Much of modern philosophy as well as psychology have been wedded to a rationalistic model of ethical action. Consequently, when ethics is taught in psychology classes, it is usually focused on teaching rules and logical decision making models. However, what students learn is not always what we try to communicate. For one thing, recent neurobiological and moral psychological research have left little doubt that many preconscious processes elucidate a great deal about the reliability and predictability of our moral actions. Specifically, automatic, intuitive and affective processes strongly influence moral action. Additionally, work in social psychology suggests that moral behaviour is a function of both mind and the environment. Despite this research, most current ethical decision making models as well as most professional ethics codes assume that logic and reasoning are the ultimate basis of ethical action. Although reasoning continues to play a major role, this paper will briefly review the literature that suggests ethical decisions are not purely cognitive. It will suggest that the Reflective Judgment and acculturation models can help ethics educators understand the development of ethical reasoning and how it may be nurtured in the classroom.

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Dr Kitchener became nationally and internationally recognized for her work on the epistemological development of adolescents and young adults and their reflective judgment as well as her work on ethics. She authored three book, more than 60 refereed articles and chapters, over 30 presentations as well as 35 invited lectures, workshops and consultations. Her 1984 article along with her book, Foundations of ethical practice, research and teaching in psychology (2000, 2010), proposed one of the first models of ethical decision-making for psychologists and provided the foundation for the ethical principles currently used in the APA Ethics Code as well as the code of a related profession. She co-edited one of the first sections in Professional Psychology: Research and Practice on ethics education. She also authored or co-authored 11 chapters in Anderson and Barret’s (2001) Ethics and HIV related psychotherapy.

She was invited to write the entry on ethical issues in psychology for the new addition of Corsini’s Encyclopaedia of Psychology and the lead article for the APA Handbook of Ethics in Psychology. She has received several awards including the Ralph Berdie Memorial Award for her work on college student development, the first Colorado Psychological Association’s Lifetime Achievement Award for Outstanding Contributions in Psychology (2006) and the APA Ethics Committee’s 2010 outstanding Ethics Educator Award.