

Whence Ethics?

There was a time when ethics seemed always to be on people's minds, part of everyday conversations, even in the news. To be sure, it was often the *lack* of ethics that caught our attention.

Government contractors who low-balled bids in order to win, then flooded performance with endless changes to the contracts in order to increase costs and capture the profits that they couldn't include in their original bids, because the bids would have been too high, their proposals would have lost, and then employees would lose their jobs. I remember when large defense contractors would explain to me that *low-ball bidding was actually ethical*, because it enabled them to keep their good employees on the job, providing for their families' needs. The company's obligations to its stockholders were also met and their corporate bonds were more attractive, easing the flow of capital to help fund the cutting-edge R&D that would spawn new companies, even new industries. All because in business, you do whatever is necessary for success, even low-balling. Or bid-rigging. Or bribing government officials in certain parts of the world.

Senators and Representatives who served their constituents for so much less than they might have made as lawyers in private practice, as real estate developers, or local bankers, or business leaders thought nothing of converting for their personal use money that had been contributed for their election. And many saw no conflicts of interest when they were paid five or six figure "honoraria" for addressing trade and professional associations whose members were subject to the regulations promulgated by the committees served on or chaired by those Members of Congress.. After all, their votes were not for sale, their judgment could not be bought.

Even clergy thought their vows of celibacy required the acquiescence of nuns or even altar boys. And successful evangelism not only harvested souls from evil, but sometimes their salvation legitimized prejudice and discrimination, even cultivating hatred and violence.

Whence ethics?

Have we lost our capacity for outrage? Have we become so decentralized, so individualized by our technology that nothing can achieve consensus?

**<< Note: too weak at the end....>>**