

My days are filled with physical work and moral dilemmas. Interestingly enough, manual labor lends itself to contemplation of other issues than the job at hand. While I don't, on principle, believe in multi-tasking, there are some tasks that are so routine that one need not think too much about them while working.

Today, the daily endeavors necessary to our lives involve some household jobs—washing and hanging out clothes, assembling ingredients and preparing for the evening meal when Runo comes home from the bee yard, and washing some windows. In the garden, I have potatoes, beets, and carrots ready to plant, and the greenhouse needs watering. So, there is plenty to keep my hands busy.

The mind, though, has other things to consider. The issue of ethics has occupied my thoughts increasingly during the past few months. Probably, the fact that we consider the present administration in this country to have little in the way of ethics in its behavior is a major reason for my preoccupation with the question.

Merriam-Webster's Dictionary defines "ethics" as "the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation." That seems pretty straightforward and clear to me. And the huge gap between that definition and the actions of the people in power seems impossible to deny. And yet, folks who claim to be good, kind people support these policies without question. They seem to be able to ignore the money-hungry grabbing, the lack of compassion for people who are not wealthy, the ignoring of dangers to the health of this planet and its ability to sustain us, and much more. How can this be?

And, that leads to personal ethical concerns. It is easy to criticize those with whom we do not agree on important matters. But, how about our friends and acquaintances who seem to share our values? Should we be as harsh in considering their attitudes? Should we keep quiet, or should we question their motives? And, what about our own behaviors? Do we always do what we know is ethical, or do we relax our ethics when it is more expedient, more comfortable, or just plain easier to do otherwise?

I suppose that looking at ethics from this angle ignores "the gray areas." If everything is not "black and white," as the saying goes, it stands to reason that our actions may sometimes lie in these gray areas—perhaps not the absolutely most ethical, but not totally "unethical," either.

I don't know the answer to any of these questions. According to Aristotle, moral or ethical virtue is the product of habit. We must practice ethical behavior in order to make it a part of our regular response to the issues of life. And Kant said that in ethical living, one must act so as to use humanity, whether in one's own person or in the person of another, always as an end, never as merely a means.

Still, these readings do not satisfy me. They do not help me learn how to treat neighbors and acquaintances—in person or in my mind—who violated a moral code—at least, in my opinion—when they voted for and continue to support the present regimes, both in Washington and in our state.

So, as I lay out the beds and plant potatoes this afternoon, as I bring in the dry sheets fragrant with the fresh spring air, as I take the organic eggs out of the nests in the chicken coop, and as I look around with pleasure at the beauty of life on this farm, in the back of my mind, the questions still nag at me. And, do people really care about ethical living?