



Book Recommendation

Right & Wrong by Hugh Mackay

Hugh Mackay, leading Australian sociologist, is no stranger to our blogs! I have recommended his books, *The Inner Self*, blog 128, and *The Way We Are*, blog 132, and blog 135. I return to his work in this blog, when recommending his book, *Right & Wrong*. I previously referred to Mackay as a learned elder, and I would now add, a trusted humanitarian.

Mackay lays out his purpose for this book as: “Most of us have experienced that uncomfortable and embarrassing gap between what we do and what we believe we should do. One purpose of this book is to help you narrow that gap; another is to suggest some practical strategies that will make it easier to work out what’s right and wrong for *you* (his emphasis) whenever you are confronted by a moral choice.”

He fulfills this purpose with clarity and incisiveness. He does this so well that it immediately resonates as common sense! (which we know is not so common). His simplest and to my mind, most compelling strategy when faced with a moral decision is to ask the question, ‘Is this the right decision for me?’ In his own words, “Although there might be no absolute rules to guide our every decision, no universal ‘right answers,’ there is always a right answer for me, here and now, and it is my personal responsibility to work out what that is.”

When doing the work of finding out what is the right decision for you, Mackay makes a resonant distinction between what roles religious institutions should play in this and what should lie within our own purview: “It is absolutely appropriate for religious institutions to offer guidance in *how* (his emphasis) to think about moral questions; the problem lies in their trying to tell us *what* to think as well. The *what* is precisely the thing we must decide for ourselves, if our moral lives are to have integrity.” This distinction is fundamental to all humans who seek self-determination and value personal agency.

This distinction is also fundamental to the business of educators: we lay out the beliefs of others, both past and present, we encourage the study of historical precedence and so on. We then teach learners the critical skills they need to discern what the lessons are (interpretation) and to explain their views coherently, justifying them with reference to the texts upon which they are based. The final step for the educator is in allowing the learner the freedom to choose which paradigms they wish to adopt personally and upon which to base their lives. As Mackay eloquently states, “The essence of moral decision-making is freedom of choice.”

Examples of Mackay’s practical strategies that will ‘make it easier to work out what is right or wrong for you’ are: “Keeping company with people we regard as good people; reading books and seeing films that give us some insights into the dynamics of human behaviour and its links to good and



bad outcomes; reflecting on our own experiences in the light of an ideal of goodness...” All such strategies lie well within the capabilities of most of us and us such can be readily adopted.

A sense of what is right or wrong for **you** underpins the philosophy of our book, *My Manifesto*. We at all times resist absolutes and encourage you, with practical strategies to assist you, to do the work to reveal what you believe in, to know your values, and to choose to live in congruence.

Thank you, Hugh Mackay for your wisdom, for your clarity and your care for humanity.

We all benefit.