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Reflections on Humanity's Moral Consciousness

Uncovering the Foundation of Values-based Leadership

— Joseph P. Hester, Independent Researcher and Writer

Introduction

Metaphorically, both "conscience" and "moral consciousness" have similar meanings as both are representative of an "inner moral voice." In this article "moral consciousness" is used with reference to an active, intentional, and communal "moral awareness" considerate of feelings that are personal and collective. Thus, rather than being a depository for one's beliefs and moral sentiments, an inner voice that somehow reaches out and speaks to us, the moral consciousness is a revolving flow of ideas and opinions offering views, sifted through reason and communal consultation, about what is or what is not moral behavior. Utilizing an analysis by Roy Woods Sellars, a case is made that knowledge, including moral knowledge, is not an isolated or individual phenomenon lying deeply within the conscious mind. Rather, it is a culturally influenced and sharing of our opinions and values with others, malleable and often inconsistent. Understanding this, especially for values-based leaders, places a strong emphasis on the importance of human relationships and communication utilizing insight, intuition, and the moral imagination as tools for effective values dissemination. Recognizing our communal nature, attached emotionally as well as physically and occupationally, the difficulties of this explication are apparent. Consequently, this reflective tour may be more of an idealized vision than a substantiated empirical assessment given the intrinsic nature of moral consciousness, moral beliefs, and sentiments. This being said and owning up to my idealism, my purpose is to set forth what I believe are the rational conditions for being actively moral. But one should be careful, for being rational doesn't deny the importance of emotions, sentiments, or the intuitions of the conscious mind; reason doesn't create our values, it only brings structure and consistency to our moral musings.

The Conscious Mind

All is Interpretation and Qualification

When referring to "moral consciousness" or "moral imagination," we could be prodding those with a more empirical mindset into what E.A. Burtt called "an extremely healthy state of skepticism about many of the traditional foundations of their thinking" (Burtt, 1954, p. 15).

> ***The cosmology underlying our mental processes is but three centuries old — a mere infant in the history of thought —and yet we cling to it with the same embarrassed zeal with which a young father fondles his new-born baby*** **(Burtt, 1954, p. 15).**

The value of logic, critical thinking, and scientific validation cannot be disputed. But their underlying assumptions, especially about ethics and morals, as Burtt suggests, require

valuation. Empiricists, especially utilitarian moralists, have diminished the intrinsic and imaginative mind and what is considered naturally important to human social interactions. Clearly, we all have loved and hated, used our emotions to unveil our values, and tapped our insights for clarity searching for paths of consultation and reconciliation. This is a movement of the moral consciousness (moral mind) working out non-humiliating ways to deal with friends and employees, all the while respecting their personal and collective dignity. The complexities are apparent, and the claims of being subjective and capricious are strong, but intuition, insight, and imagination cannot be disregarded as common aptitudes of moral consciousness.

> ***Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world*** **(Berger & Luckmann, 1966).**

Obviously, consciousness *per se* does not exist; it is not a mindless vacuum, for if it were, it would be void of meaning. As Descartes reminds us, thinking is the basic function with consciousness often taking two general forms: descriptive and prescriptive. Thus, consciousness is always mindful of something, representing with intentionality inputs from others and the environment. In his analysis, Roy Woods Sellars explains that "prescription" is generally assumed under "representation." Sellars says,

> *To make a long story short, I take perceiving to consist of deciphering referential claims which are constantly being tested. From this base, we work out our cognitive claims about things, relating them and describing them. …Modern philosophy got off to a bad start because it did not understand the causal circuit in perceiving and made sensations terminal…Critical realism moves between presentationalism and representationalism in that is referentially direct and yet recognizes the informative role of sensations* (Sellars, 1967).

With reference to "presentation," morality is a taking stock of personal and communal experiences — what is perceived and what is considered important. This begins within the moral consciousness and is later evaluated, articulated, and "represented" to others through reason and collaborative experiences. Because conscious as well as unconscious moral insights are found in personal as well as communal judgments, *representation* is a normative quality, cognitively basic, ***informing and prescribing*** as well as recognizing and recording, and often revealing a hidden moral grammar.

> ***John Gray, reflecting on the insights of Marc Hauser, comments: [Hauser] accepts the prevailing view that moral behavior is fundamentally about conforming to principles, but argues that this view attaches too much importance to conscious processes of reasoning. Just because we reason from explicit principles — handed down from parents, teachers, lawyers, judges, or religious leaders—to judgments of right and wrong doesn't mean that these principles are the source of our moral decisions. On the contrary, Hauser argues that moral judgments are mediated by an unconscious process, a hidden moral grammar that evaluates the causes and consequences of our own and others' actions*** **(Gray, 2007).**

Sellars says there are no unrepresented facts; *all is interpretation and qualification.* It is from real life experiences we take stock of life and our place in it. But these conscious

events are not always individual or isolated as the moral relativist claims — they are frequently social and dialogic as interactions with family, friends, and work associates testify. For example, ideally, even within the sterile domain of a laboratory, the scientist makes his or her empirical calculations, but, hopefully, with environmental sensitivity and in consultation with others, applies his or her discoveries with a sense of their impact on a greater humanity. This generalized example demonstrates that knowledge is social as it is empirical and often subjective, but hopefully and idealistically, a seeking of objectivity through rational methods, transparent dialogue, and with moral sensitivity. Based on Sellars' analysis and generally speaking, ***moral knowledge***, expressed in words and actions of what we think important, ***represents*** an expressed understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life.

The conscious mind is thus a multiplex of aptitudes, attitudes, and feelings including intuiting, imagining, and creating new ideas and innovative solutions to problems. Conscious judgment is sometimes insightful, rational, and considerate, and at other times irrational and maleficent, carrying within it the burden of moral decision making. It is consciousness that makes available our moral capacity, an indispensable aptitude definitive of human life. Thus, moral consciousness reveals our character and identifies who and why we are, our

> ***…communication between subjects joined in a community of rational dialogue may entail a process of moral discovery*** **(Beiner, 1983, p. 153).**

authenticity or lack thereof. It is a ***moral-identifier*** saturating our developing moral propensity with ideas, beliefs, and conclusions about people and their behavior, some articulately clear and some vague and disorganized. Understandably, moral consciousness is as communal as it is personal, typifying social behaviors and actively inaugurating moral veracity. It is within community where moral understanding is most needed, discovered, and intentionally initiated. Value sharing is thus a dialogic process of communicating diverse perspectives and becoming consciously aware of what Aristotle called "our proper humanity"; that is, humanity as community.

Grasping the conditional "content" of human consciousness and its moral guidance is necessary. Comprehending its impact is organizationally and personally essential. To be moral and maintain homes, organizations, and governments of moral authenticity requires dedication and diligence, honesty and transparency. As Sellars says, much is conditioned on how we represent our knowledge and moral understandings to others. Our moral consciousness asks that we lift our sights to the morally possible while creating and maintaining positive human relationships. Thus, to free themselves from fixed commitments to tradition – from hovering in the past – values-based leaders need to allow the winds of moral veracity sweep through, connecting internal and external evaluations to moral sensitivity as they begin to uplift the ethical profile and integrity of their organizations (*Webster Speech*, 1850).

As we are aware, moral ideas spread slowly and remain deeply immersed in traditional beliefs and practices. Formalizing these beliefs into practical ethical ideas and rules for the workplace has proven complex as human diversity remains a prevailing and sometimes disruptive influence in all areas of contemporary life. The unexhumed assumptions which have impounded civil and moral discourse require examination and the moral consciousness is an avenue for realizing this ideal. Naturally and socially, we are obliged to

unearth the idea that there lies within the domain of human cognitivity the ability to discern and lay bare the moral features of the humanity we are and the humanity we wish to become.

Consequently, care is needed when identifying collective values or values thought of as organizationally important for these are sometimes misstated or provided with the assumption of collective agreement. Also, appealing to one's "conscience" maybe inappropriate as human diversity reveals multifarious views on what is considered to be right and wrong behavior. Also, practically, strongly motivated by their own authority and suppositions, leaders need to stay grounded and not get too far ahead of their employees when engaged in discussions of value, projecting assumed values on the screen of reality with such authority these values become reality itself. Patience is required and more so, listening to what others are saying. Recognizably, in a most general sense, moral value is intrapersonal as well as interpersonal, narrated and more often than not obfuscated; this is often the world, at least our understanding of the world, we share with others. Given this reality, when orientating new employees to values considered organizationally important, leaders need to understand the importance of transparency while engaging others in discussions of their values and the idealized values of the organization. Defined as ethical and moral, the organizational culture becomes more realistically embedded by giving others a voice. All of this is a function of the conscious mind and, more precisely, the moral consciousness.

> ***One of the most important, and most radical, philosophical implications of the systems view of life is a new conception of the nature of mind and consciousness, which finally overcomes the Cartesian division between mind and matter that has haunted philosophers and scientists for centuries. In the 17th century, René Descartes based his view on the fundamental division between two independent and separate realms – that of mind, which he called the 'thinking thing' (res cogitans), and that of matter, the 'extended thing' (res extensa). Following Descartes, scientists and philosophers continued to think of the mind as some intangible entity and were unable to imagine how this 'thinking thing' is related to the body. The decisive advance of the systems view of life has been to abandon the Cartesian view of mind as a 'thing', and to realise that mind and consciousness are not things, but processes* (Capra, "We are all in this together," 2016).**

Descartes' Intuition

It was in the 17th century that Rene Descartes[1] initiated discussions of the conscious mind leading to developments in psychology and the social sciences and, to some extent,

[1] *See* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consciousness-17th/. *See also*, Peter Critchley (2011*) Philosophizing through the eye of the mind: Philosophy as ethos and praxis*. https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:22143/. Critchley writes: "By far the most famous attempt in the history of philosophy to tackle this problem, to refute skepticism by showing that we can be absolutely certain about some things, was made by the French philosopher Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Rene Descartes set the agenda for modern philosophy by placing the question 'Of what can I be certain?' centre stage. He used the method of systematic doubt, by which he would only accept what he could see clearly and distinctly to be true. He knew that his senses could be deceived, therefore he would not trust them; neither could he always trust his own logic. ***The one thing Descartes could not doubt was his own existence***. If he doubted, he was there to doubt; therefore, he must exist. This is the one truth that cannot be doubted. After all, if I did not exist, I could not doubt or even be deceived about anything. Descartes expresses this insight in one of the most famous propositions in the history of philosophy: 'I think, therefore I am' (cogito ergo sum). This, he claims, is an indubitable certainty that can serve as a foundation upon which he can build the rest of his philosophical system and thereby lay to rest the spectre of scepticism. There is a question as to what the first certainty is. Is it 'I think', or is it 'I exist'? Descartes seems to say it is the

influencing crime and punishment as conscious motivation became a leading factor in determining guilt or innocence in criminal trials. Descartes' intuition – "I think therefore I am" [common translation] can also be expressed as, "I know I am thinking because ***I am conscious*** of my thinking." Both thinking and being conscious that I am thinking are a reciprocated reality. Descartes presents us with a dual nature of humanity – thinking and being. Implied is ***not*** that thinking brings us into *being*, but *being human* or being *conscious* allows thinking to exist. That we are conscious is self-evident and ***ontologically basic to human life***. Consciousness is not a theoretical deduction nor is it a first principle; that is, a basic assumption that cannot be deduced any further. Rather, consciousness is foundation to our being alive – to our being – and irreducible to anything else. On the other hand, as Descartes suggested, we are made aware of the content of consciousness by thinking, which gives rise to the intuition of consciousness itself.

Consequently, thinking (including moral thinking) is the basic function of the conscious mind. We can question later interpretations of "think" or the Latin "cogito" as most limit its usage to reasoning only, but cognitivity – the act of knowing – is a conscious intellectual activity which includes, among other capacities, the development of perception, memory, judgment, and reasoning. Descartes would later include emotional and volitional processes such as motivating, imagining, intuiting, believing, feeling, and innovating as activities of thinking. All of these are at the center of what it means to be a human being. Thinking morally partakes of many cognitive processes making the development of knowledge and value intentional social creations. Understandably moral valuation proceeds from our consciousness, not the other way around.

Consciousness is therefore primary and embryonic without which meaningful life ceases to exist and gives rise to its basic function, thinking. This flows from Descartes' intuition; yet, although intuitively grasped, the moral content of consciousness along with rules of reason and scientific validation acknowledge the complexities of knowledge and judgment revealing their social (communal) nature. Consequently, knowledge is a living and growing affair cognitively grounded in assumptions (beliefs) about the valued nature of human life, as normative as it is descriptive. These beliefs we cling to, often without consideration. They structure our thinking, help us to separate fact from fiction, and motivate us. In particular, our moral consciousness carries us forward in a growing awareness of others often stretching the limits of our thinking, but opening fertile possibilities for growth and development.

Although knowledge and moral understanding are made possible by the conscious mind, the question can be raised about our capacity to "take in" and "interpret" what is experienced. How do we move from common sense – our fundamental presuppositions about life – to a willingness to contemplate differing views and moral alternatives? And what is it anchoring our moral commitments — is it faith, our social awareness, or something built into our human nature? These questions have provoked theoretical as well as practical discussions concerning knowledge and morality. As we are aware, deeply felt and held assumptions tint our interpretations of experience. Caution is suggested as often instinctive and habitual assumptions are the given (presuppositions) we present to reality which in turn modify

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latter. Yet if we take the statement 'I think, therefore I am' at face value, he seems to be inferring his existence from the fact that he is thinking, which implies that 'I think' is actually his first certainty."

reality and become, in our minds, reality itself. This is something about which values-based leaders need to be constantly aware when seriously opening discussions of organizational values.

What we learn from Descartes is that we have the ability to turn inward, question ourselves, and, if need be, modify our own perceptions through an invested cognitive re-examination. The implication is that we live our lives in terms of highly restricted reality images; there is much more of which we are unmindful influencing our thinking. Consciousness, therefore, remains a complexity resisting reduction to simple "awareness"; it is holistic and sometimes partial, admittedly subjective–perhaps self-deceptive–yet, hopefully, seeking understanding and rational consistency.

From this discussion we learn:

(1) Moral values are not self-evident, they proceed through experience, but collective agreement is seldom achieved. An honest exchange of ideas and opinions is therefore necessary for the gathering and applying knowledge, including that which is moral.

(2) Intentional responses to our surroundings – empirical and non-empirical, moral and nonmoral – symbolized in words (generally descriptive or prescriptive) are self-identifiers. Others know us not only by what we say, but also by what we do: "Actions speak louder than words."

(3) Enculturation – the process by which we learn the requirements of our culture and acquire the values and behaviors appropriate or necessary in that culture – shapes and binds our values and these constraints are difficult to loosen. We are naturally communal in nature and the emotions and sentiments binding our sociability more often than not define our moral and civil response to others.

(4) Commonly, we become conscious of, and are able to comprehend, the moral value of others by living moral lives ourselves. Living a moral life is a learning process that precedes comprehending its personal and social value. Awareness of our own needs and those closest to us are requisite for the extension of empathy and compassion to others.

(5) Thus, the content of our moral consciousness represents something learned and deeply sensed, seemingly self-evident because it is genuinely felt. Unable to be dismissed, this intuitive awareness initiates feelings about the value of our collective humanity and inaugurates moral reasoning. Such intrinsic feelings cannot be easily set aside as nonsense or unimportant as they provide, among other things, individual and collective meaning to our lives.

Values as Socially Constructed

Theoretically, although moral values can be examined and realigned rationally suggesting their "objective importance," as Sellars says, it would be dishonest to deny their inherent subjectivity and malleability. Practically and socially, we live in a culture orientated to the assumptions of others, especially moral assumptions and those related to the often thought of unconditional nature of the empirical. Obviously, when talking about the intrinsic – the moral consciousness – many, noticing the lack of empirical validation, will be suspect and relegate this discussion to the inexplicably subjective, influenced by personal

> ***Science cannot discover that only science leads to truth*** **(Baggini, 2016).**

feelings, tastes, or opinions. There is buried within our predilection for solidity a belief in the sensory detectable as foundational. We know this works and have witnessed its results, especially when the empirical is coupled with logical precision and physical validation. Yet, while the empirical has been proven to be useful and practical, our obedience to it has often sidestepped and ignored other obligations, especially those conceived as moral.

Industrial, economic, and scientific progress – the driving forces for the majority of changes witnessed in the 20th century – require a critical mind and a moral aptitude free of prejudice and open to new ways of thinking. These new "ways" include the application of the ethical and moral to empirical methods, discoveries, and their projected long-range conclusions. This may sound prudent, but many involved in these communities are driven by a profit motive relegating what is morally necessary to the waste bins of the relative and insignificant, ignoring it when they can. Without due consideration, some might agree, to pursue any avenue to knowledge and wealth without moral oversight and a consideration of its impact on others is socially and morally irresponsible. EMBRO REPORTS says,

> *It is therefore important that governments, public and private funding organizations, scientific societies and the researchers themselves become more sensitive to ethical questions. In the present climate, upholding the neutrality of science would not be amoral, but immoral. Scientists are the first to receive crucial information, sometimes years in advance, about the potential dangers of certain scientific knowledge* (EMBO Rep., 2001).

Clearly, empirical reason is and can never be free of disorderly, imprecise, and hard-to-justify personal judgment. This we are witnessing in 2020 as the coronavirus is impacting our lives. The social construction of knowledge is a clue: what is many times claimed as fact or rational (reasonable), is frequently based on judgments which are capricious – political and/or faith-based – lacking in moral sensitivity. We should be aware, *reason qua reason* relies not just on logic and evidence, but on insight and intuition for real world applications. Modern business, government, and community leaders should be aware as what is called "fake news" and "fake science" continues to populate the airwaves. The nature of both truth and knowledge are constantly being tested. Being socially constructed, truth and knowledge are affected by personal and organizational values, sometimes self-centered, often economically charged or politically motivated, at other times moved by religious faith. The moral consciousness is conditioned by these values and behaviors.

No one really makes a decision by running through his "moral system," like numbers through a computer program (Tivnan, 1995).

From a moral point of view, is there a stopping place where we say enough is enough? Without begging the question of subjectivity, it suffices to say everyone has to accept that some beliefs, some values, are basic to human collective living and apply these consistently. Without this acceptance there would be no way of distinguishing sense from nonsense or what is essentially human from what is not. Even the blatantly selfish individual wishes that others exercise moral acuity. This is an inference drawn from our social awareness, the perceived need for social stability; it is affected by our moral consciousness. For many, this choice is not formal but a matter of upbringing – an evolving unawareness – usually called "common sense." Yet, within common sense we discover a non-judicious mixture of several paths to knowledge – faith-based, empirical, and pragmatic, etc. – confusing moral

discourse and making moral consistency difficult to achieve. Theoretically, the implication is that no humanly construed path to knowledge and value can be considered as absolute or terminal.

Functions of the Conscious Mind

Structure is provided to the conscious mind by C. G. Jung (1955) who identifies four paths to knowledge generally identified as "thinking," but often used injudiciously. Jung's identification of these capacities will provide understanding to the functions of moral consciousness. They include thinking, feeling, intuition, and sensation representing a holistic vision of the conscious mind. One change is made in Jung's cognitive hierarchy; "thinking" will be called "reasoning" as Jung's definition allows this suggestion. All of these constitute thinking processes and are difficult to discuss without admitting this as self-evident:

> *Sensation tells us something is there;*
> *Reasoning (Thinking) makes the discrimination as to what it is;*
> *Intuition tells us about its possibilities; and*
> *Feeling reveals its subjective value*.

Together, these cognitive capacities are mutually active in representing the ***content of consciousness*** offering a holistic understanding of experience. Jung says when one is neglected, the other forms of judgment are also weakened. His insights are noteworthy for understanding moral judgments and managing a diversity of people within an organization. Individuals normally rely on one of these functions while ignoring the others. For example, leaders with highly developed analytic and pragmatic inclinations often over-emphasize the rational and economic, leaving feelings, emotions, and beliefs – as sources of corporate and moral improvement – dangling in the backwaters of the underdeveloped and unappreciated. Encouraging holistic thinking will increase understanding and improve the social climate of a business or organization. We should also understand that as forms of judgment, these cognitive processes are neither terminal nor are they absolute. They are constructions of the conscious mind, conditioned by experience and tradition, and rely a great deal, as Sellars says, on *interpretation and qualification*.

Experience teaches of the workability and practicality of the dialogic process. Significantly, and as a matter of practice, when in tune to workplace conversations a leader is able to distinguish which modes of thinking are dominating a conversation. With improved communications and with imaginative flexibility, the leader will better distinguish between which are insightful and which are over-emotional or straying off the point, and move quickly to gather a variety of opinions for more balanced decision-making. This entails some introspection but also requires attentively listening as others speak and offer opinions. Collective insight and the acknowledgement of the contributions of others will lead to enhancements in the quality of work, the satisfaction of workers, and the improvement of a values-based organizational culture. Such skill is the product of the moral imagination utilizing previous knowledge, insight, intuition, and respect for others no matter their position in the organization.

Yet, without being overly optimistic — given that many are self-promoters, self-centered, narrowly focused, and often uncooperative — this is an idealized version of a values-based organization and of the dialogic process. Wisely, C. G. Jung brings us back down to reality as he confesses,

Indeed, I do not forget that my voice is but one voice, my experience a mere drop in the sea, my knowledge no greater than the visual field in a microscope, my mind's eye a mirror that reflects a small corner of the world, and my idea — a subjective confession (Jung, 1955).

A Case for the Moral Consciousness

Living on the Thin Edge of Subjectivity

Easy to see, this commentary is suggestive, offering no empirical evidence for the existence of moral consciousness or, for that matter, moral imagination. These are intrinsic and insightful inclinations unbounded by reason and statistical manipulation; yet, definitive of our humanity. The question of "consciousness?" does raise questions requiring attention; namely, "Who are we?" and "Why are we?" Answers to these questions reveal an uncertainty habitually blurring the lines between what is thought of as innate and what is considered social and developmental. Undoubtedly, consciousness, as a form of self-awareness, is ontologically basic to human life. Without consciousness we cease to exist.

> **…[I]it would appear reasonable to conclude that conscious processes evolved out of unconscious processes, both phylogenetically and developmentally; phylogenetically, primarily in terms of the evolution of brain structure, and developmentally; phylogenetically, primarily in terms of the evolution of brain structure, and developmentally, both in terms of greater awareness as we grow psychologically from infant to adult, and historically as we develop more and more advanced civilizations (Royce, 1964).**

But it would be incorrect to say our moral nature is innate or natural. Rather, it is a developed capacity, socially anchored and constructed, and malleable — an outward flow of the conscious mind. Our moral capacity is built on understanding the importance of building strong and sustaining relationships revealing its social nature. Evolving within the family and community, our moral consciousness becomes a conduit to human communal life.

Admittedly, accounts of morality modulate between that which is considered innate or natural and that which is thought of as developmental often causing confusion. Upon a careful study of Jonathan Haidt's *The Righteous Mind* (2013), one is apt to concur. Obviously, there is much about life about which we are relatively unaware, so when speaking of "consciousness" or "moral consciousness" or "moral imagination" we are approaching the outer limits of what language can convey. Theologians, philosophers, psychologists, and social scientists have put their twist on this and we, like them, stammer and hesitate using abstraction and metaphor to give these behaviors meaning. Entrapped as we are by the limitations of language, ethics and morals, and even science and logic, must rely upon metaphor to convey their images, meanings, and importance as avenues to truth and value.

Clearly, we are on the thin edge of subjectivity indicated by how commonly we use such symbolic expressions as "self," "thinking," "moral compass," "spirit," "soul," "heart," and "mind" as indicators of "moral consciousness." These are common idioms, some theoretical and others faith-based, indicating that something humanly significant is going on here, something fundamental to human life that cannot be ignored nor reduced to insignificance. About this, no argument or moral theory is required; it is self-evident. Because of this inherent subjectivity, many seeking a more solid ground upon which to rest morality, have chosen a more utilitarian approach. Thus, they objectify morality as a set of cultural or social rules and regulations, forgetting that knowledge, especially moral knowledge, is qualitatively

interpretive going much deeper than the veneer of society often suspects. They have put their emphasis on the ***objectives of morality*** and not the ***thinking, moral person***. Subsequently, they often reduce non-empirical judgments such as insight and intuition as unsound or insignificant. But the thinking subject resists such objectification. There is a need to dig deeper for even unarticulated motives deeply felt, perhaps habitual, move our moral response to others. These retain their moral significance and cognitive understanding by the way we treat others and how they respond to us. An awareness of what motivates the moral response of us and others should be a priority of values-based leaders.

Insightfully, Karl Japers, correctly said,

> ***At the end we have no firm ground under us, no principle to hold on to, but a suspension of thought in infinite space—without shelter in conceptual systems, without refuge in firm knowledge or faith. And even this suspended, floating structure of thought is only one metaphor of being among others*** (Bennett-Hunter, 2014).

Creating Non-Humiliating Environments

Since the scientific-empirical movement began in earnest in the 17th century, Western Civilization has pruned and developed the sensory-rational functions of cognitive discourse. These functions have been combined with logical and mathematical precision to more accurately describe and make predictions about the physical world. These have proven worthy, leading to vast industrial and technological improvements. Yet, they often have ignored the quality of human life, as, for example, ignoring climate change, gender and racial inequality, and nuclear and coal-ash waste disposal. Using similar means, joined with statistical correlations, these efforts have been utilized by the social sciences, especially those involved in demographics, to manipulate political affiliations, tastes, and social values (*Investopedia*, 2020). Today, in education, these methods are used to measure learning, itself an intrinsic quality definitive of the knowledgeable person. Generally, these processes dominate the world of scientific research, industry, business, and education. They are practical and they work, but left underdeveloped has been creativity and intuition, including the moral consciousness and moral imagination.

Suggested by John Paul Lederach (2005), the moral imagination is "…the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist." It "…is about the messiness of innovation."

In light of these developments and the need for values sensitivity, the values-based leader is challenged, as Isaiah Berlin has noted, with "promoting and preserving an uneasy equilibrium, which is constantly threatened and in constant need of repair" (1994). Berlin rightly points out that the effort to walk the line between the moral certitude of conflicting values' orientations "is the precondition for decent societies and morally acceptable behaviors." This effort requires some flexibility and creativity as rational algorithms ensconced in organizational beliefs and values can stretch us only so far. Indeed, ***measurement*** has become the defining metaphor of our time, but moral value resists quantification and statistical manipulation.

A good organizational climate is the basis for successful operation of any company. It substantially contributes to the well-being of employees, but its attempts to measure and quantify organizational climate represent a testimony to the failure of the moral imagination

as moral judgment and is often accompanied by a pretense of infallibility saying that a rule is a rule is a rule (or, just taking care of business, or the bottom line). Darcia Narvaez comments,

> *Moral imagination involves not only the ability to generate useful ideas, but also the ability to form ideas about what is good and right, and to put the best ideas into action and service for others. The use of moral imagination involves exploring alternatives actions and possibilities while being sensitive to the people, situations, and lifescapes at hand* (Narvaez & Mrkva, 2014).

If our aspiration is a decent and responsible society, the activation of this goal and our commitment to it will be, as Edward Tivnan observes, ". . . a continuing conversation about how we can keep from stomping on one another's special projects of self-improvement" (Trivnan, 1995). And so, we ask, "How will a good person know when she or he is hurting or humiliating her or his neighbor?" and "How will companies, including scientific and governmental organizations, know when they are violating rather than promoting essential human values?" Valuing freedom, tolerance, and justice, says Richard Rorty (1999) "Requires me to become aware of all the various ways in which other human beings whom I might act upon can be humiliated."

> ***I distinguish between a decent society and a civilized one. A civilized society is one whose members do not humiliate one another, while a decent society is one in which the institutions do not humiliate people* (Margalit, 1996).**

From a moral perspective, values-based leaders are tasked with creating non-humiliating organizations characterized by respect for the welfare, dignity, and self-worth of those in their care. These are organizations consistently infusing within their cultures a sensitive awareness of the values-diversity among their employees, including, among other things, respect for cultural and religious differences, the need for income equality, paying livable wages, and gender sensitivity.

> ***"Thought" represents a reaction of the organism-as-a-whole, produced by the working of the whole, and influencing the whole. From our daily experiences, we are familiar with what we usually denote as being "conscious"; in other words, we are aware of something, be it an object, a process, an action, a "feeling," or an "idea." A reaction that is very habitual and semi-automatic is not necessarily "conscious." The term "consciousness," taken separately, is not a complete symbol; it lacks content, and one of the characteristics of "consciousness" is to have some content* (Alfred Korzybski, 2010).**

An Avenue of Discernment and Moral Judgment

The term "moral" designates a particular kind of *conscious content* socially prescriptive and cognitively descriptive telling us how we ought to treat one another. Through parenting, nurture, and continual interaction with others, we learn the importance of living morality. This aptitude is symbolized as "moral consciousness"; it is a social disposition identifying human interrelatedness and collective responsibility. This is learned and developed by communal awareness – in families, churches, schools, and by working with others. Thus, being moral is both natural and developmental but also reflective of cultural diversity. It may be so firmly enculturated as to be thought of as self-evident. Of course, noting the maleficence evident in society today, this should not be taken for granted. Suffice it to say,

we are molded individuals and our moral consciousness is a conditioned response to our environment. No moral theory, religious or secular, will correct this condition, but applying reason to our moral understanding can help.

Thus, as we gather and weigh experiences, information, and the needs of an organization and its employees, the moral consciousness provides an ***avenue*** of discernment and sensitivity. This will be a learning process as moral understanding is rarely self-evident and varies injudiciously among individuals. With commitment and experience, we are able to become morally adept and, importantly, comprehend why being moral is important. This opportunity ***initiates*** an appraisal of feelings, intuitions, beliefs, and assumptions bringing what are good, right, and honest to bear on social relationships and organizational competency. This knowledge and its appraisal represent the content of our moral consciousness seeking consistency and social authenticity. It will never be pure or terminal; it is an ongoing growth experience.

Morality and the moral consciousness are not strictly bound by empirical or statistical validation, rational theory, or even the rhetoric of faith and belief. This is a problem for many seeking a more solid foundation for building a values-based culture. Some even doubt adding "rational" to our moral awareness will alleviate our anxieties about the objective import of moral thinking as noted by Roy Sellars. Putting values, especially moral values, into a business model runs the risk of being free-floating unanswerable to common sense, reason, or our collective moral intuitions. Consequently, building a values-based culture cannot be an isolated decision; rather, it requires study and dialogue, respect for others, and an honest appraisal of organizational practices. Thus, many will agree that basically, ***but minimally,*** developing a values-based organization is a continuing conversation about how to place what many deem as moral qualities – responsibility, tolerance, equality, dignity, and impartiality – at the forefront of personal decisions, social values, organizational practices, and interactions with clients and customers.

Relationships, the Spiritual, and the Inauguration of Moral Insight

Stretching the Boundaries of Our Thinking

Attuned as we are to statistical methods and the use of questionnaires for the assessment of organizational climate, surely this essay stretches the boundaries of what is commonly thought of as rational. Conceptual understanding is difficult and more so when leaving the security of the empirical and peering into the vastness of the intrinsic. In the end, the explanations provided may be inadequate – an adventure of piling metaphor on metaphor seeking explanatory release. Yet, sensitivity to moral feelings and to the complexities of experience – our intuitive moral awareness – cannot be neglected; this is both an intrinsic and pragmatic reality but for many represents an existential crisis.

A function of the moral consciousness is to filter such knowledge through the sieve of our reasoned moral sensibilities. Caution should be taken, as George Silberbauer (1995) says,

> ***One's own morality lies deeply internalized, and it is not easy to overcome ethnocentric [my views are right because they are my views] prejudice when confronted by behavior which prima facie [at first sight] offends against it.***

Silberbauer warns that the dominant moral values and beliefs of a society cannot be applied to all people and all cultures without some modifications and adjustments. This will happen at only a generalized level before comparisons proceed, including comparisons of moralities.

These adjustments will include, among other things, constitutions and laws specifying duties and rights, behaviors we generally call "moral" and clarifying what is essentially moral in religious literature and talk. Most assuredly, this applies to businesses and community organizations as well. Consistently developing and articulating morally-based values within the diversity of an organization is an arduous task including what Silberbauer calls "modifications and adjustments." With this, Silberbauer demonstrates the complexities inherent in ethical talk when applied amidst our human diversity.

Sensitive to this, the values-based leader needs to be flexible, making use of the moral imagination when establishing a values-based culture. In this way, a values-based leader is able to pursue options for values impartiality and balance. This is a daily challenge and being practical and rational is often not enough. Thus, leaders are counseled to think widely and wisely to bring into themselves the opinions and reasoned judgments of others. Of course, none of us will ever be satisfied with what is heard. Perhaps we can agree that emotion guides much of moral thinking, especially when hitched to personal affiliations, traditions, and organizational commitments. When facing this challenge, a negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions will serve a leader well. This will include listening, making adjustments in heretofore judgments, and applying values-based directives that have been clear discussed and, if need be, amended.

> ***What we therefore need is a conception of reason which is thin enough for there to be mutually comprehensible reasoning between individuals and cultures in a shared discursive space, without it being so thin as to enable anything to count as reasoning, from nuanced step-by-step argument to thumping the table and insisting on the correctness of your position*** **(Baggini, 2016).**

For the values-based leader listening, collaborating, and weighing the insights and emotions of others against our own attitudes and judgments is being rational in the broadest and most general sense. It is utilizing the opportunity to explain and justify the beliefs and commitments of the organization and connect these to the values of employees and the community. It is a process of learning. Life-long learning, says Socrates, "is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel" (Leef, 2019). This signifies that which gives meaning, motivates, and brings understanding; it points to the moral consciousness, the "flame" of moral veracity.

> ***But for that [valid argument] to be illuminating, you've got to get the right assumptions, ones which seem intuitively appealing, or correctly represent how we take the world to be in some aspect, and that is where the real work goes and that's where it gets hard*** **(Michael Martin as quoted by Julian Baggini, 2016, p. 5).**

In addition to the economic realities facing organizations, the challenge is to reassess personal motivations with regard to employees, clients, and customers. Reassessment is the art of inspecting (introspecting, weighing) personal assumptions and preconceived notions through the insights of others, even those with whom we disagree. This is what is meant by "thinking widely." In this manner, reassessment becomes a rational process, coherent and judicious, a commitment making available the capacity of the rational mind seeking objectivity and communal agreement. Of course, this is an ideal, as we can never predict what others will do, or fully know what they are thinking, their willingness or unwillingness to talk freely and honestly, even when they assert their agreement. But, even idealized, the moral imagination will pay dividends as it offers flexible and creative ways for developing moral coherence, a sense of

community, and overall moral improvement. These activities and what motivates them lay at the foundation of a values-based organization.

From a philosophical perspective, Charles Taylor speaks to the moral consciousness as an affirmation of "a given ontology of the human" (1989, p. ix), involving claims, implicit or explicit, about the moral nature and status of human beings. Consequently, we are challenged by an awareness of our human multiplicity to remove the scales from our own eyes, to look inside, to the inner self, the moral self, and therein discover the dignity and worthiness definitive of our own humanity while extending this value to others.

Although consciousness is basic to human nature, as Taylor surmises, its ***content*** is not. The content of the moral consciousness evolves within social relationships and is learned, disclosing its cultural pliability. Responding to basic human needs, the moral consciousness extends and broadens conscious awareness awaiting development. Consequently, being intentionally moral is a living and growing affair, neither terminal nor absolute, but ongoing. Given this overt intentionality, and with moral comprehension and a sensitive awareness to the needs of others, values-based leaders become accountable for acting consistently within the boundaries of what is considered to be ethical and moral behavior.

Life is a Web of Relationships

Understandably, "life is a web of relationships." Relationships reveal our character; they are "the eye of needle" defining our moral obligations. Relationship-building is a powerful but fragile phenomenon, constantly changing and easily lost. We are daily confronted with making an effort to understand those around us — their familial connections, religious affiliations, political views, and deepest values. This understanding entails empathy, generosity, fairness, and reciprocity. All of these, including their polar opposites, figure into our relationship-value-equation.

Waxing metaphorically and with interpretive license, an insight from artist Paul Cézanne can inform moral responsibility. Cézanne remarked about one of his paintings, "The landscape thinks itself me and I am its consciousness" (Baggini, p. 60).[2] If the "landscape" is symbolized as "the human landscape" or "the organizational landscape," then our consciousness will be a moral consciousness of *unconcealment*. We are the gap in the trees of our human environment allowing moral insight filter in thereby bringing life to all whom we touch. With and amongst others our moral consciousness is revealed. Consequently, moral living is a crafting, a making, a growing of compassion, forgiveness, care, and love for others. Here we are grounding our lives in something firm, for without the solidity of human relationships we cannot survive. It is within the soil of everyday living where morality, duly experienced, grows in importance. Our responsibility is to let the growth of our moral sensitivities elevate others, not just ourselves, to ensure their human moral growth.

As pointed out by Fritjof Capra, thinking in terms of relationships is essentially moral thinking or "a new science." Responding to Capra's insight, we can say, in time we learn that our lives are largely built on a scaffolding of relationships. Understanding this takes many years as most of us learn this lesson late in life. Relationships—good and bad—create the web of our lives. Finding purpose in our web is difficult for much that happens to us is either

[2] *See also*, Baggini, J. and Stangroom, J. (2002) *New British philosophy: The interviews.* London: Continuum, pp, 134-135.

incidental or accidental. Purpose is intentional and a difficult and foreboding task. When we discover our purpose, we are able to maneuver through life in more productive ways.

Recognizably, our reference to moral consciousness and moral imagination appeals to our sense of mystery and awe. There is more we wish to know, but understanding will always be incomplete. We can only speak in simile and metaphor grounded in the public domain and in a pragmatic commitment to keeping the conversation about morality and its significance going in a time of values confusion and fragmentation. In our sensitive understandings and as we engage others, we will discover a *reverberating* effect as the moral consciousness is recognizably relationship dependent. Not self-contained and neither bilateral nor individualistic; our moral consciousness is flexible, holistic, and noticeably responsive – compassionate and reasoned, and yes, sometimes unreasonable – often living on the edge of emotion and incredulity. To these intuitions and feelings, perceptions, and misperceptions, we apply the *normative quality* of moral sensitivity recommending avenues and means of moral service. This is continuously reactivated through the positive response of others.

> ***I call this new science 'the systems view of life' because it involves a new kind of thinking – thinking in terms of relationships, patterns and context. In science, this way of thinking is known as 'systems thinking,' or 'systemic thinking.' Thinking in terms of relationships is crucial for ecology, because ecology – derived from the Greek oikos, meaning 'household' – is the science of the relationships among various members of the Earth Household*** **(Capra, 2016).**

That Which is Spiritual

Within societies and nations, religious values continue to shape and reshape, not only ways of life, but the political landscape as well. Yet, in a most general sense and considered definitive of "humanity as community," morality often rubs against religious absolutism which asserts that only the "faithful" can be moral. One has to admit that moral intuition and insight are difficult to identify, and even more difficult to portray as it comes in many forms, expressed variously, and is culturally compliant. It understands the value of dignity, honesty, and responsibility. It is relationship oriented and relationship dependent. The moral consciousness is charged by human activity and communal awareness losing its meaning and balance without content and context. Relationships, our collective humanity, fill the consciousness with normative beliefs about who we are and about the dignity and value of others.

> ***Religious instruction and belief remain today the lifeblood of society's moral ethos. Not only does religion teach virtue, it catalyzes moral action. As such, religion plays an essential societal role warranting special consideration*** **(Christensen, 2009).**

Recognizably, and even with its connectivity to what is essentially natural, being moral is often called "spiritual" providing it with a significant, other worldly quality. Thus, some care should be taken when using "spiritual"; its meaning varies due to its long and conflated history and association with a variety of religious faiths. Historically, the meaning of "spiritual" varies impartiality within and across cultures. "Spirit" and "being spiritual" have collective importance in both religious and secular societies; consequently, we should not disregard this common expression as it carries moral significance for many.

In daily speech we often refer to the "spirit of humanity," "team spirit," "the spirit within," "the spiritual," and "the soul," etc. as significant-value-identifiers. Not to dismiss religion in its various forms, it is commonly recognized from religion has originated many moral concepts and practices proven effective in societies and cultures. Although, these are often provincial and fortified with faith-based commitments, they are just too solidly entrenched to be dismissed. Their vitality and staying power are testimonies to their normative value. To this, values-based leaders should be sensitive.

Consequently, "spirit" is a common moral signifier within and outside of religious settings. Recognition of its many uses and meanings will be constructive for understanding the diversity of value-orientations within an organization. Recognition and respect for religious diversity is important; however, values-based leaders, in an effort to dignify this diversity, can use "spirit" in a religiously neutral way. Among other things, "spirit" signifies strength of mind, courage, character, and moral fiber. Other usages include: "the principle of conscious life," "the vital principle in humans," and "animating the body or mediating between body and soul." Symbolically, "spirit" goes to the heart of what is meant by "human being." Of course, a reductionist approach will not satisfy this variety or those who use "spirit" and "spiritual" within the context of a faith-based culture or even those who prefer a more secular connotation. A more inclusive nuance will help identify its moral significance. Without a doubt, consciousness identifies our mental acuity as being rational, often moral, and other times neither of these. To call the moral consciousness "sacred" or "spiritual" is understandable, but being intrinsic, it is plainly difficult to explain to a wider audience. Insightfully, Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980) noted,

> ***[Life's] sanctity is often thought to derive from the impossibility of any such reduction* (Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens, 1990).**

> *What is eternal and important is often hidden from a man by an impenetrable veil. He knows there's something under there, but he cannot see it. The veil reflects the daylight.*

The "veil" to which Wittgenstein refers is culture, its habits and traditions, including the philosophical and religious beliefs, that have often defined human development, progress, and refinement. Nietzsche was aware of this which led to his diatribe on self-deception lending credence to the mystery of consciousness.

Practically, it's easy to acknowledge morality as a series of value judgments, subject to rational analysis about how to live within society. But this acknowledgement will never be as objective or universal as the will to believe remains a strong force in human life revealing its uneven braiding within the moral consciousness. Selfish and unselfish attitudes, ethnic biases, and religious beliefs are part of this binding. Without careful attention to our motives, these can become mental and social detractors. They often ignore the fundamental dimensions of relationships and the inclusive nature of our moral humanity.

Fundamentally and generally, morality is an intentional awareness of self and others, our dignity and their dignity and the demands such recognition signifies. It is an acknowledgement of the inclusiveness of humanity, of humanity as community, deeply felt and spiritual, directing our attention to the worthiness of others. Thus, morality and the behaviors morality signify are recognizably social as well as cognitive, deeply felt and religious. They display the imprint of our thinking, social intuitions, practical decision making, religious beliefs, and the affairs of everyday life. Hence, being moral is an everyday

experience—cognitive, spiritual, and social. In Capra's words, it is holistic, hewn through experience (externally) yet housed internally, and indicative of the human spirit. Once socially discharged, reassessed, and exposed in dialogic communication, the manifold possibilities of the moral consciousness are able to be released.

The Inauguration of the Moral Mind

What has been written reveals moral consciousness as a perpetual activity, as well as a reservoir of experiences, needed for shaping the world and responding to its ethical demands. It intentionally explores ways and means for applying what is morally essential to human communal and organizational life. This is only a beginning of moral understanding and behavior, an ***inauguration*** of ideas and actions making living with others agreeable and civil. Begun as moral insight (Royce, 1964)[3] and utilizing our moral imaginations, the actual details and social structures of morality are developed and applied in real life situations—through rules of conduct, organizational standards, constitutions and laws, and/or following the commandments of a particular religious faith, etc.

> ***In my scientific work, I have hunches. I can't explain always why I think a certain path is the right way, but I need to trust it and go ahead. I also have the ability to check these hunches and find out what they are about. That's the science part. Now, in private life, I rely on instinct. For instance, when I first met my wife, I didn't do computations. Nor did she*** **(Gigerenzer, 2017).**

We can pick at the entrails of this explanation and can agree insight by itself seems flimsy and confined, that it is too unstable and inadequate as a foundation for objective moral discernment. And it is! Such a *conscious inauguration* is only the starting place of moral understanding. A more thorough and consistent morality requires our unvarying attention, rational examination, clarification and communication with others, especially listening and providing dignified responses. Utilizing the capacities of the moral imagination, within organizations the moral consciousness seeks exploratory applications. Undoubtedly, a finely-tuned moral consciousness releases compassion and human sensitivity into the world, is ongoing, and never terminal, awaiting confirmation and application. These are some of the major corridors through which morality travels. When one tries to make morality a quick fix, empirically or religiously, it loses its zest and power of adaptation and reorientation.

1. To collect our thoughts, the moral consciousness is continuously restored, reverberating *from the outside in and from the inside out, and back.* It is a revolving conversation — an interchange of attitudes, commitments, and behaviors definitive of humanity. More formally, environmental and communal inputs are constantly ***presented*** to us through natural events and social interactions. As this information is processed, responses are gathered, some descriptive and others normative. Through this most common process and using experience, including insight and knowledge previously gained, we ***represent*** these inputs in various ways: as facts, theories, moral judgments, insights, intuitions, and by our behavior. Moral representation moves forward as we form opinions, make decisions, and build relationships in recognizably moral ways. Unperceived, but known, evolving through experience, and socially malleable; the "mysterious" language of moral consciousness speaks to us only

[3] Royce argues that all knowledge is partial, contingent on the method(s) chosen, and therefore incomplete. Absolute knowledge or truth is out of our reach.

emerging as a form of self-consciousness allowing us to know the grounds or reasons for our beliefs and actions (Korsgaard, 2006). This is the representative "structure" and "content" of moral consciousness constantly requiring "reassessment" and "reactivation" in social and organizational contexts.

Conclusion

In this dialogue, a case has been made that we represent ourselves – our ideas, judgments, and values – to others by the activity of our moral consciousness. This is not an empirical claim, but one that is self-evident. The moral consciousness is not separate from consciousness, only representative of its prescriptive substance. Perhaps this is an *overbelief*, something I wish to believe that covers my doubts about human nature, the intrinsic, and the moral. Overbeliefs are what Henry David Aiken called, "ideological principles of orientation" (Aiken, 1963). These provide supporting contexts of ideas concerning the nature of the world, our place in it, our essential inner nature, our history and institutions, and the framework through which we express and interpret our ideas and values. But overbeliefs can become dogmatic when not released to conscious examination. To avoid such dogmatism and its concomitant encapsulation, this article opens a dialogue – a conscious examination – of the moral consciousness and its importance to values-based leadership.

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