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THE INDIVIDUAL, RELATIONAL AND SOCIAL NEUROBIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MORALITY

A discussion of moral development often begins with questions philosophers ask: Is morality innate (Emerson, Rousseau, Thoreau) or is human nature evil (Augustine, Hobbes, Machiavelli)? Can morality be taught explicitly through reason (Plato), or is it a matter of learning from experience (Aristotle)? These are empirical questions that require an interdisciplinary and empirical approach. It may be best to begin with Socrates' (or the Oracle of Delphi's) insight, *Know thyself*. do we know about human evolution and human nature, that is, what is innate, and what is "plastic" (malleable), or developed from experience? Can experience influence human moral nature? Are there sensitive periods for learning that is fundamental to moral functioning? After examining the current state of knowledge about the evolution and ontogeny of morality, the essay concludes with suggestions for how to cultivate compassionate morality.

I. THE EVOLUTION OF MORALITY

In *Descent of Man* (1871)¹, Charles Darwin identified characteristics that evolved to culminate in humanity's 'moral sense' which he considered the greater propellant, over natural selection, of human evolution. He noted the phylogenetic changes of the moral sense through the Tree of Life, reaching its pinnacle in humans. In his definition of the moral sense, Darwin included these characteristics: sympathy for others; the ability to remember the past and compare it to the present; language; conversation and concern for social opinion; and the ability to form habits and shape one's behavior in response to social preferences. Darwin ascribed these characteristics to humans, yet several of these characteristics seem to be absent or nearly so in

¹ C. DARWIN, *The Descent of Man*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1871 (1st ed.), 1981.

some individuals, particularly, those who come from backgrounds of early neglect, abuse or trauma². When the environment is able to have such a powerful effect, it suggests that the characteristics are facultative (malleable) rather than inherited adaptations³. Supportive experience early in life appears to be fundamental to the development of the moral sense⁴.

Unlike all other animals, humans are born with 75% of the brain yet to develop. As a result of this rapid development after birth, children's initial brain and body formation is highly influenced by those who care for them, especially in the first five years of life. The foundations of the brain develop in concert with care-giver treatment⁵. Later functioning is influenced by these early foundations, including moral functioning. What kind of early caregiving does the human brain require for later optimal functioning? We can answer this question by looking at human evolution and data on what happens when evolved principles are violated.

Our ancestors spent 99% of their existence in simple foraging communities (small-band hunter gatherers or SBHG)⁶. This ancestral context represents what Bowlby⁷ (after Hartmann⁸) called "the environment of evolutionary adaptedness" (EEA), when human parenting and infant needs co-evolved⁹. Our ancestors appear to have had a consistent set of child caregiving practices that anthropologists have inferred and summarized from extant SBHG communities¹⁰. A child's life in this EEA-like context is characterized not only by natural childbirth (without imposed painful procedures) but by being "nursed frequently; held, touched, or kept near others almost constantly; frequently cared for by individuals other than their mothers (fathers and grandmothers, in particular) though seldom by older siblings; [they] experience prompt

² E.g.: M.M. SANCHEZ – C.O. LADD – P.M. PLOTSKY, *Early Adverse Experience as a Developmental Risk Factor for Later Psychopathology*, in *Development and Psychopathology* 13 (2001), no. 3, 419-449.

³ G.C. WILLIAMS, *Adaptation and Natural Selection: A Critique of some Current Evolutionary Thought*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1966.

⁴ D. NARVAEZ – T. GLEASON, *Developmental Optimization*, In D. Narvaez, J., Panksepp, A. Schore, & T. Gleason (Eds.), *Evolution, Early Experience and Human Development: From Research to Practice and Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, in press.

⁵ D.J. SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, New York, NY, Guilford Press, 1999.

⁶ D.P. FRY, *The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁷ J. BOWLBY, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, New York, NY, Schocken, 1951; ID., *Attachment and Loss*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1969; ID., *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1988.

⁸ H. HARTMANN, *Ego Psychology and the Problem of Adaptation*. New York, NY, International University Press, 1939.

⁹ W. TREVATHAN, *Human Childbirth: An Evolutionary Perspective*. New Brunswick, NJ, Aldine, 2011.

¹⁰ B.S. HEWLETT – M.E. LAMB, *Hunter-Gatherer Childhoods: Evolutionary, Developmental and Cultural Perspectives*, New Brunswick, NJ, Aldine, 2005.

responses to their fusses and cries; and [they] enjoy multiage play groups in early childhood¹¹. These early life, characteristics that largely match up with the emergence of social mammals over 30 million years ago¹². Douglas Fry, James Prescott and others link childcare practices like these to peaceful character and societies that do not go to war¹³.

Narvaez and colleagues¹⁴ review the effects of EEA-consistent parenting on child outcomes, finding each to be vital for short-term and long-term well-being and noting that traditional practices have become uncommon in the USA. Indeed, children's well-being overall in the USA is worse than 50 years ago¹⁵. Child neglect and abuse which used to be limited to a subset of the population is becoming mainstream and affecting child outcomes¹⁶. Children seem to be receiving less and less optimal care. For example, children are arriving at school with poor social skills, poor emotion regulation, and sets of poor habits, all of which do not lend themselves to prosocial behavior¹⁷. One of four USA teenagers is at risk for a poor life outcome¹⁸. Moreover, the USA has epidemics of anxiety and depression among all age groups¹⁹.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹² M. KONNER, *The Evolution of Childhood*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

¹³ D.P. FRY, *The Human Potential for Peace*, NY, NY, Oxford University Press.. J.W. PRESCOTT, *The Origins of Human Love and Violence*, in *Pre- and Perinatal Psychology Journal* 10 (1996), no. 3, 143-188.

¹⁴ D. NARVAEZ – J. PANKSEPP -- A.N. SCHORE – T. GLEASON, *The value of the environment of evolutionary adaptedness for gauging children's well-being*. In D. Narvaez, J. Panksepp, A. Schore & T. Gleason (Eds.), *Evolution, Early Experience and Human Development: From Research to Practice and Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, in press.

¹⁵ J. HECKMAN, *Schools, Skills and Synapses*, Bonn (Germany), Institute for the Study of Labor, IZA DP No. 3515, 2008.

¹⁶ UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND, *Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-Being in Rich Countries, a Comprehensive Assessment of the Lives and Well-Being of Children and Adolescents in the Economically Advanced Nations*, Report Card 7, Florence (Italy), United Nations Children's Fund Innocenti Research Centre, 2007.

¹⁷ W.S. GILLIAM, *Prekindergarteners left behind: Expulsion rates in state prekindergarten systems*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Child Study Center, 2005; D. POWELL – D. FIXSEN – G. DUNLAP – B. SMITH – L. FOX, *A Synthesis of Knowledge Relevant to Service Utilization and Delivery for Young Children with or at Risk of Challenging Behavior*, in *Journal of Early Intervention* 29 (2007), 81-106; J. ZITO – D. SAFER – S. DOSREIS – J. GARDENER – M. BOLES – F. LYNCH, *Trends in Prescribing Psychotropic Medications to Preschoolers*, in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 2000, no. 282, 1025-1030.

¹⁸ J. ECCLES – J.A. GOOTMAN, *Community Programs to Promote Youth Development*, Washington, DC, Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences Education, National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002.

¹⁹ U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration*, in *Mental Health: A Report of the Surgeon General*, Rockville, MD, Center for Mental Health Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute of Mental Health, 1999; WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION/WONCA, *Integrating Mental Health into Primary Care: A Global Perspective*, Geneva & London, World Health Organization and World Organization of Family Doctors, 2008.

The negative trajectories in well-being among children (and adults) in the USA suggest that a re-examination of cultural practices is needed.

Missing support in childhood influences not only cognitive, emotional, and psychological outcomes but also moral outcomes. The position taken here is that experience during sensitive periods is critical for moral sensibilities to develop. Sensitive periods occur not only during development, but include moments of crisis and therapy. Moral sensibilities are rooted in emotion and cognitive systems. When these have a poor start, moral functioning can be negatively affected. Triune Ethics Theory²⁰, described below, specifies how early child care practices can influence personality and moral development. Later, methods for modifying less-than-optimal moral functioning are suggested.

II. THE SOCIAL NEUROBIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MORALITY: TRIUNE ETHICS THEORY

Morality, like intelligence generally, is rooted in the emotion structures of the brain. Emotions have evolved as “psychobehavioral potentials” and “evolutionary operants” that help animals behave adaptively²¹. Our basic emotions are formed in early life from “elemental units of visceral-autonomic experiences that accompany certain behavior patterns”²². Caregiving practices affect the development of emotion systems and, including the ability to regulate anxiety²³. Early care affects personality formation²⁴, for example, bringing about more or less agreeableness which is linked to prosocial behavior²⁵. Early care influences cognitive capabilities, including the ability to imagine²⁶. Especially important for social and moral functioning is proper development of the right brain, which occurs with attentive, sensitive

²⁰ D. NARVAEZ, *Triune Ethics: The neurobiological roots of our multiple moralities*, in *New Ideas in Psychology* 26 (2008) 95-119; ID., *Triune Ethics Theory and Moral Personality*, in ID. – D. NARVAEZ -- D. LAPSLEY (eds.), *Moral Personality, Identity and Character*, 136-158.

²¹ J. PANKSEPP, *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 55.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

²³ F.A. CHAMPAGNE – M.J. MEANEY, *Stress during Gestation Alters Maternal Care and the Development of Offspring in a Rodent Model*, in *Biological Psychology* 59 (2006) 1227-1235.

²⁴ E.g. A. SCHORE, *Affect Regulation and the Repair of the Self*, New York, NY, Norton, 2003; ID., *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*, New York, NY, Norton, 2003.

²⁵ G. KOCHANSKA, *Mutually Responsive Orientation between Mothers and their Young Children: A Context for the early Development of Conscience*, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 11 (2002) 191-195.

²⁶ S.I. GREENSPAN – S.I. SHANKER, *The First Idea*, Cambridge, MA, Da Capo Press, 2004.

parenting²⁷. Parents who support an infant with a “good enough holding environment” assist the infant in maintaining ‘relational presence’ with the care-giver, a factor related to later mental health²⁸ and social functioning²⁹. Early experience forms “ideo-affective postures” (cognitive-emotional orientations) the child takes into adulthood³⁰. In adults, emotion systems interact with cognitive structures and physiological and motor outputs, powerfully influencing sensory, perceptual and cognitive processing³¹. Triune Ethics Theory postulates three basic moral orientations (see Table 1).

Triune Ethics Theory (TET)³² is a moral psychology theory that integrates neurobiological and other human sciences to describe early moral development and suggest types of moral personality. TET identifies three neurobiologically-rooted orientations or central motives that drive moral functioning³³: the Safety ethic (self-protection), the Engagement ethic (relational presence), and the Imagination ethic (reflective abstraction). See Figure 1. These ethics and their subtypes draw on different parts of the brain. Each ethic represents a particular set of activated emotion and physiological systems that influence cognition and action. Each orientation influences the prioritization of values that, when acted upon, trumps other values and becomes an ethic. An ethic can be dispositional (more deeply embedded in personality) but also triggered by situations (e.g., threat triggers self-protection whereas emotional safety promotes engagement).

Experiences during sensitive periods in life (early childhood, early adolescence, emerging adulthood, therapy, crises) influence the formation of emotion systems that underlie and influence the three ethics. When parenting is inconsistent with what our ancestors experienced in the EEA (e.g., minimal social interaction; physical isolation; allowing a baby to become distressed before a response is undertaken), the systems underlying the Safety Ethic are strengthened and those underlying the Engagement Ethic are weakened. Imagination Ethic systems can also be weakened by poor social support or harmful experiences during sensitive

²⁷ A. SCHORE, *Affect Regulation*, Hillsdale, NJ, Erlbaum, 1994.

²⁸ D.W. WINNICOTT, *Mother and Child: A Primer of First Relationships*, New York, NY, Basic Books, 1975.

²⁹ SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind*.

³⁰ S.S. TOMKINS, *Affect and the Psychology of Knowledge*, in S.S. TOMKINS – C.E. IZARD (eds.), *Affect, Cognition, and Personality*, New York, NY, Springer, 1965.

³¹ SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind*.

³² NARVAEZ, *Triune Ethics*.

³³ J. MOLL – R. ZAHN – R. DE OLIVEIRA-SOUZA – F. KRUEGER – J. GRAFMAN, *The Neural Basis of Human Moral Cognition*, in *Nature Reviews: Neuroscience* 6 (2005) 799-809.

periods (e.g., violent media immersion or binge drinking during late adolescence and emerging adulthood)³⁴.

Table 1. Triune Ethics Theory Mindsets

Triune Ethics: Mindsets and Sub-Types
Mindful Morality (The “Moral Zone”)
Engagement Calm and Communal Imagination
Imagination
Detached Imagination (Intellectualized Morality)
Vicious Imagination (Righteous Morality)
Communal Imagination (Agape Morality)
Engagement
Engagement Calm (Harmony Morality)
Engagement Distress (Co-Dependent Morality)
Safety
Wallflower Mindset (Submissive Morality)
Bunker Mindset (Aggressive Morality)

1. Safety Ethic

The extrapyramidal action nervous system³⁵ fosters basic survival and relates to territoriality, imitation, deception, struggles for power, maintenance of routine and following precedent³⁶.

When threat arises, the Safety ethic tends to take charge, seeing what is advantageous for the self to adapt to and survive intact. The Safety Ethic is the default system for the organism when all else fails. It was useful for our ancestors when temporarily facing predators or other dangers. However, it is not the best long-term orientation for moral functioning because of its self-

³⁴ A. BECHARA, *Decision Making, Impulse Control and Loss of Willpower to Resist Drugs: A Neurocognitive Perspective*, in *Nature Neuroscience* 8 (2005) 1458-1463; V.P. MATHEWS – W.G. KRONENBERGER – L. WANG – J.T. YANG – M.J. LOWE – D.W. DUNN, *Media Violence Exposure and Frontal Lobe Activation Measured by Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging in Aggressive and Nonaggressive Adolescents*, in *Journal of Computer Assisted Tomography* 29 (2005), no. 3, 287-292.

³⁵ PANKSEPP, *Affective Neuroscience*.

³⁶ P.D. MACLEAN, *A Triune Concept of the Brain and Behavior*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1973; ID., *The Triune Brain in Evolution: Role in Paleocerebral Functions*. New York, NY, Plenum, 1990.

centered nature. It is a self-protective morality, rooted in instincts for survival. When people are fearful for their own safety or their self-beliefs, they are less responsive to helping others and more focused on self-preservation³⁷. When competition is the norm, the safety ethic can become dominant among members of a group³⁸. It can become an uphill battle to calm the self down in a world where one is confronted constantly with the unfamiliar (people, actions, things). Ongoing change can keep people in a state of alarm, especially when the right brain has been underdeveloped³⁹.

If the emotion systems underlying other ethics are damaged by trauma or suboptimal from poor care, the safety ethic will dominate the personality. It can dominate personality in two ways. First, the safety ethic can manifest itself as an overcontrolled disposition — a withdrawn, depressive *wallflower mindset* — that tends towards freezing, flight or submissive response as a moral habit. One can see this most easily in those who are chronically abused. For centuries, a wallflower mindset was expected from wives, slaves and children. Second, the safety ethic can reflect a resistant *bunker mindset*, which is an undercontrolled aggressive disposition, as the means of self-protection (physical or psychological, i.e., ego). These two personality orientations can develop from neglectful care or trauma in early life⁴⁰ and can combine in a unique person-by-context hybrid in which the person oscillates from one to the other. Suggestions for calming the safety ethic are offered below.

2. Engagement Ethic

The Engagement ethic is rooted primarily in a well-functioning visceral-emotional nervous system on the hypothalamic-limbic axis⁴¹ and a well-developed right brain⁴². These brain formations allow for here-and-now emotional signaling both internally (learning) and

³⁷ E.g. M. MIKULINCER – P.R. SHAVER – O. GILLATH – R.A. NITZBERG, *Attachment, Caregiving, and Altruism: Boosting Attachment Security Increases Compassion and Helping*, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89 (2005) 817–839.

³⁸ E.g. M. MIKULINCER – P.R. SHAVER, *Attachment Theory and Intergroup Bias: Evidence that Priming the Secure Base Schema Attenuates Negative Reactions to Out-Groups*, in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 81 (2001) 97–115.

³⁹ SCHORE, *Affect Regulation*.

⁴⁰ J.P. HENRY – S. WANG, *Effects of Early Stress on Adult Affiliative Behavior*, in: *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 23 (1998), no. 8, 863-875; SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind*.

⁴¹ PANKSEPP, *Affective Neuroscience*.

⁴² SCHORE, *Affect Regulation*.

externally (sociality)⁴³. The engagement ethic concerns the emotions of intimacy and interpersonal harmony in the present moment, which means the right brain is dominating experience. Engagement as a “harmony morality” is about love/care/attachment, enhancement, and elevation. The engagement ethic embraces the notions of worship and community feeling. Engagement is “here and now”, it is experiencing full presence in the flow of life, connecting to others in the moment.

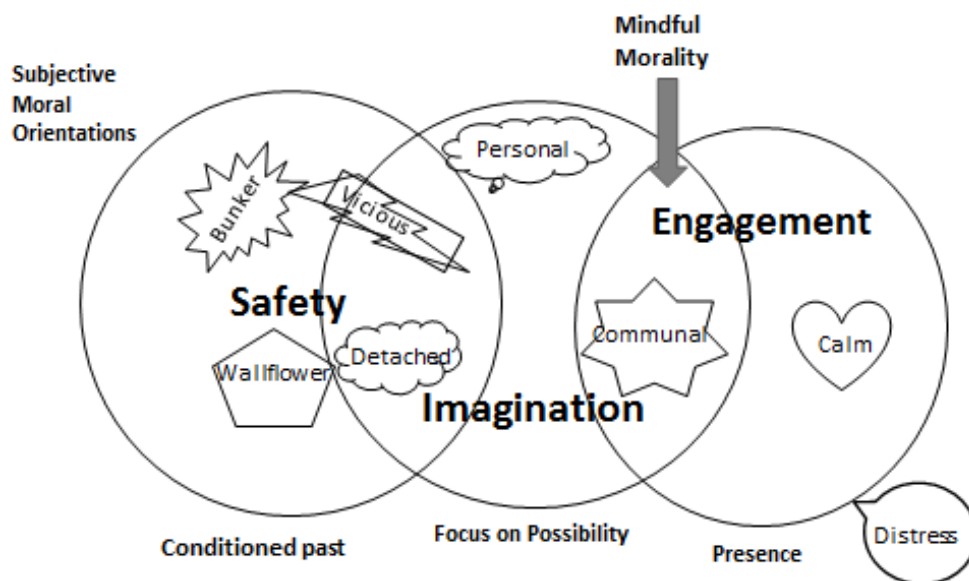


Figure 1. Graphic of Different Moral Mindsets and their subtypes

The Engagement Ethic is dependent for its full development on supportive emotional experience during sensitive periods. For example, the functionality of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA) is co-constructed by care-givers and shaped during sensitive periods early in life, as described by Bowlby’s ethological theory of attachment⁴⁴. Mammalian brains do not self-assemble. The process of attachment and relating to primary care-givers sculpts the particular ways an individual brain’s emotion and cognitive systems function. Mammalian nervous systems depend on interactive coordination with other in-tune mammals for their

⁴³ M. KONNER, *The Tangled Wing*, New York, NY, Owl Books, 2000.

⁴⁴ BOWLBY, *A Secure Base*; ID., *Attachment and Loss*; SCHORE, *Affect Regulation*.

stability. When caregiving is poor, the adaptive nature of emotion systems is disrupted, and when it is traumatic, cognition is undermined. Mammalian brains shift into physiological chaos when isolated⁴⁵. Inadequate care leads to deficiencies in the brain wiring, hormonal regulation and system integration that lead to sociality⁴⁶. Insufficient development of self-regulatory systems can lead to *engagement distress*, a co-dependent reflexive orientation to social functioning. In contrast, ideal caregiving involves “*limbic resonance* — a symphony of mutual exchange and internal adaptation whereby two mammals become attuned to each other’s inner states”⁴⁷. Limbic resonance “tunes up” empathy and puts the child in hormonal states that are linked to prosociality. The ability to maintain these states in moral situations becomes an *engagement calm* ethic. Suggestions for fostering the Engagement ethic are below.

3. Imagination Ethic

The Imagination ethic ideally is grounded in a well-functioning somatic-cognitive nervous system on the thalamic-neocortical axis⁴⁸, relying on the more recently evolved frontal lobes and especially the prefrontal cortex. Areas in the prefrontal cortex comprise executive functions such as planning, foreseeing consequences, stopping and starting actions, and taking the perspective of others. These capacities allow for a broader view of action possibilities. When these are used for personal gain without thinking of others, the individual is operating from *personal imagination*. No moral considerations are involved although an individual’s actions always have moral side effects.

Triune Ethics Theory proposes that the Imagination Ethic has three forms. When imagination is detached from emotion and presence in the here-and-now, which means it is

⁴⁵ M.A. HOFER, *Early Social Relationships as Regulators of Infant Physiology and Behavior*, in *Child Development* 58 (1987), no. 3, 633-647; A. GAWANDE, *Hellhole*, in *The New Yorker* 2009, March 30.

⁴⁶ E.g. S.D. POLLAK – B. PERRY, *Early Neglect Can Hinder Child's Relationships*, in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2005, November, 21-25; I.C. WEAVER – M. SZYF – M.J. MEANEY, *From Maternal Care to Gene Expression: DNA Methylation and the Maternal Programming of Stress Responses*, in *Endocrine Research* 28 (2002), p. 699.

⁴⁷ T. LEWIS – F. AMINI – R. LANNON, *A General Theory of Love*, New York, NY, Vintage, 2000, p. 63.

⁴⁸ PANKSEPP, *Affective Neuroscience*.

dominated by the left brain⁴⁹, the imagination ethic can lead to a *detached* or *heartless imagination*. This is intellectualized morality that sees life in discrete pieces, solves abstracted moral problems without attending to the rich context, using rational logic to make social and moral decisions. Morality can become narrowly focused and degrades into a set of procedures.

If neglect is sufficiently profound, the visceral-emotion nervous system is unable to “resonate” with others. The result is a “functionally reptilian organism armed with the cunning of the neocortical brain” — a psychopath⁵⁰. The left brain becomes dominant but is additionally fueled by the primitive emotions of anger, forming *vicious imagination*, driven by a clever seeking of power. Ruthlessness is considered necessary for control. This is an ego-centered morality that is more sophisticated and reflective than the bunker mindset (which is more reflexively aggressive). It is the sophisticated reptile. Ridicule of right-brain holistic views, destruction of anything that gets in the way of maintaining power, including for example, life forms that impede economic progress, can be viewed as moral imperatives. Vicious imagination can also include “pathological altruism” where an individual forces their will on others, “for their own good”⁵¹

Although humans have evolved to favor face-to-face relationships and have difficulty imagining those not present (such as future generations), *communal imagination* is the capacity for a sense of connection that extends beyond immediate relations. It uses the capabilities of the mind in a manner that is deeply prosocial such as imagining the consequences of one’s actions on future generations, foreseeing possible social ramifications. Using the fullest capabilities of executive functions, it is able to make plans and monitor the execution of action. It is also dependent on embodied experience in the domain of concern. Only those with deep experience will be able to accurately and fully imagine future possibilities. Those without deep experience will likely operate from detached imagination.

In the ideal — when communal imagination accesses the whole brain and partners with the Engagement ethic, to being present in the moment, emotionally open but able to use higher

⁴⁹ I. MCGILCHRIST, *The Master and the Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2009. McGilchrist offers a detailed description of left-brain functions and the consequences of left-brain dominance.

⁵⁰ LEWIS – AMINI - LANNON, *A General Theory of Love*, p. 218.

⁵¹ B. OAKLEY – A. KNAFO – G. MADHAVAN – D.S. WILSON, *Pathological Altruism*, NY: Oxford University Press.

abstract thinking as a partner — we have *mindful morality*. Mindful morality coordinates the right and left parts of the brain, intuition and conscious reason. Mindful morality includes full presence (engagement) in the moment — intersubjectivity and resonance with the other. It also includes the use of abstraction capabilities grounded in experience to solve moral problems based in deep ethical know how for the particular situation (communal imagination). Mindful morality allows the individual to deliberate about moral situations: imagine multiple options, action choices and outcomes; consider consequences and outcomes; weigh principles, situational uniqueness, goals and opportunities. This is moral wisdom. The moral imagination allows reflection on virtue and vice, which comes from knowledgeable experience. As part of the deliberative mind, mindful morality can countermand emotional reactions in the older parts of the brain, stopping what would otherwise be an instinctive response. It can also select the environments in which intuitions (and character) will be shaped⁵².

TET suggests that one's ethical stance can shift from moment to moment. A particular ethic can be evoked by the situation. Or better said, the experiencing of particular emotion (or not) influences the type of moral identity one adopts in the context. If one is personally distressed (fearful, anxious, depressed), one will more often make decisions based on the safety ethic: what is morally right is perceived to be that which protects oneself and one's own. In contrast, if one feels positive relational emotions such as sympathy, one is more likely to act from the engagement ethic. Or, if one has shut down the right brain and becomes focused on the abstract, one may act from a detached imagination ethic. Ideally in situations of moral import, one maintains emotional calm, fully engages the right brain, uses the abstract skills of the left brain and takes action from a mindful morality stance.

Dispositional tendencies, shaped from experience since the earliest of life, interact with the power of the situation to influence individual behavior. That is, although particular environments may press individuals to activate one or another ethic, personality disposition also plays a role. Personality dispositions interact with situations to evoke different moral identities in different situations for different people. A person might be habitually kind and compassionate in one situation, for example, operating from the engagement ethic at home, but ruthless in another, or operating with heartless imagination at work.

⁵² R.M. HOGARTH, *Educating Intuition*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2001.

III. HUMAN MORAL NATURE

What then is humanity's moral nature? Since human brains and minds are constructed in interaction with the environment, the answer is: *it depends*. If according to anthropologists, 99% of human genus history was spent in small-band foraging hunter-gatherer groups⁵³, we perhaps should be more attentive to human nature in these environments. Current members of such communities are deeply cooperative and find a great deal of enjoyment in social relations (laughing, singing, dancing, touching). Their basic social needs are met (trust, belonging, autonomy, competence/effectance, meaningfulness/purpose, self enhancement)⁵⁴. Like most organisms, humans thrive when basic needs are met but act out in frustration when basic needs are thwarted⁵⁵. From what we can tell, basic needs were typically met in these settings..

Small-band hunter gatherer societies in circumstances similar to those of our ancestors are largely peaceful. However, if one looks at other types of societies (tribes, chiefdoms, industrial nations), as complexity increases one finds corresponding increases in violence and aggression. As inequality and complexity increases, so does social discontent, aggression and poor health⁵⁶. Further, modern societies often undermine basic needs, including for social support, increasing stress on families and children, undermining peaceful development. And so the social well-being and peaceableness fairly ubiquitous among hunter gatherers are less certain and sometimes missing in complex modern societies (like the USA).

Human emotion systems underlie human psyches and are shaped by embodied experience, particularly early experience. Real-life experiences “train up” certain emotion systems, hormones, patterned responses and behavioral tendencies. Affective cognitive science is demonstrating what our ancestors long knew, that contrary to perhaps 2000 years of dualistic thought, human minds are not separable from their bodies. Humans are deeply embodied

⁵³ E.g. FRY, *The Human Potential for Peace*.

⁵⁴ E.L. DECI – M.R. RYAN, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, New York, NY, Academic Press, 1985; S.T. FISKE, *Social Beings: A Core Motives Approach to Social Psychology*, New York, NY, Wiley, 2004; E. STAUB, *Positive Bocial Behavior and Morality*, Vol. 1: *Social and Personal Influences*, New York, NY, Academic Press, 1978; ID., *The Roots of Evil*, Cambridge (England), Cambridge University Press, 1992; ID., *The Psychology of Good and Evil: Why Children, Adults, and Groups Help and Harm Others*, New York, NY, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

⁵⁵ E.g. DECI – RYAN, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*.

⁵⁶ FRY, *The Human Potential for Peace*; D.P. FRY, *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2009.

creatures who think with body metaphors and who think better about a topic after actual embodied experience⁵⁷. Our embodiment means we learn most of our beingness as bodies, not as minds. We learn what it means to love and be loved from our care-givers in the early months of life. We learn about justice from the reciprocity we experience in early life⁵⁸. Our personalities are shaped around what we learn to find rewarding — responsive, sensitive relationships or escape from intrusive or hurtful relationships.. The human brain gravitates towards whatever brings more pleasure. For a neglected or abused child, the social pleasure systems will be underdeveloped, so pleasure may be sought elsewhere such as in illicit drug use.

We can surmise that our ancestors experienced a supportive and pleasurable social life which included: (1) high social embeddedness (mostly with kin), with little or no social isolation; (2) virtuous role models; (3) socially purposeful living; (4) deep social enjoyment including actions that promote social bonding hormones (e.g., oxytocin)⁵⁹; (5) extensive freedom, leisure, and space (1 person per 4 or 8 miles)⁶⁰; (6) egalitarianism; and (7) partnership with the natural world rather than exploitation. We are just learning how important each of these characteristics is for personal and societal cooperation⁶¹. Most of these diminished over the 20th century in the USA⁶² (see Table 2).

As human beings are profoundly social creatures, human well-being relies on deeply felt social support from birth if not before. Cultures and families vary in the kind of support they provide and influences which emotion systems are promoted. In cultures that are responsive to child needs and “indulgent” with young children, touch is predominant, leading to (it is assumed) social satisfaction through the elevation of bonding hormones such as oxytocin. These cultures

⁵⁷ G. LAKOFF – M. JOHNSON, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought*, New York, NY, Harper Collins Publishers, 1999.

⁵⁸ M. LERNER, *Pursuing the Justice Motive*, in M. ROSS – D.T. MILLER (eds.), *The Justice Motive in Everyday Life*, Cambridge, MA, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁵⁹ See S. TAYLOR, *Tend and Befriend: Biobehavioral Bases of Affiliation Under Stress*, in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 15 (2006), no. 6, 273-277.

⁶⁰ L.R. BINFORD, *Constructing Frames of Reference: An Analytical Method for Archeological Theory Building Using Hunter-Gatherer and Environmental Data Sets*, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2001; J.B. BIRDSELL, *Australia: Ecology, Spacing Mechanisms and Adaptive Behaviour in Aboriginal Land Tenure*, in R. CROCOMBE (ed.), *Land Tenure in the Pacific*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 334-361.

⁶¹ D. NARVAEZ – T. GLEASON, *Developmental optimization*, in D. NARVAEZ – J., PANKSEPP – A. SCHORE – T. GLEASON (eds.), *Human Nature, Early Experience and the Environment of Evolutionary Adaptedness*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2012 (in press).

⁶² Of course there were negative features like high infant mortality, shorter lifespans, physical duress including regular fasting. But these were mostly physical negatives, not social ones.

tend to raise people of “sweet” disposition who are cooperative, empathic and emotionally present with others⁶³. Cultures that are wary of “spoiling” babies are less responsive to the needs of young children, fostering stressed brains (e.g., poor vagal tone) and promoting more primitive emotion systems (e.g., dominance/submission) that focus on self-concern⁶⁴. In these cultures, people are less agreeable and cooperative, and less sensitive to the needs of others.

Adult Ancestral Life	Adult Life in Economically Developed Society
(1) High social embeddedness and support (mostly with kin) and absence of social isolation (2) Virtuous (not vicious) role models (3) Socially purposeful living (4) Deep social enjoyment including actions that promote social bonding hormones (5) Extensive freedom, leisure, and space (6) Egalitarian relationships (7) Partnership with the natural world rather than exploitation (8) Considerable physical contact with others (sleeping, resting) (9) Multi-age group living day and night	(1) Social isolation and lack of social support (2) Vicious role models in media and public life (3) Self-oriented life purpose (4) Minimal social enjoyment, increasing preference for isolation or mediated social experience (e.g., TV, internet) (5) Minimal freedom, leisure and space (6) Hierarchical relationships (7) Exploitation of natural world is normative (8) Little physical touch (9) Age-group isolation in school, work, leisure activities

We can surmise how the ancestral context supported the moral sense. In our ancestors’ context, morality is linked with survival. Our ancestors were immersed in actions that were considered both virtuous and causally linked to surviving and thriving (e.g., being socially responsive). What was virtuous was responsive, cooperative sociality, and it was enjoyable. There was no isolation and little desire for it. Behavior most typically had immediate social consequences. Without group trust and support, an individual would be in mortal peril. In these circumstances, the band was united for survival but also thrived in community. There was little

⁶³ See PRESCOTT, *The Origins of Human Love and Violence*.

⁶⁴ See HENRY – WANG, *Effects of Early Stress on Adult Affiliative Behavior*.

need to control individual autonomy because morality was deeply internalized from early and ongoing lived experience. The moral sense was built from the ground up.

Thus, in my reading of simple hunter-gatherer communities that are not pressured by the modern world, the bunker mindset was a rarity with other humans, but useful for threats from predators. In reports from anthropologists, members of bands who became psychotic (harmful to others) were killed. Detached imagination would have been virtually unseen because it reflects the underdevelopment of the right brain and overuse of the left brain found primarily in Western society⁶⁵. Good caregiving and social support foster the positive social emotions (care, play, joy in relationship, empathy) and the regular and deep social pleasures found among hunter-gatherers would facilitate the right brain and the engagement ethic.

Many modern Western societies have eliminated the supports for virtue development that our ancestors experienced at all ages. These supports were the locus of pleasure as well. In the USA, social supports have been decreasing among all age groups for over 50 years⁶⁶. With neglectful or harmful child care now common in USA practices⁶⁷, the right brain and the social emotions are not cultivated with much intensity or are thwarted entirely. So the view presented here is that the USA is more likely to raise people with dispositions toward detached and vicious imagination among the privileged and wallflower or bunker mindset among the poor. These are conclusions I have drawn from looking at a range of data and findings from across disciplines. The culture influences not only childrearing practices but moral functioning generally.

IV. THE INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL IDENTITY ON MORAL FUNCTIONING

Cultural practices that shape brains are highly influenced by the culture's narratives. Cultural practices, such as child rearing, promote particular brain sets and emotion systems. But cultural narratives themselves establish what is considered normal and can influence how much social support the mother and other care-givers receive. The layers of meaning and meaning-making that surround the child affect him or her holistically — brain and body development, personality, goals and preferences. Moral identities also are shaped by immersion in culture and

⁶⁵ See MCGILCHRIST, *The Master and the Emissary*.

⁶⁶ See NARVAEZ – GLEASON, *Developmental Optimization*.

⁶⁷ V.J. FELITTI – R.F. ANDA, *The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study*, Atlanta, GA, Centers for Disease Control and Kaiser Permanente, 2005.

family; cultural and family narratives and practices are the landscape on which the child constructs him or herself. Such narratives explain the past, one's role in life, and marshal one's energy to fulfill the preferred narrative. Three types of morality are examined in light of cultural influence, vicious imagination, detached imagination and mindful morality.

1. *Encouraging BunkerMindset and Vicious Imagination*

Religious narratives play a role similar to that of cultural narratives. Like cultures, religions can promote different ethics depending on their discourse and practices. Some religious narratives are more conducive to peaceful coexistence and respect than are others. For example, when religions emphasize suspicion of outsiders, an “us-against-them” orientation or a sense of ongoing threat, they promote a bunker mindset ethic or even a vicious imagination ethic. Eidelson and Eidelson⁶⁸ found five “dangerous ideas”, any one of which can drive groups into conflict: a sense of vulnerability, distrust, a sense of helplessness, the belief that injustice has been done against the self or group, and a sense of superiority. Fundamentalist theologies typically emphasize these types of dangerous ideas. Constantly focused on threat (e.g., modernity, Satan), fundamentalists envision themselves as part of a cosmic struggle of good against evil and demonize those outside the group⁶⁹. An other-negating orientation strengthens bunker mindset and encourages a vicious imagination, as exhibited by Al Qaeda and similar groups. But these inclinations are also found among presumably normal members of society. For example, in an evangelical congregation that traditionally emphasized exclusivity, 90% of members left after the minister began to preach that the whole world would be saved and not just those of their brand of faith⁷⁰. As Allport⁷¹ wrote:

“The role of religion is paradoxical. It makes prejudice, and it unmakes prejudice. While the creeds of the great religions are universalistic, stressing brotherhood, the practice of

⁶⁸ R.J. EIDELSON – J.I. EIDELSON, *Dangerous Ideas: Five Beliefs that Propel Groups toward Conflict*, in *American Psychologist* 58 (2003) 182-192.

⁶⁹ M.E. MARTY – R.S. APPLEBY (eds.), *Fundamentalisms Observed*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 1995.

⁷⁰ NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER, *Membership Plummets after Pastor Preaches Whole World Will Be Saved*, in *National Catholic Reporter*, 42 (2005), no. 7, p. 3.

⁷¹ G.W. ALLPORT, *The Nature of Prejudice*, New York, NY, Doubleday Anchor, 1958.

these creeds is frequently divisive and brutal. The sublimity of religious ideals is offset by the horrors of persecution in the name of the same ideal”.

The evangelical church example shows the interaction between the individual and the culture. Believers can interpret religious doctrine and guidance according to different ethics depending on their own personal narrative frameworks and dispositions. In examining the “evolution of God”, Wright shows how the view of God in the Old Testament greatly fluctuated based on the Israelites’ sense of security⁷². When under threat, the “word of the Lord” was interpreted intolerantly. When resources were sufficient and there was a lack of threat, the word was interpreted benignly. This supports the view that people shift in ethical identity (i.e., safety, engagement, imagination) based on circumstance, and according to which emotions the context triggers.

2. *Detached Morality in Western Civilization*

Derrick Jensen condemns Western philosophy for emphasizing a mindless approach to life⁷³. Jensen, like others, argues that the current capitalist system is rooted in Western rationality divorced from presence — the embodied emotionality that is vital for the engagement ethic. The Western world has for so long divorced body from mind, emotion from reason, absencing itself from the present moment of being, that it cannot feel the trauma it has and is causing to life and lives throughout all ecosystems. It is based on a hierarchical, dominator model of relationships rather than on a cooperator model that is documented across simple small-band hunter gatherer communities⁷⁴. The dominator model assumes that one must coerce others for one’s survival, that your group is superior, and that only humans (or, *some* humans) are worthwhile keeping alive. The rest of the earth and its life forms can be used at will. This is the left brain approach of vicious imagination.

As Jared Diamond has pointed out in his book, *Collapse*, across the centuries in hierarchical societies the wealthy race one another to consume more and then *all* resources,

⁷² R. WRIGHT, *The evolution of God*, New York, NY, Little, Brown and Co, 2009.

⁷³ D. JENSEN, *A Language Older Than Words*, White River Junction, VT, Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.

⁷⁴ D. KORTEN, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, San Francisco, CA, Kumarian – Berrett-Koehler, 2006.

thereby undermining their and their children's futures⁷⁵. We seem to be rapidly heading in this direction but on a global scale. As Jensen points out, the powerful in science, religion and business are collaborating to destroy indigenous ways of life that for centuries coexisted in ecologically sustainable ways⁷⁶. Characteristics once construed as vices – greed, lust, envy – were converted to virtues in modern capitalism⁷⁷. The safety ethic is powerful and so are the left-brain driven ethics. All these forces are driven by the focus on primitive survival/dominance mechanisms that are the human default when an affectionate upbringing or supportive culture is missing, or when competition fever is lit. These destructive forces can be contrasted with the type of moral functioning that may be optimal for guaranteeing humanity's future.

3. *Mindful Morality*

The great religions of the world, at their best emphasize compassion and love and concern for strangers and future generations, in other words, mindful morality. Mindful morality gives a full sense of humanity's Imago Dei. Mindful morality promotes our embodied moral sense. Our moral sense informs us that we are created for deep fellowship with others and with the natural world. Mindful morality is about turning around (*metanoia*), away from the focus on self, ego-identity, having, and getting. It is letting go of I/me/they/you dichotomies and the fracturing of life and becoming one with the Spirit. The New Testament Jesus condemned those who focused on safety ethic concerns (who is up, who is down, who is better/worse), and detached imagination concerns (keeping the rules, following procedures) both of which harden the heart. Instead, Jesus emphasized being present with others in the here-and-now. How can we foster a mindful morality orientation?

V. FOSTERING PEACEABLE MORAL NATURES

Have humans lost their way? We seem to be off the path of love and pleasure that corresponds to our evolved nature⁷⁸. The view here is that we have lost our sense of how to

⁷⁵ J. DIAMOND, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail*, New York, NY, Viking Press, 2005.

⁷⁶ JENSEN, *A Language Older Than Words*.

⁷⁷ J.Z. MULLER, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought*, New York, NY, Knopf, 2002.

⁷⁸ LEWIS – AMINI – LANNON, *A General Theory of love*.

foster virtue because we have neglected to develop intuitions for being present in the here and now, interdependently engaged with one another and deeply related to the natural ecosystem in which we live. Among religious scholars of the past, there was an understanding of how a person's character is shaped by experience. Aquinas theorized that "virtue's cognitive elements join with appropriately developed dispositions to determine a person's character, actions, and emotional responses"⁷⁹. It is never too late to shape character (although it becomes much more difficult with age). Pastoral counsellors can play a role in what types of moral functioning a client adopts, practices or employs.

The recommendations here are based on what we know leads to human flourishing, both individually and communally. Some ways of being are better than others. For example, prosocial behavior facilitates flourishing in individuals and communities whereas violence does not. Developmental moral psychology identifies exemplarity and developmental trajectories and suggests ways to facilitate and improve moral functioning towards optimality⁸⁰.

Because Mindful Morality uses humanity's fullest moral capacities, we examine some characteristics of ways to foster it. Ethical know-how or virtue, seems to best describe mindful moral functioning⁸¹. Mindful moral character is a set of skills or capacities or ethical know-how that can be cultivated to high levels of expertise.

Expertise development has gained prominence in education where intellectual abilities are forms of expertise. Children develop along a continuum from novice to expert in each area of study, including moral character⁸². Expert knowledge includes both deliberative and intuitive systems⁸³: knowing "that" and knowing how, when, and how much. Expertise is situated, embodied, dynamic. Mind development is inextricably linked to embodied experience⁸⁴. We think in terms of physical metaphors (e.g., "up against the wall;" "see eye-to-eye"). Cognition is

⁷⁹ L.H. YEARLEY. *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage*, Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 58.

⁸⁰ L.P. NUCCI – D. NARVAEZ (eds.), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, New York, NY, Routledge, 2008.

⁸¹ W.D. CASEBEER, *Natural Ethical Facts: Evolution, Connectionism, and Moral Cognition*, Cambridge, MA, The MIT Press, 2003.

⁸² D. NARVAEZ, *Integrative Ethical Education*, in M. KILLEN, J. SMETANA (eds.), *Handbook of Moral Development*, Mahwah, NJ, Erlbaum, 2006, pp. 703-733.

⁸³ HOGARTH, *Educating Intuition*.

⁸⁴ LAKOFF – JOHNSON, *Philosophy in the Flesh*; GREENSPAN - SHANKER, *The First Idea*.

ultimately represented in multiple biological systems⁸⁵. Biochemical responses to situations signal “good/bad” action (based on prior experience). Because cognition is “situated” or contextualized, in unfamiliar domains, we have to learn effective ways of thinking and acting. In unfamiliar domains, we have to learn the ethical constructs, landscape, and actions for that domain.

Experts in training, in any field, are educated holistically. Good training fosters *good intuitions* (right brain) through immersion and appropriate feedback. Perceptions and sensibilities are fine tuned and developed into chronically used constructs and actions⁸⁶. Good training also fosters *deliberative understanding* (theoretical grounding and meta-cognitive guidance) (mostly left brain). Interpretive frameworks are learned and, with practice, applied automatically for information processing, judging action, taking action.

Moral psychology research examines “moral exemplars”, those that exhibit extraordinary moral action. Moral exemplars exhibit at the same time higher *affiliation* with others (communion and compassion) and *higher self efficacy or agency*⁸⁷. For example, a clear agency distinction is found among rescuers and non-rescuers in WWII. The rescuers often said “What else could I do? — They were human beings like you and me”. On the other hand, non-rescuers were more likely to say things like: “What could I do? — I was one person alone against the Nazis”.

Adaptive ethical expertise is deep “ethical know how”⁸⁸. *Adaptive* ethical expertise (unlike *routine* expertise) allows flexible, innovative response in the situation. How do we educate ethical know-how? Experts-in-training experience practice that is focused, extensive, and coached. Know how is contextualized or situation-specific⁸⁹. Ethical know-how is relational,, situational capacities for moral relations in the moment. What kinds of capacities are

⁸⁵ A. DAMASIO, *The Feeling of What Happens*, London, Heineman, 1999.

⁸⁶ D. LAPSLEY – D. NARVAEZ, *A Social-Cognitive View of Moral Character*, in D. LAPSLEY – D. NARVAEZ (eds.), *Moral Development: Self and Identity*, Mahwah, NJ, Erlbaum, 2004, pp. 189-212.

⁸⁷ L.J. WALKER – J.A. FRIMER, *Being Good for Goodness’ Sake: Transcendence in the Lives of Moral Heros*, in F.K. OSER – W.M.M.H. VEUGELERS (eds.), *Getting Involved: Global Citizenship Development and Sources of Moral Values*, Rotterdam (Netherlands), Sense Publishers, 2008, 309-326; L.J. WALKER, *Moral Personality Exemplified*, in NARVAEZ – LAPSLEY (eds.), *Moral Personality, Identity, and Character*, 232-255.

⁸⁸ D. NARVAEZ, *The Neo-Kohlbergian Tradition and Beyond: Schemas, Expertise and Character*, in G. CARLO – C. POPE-EDWARDS (eds.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation. Vol. 51: oral Motivation through the Lifespan*, Lincoln, NE, University of Nebraska Press, 2005, pp. 119-163.

⁸⁹ HOGARTH, *Educating Intuition*.

needed for mindful morality? Ethical expertise can be mapped into several sets of individual capacities: (1) Ethical Sensitivity (*perception, imagination, feeling*); (2) Ethical Judgment (reasoning, reflection); (3) Ethical Focus (attention, motivation, identity); (4) Ethical Action (effectivities, steadfastness). Action schemas in each of these components are honed to high levels of automaticity⁹⁰. Like other kinds of intelligence, moral intelligence is embodied in *action*⁹¹. It is not enough to *feel* empathy or sympathy or to *reason* well and make a good moral judgment or to be *motivated* to take a moral action. In the end, it is the *action* that counts (but which relies on these other processes of sensitivity, reasoning and motivation).

VI. FOSTERING MORAL TRANSFORMATION

How do we foster moral virtue in ourselves and our clients? How can we cultivate more peaceable moral identities? How do we help individuals develop at least an engagement ethic if not mindful morality, especially in a world of constant change? The Integrative Ethical Education model⁹² has been developed to guide educators in classrooms to cultivate moral personhood. It is possible to use the same steps in a counsellor-client situation. There are five proposals in the original model. See Table 3 for the full list.

Table 3. The Steps of the Integrative Ethical Education Model

Integrative Ethical Education
1. Form a caring and secure relationship.
2. Provide a supportive climate for ethics and excellence.
3. Cultivate ethical skills using a novice to expert approach.
4. Foster self-authorship.
5. Restore the village of support.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ F.J. VARELA, *Present Time Consciousness*, in *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 6 (1999), no. 2-3, 111-140.

⁹² NARVAEZ, *Integrative Ethical Education*.

1. Form a Caring and Secure Relationship

First, it is vital to establish a caring relationship with the client, one that fosters a secure attachment⁹³. Although things can be learned from insecure relationships, the purpose here is to provide an “immersion in care” that the client may have lacked in family life. A caring relationship can release or build up the emotion systems that lead to mindful morality. Marinating the mind in emotional support and encouragement (and the hormones that go with them) is the first step towards modifying old ways into new, or helping the individual grow and change. (More specifics about this are included in step 3 below.) Sometimes (e.g., crisis situations), a supportive relationship means providing a shoulder to cry on. Ultimately for the counsellor, it means practicing engagement (being “here-and-now”) and communal imagination (taking into account the moral landscape of the client and the counsellor-client relationship).

2. Provide a Supportive Climate for Ethics and Excellence

Second, the general climate of support usually involves more than a pair of people but here refers to the culture that the counsellor brings to the situation. This includes the expectations for growth and ethical excellence and expected efforts towards change. Climate also refers to the counsellor practices that foster these endeavors. Does the counsellor expect the client to grow in a positive direction? Does the counsellor expect efforts towards change to be beneficial? Does the counsellor express patience as the client attempts new forms of being and expression? A supportive climate provides affirmative answers to questions like these. Sometimes a supportive climate is one that challenges the client to remember his or her moral responsibilities (e.g., to talk to an estranged family member before death).

3. Cultivate Ethical Skills Using a Novice to Expert Approach

Step three is about remembering how people learn best: with immersion in experience accompanied by a mentor who offers explanation and guides understanding of what is being

⁹³ SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind*.

experienced. This is a novice-to-expert instructional approach (see previous discussion), or an apprenticeship model⁹⁴. In applying this to moral development, Narvaez⁹⁵ identified four levels of guidance or instruction that lead the client through knowledge acquisition, understanding and execution.

(1) *Immersion in examples and opportunities* in which the client develops a sense of ‘the big picture’ in an embodied manner. Here, the counsellor draws attention to examples of the skill or orientation to be learned, demonstrating how it is practiced and honed. So if the topic is relaxation, then different ways to relax are demonstrated, discussed and practiced.

(2) *Attention to facts and skills*. Here the counsellor helps the client learn to make distinctions within the domain. The client might learn how relaxation can be triggered with deep breathing, by focusing on positive emotion, or by touch from a loved one. Different skills are practiced until they become second nature.

(3) *Practice procedures*, The learner puts together several skills. In terms of learning to relax, this might include paying attention to particular types of body tension and applying appropriate relaxation techniques or learning to recognize a tight jaw at different times during the day.

(4) *Integrate across contexts*. Here the learner applies the skill in different contexts. For relaxation skills, this involves learning to use different relaxation techniques, for example, at work with the boss, at home with the children, or during commuting.

Step three is also about selecting activities that foster particular emotions and character dispositions, specifically, positive emotions and imaginative response, which are related to mindful morality. Although moral personality is best built beginning in early life from the ground up, there are some things that adults can do to increase moral personality. Here are two capacities that counsellors can help clients develop.

⁹⁴ B. ROGOFF, *Apprenticeship in Thinking: Cognitive Development in Social Context*, New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁹⁵ D. NARVAEZ – T.S. BOCK – L. ENDICOTT – J. LIES, *Minnesota’s Community Voices and Character Education Project*, in *Journal of Research in Character Education* 2 (2004) 89-112; NARVAEZ, *Integrative Ethical Education*.

Foster Emotional “Presence in the Moment”. Those who focus on the present are happier than those who worry about the past or future⁹⁶. Our ancestors lived in the moment. Many mystical aspects of major religions focus on feeling God’s presence “here and now” at least once in a while (e.g., worship, ecstatic rituals) or even in an ongoing way (meditation, prayer). One similar intervention that an individual can adopt alone or with guidance is learning mindfulness. Mindfulness training typically begins with deep breathing and attention to sensory and perceptual input. It means pulling oneself out of automatic responses to familiar contexts and paying attention to the newness in the situation. Mindfulness is related to savoring. Savoring is the ability to pay attention to the positive feelings that one experiences in life⁹⁷. One can increase savoring by writing about negative life experiences. This can create a logical narrative that provides insight into personal suffering. Writing to explain one’s joys can also enhance savoring as does thinking about how much worse things could have been. Social support generally or through spiritual or religious affiliations also can contribute to savoring. Savoring can be noticing the uniqueness and beauty of a living creature (e.g., tree, animal, person), including a loved one.

Learning everyday emotional presence may require not only learning how to pay attention to “now” but also dealing with past history that has frozen one’s emotions in place. It may require uncovering and reconstructing deeply buried emotions or convoluted painful memory through psychotherapy or spiritual regeneration. It may also require awakening the right brain systems that were never adequately stimulated for prosocial emotion or were shut down by traumatic experience⁹⁸. This will typically happen within a caring relationship. The counsellor, as Sills suggested⁹⁹, can provide the “holding environment” of emotional security that was missed in early life. Initially, there needs to be immersion in responsive, caring relationships in order to “retrain” the attachment system. Secure attachment is mediated by “emotionally involving, elaborative, and contingent communication with others”¹⁰⁰. “Earned

⁹⁶ E. LANGER, *Mindfulness*, New York, NY, Da Capo Press, 1999.

⁹⁷ F.B. BRYANT – J. VEROFF, *Savoring: A New Model of Positive Experience*, Mahwah, NJ, Erlbaum, 2007.

⁹⁸ A. SCHORE, *The Effects of Early Relational Trauma on Right Brain Development, Affect Regulation, and Infant Mental Health*, in *Infant Mental Health Journal*, 22 (2001) 201-269; ID., *Affect Regulation and the Repair of the Self*; ID., *Affect Dysregulation and Disorders of the Self*.

⁹⁹ F. SILLS, *Being and Becoming: Psychodynamics, Buddhism, and the Origins of Selfhood*, Berkeley, CA, North Atlantic Books, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind*, p. 97.

secure/autonomous attachment” occurs when an individual with insecure or poor attachment from early life relearns to attach through a close friend, partner or therapist. In therapy, clients are helped to explore their emotional life, current relationships, the relationship with the counsellor, and imagine and act on better relational choices¹⁰¹. The client can learn *social* mindfulness, the ability to attend to the relational context and the person with whom one is speaking or interacting.

Mindfulness is important for moral functioning in part because *mindlessness* can lead to harmful outcomes. Detachment from emotional response to others can lead to cruelty and destructiveness. John Kekes calls these *unintentional* evil actions because they occur from a lack of reflection and shaped automatic responses¹⁰². Mindlessness! If character morality comes about from the choices one makes and the actions one takes, Kekes suggests that vices can be formed from *not* making a choice, by falling into characteristic, unchosen behaviors that bring about evil. According to Kekes, these ‘accidental’ behaviors are the source of most evil in the world, resulting from failing to develop appropriate sensibilities and habits, perhaps as a result of one or more of the three types of vices he names: malevolence (blaming), insufficiency (not reflecting critically) and expediency (harming others when they get in your way). These are characteristics of defective characters and, in his view, being dominated by these vices represents evil.

Increase Positive Emotions and Attitudes Towards Others. Positive social emotions such as gratitude, sympathy and compassion provide fertile ground for mindful morality. Like mindfulness training, open-heart meditations can facilitate sympathy development in the present moment. The Heartmath Institute has studied the effects of heart-centered meditation and visualizations on alleviating stress, re-balancing the body, and increasing empathy and positive action towards others¹⁰³. They have developed several techniques that individuals can practice. One is called the “heart lock-in”. In this exercise, the individual focuses on the heart in a meditative way for five to fifteen minutes and remembers a feeling of care or appreciation for someone easy to love. The individual imagines gently sending the feeling of love or appreciation to self and others. The neurobiology of the heart influences the functioning of body and brain,

¹⁰¹ BOWLBY, *A Secure Base*.

¹⁰² J. KEKES, *The Roots of Evil*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1990.

¹⁰³ D. CHILDRE, *The HeartMath Solution: The Institute of HeartMath's Revolutionary Program for Engaging the Power of the Heart's Intelligence*, New York, NY, Harper One, 2000.

facilitating moral mindfulness. With greater practice, the individual can expand the heart lock-in to persons that are difficult to love.

Individuals can expand understanding of others by becoming acquainted with people from outgroups through face to face relationships, long-distant or online relationships or through reading rich descriptions of other people's lives. They can participate in activities where participants are of equal status working towards a common goal (i.e., social contact theory¹⁰⁴) which increases empathy and understanding.

4. *Foster Self-Authorship*

Increasing self awareness is also a route to mindful morality. Sometimes the counsellor can ask a simple question that brings the client back to a focus on self-becoming (e.g., "is your anger more important than a peaceful death"?). Self-awareness increases through attention to one's emotions. If one has little sense of one's own feelings, one have difficulty recognizing them in others. Individuals can restore and revitalize the emotional parts of the brain, particularly the soft emotions through self-awareness activities such as journaling, paying attention to likes and dislikes and spending more time doing things that bring joy. Siegel¹⁰⁵ describes the opening of the right brain emotion systems through artistic, musical, and playful endeavors. Playful activity is also a good way to learn to stay in the present (e.g., rough-and-tumble play, being silly, making up music and songs, making up stories). Brown¹⁰⁶ suggests that when people don't play, they are more likely to be depressed.

5. *Restore the Village of Support*

Support groups, new friends or revised relationships are important for maintaining the changes that come about from immersion in therapy or similar experiences. These changes can fall away if the person returns to old environments and relationships, or becomes isolated. Perhaps the best place for support in a religious setting is attending worship services with

¹⁰⁴ ALLPORT, *The Nature of Prejudice*.

¹⁰⁵ SIEGEL, *The Developing Mind*.

¹⁰⁶ S. BROWN – C. VAUGHAN, *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, New York, NY, Avery-Penguin, 2009.

supportive others. Active, full body experiences such as singing, playing, dancing, and laughing are ways to feel an embodied, positive sense of community. Sometimes clients are lonely and isolated. The counsellor can check to make sure the client is feeling connected to and supported by the community in a way that brings the client joy.

VII. CONCLUSION: SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The human “moral sense” is not innate but is shaped by experience. When individuals have not experienced the sustaining and encouraging relationships from a young age that are necessary for optimal brain and moral functioning, there are several interventions that can facilitate the growth of mindful morality. Although morality is a matter of self-authorship, it can be fostered through guided apprenticeship and a village of support. It requires supportive relationships and a conducive climate for its unfolding, both of which can be provided by pastoral care-givers.

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