

Ethics. What has love got to do with it?
Talk given on behalf of Supervision Conference UK
Hosted by Severn Talking Therapy.
At Cambridge 18th October 2014.
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The subject for this talk came in part from a book called *Loveability* by Robert Holden. He was talking about conscience and how religion has postulated that humans need conscience and that guilt is our conscience. Holden writes “*Guilt is not your real conscience; love is your real conscience.*”

‘When you pass through your actions and decisions through the conscience of love, you realise love is wise. It knows what you do to others you do to yourself. Love is ethical. It knows the difference between right and wrong.’

Here there are shades of Paul in Corinthians 13 when Paul writes

Love is patient. Love is kind Love... rejoices with the truth... Love never fails.

And I am really saying what they say, namely it is love that makes us ethical. We shall return to this.

The actual title for the talk is from a Tina Turner song.

What's love go to do with it, got to do with it?
Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?

I've been taking a new direction
But I have to say
I've been thinking about my own protection.

I will come back to those words when I look at vulnerability towards the end. For now let me just say that if I have to protect myself from you, then the implication is that you are dangerous, and therefore at some level that thought is an attacking thought. This comes as a surprise to people as they have only concentrated on their own protection and do not see the attacking element.

So in thinking about this talk, I came up with ten principles, questions, ways of looking.

1. The first is *know thyself*. We are all capable of anything, so jumping to an ethical conclusion that has judgment and moral self righteousness is unlikely to be a useful or honest position. But if we do not know ourselves, and even if we do, we are capable of the most intricate of rationalisations and justifications, so that in itself is useful to know. Macbeth in debating whether to kill Duncan, “To know the deed would best know not myself.” And there is an excellent book called *Wilful Blindness* which shows our propensity for fooling ourselves, a pre-requisite for unethical behaviour.

2. Connected to this is *create a space for reflection*. Supervision provides this. It can help point out our blind spots, challenge us, help us to see the bigger picture. There is a lovely quote from Byron Katie who says, “If you want to know the Truth, get an enemy.” Take the enemy to supervision. He or she is a wonderful mirror, as is anything we find difficult, give us an opportunity to know self.
3. *Help to create a moral community*. We can’t be ethical alone easily, because the zeitgeist is so transactional. The whistleblower is isolated and very often scapegoated. Get together with people who can tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity. Black and white thinking is rarely ethical as it avoids complexity.
4. Related to complexity, *see the bigger picture* which others may need to help you with. What might be ethical in one part of the system, might be seen as unethical in another.
5. And because of this, and all of the above, *courage* will be needed. In the book *Wilful Blindness* I mentioned this need the author shows how strong the need to belong can blind us, so it is important to have the courage to stand alone if need be. And of course there are the experiments of Milgram which show how obedience can make us behave unethically. The courage to say no supports ethical behaviour.
6. It is important to tolerate *being seen* by some people in the system *as a betrayer*, and being willing to act in spite of that. Otherwise difficult decisions could be avoided or communicated badly or there might be a need to be seen as the nice guy, all of which could lead to unethical decisions.
7. *Ask what am I afraid of?* Fear promotes survival patterns which could very easily lead to unethical behaviour.
8. *Ask what is the system afraid of?* It could be reputation, financial insolvency, a hostile takeover. Systems have their own dynamic and are as much into their own survival as individuals.
9. *Ask what would love do?* Do we believe in the goodness of human nature or that we are basically sinners? This will affect whether our approach to ethics is love based or more likely to be punitive. For me love connects to keeping the heart open whatever the circumstances, and this is about a willingness to be vulnerable. And I want us to be still in touch with the love that brought us into the work and not let the fears that surround us in the zeitgeist dominate. In the summer edition of *Self and Society* there is an excellent interview where the interviewee says you cannot reduce the love in a therapeutic encounter to something that can be measured. In the 90’s I was very interested in alternative methods of accreditation as I saw dangers in procedures not being face to face and in relationship. I asked a group of people to talk about the love in their work. It was very moving, and supported a philosophy of looking for love and building on that to improve standards rather than looking for faults.
10. Finally *be willing to go beyond simple right and wrong dichotomies*. Rumi. “Out beyond right and wrong, there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” Not out beyond right and wrong, there is an ethics committee ready to name and shame you. Bob Dylan “To live outside the law you have to be honest.”

Today has been about finding your own ethics through deep inquiry and a willingness to challenge and be challenged. Keeping to the rules can be unethical as in the example of a headteacher who knee jerkily reported sexual abuse instead of waiting to find out what was best for all concerned with the result that the young girl was re-traumatised. DeMello. "Obedience keeps the rules. Love knows when to break them."

Finally, Karl has introduced me to a book called The Master and his Emissary by Iain McGilchrist. It is a big book but I have just skimmed it and looked at the last chapter which gives a great context for the examination of ethics in terms of left and right brain dominance. To oversimplify an ethics of the left brain will always miss the bigger picture, as it will be about measurement and control. Sound familiar?