

Sitting down at the end of the day, contemplating what one has accomplished and planning for tasks yet undone, the mind occupies itself with everyday aspects of life. But, if one remains quiet long enough, thoughts often turn to introspection and to the larger issues we face as human beings. During this past year, a reduction in social interaction has probably contributed to added “philosophizing,” at least in our household here on Coe Creek.

Most often, when a foray into the realm of human actions and the reasons behind what people do is on my mind, I think about ethics. As a discipline involving what is good and what is bad—to put it in the plainest possible terms—it is an issue that should concern all of us.

It is often easy to look at the actions of other people and judge them as right or wrong, but it is usually harder to examine one’s own behavior and apply the same standards. On the evenings when this is the issue that is most on my mind, I find myself with a lot of questions about ethical behavior.

One of the most important queries, as far as I am concerned, is this: At what point do most of us abandon an ethical stance because it does not serve our short term interests? And, this leads to a host of other questions I pose in my thoughts.

Are we ethical only until it becomes inconvenient? Is it ethical to have and use as much as we wish as long as we can afford it? Am I abandoning my own ethical beliefs by not speaking out when these beliefs come into question? Is using “wanting” instead of “needing” as a guide to what we do and what we buy ethical?

On a purely personal level, these questions plague me at times. One example is that which is demonstrated by our bathroom lavatory. The sink and top are one piece—all white porcelain. A few years ago, something heavy fell from the medicine cabinet above and struck the sink a glancing blow on a corner, making a very visible crack about four inches long. It doesn’t look good, if one is concerned about such things. I am, but only to the extent that I notice it every time I clean the sink or wash my hands. Conventional wisdom would indicate that it would be perfectly acceptable to replace the sink. But, is that an ethical choice? Everything works properly, there are no sharp edges or places for dirt to gather, there is really nothing wrong with that lavatory. Yet, it crosses my mind that we should probably buy a new sink. In this case, it really is the ethical concern that keeps us from doing just that. When I think of that sink abandoned somewhere in a landfill or even recycled—if such a thing is possible—I know that it would have been appearance only that caused the fixture to be replaced. This may not be anything that bothers another person, but, to me, getting a new sink when the old one was perfectly usable was unethical.

A rather odd and perhaps silly illustration, but it speaks to this question: At what point are our own compromises—in this case equating “want” with “need”—sully our ethical beliefs? I guess a lot more evenings of quiet thought will be necessary to come to any conclusion about this issue.