

Three Stages of Ethical Development

Adapted from *Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World*,
His Holiness the Dalai Lama, pp.103-112

1. The Ethic of Restraint

- Includes avoiding certain kinds of obviously harmful behavior that are identified as such by all the world's major faiths and the humanistic traditions, such as murder, theft, and inappropriate sexual conduct which are by definition harmful to others
- However, the ethic of restraint calls for avoiding more than just those that are obviously harmful, since not all our actions are immediately violent but could still endanger others' welfare
- In Buddhism and Jainism, this is embodied in the practice of *ahimsa* or nonviolence toward all living beings
- Also included in this category is avoiding inflicting harm on others through our careless use of harsh words, as well as through our dishonesty, slander and divisive gossip
- Nagarjuna's six principles:
 - i. *Avoid excessive use of intoxicants.*
 - ii. *Uphold the principle of right livelihood.*
 - iii. *Ensure that one's body, speech, and mind are nonviolent.*
 - iv. *Treat others with respect.*
 - v. *Honor those worthy of esteem, such as parents, teachers, and those who are kind.*
 - vi. *Be kind to others.*
- In addition to the above guidelines, we need a "toolkit" to help us in our daily effort to live ethically
- In Buddhism we utilize three interrelated factors known as *heedfulness*, *mindfulness*, and *introspective awareness*, which may also be useful in a secular context
- Additional factors that can aid us in being more conscientious in our restraint from harming others are *self-respect* and *consideration for others*

2. The Ethic of Virtue

- If we can manage to refrain from harming others, we can then start to give more serious attention to actively doing good, which can bring great joy and confidence
- This includes actions such as being generous with others and helping those in need, as well as praising others and offering them advice and encouragement
- Cultivating an attitude of sympathetic joy in others' achievements and good fortune is a useful aid in bringing benefit to others through our words and actions

3. The Ethic of Altruism

- Altruism is a genuinely selfless dedication of one's actions and words to the benefit of others
- This can be undertaken by anyone, not just those in the helping professions, since it simply entails making serving others a priority