

**Six Categories of Cultural Discourse:  
How to Understand, Communicate, and Gain Consensus in Social Ethics  
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**Introduction**

In order to understand the six categories of cultural discourse and their effects on the principles, aspirations, and ideals of individuals and society, we will first need to briefly summarize the Four Levels of Happiness which are described extensively elsewhere (see <https://www.magiscenter.com/the-four-levels-of-happiness/>). Section I will be devoted to the Four Levels of Happiness and Section II will be devoted to the Six Levels of Cultural Discourse.

There are multiple references to “The Ten Universal Principles” or “Principles” throughout this text. These refer to the three principles of objective truth, the three fundamental principles of ethics, and the four principles of justice and social ethics upon which humane civilization are built. Readers interested in these principles may want to obtain the volume *Ten Universal Principles: A Brief Philosophy of the Life Issues* (Ignatius Press, 2011).

**I.  
Four Levels of Happiness**

There is a large body of evidence supporting the theory of the four levels of happiness/purpose in philosophy, theology, and psychology. Partial or full expressions of it may be found in the works of such diverse thinkers as Plato and Kierkegaard, Aristotle and Jaspers, Augustine and Buber, Viktor Frankl and Abraham Maslow, and Thomas Aquinas and Lawrence Kohlberg.<sup>1</sup> One may also see them in the scriptures of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Throughout the last 3,500 years one can see them recur again and again in the cultures of North and South, East and West. Many of us will view this theory as common sense, and after reading it, will say, “That makes a lot of sense. You’ve put words to what I’ve always known.” But it is worth putting words to common sense, because it will help us to articulate the urgings of our hearts, to formulate plans for growth in purpose, to find paths to greater psychological health (and even sanity), and to make the most out of our time, talent, and lives.

The third and fourth levels of happiness (inspired by the Golden Rule) have great bearing on the philosophy in this book, for they have the capacity to transform the “mind’s reasons” into the “heart’s reasons.”<sup>2</sup> When many people read the above Principles 1-9 for the first time, their *minds* are engaged. They are not only trying to understand the principles, but also to survey the effects that they have had on the growth of civilization (as well as the problems that arise when

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<sup>1</sup> The precise citations of the works of all these thinkers may be found in Spitzer 2000, pp. 59-60, notes 3-12.

<sup>2</sup> See Pascal 1961, #277.

cultures ignore them). Yet, this engagement of the mind can allow for a curious emotional distance from the principles – as if they are something we are looking at through a window, and it is here that we may want to intentionally engage our hearts. These principles have a nobility which can stir the spirit of humankind to heights of idealism, progress, and transformation of civilization. They have moved the most influential leaders in world history to accomplishments which were not even dreamt; accomplishments which gave rise to the protection of populations, the burgeoning of cultures, and a horizon for the common good which have led to a better life for everyone. The personal and cultural movement from a dominant Level 2 identity (ego-comparative) to a dominant Level 3 identity (contributive) is the step necessary for the engagement of the heart that transforms these principles from “interesting concepts” to “noble ideals,” and so these levels of happiness/identity merit deeper exploration.

As will become clear, human beings possess four kinds of desire. The fulfillment of each kind of desire leads to happiness, while the non-fulfillment of these desires leads to unhappiness. One of these kinds of desires/happiness will become dominant in our lives, and when it does it will become our purpose in life. As this purpose becomes habitual, it will become our dominant identity. Thus, there is a natural progression from a dominant desire (happiness) to purpose in life to identity. The four *kinds* of desire/happiness may be organized into four *levels* in accordance with the degree to which they produce effects which are pervasive, enduring, and deep. “Pervasive” means to produce effects which go farther and farther beyond the self; “enduring” means to last longer; and deep means to utilize the higher powers of human consciousness, such as intelligence, creativity, idealism, moral reasoning, love, spiritual awareness, etc. The lower levels, though more immediately gratifying, intense, and surface-apparent, are less pervasive, enduring, and deep. The higher levels are precisely the opposite.

**Desire/Happiness Level 1** (in Latin, “*laetus*”) is the desire for externally stimulated or physical pleasures and possessions (e.g., a bowl of linguini or a new Mercedes e-Class with leather upholstery).

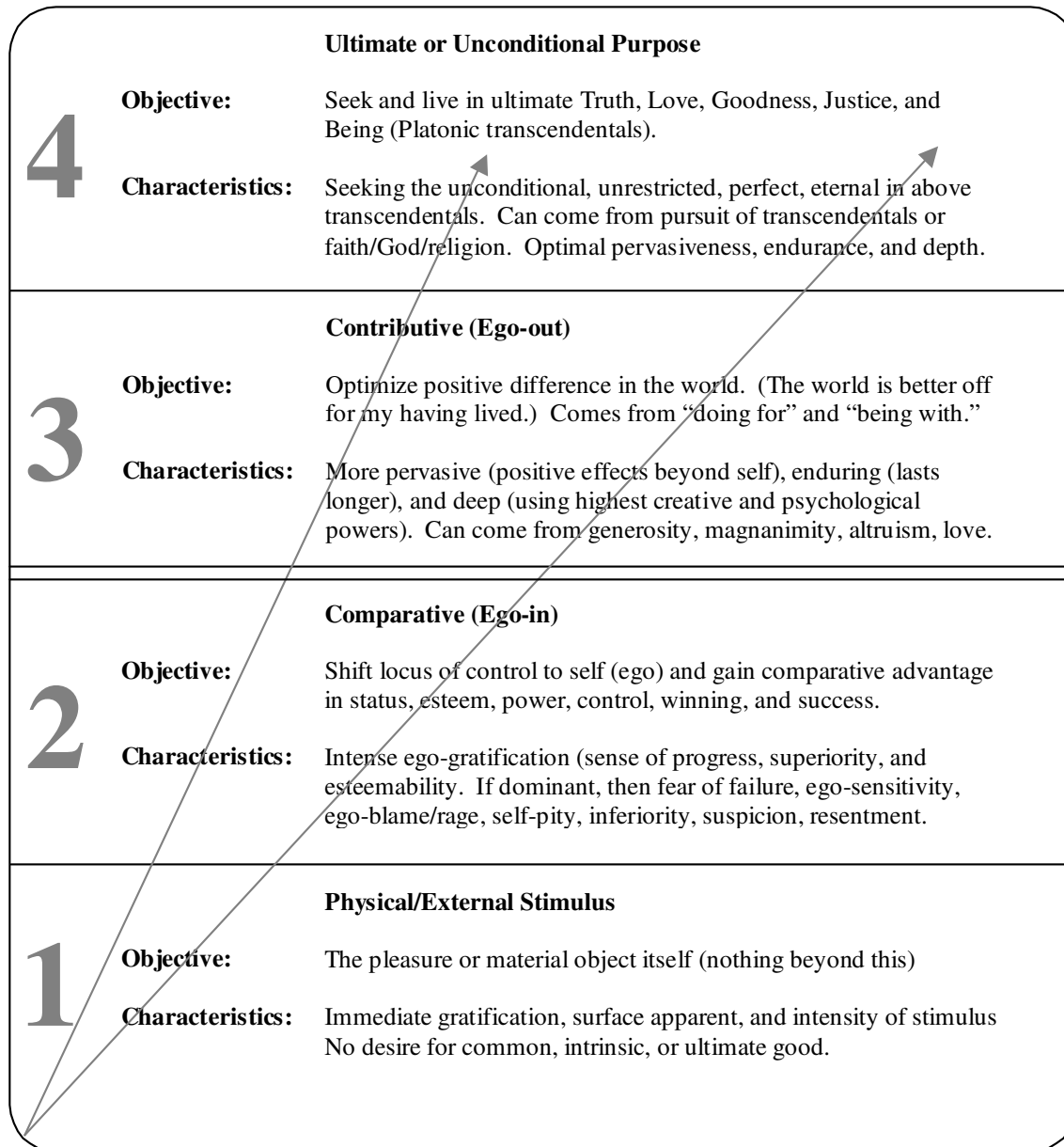
**Level 2** (in Latin, “*felix*”) is ego-gratification arising out of shifting the locus of control from the outer world to my inner world (my *ego* – “I”). Such ego-gratifications might take the form of increases in status, admiration, achievement, power, control, winning, etc., and generally entail a comparative advantage which compels questions such as, “Who’s got more intelligence; who’s got less intelligence?” and “Who’s got more status; who’s got less status?”

**The third level of desire/happiness** (in Latin, “*beatus*”) moves in the opposite direction of Level 2. Instead of shifting the locus of control from the outer world toward my inner world, it invests my inner world in the outer world, that is, it tries to make an optimal positive difference to the world (e.g., to family, friends, organization, community, church, culture, and kingdom of God) with my time, talents, energy, indeed, my life. It can occur through both action and empathy (being with others) and occurs most powerfully through *agape* (love without expectation of return – love for the sake of the beloved).

**Level 4** (*sublimis*) is the desire for the ultimate, unconditional, or perfect in Truth, Love, Goodness, Beauty, and Home. Faith identifies perfect and unconditional Truth, Love, Goodness, Beauty, and Home with God; and so Level 4, for people of faith, is the desire for God.

The above four levels of desire (or happiness) may be summarized in the foregoing diagram:

## Four Levels of Desire/Happiness



Normally, one of the four levels of desire becomes dominant and the others become either recessive or ignored. The dominant desire becomes our purpose in life (and eventually, our personal identity), while recessive ones serve the dominant one. Ignored desires generally frustrate or debilitate us. Even though all four desires are functional, the dominant desire (or identity) tends to control the way we view success, our goals in life, the way we conduct

relationships and view love, our principles and ethics, the ideals we seek, and the way we judge our self-worth, our progress in life, and our very selves. Needless to say, the kind of desire we allow *or* choose to become dominant is one of the most important decisions in our lives.

As one moves *up* the four levels of desire, one attains more pervasive, enduring, and deep purpose in life. For example, Level 3 or 4 purpose has a much greater effect in the world (more *pervasive*) than a Level 1 or 2 purpose (which is restricted to *self*-benefit). Similarly, Level 3 and 4 purpose *endures* much longer than Level 1 or 2 purpose. Level 4 purpose even endures unto eternity. Finally, Level 3 or 4 purpose is *deeper* (utilizes our higher powers of creativity, intellection, moral reasoning, love, and spiritual awareness) than Level 1 or 2 purpose. If efficacy in life is determined by the pervasiveness, endurance, and depth of one's actions, then the higher one moves up the levels of desire, the greater the effectiveness of one's life.

The only “down side” to this increase in effectiveness and purpose in life is that one has to delay gratification, look beneath and beyond the surface of life, and give up some degree of intensity. It is clear that Level 1 is immediately gratifying, surface apparent, and intense; while Level 4 frequently requires nuance, education, subtlety, delay in gratification, and detachment from intensity. Thus, the higher levels are marked by a trade-off – in order to attain to universal and eternal effects arising out of our self-transcendent powers of truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home, we frequently have to give up some degree of immediate gratification, intensity, and surface apparentness.

This “trade-off” marks one of the most difficult challenges of the identity transformation, for it is not easy to let go of what is so easily and intensely satisfying. Yet, it is worth it, for the move to Levels 3 and 4 fills us with higher purpose, more enduring (even eternal) effects, and awakens the highest, most sophisticated powers within us. (Moreover, Level 4 introduces us to the transcendent domain and the spiritual life.<sup>3</sup>)

As noted above, each level of desire/happiness can become dominant, and when it does, it becomes our purpose in life and our identity. In other books, I explain that human beings can only be *ultimately* satisfied by a Level 4 identity, because our desire for the unconditional and perfect in truth, love, goodness, beauty, and home can never be satiated by what is conditioned or imperfect. Inasmuch as God is unconditional and perfect Truth-Love-Goodness-Beauty-Home, then God can satisfy us.<sup>4</sup>

Now let us turn to a matter of considerable significance, namely, the transition from a dominant Level 2 (ego-comparative) identity to a dominant Level 3 (contributive) identity. The reason for emphasizing this transition is that it is the one with which most people in our culture will have to contend many times throughout their lives. Even though there are a large number of people who have a dominant Level 1 identity, many more people in our culture are unconsciously situated at a dominant Level 2 identity – and suffering significant emotional consequences because of it.

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<sup>3</sup> A more detailed explanation of Level 4 and the spiritual life may be found in Spitzer 2008.

<sup>4</sup> See Spitzer 2000, chapter 3; Spitzer 2008; and Spitzer 2009, chapter 8.

Recall that Level 2 is almost always linked to comparisons. In order to shift the locus of control from the outer world to the inner world, I must constantly ask myself, “Who’s achieving more? Who’s achieving less? Who’s making more progress? Whose making less? Who’s winning? Who’s losing? Who’s got more status? Who’s got less status? Who’s more popular? Who’s less popular? Who’s got more control? Who’s got less control? Who is more admired? Who is less admired? Who is more intelligent? Who is less intelligent?” Notice that one is using these comparative questions to obtain identity. Thus, one is literally living for a Level 2 answer to these questions, and is therefore treating these comparative characteristics as *ends in themselves*. Hence, one is not achieving in order to contribute to family, colleagues, or the culture; one is achieving as an end in itself, as if achievement gave life meaning. Similarly, one is not seeking status in order to have the credibility to do good for others or even the kingdom of God. One is simply seeking status as an end in itself. The same holds for winning, power, control, intelligence, and so forth.

Notice further that Level 2 is not bad. Indeed, quite the opposite. The desire for achievement leads to progress in civilization. The desire for respect leads to credibility, confidence, and self-respect. The desire to win leads to competitiveness and the seeking of excellence. Even the desire for power can be used for good purposes. So what’s the problem? The problem is not Level 2, but living for Level 2 *as an end in itself*. When one does this, then achievement leads to compulsive “getting ahead,” instead of “a good beyond the achievement.” Seeking respect leads to pandering after admiration. Power sought as an end in itself corrupts – and absolute power sought for itself corrupts absolutely.

A variety of consequences follows from this narrow purpose in life: one may feel emptiness arising out of “underliving life.” The desire to make a positive difference (or even an optimal positive difference) to family, friends, community, organization, colleagues, church, culture, and society (Level 3) goes unfulfilled. One begins to think that one’s life doesn’t really make any difference to the world or to history – “the world is not better off for my having lived.” To make matters worse, one’s desire for the ultimate (in Truth, Love, Goodness, Beauty, and Home – God) is also unfulfilled. Though one may long for the ultimate with all one’s heart, one’s obsession with Level 2 precludes the pursuit of Levels 3 and 4. Again, one’s spirit reacts with a profound sense of emptiness, a sense of underliving life, a more and more poignant awareness that “I am wasting the little precious time I have in this world.”

Additional negative emotions accompany this sense of emptiness. Most of these emotions arise out of a fixation on comparative advantage. Since a dominant Level 2 identity treats status, admiration, power, control, winning, etc. as ends in themselves, it is compelled to seek comparative advantage as its fulfillment. This fixation requires not only that I progress more and more (in status, power, winning, etc.), but also that I have *more* of it than Joe, Sue, Frank, and Mary. When I do not have more, when I am not better than others, I profoundly believe that my life is either stagnant or slipping away. I feel a profound diminishment in self-worth and success. And so I begin to feel jealousy, a malaise about life, inferiority, loneliness, frustration, and even a sense of self-pity and resentment.

One might respond that these negative emotions do not befall the dominant Level 2 *winner*, for to the victor go the spoils. While it is true that winners do receive significant ego-

gratification, it is worth noting that the above-mentioned emptiness still follows in its wake. Furthermore, such winners are obliged to increase in their Level 2 successes, because they cannot attain any sense of progress without doing so. If they do not continually increase in their successes, they experience the same kinds of malaise, inferiority, jealousy, frustration, and self-pity as non-winners.

Moreover, these winners contract a peculiar disease – namely, the desire to be overtly admired. When perceived inferiors do not acknowledge the winner’s superiority (and their own inferiority by comparison), the winner feels tremendous resentment. “You have not given me the accolades I deserve. And furthermore, you are actually treating yourself as my equal – who do you think you are?” This peculiar disease has another aspect, namely, contempt. Dominant Level 2 winners can’t help it. They really do feel that their lives are worth more than other people’s lives, and so they either project contempt or (if they are more enlightened) they are patronizingly condescending (“That’s a nice *little* project you did there”). In the end, such winners cannot afford to fail; if they do, those whom they have treated with contempt will savage them.

Furthermore, a winner’s self-image cannot tolerate being embarrassed in front of inferiors. Let us suppose you are a reasonably intelligent person, and you mispronounce the word “spectroscopy” in a public lecture, to which a colleague says, “I cannot believe that a person of your caliber would make such a mistake.” You go to your room, close the door, and play that excruciating tape over and over again in your mind until you want to do yourself physical harm, for the physical pain would be so much better than... “I can’t believe I made that mistake in public!” Dominant Level 2 winners also feel the need to blame others for failures (because, in principle, they cannot fail).

In sum, winners better be perfect; but then again, they can’t be altogether perfect. So winners must construct a huge façade and then protect it; but then again, they cannot construct a façade impenetrable enough to keep observant inferiors at bay. So, dominant Level 2 winners better be prepared for contempt, resentment, blame, anger, debilitating ego-sensitivities, and above all, loneliness – for no one (except Mother Theresa, and maybe their own mothers) will want to be around them for any other reason than sheer necessity. The reason I know all these things is because I have struggled and continue to struggle with these negative emotions (from both winning and losing). Nevertheless, I (and many others) can attest that Level 3 (contributive/love) and Level 4 (transcendent/spiritual life) help immeasurably to diminish the pain, emptiness, and obsession of a dominant Level 2 identity.

Unfortunately, making Level 3 and/or Level 4 a dominant identity is not as easy as simply making a choice. We have to allow ourselves to be at home with that choice, and then allow that choice to become habitual (so that we do not have to think about it all the time). This requires writing down certain concrete aspects of one’s new Level 3 and/or Level 4 identity, reviewing this document every morning for at least a month, and reflectively trying to resolve the tensions and problems that arise out of living in this new identity. I have found one particular technique to be quite helpful in carrying out this reflection process: write your own personal manifesto.

The easiest way to proceed with this task is to write down on a single sheet of paper (two sides, if you must) the ways in which you think you can make an optimal positive difference with your particular time, talent, and energy, to the following groups: family, friends, co-workers, stakeholders at work (employees, customers, etc.), church (if you have faith), the kingdom of God (if you have faith), your community (charities, sports teams, community boards, or other ways in which you might interact with the community), the culture (working in an educational institution, on a political campaign, or in the arts or the media where you might be able to influence people's values and ideals), and finally, the greater society (if you are a political or cultural leader). Ask yourself, "How can my part of the world be optimally better off for my having lived?" or "How can I leave an optimal legacy to my part of the world with my time, talent, and energy?" These questions take our attention away from who has more comparative advantage (e.g., "who's more or less intelligent?"), and instead put the focus on how we can use our intelligence, status, talents, energy, and time to make the world optimally better for our having lived. When you have completed this manifesto, put at the bottom of the list: "For this I came." This statement makes the list more than a set of aspirations, and transforms it into a life *purpose or identity* statement.

Remember, in order to get the most out of this exercise, once you have completed the manifesto, you must reflect on it for at least five minutes every day for at least a month, and you must also reflect on the tensions that this new identity may cause, particularly when it comes into conflict with the dominant Level 2 identity with which you may be more comfortable. Be patient with yourself. You will tend to return to the dominant Level 2 identity at least 20 times per day for a long time. However, stay the course, because in my experience (as well as that of many others) slowly but surely, the new identity will begin to take hold, reversions to the former dominant Level 2 identity will happen less frequently, and a new (almost addictive) sense of purpose and spirit in life will come in its wake. Along with this new sense of purpose and spirit will come a marked decrease in the anxieties of jealousy, fear of failure, ego-sensitivities, ego-rage, blaming of others, self-pity, contempt, inferiority, superiority, and the other negative emotional conditions mentioned above. Thus, this one change in perspective can lead not only to much greater efficacy in life, but also to greater happiness.

There is another remarkable effect stemming from this identity transformation, namely, the engagement of our hearts in the nine universal principles set out earlier in this book. As noted above, the engagement of the heart transforms these principles from "interesting concepts" to "noble ideals," and this makes all the difference. If you the reader have chosen to move toward Level 3 or Level 4, and if that purpose in life is beginning to take a dominant position within your psyche, and if you are feeling a marked decrease in the negative emotional conditions mentioned above, you will then want to re-read the first nine principles set out in this book, and you may want to consider the life issues in the light of these principles grasped through both the mind and the heart. If you resolve that these principles merit more than mere intellectual consideration, then I would ask that you teach them, and take action against the obvious injustices they elucidate.

## **II.**

### **The Six Categories of Cultural Discourse**

We now have only one more subject to consider, namely, how to speak about these issues within the culture. There are six terms (concepts) which seem to come up not only in the discussion of the life issues, but also with any issue concerned with the ten universal principles:

1. Quality of Life /Success
2. Freedom (or “choice”)
3. Ethics/Virtue
4. Love
5. Suffering
6. Social Responsibility and the Common Good

The reader may have already surmised that the definitions of these terms change along with one’s level of happiness/purpose. Thus, if one has a dominant Level 1 view of happiness/purpose, one will view quality of life or freedom in a very different way than if one has a dominant Level 2 or dominant Level 3 view of happiness/purpose. This means that there will be at least four different meanings for each of the above six terms (concepts) which can make speaking to the culture very difficult. A person at Level 2 may say, “We must protect freedom,” and this could mean something totally different from a Level 3 person’s desire for freedom. Aside from the obvious miscommunications which can result, one can expect misunderstanding of motives, suspicion of others, unnecessarily heated debates, and a host of other problems opening upon a kind of cultural chaos. So what can we do about it?

At the very least, we can be certain about what *our* dominant purpose/identity is, what level of discourse we are using, and help others to clarify the level of discourse they are using. This will help to sort out unnecessary miscommunications and misunderstandings – leaving only those differences which are truly substantive. If you are a Level 3 person and seek to make the world an optimally better place for your having lived, you are going to have a very different view of the six above-mentioned terms (and the ten principles) than someone who has a dominant Level 2 identity. Unless you can convince this person to move to Level 3, you may as well agree to disagree, because your fundamental definitions of terms, your interpretation of the ten principles, and your position on the issues will simply be incongruent. However, if you disagree on the issues, first see if there is some Level 3 common ground upon which you both can stand. If there is common ground, then see if you can get a common Level 3 understanding of the six above-mentioned terms. And if you can, then you will be able to make progress about discussing and implementing the ten universal principles.

So how can we get a consistent understanding of the six above-mentioned concepts? I will here set out a brief synopsis of each, showing the changes in definition that occur according to the level of happiness/purpose through which they are interpreted. If you would like a much fuller explanation of these concepts, you will want to consult my book, *Healing the Culture: A Commonsense Philosophy of Happiness, Freedom, and the Life Issues* (chapters 4-7). Let us begin with quality of life/success.



## **II.A Quality of Life /Success**

It should come as no surprise that our views of quality of life and success will mirror our view of happiness/purpose; for if we are happy and have purpose, we will think of ourselves as having a good quality of life and as being successful. Therefore, our definitions will very likely fall into the following categories.

Level 1 – Quality of life /success is acquiring many material possessions, feeling entertained, having access to sensual pleasure and kinesthetic activities (e.g., skiing), and having nice things to wear, etc.

Level 2 – Quality of life /success is having competitive advantage, having talents which will enable us to stand out and be respected; being respected by people who we respect; having status that can be objectively measured (e.g., high prestige career, influence in public, academic qualifications); being competitive or a winner, having control or power in family, organizational, community, and societal settings; having admirers and feeling elite or special.

Level 3 – Quality of life /success is having an optimal positive impact on family, friends, community, organization, colleagues, church, culture, and society; being able to leave a legacy; and having good empathetic relationships (where giving is as important as receiving). The objective is to make the best use of one's time, talent, and energy to make a positive difference rather than counting one's talents (say, intelligence) as an end in itself.

Level 4 – Quality of life /success is being able to contribute to a cause that will last for an eternity; being able to contribute to the building of the kingdom of God; having an impact on others that will last for an eternity (e.g., helping others with their faith); engaging in activities that will be pleasing to God; the pursuit of absolute Truth (theological truth); the pursuit of absolute Justice/Goodness (theological goodness); loving surrender to God; and being at home with God.

## **II.B Freedom**

The way we view happiness/purpose also affects the way we view freedom, because freedom can either serve us alone, or it can serve some purpose beyond ourselves, and even an ultimate purpose beyond ourselves (God). This will affect the way we view options, commitment, self-sacrifice, and surrender.

Level 1 – I feel free when I am getting my strongest sensorial desires met as quickly as possible. I feel free when I can get an ice cream cone when I want it; when I can get cash from my bank account when I want it; when I can be emotionally satisfied by somebody else when I want it (e.g., get sympathy or affection). It also refers to being able to avoid emotionally dissatisfying situations as quickly as possible. I feel free when I don't have to study for an exam; when I

don't have to help Joe; when I don't have to do chores. Evidently, this notion of freedom is antithetical to commitment.

Level 2 – When I am in relationship with others, I feel most free when I am getting what I want over against others; when I can make my will felt; when others cannot constrain me; when I can constrain others. When I am by myself, I feel most free when I am self-determined and when I can keep all my options open for as long as I would like (avoiding commitments which would foreclose perfectly good options). If I have to be committed (select a course of action which will require time and energy, and therefore will foreclose certain options), I feel best when I am able to achieve the goals which will bring me status, admiration, power, and success. Thus, the notion of freedom accommodates some measure of commitment and self-sacrifice, but only to achieve goals which will benefit me and my long term comparative advantage. I feel constrained (not free) when somebody else's will prevails over mine; when someone has power over me; when I have to do things for somebody else (which will not advance my ego-comparative goals); when I have to spend time with people who will not advance my long-term ego-comparative goals; or when I cannot pursue the fullest degree of competitiveness because of the ethical concerns or perceptions of others.

Level 3 – I feel free when I am advancing a noble purpose which will make the world better; when I am leaving a legacy that is truly worth my time and energy; when I am entering into common cause with similarly committed people to achieve a noble purpose; and when I am able to pursue what is most pervasive, enduring, and deep without being inhibited by the need for ego-gratifications, sensorial distraction, recognition from others, and comparative advantage. This notion of freedom shifts the focus from getting what I want (L1) or being in control or on the top (L2), to actualizing what is objectively good for something or someone beyond myself. It therefore makes accommodation for, and values, the fruits of discipline, commitment, and self-sacrifice. One may find this discipline to be difficult, commitments to be tedious, and self-sacrifice to be painful, but one appreciates the ability and the freedom to do these things in order to actualize an objective good. Notice that this freedom means that one does not feel constrained (unfree) by discipline, commitment, and self-sacrifice, but precisely the opposite (i.e., free to be able to do a good which is difficult, tedious, and painful, but nonetheless worthwhile).

Level 4 – Freedom is seeking the will of God and acting on it out of a conviction that God's will is what will actualize what is most pervasive, enduring, and deep. There is a willingness to commit myself and make sacrifices of what I would like, or what I would will (even if these seem to be contributive) in order to actualize what I believe to be the will of God. Therefore, this kind of freedom is frequently identified with surrender to God. The fruit of this kind of freedom is being an instrument of God; being able to do what is most pervasive, enduring, and deep in the eyes of God (which may be at odds with what I might think); and being at peace with my surrender to God (even if this requires giving up what I want – L1; giving up achieving a goal that would bring status or power – L2; or even giving up doing something which I think would be very contributive – L3 – but which may conflict with something that I consider to be the will of God). Freedom is being at peace with, and being able to accomplish, whatever I discern to be the will of God according to God's truth and God's love (which may not necessarily be my view of truth or love).

## II.C Ethics/Virtue

Ethics and virtue generally arise out of Level 3 or Level 4. Dominant Level 1 and Level 2 individuals are generally not internally motivated to be ethical; they generally require some extrinsic motivation or reward.

Level 1 (Modern Epicurean) – There is very little comprehension of ethics/virtue having value. There is no internal motivation to learn about or pursue ethics. Indeed, this group is generally perplexed as to the purpose of ethics. If persons from this group believe that they will obtain a pleasure-materialistic advantage from appearing ethical, they will probably accommodate this by giving the appearance that matters of virtue and ethics are important. Otherwise, if someone is appealing to persons from this group to be ethical or virtuous for its own sake (because it's the right thing to do), these individuals will meet this suggestion with almost complete indifference.

Level 2 (Modern Stoic) – Inasmuch as Level 2 requires delayed gratification in order to obtain success, status, perceived intelligence, control, and power, this group tends to embrace modern stoic values (courage, perseverance, and self-discipline), because these virtues tend to manifest strength, autonomy, and competitiveness (all of which tend to help in the pursuit of Level 2 goals, image, and status). Dominant Level 2 persons often treat the virtues of courage, perseverance, and self-discipline as ends in themselves. They may pursue these virtues in order to see themselves as “above mediocrity” and even superior to others. In a dominant Level 2 perspective, these virtues do not serve higher virtues such as prudence (conscience), justice, and love, and therefore could be used in the service of arrogance, injustice, and cruelty.

Level 3 – In this perspective, the “other-centered” virtues have priority over the stoic virtues. Thus, prudence (conscience), justice, or love (or all three) are seen as “end virtues” while the stoic virtues are seen as “means virtues.” The stoic virtues are necessary to carry out end virtues (e.g., one must have courage and self-discipline in order to be just and loving), but the stoic virtues are not viewed as ends in themselves. In a Level 3 view, the principle of non-maleficence is undisputed and indispensable for a good life (because the Golden Rule – L3 – presumes the Silver Rule); and since Principles 6, 7, 8, and 9 are natural extensions of the principle of non-maleficence, they too are viewed as undisputed and indispensable for a good life. Persons in this group tend to value and listen to conscience, and to subscribe to Principle 5 (the end does not justify the means), and therefore feel themselves accountable to some rules or ethical precepts (such as “don't cheat,” “don't lie,” “don't steal”). They also tend to see the Golden Rule as a value because the Golden Rule is essentially contributive. Therefore, they see social responsibility and altruistic activity (to better humankind) as a part of their ethical obligation. They generally have a sophisticated sense of community and frequently subordinate individual goods to the common good.

Level 4 – In the West, the transcendent and religious perspectives tend to hold all of the tenets of Level 3 ethics (see above). There is generally a belief that all of these tenets are part of the divine will; therefore, they have value not only because they avoid unnecessary harm to others, do good for others, and enable us to pursue our ends in the right way (for the sake of others), but also because these actions are pleasing to God, who is generally viewed as just and loving.

There is the expectation that God cannot be less just or loving than any human being, and so there is little tension between Level 3 ethical objectives and Level 4 ethical objectives. This group would attest that prayer, grace, and common cause with a just and loving God reinforces and helps them in their ethical beliefs and conduct.

## **II.D Love**

Love (*agape*) may be defined as empathy for another leading to a unity with another whereby doing the good for the other is just as easy, if not easier than doing the good for the self. There are other notions of love, such as feelings of affection (in Greek, “*storge*”); friendship (in Greek, “*philia*”), and romantic love (in Greek, “*eros*”). *Agape* is a Level 3 and/or Level 4 virtue, because it is essentially contributive (seeking the good for the other). Inasmuch as dominant Level 1 seeks pleasure-materialistic satisfactions, and dominant Level 2 seeks ego-comparative satisfactions (and can even be narcissistic), these lower levels can come into conflict with *agape*. However, this group can experience the other kinds of love as specified below.

Level 1 – Since dominant Level 1 individuals are likely to subordinate contributive ideals to pleasure-materialistic satisfaction, it is unlikely that they will pursue *agape*. They may not even be able to understand the value of *agape*. These individuals’ experience of love generally focuses on feelings of affection (*storge*) and feelings of romantic love (*eros*); they do not generally see these feelings as serving the greater end of *agape*. These feelings tend to be ends in themselves. Persons in this group also form significant friendships (*philia*), but these friendships tend to be what Aristotle termed “friendships of pleasure,” or “friendships of utility;” not friendships arising out of empathy (which lead to doing the good for the other as if one were doing a good for oneself). In light of all this, it is unlikely that persons in this group will be able to understand and appreciate Principles 5-10. They may be able to appreciate Principle 4 (non-maleficence) as a necessity to maintain appropriate social order so that pleasure-materialistic satisfactions will not be interrupted.

Level 2 – Dominant Level 2 individuals may experience occasional moments of empathy, and may actually desire to make a positive difference in the world; but their preoccupation with achieving ego-comparative advantage tends to overshadow their positive sensibilities and motivations. When ego-comparative advantage becomes obsessive, it leads to narcissism which almost completely precludes empathy and contributive motivations. In this respect, the dominant Level 2 may be less successful at *agape* than a dominant Level 1, because the dominant Level 2 could actually destroy *agape* in order to achieve ego-comparative satisfaction. Like the dominant Level 1, this person’s experience of love focuses on feelings of affection (*storge*) and romantic feelings (*eros*). These feelings of *eros* can be tied into a narcissistic need *to be* loved, and persons in this group can mistakenly think that they are practicing *agape*, when in reality, they are simply appreciating the admiration or romantic love that others have for them. This is not to say that “being loved” is inconsistent with *agape*, because it is quite consistent so long as it is accompanied by genuine empathy for the other whereby doing the good for the other is just as easy as doing the good for oneself.

Persons in this group also focus on friendships of pleasure and utility, and on friendships of what Aristotle called “intellectual companionship” (frequently to reinforce their sense and reputation of being intelligent and elite). When the ego-comparative identity becomes obsessive, it can lead not only to narcissism, but also to elitism which may produce a subconscious contempt (and even hatred) for perceived inferiors. This could lead to contempt for Principles 5-10, which may be seen as elevating inferiors to an undeserved status which entitles them to undeserved rewards. This group may be quite unaware of the narcissism and elitism underlying this contempt, because they may feel that they subscribe to the “correct” positions in other important areas of justice (such as alleviating hunger or disease). If a genuine feeling of *agape* (authentic, empathetic, self-sacrificial love) truly underlies this concern for justice, then these individuals can be persuaded to move to a consistent Level 3 position of love (which would include the unborn, the elderly, the physically and mentally challenged, etc.).

Level 3 – The ideal of love for these individuals is to make *agape* primary, while allowing the other three loves (*storge*, *eros*, and *philia*) to reinforce, enhance, and be directed by *agape* in ways that are appropriate to them. This can be very difficult to accomplish, because people do not achieve the ideal of Level 3 love in an instantaneous fashion. The process is filled with new beginnings, fits and starts, setbacks, slow progress, frustrations, and a myriad of other challenges. Thus, a person trying to move from dominant Level 2 to dominant Level 3 may be sorely tempted to be narcissistic, to place *being loved* above *loving others*, and to place romantic gratification over authentic empathy and self-gift *at the very moment* they are trying to prioritize *agape*. This schizophrenia can be exceedingly frustrating and even discouraging. However, the pursuit of Level 3 love is worth the effort, because it eventually alerts us to our moments of inauthenticity, and helps us to deepen the authenticity of *agape* in our lives. Every frustrating setback, when dealt with patiently and maturely, produces both of these beneficial effects.

Changes in external circumstances (such as being promoted, acquiring a Ph.D., gaining increases in status or financial resources) can also lead to setbacks because they can tempt individuals to bask in their new Level 2 glory and, as a consequence, move away from authentic empathy and self-gift. Once again, perseverance is the key. When one discovers oneself reverting to a dominant Level 2 view of love, one must again rekindle one’s sense of the intrinsic goodness, mystery, and lovability of every individual (inducing empathy), and one’s sense of nobility for making an optimal positive difference with one’s life in the world. Every setback which is appropriately redressed will again produce authenticity and depth of *agape*.

When Level 3 love grows in depth and authenticity, Principles 4-10 will be viewed as self-evident, undisputed, and indispensable. It would be unthinkable and unbearable for someone with authentic empathy and contributive spirit to advocate unnecessary harm to anyone (Principle 4), to use unjust means to attain just ends (Principle 5), to value human beings as anything less than their fully developed potential (Principle 6), to deny any human being the rights that belong to them by their very nature and existence (Principle 7), to put one group’s liberty or property rights above the right to live (Principle 8), and to lay undue burdens on one group in order to produce new freedoms for others (Principle 9).

Level 4 – These individuals are generally motivated by a recognition that God loves them in an unconditional and perfectly authentic way. This recognition stems from their awareness of

the intrinsic goodness, mystery, and lovability of others, the goodness of *agape* as the primary meaning of life, and perfect *agape* as being integral to the Creator of human nature.<sup>5</sup> The recognition of God's unconditional love for these individuals generally produces a loving response from them which tends to be reinforced by a felt awareness of God's presence and guiding force. A relationship with this unconditionally loving God produces a call to ever-greater authenticity and humility which deepens Level 3 love for neighbor. Thus, Level 4 love of God deepens the practice of Level 3 love of neighbor, which, in turn, deepens the Level 4 love of God. Additionally, Level 4 love of God alerts us to an awareness that we are not the only ones who are sacred (called to perfect love with God). Every other human being is also sacred, and therefore inestimably precious and lovable to the unconditionally loving Creator. Thus, Level 4 love of God calls Level 3 love of neighbor to perfection. It deepens authenticity and heartfelt commitment which, in turn, makes more unthinkable and unbearable any violation of Principles 4-10.

As with Level 3 love, Level 4 love is not instantaneous. It too takes time to gain in strength and authenticity, and this process will be filled with frustrations, challenges, and setbacks. However, as with Level 3 love, every setback, dealt with patiently and maturely, can be the pathway to continued growth in *agape*.

## **II.E Suffering**

Giving meaning to suffering again depends on one's level of happiness/purpose because this view will determine the kinds of value we will see in suffering. The benefits of suffering are generally found in Level 3 and Level 4, because suffering can help us to detach ourselves from superficial purpose in life (living beneath ourselves), to value making a positive contribution beyond ourselves, to value humility as the way to make *agape* authentic, to see the value of relationship with a loving God, and to allow God to help us in our pursuit of virtue and love. There are some Level 2 benefits of suffering which might be termed "stoic benefits." These would include becoming stronger, more courageous, and more experienced through the pains of challenge in life. The following will make this clear.

Level 1 (Modern Epicurean) – Inasmuch as these individuals interpret quality of life in terms of pleasure-materialistic satisfactions, and inasmuch as suffering can deprive them of these satisfactions, suffering is viewed very negatively. Inasmuch as the benefits of suffering are generally found in Level 3 and Level 4 (and stoic benefits in Level 2), these individuals will usually see little benefit in suffering. Hence, suffering seems to be a pure negative without any purpose. The only recourse left to these individuals is to compensate suffering with sensorial-materialistic pleasure (e.g., eat something, drink alcohol, or go shopping). Unfortunately, such pleasures have a limited value in their capacity to compensate for suffering, and so long-lasting or deep suffering will generally be viewed as unmeaningful, and can very likely lead to anxiety, depression, and even thoughts of death. Many in this group would consider euthanasia to be a social good. They may also believe that abortion is a good solution for children who would be born into poverty.

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<sup>5</sup> See Spitzer 2009, Chapter 1, where the progression of this insight into the love of God is set out.

Level 2 (Modern Stoic) – Inasmuch as individuals in this group attribute value to stoic virtues (strength, courage, self-discipline, perseverance – see above), they are likely to positively interpret suffering in light of them. The sufferings of war have value because they help to control fear and refine courage. Suffering that leads one close to death is good because “what does not kill me makes me stronger.” Inasmuch as all suffering can lead to greater self-discipline, it can help to develop thick skin, and to meet significant challenges more easily. Suffering can also help one rise above mediocrity and the baseness of humanity (which can be a significant ego-comparative boost).

The difficulty with this view of suffering is that it treats the stoic virtues as ends in themselves, and inasmuch as stoic virtues are self-centered, suffering has no value beyond oneself. Thus, if suffering reaches a point where it is too debilitating to be compensated by stoic benefits, these individuals will devalue themselves and their lives. Instead of moving above mediocrity, they will feel themselves slipping into mediocrity which may lead them to anxiety, depression, and even thoughts of death. Suicide was considered noble by many classical stoics (because “it is better to be dead than the living dead”).

This group would tend to view euthanasia for people slipping into mediocrity as a social good. They might also tend to view aborting children who would be born without opportunity for wealth or advancement to be a social good.

Level 3 (*agape*) – These individuals believe that there are significant benefits in suffering. They see suffering as helping to lead to identity transformation (from L1 to L2 to L3), and believe that their progress from superficial purpose in life to contributive-efficacious purpose comes, in many respects, from suffering. They also believe that suffering is integral in their journey toward *agape* and also to the deepening of *agape* in their lives. Many of these individuals believe that suffering leads them to greater toleration of weakness, more empathy for others, a decrease in feelings of superiority and contempt, a more realistic sense of themselves, more compassion for others in their weakness, more forgiving attitudes toward others, and other attributes integral to *agape*. If these individuals see stoic virtues arising out of suffering, they do not treat them as ends in themselves, but rather tend to see them as helping the primary virtue of *agape* (“the self-discipline and courage that comes with my suffering helps me to be a more loving person”).

Since individuals in this group are alert to the possibility of identity transformation and more authentic *agape* arising out of suffering, they tend to look for these opportunities in suffering, and so help to bring them about. Thus, even though they may feel sadness, challenge, and malaise during times of extended suffering, they are less likely to become depressed and despairing (though this can happen).

This group tends to view the last months of life as very important, because great progress can be made in forgiveness, compassion, empathy, and *agape*, which not only can deepen the heart of the suffering person, but also leave a legacy for survivors. Thus, this group tends to view euthanasia as a waste of one of the most important periods of life. Furthermore, this group does not restrict “life’s opportunities” to those which would produce advancement, status, comparative advantage, power, and other Level 2 benefits; but rather sees opportunities in being

contributive to family, friends, community, church, etc., and in using empathy and friendship as a way of helping others. Thus, a lack of Level 2 opportunity does not equate with meaninglessness of life, and so the abortion of children who are born into poverty (or who may lack Level 2 opportunities) is not viewed as a social good, but rather as a waste of a life that could be filled with love and be optimally contributive.

Level 4 –These individuals generally believe that love (*agape*) is the meaning of suffering, and that God is love. Therefore, they believe that God will redeem their suffering by guiding them to greater opportunities and depths of love, and that they do not have to be the primary instruments through which suffering will become efficacious. They see God guiding them to new paths of life, new opportunities to serve, new friends with whom to serve, and new communities in which to participate. These changes produce a new efficacy and sense of purpose. These individuals also see God as guiding them to eternal life. As such, although they may feel quite bereft at, say, the loss of a loved one, they do not see any particular suffering as *ultimately* tragic, because all suffering will be redeemed in God’s loving eternity. In their faith, they see God as helping them to see the transcendent and eternal dignity (sacredness) of every human being, and so they are inclined to help others see this dignity in themselves. Thus, they see suffering as helping them to be disciples of both love and hope in the world.

Though these individuals can feel great sadness and loss in times of suffering, their faith tends to obviate depression and despair so long as they continue to trust in God and remember His unconditional love. Since they view all human beings as having transcendent and eternal dignity, they see suffering as something positive leading toward unconditional love in eternal life. As such, they do not view euthanasia as either an individual or social good. Furthermore, since they view every individual as having a transcendent and eternal dignity, they do not see human beings as the possession of any other human being, but rather the possession of God. Therefore, they tend to view abortion in all its forms as a violation of this sacred dignity.

## **II.F Social Responsibility and the Common Good**

Our view of social responsibility and the common good follows directly from our views of freedom, ethics, and love. It is best to avoid associating a particular economic or political system (say capitalism or Marxism) with any specific level of social responsibility and common good, but rather to use the most proven principles of economics and social theory to carry out our convictions about the common good.

Level 1 – Since persons in this group have an individualist-emotive view of freedom (getting my strongest desire or emotion fulfilled as soon as possible), an epicurean view of ethics (to assure enough social order to allow for uninterrupted pleasure-materialistic satisfactions), and a view of love which focuses on *storge*, *eros*, and limited kinds of friendship, they will not have a developed view of social responsibility or the common good. Even if they understand these concepts, they will very probably not care about them, and will not factor them in to their decision-making process. Therefore, they will be unmotivated by Principles 5-10, and may not even want to learn about these principles. They will not want to involve themselves in the formation of culture, and will probably consider this to be a waste of time.



Level 2 – Since people in this group have an autonomous view of freedom (“I feel free when I am in control and when others are not impinging upon me”), a stoic view of virtue (which values virtues such as courage and self-discipline), and a view of love which focuses on *storge*, *eros*, and limited kinds of friendship, they will generally limit their view of social responsibility and the common good to what they can influence and control, and to areas from which they can obtain Level 2 benefits. Therefore, they are unlikely to have an interest in domains of the common good which are outside their sphere of influence. They may be curious about Principles 5-10, but will be unlikely to promote them (or care about them) beyond their sphere of influence.

Level 3 – Individuals in this group move beyond freedom as mere self-determination and see freedom as the ability (discipline and commitment) to actualize optimal contribution in the world. They also believe that stoic virtues are subordinated to ends virtues (such as justice and love), and so are naturally disposed toward the common good considered in itself (not the common good within one’s sphere of influence). This group also views love in terms of authentic *agape*, and so feels not only a responsibility for, but a compassion toward all human beings, particularly those who are marginalized or in need. As one grows in Level 3 commitment (see above, Love – Level 3), one develops a deeper sense of social responsibility and takes action to help both neighbor and stranger. Inasmuch as Principles 4-10 are integral to the most basic concept of the common good, this group will be motivated to teach and promote these principles in all domains of culture, and to actualize these principles with respect to every relevant ethical issue.

Level 4 – These individuals will have convictions similar to those in the Level 3 group. Since they believe in a transcendent Principle (God), they will see all human beings as belonging to God’s family. They will be solid in their conviction that Principles 4-9 should be shared with the entire world. Since they believe not only in the intrinsic value of human life, but also in the transcendent and eternal (sacred) value of human life, they will generally view Principles 4-10 as having not only a natural significance, but also a transcendent and eternal significance.

### III. CONCLUSION

As can be seen, one’s level of happiness and purpose in life is quite relevant to what one believes about quality of life, freedom, ethics, love, suffering, and social responsibility; and what one believes about these six concepts is quite relevant to how one values Principles 4-10. Even if dominant Level 1 and dominant Level 2 individuals understand these principles and the importance they have enjoyed in world history, they will find these principles difficult to care about or promote because they are focused on a different dimension of identity and life.

Our culture tends to foster dominant Level 2 individuals. Even though this dominant identity may make us unhappy (because of jealousy, fear of failure, ego-sensitivity, etc.), we can become almost obsessed by it if we do not see it as the root of our unhappiness. As a result, we can find ourselves empty and unhappy, under-living our lives, and caring little for anything beyond “how I measure up.” When this becomes one’s dominant perspective, the ten universal principles seem to be little else than interesting abstractions or footnotes to intellectual history.

But if we can break free of the grip of dominant Level 2, if we can see our way clear to choosing a Level 3 and/or Level 4 identity, if we can select some friends or groups who will help us to maintain and grow in this new identity, and if we can keep ourselves on the road to greater actualization of Level 3 and/or Level 4 identity (despite the many setbacks that will occur), then our lives will begin to be free of the negative emotions mentioned above, begin to become more efficacious, and begin to create a lasting legacy of goodness and love (even an eternal legacy). The ten universal principles will then take on a significance in our minds and hearts that they never had before, and they will become something worth protecting and even fighting for. At this juncture, the life issues will not simply be a matter of personal choice; they will be a matter of protecting the innocent and protecting our culture, and therefore, worthy of the personal sacrifices which may be asked of us.