Mike’s Musings: 
Hints and Help from Mike Jay
Musings on Ethics: Nature vs. Nurture

Mike Jay

This article first appeared in the International Journal of Coaching in Organizations, 2004, 2(3), 75-76. It can only be reprinted and distributed with prior written permission from Professional Coaching Publications, Inc. (PCPI). Email John Lazar at john@ijco.info for such permission.

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Musings on Ethics

Nurture

Lawrence Kohlberg's ideas of moral development are based on the premise that at birth, all humans are void of morals, ethics, and honesty. He identified the family as the first source of values and moral development for an individual. He believed that as one's intelligence and ability to interact with others matures, so does one's patterns of moral behavior (Woolfolk, 1993).

Kohlberg based his ideas of moral reasoning on Piaget's moral reasoning and morality of cooperation. He described three main levels of moral development with two stages in each level.

- **PRECONVENTIONAL**
  1. punishment-obedience orientation
  2. personal reward orientation
- **CONVENTIONAL**
  1. good boy-nice girl orientation
  2. law and order orientation
- **POSTCONVENTIONAL**
  1. social contract orientation
  2. universal ethical principle orientation

Nature

Matt Ridley, writing in *Origin Of Virtues*, in 1996 actually identified "hard-wired" virtues (ethics?) that actually were a part of the native structures of our inheritance. "Our minds have been built by selfish genes, but they have built to be social, trustworthy and cooperative," states Ridley. He goes on to add: "Human Beings have social instincts. "They have come into the world equipped with predispositions to learn how to cooperate, to discriminate the trustworthy from the treacherous, to commit themselves to be trustworthy, to earn good reputations, to exchange goods and information, and to divide labor...Our societies and our minds have evolved together, each reinforcing trends in the other."

I complete my quotes of Ridley with an admonishment he makes on p. 260: "Human beings have some instincts that foster the greater good and others that foster self-interested and anti-social behaviour. We must design a society that encourages the former and discourages the latter."
Ethics & Complexity

It wouldn’t be right, not to leave you with a thought about the complexity of ethics. As I may have mentioned before in my musings, I’ve put together what I refer to as an integral model containing four domains of effect: personal, professional, business, network (social if you like, although most things can be explained more effectively with network typology than social typology which is often fractured network typology, but you choose which you like); four perspectives: internal, external, financial and developmental (borrowing from the balanced scorecard work of Kaplan and Norton at Harvard) and viewing those domains and perspective across dimensions of time: past, now, near, and far.

When I use my little integral model depicted visually here (http://www.leadu.com/RCAP) with ethics, I can create complexity in ethics that most people don’t want any part of in today’s “microwave” world. In my view, the consideration of ethics in an integral frame will create higher quality ethics. Therefore the act of “integrating ethics” will in practice support the development of more robust ethical practices.

In my view, ethics are lost when we lose sight of the range of effect, perspective and time. Many people, and coaches who in fact call themselves ethical, fail under the integral test I’ve outlined. If we are to begin to create “integral ethics” then we’ll have to begin to open ourselves up to the diversity in value systems that perpetuate the many cultures around the world. In many case, the opening will split ethical practices into a variety of conflicting goals and objectives creating significant danger of polarizing people, rather than uniting them.

My admonition builds upon Ridley’s with this reminder: test your ethics against an integral model before “breaking the seal.”

Mike Jay

“I do not thrive on the monastic virtues of stability, centeredness, balance. As much as I may need those qualities in my life, the words do not name those moments when I feel most alive and most able to share life with others. I thrive on the vitality and variety of the world of action. I value spontaneity more than predictability, exuberance more than order, inner freedom more than the authority of tradition, the challenge of dialogue more than the guidance of a rule, eccentricity more than staying on dead center . . . .

The core message of all the great spiritual traditions is ‘be not afraid.’ Rather, be confident that life is good and trustworthy. In this light, the great failure is not that of leading a full and vital active life, with all the mistakes and suffering such a life will bring (along with its joys). Instead, the failure is to withdraw fearfully from the place to which one is called, to squander the most precious of all our birthrights—the experience of aliveness itself.”

-- Parker Palmer, The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring
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