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Collaborative Ethics

I will examine three issues bearing on ethics which are opened up by the use of 'collaborative projects' as a unit of analysis for the human sciences.

Firstly, I shall demonstrate that every theory of society is implicitly a theory of ethics, and every ethics is implicitly a theory of society, so social theory cannot succeed in describing and explaining, let alone changing, social life unless it also makes sense as an ethical theory applicable to the society it describes and the methods it uses.

Secondly, I shall demonstrate that general ethics must have recourse to the idea of collaboration between projects and elaborate the relevant ethical principles.

Thirdly, I shall elaborate the ethical principles entailed by a number of individuals participating together in a collaborative project. Together, these considerations point to a secular general ethics relevant to the modern world based on the notion of collaborative projects.

Social Science and Ethics

In the positivist tradition of science, ethics and science are incommensurable and are kept separate. 'Is' must not be confused with 'Ought'. The only place for ethics in mainstream scientific research is to put boundaries around the activities of scientists to ensure that they don't violate the rights of others in their pursuit of knowledge. Working within the social division of labor in capitalist society, the producer of knowledge is almost inevitably committed to a position of the ends justifies the means.

But in the tradition of romantic or emancipatory science, things are not so clear-cut. Goethe, Hegel, Marx and Vygotsky did not develop separate ethical and scientific theories; their ideas were simultaneously ethical and scientific. And there are good reasons for this.

The first problem which arises is when a norm of conduct is presumed to apply to the research subject as if it were a simple matter of fact, but is in fact the postulate of an unrealistic theory of ethics.

For example, liberal economic theory bases its science on the presumption of individuals acting as mutually independent, self-interested, rational agents. That is, it takes it that this is the *norm* for the behavior of individuals, and that it is individuals, or groups such as families acting as if they were individuals, which are the agents in economic life. The fact that agents are neither individual, independent, self-interested nor rational registers as a 'distortion' of the market (as 'friction' or 'rigidity' for example), and as something which needs to be fixed. Public service is denigrated and so far as possible replaced with commercial services, public health and welfare sacrificed on the altar of the free market. By making an atomistic society the norm for economics, economists make policy recommendations which have the effect of atomizing society. Education is deemed to be the personal property of the educated person, so policy is set so that those who want an education pay for their certificate, get what they paid for, and then expect to be duly remunerated for their trouble. The norm of the independent rational economic agent orients both the science and the ethics. Public education is deemed a cost which needs to be minimized. Policies based on these false assumptions

reduce public service to administering contracts, managing funds and prosecuting court cases; public provision of health and education is undermined and the people who provide such services are increasingly demoralized. The result tends to produce a nation of self-seeking individuals accustomed to the disinterest of the community in their welfare.

Equally, the norms of virtue on which a church relies in governing its hierarchy may be as unrealistic as the utilitarianism presumed to govern the market, and faith in that hierarchy of virtue only serves to exacerbate its corruption.

Behavioral psychology is based on the ethical principle that people interact with others with the aim of predicting and controlling their behavior. The activity of behavioral psychologists serves to promote just such strategic action by the marketers, advertisers and political advisers who purchase their services. So it is that we have universal suffrage coexisting with unprecedented levels of economic inequality.

A human science which does not make its ethical commitments explicit is deceiving itself and others. Human beings *are* rational and reasonable agents and no study of their activity can be complete without a consideration of *how* individuals decide on what is right, on what they *ought* to do, that is, without an ethical examination which takes seriously the subject's own ethical consciousness.

All social theorists know that social formations operate according to ethical norms. These norms form part of their data, but may take the ethics of the scientific project as something separate from the data. All kinds of misunderstanding arise in these circumstances; the ethics applying to participation in a scientific project are more or less widely known in those societies where science has a profile and subjects will easily adapt to the role of being a subject. But in other social situations subjects may fail to understand the researchers' questions and their own responses may in turn be misconstrued.

I shall demonstrate that the idea of 'collaboration' and 'project' as basic notions for social theory allows us to examine ethical principles that are relevant, not just to participants in an explicitly acknowledged collaborative project, but to interaction with others in general.

Modern Ethics

The Christian religion has inscribed in its principles the Golden Rule: 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' (Luke 6:31). In the Muslim *Hadith* ('Sayings of the Prophet') we have: 'None of you truly believes until he desires for his brother what he desires for himself'. This ancient principle transcends all religious barriers. Versions of the Golden Rule can be found in Bahá'í, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, the Native American and African traditions, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism and Zaroastianism at least. The Golden Rule is a gift we have inherited from antiquity, a moral principle which is shared across all cultures which gives us the rule for collaborating with each other.

As part of the Enlightenment project, seeking to place the teachings of religion on a rational basis, Kant claimed to prove that as rational beings, we must always treat another person as an *end* and never as mere means (Kant 1780). From this, he was able to reformulate the Golden Rule as the Principle of Universalisability (hereafter the Categorical Imperative): 'Act according to a maxim which can be adopted at the same time as a universal law' (Kant 1785).

However, even though the Categorical Imperative, whether in Kant's secular formulation or in that of a religious tradition, is indigenous to all cultures, it overlooks the fact that others may not want to have done unto them the same as you want to have done unto you. It fails to take account of the fact that others may have radically different needs and desires. "You wouldn't do that in your own house!" is not always an effective rejoinder to poor behavior.

Even leaving aside cultural differences and the lack of a shared sacred text, the Categorical Imperative takes no account of the asymmetrical obligations in paternalistic, hierarchical and class social formations. And despite Kant's commitment to taking others as ends and not means, it effectively casts other people as passive objects of one's own actions, which are in turn taken as if an individual were the sole author of their own action and its consequences.

A revival of interest in moral philosophy and ethics over the past half-century has led to a number of attempts to rectify the problems in Kant's formulation which takes account of the ethical problems which have arisen principally as the result of the ethnic diversity of modern states. Foremost amongst the approaches directly drawing on Kant's rationalization of the Categorical Imperative are Habermas and later Critical Theorists including Agnes Heller and Seyla Benhabib. Also contributing to the approach which I propose here are John Rawls, Alasdair MacIntyre and Amartya Sen.

John Rawls' Political Liberalism

Both Rawls and Habermas approach the lack of a universally respected revealed religion by looking to principles of justice being derived or validated through reasonable and rational dialogue between citizens, whether real or hypothetical. Rawls sees the discourse in which consensus is reached on just social arrangements (1) requiring participants to lay aside any 'comprehensive world views' they may hold and (2) basing themselves on mutually accepted *facts*, evidently including taken-for-granted social arrangements, rather than the specific constitutional provisions which are the subject of decision. However, these facts may be the outcome or manifestation of prior constitutional or legal measures, and so in that sense not genuinely actual. Rawls fails to see that only a comprehensive world view can encompass the counterfactual and the consequential, whether or not in a way which is convincing to those not sharing the comprehensive world view in question.

A typical example would be an organization with all-male leadership which resists affirmative action to increase female participation, claiming that they only appoint on merit. But obviously they do not. Once the paternalistic features of their organization have been removed they find that appointment on merit produces 50-50 gender representation. Only a feminist critique could have justified affirmative action, and in the meantime, until systems had been feminized, a lot of men would rightly feel they had been unjustly passed over in favor of a woman. Institutionalized injustices cannot be rectified by consensus. Only a project which succeeds by illiberal means in realizing its ideal, changing social arrangements and creating new facts, can create the basis for reaching a new consensus.

Rawls' reasoning from a supposedly 'original position' is flawed because the original position is original only in terms of a constitution and set of laws being legislated and an individual being placed into a social position. The original position is not original but belated, because it leaves in place comprehensive world views which reflect taken-for-granted social arrangements and consequential 'facts' which were

supposedly still to be instituted. Only real human beings raised in some definite social situation can engage in the kind of thought experiment which Rawls requires.

However, confronted with the obvious fact that according to his system the entire Civil Rights Movement would have been 'ruled out' (and the same would apply to the Women's Liberation Movement), Rawls introduces an amendment to allow that leaders of a project aiming to change social arrangements would 'not go against the ideal of public reason ... if the political forces they led were among the necessary historical conditions to establish political justice' (1995, p. 251). This is a principle of *dynamic justice*, and Rawls is correct here – social justice movements change facts crucial to the achievement of the social arrangements they advocate for. But I believe that this proviso undermines his whole conception of political liberalism. A certain claim is just if a project exists which is capable of realizing the social arrangements in which unforced consensus could subsequently be freely arrived at. So despite Rawls' aim to rule out 'comprehensive doctrines', justice can only be determined by making an assessment not of doctrines as such, but of the collaborative projects which realize doctrines.

Whereas Rawls tried to resolve the problem of a multiplicity of world views by defining a restricted domain of discourse, Habermas looked to a procedural solution.

Habermas's Communicative Ethics

Habermas also responded to the problem of radical failure of mutual understanding characterizing modernity, but rather than attempting to directly prescribe the *kind of discourse* which could justify ethical principles, he opted for a *procedural prescription* in the form of discourse ethics. Empathy has to be transcended with an actual enquiry into the other person's needs.

Taking Kant as his setting off point, he put it this way:

> '[Kant] tacitly assumes that in making moral judgments each individual can project himself into the situation of everyone else *through his own imagination*. But when the participants can no longer rely on a transcendental pre-understanding grounded in more or less homogeneous conditions of life and interests, the moral point of view can only be realised under conditions of communication that ensure that *everyone* tests the acceptability of a norm, implemented in a general practice, also from the perspective of his own understanding of himself and of the world ... in this way the categorical imperative receives a discourse-theoretical interpretation in which its place is taken by the discourse principle (D), according to which *only those norms can claim validity that could meet with the agreement of all those concerned in their capacity as participants in a practical discourse*'. (1998, p. 33-4)

Habermas set out the conditions which would allow such a practical discourse to proceed without coercion or exclusion, including, like Rawls, ruling out dogmatism, performative contradictions, and so forth, so that discourse could expected to produce a rational and reasonable consensus. Continuing to parallel Kant, he derived from the discourse principle the principle of universalization (U):

> 'A [moral norm] is valid just in case the foreseeable consequences and side-effects of its general observance for the interests and value-orientations of *each individual* could be *jointly* accepted by *all* concerned without coercion' (1998, p. 42)

Although this is framed in terms of justifying moral norms, Habermas went on to make it clear that the principle of universalization was to apply to real practical discourse, including the making of decisions about real projects, and that it was required not only that each individual affected be consulted, but that their reasonable agreement had to be gained.

Thus Habermas made real collective decision making the criterion for ethical action.

He granted however, that in the light of the multiplicity of conflicting interests in modernity a 'fair bargaining process' would often take the place of actual agreement on the rightness of the relevant action. Continuing along these lines, he formulated the conditions for laws to regarded as legitimate to be that the laws are reasonable products of a sufficiently inclusive deliberative process.

Like Kant, Habermas continued to develop his ethics on the basis of individuals who are taken to be, and take each other to be, ends in themselves, autonomous moral agents, who do things *to* each other but never *with* each other. Despite the move to give procedural form to moral obligations, Habermas's communicative ethics remains, as a number of writers have said, insufficiently concrete. We are left with an indefinite number of atomistic individuals engaged in egalitarian and inclusive 'practical discourse' over some decision with which they claim to be 'concerned' and all are to be treated alike as ends in themselves.

I contend that Both Habermas and Rawls fail in their project because they do not take collaboration as the norm for interactions between individuals. Individuals being the author of unmediated actions they take *against* another individual is far from being the typical ethical relation in social life – in the jungle perhaps, but not in a modern social formation. Ethics needs to be based on a form of relationship which can function as a methodological 'germ cell' of a social formation, and one individual acting upon another fails as such a germ cell.

Seyla Benhabib

Seyla Benhabib in particular has pointed out that Habermas's formulation is far too abstract, and in its abstractness it fails to find relevance in real world ethical problems.

> 'The fiction of a general deliberative assembly in which the united people expressed their will belongs to the early history of democratic theory; today our guiding model has to be that of a medium of loosely associated, multiple foci of opinion formation and dissemination which affect one another in free and spontaneous processes of communication'. (Benhabib, 1996)

Benhabib insists that so long as the other is considered abstractly, lacking any determinateness in relation to the subject, the perpetuation of the above fiction has the effect of promoting a destructive kind of liberalism which is blind to the diversity of projects in which people are engaged, and the conflicts between these various projects. Benhabib (2006) illustrated this point with a consideration of the range of quite different definitions of the 'citizens' of a nation-state, according to whether kinship, residence, ethnicity, language, work or political participation is at issue. In her opinion, ethical problems arising in the European Union can only be resolved by disentangling these distinct projects, rather than trying to see Europe, for example, as made up of groups of individuals each sharing a unitary nationality.

Amartya Sen

Coming from a study of the measurement and causes inequality, Amartya Sen engaged in a life-long internal critique of Utilitarianism. In successive refinements of measures of social welfare and inequality he successively demolished wealth, income, capability, functioning and voice (Sen, 1999) as measures of what it is in a social formation which ought to be more equally distributed. He (Sen, 2002) finally arrived at the concept of 'critical voice'; it is not enough that some group has an adequate level of functioning and a voice in the making of decisions about social arrangements affecting their welfare, but they had to have a *critical voice*. This led to his proposal that the foremost measure which was needed to rectify inequality in India was the education of women. It is very significant that critical voice as the substance of justice – not just as a means – arose from a critique of utilitarianism, the ethic underlying modern economic theory.

Sen (2002a) has also made an astute observation on the question of cultural relativism. He observes that, so long as there is some communication with other parts of the world, *every* culture has its own critics and dissenters, people offering *internal* criticisms of their own culture. Established opinion never offers a reliable measure of what is good in a given social formation, because by definition established opinion is that of the dominant group. There can be no basis for withholding outside criticism of a culture on the basis of deference for cultural relativism, but such criticism can be effective and valid so long as it finds effective internal dissenting voices with which it is able to solidarise. So even very broad cultural criticism, to be valid, requires a foundation in real relationships of collaboration. The justice or otherwise of the relevant social arrangements have to be judged by the strength and persuasiveness of the dissenting voices.

Sen (2002a) also made an extensive study of majority decision making, drawing largely on the mathematics of complexity theorist Kenneth Arrow. It must be granted that each individual will have a whole array of preferences in respect to some decision domain which cannot be reduced to a yes/no answer to one arbitrary question. So even if it is accepted as a principle of justice that a choice between two options ought to be made by majority decision, an elaborate meeting procedure is presupposed in order to reliably and consistently negate the fact that the outcome is determined by the selection of the question to be posed. Sen affirmed that majority voting is in the same position in regard to the question posed as consensus decision making is in regard to the status quo ante. The only guarantee of a just group decision is a body of individuals motivated to find and collaboratively create a just arrangement, with an effective tradition of collective decision making, an understanding of which is shared among all the participants.

Agnes Heller

Agnes Heller has also found Habermas's approach insufficiently concrete, and among other things she has made an extended study of the Golden Rule, which she reformulated as follows:

> '*What* I do unto you and *what I* expect you to do unto me should be decided by you and me' (Heller, 1986).

I find this formulation unsatisfactory because it still restricts the domain of action to individuals acting upon one another whereas the far more important domain of activity

is what we do together, as collaborators, and it is our relationship as collaborators which determines how we consult one another, make decisions and share the blame or credit for the outcome of our collaboration. Undoubtedly individual experiences will always have a privileged position in questions of ethics, but I would contend that individual action can only be approached as a determination of the 'we' perspective which must form our starting point, in theory as it does in reality. Taking collaborative projects to be the essential, concrete practical relation between people, I reformulate the Golden Rule in this way:

'*What we do*, is decided by *us*'.

That is, by default, I take another person to be a collaborator in the project which is implicated in the moral problem raised between us, and that includes those who are participants by virtue of being or claiming to be affected. Conflict is an essential moment of collaboration. The aim is seek consensus on what we do, that is, taking us to be joint participants in a project. If no such shared project is conceivable, then the supposed moral problem is void.

The original Golden Rule specified only what I do unto another, and takes no account of the fact that the impact of my actions on the other may be the resultant of action which we are taking or ought to take together as collaborators. The Golden Rule modified by the introduction of the we-perspective makes no prescription about what I ought to do in the absence of a we-perspective. However, the we-perspective is to be interpreted generously, including the imputed or prior consent of agents who may be incompetent, highly mediated collaborations or collaborations which are more conflicts rather than cooperations.

Further, the concept of project collaboration should frame our practical relations even with strangers, not just our immediate collaborators. Universal ethical claims, such as the denunciation of economic inequality, can only be made coherent if they are implicitly addressed to either the state or some social movement. Such broad claims are coherent only to the extent that a mediating project, and thereby the parties addressed by the claim, are made explicit.

Further, a range of different collaborative relations are normative in different circumstances. What kind of collaborators are we? Whose project is this? These questions have to be answered *concretely*. The point is to struggle to identify a viable 'we-perspective'. This raises the issue of the various paradigms of decision making which apply to collaborative projects. I will come to these questions presently.

The writer who has come closest to formulating an ethics on this basis is Alasdair MacIntyre.

Alasdair MacIntyre

In 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre published *After Virtue*, which, despite the fact that MacIntyre had recently converted to Catholicism, became a reference point for secular critique of liberalism. MacIntyre was interested in whether the ethical life of Aristotle's ancient *polis*, where 'activities are hierarchically ordered by the *for sake of* relationship' (p. 107), could be recovered in conditions of modernity. MacIntyre looks to the ethical norms operative in 'practices' which he understands much as I understand 'projects': 'Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good' (1981, p. 139). MacIntyre distinguished between 'internal goods' 'realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive

of, that form of activity' (1981, p. 175) and 'external goods' such as prizes, monetary rewards and wages which are used to sustain the practice, and are associated with the transformation of a form of practice into an institution. In this connection, MacIntyre refers to the 'corrupting power of institutions' (1981, p. 181), so we see the potential for 'fossilized projects', that is, institutions – from organizations such as schools or hospitals to entire political communities, 'concerned with the whole of life, not with this or that good, but with man's good as such' (1981, p. 146) – to be both the site for the development of an ethical life or for the corruption of human relationships.

MacIntyre advocates an ethics of virtue, rather than the ethics of rights and duties advocated by liberals such as Rawls and Habermas.

Thick and thin ethos

One qualification to MacIntyre's ethical project which is important to the task at hand is Agnes Heller's (1987, 1988) contrast between the sense of equality and the 'loose ethos' which prevails in the marketplace of public intercourse and the 'dense ethos' uniting participants in a project. Heller observes that the obligation to treat others as equals is not universal. While we are obliged to treat equals equally, within the practices of an institution 'equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally' – the boss gets paid more, managers give orders to subordinates, parents bear the burdens of care for their children, etc. Utopian dreams notwithstanding, there is no real project within which equality is truly the norm. Consequently, Heller points out that the ongoing displacement of the formerly dense ethos of institutional life by the loose ethos of modernity which underlies MacIntyre's concerns is *not* simply a regressive development. The sexual abuse of children that has been taking place, probably forever, in all kinds of hierarchical institutions is a symptom of the dangers of hierarchical institutions insulated from the liberal ethos of outside society. The recent rash of exposés is probably due to the penetration of the dense ethos of these institutions by the loose ethos of modernity. The long-held antipathy to hierarchy in particular and institutionalisation in general which has characterized social change movements demands a response to this problem.

Summary

Human freedom can only be attained through mediated self-determination, *i.e.*, participation in projects. A stranger encountered in a public space is to be treated, Kant tells us, as an end in themself, that is, as a project. My relationship to a stranger then is that between two mutually independent ends, or projects. At the same time however, the other is a *person*, and not just any aggregate of actions, and persons are bearers of ineliminable rights. But the interaction between two individuals is never unmediated, except in the jungle perhaps, the question is always to discern which project defines the relationship relevant to a specific ethical problem.

The foregoing review of efforts to devise an ethics appropriate to life in modern, secular nation states, needs to be taken together with my proposal that these efforts can only reach a successful outcome by taking a collaborative project as mediating the relationships between individuals. This leads us to a two-step approach to resolving ethical problems. First we must identify the relevant project and the position of the subjects within that project, or alternatively determine that the subjects must in the given instance be regarded as independent projects. Then we must identify the ethical norms indigenous to the given project(s), which we will do on the basis of a typology of

projects and relations between projects. For each paradigm there are specific ethical norms. Every project has its own ethics, according to its self-concept; however, not in every case can such norms be endorsed as rational and reasonable, and it will be the ethics shaping the paradigmatic norms of collaboration that will conclude this examination.

The Ethics of Collaboration

In the first part of this section I will discuss what it means to take an individual as a project in themselves, and then the ethics of relations between projects in terms of four paradigmatic cases, viz., exchange, solidarity, colonisation and collaboration.

In the second part I consider three paradigmatic types of project, viz., counsel, majority and consensus.

The Ethics of interactions between projects

Projects are collaborating when they share the same *Arbeitsgegenstand* (a German word for the object being worked upon), even if they are in conflict over the end.

If there is no interaction between projects, then no ethical questions arise between them. We take the interaction between two distinct projects under the concept of how one project *contributes to* another project while retaining its own identity, its own end.

There are four such modes of contribution: exchange, solidarity, colonization and collaboration.

Exchange

This mode, which for want of a better word I have called 'exchange', is the most common relation between projects found in modern capitalist societies. It entails each doing something for the other, within finite limits, on the basis of mutuality, either explicitly or implicitly involving a contract and decisions are made about cooperation by bargaining or negotiation, to arrive at an exchange of values which allows each project to further their own end. It is a relationship of mutual instrumentalisation. Typical instances are everyday purchase-and-sales, wage labor, commercial contracts or treaties, agreements between nation-states or other groups.

From an ethical standpoint, the essential relation is that each treats the other as an autonomous agent and bargains in good faith and honestly fulfills their obligations without exploiting the other. The characteristic feature of exchange is that the two projects retain their autonomy relative to one another whilst contributing to the others' end by action or payment, because by doing so it furthers their own end. In taking the other as an autonomous project, each is indifferent to the other's end. What each does unto the other, just as what each does *with* the other, is *negotiated*. Exchange encompasses what Alasdair MacIntyre called 'external reward'.

This relation, essentially the exchange of commodities, is the characteristic relation of bourgeois society. It fosters the development of autonomy among agents who gain recognition from others by virtue of the fact that they can do something which meets the needs of another such subject.

The next two modes do not involve mutuality.

Colonization

Colonization (or philanthropy) is where the master-project subsumes the other project into its own project, 'colonizes' it, either because it is able to and seeks to further its own ends by so doing, or because the other is in dire need and the master-project aims to 'rescue' it by taking it in. In either case, the autonomy and subjectivity of the other project is extinguished, but nonetheless, by becoming pro tem a part of another project, they may achieve conditions of normality and may later be able to emancipate themselves and restore their autonomy.

Note that while colonization may lead to the extinguishment of the colonized project, this in no way suggests the *persons* engaged in that project are destroyed. On the contrary, they are recruited into a new project.

From an ethical standpoint, since the master-project takes moral responsibility for the relationship, the ethical relationship is one of care and responsibility. They do not treat the other as autonomous and equal, but do take on responsibility for the other's welfare as for their own, and according to their own lights.

Solidarity

Solidarity is where the subject (i.e., the project lending solidarity to the other) subordinates itself to the other and acts under its direction, in order to assist the other in regaining normality and autonomy. The subject is not in danger of losing its autonomy by subordinating itself to the other pro tem; on the contrary, it can expect to strengthen its own subjectivity. Nonetheless, trust is a precondition for solidarity and solidarity builds trust.

It may well be the case that the subject sees long term advantage for itself in offering solidarity, but that is beside the point, because it gives support by subordinating itself to the other's subjectivity; it does not *use* the other or 'take it over'.

Collaboration

All the above are limiting forms of collaboration, but *normative* collaboration is where the projects enter into one of the collective decision making relationship dealt with below through delegates or representatives. Such a collaboration forms a collaborative project in its own right. Here the projects cooperate and conflict over the means to be adopted and how the end is to be achieved, but share the end each as part of their own self-consciousness. There is no bargaining, because everyone is committed to the same end.

Normative collaboration is marked by a move towards full consultation and participation in decision making and the sharing of blame and credit for outcomes.

The Question of Conflict

Possibly the reader believes that I have wrongly omitted the case where two projects are in conflict, such as in the case of rival political parties. Let me illustrate the point using this example.

Suppose there are two political parties, one of them spends most of their time campaigning in the ranks of the unions, arguing over policy and selecting candidates and the other is doing similar things in the business community, but such that they never cross each others' paths. Two distinct projects. But every few years they contest an election to fill the seats in Parliament. This election and the work of the Parliament is a *collaborative project*, even though there are two distinct projects involved. For the

current purposes, the elections to and work of the Parliament in governing the country is a single collaborative project and is treated as such here. Hostilities between the parties which are outside of the Parliamentary process may approach forms of colonization – with one project attempting to subordinate the other to its own ends. Here the ethic of care and responsibility simply means that the subject expresses its own program in how it fights its enemies.

In the thin ethos of the public sphere in modern capitalist society, the maxim that persons are to be treated as ends in themselves translates into the maxim that all persons are to be taken as projects in themselves. (I reality, all individuals are participants in collaborative projects, and their participation in political life is predicated upon that.) Consequently, the above four modes of interaction between projects defines the four possible stances of individuals and institutions towards persons. Within the thick ethos which pervades institutions and social movements, where the conduct of individuals and their interaction is governed by rules expressing the self-concept of the relevant project, persons are not treated as ends in themselves and quite distinct ethical principles are at work, and I now turn to these.

The Ethics of Collaboration, within Projects

The essential feature of a project which manifests its ethical shape is the mode of collective decision making used within the project. The mode of decision making does not exhaust the ethos existing within a project but is an important first step.

I have made an extensive study of the historical development of collective decision making (Blunden, 2016), and have discovered that (aside from sortition) there are just three paradigmatic modes of collective decision making, each of which has a quite distinct social history and social basis. While hybrids and ambiguities do exist, the sharpness of the distinctions and the deep ethical convictions which accompany the use of each is striking. Every project has quite distinct decision making norms and the ethics of collaboration of persons within a project flow from the paradigm which is applicable. Norms will differ from project to project, but the ethical foundations upon which decision making rest are very consistent.

Within all projects, the maxim of 'What *we* do, *we* decide' applies, but *how* we decide varies distinctly.

Counsel

The most ancient paradigm of collective decision making is Counsel. This form of collective decision making was codified by St. Benedict c. 500AD, amply recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Witanegemot and is documented in African traditional societies under the name of Lekgotla. In Counsel, one person, the 'Chief' let us say, takes moral responsibility for making the decision, but is obliged to consult every one of the collective before announcing the decision. Counsel is still the dominant form of decision making in private firms and traditional families and is often the de facto form of decision making even where the procedures characteristic of Majority or Consensus are acted out. Counsel also applies to artistic projects, such as when a sculptor engages a technician to make castings, and so on, to the extent that Counsel is sometimes seen as the art paradigm of decision making because of its emphasis on realising the authentic vision of the artist rather than the satisficing of diverse visions.

Counsel should not be discounted as a genuine and effective form of collective decision making. The King is only as wise as his counsel, but whereas both Majority and Consensus risk producing compromise decisions which are some kind of arithmetic mean of divers points of view, a decision by Counsel is the considered, undiluted and informed decision of one well-advised person.

According to those who have documented this paradigm, although there are procedural requirements to consult everyone implicated in the decision, the ethic of Counsel is primarily an ethic of *virtue*. The attributes of the good chief are many, but include wisdom, charisma and the ability to listen. Once the Chief has made a decision, there is no dissent, so an outsider can easily mistake Counsel for Consensus.

Instances where a person is vested with authority in a chain of command or in the field of action, I count as truncated or degenerate forms of Counsel. An officer commanding soldiers in the field is not engaged in collective decision making but simply executing her/his appointed role and the soldiers theirs; likewise tradespeople overseeing apprentices. Nevertheless, some features of Counsel will be manifested in these instances. It makes more sense to count command and mentoring relationships as truncated forms of Counsel than to take them as distinct modes, as neither command nor mentoring necessarily involve collective decision making at all.

Majority

Majority decision making dates from the break up of the early medieval period with the emergence of a merchant class and independent tradespeople based in the towns who had no rights in a feudal system organised by land ownership, tenancy and kinship. In order to look after their own welfare in the absence of protection in feudal society, they formed guilds and corporations based on voluntary association and mutual aid. Modern parliaments, companies and trade unions all originate from these medieval guilds and by and large inherit from them the same procedures for collective decision making and the same ethical principles.

Majority is distinguished from Counsel and the norms of feudal society in general by its egalitarianism which is reflected in the capacity of each member of the collective to cast one vote equal in value to the vote of every other member. Such a procedure was simply unthinkable in feudal times though it did exist in truncated form within the Church and in Church elections. Although Majority may have originated as a pragmatic measure to allow decision making under conditions of equality, solidarity and tolerance, over the centuries it became hardened into a powerful ethical principle in its own right. During the nineteenth century and during later struggles for universal suffrage Majority became arguably the most powerful and significant principle of political ethics, acting as a proxy for the notion of universal equality.

Under conditions where there is just one question to be decided and there is no dissent on the question to be posed, Majority is capable of producing a valid decision subject to provisos such as those outlined by Habermas in his Communicative Ethics. However, as Marquis de Condorcet showed 230 years ago and Amartya Sen has demonstrated quite exhaustively, majority voting is unable to consistently and reliably decide on realistic differences, which are invariably multi-dimensional and multivalent, between individual members of a collective. However, over the centuries, elaborate procedures have been developed on the basis of the principle of Majority to facilitate relatively satisfactory decisions under a wide variety of conditions. Majority decisions carry great moral weight, foster creative deliberation, rational and reasonable dialogue

and are invariably accepted by participants and concerned non-participants as ethically valid, if arrived at in accordance with *agreed traditional procedures*, such as those documented in *Robert's Rules of Order* or Walter Citrine's *ABC of Chairmanship*.

Majority itself not does not warrant automatically an ethically valid decision because of the fact that majority votes can only decide one question. A case in point is the 1999 referendum on an Australian Republic where the PM, a monarchist, asked voters to choose between an unpopular model of a republic and the status quo; although the majority of voters favoured a republic, a majority were not in favour of the model offered. Another case is the Egyptian election in 2005 in which the run-off election was between a military leader who favoured a return to the regime just overthrown and the Muslim Brotherhood. The democratic grouping had come third in the first round, but in a head-to-head contest would have won against either of the other two.

The ethical status of Majority is an established moral fact of modernity, even though it cannot reliably and consistently function as a proxy for the moral equality of all persons. But it is the product of a tradition which is more than any other responsible for the very existence of modernity. Its ultimate justification is that tradition.

Majority decision making expresses, in addition to the principle of majority, three other ethical principles which are part of the same tradition and are built into the procedures for Majority decision making: equality, tolerance and solidarity.

As remarked above, it was the principle of *equality* which made possible and gave rise to Majority and is expressed in the equal value of each vote. The principle of equality means the equality of all members of the collective as autonomous agents having a stake in the decision.

The impulse which gave rise to Majority was not equality itself but the principle of *solidarity*, the same principle as referred to above in connection with relations between projects. Members extend mutual aid and maintain the collective irrespective of whether they are in agreement with the decision(s) – the minority works under the decision of the majority. This principle probably arose from pragmatic grounds inasmuch as a voluntary association can only survive by the fact that all contribute equally irrespective of whether they agree with the conduct of the collective. Over the centuries the pragmatic acceptance of this principle became a matter of deeply held moral conviction, as is manifested in the opprobrium attached to words like traitor, scab, turncoat, etc.

Tolerance is the principle that complements and sustains the principle of solidarity – the majority sustains the loyalty of the minority and secures its continued participation, including its dissenting voice in decision making. Tolerance differs from laissez faire because the dissident is still required to maintain their contribution to the collective. And nor does it imply mutual respect, because even while the dissident is recognised as an independent moral agent with an equal stake in the decision and procedures will ensure that their voice is heard, if a view is in a minority no compromise is required out of respect to the minority view. Respect would entail that a minority view is not only listened to but respected in action.

These three ethical principles – equality, solidarity and tolerance – have been nurtured under the principle of Majority in the formation of the modern world.

Majority became fixed as an ethical principle in opposition to the rule of a wealthy or privileged nobility. However, in practice, in capitalist societies, it is restricted to a judiciously defined public sphere while the real decisions are made in a so-called

private domain. As a consequence, Majority has proved to be an effective tool for the rule of a wealthy or privileged minority. This conundrum arises from the defects of Majority mentioned above. Voting is an abstract procedure incapable of consistently and reliably guaranteeing rational and fair decisions on concrete questions.

Consensus

Although Consensus decision making had been practised among the Quakers since 1662, effectively Consensus was introduced by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Women Strike for Peace in the USA in 1960/61. The social strata which were mobilised by these organizations were young Blacks in the South (and the students who supported them) and middle-class housewives respectively. These were two groups who had been excluded by the post-World War Two settlement and were inspired by the national liberation movements' on-going success in bringing an end to colonialism. Consensus spread from the SNCC and WSP to the Peace, Women's Liberation and Environmental Movements. As the profile of the labour movement in the social justice movements outside the workplaces declined from the late 1990s, Consensus became the preferred method of decision making among a larger and larger section of voluntary associations of all kinds.

The rationale for the use of Consensus in SNCC was that no-one could be forced to put their life on the line while confronting racism with nonviolent resistance, simply on the basis of having *participated* in making the decision. Only if a person had positively consented in formulating and deciding on an action could they be expected to endure its consequences. For WSP, Consensus was connected to their desire to remain firmly within the ideas and forms of action which were uncontroversial within their own social base and to avoid the construction of the apparatus of a voluntary organisation. As things developed, we can see that the essential basis for Consensus is that the only resource people have is each other (lacking property assets and full-time staff), and the collective has neither the desire nor the capacity to force individuals to comply with a collective decision. The impression is one of unity, but the essential counterpoise to unity is laissez faire. The actual process of discussion which generates the collective decision is not essentially different in Consensus and Majority; both aim for unanimity. "We decide what we do" is the maxim for both. The difference manifests itself when disagreement is persistent. In the case of Majority, there is unity in action; in the case of Consensus, it is laissez faire.

Consensus fosters certain duties and virtues which are not fostered by Majority. The ethic of Consensus is above all *inclusion*. Discussion will continue until every point of view has not just been heard, but taken account of in the proposal. Even laissez faire supports inclusion in that multiple actions are an alternative to pressing on for actual unity. Consensus does not foster solidarity however, because the dissident minority is free to go their own way and is under no obligation to support the majority in their decision.

Consensus expresses *respect* for others, for the different. Whereas in Majority, the dissident is tolerated, because after all, the collective can always move to a vote. In Consensus, this option is not open; the collective must continue discussing until the dissidents' point of view has been incorporated. This can lead to intolerance for persistent nonconformity, but at the same time it denotes respect for the different opinion.

I don't believe that equality is an ethical principle which is relevant to Consensus; different persons are considered incommensurable rather than equal. Abstract decision making by the counting of votes is discounted in favour of exhaustive efforts to find a creative solution to differences.

There is a serious problem with Consensus however, which has ethical implications; this is the *paradox of the status quo*: if there is no consensus, then the status quo ante is the default decision. Let's suppose someone can't hear what is being said in the meeting and proposes that the air conditioning be turned off; if anyone refuses to agree, then the air conditioning stays on. But let's suppose the complainant had simply turned it off and then left it for someone to propose that it be turned on – it would remain off. Let us suppose that all the employees in a privately owned firm meet with the owner with a view to transforming the firm into a cooperative; everyone agrees except the owner; so, under the paradigm of Consensus, the firm remains in private hands. Clearly social transformation cannot be achieved by Consensus, because participation in a social order is compulsory, and there is no possibility of opting out.

Further, the absence of solidarity in the ethics of Consensus means that it is impossible to accumulate property, and apart from the Quakers, history has confirmed this truth. If you want a leaflet printed or premises for the night, find a trade union or socialist group to help you out.

Rawls and all the discourse ethicists assume that when ethical principles are derived by dialogue between participants they *presume* that *Consensus* is the mode of collective decision making to be used. I believe that this is the reason that discourse ethics invariably arrives at liberal conclusions. But Majority is also flawed because of its reliance on the right question being asked. Thus Discourse Ethics inevitably fails in its project at least insofar as it does not explicitly take account of collaborative projects as mediating the relations between individuals.

Summary

Ethical communities are not constructed by theologians and moral philosophers or even by police and judges. Ethical communities have been constructed by collaborative projects of various kinds, essentially by forms of collective decision making together with the collective implementing of those decisions. As I have tried to show, the various rights, duties and virtues which are manifested in social life have their basis in the demands of specific modes of collaboration, both forms of collaboration between distinct projects – negotiation, solidarity, colonisation and normative collaboration, and forms of decision making within collectives of individuals – Counsel, Majority and Consensus. The virtues and duties we have mentioned above – honesty, good faith, care and responsibility, solidarity, trust, wisdom, attention, equality, tolerance, inclusion and respect – all originate in specific forms of collaborative project. I think it is reasonable to argue then, that moral philosophy must be incoherent unless attention is paid the collaborative projects mediating interactions between individuals.

The Question of Delegation and Hierarchy

Two problems have plagued efforts to achieve human emancipation through organisation over the past millennium: delegation and hierarchy, with the incipient transformation of delegates into officers.

The tendency of a delegate structure to solidify into a hierarchy does not issue from egotism on the part of delegates, but on the contrary, more often because the

unwillingness or incapacity of other members of a collective to do the work required of a delegate. Even in organisations where top-down appointment is completely absent, there is undoubtedly an incipient tendency for delegation to fossilize into an office, and a representative to be transformed into some form of manager. Voluntary associations have been aware of this tendency and have struggled to overcome it for at least 500 years. But it is impossible to organise on a scale larger than the number of people who can meet in one room together without the use of delegation. The internet certainly moderates these pressures but I don't believe it essentially changes the situation.

At this point I can only offer the negative observations that refusal of delegation and representation, or adoption of Consensus rather than Majority are not solutions to problems which have dogged Majority for a millennium. The experience of Consensus, beginning with the WSP in the 1960s, is that if delegates are not elected, they nominate themselves, and if a leading committee is not elected, then it is self-selected. This has proved to be the case ever since.

Conclusion

The powerful ethical convictions which accompany the use of Consensus, Majority or Counsel for making collective decisions emphasize the futility of understanding collective, that is, social action without engaging with the ethical foundations of collective action. As social life has become more and more 'democratized' with bureaucratic direction being more and more replaced by forms of collaboration, these problems of the ethics of collaboration become ubiquitous.

As has been demonstrated, these problems arise directly as an extension of the development of secular ethics over the past 50 years.

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