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CLINICAL PRACTICE AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Buddhist Psychotherapy Professional Training Course 6 Module 2

Saturday 2nd July 2022

Abraham Maslow Toward a Psychology of Being

“...every falling away from species-virtue, every crime against one's own nature, every evil act, every one, without exception, records itself in our unconsciousIf we do something we are ashamed of, it 'registers' to our discredit, and if we do something honest or fine or good, it 'registers' to our credit. The net results ultimately are either ...we respect and accept ourselves or we despise ourselves and feel contemptible, worthless, and unlovable.”

- or perhaps we dissociate, detach or harden

Ethics in practice

The central question of ethics: What should I do ?

- what is right?
- in whose interests?
- how will I do what is right?
- how do I manage competing “rights”?

Often it is unclear

AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

Ethical choice is informed by

1. the intention, motivation, capacity
arising from greed, hatred, ignorance or not?
2. the result or consequences for the doer
unhappiness or happiness?
3. the result or consequences for others
harmful or helpful? happy/unhappy?
4. External requirements or expectations

Ethical Practice

involves a complex mix of competing

values & desires

responsibilities

roles

relationships



WHAT COMES TO YOUR MIND?

Specific aspects of clinical work

Helping professional's role is
intrinsically unequal

requires prioritizing client need
over your own - compassion

involves rank - position,
knowledge, skill, privilege

power - to assess & treat
access information often of a
sensitive personal kind
to hide our self - unequal



Helping professionals encounter

vulnerable people

complex situations with no obvious right action

people with differing values, expectations, lifestyles, cultures

competing needs, conflicting values, allegiances, responsibilities.

Examples: may help the client but harm their family. Client's interest antithetical to interests of the organization, management, financial responsibility, accountability, contracts, yourself or other values eg suicide, terminations, assisted dying, colonising practices



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Helping professionals operate in a context & paradigm

workplace -
requirements, auspice,
funding, referral

professional codes,
methods, values

legal frameworks and
expectations

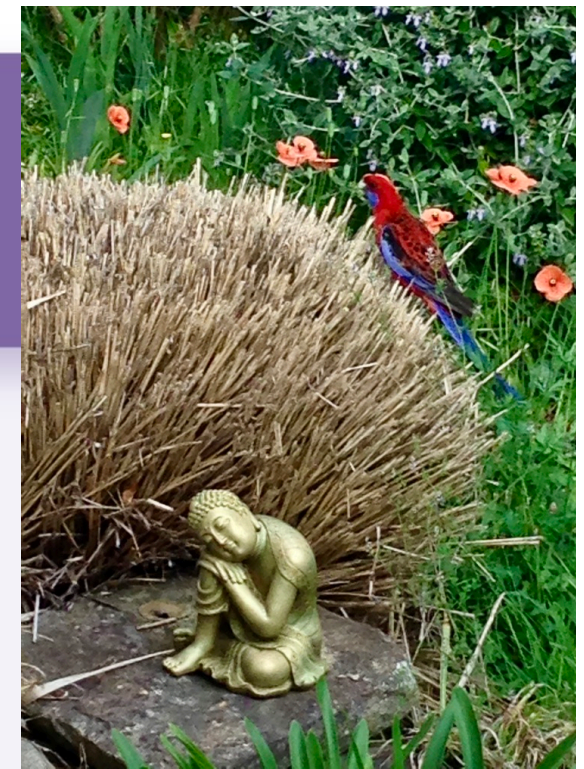
culture & therapy -
Western-centric in
multi-cultural society





Buddhism & Psychotherapy

- similarities



INTENTION:

to find a path out of, and relief from suffering
compassion for, & service to, those suffering

VALUES

cultivate empathy, compassion, kindness - unconditional positive regard
to avoid harmful thoughts words and deeds - client centred, non-judgement
Brahma Viharas, loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity
right livelihood, right speech, right action

MEANS

develop skilful means and wisdom - boundaries, safe holding, reflective practice,
professional development and supervision

8 fold noble path - Buddhist Psychology



Specific Boundaries



Abide by our code of ethics, including:

- Respecting client's autonomy & decision making - 1st & 4th
- Refraining from exploitation of any kind - 2nd precept
- Respecting client's privacy/confidentiality - 2nd & 4th precept
- Refraining from any form of sexual conduct with a client - 3rd precept
- Refraining from client work when unwell/ unfit for the work - 5th precept
- Using speech which is appropriate, supportive and kind - 4th precept

Also

- understand the 'power' of the therapist / & avoid dual relationships
- understand interconnectedness - transference & countertransference

based on work by Jitindrya 2018



In seeking to know what to do, ethics involves...

- * relationships - personal & professional
- * a well-informed conscience
- * being true to who we are and what we stand for
- * dealing with conflict, paradox and pain
- * accepting the cost of our values, decisions and behaviour
- * the courage to explore difficult questions

*for every complex problem there is a simple solution
.....that is wrong*

AND REMEMBER

a few people are sometimes unethical in big ways
most of us are frequently unethical in small ways



we're human too



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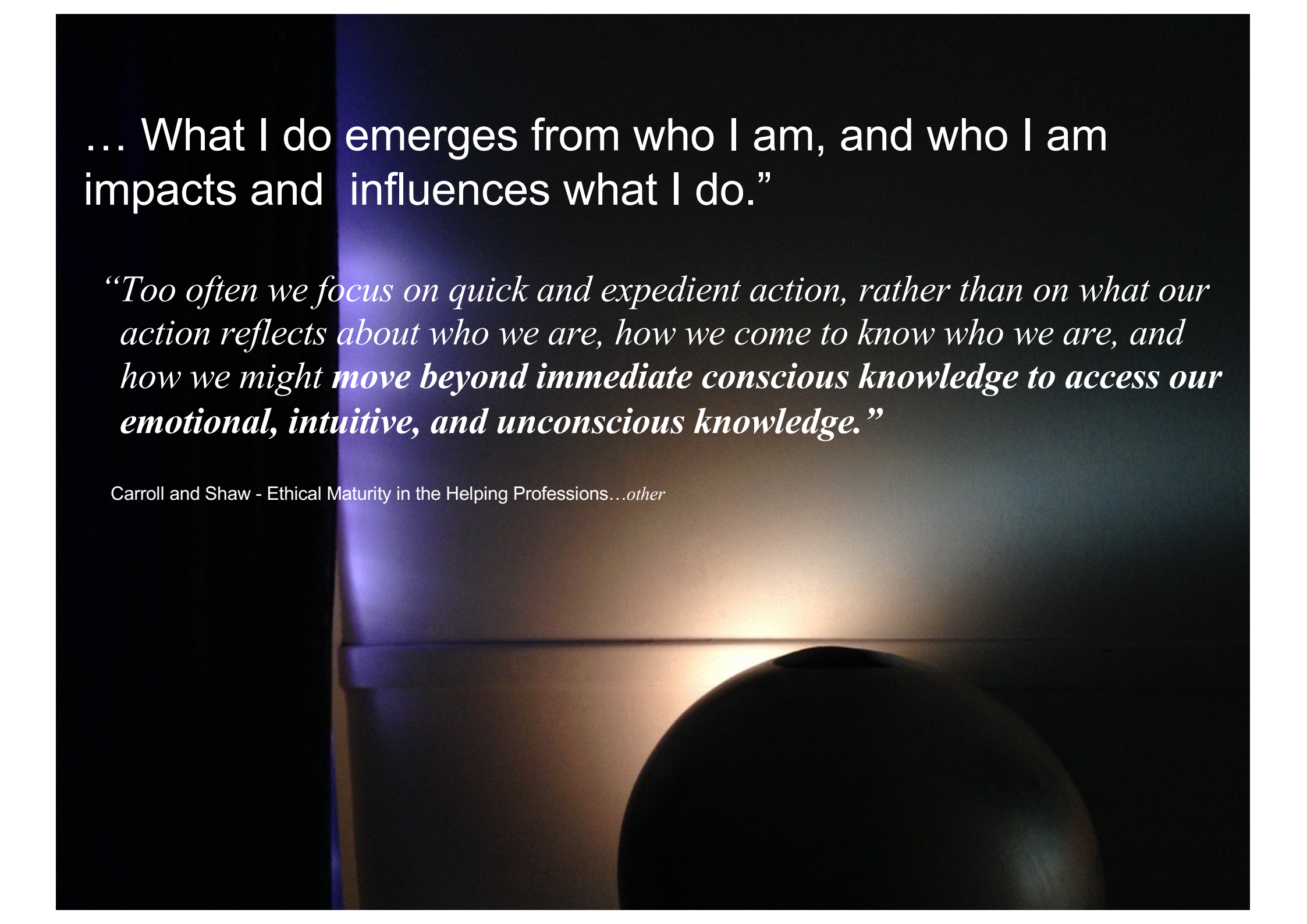
Behavioural Ethics



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBSac1BjVOM>

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... What I do emerges from who I am, and who I am impacts and influences what I do.”

“Too often we focus on quick and expedient action, rather than on what our action reflects about who we are, how we come to know who we are, and how we might move beyond immediate conscious knowledge to access our emotional, intuitive, and unconscious knowledge.”

Carroll and Shaw - Ethical Maturity in the Helping Professions...other

CULTIVATING ETHICAL PRACTICE



Ethical Development and Maturity

Moral development - Lawrence Kohlberg

Level 1 Pre-conventional

- 1 punishment/obedience - compliance, avoid punishment
- 2 Instrumental relativist - my needs paramount

Level 2 Conventional

- 3 Be good/nice - conform interpersonal approval
- 4 Law & order - duty to follow authorities & rules

Level 3 Post-conventional

- 5 Social contract - perspective; respect difference; democracy, social contract
- 6 Universal Ethical Principles - conscience based on justice - may violate laws, conventions

NB this model challenged by Carol Gilligan & others



*The 8 fold path is also
developmental*



What we do grows out of right view

As Buddhist informed therapists, we

- Hold skilful boundaries
- Create and support a safe holding environment - the unknown, dukkha, anicca, the unfolding process
- Develop skill in self-knowledge/self-awareness, self care - Aware of my agendas, triggers etc
- Rest in embodied awareness (of self & other)
- Be fully present for the client



‘What we do ...’

- Recognise Buddha nature and inherent capacity of wisdom & compassion (in self & other)
- Be stable, calm, reflective, compassionate, empathic, non-judgemental presence - as best we can
- Skilfully reflect back with wisdom & compassion appropriate to the time, being & situation
- Take care of ourselves - cultivate our own practice, self compassion
- Seek our sangha - supervision, peer support, professional development



Knowledge & practices support us to do the right thing

- * personal practices that develop our capacity for ethics, compassion and wisdom
- * knowledge of legal/professional responsibilities
 - i. privacy laws and confidentiality
 - ii. risk assessment and responsibility
 - iii. Anti-discrimination and sensitivity to diversity
 - iv. Organizational/Employment policies,
- * honest self-evaluation, reflection; understand motivation, paradox, values, expectations, social context.
- * identify our own culture, rank, privileges, blind spots
- * a clear framework for ethical decision making
- * supervision to monitor & support ourselves



ACTIVITY - GROUPS OF 4

BRAINSTORM SELF CARE STRATEGIES





<http://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/video/best-self-part-2-moral-decision-making>

ETHICAL DILEMMAS: Red Flags

Specialness

Attraction/aversion

Client feedback - traps in +ve
and -ve feedback from a client

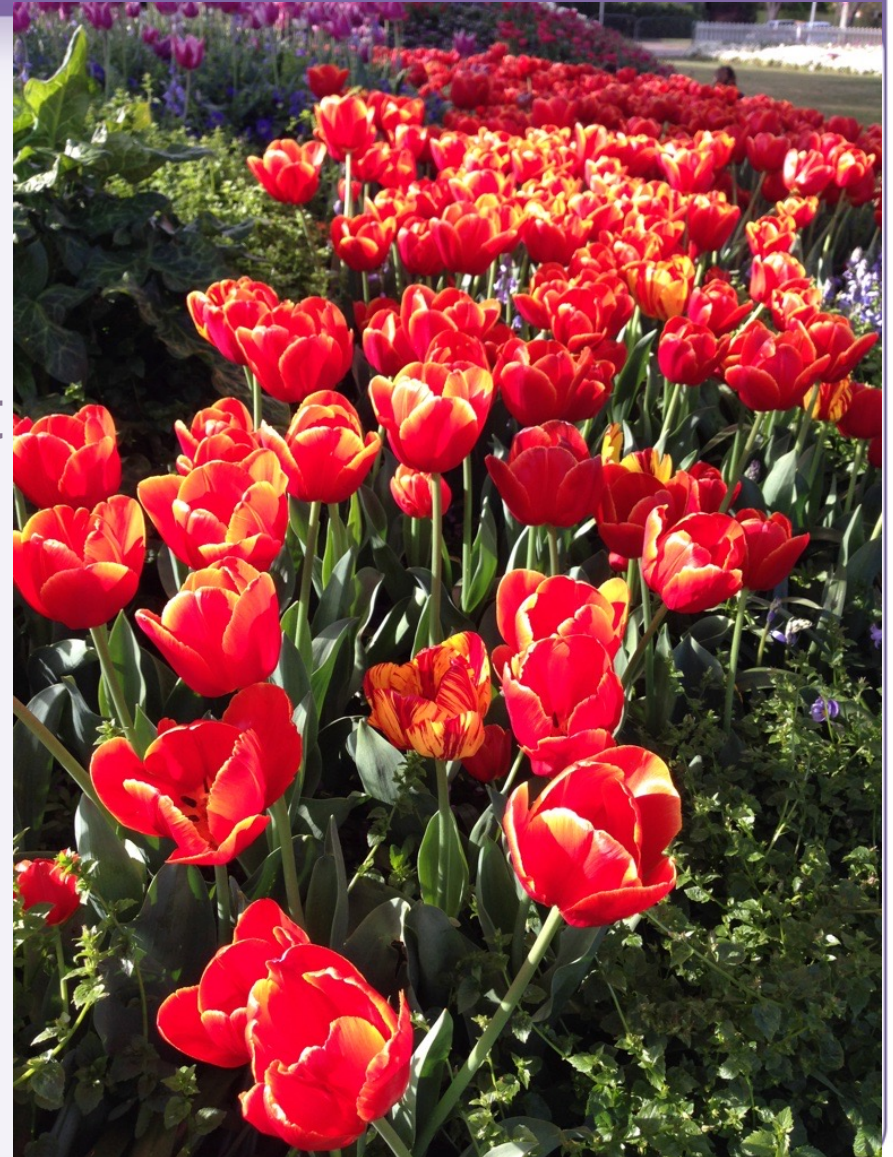
Alterations to the therapeutic
frame

Violating clinical norms

Professional isolation

Burn out and overwhelm

Emotional reactions



Steps in ethical decision making

CONSIDER ALL those affected - needs/wants

BRAINSTORM and discuss options.

LIST implications of options for all - include medico-legal

EVALUATE and DECIDE between options - seek advice, supervision

Use the Safety Checklist on the preferred option

PRACTICE, ROLE PLAY so you are prepared to ACT effectively

EVALUATE the outcomes and if further action is necessary.

CONSIDER the learning and implications for your future practice

St James Ethics Centre - ethics counselling service



Safety Checklist questions

Have I considered all the relevant facts from each perspective?

Am I making assumptions or selecting facts due to particular values/prejudices?

What are the weaknesses in my own position and have I considered all issues?

What if this decision were front page news or my family knew what I've decided?

How would I like it if someone did this to me, to my child or parent?

Will the proposed course of action bring about a good result? Do the ends justify the means? Are the means and ends congruent and consistent?

What will this decision do to my character or the character of my organisation?

Is the proposed course of action consistent with my espoused values and principles and my legal and professional obligations?

What would happen if everybody did this?

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ACTIVITY

In pairs

Individually choose a real, recent ethical decision you made.

Meditate together briefly

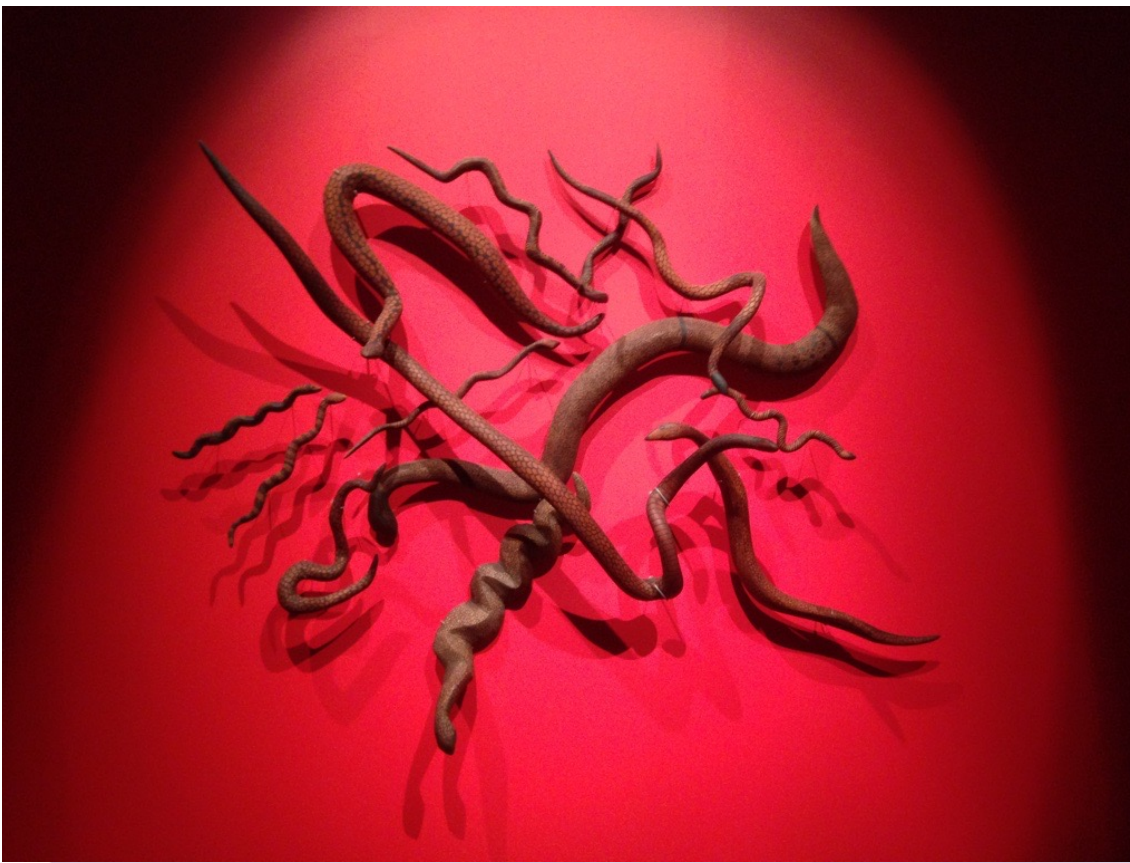
Reflect on it in relation to

- * the process of ethical decision making;
- * what helped or hindered your choice.
- * would you do something different

Swap - 20 mins each







Choose an ethical dilemma - personal or work life

Reflect inwardly then explore with partner

how does it relate to the precepts?

what are the values in conflict?

what guidance do Buddha's teachings offer you?

insights for "right" action?