1978). According to Hobbes, our brutish, predatory nature forced us to develop strong legal systems to keep us from each other's throats. Evolutionary biologists and evolutionary psychologists posit selfish genetic influences that make us victims of evolutionary processes leading to self-centered behavior.

De Waal (2006) argued that veneer theory emerges from these flawed positions and encourages us to assume that we cannot expect much good from human nature. According to veneer theory, morality is but a thin veneer covering an immoral or at best amoral core human nature. When all is calm the veneer keeps us from exploiting and abusing one another, but scratching this surface, as occurs in crises such as tragedies or resource shortages, reveals our unsavory core dispositions that give rise to evil behavior. Undoubtedly, evil does emerge under such conditions but veneer theory magnifies it while obscuring our altruistic inclinations.

Instead, de Waal (2006) based his opposing, more optimistic vision of human nature on many years of observing primates, concluding that evolutionary processes favor collaborative, altruistic behavior. His findings revealed that altruism is common among primates and it derives from their emotional responses to the plight of others. Furthermore, contrary to the arguments of some evolutionary biologists and psychologists, such emotion-driven, altruistic responses are adaptive from an evolutionary viewpoint because they promote group cohesion and groups survive better than scatterings of atomistic individuals. The altruism that typically emerges is genuine, not the tit for tat reciprocal altruism in which the altruist expects some form of payback from the beneficiary. While reciprocal altruism does occur in some cases, it does not dominate such actions.

4.2.2 Identity as an Atomistic Individual or Intertwined with Humanity?

Monroe (1996, 2004) revealed some flaws of rational-choice theory, which promotes the idea that individuals develop as self-encapsulated, atomistic egos whose identities are defined by highly competitive pursuit of domination, control, and materialistic accumulation. The dehumanizing use of others as means to individual gain is an intrinsic element of societies built on rational-choice assumptions (see Beckert 2002).

Running counter to rational choice constructs, Monroe discovered identity dynamics defined by a collaborative connectedness with others and an accompanying sense of self-transcendence. In studies of altruistic behavior she investigated the experiences, reflections, and motivations of moral exemplars, focusing on those who compromised their own safety and well being to rescue strangers who were in serious danger. She discovered that the dynamics of personal identity formation are crucial in the positioning of individuals along a continuum ranging from egoistic self-interest to altruism. The altruistic rescuers were not driven by self-centered, rational, utilitarian, cost-benefit calculation but by an emotional sense of connectedness with others. Rescuing behavior happened reflexively, without much thought.

In contrast, less altruistic individuals tend to engage in some kind acts toward others but in so doing are more inclined to employ rational, cost-benefit calculation. Those far less altruistic can exhibit cruelty because they insulate their identities from the cognitive dissonance that normally would ensue from their wicked actions.

They can maintain a positive self-perception by detaching themselves from those they intend to abuse. For example:

> Genocidalists appeared to psychologically distance themselves from neighbors once considered friends, relegating them to the subhuman category in order to justify mistreating them. Reclassification and recategorization seem to be critical parts of the psychological process by which other human beings are declared "unworthy of life." (Monroe 2004, p. 256)

Chirot and McCauley (2006) concurred with the importance of these identity dynamics and illustrated how those wanting to advance the interests of their own identity groups often portray other racial, ethnic, or religious minorities as polluting influences, thereby justifying extreme acts of aggression against them up to and including genocide:

> Mass murders or deportations that are ethnically, religiously, ideologically, or class based can be caused by fear of pollution. This is at once the most intense, but also the psychologically most difficult cause to understand for those who do not share the sentiment that a particular group is so polluting that its very presence creates a mortal danger. (p. 36)

These insights magnify the importance of self-perception and identity formation in the development of gifted individuals. To the extent that we enable them to view themselves in highly individualistic terms, as atomistic entities, or as members of a preferred superior group, we may be aggravating the erosion of their ethical fiber over the long term. We may be creating very clever but potentially diabolical agents in the world.

4.3 Confounding Legality with Morality

Societies built on flawed ethical assumptions, such as an overreliance on rational-choice theory, must follow Hobbes' (1651/1985) advice and create strong legal frameworks to keep humans from excessively harming one another. A strong legal system can make a society stable and just (Habermas 1996) but if a society's laws condone some degree of degradation or exploitation of some people by others, the fact that these actions are legal does not make them ethical. The dominance of rational-choice theory might lead us to confuse morality and legality on the large scale. If a morally questionable act is deemed legal by society, bright but morally hollow people can consider its legality a green light for action regardless of the ethical implications. Actions with moral dimensions can be legal but immoral, moral but illegal, both moral and legal, both immoral and illegal, or they can fall into gray areas between morality and immorality, or between legality and illegality. While we can posit a correlation between morality and legality with some degree of confidence, there is plenty of room for immoral, even monstrous actions that a culture or society deems perfectly legal. Twentieth-century South African apartheid and racial segregation in the American South were two prominent examples.

Dangers arising from confusing legality with morality are most prominent in sociopolitical systems that trust their legal systems as proxies for moral guidance.

Neoliberal, capitalist nations rely heavily on their legal systems because governmental power in the lives of citizens is restricted to refereeing disputes among self-interested rational actors in a laissez-faire marketplace (Wolin 2008). Such refereeing is to be as hands-off as possible.

These systems can sustain morality and ethics, at least to some extent, as long as the legal frameworks stay transparent, fair, and free of corruption, but that is a seldom-realized ideal. A socioeconomic system based on the lionization of the self-loving, atomistic, materialistic, self-aggrandizing individual allocates considerable freedom to those who would apply their creativity and talents to the exploitation of others. It makes room for creative manipulation of the legal system itself so that the most selfish, ruthless, and cunning make laws and loopholes that favor their own unsavory, manipulative actions over those of their more virtuous peers. Neoliberal, laissez-faire socioeconomic systems make the most room for such manipulation because they lionize the individual, rational actor more than any other system (for examples see Hacker and Pierson 2005).

4.4 A Model of Moral-Ethical Impact in the World

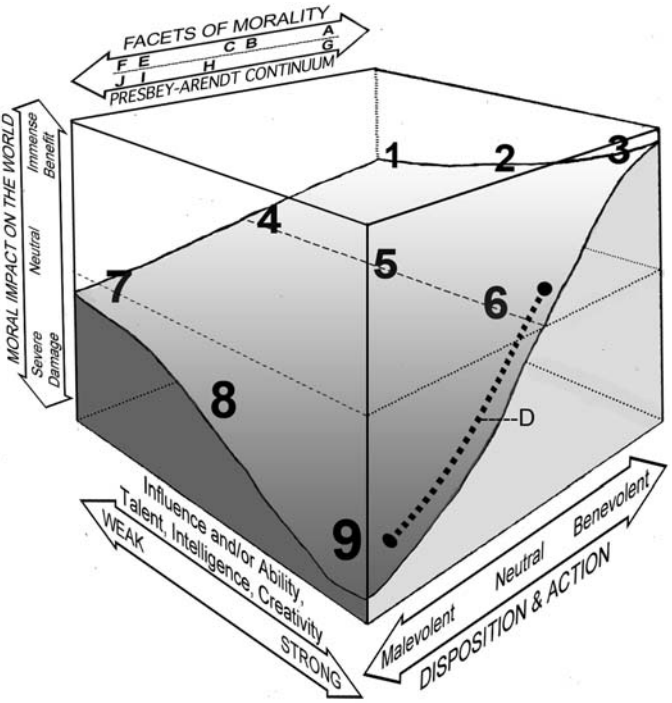
The foregoing analyses of ethics, morality, and sociopolitical contexts represent an incomplete but highly complex picture because they derive from very diverse theories and research findings from multiple disciplines. The cube-shaped moral-ethical impact model in Fig. 4.1 represents an attempt to capture and simplify much of this complexity within its three dimensions and on the undulating surface within. Imagine the cube as gargantuan, half-filled with earthen material representing a landscape upon which individuals and societies locate themselves according to the ethical or unethical nature of their actions. The surface of the landscape is rather flat and gently sloping on the left side and on the right side it has a steep hill at the back and deep valley at the front.

The model includes three continua that represent three different dimensions of ethics. The depth dimension, moving from back to front, represents a continuum of *moral disposition and action* ranging from highly admirable, altruistic moral action at the back of the model to despicable, immoral, evil action at the front. The midpoint in the back-to-front dimension represents amoral or morally neutral behavior.

The vertical dimension represents the *moral impact* of one's actions in the world. Listed here are characterizations of these impacts ranging from top to bottom on the model:

Lofty position at or near the top of the hill in the back-right corner of the earthen landscape. Far-reaching, positive, altruistic global impact on large swaths of humanity. (e.g., transforming the institutions or ideology of a society to create a more humane context for human development; inspiring large masses of people to become more altruistic over the long term).

Just above the neutral, mid-level. Small-scale moral actions ranging from high to low impact on one or a few individuals, or having minor impact on many, but



FACETS OF MORALITY	PRESBEY-ARENDT CONTINUUM
A. Universalist morality, relational altruism	G. Free consent
B. Quasi-altruism	
C. Amorality	H. Manipulation, propaganda
D. Particularist morality	I. Coercion, constraint
E. Immorality	J. Violence
F. Malevolence	

Fig. 4.1 Model of moral–ethical impact

ultimately generating little impact on the world. (e.g., being a good Samaritan to a lost or injured individual; giving a modest sum to a worthy charity).

Neutral position at the middle. Actions that have no noticeable moral impact on the world. Many of our everyday actions fit here.

Just below the neutral mid-level. Small-scale immoral actions ranging from high to low impact on one or a few individuals, or having minor impact on many, but ultimately generating little impact on the world (e.g., stealing a car; abusing a child).

At or near the bottom of the valley in the front-right corner of the earthen landscape. High-impact immoral or evil effects on large swaths of humanity (e.g., transforming the institutions or ideology of a society to benefit oneself and a favored identity group while oppressing or doing violence to many others; starting wars for vainglorious purposes).

The distinctions here are not meant to diminish the importance of small-scale altruism or the gravity of small-scale immoral acts. Helping an endangered individual may be the epitome of heroism. In fact, the actions of Monroe's (1996, 2004) subjects in her studies of altruism often were extremely heroic but would not rise high on this model, only because they had small impact on the world. Similarly, abusing a child is a horrific, evil act. Such small-scale evil actions do not extend very low on the model simply because they do not individually impact the word in significant ways. Nevertheless, small actions can become global if, for instance, the single beneficiary of an altruistic act is inspired by that act to do great, altruistic things later in life. In addition, many small, positive actions done by many individuals can additively generate very large global impact while many small, immoral actions can accumulate into collective depravity and generate widespread misery in the world. For the sake of this analysis, however, these collective influences are set aside in order to focus on the actions of individuals.

The left-to-right dimension of the model represents *the power an individual exercises in the world*. Those with little power and influence act on the left side where the impact of their actions on the world is minimal, as signified by the very low rise in elevation toward the back of the model and the very shallow valley toward the front. Those with enormous power and influence act on the right side where their actions can have immense influence on the world, as signified by the tall peak of altruism at the back of the model and the very deep valley of malevolence at the front. In general, those born into deprivation have little power to influence the world as individuals, so most of them operate at the left side of the model. Conversely, those born into privilege have more opportunities to develop their talents, and have more ready access to important resources and influential support networks, so they find it easier to gain access to the levers of power; hence, they tend to operate on the right side. Gifted, talented, creative, or intelligent individuals have capacities that can magnify their influence in the world so they are more likely to move rightward on the model as they mature, operating closer to the right side of the model when they become adults.

The surface of the model shows how individuals and groups can locate themselves as ethical, or unethical, actors in the world. They can spend most of their lives operating at one specific location on the surface. Alternatively, they can evolve over time as ethical agents, moving (a) from left to right as they develop their talents and gain more power and influence; (b) from front to back if they become more altruistic, (c) from back to front if their ethical sensibilities erode; (d) from lower slopes on the undulating surface to higher levels as they impact the world positively; or (e) from higher levels to lower if their impact is harmful.

Figure 4.1 also maps some major theorists' categorizations of ethical behavior (see de Waal 2006; Gewirth 1998; Monroe 1996, 2004) onto the surface of the model. While amorality resides in the morally neutral territory midway between front and back on the model, and immorality and malevolence are situated at the front, universalist morality and relational altruism extend to the higher elevations and the most benevolent region at the back (see the Facets of Morality arrow in Fig. 4.1). Relational altruism entails behavior intended to benefit others, even when

it may bring harm to the altruist (Gewirth 1998; Monroe 1996). Some forms of benevolent behavior are called quasi-altruistic because they don't rise to the high level of pure altruism seeing that they do not entail risk to self, or they are done largely for selfish purposes. For example, people are quasi-altruistic if they give to a charity to assuage their own guilt, to look good in the eyes of others, or to magnify their own senses of self-importance. Particularist morality is represented by a dashed line (labeled "D" on the model) stretching from mild positive influence in the world all the way down to the depths of widespread, devastating, evil effects, because people who confine their altruism to those who are most like them can do good for insiders while seriously harming outsiders (Chirot and McCauley 2006). The Presbey-Arendt continuum is explained in a later subsection.

4.4.1 Individuals' Locations and Life Trajectories on the Landscape of the Model

The locations shown by numbers one through nine on the surface of the model in Fig.4.1 represent the moral locales in which people can spend their lives. They also represent locations individuals can move toward during moral development. Such movement can be from less to more benevolent behavior, or the reverse; from less to more personal ability and/or influence in the world, or the reverse; and toward either less or more benefit or damage to the world.

Individuals' locations or developmental movements largely depend (metaphorically speaking) on magnetic attraction or repulsion from the right-side panel on the model, which represents the location of strongest power and influence. The right-side panel attracts individuals who possess high ability, or the advantages of socioeconomic privilege, or both. Consequently, people with these attributes and/or advantages move toward the high-impact region on the right-hand side of the model as they mature because they have what it takes to make a significant impact on the world. Whether that development leads toward the altruistic high ground in the back-right corner of the model, or the immoral low ground in the front-right corner depends on the individual's benevolent or malevolent inclinations, which can be shaped by his or her innate propensities, mentorship, education, the sociocultural and economic context, or any combination of these factors.

The right-side panel also magnetically repels those who lack high ability or who suffer from socioeconomic barriers that stunt their aspiration growth and talent development. These barriers usually derive from deprivation, stigmatization, and segregation (for analyses of socioeconomic barriers see Ambrose 2002, 2003, 2005b, 2005c; Fischer et al. 1996), Consequently, most nongifted or deprived people are confined to the low-impact region on the left side of the model and exert little influence in the world. A few deprived but outstanding individuals of high ability do make it into the high-impact, right-side region because their gifts, talents, creativity, or intelligence enable them to overcome the strong magnetic repulsion of their oppressive life circumstances.

Life positions represented by the numbers three, six, and nine on the right side of the model are sparsely populated because very small elites typically exert most control over their societies (Wolin 2008). Only a few are allowed to manipulate the levers of power and this region of the model is where most of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural power of a society exists. Moreover, those who reside in these locations typically arrive there through one of the following influences, or some amalgam of the two: (a) exceptional ability in the form of talent, creativity, intelligence, or some blend of these; and/or (b) the benefits of privilege such as wealth, support from lofty insider networking contacts and mentorships, and downright nepotism. In essence, a person in these regions can be anything from a paragon of high ability to someone of moderate ability but good fortune, to someone with unremarkable or even very weak intelligence and talent but bountiful resources and exceptional favoritism from powerful friends or relatives in the society.

Conversely, those populating the left side of the model at or near positions one, four, or seven are vast in number because the masses typically exert little to no influence over their societies, even in liberal democracies, which tend to be democratically nominal in today's corporate-dominated globalized environment (see Hacker and Pierson 2005; Wolin 2008). Moreover, those who reside in these locations typically arrived there through one of the following influences, or some amalgam of the two: (a) unremarkable or weak ability in the form of limited talent, creativity, intelligence, or some blend of these; and/or (b) the suppression of aspiration growth and talent development due to socioeconomic deprivation, stigmatization, and segregation.

Those populating the mid-range numbers two, five, and eight on the landscape also are numerous, much more so in nations that are somewhat egalitarian socioeconomically and much less so in highly stratified nations, which push the bulk of their populations into the powerless far-left side of the landscape. Most of those who operate in this mid-range arrive there by virtue of moderate abilities and/or moderate socioeconomic supports or barriers although some may have weak abilities augmented by favorable socioeconomic support or strong abilities hindered by socioeconomic barriers.

Interestingly, at least a few individuals can operate at more than one location on the landscape. Some exemplars of altruism are moral paradoxes making enormous, enduring ethical improvements to the world while also doing moral harm in the small scale. For example, Mohandas Gandhi catalyzed India's nonviolent escape from British colonial oppression but also treated some of those closest to him with indifference and cruelty (Gardner 1993). This locates him simultaneously at points three and seven on the model where he exerted the highest levels of positive, moral impact on millions while simultaneously doing mild harm to the world by treating a few miserably. While these latter actions are lamentable, we should avoid the temptation to dismiss Gandhi's influence on the grounds of hypocrisy. His human failings should not disqualify him as a moral exemplar because no human is infallible. Such disqualifications would rob us of most if not all positive exemplars and their useful messages. Table 4.1 shows some specific examples of moral life locations according to the numbers on the model.

Table 4.1 Examples of individual locations on the moral landscape (position on the model designated by number)

	Left side of the model	Center of the model	Right side of the model
Potential moral impact on the world	Low impact	Noticeable impact but not profound or widespread	Widespread, transformative high impact
Blend of ability & socioeconomic (SES) influence required for positioning at these locations	Insignificant or weak ability; or moderate ability + serious SES disadvantage; or high ability + severe SES disadvantage trap individuals on low-impact left side of landscape	Moderate ability + moderate SES advantage; or high ability + SES disadvantage; or low ability + very strong SES advantage enable location in moderate-impact left-to-right center of landscape	Low or moderate ability + enormous SES advantage; or high ability + significant SES advantage; or rare, outstanding ability overcoming SES disadvantage enable location on high-impact right side of landscape
Benevolent moral disposition and action	1. Impoverished parent who often provides guidance and compassion to children in a deprived neighborhood	2. Mother Hale, a poor African American widow, adopted, raised, and educated over 40 deprived children while helping scores of others including many who were born drug addicted or with HIV (see Lanker 1999)	3. Muhammad Yunus, Bangladeshi economist, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and "banker to the poor" lifts many of the world's poorest out of poverty by providing microcredit for widespread, small-scale entrepreneurship (see Yunus 2003, 2008)
Neutral moral disposition and action	4. Educator who goes through the motions to meet the demands of NCLB; does little to engage the moral imaginations of self or students; moral ambivalence subverts the opportunity to make a difference	5. Business executive whose innovative work transforms corporate procedures without generating either positive or harmful ethical implications; does significant work in the world but moral ambivalence limits moral impact	6. Gene Roddenberry, science-fiction author, writer and producer of Star Trek TV series and movie franchise among many other productions; did rare, highly influential work but made little moral impact (see Fern 1994)
Malevolent moral disposition and action	7. Street gang member who murders members of a rival gang due to conflict over drug-dealing turf; insatiable desire for material gain and self-aggrandizement motivates actions	8. Cult leader who exploits the labor of followers, commandeers their assets, or exhorts them to mass suicide; owner of third-world sweatshop exploiting desperate workers	9. Adolf Hitler undermined and overthrew the democratic government of the German Weimar Republic, catalyzed World War II, and engaged in massive genocide (see Brustein 1998)

Admittedly, placement of the specific examples in the locations in Table 4.1 is problematic. Individuals arguably could be placed in other locations. For example, Mother Hale is placed in location two because she did much more than most would or could do in similar circumstances. That places her well beyond location one. However, her influence didn't extend to the large-scale, regional or national level, which would have placed her in location three. Nevertheless, it is difficult to gauge the impact of an individual's influence over the long term. It could be that some of her protégés and their progeny have or will impact the world in profound ways due to her catalytic influence. In addition, her work may be even more impressive than the work of many better-known altruistic exemplars because it might have required more personal sacrifice, creativity, and diligence.

4.4.2 Additional Ethical Frameworks and Their Fit on the Moral-Ethical Impact Model

Most ethical constructs and other theories pertinent to morality can fit on the moral-ethical impact model. Examples included here are the Presbey-Arendt continuum and a distinction between ethical particularism and universalism.

4.4.2.1 The Presbey-Arendt Continuum

Power relationships in communities and nations fit on a continuum derived from the work of Arendt (1958/1998) and Presbey (1997). The following positions on the continuum are arrayed along the top arrow of Fig. 4.1: (g) free consent, (h) deceptive manipulation and propaganda, (i) coercion and threats of violence, and (j) actual physical constraint and violence. Position "g" is most conducive to group- and individual freedom, self-actualization, and widespread benevolent action while position "j" is least. An individual who helps a community or an entire nation achieve position "g" moves large masses of people toward the morally positive back sector of the model in Fig. 4.1. For example, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu, and others pushed the nation of South Africa away from the malevolent valley in the front up the landscape somewhat toward the benevolent hill in the back. An individual who works to manipulate, deceive, enslave, or do violence to others moves toward the evil front of the model. A society that encourages free consent in its sociopolitical dynamics promotes transparent, egalitarian, democratic governance that works for the benefit of all citizens (Wolin 2008). Such a healthy sociopolitical context encourages creative, gifted people to move toward the lofty, altruistic back of the model. Conversely, a society that allows or enables talented, ambitious psychopaths to employ deceit, propaganda, coercion, and violence to commandeer the levers of power erodes whatever democracy it had established in the past. Such conditions wash many creative, gifted people down toward the malevolent valley in the front of the model.

4.4.2.2 Universalist Versus Particularist Morality

Some ethical philosophers (e.g., Gewirth 1998) distinguish between two important dimensions of morality. People who are guided by universalist morality may favor their own well-being and that of their family, ethnic group, or nation over that of outsiders. But they don't allow themselves to seriously impede the fulfillment of outsiders in pursuit of their own goals because they don't see their own wants superseding the needs of others. In contrast, a person guided by particularist morality adheres to the moral framework of a particular group and shows much less concern for the well-being of outsiders or humanity as a whole.

Particularist loyalty to one's own cultural, ethnic, religious, or national group has its merits because it provides strong frameworks for personal identity formation (Gutmann 2003). Nevertheless, excessive adherence to a particular group can create serious ethical problems. Particularists may be altruistic toward members of their own identity group but their kindness usually does not extend beyond to those different from them. They are likely to favor the frivolous wants of insiders over the desperate needs of outsiders. In an especially virulent example, fanatical patriotism and racist ethnic cleansing are desirable from within the particular ethical frameworks of some extremist right-wing groups but they definitely are immoral from the viewpoint of a universalist. Historically, other particularist ethical frameworks have been used to justify slavery, military conquest, and even genocide. For these reasons, Gewirth (1998) advocated universalism over particularism as a prerequisite for high moral development. The actions of individuals following particularist morality tend to show up anywhere just above the amoral zone in the middle of the moral-ethical impact model to the malevolent front while the actions of universalists tend to appear near the benevolent back of the model.

4.4.2.3 Irrational Action Within Globalized, Runaway, Neoliberal–Neoclassical Capitalism

As mentioned earlier, free-market, capitalism encourages individuals to view themselves as self-interested, atomistic, rational actors. In a globalized, free-market system guided primarily by neoclassical economic theory, regulatory rules diminish considerably (Appelbaum 2005; Babb 2001; Frank 2007; Kasser et al. 2007; Kuttner 1999; Madrick 2008; Nadeau 2003) largely leaving the ethics of socioeconomic action to individual choice. In such an environment, the only significant check on individual freedom is the legal framework of the society, which should prevent egregious misbehavior. However, as discussed previously, legality and morality do not always coincide. When the legal system is compromised by corruption it offers little protection from malevolent acts and may even *encourage* them. An extreme free-market system with a corrupted legal framework represents a perfect storm of ethical erosion that washes the collective behavior of millions downward from the amoral mid-regions of the model toward the dark malevolence of the valley at the front.

Examples of such erosion in the form of corrupt, immoral but legal actions perpetrated by cunning, gifted or talented individuals in neoliberal socioeconomic systems are ubiquitous. The few listed below are illustrative:

1. Repealing inheritance taxes by deceptively calling them "death taxes" (see Graetz and Shapiro 2005) is unethical because it shifts the tax burden from the highly affluent who can afford it to the deprived who cannot while seriously eroding equality of opportunity, thereby making a sham of the meritocracy we claim as the nurturing ground for the emergence of giftedness and talent.
2. Gifted lobbyists for the pharmaceutical industry collude with clever politicians in the establishment of laws that enable extortion of artificially exorbitant drug prices and other medical costs while nearly 50 million people cannot afford basic medical care in the United States (Goozner 2005).
3. The cigarette industry developed clever, deceptive marketing and lobbying practices to create a disinformation campaign aimed at sidestepping government regulation and undermining and suppressing scientific inquiry into the harmful effects of their products (Brandt 2007).
4. Gifted corporate leaders take advantage of international free-trade pacts they lobbied to establish. Free trade enables them to move capital around the globe freely to take advantage of the weakest labor laws and environmental regulations in impoverished nations (Appelbaum 2005; McMurtry 1999, 2002). In so doing, they maximize their own profits while eroding the well-being of American workers and ruthlessly exploiting third-world sweatshop workers.
5. Talented neoclassical economists and the policy makers who follow them implement economic systems that ignore the environmental costs of doing business while generating widespread environmental devastation (Nadeau 2003).

Many influential, gifted adults initiate these immoral practices with impunity because the American regulatory system currently suffers from corruption (Hacker and Pierson 2005; Wolin 2008).

These dynamics are signified by two of the arrows in Fig. 4.2. Utopian ideologies represent grand hopes for humanity, usually couched in ethical terms (Kumar 1987); however, they often go awry and lead to serious ethical erosion (Ambrose 2008). The utopian Third Reich's golden age of Aryan supremacy in Nazi Germany and Pol Pot's idiosyncratic, agrarian version of utopian communism in Cambodia were extreme examples. Morally hollow or misguided individuals who are gifted, talented, or creative leaders often catalyze and sustain such utopian movements. The downward sloping arrow of hegemonic utopian ideology in Fig. 4.2 represents the moral erosion utopianism often entails. The weaker, ghostly dashed arrow moving back up the hill toward relational-altruistic benevolence represents the self-deceptive high hopes of the ideologues at the core of the utopian conceptual framework.

The corrupt actions described earlier in this subsection provide evidence that neoliberal ideology, along with its close cousin, neoclassical economic theory, together represent another, very powerful utopian framework that is washing many bright, talented people down toward the malevolent front of the model (see Ambrose 2008,

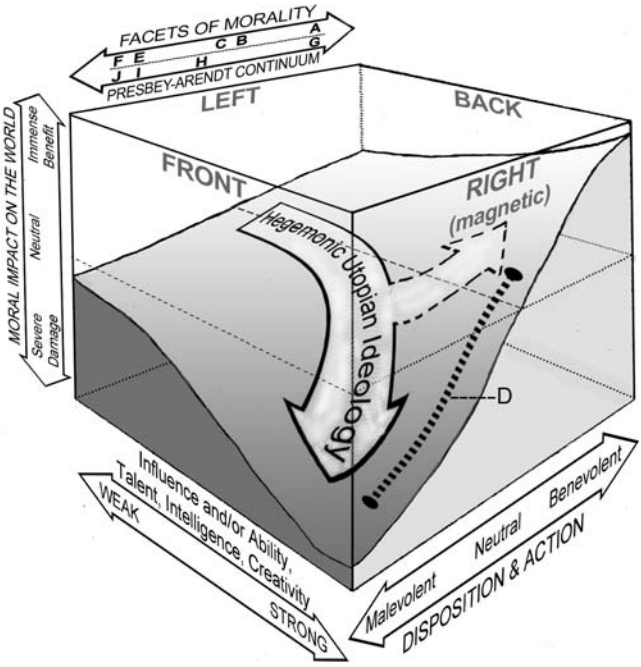


Fig. 4.2 Hegemonic, utopian ideology mapped onto the model of moral–ethical impact

and Green's Chapter 6 in this volume for additional analyses of these dynamics). When mapping neoliberal ideology and neoclassical economics onto the model, the downward sloping arrow of hegemonic utopian ideology represents the self-loving, self-aggrandizing, highly materialistic moral erosion of the current globalized socioeconomic system. The weaker, ghostly dashed arrow moving back up the hill toward relational-altruistic benevolence represents the somewhat less prevalent moral good that globalized capitalism actually does by encouraging economic vibrancy in some locales, as well as what it could do were it guided by stronger regulatory and ethical frameworks as recommended by various high-profile economists and political theorists (e.g., Chang 2002, 2007; Hacker and Pierson 2005; Madrick 2008; Wolin 2008) and by none other than the eighteenth-century philosopher-economist Adam Smith, the icon of free-market capitalism. According to Fleischacker (2004) and Muller (1995) Smith's strong moral messages have been ignored while his free-market advice has been magnified in recent decades. Smith actually recommended the use of regulation to countervail the excesses of marketplace greed. Gifted, neoliberal ideologues and those who follow their message see only the upward arrow and remain oblivious to the massive erosion represented by the downward arrow.

4.5 Implications for the Ethical Development of High Ability

Identity formation appears to be central to important forms of both altruism and malevolence (Gewirth 1998; Monroe 1996, 2004). To the extent that educators, parents, and policy makers influence the identity formation of bright young people, we must raise our awareness of the extreme positive and negative directions that formation can take. The tendency for dogmatic conceptual frameworks to ensnare human minds, even the brightest, can induce erosion toward the lower, malevolent regions of the moral-ethical impact model. Some highly gifted young people with leadership potential may be influenced to develop excessively grandiose, egocentric identities and apply their abilities to malevolent ends. Fortunately, the contributors to this volume provide additional ways to understand how and why people of high ability locate themselves at various positions on the landscape of the model. These insights are discussed briefly at the end of this chapter.

4.5.1 Clearing Dogmatic Fog

The preceding examples of ethical problems generated by the hegemony of neoliberal-neoclassical ideology highlight the issue of dogmatism and the extent to which it contributes to ethical erosion on the moral-ethical impact model. While some, perhaps many, of the powerful, talented ideologues and gifted corporate leaders who drive the neoliberal-neoclassical system might be morally bankrupt, highly egocentric, possibly even psychopathic, many others believe strongly in the ethical value of the system, emphasizing its freedom-enhancing capacities, for example. There is good reason to hypothesize that dogmatic attachment to conceptual systems makes large numbers of people, including gifted leaders, engage in malevolent acts while genuinely believing they are working for the greater good. Self-deception might be at play in such cases. Mele (2001) analyzed the dynamics of self-deception, showing that the phenomenon occurs when individuals hold excessive belief in things they want to be true, or unwarranted belief against something they want not to be true. The problem of self-deception can occur on a mass scale. Entire nations can self-deceive to the point of re-inventing their histories or engaging in self-destructive actions on the world stage (see Moeller 2001).

This hypothetical phenomenon of mass self-deception can be represented metaphorically as dogmatic fog drifting over the undulating landscape on the moral-ethical impact model. The fog of dogmatism hinders accurate perception of where one actually is on the landscape, deceiving some into believing they are on the moral high ground when, in actuality, they are sliding into the malevolent valley at the front of the model.

Of course, fog collects thickly on the malevolent low ground and thins out on the benevolent high ground because those most trapped in dogmatism are least likely to understand the harm they do. Conceptual systems capable of generating the fog can be ontological (assumptions about the nature of reality), epistemological

(assumptions about the nature of knowledge), ideological, ethnocentric, cultural, religious, or any combination of these.

Ontological and epistemological dogmatism occur in scholarly fields (Ambrose 1996, 1998; Overton 1984; Pepper 1942) and might contribute to moral erosion indirectly; however, the ideological, ethnic, and religious forms of dogmatism are more germane to this analysis. While the neoliberal-neoclassical system provides an example of ideological dogmatism, ethnic dogmatism can come from the phenomenon of particularist morality (strongly favoring one's own identity group), which is mapped onto the model (see Fig. 4.1).

Religious dogmatism can generate another form of particularist morality that encourages moral erosion on the landscape of the model. The identity formation of most people worldwide, gifted young people included, heavily rests upon religious and spiritual influences from the surrounding culture. Moore (2000) and Stark (2003) illustrated the good and the harm monotheistic religions foment, with the harm extending up to and including genocide. Given both the promise and dangers of monotheistic religion, these influences on identity formation have powerful ethical implications. If otherwise gifted individuals stop short of deep, spiritual development, which tends to unite diverse peoples, while adhering to superficial, religious doctrine, which tends to alienate groups from one another, they will be more inclined to support or initiate hateful conflicts with those of other religious beliefs. They will consider outsiders somewhat less human and less worthy of compassion. Conversely, if they find ways to develop deep, inward, spiritual growth and move past the particularities of religious doctrine, they will become more compassionate, altruistic, and universalist in their moral approach to life. They will be more inclined to reach out and help others regardless of superficial differences.

Whatever form the dogmatic fog takes (ideological, economic, particularist ethnic or religious), young people of high ability will need help to peer through it. Fortunately, their expansive intellects and their propensities for panoramic global awareness (Gibson et al. 2008; Roeper 2008; Silverman 1993) make them capable of capitalizing on any guidance we can provide.

4.5.2 Watching for Excessive Self-Aggrandizement Within Warped Meritocracies

Consistent with the atomistic individualism encouraged by rational-choice theory, in describing the extremes of egocentrism Bohm (1994) pointed out that enormously gifted or talented megalomaniacs such as Alexander the Great have tended to become intensely self-focused and develop grandiose senses of their destiny in the world. In their minds, the grandiosity of their visions appears to justify whatever courses of action they take, no matter how harmful to others. In Alexander's case, he was so caught up in self-aggrandizement that he felt compelled to do no less than conquer and rule the world.

Alexander was an extreme case, but he illustrates a caution we must heed in our work with individuals of high ability. While we shouldn't burden the gifted

with expectations that they must solve all the world's problems because they are gifted, we still should consider their future actions on the world because their high potential makes them more likely to impact the culture, socioeconomic system, and environment than their peers of lesser ability. Their potential ethical impact, whether positive or negative, magnifies the importance of attending to their moral development.

The ethical effects of megalomania can be magnified by socioeconomic and political contexts that are portrayed as far more meritocratic than they truly are. Self-aggrandizing megalomaniacs find justification for their vainglory when the societal context accepts or even lauds self-serving, possibly reprehensible actions as natural and any ensuing rewards as well-deserved outcomes from the exercise of meritorious creativity, talent, or intelligence. For example, today's globalized, corporate capitalism exalts self-love, materialism, and the exercise of domination over others while diminishing the value of community and concern for others (Kasser et al. 2007; McMurtry 1999, 2002), thereby warping the ethical fiber of its meritocracy. Moreover, forgetting ethics for a moment, even possession of material affluence and power might not emerge from outstanding talent, creativity, or intelligence but instead might accrue to individuals effortlessly on the basis of inheritance and birth privilege. In a system that protects such privileges and in which merit is underdefined (see Gates and Collins 2004; Sen 2000) morally vacuous individuals who lack ability can find themselves in "meritorious" positions of great power.

The dynamics of such a system raise issues about the nature of merit. First, a true meritocracy would not allow those with little ability into lofty positions of immense power. Second, it would not laud them as meritorious unless they actually accomplished great things. Third, it would establish clear criteria for what counts as merit and those criteria would not be dominated by materialistic self-interest. This last point is of most concern when considering moral development because it magnifies the importance of societal context. If educators and mentors of bright young people must swim upstream against strong ideological currents that undermine moral development they will need the help of wise policy makers to improve the prospects for moral development in the long term. In spite of strong, neoliberal ideological hegemony worldwide, some nations do a better job of others in providing equal opportunity for aspiration development (see Ambrose 2005c; Smeeding et al. 2002) and some are less caught up in materialistic value systems (see Inglehart 1997). Consequently, large-scale socioeconomic and political contexts conducive to stronger moral development exist and are worthy of attention by educators, and of emulation by policy makers.

4.5.3 Plotting the Chapters in This Book on the Model

Finally, the contributors to this volume reveal some additional dynamics of movement and location on the landscape of the moral-ethical impact model. Tom Green illustrates some ways in which economists of high ability trap themselves in

somewhat myopic economic theory that washes them, and the millions they influence, downward toward the malevolent valley at the front of the model. Amit Goswami suggests ways that those in the world of business can avoid such ethical erosion and climb toward the high ground on the model by using creative thinking to synthesize commerce with ethics. Laurence Bove illustrates some ways in which conceptual framing and storytelling can help us resist the corrosive effects of power and domination in societies, which push large masses of people into the malevolent region. Richard Paul and Linda Elder argue for a stronger blending of critical thinking, creative thinking, and ethical reasoning to build the scaffolding needed for climbing toward the ethical high ground at the back. Deirdre Lovecky as well as Annemarie Roeper and Linda Silverman analyze many of the child-development dynamics that move individuals toward the powerful back-right corner. Deborah Ruf shows how family, school, and social backgrounds can distribute the gifted widely across the surface of the landscape. Robert Sternberg and Mary Jacobsen look for ways that gifted leaders can find the high ground themselves while encouraging others to do the same. Several authors emphasize the potential of instructional or mentoring frameworks for moving young people toward the high ground at the back of the model. Christy Folsom develops an instructional framework that synthesizes cognition with affect to give young people more strength for climbing the ethical high ground. Kay Gibson and Marjorie Landwehr-Brown generate a global learning framework that can attract the young and gifted to this high ground. Scott Seider, Katie Davis, and Howard Gardner argue that the value neutrality of human rationality requires us to support the good works of young people as they strive to reach the high ground. Barry Grant shows how some character education programs may be ineffective in their attempts to move bright young people toward the back of the model. Adam Martin and Kristen Monroe reveal some subtle identity dynamics that make some individuals navigate on the high ground of the model while the identity orientations of others keep them in neutral or malevolent territory. Meier Dan-Cohen also focuses on identity, discussing how societal values and legal frameworks can push us one way or another on the landscape. Maureen Neihart reveals some thought processes emerging from criminal logic, which pulls some bright people down toward the front, malevolent region. Michael Piechowski explores the strong emotions, energy, sensitivity, and spirituality that help some gifted individuals move toward the back-right corner of the model. Christopher Reynolds and Jane Piirto also explore the inner lives of the gifted, using depth psychology to reveal human interconnections with the potential for moving us upward toward the high ground en masse. Mark Johnson shows how we can slide unwittingly in one direction or another on the landscape because our cognition is shaped tacitly by metaphorical abstractions. David White discusses the problems caused by misunderstandings between those who adhere to differing cultural values and then uses philosophical arguments to resolve such problems. Following his advice may help many to avoid sliding down the slope toward malevolent cultural conflict. Chua Tee Teo and Yuanshan Cheng show how these cultural values vary considerably among several Asian nations. Of course, the movements and locations portrayed here oversimplify the nuances

of our contributing authors' arguments; however, they do reveal the complexity of this conceptual terrain while suggesting new directions for future work on the ethics-high ability nexus.

4.6 Some Concluding Thoughts

There is far more ethical ground to cover than can be accomplished here. Studies of ethics and morality are extensive and reach into multiple academic disciplines. Conflicting views on ethics show up in most of these bodies of literature and require resolution or synthesis. Given the enhanced moral sensitivity of many gifted young people, and their likely magnified impact on the world when their abilities unfurl, we certainly need more light shed on ethics-high ability connections. In a world plagued with international conflicts, exploitative economic practices, and pending, world-transforming environmental disasters of our own making, understanding the ways in which gifted young people develop their identities and apply their talents has never been more important.

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