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CREATING AN ORGANISATION ETHIC FROM THE GROUND UP

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ABSTRACT: When an organization produces and issues its code of ethics, often specific to the needs of that particular organization or institution, it frequently contains a brief introduction from the Chief Executive, Chairman or within the military, a Service Chief. This is a top-down exercise. Very good reasons why this should be so can be easily imagined. In some instances, the "brand" of the organization will be inextricably linked with the professional behavior of its people. In others, the conduct of its personnel outside of the workplace might affect public perception of the "brand." It is difficult to see how it could be possible to produce an organization ethic without the explicit endorsement by the senior management of any organization or institution. This article will maintain that there may, however, be a serious problem with a "top-down" approach in the 21st century. Frequently, there are two implied assumptions in these policies: firstly, that personnel within an organization/ institution will understand the ethical language used; secondly, that the shared, societal frameworks necessary for ethical concepts to be understood are known, recognized and accepted. This article challenges the validity of these assumptions. It contends that ethical language has become fragmented, and that an organizational ethic must begin from the ground up by beginning with first principles. The genesis of creating an organizational ethic from the ground up comes from the work the author did as the British Army's lead on ethics.

KEY WORDS: postmodern, individual, ethics, organization, rights

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1. Stating the Problem

In 1981 the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre published his well-known work *After Virtue*.[2] Although it has gone through several editions, apart from his response to criticism, he stated in the 2007 edition that "I have found no reason for abandoning the major contentions of *After Virtue*."[3] It is his claim in relation to ethical language that I specifically want to focus on. The "Disquieting Suggestion" of chapter 1 is based upon an imaginary world that he constructs in which a:

Know-Nothing political movement takes power and successfully abolishes science teaching in schools and universities, imprisoning and executing the remaining scientists. Later still there is a reaction against this destructive movement and enlightened people seek to revive science, although they have largely forgotten what it was. But all they possess are fragments: a knowledge of experiments detached from any knowledge of the theoretical context which gave them significance; parts of theories unrelated to the other bits and pieces or theory.[4]

In this imagined world the language of natural science although used, "is in a grave state of disorder."[5] MacIntyre uses his allegory to explain the impact of Enlightenment philosophy, from his perspective, upon moral theory, maintaining that it was doomed from the start precisely because it used ethical language that had been detached from its source, namely Aristotelianism with its teleological idea about human life. He states that "the language and the appearances of morality persist even though the integral substance of morality has to a large degree been fragmented and then in part destroyed."[6]

Macintyre's argument is a carefully constructed critique of moral discourse emerging from Enlightenment philosophy, which from his per-

2 A MacIntyre, *After Virtue: a study in moral theory* (London: Duckworth, 2007).

3 MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* vii.

4 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1.

5 MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2.

6 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 5.

spective was a failure. The point he makes is that Enlightenment philosophers were the inheritors of both a moral language and the substance that gave that language meaning and shape. The rejection of Aristotelian virtue ethics with its teleology, led to the fragmentation of moral language and the substance from which it is derived being ignored and then destroyed. A significant contributory reason the project was doomed to failure was, for MacIntyre, the invention and role of the individual in moral discourse. He contended that the individual moral agent "conceives of himself and is conceived of by moral philosophers as sovereign in moral philosophy."[7] This inevitably led, he argued, to moral emotivism.

This is not the occasion to engage fully with Macintyre's overall argument. One of the greatest achievements in human history, at least to this author, is the developmental process that resulted in the individual as imagined in Western thought. A key point to highlight, and note, is Macintyre's idea that moral language has become fragmented. I would like to contend that not only has the process of fragmentation continued, even the ethical frameworks created by the Enlightenment philosophers and their successors are now largely unknown. What little knowledge of them that remains, among the general public, is disjointed at best. Abundant evidence may be discerned through watching a debate on TV that purports to examine an ethical subject.

The first part of the problem I want to identify lies in the assumption that organisations / institutions make when they issue their organisational ethic: that their personnel will understand the ethical language used and the implied authority that underpins it. I agree with Macintyre's idea that moral language today has become fragmented and detached from the substance that gives it meaning. The implied assumption that people will understand the language used in ethical codes and understand it in the manner the organisation expects, is questionable. The problem is deepened further by the second aspect to the problem I want to articulate.

7 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 62.

The second aspect to the problem, I want to contend, lies in the assumption that the shared, societal frameworks necessary for ethical concepts to be understood are known, recognised and accepted by the personnel working for that organisation or institution. I want to go much further than MacIntyre and suggest that not only is moral / ethical language fragmented and detached from the substance that gives it meaning, but that the shared societal frameworks within which ethical concepts must be understood are unknown, forgotten by many or have been transformed without much social awareness that this has taken place.

My thinking in this area has been shaped by my interaction with Charles Taylor's philosophical observations concerning modern social imaginaries.[8] According to Taylor, "the social imaginary is not a set of ideas; rather, it is what enables, through making sense of, the practices of a society;"[9] it is "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations."[10] His focus is primarily Western history and the social imaginary that underpinned the rise of Western modernity.[11]

Taylor contends that although our modern social imaginary has been shaped by influential theories, particularly those of John Locke and Hugo Grotius[12] in combination with Reformed Theology,[13] it is not identical

8 C Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

9 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 2.

10 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 23.

11 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.

12 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 10.

13 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 150. Taylor does not specifically use the phrase Reformed Theology. Rather he refers throughout this book to Protestant theology. However, his references to Protestant can be described as Reformed because of the theology involved and the church groups identified, i.e., Baptist and Presbyterian.

with them. The revolutionary nature of the consequences contained within the theory associated with Grotius and Locke, Taylor observes, would not have been obvious to those who initially embraced them, though they seem obvious to us today.[14] Indeed, "modern modes of individualism seemed a luxury, a dangerous indulgence."[15] However, contained within the logic of the Grotian-Lockean theory of the individual were intellectual drivers that would set in motion changes in the way people imagined their relationship to each other within a community.[16] Instead of a social imaginary based upon some form of Divine order or Platonic-Aristotelian concept of Form, which resulted in a hierarchical sense of society from "time out of mind,"[17] the social imaginary began to be infiltrated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by ideas based around the needs of each member of society as an individual capable of establishing a mutual basis of exchange.[18]

One of the characteristics of a social imaginary, according to Taylor, is that it "can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention,"[19] and "seems the only one that makes sense."[20] Social imaginaries can change over time. How "people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met" has evolved in the past. My point is not that social imaginaries change but that the societal frameworks from which our ethical frameworks emerged is unknown to many, perhaps even the majority, and that a process of transformation has occurred without much social awareness that this has taken place. The "taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious

14 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 16.

15 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries,* 17.

16 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 12.

17 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 9.

18 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* 12-13.

19 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 29.

20 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 17.

to mention" has been forgotten or has become unknown, precisely because it had the characteristic of being "too obvious to mention."

2. Explain the Problem

This section makes no claims to providing an exhaustive explanation of the problem. Its main purpose is a brief sketch of elements that have contributed to the problem. Secondly, before we begin with a broad-brush approach, it is not my contention that society is somehow broken. I am hoping to illustrate important changes that have taken place that when viewed together may offer some explanation for the problem outlined in part 1.

2a. *Concepts like language are fluid*. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman introduced the idea of *Liquid Modernity.*[21] Mark David comments that "Bauman has employed the metaphor of "liquidity" in order to capture the dramatic social changes taking place in our everyday lives. In this way, he seeks to convey the increasing absence of "solid" structures that once provided the foundations for human societies."[22] Bauman argued that Modernity melted those foundational "solids" that gave pre-modern social structure its essential character in-order-to reshape and mould them to fit its needs. In this late-modern period, as a consequence of the interaction between globalisation and individuality, Bauman maintains that "the solids whose turn has come to be thrown into the melting pot and which are in the process of being melted at the present time, the time of fluid modernity, are the bonds which interlock individual choices in collective projects and actions - the patterns of communication and co-ordination between individually conducted life policies on the one hand and political actions of human collectivises on the other."[23] In other

21 Z Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006).

22 Mark Davis, "Liquid Sociology – What For?" in *Liquid Sociology: Metaphor in Zugmunt Bauman's Analysis of Modernity*, ed., Mark Davis (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013) 1.

23 Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* 6.

words, the same process that overtook pre-modern life has been increasingly active in the second half of the twentieth century. This time rather than new "solids" taking the place of that which had been melted and reshaped, concepts like love, fear, social structure resemble the characteristic of a liquid in that they do not stand still for long and keep its shape for long.[24]

In the twentieth century, language became a specific area of interest for those whom we might describe as postmodern thinkers. Nash observes that postmodernism has at its heart an "eminent 'lack of trust' in language as a medium for the representation of truth, its unsleeping attention to the fine print of what is said, its rigorous aim to search out inconstancy, inconsistency and contradiction, and its express intent on the dismemberment of foundational authority."[25] Postmodern ideas were grounded in a linguistic indeterminacy,[26] which was driven by a "discourse of suspicion."[27] Language, it was maintained, is a social construct and that all human discourse is conditioned by the socio-political nature of reality.[28] Language therefore, is a cultural creation expressing the socio-political nature of a particular community.

One of the most significant cultural expressions that has become ubiquitous in the twenty-first century, is text-speak. Is text-speak an evolution in language[29] and illustration of the liquidity of language; or is it just intellectual laziness? The answer is not simple or straightforward. The study

24 Davis, "Liquid Sociology" 2.

25 C. Nash, *The Unravelling of the Postmodern Mind*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001, 77.

26 Nash, *Postmodern Mind*, 97.

27 Nash, *Postmodern Mind*, 77.

28 S Pattison, *Pastoral Care and Liberation Theology* (London, SPCK, 1997) 34.

29 See A Merritt, "Text-speak: language evolution or just laziness?" in The Daily Telegraph (3 Apr 13) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/9966117/Text-speak-language-evolution-or-just-laziness.html (accessed 25 Oct 23).

conducted by Drouin and Davis indicated that "the use of text speak is not related to low literacy performance. Nonetheless, more than half of the college students in this sample, texters and nontexters alike, indicated that they thought text speak was hindering their ability to remember standard English."[30] Like any dynamic language, English has needed and will need to evolve to survive. As it has evolved since the end of the Second World War, one may perhaps discern a connection between the idea of linguistic indeterminacy, associated with thinkers like Derrida, and Bauman's more recent concept of liquidity.

Not only has ethical language itself become fragmented and dislocated from the substance that gave it meaning, but language is also increasingly fluid-like and demonstrates evidence of being progressively indeterminate.

2b. *Forgotten, Unknown and Transformed*. How have the foundational concepts that underpin Western democratic society, the "taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention," become unknown to many, forgotten by many? Please note the comments at the beginning of this section, that this is only a brief sketch of some elements that have contributed to the situation.

One might turn to the striking idea of the eminent sociologist Ulrick Beck and what he refers to as "zombie categories" in twenty-first century life, for the first clue.[31] Beck explained his idea of "zombie categories" in an interview with Jonathan Rutherford in London on the 3rd of February 1999. Beck used what he described as "individualization" to explain what he referred to as "disembedding of the ways of life of industrial society,"

30 M Drouin & C David, "R u texting? Is the Use of Text Speak Hurting Your Literacy?" in the Journal of Literacy Research (2009) Vol 41, 46.

31 U Beck & E Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (London: Sage, 2001), chapter 14 "Zombie categories: Interview with Ulrick Beck" 202-213. See also Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies," in *Theory, Culture & Society* (2012) Vol 19 (1-2), 17-44.

for example class, family, gender and nation. Individualization does not, he maintains, mean individualism.[32]

Individualization liberates people from traditional roles and constraints in a number of ways. First, individuals are removed from status-based classes. Social classes have been detraditionalized. We can see this in the changes in family structures, housing conditions, leisure activities, geographical distribution of populations, trade union and club membership, voting patterns etc. Secondly, women are cut loose from their "status fate" of compulsory housework and support by a husband. Industrial society has been dependent upon the unequal positions of men and women, but modernity does not hesitate at the front door of family life. The entire structure of family ties has come under pressure from individualization and a new negotiated provisional family composed of multiple relationships — a "post-family" — is emerging.[33]

"The liberated individual becomes dependent upon the labour market and because of that," he argues, "is dependent on, for example, education, consumption, welfare state regulations and support… Dependency upon the market extends into every area of life."[34] It is because of individualization we are living with a lot of zombie categories which are dead and still alive.[35] When asked for illustrations of "zombie categories" Beck cited family, class and neighbourhood as examples. It is striking to think that one of the most distinguished sociologists of our age, described institutions, traditionally understood as being critical to modern life, as husks whose life has been hollowed out: transformed into the living dead.

Another example of transformation that may inform our understanding of the problem is the idea of the state and its impact upon our understanding of the citizen. Philip Bobbitt maintains that there have been various manifestations of the "state." His analysis begins in 1494 when

32 Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*, 202.

33 Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

34 Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

35 Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization*.

Charles VIII invades Italy and continues up to the present day.[36] Bobbitt's argument is essentially that the concept and nature of the state evolved over time adapting to meet the challenges and demands it encountered. He defines the various stages of the state as:

- The Princely State
- The Kingly State
- The Territorial State
- The State Nation
- The Nation State
- The Market State

With the Princely State, the state confers legitimacy on the dynasty; with the Kingly state, the dynasty confers legitimacy on the state; with the Territorial State, the state will manage the country efficiently; with the State Nation, the state will forge the identity of the nation; with the nation state, the state will better the welfare of the nation; and with the Market State, the state will maximize the opportunity for its citizens.[37] Royal Dutch Shell Scenarios sought to illustrate the transformation as follows:

[T]he gradual transition from the Nation State to a Market State model implies a redefinition of the states' fundamental promises, towards maximisation of opportunities for companies, investors, civil society and citizens rather than of the Nation's welfare.[38]

It is not difficult to see how Bauman's concept of liquidity and Beck's individualization fit remarkably well within this notion that a key priority of the Market State is opportunities, or choice, available for individuals, civil society, companies and investors.

We may detect indications of the evolution of the state in the last one hundred years in a transformation in the concept of an individual as citi-

36 P Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent* (London: Penguin, 2008) 190-191.

37 Bobbitt, *Terror and Consent*.

38 *Shell Global Scenarios to 2015: The Future Business Environment Trends, Trade-Offs, and Choices* (London: Shell International Limited, 2005), 18.

zen to that where the emphasis is upon the individual as citizen-consumer. The notion of citizen, at least in some significant senses, contains ideas such as civic responsibilities, obligations and duties, whereas, the emergence of the citizen-consumer has led some to talk about *The Authority of the Consumer.*[39] The relationship between the state and the citizen as described by the Scottish Enlightenment Philosopher Adam Ferguson is not one that would sit easily with the majority in the twenty-first century.[40] In his work *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Ferguson essentially considers why nations cease to be eminent.[41] He traces the rise and fall of great civilisations like Sparta, Carthage and Rome and examines the relationship that virtue played both in their success and subsequently its lack in their demise, "when" Ferguson laments "men ceased to be citizens."[42] His point, of course, was to encourage the role of the virtuous citizen. Nations consist of men, according to Ferguson, men prepared to fight for their nation.[43] The West has changed dramatically since Ferguson wrote his critique. It is, however, worth noting that even in the age of the citizen-consumer many within the United Kingdom will remember on the 11th of November the sacrifice of millions who would have recognised the responsibilities of the citizen as described by Ferguson.

2c. *A transformation of what it means to be human?* The history of humanity is intertwined with the historical development of technology. The argument that to be human is to have some form of relationship with technology, regardless of whether that is a flint knife, bladed farming tool,

39 *The Authority of the Consumer*, ed., R Keat, N Whiteley and N Abercrombie (London & New York: Routledge, 1994). See also M Schudson, "The Troubling Equivalence of Citizen and Consumer," in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (2006) Vol 608, 193-204.

40 A Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed., F Oz-Salzberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

41 Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 200.

42 Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 207

43 Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*. 214.

sword or clock is difficult to resist.[44] Andy Clarke in his book *Natural Born Cyborgs* argues forcefully that humans are natural-born cyborgs.[45] "When our technologies actively, automatically, and continually tailor themselves to us and we to them – then the line between tool and user becomes flimsy indeed."[46] His illustration of the humble wristwatch as an example of the transparent symbiotic relationship we already have with technology is compelling.[47] Approaching the relationship between man and technology from an evolutionary scientific perspective, Timothy Taylor contends that it is not possible to understand man's evolution apart from his development and use of technology.[48] It was our use of technology, he maintains, that altered our physical and mental evolution.[49] Christopher Coker notes that the blurring of man and the machine "is in essence the post-human condition."[50] That humanity can have a positive relationship with technology is not, however, the main area of concern. It is whether the speed of technological development is producing changes whose consequences are as yet unknown.

Peter Singer's observation that "a knight of the Middle Ages could go their entire life with maybe one new technology changing the way they lived" offers a reference point from which to glimpse the rapid pace

44 T Taylor's, *The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution* (London: Palgrave, 2010), 77.

45 A Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) 3. In this book he seeks to establish one of his main points in the first few pages. "The human mind" he states, "if it is to be the physical organ of human reason, simply cannot be seen as bound and restricted by the biological skinbag." 4.

46 Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs,* 7.

47 Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs*, 39.

48 Taylor, *The Artificial Ape*.

49 Taylor, *The Artificial Ape*. 33.

50 C Coker, *Warrior Geeks: How 21st Century Technology in Changing the Way We Fight and Think About War* (London: Hurst, 2013), 24.

at which technology has been increasing.[51] The rapid development of technology raises questions regarding humanity's ability to cope with, let alone master, these changes. Is it possible that humanity will simply continue to be passively changed by them as we are cognitively manipulated to adapt to the changing technological reality? Scholars continue to raise substantial concerns over the metaphysical impact of technology and life in the virtual world of the internet. For example, Coker maintains that "we know that technology is changing our habits and lifestyles and sometimes even our identity; what we do not know is whether the virtual world in which we now live at least part of our lives is changing us culturally."[52] If we take a military example, one of the consistent features of many of the robotic weapon platforms being developed by Western militaries, is that they have been designed to be used by a youth generation who have spent a significant part of their lives in a virtual computer world. Computers, comments Coker, "are now re-wiring our minds in subtle but important ways."[53]

The work of Baroness Susan Greenfield in this field is particularly relevant.[54] In the past, previous generations had the options of being *Someone* or *Anyone*.[55] However, in the twenty-first century there is now a third option: being "*Nobody*."[56] "The *Nobody* world," according to Greenfield, "is the province of cyber space."[57] She notes that in a recent survey "a child in the UK spends, between their tenth and eleventh birthdays, on aver-

51 P W Singer, *Wired for War: The Robotics Revolution and Conflict in the 21st Century* (London: Penguin, 2009) 101.

52 Coker, *Warrior Geeks*, 124.

53 Coker, *Warrior Geeks*, 131.

54 Baroness Greenfield has been Professor of Synaptic Pharmacology since 1996 at Oxford. Her book, *You and Me: The Neuroscience of Identity* (London: Notting Hill, 2011) has not only influenced scholars like C Coker cited earlier, but represents the latest findings in neuroscience.

55 Greenfield, *You and Me,* 114.

56 Greenfield, *You and Me,* 115.

57 Greenfield, *You and Me,*

age 900 hours in class, 1,277 hours with their family, and 1,934 hours in front of a screen – be it television or computer."[58] "The screen based lifestyle" she contends "is an unprecedented and pervasive phenomenon… prolonged and frequent video-gaming, surfing and social networking cannot fail to have an unprecedented and transformation effect on the mental state of a species whose most basic and valuable talent is a highly sensitive adaptability to whatever environment in which it is placed."[59]

Potentially, one of the most significant aspects of this is in regard to our capacity to be empathetic. Greenfield cites a report based on a study of 1,400 college students in the USA, where the participants "showed a decline in empathy over the last thirty years, with a particularly sharp drop in the last decade."[60] While she accepts that a declining ability to be empathetic and the popularity of the internet does not prove a causal link, she does however, suggest that it is a starting point for further investigation[61]. An internet addiction, Greenfield speculates, may lead to "an absence of an internally generated past or planned future, in favour instead of just the atomised present. Could one stark and extreme possibility be that, in the end, such people may have simply *no* identity?"[62] (emphasis original). Taken together, the picture offered by Greenfield is quite terrifying: a "*Nobody*" people, living in an atomised cyber-world of a perpetual now, potentially deficient in their capacity to empathise with others and devoid of personal identity. If, however, we are as Clark and Taylor argue, a species who has evolved in partnership with technology, the picture may in fact be much brighter.

This has been only the briefest of sketches designed to offer a partial explanation of the problem I have sought to identify in a top-down approach to creating an organisational / institutional ethic. The implicit

58 Greenfield, *You and Me.* She states that "the two types of devices are converging," 115.

59 Greenfield, *You and Me*.

60 Greenfield, *You and Me,* 118.

61 Greenfield, *You and Me.*

62 Greenfield, *You and* Me 127.

assumption that personnel in an organisation or institution will both understand the ethical language used and the shared, societal frameworks necessary for ethical concepts to be understood is unsound. The fragmented nature of ethical language, separated from the substance that gives it meaning and the transformation that has occurred within and to the historic and shared societal frameworks, within which that language has been traditionally understood, in conjunction with the impact of rapid technological change, along with potential implications upon humanity, requires a different approach to the creation of an organisational ethic.

3. Practical Solution to the Problem

To create an organisational ethic, one must begin with first principles, ensuring that any expression of values must be grounded upon an ethical foundation that is clearly articulated and the underlying source of any code of behaviour. Now I realise, that the sceptic might accuse me of doing little more than stating the obvious. My experience, however, of giving presentations in the UK and abroad is that what is assumed to be "the taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention," is no longer obvious to the majority. But neither is it altogether foreign. It is also important to note that many of those I have given presentations to are graduates, many with post-graduate degrees. What has been hugely positive is the response to the ethical foundation that I was charged with socialising within the Army. My experience was that about 80% "get it" immediately and respond with statements like "I have never really thought about it in the way you presented it but you have articulated what I have always believed." I recognise the liquidity of many aspects of modern life and intuitively warm to the notion of "zombie categories," what I want to maintain is the notion that the underlying foundation underpinning the UK, and the West in general, is an excellent place from which to construct any organisational ethic because it is still inviolable.

Mary Midgley refers to social-contract theory as a myth that still shapes our moral and intellectual thinking.[63] For Midgely "myths are not

63 M Midgley, *The Myths We Live By* (London & New York: Routledge, 2011) 10-12.

lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning."[64] While she regards the social-contract myth as a typical piece of Enlightenment simplification it was nevertheless an important answer to the divine right of kings.[65] I would want to be more specific than Midgely. Social-contract theory has the ability to shape our moral and intellectual thinking but like our shared societal social frameworks, it is or has become unknown. My own view is that social-contract theory and our shared societal social frameworks exist in symbiotic relationship. The health of one is reflected in the health of the other. Social-contact theory matters because it is inextricably linked with the concept of "the state-of-nature." The primary reason why this notion is important is that it encompasses a description of the human individual. It is our understanding of the individual in the state of nature that shapes fundamental moral ideas about the status of that individual. Robert Nozick is correct in his contention that if the state-of-nature theory did not exist it would be necessary to invent it.[66]

From Hugo Grotius' 1625[67] great work *On Law of War and Peace*, through political philosophers like John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Thomas Jefferson to French political document of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in 1793 the idea of the inalienable natural rights of man was buried so deeply that it has formed the basis for Western governmental, legal and societal practices. What natural rights would a person possess in a state of nature? Well for Locke, Rousseau and Jefferson (British, French and American thinkers) the answer would be Life and Liberty and the pursuit of property (Locke) which Jefferson changed to the pursuit of happiness.

64 Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*, 1.

65 Midgley, *The Myths We Live By*, 12.

66 R Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York: Basic, 1974), 3.

67 H Grotius, *On the Law of War and Peace,* "Prolegomena" (XI) (1625) translated from the original Latin *De Jure Belli ac Pacis*, ed. AC Campbell.

Individual life and personal existence are existentially basic. When faced with an existential threat, life will invariably struggle to survive. For cognitively aware species, this struggle is more than mere animal instinct; invariably it will involve the conscious awareness of the consequences of any impending threat to life. Death is not an emotion, it is fact. Life is not an emotion, it is fact, even though it may evoke a bewildering array of emotions in its journey. Life from this perspective is the basic good; without life nothing is possible for any individual.

The concept of liberty has been and continues to be the basis upon which our form of government, approach to law and the type of social construct we accept is founded. For Locke, "In political society, liberty consists of being under no other lawmaking power except that established by consent in the commonwealth."[68] John Stuart Mill, in his great work *On Liberty* recognised that liberty was not only the freedom to act but also the absence of coercion. We can detect both ideas in our democracy. In national elections, the major political parties, especially in the UK, present to the voters of the nation what they would do if elected. In essence, when combined with their manifestos, the electorate were asked to choose freely what laws would be enacted in the new Parliament, who should govern and the nature of the society that would be shaped by both the executive and the laws they would pass. This basic but profound idea of the free sovereign will of the people stems from the political philosophy of thinkers like Grotius, Locke, Rousseau and Jefferson.

How does this shape an organisational ethic? *The Police Service of Northern Ireland Code of Ethics 2008* is an interesting example. In the introductory preamble it makes explicit reference to "respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals as enshrined in the *European Convention on Human Rights*." The *European Convention on Human Rights*, written in 1950 and enacted in 1953 makes reference in its introductory preamble to "the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on

68 J Locke, *Two Treaties of Government*, chapter IV "Of Slavery" 114. See http://www. earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf

10th December 1948." Readers of this article will have noticed how each ethic makes reference to a preceding code. In other words, an assumption is made that the reader of a particular code will be aware of the content of the underlying document. In contrast the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) begins with the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." Article 1 states "that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" and article 3 that "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." Natural rights are not the same as human rights; although it is not difficult to see where some of the language and ideas came from. Natural right is a much older concept and is the intellectual source of the foundational articles in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

Creating an organisation ethic must begin with a foundational statement, rather than a reference to some other document, however, excellent that document might be. On the basis of the foundational statement, it is then possible to say something about the ethical principles of the organisation.

At this point I want to briefly outline three ethical principles the British Army considered when refreshing its *Values and Standards* document.[69] If the starting proposition is that everyone has fundamental and inalienable natural rights, this is a first order statement from which second order principles may be deduced. The possession of identical natural rights introduces the idea of intrinsic individual moral equality. Moral equality in Western democratic societies is expressed in a number of ways: for example, equality before the law. Many statues of Lady Justice depict her blindfold. There is equality of voting, although this took too many years to realise in many societies. And of course, many countries now have statutory equality laws. Expressing moral equality in an organisational

69 *Values and Standards* https://www.army.mod.uk/media/5219/20180910-values_standards_2018_ final.pdf (accessed 25 Oct 23)

ethic on the foundation under consideration generates the expectation of equal treatment within that organisation, in terms of opportunities and responsibilities.

The second moral principle is that of intrinsic individual moral dignity. The sociologist Peter Berger describes how the older concept of honour was gradually replaced by what he describes as "a historically unprecedented concern for the dignity and rights of the individual."[70] It is one of the key distinguishing marks of the transformation from an aristocratic, historical ordering of society to one marked by reciprocity, in which the role of the individual became a matter of personal choice and not that dictated within a predetermined social order. Honour ascribed status on the basis of what someone did, whereas dignity, according to Berger, "always relates to the intrinsic humanity devised of all socially imposed roles and norms."[71] "Both honor and dignity are concepts that bridge self and society;"[72] honour to a social construct of imposed roles and norms established by a higher order of society that defined everyone's place in the hierarchy and dignity to a social construct that was based upon human equality. It is this concept of dignity that forms the basis for the idea of individuals being worthy of respect.

The third principle is that of intrinsic individual moral worth. As a noun the word "worth" means "the level at which someone or something deserves to be valued or rated." In the Christian theology, human value is linked to the belief that man was created in the image of God. The concept of equal moral worth also lies at the heart of classical liberalism.[73] For Loren Lomasky it is our capacity to forge personal identities and individuate ourselves by committing ourselves to certain ends and

70 P Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor" in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed., S Hauerwas and A MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1983), 173.

71 Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor," 176.

72 Berger, "On the Obsolescence of the Concept of Honor."

73 NK Badhwar, "Moral Worth and the Worth of Rights" in *Liberty and Democracy*, ed., TR Machan (Stanford: Hoover, 2002) 89.

then shaping our lives in relation to those ends[74]. Developing this idea of ends Neera Badhwar proposes that individual moral worth resides in "*the equal worth of a shared capacity*, a capacity for appreciating and creating value" [emphasis original].[75] The premise that we should see other human beings as "ends" in themselves, as possessing inherent worth, and not as a "means" to some goal is of course Kantian. Human beings have value by virtue of their capacity, or potential, to appreciate and create value. Individual moral worth resides in our potentiality. Organisations that run training courses to develop individual potential, whether they or their personnel appreciate this or not, are reinforcing the idea of individual moral worth. The British Royal Navy recruitment video "Born in Carlisle, made in the Royal Navy" was designed by clever advertisers who understand how powerful the idea of becoming is to human beings.

Conclusions

I have sought to challenge the validity of what I have described as a "top down" approach to the creation of ethical codes. The fragmentation of ethical language and the liquidity of language in the twenty-first century mean that institutions must construct their ethic with this key concept firmly in mind. For example, the word loyalty can have a very fluid meaning. Organisations that wish to use this value in their codes need to carefully articulate exactly what they mean when using it.

My experience of giving presentations both here in the UK and abroad is that what we have assumed to be "the taken-for-granted shape of things too obvious to mention," in relation to shared societal frameworks, is no longer obvious to the majority. But although it has become unknown and has been transformed, it is not altogether foreign. What has been hugely positive is the response to the ethical foundation that I was charged with socialising within the British Army. About 80% "get it" immediately and respond with statements like "I have never really thought about it in

74 L Lomasky, *Persons, Rights, and the Moral Community* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) 31-34.

75 Badhwar, "Moral Worth" 102.

the way you presented it but you have articulated what I have always believed." The moral foundation that underpins the UK is an excellent place from which to begin the creation of an ethical code.

The approach to creating an organisation ethic needs to change and begin from the ground up. It must begin with a statement of first principles from which everything else then flows. It must begin with the individual and an explicit explanation of how the organisation views and understands every member of its personnel, indeed, humanity in general. Far too often, senior managers or executives make assumptions, that what is self-evidently obvious to them, is also obvious to their subordinates. In the last 18 months talking with groups (civilian and military) and giving lectures and running training days for units and formations I discovered that while most will understand that human beings have worth, few can articulate why people have worth. It is not enough to simply state that people deserve respect. Organisations must explain the moral basis that affords the status of individual respect. How can an organisation expect its personnel to show respect to others, if they have not begun by explaining to their own people the basis of on which they are respected within the organisation?

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