Moral ambition or, conversely, ambitious morality?

A quest for the best solutions to the world's biggest and smallest problems.

What happens inside you when you change the sequence of these words?
Ever since I first heard the term "moral ambition," something about it triggered me. On the one hand, there is, of course, much to be said for an ambition driven by morality. But or rather, and on the other hand, does that really emphasize what matters most? Whenever I brought up the reversed phrase—"ambitious morality"—during a conversation, I could see the other person thinking. Yes, that feels different; it represents a fundamental distinction.
Placing morality at the center and being ambitious about it.
That is different from placing ambition at the center and being moral within that pursuit.

Bregman (historian, author and founder of the school for Moral ambition) describes moral ambition as "the desire to be among the best, but with different measures of success. Not a fat paycheck, a fancy title, or a corner office, but a career dedicated to the best solutions for the world's biggest problems."
A noble pursuit, certainly. Truly admirable. And.....
Different measures of success—distinct from a fat paycheck, a fancy title, or a corner office. That raises questions. What, then, are those measures? What are those best solutions, and how clearly are they debated? Best solutions according to whom? And how do you create a win-win-win-win-win situation? After all, I assume that the best solutions for global problems aren't meant for a select few, but for everyone.

Your soul in service of your ego, or your ego in service of your soul?

The way you phrase things matter. In fact, it changes the very essence.

The desire to belong to the "best" puts the ego in the center and at the front.
The desire to put your best foot forward "for the greater good" places inspiration at the heart of things.
While "the best" relates to who you want to be (identity); putting your best foot forward is about behavior and capability—the actions that must ultimately lead to results when it comes to improving the world.

In Dutch the term vision is translated into 'visie', instead of into 'visioen'.
A 'visie' is similar to your 'perspective on things', which is fundamentally different from a 'visioen', your visionary ideal.
In your visionary ideal, you can embrace your aspirations for a better world. What does that better world look like? So 'visioen' is a much more proper name to use when speaking about ambitious morality.
And then comes the question: What is your perspective on how to realize this vision, how is it aligned with your vision. What are the best solutions to the world's greatest and smallest problems?

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One of the most important measures of succes

From macro to micro.

It is a little embarrassing that,
after forty-five years of research and study,
the best advice I can give to people is
to be a little kinder to each other.
Aldous Huxley[1]

In my view, communicating with others in a civilized, respectful, and thoughtful manner lies at the heart of finding the best solutions to the world's greatest problems.
I dedicate my life to this. I want to train and facilitate people in this.

There is a great deal of work to be done, because civil, respectful and nuanced communication is a scarcity these days.
And therein lies the major stumbling block.

News media often opt for sensationalism.

Some columnists take pleasure in making spiteful remarks, thereby ridiculing the sincere efforts of (some and more) politicians.
Within the political sphere, too, communication grounded in a sense of morality—whether in public or behind closed doors—is sorely lacking.
In the Netherlands there are scandals around childcare benefits, natural gas extraction and the state secure youth care. They all bear witness of an indequate approach of the government and involved organizations. Apologies alone are not enough; effective, tangible action remains (for too long) absent.
Power is wielded for self-interest, and certainly not for "the greater good"
Global problems are being aggravated by political polarization and the widening gap between rich and poor.

Communication is frequently characterized by an increasingly harsh tone.
People in the Netherlands, who use the 'Living Together' poster to signal that they prioritize love and humanity are called names like 'bitch' and 'whore'.
Communicating and using provable disinformation—such as the narrative regarding successive waves of family reunification of asylum seekers —brought the Dutch government down. The goal was to win more voters in the next elections.

And then there are the inconsistencies in statements.
Consider a political leader who joins a 'Red Line' protest (against the genocide in Gaza) but, as Prime Minister, fails to 'walk the talk'.
Or inconsistencies in statements that often are not even grounded in facts. Just how many wars has Trump actually ended by now, and how close were they to peace in the conflict with Iran?
This American president builds upon the appropriation of land originally belonging to Native Americans and has set his sights on Greenland.
The irony is that, as a descendant of immigrants, he now makes life miserable for immigrants himself.
And the irony is that it was precisely the First Nation People who provided the commandments as an ideal for high moral standards.

[1] Aldous Huxley, Brits-Amerikaanse schrijver, filosoof en essayist. Bekendste werk: A brave new world.

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Native American commandments as guiding principles for an ambitious morality.

I feel more at home with the Native American commandments, primarily because of their positive linguistic phrasing—unlike the Ten Commandments of the Catholic Church. The Native American commandments provide much clearer direction and cover broader scope, especially when applied in conjunction with one another

- Treat the Earth and all that dwell thereon with respect
- Remain close to the Great Spirit
- Show great respect for your fellow beings
- Work together for the benefit of all People
- Give assistance and kindness wherever needed
- Do what you know to be right
- Look after the wellbeing of mind and body
- Dedicate a share of your efforts to the greater good
- Be truthful and honest at all times
- Take full responsibility for your actions

These principles may well be prerequisites for the ambitious morality of helping to solve global problems.
The reality is that we are further away from this than ever. And yet, every human being—every individual—has a personal choice and responsibility in this matter.
This calls for refined communication aimed at fostering connection rather than polarization. In turn, this requires focused and conscious attention stemming from the head, heart, and soul.

What if these were the benchmarks for success? Striving to make the difference that truly matters. It might be like a drop on a hot stone, but that is okay.
Every drop counts.
Every day, there are many people who contribute to make a positive and constructive difference. How wonderful it would be if this were celebrated, if this set the tone in the news media, and if this became our constant aim. Moving the critical mass in the right direction.

A long way to go.

Certainly! Simple? Well, no. Not at all. Or rather, not always.
A helping hand for a neighbor or a friendly gesture is already a step in the right direction.
Is in fact that drop on the hot stone.A 'drop' to be proud of. Born out of the realization that every drop counts.

Communicating with care

Zoë Papaikonomou (historian, investigative journalist, and winner of the 2024 'Woman in the Media' Impact Award) is an excellent role model for careful communication and a prime example of its importance. She constantly draws attention to this issue and truly hits the nail on the head. In doing so, she crafts headlines that accurately capture the essence of the matter of abuse while clearly identifying the perpetrator.



Translation of the original post:
~~A woman is sleeping at a close friend's place - as she often does - when she wakes up and realizes something is wrong.~~
~~When a young woman woke up in the middle of the night with a strange sensation, she realized something was wrong.~~
Man suspected of raping close female friend while she was asleep. Sexual assault and rape.

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Communicating with care means ensuring facts are presented correctly and using proper words that truly reflect the situation. Zoë excels at being conscious of the impact words have—and the consequences they trigger. It is a responsibility she champions tirelessly and with admirable perseverance.
For only then can change happen.

Positive sustainability initiatives.

The Happy Activist is an initiative by advertising professional Matthijs Jaspers. He provides positive sustainability initiatives with a free shortcut to greater reach, highlighting the various campaigns.
He demonstrates how it is possible to make a difference even on a small scale, placing his confidence in people's self-reliance and ability to solve problems.

Ecological awareness as a foundation for both diligence and success.

A focus on ecology is central to the NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) training courses I conduct.
With every personal transformation, the question is asked whether the change is positive for the entire individual (congruent), in the light of the bigger picture, and in the long run.
This question takes the following forms:
What is wrong with it? Is there an internal objection? Is there a problem with it in the long term? Is there a problem with it within the bigger picture?
It is important to take every objection or criticism seriously—not to simply accept it, but to examine it. Objections and criticism point to an underlying value that has not yet been met; consequently, there is still work to be done to incorporate this value into the solution.

What do you do when something intuitively doesn't feel right?

The message below has always stayed with me. I received it from a woman who had taken my NLP Practitioner course and worked in education as a mentor.
*"The NLP year still resonates with me in how consciously I conduct conversations. This led to me working with a girl, I had a gut feeling that something was wrong. I utilized every tool I had—applying them fully to myself! By asking the right questions—or simply letting her speak—I earned her trust. And I got her out an unsafe home environment She shared her story... a harrowing, deeply disturbing, and *so* wrong situation. That's when I took decisive action to intervene for this underage girl. The weeks that followed were tough, but we succeeded: she is now in a safe place and doesn't have to go home."*
A significant contribution to improving this girl's world—something that would not have happened without careful observation, awareness, and communication.

Feasibility

Just look at what has been achieved in the world.
The construction of skyscrapers and ingenious bridges, traveling to the moon, the development of communication technologies like the telephone and the internet—these are just a few examples of human achievement.

There are movements that do not protest out of self-interest, but out of concern for human lives—such as in Gaza—or for the climate.
Albanians have protested already over 100 days. They are angry about plans for a mega-resort in a protected nature reserve—a development project led by President Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Through their demonstrations, they aim to halt the construction and the associated corruption, while protecting the natural environment and the flamingos.

These movements deserve to be heard by governments. Yet, merely being heard is not enough; decision-making and action are required. After all, the proof of the pudding is in the eating.

The problem is that, unfortunately, there are too few good souls in power—people who hold morality as their highest standard and possess ecological awareness. Yet, an ambitious morality must be achievable; after all, it is only truly adequate if it is actually put into practice.
In this context, it is beneficial to focus on existing role models.

Holier-than-thou?

No. I am human, and nothing human is alien to me. (quote of Terentius, Roman playwriter,c. 190-159BC)
However, I wish to reflect on—and take responsibility for—what and how I communicate, as well as the impact that has on others.
In doing so, I aim to contribute—however small—to ambitious morality.

How wonderful it would be if ambitious morality, moral ambition, and ecological awareness went hand in hand as guiding principles for solving both macro and micro-level problems in the world.
All while recognizing that many individuals are already making a significant contribution to this.
I am convinced that **how** we communicate is just as important as **what** we communicate about.

Want to know more about my NLP training courses? Check out my website or send me an email.

Anneke Durlinger

Anneke Durlinger works as an NLP Master Trainer, offering a variety of NLP training courses (in Dutch) at a beautiful location: Het Molenaarshuys in Batenburg.
She has been doing this for over 30 years with enduring enthusiasm, combining passion with expert craftsmanship.
She is recognized as a Fellow Member Trainer by the IA-NLP; consequently, her training courses are internationally accredited in accordance with the IA-NLP's high quality standards.
She views NLP as a form of 'inner human resource management' and as an ideal tool for achieving self-realization. In this work, she places implicit trust in people's qualities and potential.
Together with Guus Hustinx, she co-authored the book 'Voorbij je eigen wijze' on the subject of metaprograms/behavioral patterns. Also available in English: Mastering communication.
In 2011, she published 'Handboek voor trainers: stappen ter verrijking' (Guide for Trainers: Steps Towards Enrichment). Only available in Dutch.
She is currently writing her third book: *Group Mindfulness as a Foundation for Excellence: How to Orchestrate a Team into a Symphony? (English)

To learn more, visit www.annekedurlinger.com
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P.s. I used google to translate this article from Dutch into English, and carefully went over the formulation. For the orginial article I did no tus AI.