



The Capacity for Ethical Conduct: On psychic existence and the way we relate to others

David P. Levine

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What is the root cause of ethical failure? Why is preoccupation with ethics more a part of the problem than a part of the solution? What makes ethical conduct a natural expression of who we are? What enables us to be ourselves in our relations with others?

Ethical failure has become a significant concern in public life, in organizations and in educational institutions. *The Capacity for Ethical Conduct* explores how qualities of character and personality either make ethical conduct possible for the individual or foster ethical failure.

David Levine discusses how ethical conduct is a special way of relating to others, one that secures respect for their integrity by assuring that what they do can express who they are. He argues that this special way of relating to others results not from knowledge of, or a stated commitment to, rules, norms and values, but from the way we experience ourselves, especially from our ability to make a positive emotional investment in being and having a self. Traditionally, emphasis on the importance of values and ethics in shaping conduct tends to be connected to the need to find fault in self and others, fostering an atmosphere where the self is put at risk in its relations to others. This means that an excessive emphasis on ethics, rather than assuring ethical conduct, tends instead to create interpersonal settings marked by emotional assault. Because of this, talk about ethics often expresses ambivalence about ethical conduct, which makes the familiar combination of preoccupation with ethics and ethical failure unsurprising.

The Capacity for Ethical Conduct explores the ways in which the interpersonal world of work either fosters a feeling of safety or encourages various forms of emotional assault. Presenting case studies and applying psychoanalytic object relation theory and self psychology, this book explores the factors underlying ethical failure and the capacity for ethical conduct. It will be of interest to scholars and practitioners in the fields of psychoanalysis, psychology, philosophy, sociology, organizational dynamics, management and public administration.

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