A U S T R A L I A N   E T H I C S

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Professional & Applied

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome everyone to the 2019 Winter edition of Australian Ethics!

In this issue, you'll find information on the upcoming AAPAE Symposium, details on the achievements of our associated journal, *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, and much more.

A common theme running through the issue is one of social identity. Glenn Martin kicks things off by reflecting on the use of roles and role-playing to teach ethics to engineers. Next, Chris Provis interrogates the ethical value—and ethical dangers—of the current rise of identity politics and thinking in the world. The following article considers the extent to which moral responsibility for evil should, or should not, extend to larger (often identity-based) groups, before Theodora Issa turns her attention to two groups, the family and the country, and considers what the current Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety might be saying about our own culture and responsibilities.

As always, thanks go to the editor of *Australian Ethics*, Charmayne Highfield, for putting together another terrific issue.

Turning to the future, I hope to see many of you at the upcoming Sym-posium in July. Whenever I chat to AAPAE members, I have always been struck by the interesting stories and experiences they relate as they talk about navigating their lives in the applied ethics space, doing what they can to understand, implement, encourage, learn and teach practical ethics. Sometimes I've felt I've learned as much from the informal chats over lunches and between sessions about these experiences, challenges and 'lessons learned', as I have from the formal presentations and original research.

It's for this reason that I was particularly excited when the AAPAE began considering the possibility of running a different format in 2019, instead of putting on a normal academic conference. Rather than presenting original academic research, we're going to be having panel discussions and hearing reports of people's experiences, ideas and challenges on the topic of ethics teaching and ethics survival. I'm sure it will be a fantastic and thought provoking event. Warm thanks go to UTS (and Bligh Grant) for making the venue available to us.

Looking forward to some enjoyable discussions at the Symposium,

Hugh Breakey
(President)

Achievements

Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations (REIO)

REIO and the 2018 ERA

The AAPAE's journal, *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations* (REIO), once again features in the Australian research excellence assessment, the ERA. REIO is included in the ERA submitted journals list. Seven universities submitted articles that appeared in REIO. **A total of 14 articles from REIO were included by universities in support of their applications for ranking**.

The 14 articles from REIO compares favourably with five from *Business Ethics - A European Review*, six from *Business Ethics Quarterly* and two from *Business and Professional Ethics Journal*. There were over 200 from *J Business Ethics* which publishes 28 times a year.

The seven universities which included articles from REIO in their submissions to the 2018 ERA round were Griffith, Monash, UNSW, QUT, RMIT, USQ and Tasmania.

This is good news for the Association, for the journal and for our authors. The ERA listing no longer has journal ranks; what counts is that the articles being submitted are in journals which are also being submitted by leading academics in the field and by leading departments. So, having articles submitted by seven universities is a strong indication of recognition. For authors in business schools, there is fur-

ther benefit in that REIO is included in the ABDC Journal List, the listing of the Australian Business Deans Council. Publishing in ABDC-listed journals is often an element in measures of performance and funding in Australian business schools.

The achievement is even more notable, given that the first AAPAE-linked issue of REIO did not appear until 2011. It is a credit to authors, reviewers and the guest editors of the 'conference issues' that REIO has done so well, providing an outlet for the work of Australian and New Zealand scholars working in applied ethics.

Many of the submitted REIO papers will have begun life as presentations at AAPAE conferences. This is further evidence of the Association making a positive contribution to scholarship and practice in applied ethics in Australia and New Zealand.

On a more technical line, in the Applied Ethics field of research, 2201, multiple REIO articles were submitted by the only university with a 5 rank, that is 'well above world class'.

In the business and management field, 1503, REIO items were submitted by three universities which achieved a score of 4, above world class, on the ERA rankings.

https://www.emeraldinsight.com/series/reio

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A A P A E   L i s t s e r v

If you have any information or notices that you would like us to relay to your peers, please email your request (word format) to: info@aapae.org.au

The AAPAE's Listserv has over 600 subscribers locally and o/seas.

AAPAE 2019 SYMPOSIUM

EDUCATING PRACTITIONERS AND ASPIRING PRACTITIONERS— THE ART OF (ETHICAL) SURVIVAL

***THEMES*:**

- Bridging—and exploring—the gap between ethics (as an academic discipline, including the theories of moral philosophy) and ethics (as needs to be taught to or practiced by practitioners, to confront their practical lived challenges).

- Exploring the distinct and overlapping ethical issues in the four work-related domains of commercial, professional, corporate and governmental.

- Educating practitioners for ethical life: What works? What doesn't?

***VENUE*:**

University of Technology, Sydney

***DATE*:**

4-5 July 2019

***COST*:**

A$120.00 registration plus A$50.00 AAPAE dinner on 4 July (optional)

***LOGISTICS*:**

The Symposium will run for one-and-a-half days, and will include discussion and ideas about how to inform the AAPAE's work and engagement with the Symposium themes. The Annual General Meeting (AGM) will be held just after lunch on Day 1,.

Attendees will use a single space within the venue, with panel discussions, workshops, roundtables and abridged papers throughout the event.

All AAPAE members are cordially invited

***FORMAT*:**

The aim is not necessarily communicating new, original research through paper presentations, but rather discussing and sharing experiences in education and engagement with practitioners and future practitioners.

***PUBLICATION NOTE*:**

While there is no expectation that papers presented at the Symposium will be invited for publication in a 'conference proceedings' issue of Research in *Ethical Issues in Organizations* (REIO), as the format is not a traditional conference presenting original work-in-progress, some papers may be developed from the Symposium, and these may be appropriate for publication in REIO. The AAPAE Executive is liaising with the editors as to likely outputs from the Symposium, and the priorities of REIO.

ETHICS FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

Glenn Martin

What would you do if you were asked to provide a one-off session on ethics for a group of engineering students? What could you usefully cover, and how would you go about it? Recently I delivered a 90-minute session on professional ethics to a group of students who were on-campus for the face-to-face part of an online course, an Associate Degree in Engineering.

The course is a pathways course at The College, Western Sydney University, for students (generally mature-aged and employed) wanting to pursue a Bachelor of Engineering. The course is online, but a three-day session is held on-campus each term. Professional ethics is a topic within the unit '*Professional Practice for Engineer Associates*'.

The ethics material I was to cover was crowded in among content on all aspects of engineers' professional practice, including work health and safety, communication, sustainability, managing projects, and planning your career. The ethics content set a context for the discussion of ethics in business and in engineering, briefly addressed ethical theories in moral philosophy, and presented the *Code of Ethics* of Engineers Australia.

My session assumed familiarity with the website content. I did not attempt to reiterate what was there. Instead, I started by talking about broad orientations towards ethics in life and making a distinction between two ethics conversa-

tions – personal and social:

Personal: this conversation was about the ethical standards (values) you apply to yourself in life, and

Social: this conversation covered the standards we agree to as a group (organisation, society, etc.) that apply to all of us, and how we ensure that those standards are upheld (laws, policies and norms, and policing, penalties, social pressure, etc.).

This differentiation helped students to distinguish between their personal standards (which could be 'higher' or 'lower' than others in particular spheres) and what we have a 'right' to expect of others. And, of course, I drew attention to the importance of being aware of how we use various words to shape the direction of conversations.

We then talked about what we mean by ethics. Definitions of ethics determine what we focus on. I noted, for example, that some definitions focus attention on rules and compliance, others focus on reasoning, and some put the focus on right and wrong. I offered the definition of Albert Schweitzer:

"*In a general sense, ethics is the name we give to our concern for good behaviour. We feel an obligation to consider not only our own personal well-being, but also that of other people, human society as a whole*, [and the environment]."

(This definition is quoted in Hill, 1976, p.4, but dates back to 1952 in his acceptance of the *Nobel Peace Prize*. I added "the environment" because it needs to be there, and I think Schweitzer would not object if he were alive today. I told this to the students.)

We worked through the elements of this definition:

- It recognises that ethics is a concern that humans have (we feel an obligation);

- Ethics is about 'good', not success or image-enhancement or profitability, but the values exhibited by the act or the qualities of the person/organisation; and

- Ethics is essentially about the well-being of all, not my own personal well-being (or my company's), although it is recognised that my well-being is a valid consideration. Accordingly, 'ethical egoism' is a contradiction in terms.)

Next, I acknowledged the psychology and sociology of ethics. It is particularly important for younger people and people not in positions of power to recognise that people <u>and</u> organisations have varying levels of commitment to ethical conduct. I presented a five-point spectrum (see Hall, 1986; Barrett, 2010; and Martin, 1998, 2007 and 2011). The points along the spectrum were given as:

- I try to get away with whatever I can (and tell lies about it if I

ETHICS FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS (CONT.)

(Continued from page 4)

have to);

- I will comply with the law (minimally);

- I will follow social conventions and expectations;

- I will work at developing individual ethics and building ethical relationships; and

- I am committed to high ethical values and I seek to contribute to the good of all.

While working along this spectrum from lawlessness (which may be accompanied by distracting rhetoric from the public relations department, e.g. Enron), to lawfulness without much ethical effort, through to the development of positive individual values and commitment, it became apparent from the reactions of students that this framework holds intuitive meaning for them.

With this context, we turned to how we make decisions in the light of ethics, keeping in mind that for engineers this occurs in a social context and under business constraints. For the purposes of this time-limited, single session, I asked the students to reflect on our earlier discussion and to think about their own work contexts to answer:

1. What should we do?

2. How much should we do?

3. Who/What should we take into consideration?

4. What is possible?

5. Will I be able to live with myself?

With this as preparation, we tackled the *Ford Pinto* case from the 1970s, but with a difference. Instead of just discussing it, the students took on various roles. It is an old but well-argued business ethics case that the students

Get around the law | Comply with the law | Follow conventions | Build ethical relationships | Commit to high values

ETHICS

could follow up themselves afterwards (see Leggett, 1999; Paine, 2003; and various YouTube clips).

The scene: A young engineer is faced with the ethical issue of a car his company produces bursting into flames in situations that ought to be low-risk, and burning the occupants to death.

Only one of the thirteen students in the session had heard of the case. Interestingly, a few students looked it up online as I was presenting the facts, and chimed in with their own input. It was a positive addition rather than a distraction, and enhanced engagement.

I gave the company's business case for introducing the Pinto – its entry into the small car market to compete with the Japanese. I presented the problems with the car, and outlined the company's initial efforts to perceive it as an **accounting problem** (payouts for x

lives would be less than $x to recall the cars and fix the design).

At this point I put up a list of roles, firstly, roles within the company – Executives, Accountants, Marketing, Public Relations, Engineers. This was followed by external roles – Victims and Families, Pinto Owners, Potential Customers, Regulators, Media, Society/General Public and assigned each student to a role.

Students had five minutes to discuss the case from the perspective of their role, talking to other students in their immediate vicinity, in preparation for a stakeholder meeting where each role would present their point of view and respond to others. The five-minute discussion time was animated and comments were related to the issues.

The meeting started with the Executives justifying their actions. They gave a convincingly upbeat account of the car's success. They called upon the Accountants to provide data to support their perspective. I then called on the Public Relations person to say what they were going to tell the Public. The representative of the Victims and their Families did not need to be asked to respond, they came in with outrage, and then other roles came in with their views.

At some points I had to coax the conversation along. The Engineers were quiet, and I asked them to

ETHICS AND IDENTITY POLITICS:
Putting the Genie back in the Bottle

Chris Provis

Identity politics has been referred to more and more often in recent years, with application to Brexit, Trump's election, climate change denial, #MeToo, and various other public issues. But what it is, and how it works, both deserve more attention.

In mid-2018, an article by Sheri Berman in *The Guardian* was illustrated with a memorable picture. It showed the rear view of a person's head, short-haired, with a visible toggle switch in the centre. The article was about identity politics. The point of the picture is that humans are susceptible to massive 'switching' effects in some situations. In particular, if something makes their group memberships salient, then they may quite suddenly switch the way they see things. A study of a Northern Ireland community brought this out quite forcefully a few years ago. The author commented on "*The readiness with which people switched from a view of their neighbours based on a perception of reality in which each was an individual with a mixture of traits, good and bad, to a myth of good and evil, a myth of 'our fellow' and 'their fellows'*" (Harris, 1985, p. 32). The switch was turned on by something that reminded people whether they were Catholic or Protestant. But it is a very general mechanism. Religion, nation, gender, race, age—all these and many others are group identities that can be summoned up at the flick of a switch. When psychologists began studying group identification, one of the earliest things they found was how easy but effective it was to make identities salient. Relatively minor changes to context could bring about major changes in behaviour. 'Minimal group' experiments showed effects when people came to believe even that they were members of groups that were essentially fictional, favouring putative members of their own group over others. Since then, a lot of work has been done studying such effects, and while it has added more and more depth to our understanding, the general point remains: **simple cues bring group membership to the forefront of our minds, and thereby affect behaviour markedly.**
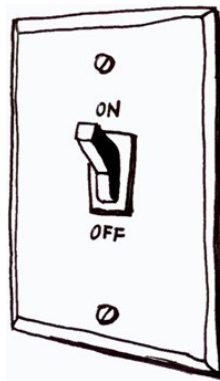
Identity politics trades on this effect. By reminding people of their group membership, it gets loyalty, support and action. The idea is an old one. It is no novelty to remind people of their loyalties to a people, state or group. However, focus on the process and the term 'identity politics' itself only emerged in the late twentieth century. It especially applied to the USA movement for recognition and empowerment of African-Americans, but also gave conceptual form to efforts of women and gays. In political science, it allowed understanding of processes that involved identity groups rather than interest groups, where individuals united and took collective action of some form on the basis of their shared experience of oppression rather than their identifiable shared interests. As understanding developed of the process involved, it became clearer how to harness and direct the forces of group identity to combat oppression and discrimination.

Unfortunately, however, it also became clear that these forces could be used to harness and direct the forces of many other group identities. The genie was out of the bottle. Hobsbawm (1996) said very early in the history of the idea of identity politics that particularly where parties compete for votes, "*constituting oneself into such an identity group may provide concrete political advantages*", and that is what has happened. It is easy to persuade groups of people that they are oppressed and disadvantaged. Tempting political gains are on offer. "*Whites and blacks, Latinos and Asians, men and women, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, straight people and gay people, liberals and conservatives—all feel their groups are being attacked, bullied, persecuted, discriminated against*", notes Chua (2018).

The difficulty, of course, is that

ETHICS AND IDENTITY POLITICS: PUTTING THE GENIE BACK IN THE BOTTLE (CONT.)

(Continued from page 6)

some groups are more truly oppressed and disadvantaged than others. But which are they? There are cases of genocide and dispossession of whole peoples from their homes and lands. Even some of those cases are disputed. How much harder are other cases? The same mechanism that summons up loyalty and support for group action makes it harder for us to stand back and look objectively at the merits of claims made by our own groups and others. Objective criteria? But we can dispute what the criteria should be. And should they apply to all members of the group? What if some whites are disadvantaged and oppressed, in some places? That could but ought not call up the group identity of others elsewhere. The internet and modern social media have made it easy for people to express support for other members of a putative identity group, whatever real similarities or differences amongst individuals, and equally easy to express shock, indignation and anger at alleged wrongs to fellow group members.

And so we come to issues that have been discussed and debated by ethical theorists for many years. Issues of justice, respect and recognition, have been given new life by identity politics, and tied to that new question: How do we set aside our own group memberships to get a balanced point of view? Some groups are obvious: race, religion, gender, for ex-ample. Others, perhaps are less so. Progressives may think, "*I'm one of the people who understand that climate change is the biggest threat to the whole world*", while conservatives may think "*It is people like me who understand the threat that immigration poses to settled culture and values*". In either case, it is a challenge to set aside group loyalty to get a clear view.

One slightly-used lamp for sale. To good home only!

The answer given in one form or another by thinkers from Mill to Habermas is the need for us to engage actively with different points of view. Easier said than done, of course. Nowadays, 'diversity' is fashionable, but often it connotes differences of background and appearance rather than different ideas. Our own group identity can certainly be threatened by others' background and appearance, but different ideas can be more threatening still. It is hard work to take them seriously, respond to them respectfully while maintaining our own commitments, genuinely considering possible change in our own views.

It needs a lot more than the click of a Facebook icon, and it goes way beyond surface acknowledgment of difference. It is both effortful and time-consuming. On the other hand, it can be very rewarding. It opens the way for us to see more deeply into our own lives and others', and to develop richer, more stable relationships.

However, this is just what identity politics discourages. Its very point is to summon support through unreflective mental processes that have immediate effects on emotion, motivation and behaviour. That is why it can be so effective. But it is also why it is so dangerous. It can be harnessed for good ends, but it can also be harnessed for bad ends. There is no straightforward way to restrict it to good ends alone. At the same time, its own nature is bad: it promotes instinctive, unreflective responses at the expense of the dialogue and considered judgment that make people most fully human. The good ends that identity politics can be used for must not be forgotten: oppression and discrimination are everywhere to be opposed. However, some forms of opposition can destroy the good as well as the bad.

For a list of **references**, please contact the author direct.

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TERROR, MASS-MURDER AND WIDER RESPONSIBILITY

Hugh Breakey

In March, fifty people were killed by an Australian man in shootings at two separate mosques in Christchurch. The murderer appears to have been a white supremacist, motivated by his fascist beliefs and closely involved in a like-minded online community. The murderer live-streamed his attacks, recording and releasing his shooting of innocent men, women and children at prayer.

Widespread and strong repudiation of the massacre followed, especially from political leaders in New Zealand and Australia—though one Australian Senator provided an unwelcome exception to the unanimous chorus of unqualified disapproval for the murderer and sympathy for the victims.

At the time of writing, it appears that the recent co-ordinated Easter massacres in Sri Lanka, with more than 300 dead and 500 wounded, may have been in part a perceived retaliation for the Christchurch massacre. This next, and escalating, wave of violence leaves ordinary citizens of all stripes horrified at the prospect of being trapped in tit-for-tat terrorism where violent extremists each target the other 'side's' most vulnerable and innocent.

(I might raise a brief query whether the recent Christchurch and Sri Lankan attacks count as 'terrorism'. Ordinarily, terrorism refers to the use of deadly arbitrary violence to create fear in a population to force that population (or its rulers) to alter their behaviour—such as to remove troops from a war, to remove colonial rule, etc. That is, the purpose of terrorism is *terror.* But in these cases, it seems that the purpose was to contribute to, and to encourage others to contribute to, the outright *elimination* of a population. If that's right, the aim is not terrorism, but something even worse: *genocide*.)

When such events happen, as an ethicist it can be difficult to know how to respond. Such wanton murder is so far beyond the pale that there seems little that can be done except to call it for what it is: evil.

Still, even while placing full moral responsibility for the crimes on the individuals who committed them, and on any individuals that were complicit in planning, implementing and executing the crimes, the atrocities can invite us to reflect on wider questions. What effect, if any, do larger groups' values and beliefs provide support for the murderous actions of individuals who are part of those groups? If there is an effect, what moral responsibility lies with such groups, and gives them reason to reconsider their positions or public pronouncements? Alternatively—and perhaps pressing in a contrary direction to the last question—how constructive and helpful is it to attribute responsibility to those larger groups?

Of course, in some cases the effect of larger groups (of any sort) is almost zero. Many mass shootings, for example, have no ties to any wider agenda, and membership in any larger community is incidental to (if not antithetical to) the ensuing crimes. Yet this is not so for much Islamist and extreme right-wing terrorism. In international terms, over recent decades, both have proven a fertile ground for the generation of values and beliefs capable of countenancing, if not driving, mass-murder—and of communities that endorse and support such atrocities.

How wide one draws the scope of attributions of causal and moral responsibility can be a challenging question. One could imagine, for extreme-right xenophobic atrocities, a spectrum ranging from: right-wing politics; conservative politics; those wary of immigration; those wary of immigration for cultural reasons; those distrustful of all foreign religions and peoples; white supremacists; and, finally, racists supportive of the actual use of political violence and terrorism. And this is all before we get to those who are actual members of terrorist groups, those complicit in the murders, and the murderers themselves.

So too for Islamist terror: One could imagine a spectrum running from: religiosity in general; Islam; par-

TERROR, MASS-MURDER AND WIDER RESPONSIBILITY (CONT.)

(Continued from page 8)

ticular sects of Islam; Islamist political ideology; and, finally, those supportive of the actual use of political violence and terrorism.

In both cases, at some point in the chain a level of causal and (then) moral responsibility presumably raises, and it is both an empirical and normative question when this occurs. With respect to the normative question, it bears emphasis, I think, it is *the same question* in each case. That is, it is hypocritical for extreme-right proponents to hold that Islam is a worrying religion, while their own xenophobic beliefs and values seem at least as capable of giving rise to murderous violence. Equally though, it is hypocritical to imply that mainstream conservative sceptics about immigration have anything to do with the attacks, if one would at the same time object to casting moral responsibility for terrorist attacks widely across religious devotees.

Indeed, I think there may be a relevant analogy across both groups (mainstream Muslims and main-stream conservatives). Both groups demonstrate there is no problem holding certain religious or political beliefs, and still being peaceable, inclusive, law-abiding citizens of liberal democracies. This is exactly the position that the terrorist means to attack; he (or she) wants to say that if you hold those sorts of beliefs, you are necessarily engaged in a violent civilisation-wide battle for survival. If that's right, then vigorous inclusion and acceptance of these groups may be the best weapon we have against the spread of their noxious agendas.

Endnotes

1. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-23/sri-lankan-bombing-retaliation-christchurch-minister-says/11040122
2. https://theconversation.com/why-the-media-needs-to-be-more-responsible-for-how-it-links-islam-and-islamist-terrorism-103170

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ETHICS FOR ENGINEERING STUDENTS (CONT.)

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say what their solution was, and how they felt about being side-lined by the Executives and Accountants. The Regulator stated what their struggles were, pushed on one side by large automobile companies (not just Ford) and on the other by the Public and by Government.

Everyone had a say and were encouraged to respond to other comments. When someone spoke, they stood and announced their role. For a while, I showed the slide with the basic facts of the case, then I switched to the slide that showed the criteria for decision-making.

The discussion was lively and could have continued for much longer, as the students were beginning to see the case from different perspectives, and wrestle with what it takes to arrive at a resolution in a social context like this. I led a short debrief and closed by referring back to Albert Schweitzer's definition of ethics.

I received an email from the teacher the following day to say that the students were still buzzing in the afternoon from the session. They could see their own personal stake in ethical issues in the workplace. Among the materials I sent them as a follow-up, was the paper that Dennis Gioia (1992) wrote about his experience at Ford. He was the young engineer.

For a full list of **references** and a more detailed explanation of the **teaching plan**, please contact the author direct.

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ARE WE REALLY [RE]PAYING THIS PERSONAL DEBT?

Theodora Issa

Preamble – Early May 2019, HRH Prince Harry chatted to the press following the birth of his son 'Archie'. Watching this brief encounter, we witnessed the genuine happiness that generates in the heart of a parent on the arrival of a child. The commentators were quick to indicate that the way Prince Harry faced the press (although a seasoned spokesperson and highly educated in the rules of addressing the media, his joy was clearly evident) reminded them of the day they welcomed their children into this world. They added, "this is a natural reaction". Others stated that the birth of any child is such a miraculous event that one would stand in awe and be speechless, let alone the first child, which is beyond words or description.

The Argument – the parent/child relationship

The parent/child relationship is beyond any material explanation and parents adjust their ways to accommodate *their* new child. Wholeheartedly welcoming this person into their lives, parents exert every effort to bring happiness and care to this newcomer. In addition, one parent (often the mother, but increasingly the father) might forsake their career to take on the role of primary caregiver to raise the child. We might say this is natural instinct, while some go further to explain this remarkable dedication through the chemical and biological changes in the body and mind that alter the way parents behave, especially in the presence of or when interacting with their infant child. This might be scientifically true; however, the love and care of children goes beyond that first moment of laying eyes on the infant, into their teens and, in some cultures, well into adulthood. Indeed, parents throughout these stages often continue to sacrifice to provide for their children.

While parents are thrilled to welcome children to this world, parents have been sacrificing their way of life, their incomes, their careers, to take care of their children. In some cultures, it is not only the school and university expenses, but parents also set their children up for their adult lives. In light of this continuity of care, we should reflect on the following questions:

♦ **How might children repay this accumulated debt (if indeed it is a debt)?**
♦ **How much respect should children show their parents?**
♦ **How much care should children show their parents as they age?**

We can examine these questions through many different perspectives and disciplines. For example:

From a **social perspective**, it is simply 'reciprocity' - responding to a positive action with another positive action. For instance, a debt that individuals, in lucky countries like Australia, might accrue completing their tertiary studies. Graduates keep this 'debt' in mind, and endeavour to re-pay the government. This is great, as the government took care of these graduates at the time when they were unable to take care of themselves. As an infant unable to speak and care for itself, their parents take charge and raise the child to reach its highest potential. It is the parents' hard work, sacrifices and dedication that assists these children to secure rewarding and fulfilling careers in adulthood. It is then unfortunate as parents age that these same positions and careers, keep some children away from their parents—and so cannot physically help when their parents become unable to care for themselves. More distressing is that some children seem to forget that when they were young, their parents cared for them. It is natural that this 'indebtedness' be paid back; and reciprocity assumes that the children will take care of their ageing parents. Is this a moral responsibility?

Through the lens of **Virtue ethics**, virtues (such as justice, charity and generosity – part of the fabric of our *character*) are dispositions to act in ways that benefit both the person possessing that virtue and that person's society. What would the virtuous *character* of the child prescribe for the relationship with their parents? The *character* would recognise

ARE WE REALLY PAYING THIS PERSONAL DEBT? (CONT.)

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that the relationship must be based on 'respect' and 'honour'.

Kantian ethics makes the concept of duty central to morality. Accordingly, what is the obligation of the child towards their parents? This might simply be a social contract between the two parties, and parents have a right to expect 'respect' and 'honour' from their children, and it is the duty of the child to care for their parents, irrespective of how the parents cared for the child, as duty necessitates respecting moral law.

From a **religious perspective**, respect for parents is paramount. Indeed, almost all religions and societies give parents honourable status. This respectfulness is not only limited to the Holy Bible in its two Testaments, the old and the new; but, if we look at other philosophies and other ideologies, we can also see the same or similar statements, highlighting the need to 'RESPECT' and 'HONOUR' parents. However, what we are witnessing in Australia, suggests a lack of 'respect' and 'honour' towards our parents and the ageing population in general. This is an unfortunate realisation, and might identify a society as being cruel and unappreciative!

Australian reality? In a perfect society, children are cared for by parents and parents cared for by their children when the need comes. However, reality is unfortunately not perfect, as seen in the recent media images portraying a darker side to Australian Society—neglect of the elderly, not only by their children but also by third-party carers and society. In some cases, a child might not have the capability to personally care for their elderly parent, but still exerts every effort to provide care through licenced institutions. However, these trusted third-party carers and institutions have failed the children but more so the elderly. **Is this really Australian society today?** The horror stories coming to light are very sad and distressing—initial revelations prompted more than 5,000 submissions to the Department of Health from aged care consumers, families, carers, aged care workers, health professionals and provid-

ers even before the federal government announced the terms and conditions of the *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety* in late 2018. Unfortunately, there is no magic wand and restitution (as a minimum, correcting the wrong so that it never happens again) takes time, resources and our collective willingness to do better by everyone. The Royal Commission's interim report is due in October this year, with the final report not expected until 30 April 2020. **May positive change come swiftly to resolve this awful situation.**

With due 'respect' and 'honour' for our elders, there would have been no need for a Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, but humans are humans, and there has been a fault line in the morality of many individuals and parts of society that has led to the disrespect and dishonour of the elderly, who should be the source of wisdom for everyone.

Regardless of the ethical perspective argued, religious beliefs or a society's cultural norms, the willingness of adult children to provide continuing social, moral and financial support to their elderly parents, although partially rooted in earlier family experiences, should be guided by an implicit social contract that ensures long-term reciprocity. On the issue of paying the debt back, to be a truly honourable society (respectful of the past, present and future, as well as honouring the legacies that we enjoy –parental, military, the generosity and kindness of others who are often anonymous, and so forth), we also need to continually pay it forward regardless of the quantum we originally received.

References
For a list of **references** and **further reading**, please contact the author direct.

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The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety: https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/

AAPAE

AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR PROFESSIONAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

2019 AAPAE Symposium

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The broad purpose of the AAPAE is to encourage awareness of, and foster discussion of issues in, professional and applied ethics. It provides a meeting point for practitioners from various fields and academics with specialist expertise and welcomes everyone who wants or needs to think and talk about applied or professional ethics.

The AAPAE fosters and publishes research in professional and applied ethics, as well as attempting to create connections with special interest groups.

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