

JANE, THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE

Unlike many in other professions, we are not likely to have the opportunity to pursue many years of higher education leading to a graduate degree in mediation. Instead, we attend seminars and workshops seeking to find avenues to improve of our skills. Often at these events, there will be a powerpoint slide about the inherent need of most people to develop their ability to function as human beings.

At one such event recently, there were posited, “five sets of innate intuitions” that influence moral development. These involved 1) nurture, care and protection of others; 2) fairness and reciprocity; 3) ingroup loyalty; 4) obedience and respect for authority; and 5) purity and sanctity; all viewed as, “evolved psychological mechanisms,” in the published works of Jesse Graham and Jonathan Haidt at the University of Virginia. Though none of these intuitions was presented as originating from any source even remotely divine, the presenter was Jane Juliano, a former student at the Harvard Divinity School. This got me thinking about the development of the views of the late C.S. Lewis, best known to many from movies made about his tales of a fictional kingdom called Narnia.

Lewis was also a highly regarded student of human behavior and morality, who over the period of his life journeyed from atheism to religious faith. Writing in Book I, Part 2 of Mere Christianity, Lewis concluded that, “The moral law is not any one instinct or set of instincts; it is something which makes a kind of tune (the tune we call goodness or right conduct) by directing the instincts. * * * All I have got to is a Something which is directing the universe, and which appears in me as a law urging me to do right and making me feel responsible and uncomfortable when I do wrong.” As Lewis grew older, the foundations of his morality became clearly rooted not so much in reason, as in his faith.

As mediators, we are constantly reminded of the importance of moral instincts to our work. In Bush and Folger’s revised edition of, The Promise of

Mediation, they state on page 54 that, “The critical resource in conflict transformation is the parties’ own basic humanity – their essential strength, decency and compassion, as human beings.” Moving from this ‘critical resource,’ their work proceeds with a strong moral sense to outline the development of the methodology of transformative mediation; however, little or no attribution is made to any divine source.

Those fortunate enough to have received an education in the humanities have been exposed to the efforts of humankind’s greatest thinkers to find the source of “basic humanity,” sometimes in faith, sometimes in science, and sometimes in reason unaided by science. Wondering about these questions, we may often arrive at a place replete with diverse explanations about why people behave as they do, but with nothing unifying to tie it all together, nothing that might provide constant guidance about how and whether to respond to the shifting currents in every mediation. Challenged about our actions as mediators, sometimes we can only offer a lame explanation like, “Well, it is an art, and not a science.”

But there is one clue left to ponder. When thinking of mediation primarily as a bundle of techniques and methods, I have gained little satisfaction from it, no matter how ‘successful’ the outcome. When thinking of it with faith in the inherent goodness of others, it has provided the greatest feeling of reward, no matter what the outcome.