

Moral Courage, Digital Distrust: Ethics in a Troubled World

RUSHWORTH M. KIDDER

Why are you here today? Let me suggest a few answers. I think you're here because Martha Stewart is in Camp Cupcake. I think you're here because Bernie Ebbers and Richard Scrushy are now in court over their activities with WorldCom and HealthSouth. I think you're here because major league baseball is riddled with steroid abuse. I think you're here because the FDA is telling us they can't guarantee to protect us from all the new legal drugs out there.

You're here, in other words, because issues of ethics are coming at us from all sides. Every one of these examples, if you think about it, has to do with moral courage. Somewhere in each of these cases there was an individual who could have made a difference, who could have stood up and said, "Wait a minute, we don't do it this way," and who didn't do that. Today I want to focus on this idea of moral courage. I'm going to do three things. I'm going to talk to you about what moral courage is. I'm going to argue that it matters much more than it has ever mattered. And finally I'm going to focus on the way in which ethics and information technology come together in a tremendously potent mix, which can carry us into all kinds of difficulty or all kinds of glory, depending on how we sort it out.

Rushworth M. Kidder is a Verizon visiting professor in Business Ethics and Information Technology, and Founder and President of the Institute for Global Ethics, in Camden, Maine.

Let me start with a few words about moral courage by telling you the story of Viktor Pestov. I met Viktor two time zones east of Moscow in the Ural Mountains in 1998, when I was visiting a place called Perm-36. Perm-36 is now better known as the Gulag Museum. You remember the archipelago of gulags that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn made famous in his novel—the network of prison camps started by Stalin in 1946, spreading all across the old Soviet Union. By the late 1990s, only one of the camps hadn't been bulldozed, which was Perm-36. By the time the gulags were destroyed, they had been used by the Soviet government to kill an estimated 30 million of their own citizens. Think about that number: it's five times the magnitude of the Holocaust. We're talking about an immense tragedy that in some way affected the lives of every single family in the Soviet Union during that period.

When you visit Perm-36, you go through seven different barriers to get in: barbed wire, chain-link fence, electric fence, cinder-block wall, and so on. When you finally get inside, you find yourself in one of the tiny cubicles where you see, on the bunks, the garments that the prisoners used to wear: nothing but a pair of thin cotton trousers and a thin long-sleeved shirt, with maroon and grey stripes marking out the wearer as a prisoner. As a prisoner in Perm-36, you were in a room with an ill-fitted window and a heater on the wall about the size of a laptop. That's all you had against the raw Siberian winter. You got to exercise 45 minutes a day, in a 9 × 9 × 9 foot cubicle with barbed wire across the top. Meals were bread and water with soup—such as it was—every second day. You spent your days building domestic irons for the consumer market—slave labor.

Viktor spent 5 years in the camp. You might say he was a charter member: the camp opened in 1970, the year he was sent there. So I asked him what happened. What was the story that took him there?

Viktor grew up in Sverdlovsk, which in the old days was Ekaterinburg, a city well known in Russian history as the site of the assassination of the royal family. His mother was high up in the KGB; his father ran a major hospital in town. They were, in other words, living as well as you could live by the standards of a Soviet provincial city. In 1967, during the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, Viktor was being told (as all Soviet citizens were) that the Soviet nation is perfect: everything is taken care of, there is no homelessness; everyone lives well. He told me that one day he went to visit some friends of friends who lived in a building in

the middle of the city. They went down to the basement—and then to a basement below that one. Finally they arrived at a third basement—dirt floored, damp, airless, and without windows or light. That's where the family lived.

Viktor realized something wasn't right here. So he began listening—at great peril, given his family connections—to *Voice of America* and *Radio Free Europe*, to try to figure out what was going on. He was 19 at the time, working in a candy factory. Over the breaks in the middle of the day, he would listen to the radio, and he began to hear about the Prague Spring—the uprising led by students in Czechoslovakia in 1968. Then on August 20 he heard about the Soviet tanks rolling into Prague to crush the uprising. He said to his friends and his brother, "We've got to do something about this." But what could you do in the Soviet Union if you wanted to take a stand? They decided to become pamphleteers. That doesn't sound like much to us, but think about the old Soviet Union, where nobody read much news because there wasn't much to read. All the reading material you had was dictated by the government; it was the official lie. When you found something that was real, when you found a piece of writing that was authentic and told you something that mattered, you snatched it up and you read it.

So they became pamphleteers. That, by the way, doesn't mean they went out and bought a Xerox machine. It doesn't mean they bought a printing press—none of that was available. They couldn't even buy a mimeograph machine. What they could buy was a second-hand typewriter—and a lot of carbon paper. To make an edition of pamphlets, they would type them six at a time, the same thing again and again, until they had this precious stack of 200 sheets.

But that was the easy part. The hard part was distribution. You obviously didn't stand on the streets of Sverdlovsk shouting, "Pamphlets! Pamphlets against the government! Come get them!" For a while they tried throwing them out of upper-story windows when parades were going by, until the police chased them through the attics and nearly caught them. He told me about some of his fellow pamphleteers crawling into the trolley yards late at night when the cars had been washed and the dew had settled on the rounded steel car tops. They would climb up on the cars and stick the pamphlets down onto the wet surface. In the morning when the cars went out into the streets, and the sun came out and the wind began

to blow, the pamphlets would dry up and fly off one by one, here and there, and nobody knew where they came from. When they hit the ground, people were there to pick them up and hand them around to others and learn about what was going on in Prague. He also told me about his friends taking damp bits of bread and climbing out through the windows on to the steep slate mansard roofs around the city, and sticking the pamphlets to the roofs with the bread. In the morning the pigeons would come up and eat the bread, and the pamphlets would slide off into the street. By then, of course, Viktor's friends were long gone.

But at one point, Viktor's team built a particularly large edition of pamphlets and needed help getting them out. So they recruited somebody else to distribute pamphlets with them, and that somebody betrayed them. Viktor's mother lost her job immediately and never worked again. His father was demoted to assistant X-ray technician in the same hospital where he had been in charge. Viktor was sent off to the concentration camp for 5 years.

I asked him what he thought about that. What was going on in his mind while he was doing that? "Since it all happened to my family," he said, "since it all happened because of me, I feel very guilty." But he also felt the enormity of his moral purpose. "What we were fighting against," he said, "was the idea that someone will think for you, someone will make decisions for you." He said he was fighting, really, for the principle that "a person should be the master of his own fate," and that there should be "one law for everyone."

I asked him finally, what made him most proud. He thought for a moment, and then he said, "I believe I did the right thing. I wasn't silent. I was saying and doing what I had to do. There was a very small contribution of mine to the fact that the Communists were pushed out of power." That is what made it worth it for him.

Would you agree that the story I've just told you was in fact a story of moral courage? If so, then the question is, why? What makes it so? What is it that causes you to hear that story and say, "Yes, that's moral courage?"

I think there are three things. I think it's got to be a story that involves significant recognized risk, real danger. Viktor would have been aware of that danger. The rumors in the *samizdat* press and the underground grapevine, stories about the gulags, were all around. That wasn't secret in the old Soviet Union. You knew that people were dying regularly—just not coming back from those camps.

Second, I think there has to be a willingness to *endure* that risk. You've got to look at the risk and say, "Yes, it's there, and I will take a stand for what I believe in."

Third, I think the first two things have to be in the service of a higher moral and ethical principle. If the principle isn't there, all you have is what we would normally refer to as *physical courage*: recognition of risk, and willingness to endure. That's bungee jumping. That's extreme sports. That's all kinds of things that we recognize as physical courage. But in the service of principle it becomes moral courage.

Think about what happens, by the way, if you remove any of these other two things. Suppose you have a real willingness to endure for the sake of principle, but with no clue about how dangerous it is. You just don't get it; you're sort of blindly going along. What do we call that? Stupidity? Foolhardiness? Naïvete? Or think what happens when you have a tremendous amount of risk for the sake of principle, and you look clearly at it and run the other way. That's cowardice. Moral courage, instead, has to have these three things all together.

Think about moral courage, then, simply as *the courage to be moral*, the courage to be ethical. That, of course, begs some questions: What do you mean by ethical? What do you mean by moral? What kind of values are we talking about?

Here's the point where the Institute for Global Ethics has done significant research, trying to figure out what people mean by *ethical*. What values matter around the world? I won't go into that research in detail, but I will give you the bottom line. In every country we visit (and we've done this work in a number of different countries), and with whatever methodology we use—whether working with the Gallup Organization or other survey research firms, or working in focus groups, or in seminars, or with individual interviews—when we ask people what values most matter, we don't hear an array of different things. We hear them talk about five core values. When I tell you what they are, they will not strike you as surprising; in fact, they may seem obvious. People talk to you about *honesty*, or truth or integrity—the word is not as important as the idea. (By the way, these five are not in hierarchical order; this is a constellation of different ideas.) They'll also talk to you about *responsibility*. They'll talk to you about *respect*. They'll talk about *fairness*, and they'll talk about *compassion*. Get beyond those five and you'll hear lots of different values from different cultures. But within that core of five,

we're finding it very difficult to see any statistically valid differentiation between groups. What I mean by that is that if you ask men and women, you find they've got the same values. Ask people who speak English as their native language and people who speak some other language—they've got the same values. Most important, I think, ask people who say, "I come from a strong religious tradition," and ask people who say, "I've got no religious tradition whatsoever," and *they've* got the same values. Now, this points to the shared core values that we have. It makes the point, for me, that values are what make us human. We are human because we share this set of values.

I tested this perception at a meeting convened by Gorbachev in San Francisco a few years ago. We did a survey of the attendees. Clearly, this was not a random sample survey: people who come to a meeting that Gorbachev convenes are not like most people. But nevertheless they were thought leaders. We got this same set of five values back. Joining us at that meeting was Jane Goodall. Some of you may know her work with chimpanzees. She had already said to the group that chimps and humans share 98 percent of their DNA. We are, in other words, 98 percent like chimps. So the question is: What's in the other 2 percent? I asked Jane, "Do chimps have ethics?" She thought about that for a while, and she said, "I don't think so." Ethics, she said, requires a capacity to use an abstract language. Now, chimps have a language; they can talk. They can say, Let's eat, Let's go to war, and so forth. But they can't talk about truth and fairness and responsibility. But I said to her, "So what? Do they act them out? Do they behave on the basis of these values?" She told me that every once in a while somebody comes to her center in Tanzania, and they think they're seeing a chimp do some marvelously altruistic act. When the mother chimp dies to save the life of her young, they think they are seeing ethics in practice. But that, said Goodall, is not ethics, that's genetics. That's the desire of every living species to protect its own genetic line, even at the expense of the elder generation. The real question is: Does this mother chimp over here die to save the life of that little chimp over there, with whom there is no blood connection whatsoever? The answer is, hardly ever. Occasionally, we see headlines like "Ape Saves Man from Drowning in Zoo" or something similar. But those are the strange ones. For the most part, animals don't die for ideas.

Humans, by contrast, die for ideas; that's what the American Revolution was all about. People die for those kinds of ideas, for

good ideas and for bad ideas. In a sense, the latter is what terrorism is all about. But the fact is we don't die simply to save our bloodline. There is something else motivating us. At bottom, there is a core of values that drives people forward.

Now, if in fact there is this core set of values that underlies our thinking, this begins to explain where ethical issues come from. They came from one of two conditions. First, there is the situation where one of our values is being challenged or violated. For instance, you believe that honesty matters, but one of your coworkers is suggesting doing something dishonest. This is an ethical choice of *right versus wrong*. That's not hard. We've been taught the difference. Secondly, the more difficult situations are those in which two of our core values come into conflict with each other. They're both right, and we can't do both at the same time. Ethics, then, becomes a matter of *right versus right*. Those are the tough decisions. Those are the decisions that all of you, especially as you move into your professional careers, will be encountering. In fact, if you find in five or ten years that the toughest issues you're facing are the right-versus-wrong questions of compliance, I would suggest that you've got the wrong staff. Those issues should get sorted out below your level. The tough issues, the really challenging management questions for you, are going to be issues of right versus right, where you can build a powerful case for both and you can't *do* both.

Go back to Viktor's example. Think about the initial right-versus-right question that he faced. You can build a powerful moral case for saying that family matters—that you have got to do whatever sustains and supports the rest of your family. But you can also build a powerful moral case for saying, "Look what's happening in my country right now. I have got to take a stand. Something must be done here, even though it will lead to the destruction of family." Viktor faced a right-versus-right choice, but he had the moral courage to stand up and say, "I've got to make a difference," and to move forward on that basis.

Viktor faced a tough world, and so do we. The question then is: Why is Viktor's story so important? This is where I want to move to the second part of my discussion today. Why does ethics matter now more than it has ever mattered in the past? Let me try to build that case for you. It's really a case that has to do with the relationship of technology to ethics.

- Think about what happened in Chernobyl in 1986. A couple of unethical engineers made decisions against the moral standard that they should have known was important, and created the largest industrial accident in the history of the world. Think about what would have happened had they made those decisions in the late 19th century. The same decisions might have blown up a coal-fired manufacturing facility, but they could not have produced a world-class disaster.
- Think about the *Exxon Valdez*, and about what's required for a drunken captain to run a ship aground and produce, in its own way, a world-class environmental disaster. He could not have done that in the 19th century; there was no ship big enough.
- Think about Barings Bank: a 200-year-old institution with deposits from the Queen of England that helped to fund the Napoleonic Wars. It was brought to bankruptcy in 3 weeks by the activities of a 28-year-old trader named Nicholas Leeson. He was trading derivatives on the Nikkei Exchange from his base in Singapore, with an immensely complex computer system in front of him and—this is crucial—a flattened management structure that put him in charge of doing the trades and then reporting on them. Three weeks—bankruptcy! In 1970, when Viktor went to Perm-36, that could not have happened. The technology simply did not exist in earlier decades to allow Nicholas Leeson to do that kind of thing.
- Think about the Love Bug computer virus, launched several years ago by a couple of kids in the Philippines. Not terrorists, not kids trying to make a lot of money. Just kids pushing the envelope, the way kids have been pushing the envelope for years. What would you do if you were a kid on the streets of Manila in 1970 and you wanted to push the envelope? I don't know—you'd chase cats, you'd break windows, you'd steal hubcaps. Now you've got a computer keyboard—and now when you sit down to push the envelope, you create \$10 billion worth of global damage.
- Think about the last and saddest case: 9/11. Think about what happened when a handful of individuals took control of a technology—big aluminum tubes in the air filled with people and explosive fuel—that simply had not existed in the prior decades.

What do all of these have in common? One simple thing: They suggest ways in which *our technology leverages our ethics* in ways we have never seen in the past. It is now possible for a single unethical decision, by somebody way down in the ranks of an organization, to produce a world-class disaster. These things simply could not have happened 20, 30, or 40 years ago because of the scale of our technologies—and because we have taken these technologies away from the great big computer rooms that IBM used to put them in and we've put them into the Blackberry and said, "Here's your personal computer." You can do everything there that IBM used to be able to do.

The capacity for mayhem, in other words, has increased in all kinds of ways because of this leveraging of the technology. If that is so, and the unethical activity of a few individuals can create almost instant disaster around the world through the leveraging effect of technology, how are we doing as we educate the next generation to deal with these questions? I see a lot of data coming across my desk at the Institute for Global Ethics—the same kind you see here at the Center for Business Ethics—about the propensity for cheating among students. The latest figures we're seeing from Donald McCabe at the Center for Academic Integrity at Duke University (based on a survey done in 2001) suggest that 74 percent of high-school students admit to serious cheating on tests, and 72 percent admit to serious cheating on written assignments. By the time they get to college, that number rises to about 75 percent, with about one third of them being repetitive, regular, industrial-strength, weapons-grade cheaters—serious, perpetual cheating. There's also a phenomenon McCabe has called "cut-and-paste plagiarism," where you're smart enough not to take a whole paper off the Internet, but you're happy to take a few words here and a few words there, weave them together, and not bother with attribution. In 1999, McCabe's surveys found that 10 percent of students were doing "cut-and-paste plagiarism." By 2001, 41 percent were admitting to doing it. When he asked them, "Do you think it's serious?" two thirds of them said, in effect, "No, it doesn't matter. Cheating is not a big deal. It's okay."

Let me summarize simply. If ethics is as serious as I have suggested that it is, there's the real risk is that we may not survive the 21st century with the ethics of the 20th century, given the capacity for this leverage. If it's that serious, and this is the way we are educating the next generation, especially in the high schools, the real

question is: How do we get there from here? How do we make a serious difference?

I'll share with you my first slide at this point. It is, of course, a virtual slide, because I didn't bring slides. (Does anybody here really feel the need to see yet one more PowerPoint?) You'll understand this when I show it to you up here. It's a graph. Slides used in presentations like this are either graphs like this [indicates falling trend] or like this [indicates rising trend]. This one is a graph like that [rising trend]. It starts over here in 1968, as you can see, and over there by the year 2000, it ends. It starts at 42 percent, and it rises to about 76 percent. It is based on studies published by the American Council of Education of interviews every second year with incoming college and university freshmen. For this one that I'm showing you, the question is this: "How important is it to you to be very well-off financially?" As you can see, it's 42 percent in 1968, and 76 percent by the time you get to the year 2000. Keep that rising trend in mind while I show you the next slide, which is now a graph going in the other direction. As you can see, it starts very high over here—about 80 percent—and ends up at 42 percent, the place where the other one started. The question this time is: "How important is it to you to develop a meaningful philosophy of life?" For those of you in the audience who are about my age—we've got some very interesting thinking to do. When we were in school, there was an understanding that developing a "meaningful philosophy of life" was an idea shared by at least three of four or four of five of our friends. That appears not to be the case these days. It appears, instead, that the crossing of these two curves in the course of a single generation has created a profound change.

Now, I have two things to say about this. First, this question of cheating is not the fault of the students. Don't blame them. We are the generation that has set the parameters; we have established the standards. We have failed to make the case that cheating really matters. We are the culpable ones, and we've got a lot of work to do. Second, I have no quarrel with students who say, "I need to be financially well-off." You and I know what it costs to get an education these days. We know the kinds of loans and payments that are out there. My concern is this: what is it that our students are trading in order to get there? What are they giving up when they say, "I want to be financially well-off. I don't really want to develop a philosophy of life." Think about their future, when finally they've

made it. They've got tons of money, and they've retired. What are they going to do all day? Are they condemned to roam the malls of America looking for stuff to buy, because that's the only thing going on in their heads? That's not what life is all about. It's about something far more important. It is about meaning; it is about values; it is about relationships.

This is where we have got to take the entire enterprise of education: toward a much clearer understanding of the moral importance of meaning and values and relationships. And this, by the way, is the real reason I am here today. Here at Bentley, you're in the presence of one the legends in our field of ethics: Mike Hoffman. It is an astonishing thing that has happened here, turning the ship of an educational enterprise toward saying that ethics really matters, that ethics is core, that ethics is not some fringe idea out there on the edges of experience that you can have or not, an option you can bolt on if you'd like. Mike's recognition that ethics is central—a recognition he's been willing to stick with for 29 years—is extraordinary. So bear in mind that I am not talking about *you* students in the audience today when I'm talking about the next generation. You've got a different take on this, or you wouldn't be in this program.

Let me take you finally, then, to a consideration of how this all relates to the question of information technology. My concern, as I have suggested in the title of this lecture, is to relate moral courage and digital distrust. We are entering into a situation where, unless we are careful, we may well see the entire enterprise of technological innovation and invention brought to naught, stopped in its tracks by public fear. Let me put it this way: unless we have the moral courage to radically restructure the relationship of ethics and technology, we risk losing our entrepreneurial edge in a tsunami of public mistrust.

To build my case, I want to go back to the rather peaceful days of the year 2000, before 9/11 and all that has hit us since then. I want to remind you of a line of reasoning put before us in a fascinating article (which has stirred up a lot of criticism, I admit) by Bill Joy, the cofounder of Sun Microsystems, appearing in *Wired* magazine in April 2000 and titled "Why the Future Doesn't Need Us." The reason the future doesn't need us, he said, is that we are now at the intersection of three remarkable technologies: genetic technology, robotics, and nanotechnology, or making things tiny. As these three technologies come together, he said, we can expect an increase in

computing speed of at least a trillionfold over the next several decades. As he pointed out, a trillionfold increase is the difference between the explosive power of a matchstick and a hydrogen bomb. That's what it means to have something that goes a trillion times faster than it used to. He made the case that as speed increases, cost will drop drastically. We are already seeing that—computers are being built into everything. In fact, nobody in the future will be charging for computers. We'll have to buy the software, and that's where companies will make the money, but they'll toss in the machinery free because it is so inexpensive to make (by the way, under Bill Joy's scenario, we would not say *make* but *grow*—we're talking about genetic technologies, remember). At that point, robotics kicks in, and we begin to find ourselves surrounded by robots that are so intelligent, so capable of doing everything we're doing, so willing to do the dirty work for us, that in the end most of us really don't need to work. That doesn't mean productivity is going to go down the tubes, or that there's going to be no money. Quite the reverse. There's going to be amplitudes of stuff, according to Bill Joy. We'll have everything we need. It's just that we're not going to have to work to do it. That raises very interesting moral questions, as I suggested earlier, about what we do all day. If we just sit around doing nothing, how do we maintain any sense of importance to our identity?

But it raises even bigger questions than that. Suppose we've got all of these robots running around doing the things we now do, and it's beginning to dawn on the robots that humans are really very inefficient things to have around. We spend about a third of our time in actual productive work, right? Otherwise, we're either resting, or recharging ourselves, or something like that. What's more, we get sick, and we have all kinds of emotional problems. It also takes us about 20 years of life just to get up to speed and understand what we're supposed to do. Then we have this blip of a working life, and then we just sort of tail off for a while. Robots don't do that. They come up to speed just like that, they work 24 hours a day, and they just keep going. When you finally build the next generation, you blow them up and get rid of them, and nobody worries about it because they're not human. So why, says Joy, will the robots need us? Why will they want us around?

Now, this is an intriguing line of reasoning. There are various arguments you can array against it, of course. You can make the point that without a conscience, what will keep the robots thinking

and moving forward? Why will they want to keep doing what they're doing? Why won't they just take the easy way out and self-destruct? Nevertheless, it's a scary and interesting scenario.

I heard Bill Joy speak at a conference in Camden, Maine, a while ago, and based on this line of reasoning, he raised what I take to be the central and Faustian conundrum. Are there things, he asked, that we should *not* know, knowledge that we should *not* seek, inventions that we should *not* pursue? "Even if the search for truth is our highest value," he told his audience, "there must be some exceptions. It is not always desirable to know everything." I realize that what I have just quoted is a stunning, radical, and revolutionary statement to make on the campus of an academic institution like this one, where the basic article of faith is that knowledge is, in and of itself, a good thing, and where the pursuit of knowledge must be put above everything else. Yet here comes one of our leading thinkers in technology, saying, "Wait a minute—the future is sufficiently dangerous that, in fact, there may be things we ought *not* to know."

Now, my concern is that when this kind of scary thinking escapes from the academy and gets out into the public square, it develops a fear factor about all the new things that are happening. Will there finally be a public backlash that says, "If this is where technology is taking us, we don't want to go there. Stop!"

You may say to yourself, "What? You can't stop this momentum, this enterprise, this tremendous entrepreneurial innovation." I'll tell you how you stop it. You stop it with tax and regulatory policy. That's what Sarbanes–Oxley is all about. For years, the kinds of regulations embodied in Sarbanes–Oxley remained in the background, never made into law, and always resisted successfully by the lobbyists. And then came Enron, and WorldCom, and Global Crossing, and all the rest. Finally, with the markets tanking in the summer of 2002, the Gallup Organization was reporting that more than 60 percent of Americans appeared to feel that there wasn't a single number coming out of the corporate world that they could trust. With fear and distrust so great, Sarbanes–Oxley finally roared right over the opposition. It's a bad piece of legislation. There are all kinds of problems with it. But it's there, and it is beginning to make a difference for good. It is also, however, beginning to restrain some of the creative potential that could have produced excellent new enterprise and innovation.

Take another example. Look at what's happening to charitable foundations right now. They are under serious criticism in the Senate Finance Committee because of self-dealing and other unethical practices on the part of a few of them. Currently, foundations are required to pay out the equivalent of 5 percent of their corpus each year, and that percentage just about works. At that payout rate, the corpus can continue to grow, and you can continue to make grants, continue to support things like the Center for Business Ethics and the Institute for Global Ethics. But all that Congress would have to do is change that one number—5 percent—and they could put foundations right out of business. Change it to 12 percent, for example, force foundations to spend more than they earn each year, and very quickly that foundation disappears. Somebody else can start a new foundation, and that's fine, but it too will soon go out of business.

In other words, you can do a lot with tax and regulatory policy. You can even say to the great innovators popping up in Silicon Valley and along Route 128, "Go off into your garages and propagate and grow rich. Do what Bill Hewlett and David Packard did in your little backyard shops. By the way, just one thing has changed: when you finally sell the company, we will tax you at 95 percent. But please go ahead and innovate." That's pretty much the end of innovation. All it takes is a public sufficiently frightened by what's going on in cutting-edge technology to say, "Wow, this is dangerous! We don't know what's happening. We've got to put a stop to that."

So here is my real challenge to all of us in this room today: what are we doing about that? Are we making *any* effort to rebuild the public trust as we head off into a scale of ethical leveraging that is going to make Chernobyl look like small potatoes? As we head off into situations where single individuals will have this trillionfold computing power right there in their Blackberries to do whatever ethical or unethical thing they want to do?

Here's what I think has to happen. We have to build a capacity of what I've called *ethical futurism*. We've got to be able to look over the horizon at the ethical issues we are creating as we develop new technologies. We must be able to say, "Yes, we can foresee this ethical challenge. We're not waiting to have it catch up to us and surprise us."

As an example, think about the human genome project. When it was established in 1990 by James D. Watson, he insisted that 5 percent of the funding go into what was called the "ELSI" questions:

the “ethical, legal, and social implications” of the technology. His point? Don’t wait until the technology’s out there. Don’t wait until we have finally built the map of these three billion chemical pairs that make up our DNA. Try to imagine what the ethical questions are going to be before they hit, so that we’re prepared. He wanted to ask questions like: Who should have access to genetic information? How does that person’s genetic information affect society’s perception of that person? What is to be considered acceptable diversity? How far are we going to take this question of diversity? Where’s the line between medical treatment and enhancement? How will genetically modified food technologies affect the developing nations’ dependence on the West? These are tough, interesting, ethical problems. We could have waited for them to happen, of course, and then suddenly said, “My gosh, all the developing countries are trying to buy genetically developed seeds from the West, and they can’t because the price is too high. So now they are absolutely dependant on the West in ways they have never been in the past. We have created this monster, and we never saw it coming.” All Watson said was “see it coming—watch and see what’s happening.”

Here’s a more current example. We are now developing, as you know, radio frequency identification (RFID) tags that will replace barcodes with electronic chips. This book will have an RFID chip. My eyeglasses will have a chip. That sweater will have a chip. Your pen will have a chip. It will record lots of information about the product, so that when you go to the supermarket, you won’t have to stop in the checkout line. You’re going to put all your stuff in the basket, and you’re going to walk out the door. And as you walk out the door, a sensor is going to read everything in that basket. Because you too will have a chip, the sensor is going to know who bought it, and it’s going to send the bill back to your credit card company.

That’s very efficient. But think about that capacity to know who bought what, where, and when. Think what that does to privacy. You might say that’s a good thing. If we had only been able to track the fact that some guy named Timothy McVeigh was buying tons of fertilizer, and he had never been a farmer nor had any intention of being a farmer, and in the end he blew up the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Wouldn’t we have liked to know that? We could have nipped that terrorist in the bud. But if we can do that to Timothy McVeigh, somebody can do that to you. If you

have a challenging medical problem, do you want your prospective employer to know exactly what medicines you're buying and how frequently, before they hire you? Might they surreptitiously look at a list and say, He's not really a good risk—but of course we can't tell him, so we're just going to have to say, "Sorry, we've chosen someone else." How are we, as a nation, going to control this kind of information?

My point is that we don't have to wait. We can foresee these issues. We have an opportunity, and we have an obligation, for this kind of foresight. We must begin, right now, to take charge of the ethics of our technologies. We cannot let them just happen. There has got to be serious foresight about that. We want this sense of innovation to continue. But we're in a situation where the public is beginning to feel not only a delight with the technology but a dread about what could happen. And the dread, the outrage, will finally be capable of stopping this sort of innovation, unless we're serious about learning and applying the disciplines of ethical futurism.

Now, last thing. What is the possibility that a small group of people like those of you here today can actually make that happen? Are you sitting there saying, "Huh! Big idea, but that's not for me. I can't do anything about it?"

If that's the way you're feeling, let me end with an analogy. Back when I was with *The Christian Science Monitor*, I found myself on one occasion interviewing several black, professional men who had made it in our culture. They had come up from some of the worst ghetto areas in America, and they were successful. And I said to them, "How come you weren't gunned down on a street corner at age 18 as, statistically, you should have been?"

The answers they gave me were each variants of the same thing. They said, "Well, it was old Mrs. So-and-So in the fourth grade. She turned me around, she really made a difference."

And I said, "Wait a minute, you've already told me about the dozens of other teachers you had, most of them terrible." And they said, "Yeah, that's right."

"And you've already told me about your extended, dysfunctional family, where nobody worked and all the wrong examples were set." And they said, "Yeah, that's right."

"And you've already told me about your hundreds of friends, many of them now dead, many in jail, none of them setting good examples."

And they said, "Yeah, that's right."

"And you're telling me that one woman made the difference?"

And they said, "Yeah, that's what I'm telling you."

The power of a single example is enormous. You know that. I'm not telling you anything you don't know. But think about the obverse of that fact. Why is it not true that people can come from wonderful backgrounds, terrific families, great friends, fine education—and all it takes is one rotten teacher in the fourth grade to turn them forever into a life of crime? We don't see that happening.

The question is, Why not? Why is it that the single good example makes a difference in ways the single bad example doesn't?

To answer that question, I want you to perform an experiment, if you would, when you get home tonight. Find a closet in your house that's been closed up for a very long time. It's dark as pitch in there. The darkness in that closet is serious, tough, real darkness, and it's had a long time to fester. Take a candle. Turn out the lights in the room outside that closet. Light the candle, and open the door of that closet. And now watch to see how this ugly, thick darkness comes pouring out and puts out your candle.

No? You're right. It has never once happened in the history of the world. Every time you light the candle, the candle illumines the darkness. The darkness never puts out the candle. Again, I'm not telling you anything you don't already know.

But again the question is, why? What is the relation of light to dark that causes this to happen? The simple answer is that darkness is not the *opposite* of light. Darkness is the *absence* of light.

But think about our metaphors for the world. Most of them are built around opposites. We think about hot and cold as opposites. We think about plus and minus charges in chemistry and electricity as opposites. We think of north and south poles in magnetism as opposites. And then we think about light and dark as opposites—because, after all, there is about as much daylight as there is night in the course of the year, isn't there? And then we import that entire metaphor into the realm of ethics, and we say, "See, it's like light and dark. Good and bad—they're opposites."

What if—just what if—bad is not the *opposite* of good? What if bad is the *absence* of good? Do you begin to understand now why it is possible for a single teacher in fourth grade to turn around an entire life? She was not up against the collective forces of malevolence that had come down through the centuries and were evenly balanced

against the forces of good. She in fact was simply putting in place a presence where there had been nothing.

If that's true, then the kind of work that the Center for Business Ethics is doing, and the kind of work that each one of us is able to do, is capable of transforming the world. We have that capacity. We are not up against the sum total of evil. We're simply bringing a *presence* to an *absence*. So we can make—and, if my argument stands, we *must* make—every stand we can for the moral courage to turn that metaphor around, to put the good in place where the bad wasn't ever. And that will make all the difference in the 21st century.

Thank you.

Below are highlights from Rushworth Kidder's question-and-answer session with Bentley faculty, students, and guests.

QUESTION: That's a powerful metaphor you used at the end of your address, but isn't there a real need for us to look at the way things are so often done?

R.K.: We do the things we do because of the mental conceptions that have about them. So if we build our view of the world on a metaphor of opposites, we will see a world built on opposites, and we will behave that way. I was reminded of that over the last couple of weeks, during the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. That was the kind of thinking that made Auschwitz happen in the first place.

My wife and I visited Auschwitz a few years ago. After seeing the rooms where the Jews were incarcerated, and the piles of eyeglasses and the piles of shoes that were taken from them, we were then taken down through the gas chambers and into the crematorium. After that, we emerged above ground, on the outside of the perimeter fence. And at the point, the guide pointed above the trees about a block away, to the gabled brick roof of a pleasant-looking three-story house. That, she said, was where the Nazi commandant lived. That's where he went home every evening and played with his dog on the lawn and had fun with his kids and talked with his wife and invited people over for dinner, and read his poetry and listened to music. And then he went back to his day job of killing Jews.

Now you look at something like that and you ask, how on earth can that happen, especially if we're talking about shared values? Well, oddly enough—and this may strike you as a shocking idea—I think it's arguable that the Nazi commandant shared the same five

values that you and I have. He had a clear sense of *honesty*, at least within his little circle. He was clear about *responsibility*: if he invited somebody to dinner, I imagine he was there. He understood what it meant to *respect* people in the chain of command. He was *fair* with those under him. He was probably *compassionate* with his kids, his dog, and his wife. The problem was that this set of values didn't even extend a block away from his residence. The circle within which he put those values was so shrunken, so tiny, that it didn't include all of those people that he was decimating as he went on with his job during the day.

What we're seeing here is a capacity for humans to operate within a tight moral perimeter. People take the position that, yes, I have a set of values, but it only extends this far and, beyond that, I really don't have any moral obligation. The Mafia has wonderful values. You've got to be responsible if you're going to be a good hit man. You've got to be fair if you're going to run an organization where people get paid off. But that's all within the family. Outside the family, it's all fair game, and I owe no moral obligation.

So I'm under no illusion that there is not an immense potency in this concept of darkness, this sense that evil appears to be something very present, very real, something that we must take stands against.

Similarly, I'm under no illusion that compliance in the corporate world doesn't matter—that we've got no obligation to teach people the difference between right and wrong, and to hold firmly to that sense that some things are wrong and must not be done. Of course we must take that stand. But I'm also under no illusion that if your only metaphor for the world is one that says, "It's all about right and wrong"—it's all about black and white, what's good and what isn't—that quickly leads you to a merely legalistic structure. In the end, that merely forces people to obey blindly. Instead, we need to be saying to them "We want you to understand what this is all about. We don't want obedience just because we're pushing you; we want obedience because there's an understanding of what ethics really is, and it is drawing us all forward."

My conviction is that, as ethics draws us all forward, we're pulled into a world where we understand that there is a tremendous power in the goodness of individuals and in the goodness of organizations. I am also convinced that those organizations that are beginning to glimpse this fact are now making an impact in the way the world

works. They're beginning to see that goodness falls directly to their bottom line. They're also beginning to understand that this is not rocket science; and that in order to keep good people, even major *Fortune 500* corporations have to treat them well—just the way people would want to be treated if it were the corner dry cleaner. How many times are you going to let the dry cleaners tear off your buttons and get your suit back to you three weeks later, covered with mud, before you say, “Sorry, I’m not coming here anymore”? How long will we go on working with a major corporation if what we see there is behavior that strikes us as being blatantly unethical? There’s too much competition out there. There are too many opportunities to work in other places. The point is that there is real power in goodness.

QUESTION: I’m intrigued by what you said about public distrust of the advance of technology, and I’m thinking now about the use of embryonic research. Currently, it seems to be stalled around a religious notion of not destroying human life but I wonder if what is really underlying the lack of progress is public distrust of where this technology is going to take us.

R.K.: I think it really is. Take this back to the “Frankenfoods” debate—the huge reaction against genetically modified foods, which absolutely caught the food industry flat-footed. Sadly enough, if you had any willingness to combine the principles of future studies with the principles of moral philosophy, you could’ve seen that coming years ago. You wouldn’t have Monsanto back-pedaling all over Europe, trying to get hold of a debate that they’ve let get way out of hand. I think there is something of this in the embryonic stem cell research debate, too. In part, I think it’s because we’ve been watching what’s happened over the years, and noticed that things that technology has promised haven’t really worked out the way we had thought.

We’re not quite sure what to do right now with nuclear power, for example; largely because we don’t know what to do with the stuff that’s left over. Nobody ever talked to us about that in the old days, when we were building the power stations. Nobody ever really talks to us these days about the fact that when you’re buying this car, this mass of metal and plastic, you’re going to have to do something with it 10 years from now. Where is it going to go? Only within the last few years have we come to the clear understanding in the environmental movement that there is no “away” where you can throw

it. “Away” is here. With that kind of thought resonating in our minds, then we say, “Wait a minute, is this where we want to go?”

Think, if you will—I hate to say this in the presence of my friend from Verizon—about how little we thought about the ethical implications of developing cell phones. It may be helpful that we can track the location of a cell phone using GPS technology, to the point that we can pinpoint a terrorist in Afghanistan who is using one. But nobody really sat down and said, “This thing in my hand is actually a detonator. What would happen if you wired it into a backpack of explosives on a train in Madrid, and then set it off from anywhere in the world by just dialing that number?”

Similarly, we haven’t thought about the ethical issues of camera phones. You’ve got millions of people out there taking pictures on city streets. Suppose we had some way to databank all those pictures. What good is that? Well, think about the new 3-D face recognition technology, where if you have a picture of somebody, no matter whether the light is dim or bright or they’re turned this way or that, you’ve got the points that recognize the outline of that face. And you’ve got that all in the databank, and you apply the face recognition technology to it. There would be no anonymity anywhere for any of us. So any time we walk down the city street, we’re part of that technology, and somebody who wants to locate us can do so. Maybe it’s a terrorist. Maybe it’s our long-lost brother. Maybe it’s our parents wondering where we are and trying to help us. Maybe it’s a stalker. All of these questions are out there, and the point is we’re not even thinking about them. And because we’re not, that I think is where the trust fades and the fear develops.

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