
This book is a masterly application of empirical method on a matter of vital importance. It seeks to understand behavior in commerce and politics as recorded in centuries of history ranging from ancient civilizations to modern multinationals.

In a dramatized dialogue between five fictional (but very true-to-life) characters, fourteen conversations are presented to discuss and analyze the empirical details of how people trade with one another in organized ways and how they protect this trade from disorganizing itself. From these details, many moral precepts are inferred, of which thirty precepts are found to be specifically relevant to commerce and politics.

Jacobs observes that some of these precepts manifest a tendency to cluster together and others a tendency to conflict with other precepts. She arranges the precepts into two groups called the "commercial syndrome" and the "guardian syndrome."

The commercial syndrome consists of precepts to: shun force, come to voluntary agreements, be honest, collaborate easily with strangers and aliens, compete, respect contracts, use initiative and enterprise, be open to inventiveness and novelty, be efficient, promote comfort and convenience, dissent for the sake of the task, invest for productive purposes, be industrious, be thrifty, and be optimistic. The guardian syndrome consists of precepts to shun trading, exert prowess, be obedient and disciplined, adhere to tradition, respect hierarchy, be loyal, take vengeance, deceive for the sake of the task, make rich use of leisure, be ostentatious, dispense largesse, be exclusive, show fortitude, be fatalistic, and treasure honor.
As this two-syndrome pattern emerges in the dramatized conversation, dialectical situations also emerge, sometimes leading to innovative proposals of resolving them with symbiotic and flexible processes, and sometimes accepted as challenges for further study. The biggest challenge is the problem of systemic corruption arising from one syndrome embracing functions belonging to the other syndrome. This and other problems confront readers who are overwhelmed by daily reports of graft and corruption in high places, and by many moral dilemmas often experienced in the marketplace and in the corridors of power.

Some readers may notice a remark of the "Hortense" dialogist about family: she says "I'm sick of cant about the family being the bedrock of society. The reverse is true" (p. 209). The reverse is not completely true. Society may be the bedrock of those nuclear and extended families whose participation in society is limited to commercial and political activities. But are these activities the systematic foundation or "bedrock" of all human good? The answer has to come from a higher viewpoint coherent with the transcendental precept: Be responsible.

There is need to examine the record of moral responsibility of the present multinational society. This society is largely under the formidable prowess exerted by the World Bank which, "inspite of its name, is a thoroughly political outfit, not a commercial enterprise" (p. 132). It ignores the moral precepts of the commercial syndrome, particularly the precepts to be competitive and to be open to inventiveness and novelty. Hence, the systemic corruption eroding multinational society. Unless the integrity of the commercial moral syndrome is restored immediately, the long-term consequence is chaos.

However, "even chaos has patterns" as "Kate" says on page 19, no doubt voicing the insights of Jacobs and her extended family (named on page 235). She adds "I like uncovering systems; it's what I have enjoyed most . . ." (p. 21). Such joy of discovery indicates that the two-syndrome pattern, offered by Jacobs and her family to society, is really a heuristic pattern. It is a tool with which society can, if it chooses, discover systems of survival despite threats of chaos.

This book is highly recommended to television programmers here in the Philippines. It will challenge them to produce a series of talk-shows featuring this or a similar drama. Such a production will require a thorough study of the sources of data offered by Jacobs and of their relevance to the Philippine situation. The study is vital, for it concerns survival amid chaos.

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