

***Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions
Making Difficult Life and Work Decisions***

Michael Carroll & Elisabeth Shaw

PsychOz Publications, Australia, 2012

ISBN: 978-0-6465-7259-8

Reviewed by Sally Denham-Vaughan

I am going to start this review in a somewhat unorthodox way since, my experience is, that this book has called it out of me. So, here goes.

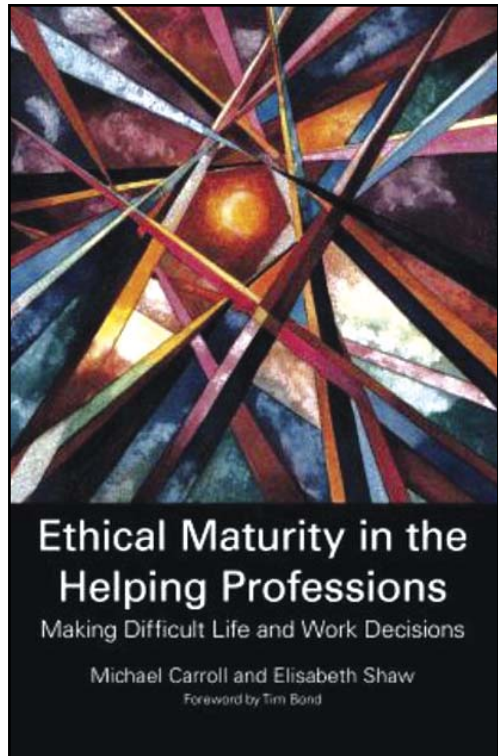
GO AND BUY THIS BOOK: you need to read it. And then read it again.

Phew. That feels better; a 'correct', considered and, I believe, ethically mature response inspired by Michael Carroll and Elisabeth Shaw's new book.

I realise that, strictly speaking, I should build incrementally to such a recommendation. Wend my way through careful description, reflection and rational analysis to a balanced set of reasons why *Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions* is worth reading. But, the book just demands more response from a reader than that. At times I found myself inwardly and silently cheering, fantasising about strapping myself to a railing in the service of a worthy ethical cause. Such is the power of the content, extent of referencing and vivid, first person, writing style; all ably supported by a marvellous range of questions, inquiries and reflective 'exercises' that readers are prompted to undertake.

Nonetheless, in what follows I will try and explain why I think *Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions* is such a 'must have', and what the main prompts to my personal response are. In the service of balance, I will also point to a few areas where I personally would have welcomed inclusion of additional material.

Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions aims to review the notion of ethics originating in moral philosophy and assess the current ethical landscape in light of recent insights from neuroscience, education, psychology and organisational development. It is a lengthy book, 360 pages divided into



21 chapters, with both the Foreword and Chapter 20 (The ethics of research), being authored by Professor Tim Bond of Bristol University, UK.

In my opinion, the book principally aims to assist readers' reflections concerning what it means to be ethical, specifically as revealed in our actions, not our theories. For Coaching Psychologists the topic is of foundational importance and demands intense intimate personal scrutiny of our action practices, preferably witnessed by work peers. We learn that we cannot, indeed must not, trust our personal narratives to reveal our ethical stance; this is only expressed in our behaviour.

The 21 chapters fall into three parts, each of which could be read as 'standalone' pieces of work. For me, the order of the chapters was not particularly easy to follow, with the exception of Section Two concerning 'the six components of ethical maturity'. This does not imply that I could think of a more logical, linear, order for chapters, but rather than

I realised as I read that all the topics form an intricately related web; iterative circles of learning and reflection that have many interdependencies. This mirrors Carroll and Shaw's main thrust about ethical behaviour: it is not a logical, linear, standardised set of rules to be learnt, but more a sensitisation and building of responsiveness to complex and challenging situations.

Part One (Chapters 1 to 7), provides an overview of writing from authors coming from philosophy, science and more latterly, psychology, who Carroll and Shaw consider to have been the most ethically influential over the ages. Accordingly, we are treated to a wonderfully engaging insight into the work of Socrates and Aristotle, with the former attempting to define the constituents of the 'good, (ethically mature), life' and the latter being concerned with moral character. Although it is tempting to dismiss these figures as ancient history, Carroll and Shaw show how these same dilemmas and issues are still of foundational importance in both identifying ethical issues and explicating our response to them. Importantly for the coherence of the work, they are presented in a way that enabled me to see clear links with the developmental notion of ethical maturity lying at the heart of this book. For example, while Socrates seems to have proposed that unethical behaviour is often the outcome of ignorance, Aristotle instead framed the issue not as one of lack of knowledge of the right action, but as a lack of moral will to carry it out. Both lacks can be proposed as examples of individual 'immaturity' and both can be remedied through acquisition of knowledge and skill in application: careful reflective attention to the issues of 'what ought I do', in balance with 'who ought I be' (p.84).

Of particular relevance and interest to me, however, was the way in which Carroll and Shaw bring these notions bang up to date by addressing the recent turn towards relational ethics: how attention to and awareness of contextual factors and subjectivity is vital in reaching ethical decisions. Indeed, Chapter 6 is a shining example of an easily

accessible explication of the 'relational turn', and the move from an epistemology and ontology of rampant individualism, (where we are 'outside' the problem that is viewed as belonging to an individual), to one of shared responsibility and awareness that our relational context is often of paramount importance in determining actions. This post-modern paradigm shift has immense repercussions for ethical considerations as it moves the focus of development from one of upskilling/educating/coaching individuals to one of analysing and supporting systems/contexts. Zimbardo (2007), describes this as moving from the 'Bad Apple' to 'Bad Barrel' epistemology and it has huge implications for all of us as coaches and practitioners. For example, the recent Francis Inquiry into the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust might be understood to reveal an isolated case of poor clinical care and/or failing leadership/management. Instead, however, careful reading points more to a failing situation/context where, despite individual ethical concerns and efforts, the environmental drivers all stacked up to lead to a litany of dreadful failures in patient care: a lack of 'relational responsiveness' (p.111), to the alarm calls of service users, carers and staff. It is in this chapter that I would have welcomed inclusion of more post-modern philosophy, particularly reference to the work of Emmanuel Levinas, who evocatively writes of ethics as first philosophy, necessarily needing to be considered prior to any epistemological or ontological concerns. In other words, before I consider knowledge/information or my way of being in a situation, I need to be aware of my relationship with, and responsibility for, the others involved, (both those present and those absent). Levinas calls this relationship an Ethical one, by which he means a radically asymmetrical relation of care towards the other, where caring is foundationally important in affecting how we will be with others and what we will do, (with, or to, them). Levinas is, therefore, I would suggest, the philosopher who most powerfully challenges

us to be relationally interconnected and responsive.

Indeed, this relational responsiveness, (which I would see as an alternative frame for ethical maturity), is identified as a key protective factor in helping us all avoid sleep walking into sloppy and/or dangerous unethical practice. Chapter 2, which deals specifically with unethical behaviour (which you may or may not want to consider as 'Evil'), is again a wonderfully researched and authoritatively written account of a range of ways in which poor/dangerous practice can be made much more, or less, likely to occur. Top of the list of strategies that help sustain us to 'save ourselves from being unethical' is thinking relationally: that is considering actual relationships and impact on others while also considering the whole context and key environmental drivers. Of particular note is Carroll and Shaw's cautionary note about the need for positive self-care if we are to sustain responsive, ethical practice and avoid 'the slippage into burnout which provides a context for some ethical fading' (p.59).

Indeed, here is a point in the book that I particularly valued, and yet, I am still not sure was emphasised enough, (maybe it cannot be over-emphasised): ethical maturity is not an automatic rite of passage that comes from years of experience and being a senior practitioner. Ethical lapses can happen to all of us at any point in our career, and indeed are more frequently reported by senior, so called, 'mature' practitioners. Instead, maturity is explicitly seen as both an evolutionary process and a state that we can move towards or away from. Equally, it can be episodic, only applied in certain areas of our practice, contextually cued, and more or less present depending on our physical and mental states. Nonetheless, Carroll and Shaw, while reviewing pretty much every cogent developmental frame and theory I could think of, (including, Erikson, Kohlberg, Kegan and many others), do name six components that they believe will feature in the practice of ethically mature professionals: sensitivity/mindfulness; ethical decision making; ethical

implementation; accountability; sustainability; and integration. They also raise fascinating issues concerning how to learn to be more ethically sensitive, (Chapter 8), and what/how training courses might best teach on the topic (Chapter 17).

In summary then, this book is an absolute treasure trove of knowledge and full of prompts for reflecting on and stretching ones practice. It is not always a comfortable read, highlighting again and again that while there are 'values I think and say I believe in, and another invisible set that informs my decisions and actions. The two sets of values do not talk to each other often and seem to have no connecting links (p.13). My experience of reading was of starting to square up to the need for both starting, and then supporting and sustaining an internal, ongoing dialogue between these value sets: what I think I do and what I 'find' myself doing. I would propose that I am probably not alone in thinking that committing to such an ongoing conversation is essential to most of us practicing as Coaching Psychologists, and indeed for us as a community of professional practitioners who frequently work in the most challenging of contexts. I whole heartedly applaud Carroll and Shaw for framing this hugely important conversation and outlining a process for engaging in it.

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