

# AUSTRALIAN ETHICS

DECEMBER 2013

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

### ETHICAL REFLECTIONS ON MEANNESS

Hugh Breakey

#### ETHICS: APPLIED AND PROFESSIONAL

- ◆ Business
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Meanness is a common occurrence. It forms part of the social backdrop in which we all live, play and work. Most of us, I think, can think of examples of mean behaviour we have witnessed, and many of us would know someone we think of as 'having a mean streak'.

Yet meanness is not a topic that garners much ethical attention. Out of curiosity, I recently searched a few academic databases for works on meanness. Even in the context of psychology there was surprisingly little—most of it about school-age children. In terms of philosophical or ethical analysis, there was almost nothing. This seems to me startling—surely meanness, as much as selfishness, is one of the key drivers of human misery in the modern world. Perhaps it is more visible when performed to and by schoolchildren, but it is hardly an exclusive concern of that age-group.

I wonder if this lack of discussion implies that we struggle to face up to the idea that some people might want to be cruel to other people, just for its own sake. Hobbes, for example, is not a philosopher known for his rosy view of human nature. Yet in an otherwise lengthy explanation of emotions and their meanings in *Leviathan*, he does not mention meanness at all. The closest he gets is the emotions of

'contempt' and 'cruelty'. Even here, his treatment is revealing. Hobbes holds that these emotions arise from being insensitive to others' calamities—an insensitivity he thinks proceeds from one's own security. For Hobbes does not conceive it possible 'that any man should take pleasure in other men's great harms' purely for its own sake. As I read him, Hobbes first tries to present cruelty as an instance of insensitivity (which it is not), and then tries to confect 'ends' being served by the cruelty, so as to deny the possibility—the very *conceivability*—of someone inflicting harm for the sheer pleasure of it.

#### Defining meanness

I think Hobbes is wrong. Meanness is not selfishness or callousness. The callous person is *amoral*: she is someone who is willing to do whatever it takes to secure her desired ends: power, money, influence and so on. But the harm the callous person inflicts is not performed for its own sake, as an end in itself. It is done only instrumentally, as a means to some other, distinct value. The mean person, however, performs the harm for its own sake, and not for any further good. He *wants* to inflict harm, to drag another person down, to wreck her self-belief and undermine her self-esteem. Meanness, then, is low-grade

REFLECTIONS ON MEANNESS (CONT'D)

cruelty; cruelty for people without a work ethic.

Meanness, so defined, is everywhere, including in the domain patrolled by professional and applied ethics. I submit that it motivates harassment and bullying in the workplace, vitriol in the twittersphere and attacks on facebook, personal abuse in relationships, point-scoring in boardroom discussions, and verbal assaults on random strangers in public places. To be sure, all these actions can happen for motivations distinct from meanness. But very often, I think, they are a result of a naked will to harm for its own sake.

**Meanness as will to power**

Why are people mean? This seems to me a much more perplexing question than the more general one of, 'why are people selfish?' People are selfish because they don't accept any moral constraints on getting what they want. Selfish people simply see what they want and they go for it. But meanness is to enjoy inflicting harm for its own sake—not merely as an instrument to some further, ulterior motive. As such, meanness is not only different to selfishness, but can often *conflict with* the narrow pursuit of one's other desires. Mean people often undermine their own self-interest when they are mean. Instead of facilitating relation-

ships that might prove massively beneficial for their future, mean people go around unnecessarily making enemies. Soundlessly, invisibly, mean people are cut off from future job opportunities, helpful associations, fun events,

***“If it isn't performed on the basis of selfishness or self-interestedness, why are so many of us mean, at least on the odd occasion?”***

positions of authority, friendships and relationships, and all because they couldn't resist the temptation to knock someone down a peg.

But this very fact makes meanness perplexing. If it isn't performed on the basis of self-interested prudence, why are so many of us mean, at least on the odd occasion?

Here's one speculation: perhaps meanness is an expression of what Nietzsche called the will to power—the wish to feel and know that one is powerful. Meanness gives the mean person the thrill of mattering in the world, of being an object of others' attentions, of having an impact on what others are doing and feeling. It is an action one can perform where one can see

the immediate effect one has on the world. A mean action makes a difference, it is a way the world is changed by one's actions, it is an achievement (albeit one easy to accomplish). If that is right, meanness is a strategy against insignificance; it is a prop for an ego that needs to see its will impact upon the world.

**The significance of meanness: Racism and sexism**

Suppose we take meanness seriously as a real and abiding fact of human psychology. Could that inform the way we think about some issues in professional and applied ethics?

It might. For the existence of meanness might imply that the problems we think we have with other areas—such as racism and sexism—may in large part be a problem we have with meanness.

Sometimes social commentators seem to speak as if racists are otherwise decent, reasonable folk who—if only they could only be disabused of their irrational notions about racial difference—would thereafter be good and worthy citizens. On this view, the problem is fundamentally one about their views and values on race in particular, and not a more general one about their moral psychology.

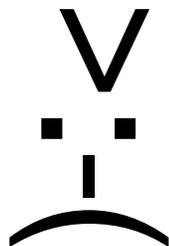
I accept that there are some people who are like this. It's not hard to imagine an otherwise good-hearted person who grew up in a

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT (CONT'D)**

culture where children are taught that racial differences are morally relevant, or who lives in a world where all the people with a particular skin colour are poor and uneducated, and who mistakenly concludes that racial difference correlates with differences of character or rationality. But in my own world at least, I don't think I've ever actually met anyone like that. Pretty much every person I've ever met who espoused what seemed to me genuinely racist or sexist views was not otherwise a nice person. Their character flaws were by no means limited to their particular views on discrete classes of people. They were mean in a much more unqualified sense.

This point needs to be distinguished from a person being *insensitive* to racial or sexual issues. Certainly someone can be a decent person who, through lack of awareness about current society or prior history, or entrenched institutional structures that perpetuate inequalities, behaves without an appropriate degree of sensitivity to minorities. Education can fix a decent person

who is culturally insensitive—they just need to learn that their behav-



our hurts others and to understand why it does so. But such a course of consciousness-raising cannot cure meanness. The mean person *wants to* hurt others. Showing him the effects of his actions just demonstrates that he is succeeding.

***“Their character flaws were by no means limited to their particular views on discrete classes of people.”***

This isn't to say that programmes preventing racism and other sorts of discrimination are not worthwhile. Preventing racial insensitivity and thoughtless sexism are noble goals, and rules prohibiting certain acts can work irrespective of the motives different people have for performing those acts.

But it is to say that in some cases it is necessary to be realistic about the pervasive nature of moral vices. There are three reasons for this. First, if we misread the motivations at work, then we might attempt to treat the moral vice with an ineffectual intervention. Second, we might merely shift the outlet of the mean person's vice to a different but equally vulnerable target. Finally, we might need to pre-

pare for people to actively attempt to undermine our efforts to implement such measures. If racist or discriminatory behaviour is not a means to an end, but for the mean person an end in itself, then prohibiting such acts do not merely prevent a person taking particular means to pursue ends they can achieve in other ways. Instead, such rules prohibit the person's desired end itself. And that suggests such prohibitions will be resolutely resisted.

To be sure, it's possible I have the causal story quite backwards. Maybe the presence of sexism and racism enable and encourage the broader character trait of meanness, rather than being manifestations of it. But either way, if our goal is to improve the morality of workplaces, homes and social engagements, it helps to be clear-eyed about the nature of the problem confronting us.

**Hugh Breakey**

Institute for Ethics, Governance and Law (a United Nations University Associate Institution)

Griffith University



## Welcome to the 21<sup>st</sup> ANNUAL AAPAE CONFERENCE Sydney, June 2014

Mark your Diaries!

Sunday 22nd June – Tuesday 24th June, 2014  
University of Notre Dame, Broadway Campus, Sydney.



The 21st annual AAPAE conference will be held in Sydney from June 22nd to 24th.

Hot on the heels of hosting the AAPAE's 20th conference in Fremantle earlier this year, the University of Notre Dame Australia will once again host the AAPAE Annual Conference—this time at UNDA's Sydney Campus.

The university has a strong commitment to the teaching of ethics across the curriculum, and it houses the Centre for Faith, Ethics & Society.

The Conference theme is: *Conscience, Leadership, and the Problem of "Dirty Hands"*

The Call for Paper is already out. We have some excellent keynote speakers confirmed and more to come.

See you in Sydney next June!

The 2014 Conference Committee.

### Conference Committee

Feel free to email with any queries about the conference.

Assoc Prof Sandra Lynch, University of Notre Dame,  
[sandra.lynch@nd.edu.au](mailto:sandra.lynch@nd.edu.au)

Dr Joseph Naimo, University of Notre Dame, [Joe.Naimo@nd.edu.au](mailto:Joe.Naimo@nd.edu.au)

Dr Alan Tapper, John Curtin Institute of Public Policy,  
[alandtapper@gmail.com](mailto:alandtapper@gmail.com)

Dr Peter Bowden, University of Sydney  
[peter\\_bowden@usyd.edu.au](mailto:peter_bowden@usyd.edu.au)

For paper submissions:

Matt Beard, University of Notre Dame,  
[matthew.beard@nd.edu.au](mailto:matthew.beard@nd.edu.au)

### The Centre for Faith, Ethics & Society

CFE&S is a research centre based at The University of Notre Dame Australia focusing on social, political and applied ethics from philosophical and theological perspectives. CFE&S aims to engender dialogue within both the academy and public sphere with a view toward creating a more ethically intelligent and imaginative society.

For more information, please visit CFE&S online at: <http://www.nd.edu.au/research/cfes/cfes.shtml> or find them on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/nd.cfes](http://www.facebook.com/nd.cfes)



**CALL FOR PAPERS!****Conference Theme: *Conscience, Leadership, and the Problem of "Dirty Hands"***

The development of professional duties and responsibilities is no panacea for Applied Ethics. At times, professional responsibilities appear to clash with deeper moral beliefs regarding what one ought to do, or how one ought to live. At other times, situational necessities seem to require or justify some individuals violating or ignoring their moral duties. The question remains: Are we sometimes obliged to get our hands dirty? In this 21st meeting of the AAPAE, we call for papers discussing how the demands of conscience and the problem of dirty hands bear on ethical leadership in the professions. Although we welcome submissions from any area of professional or applied ethics, suggested areas of discussion include:

- Military Ethics & Supreme Emergency
- Policing Ethics & Honour Role Corruption
- Sports Ethics & Governance
- Medical Ethics & Conscientious Objection

**Abstracts are due by 1st April, 2014.**

There will be opportunities to publish conference submissions following the completion of the conference—including through *Research in Ethical Issues in Organizations*, the official journal of the AAPAE.

To offer a paper, please submit an abstract of 300-400 words to: Matt Beard, Research Associate, Centre for Faith, Ethics & Society, University of Notre Dame, Ph: (02) 82044189,

Email: [matthew.beard@nd.edu.au](mailto:matthew.beard@nd.edu.au)

**Confirmed Keynote Speakers****Professor Raimond Gaita,**

Professorial Fellow in the Melbourne Law School and The Faculty of Arts at the University of Melbourne and Emeritus Professor of Moral Philosophy at King's College London. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

Gaita's books include the award winning *Good and Evil: An Absolute Conception*; *Romulus, My Father*; *A Common Humanity*; and *The Philosopher's Dog*. Because he believes that it is generally a good thing for philosophers to address an educated and hard-thinking lay audience as well as their colleagues, Gaita has contributed extensively to public discussion about reconciliation, collective responsibility, the role of moral considerations in politics, the Holocaust, genocide, crimes against humanity, education (the nature of teaching as a vocation, the role of love in learning) and the plight of the universities.

**Dr Pippa Grange**

Pippa Grange is a Doctor of Psychology working primarily within elite sport in the areas of culture and ethical leadership. In particular she provides strategic leadership and governance on culture change projects, including stakeholder engagement, policy development, creating high performing and functional environments and an emphasis on lifetime wellbeing. She also provides consultancy in ethics and leadership for sport and other high performance environments, which can include mediation, advocacy, coaching, and decision-making counsel. Grange is the founding director of *Bluestone Edge: Building Sound Cultures*: <http://bluestoneedge.com/>

## A COMPREHENSIVE THEORY OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Gordon Young

The concept of accountability is a core aspect of applied ethics, addressing conflicts between individuals, groups and institutions, to both determine responsibility and ensure just restitution. Yet despite this, no objective theory of accountability currently exists in the field of philosophy or ethics, resulting in widely differing views on when accountability exists, what it involves and how it should be enforced.

This gap was identified during my research into [The Ethics of Accountability within Government](#), resulting in the development of a comprehensive and measurable theory of accountability designed to establish precisely when one party becomes accountable to another, the precise nature of this relationship, and what the practical consequences may be.

### When does accountability occur? Relationships of Accountability.

Accountability has a number of definitions, but is essentially about explaining one's decisions and behaviours, either voluntarily or by requirement, with a view of justifying them – demonstrating that they were right or acceptable. As such, in order for Party A to be held accountable, they must be held accountable *by* someone for a reason.

*If Party A is a builder, contracted by Party B to build their house, and he fails to include a bathroom, then he is clearly accountable to Party B.*

This example shows that in order for a relationship of accountability to

exist, Party A must impact upon the interests of Party B – in this case by delivering an incomplete house that must be re-built.

This applies even when Party A impacts upon their *own* interests. If the builder above was building a house for *himself* then it is both

reasonable and realistic for him to explain and justify his decisions to himself – indeed this process could be said to underlie all decisions made by individuals, if usually on a subconscious level.

From this we can determine that it is *the impact upon a party's interests* by the decisions and actions of another that establishes a relationship of accountability between them.

- It is reasonable for Party B to hold Party A accountable where Party A's decisions or actions impact upon the interests of Party B.
- It would be unreasonable to hold Party A accountable to parties, upon whom their decisions and actions do not impact.

It should be noted that relationships of accountability are often formally established through the granting of agency, whereby Party A is empowered by Party B to act or make decisions on their behalf – the builder is empowered by the owners to build their house and can therefore be held accountable by them. While being granted agency makes a relationship very explicit, it alone is insufficient for a comprehensive theory of accountability as it fails to address situations where a party impacts on the interests of others indi-

rectly or without prior communication – if the builder uses the neighbours' front yard to dump rubbish then he can clearly be held accountable by those neighbours, despite no formal understanding or prior communication existing between them.

**“Accountability is essentially about explaining one's decisions and behaviours, with a view of justifying them.”**

Using ‘impacts on the interests of others’ as the basis for accountability however means that that virtually any decision or action a person does or does not take establishes a relationship of accountability with themselves and others – there are

very few, if any, actions an individual takes that do not affect others to some degree, if only to an extremely minor degree.

Therefore these relationships must be limited to reasonably serious and immediate impacts upon the interests of others; additional elements of Scope and Degree are required.

### Limits of Reasonableness: Scope and Degree

#### Scope

If a relationship of accountability is established when one party impacts upon the interests of others, then the scope of that accountability is determined by the *number of people that are directly impacted* by said decision or action:

*By constructing an incomplete house, the builder not only leaves the owners with expensive modifications to make, but also creates emotional distress – distress*

In the previous issue of *Australian Ethics*, Gordon Young provided an analysis of accountability within the Victorian Parliament (AE, 2013, Issue 1). In this issue he describes the theory of accountability he developed during that research.

## A comprehensive theory of accountability (Cont'd)

which may spread to their family and friends. While it is reasonable to hold the builder accountable for the emotional distress caused to the owners, their family and friends are not impacted upon in a sufficiently direct manner to consider the builder accountable for their distress as well.

The scope of a party's accountability must also be limited to *the exact interests of others which they impact upon* – for example, it would be unjust for the owners to hold the builder accountable for their garden dying when his actions (including his failure to build a bathroom) had no impact on the garden whatsoever.

- It is reasonable for Party A to be held accountable by the number other parties upon whom their decision or behaviours have impacted reasonably directly, for the specific interests they have affected.
- It is unreasonable for Party A to be held accountable to parties whose interest they do not impact reasonably directly, or for any specific interests they do not impact upon.

### Degree

The significance of the accountability between a Subject and a Protagonist is based on both an expectation and a corresponding reality.

*When the owners commissioned their house, they expected it to include a bathroom as per the blueprints and the price they paid. The degree to which the house created by the builder differs from this expectation will determine how upset they are about it and the amount of money required to fix the situation – painting the bathroom the wrong colour will be significantly easier to fix than failing to build it altogether.*

From this example we can see that the seriousness of the impacts upon a party's interests determines the Degree to which the offending party is accountable to them, and that this seriousness can be determined by the difference between the Subject's expectations and the reality which the Protagonist delivers.

It is important to note that expectations are often subjective however, and as such the owners in the example above may be unsatisfied even when the builder delivers exactly what they asked for. While a relationship of accountability likely still exists (the owners will probably be quite upset), the objective seriousness of this relationship will be far less than the owners believe it to be. This issue of subjectivity is compounded when the expectation between parties is unstated or implied – the owners will expect the builder not to dump rubbish in their garden without having explicitly asked them not to, but may also expect water tanks installed without having ever asked (or paid) for them.

In light of this, the degree of accountability between one party's expectations and the reality delivered by the Protagonist must be measured as objectively as possible, drawing on measurable impacts upon the party and the reasonableness of their expectations. Additionally, a threshold of Degree must be recognised in order to ensure this Theory remain practical, whereby any impact on a Subject's interest that is too minor or trivial be excluded – for example holding the builder accountable for making noise during business hours is unreasonable.

- It is reasonable for Party B to hold Party A accountable proportionate to the degree that they objectively impact upon Party B's interests, where those impacts pass a reasonable thresh-

old of seriousness.

- It is unreasonable for Party B to hold Party A accountable disproportionately to how seriously their interests were objectively impacted, or where such impacts are insufficiently serious.

### Activating accountability: Quality of accountability

The theory thus far establishes when one

party can be held accountable by others, and when this is reasonable based on the limiting factors of Scope and Degree. However, these elements only demand that the Protagonist give an explanation for their decisions and actions; it does *not* determine whether those actions were acceptable or not. To do this a separate element of *Quality* is required.

*If the builder constructs a house without a bathroom then the owner's interests are impacted directly and seriously by them – the owners may reasonably demand an explanation from the builder, who is ethically compelled to provide one. However, if the builder can provide reasonable cause for their actions – such as that no bathroom was included in the blueprints, or that instability of the site made construction dangerous – then while they can be considered accountable for impacting the owner's interests, they cannot be considered at fault for doing so.*

As this example demonstrates, the distinction between accountability

**“The scope of accountability must be limited to the exact interests of others which are impacted upon.”**

## A comprehensive theory of accountability (Cont'd)

and responsibility is a serious one. Accountability demands that a party explain their decisions or actions, but does *not* determine whether they were right or wrong to make those decisions or behaviours. The question of responsibility is another topic entirely and can be addressed in a variety of ways, however it must be judged for accountability to be of any practical value; demanding and securing an explanation from the builder is meaningless unless that explanation can be judged and acted upon.

- It is reasonable for Party B to judge Party A as unjustified where a relationship of accountability is established and appropriate tests of justification are failed.
- It is unreasonable for Party B to judge Party A as unjustified where either a relationship of ac-

countability is not established, or where appropriate tests of justification are passed successfully.

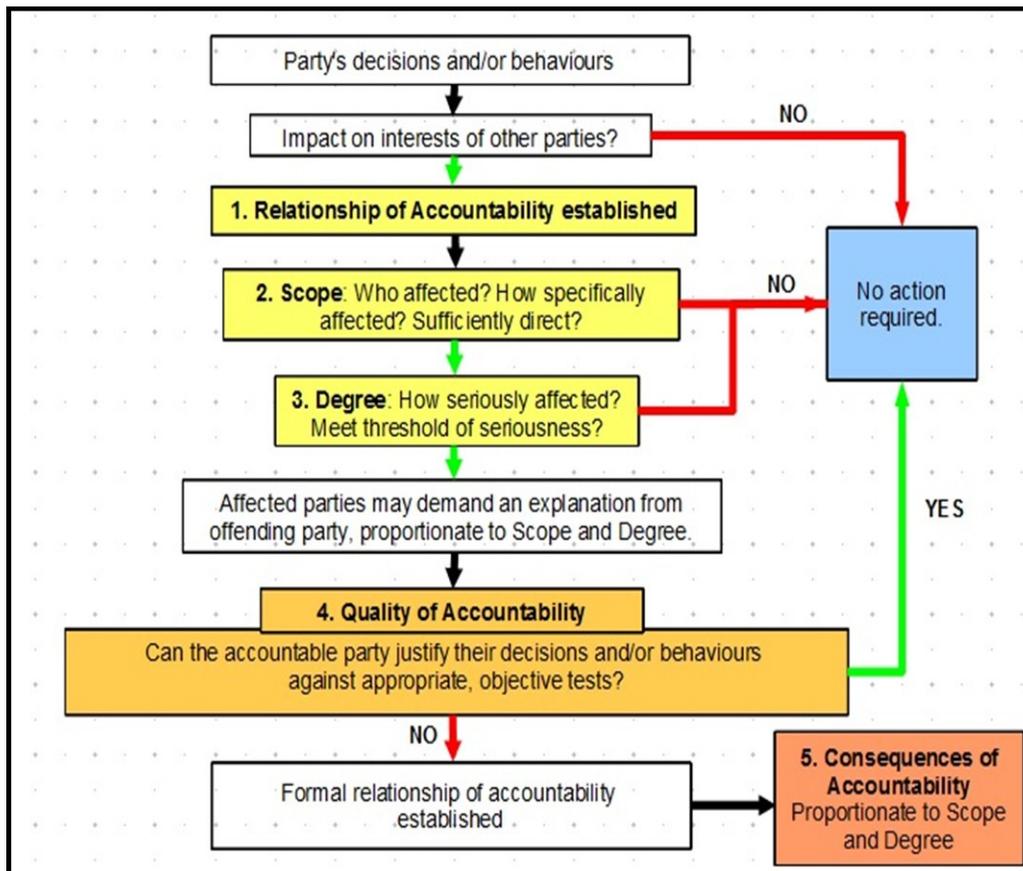
### Consequences of accountability

Where a relationship exists and the accountable party fails appropriate tests of justification, we can now declare them formally accountable. However, such a conclusion becomes completely irrelevant unless this then leads to corrective action – such consequences must be proportionate to the scope and degree of the established relationship in order to be just:

*The builder failed to include a bathroom, inflicting considerable financial and emotional burden on the owners. They are clearly included in the scope of the relationship, and the degree is both serious and the expectation underlying it is reasonable. When an explanation is de-*

*manded the builder cannot justify his actions, as he simply forgot. As such the owners can justly demand restitution for the money and time lost, as well as emotional trauma caused by the builder. Demanding the builder construct them an entire new house, vastly more valuable than the original, would not be justified however.*

This component of the theory is perhaps the most neglected in day to day life, yet without it the entire theory is irrelevant. Given the intent of this theory is to describe and regulate all instances of accountability, there cannot be any exceptions to this element. In other words, the consequences of accountability must be compulsory, regardless of the context of the situation, though the context should be considered in determining the methods by which the consequences are enacted.



The Complete Theory

Gordon Young

Comment and critical analysis of this theory is welcomed as it is in the process of review prior to submission for publication.

Contact Gordon Young at:

[gwfyoung@gmail.com](mailto:gwfyoung@gmail.com).

## ***Building the ethical muscle – St James Ethics Centre’s Executive Counsel and Ethics Counsel programs***

Across all sectors, the capacities and competencies of individuals to be more aware and to better understand the ethical dimensions of their professional lives and the values, principles and purpose that guide their own deliberations, along with their relative organisations and professions, are imperatives in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

At senior levels in organisations the need for ethical leadership from senior executives has never been greater, from the perspective both of the organisations which they lead as well as the communities in which they operate. Intense public scrutiny, pressure to manage for the short term and an uncertain economic, social and business environment require extraordinary leadership—not just management—capabilities.

However, regardless of role or organisational level the capacities of individuals to make ‘good’ (read ethical) decisions, is integral to all professional roles. St James Ethics Centre provides a range of professional development and learning services to help individuals better understand the ethical dimensions of their personal and professional lives, and importantly, provide tools, techniques and the development of capacities to make better decisions and work together more effectively. This work and our programs as a whole have a focus on enabling practical, real world ethical decisionmaking and responsible behaviour both within organisations and more

broadly in society.

Through its commercial services arm, *The Practice*, the Ethics Centre provides two programs—*Executive Counsel* and *Ethics Counsel*—that develop the competencies and capacities of individuals to make good decisions and to build their awareness of the ethical dimensions of their professional life and roles.

Through the *Executive Counsel* program, experienced and emerging leaders are able to examine and develop their capacity to consciously shape the direction of their organisations.

The program utilises an experiential learning approach and through a series of one-on-one meetings combined with individual reading and work programs, it allows executives to explore guiding frameworks of purposes, values and principles of the executive and their organisation, as well as the obstacles faced in giving them practical effect. Participants investigate challenges to ethical leadership as well as opportunities to overcome resistance to change. Customised for the objectives and needs of clients, the *Executive Counsel* program stimulates the deep reflection and exploration needed to clarify and transform understanding of self and others, and in turn to transform individual leadership capacity.

The Executive Counsel program allows executives to explore guiding frameworks of purposes, values and principles of the executive and their organisation, as well as the obstacles faced in giving them practical effect.

ity.

In contrast, the *Ethics Counsel* program is applicable to individuals at any level of an organisation or as a member of a professional association who has breached an ethical framework, guideline or code of practice. To date we have offered the *Ethics Counsel* program to practitioners in the pharmacy, nursing and medical professions, as well as to commercial clients. Clients who are referred to us can include individuals in commercial organisations who have breached a code of conduct. More commonly however, the service is taken up by members of professional associations or through licensing boards who have issued an education order or suspended a license to practice, subject to the individual successfully completing an ethics related program.

The program builds on the diverse range of consulting, leadership, learning and development and counselling work the *Ethics Centre* has undertaken over many years. Our approach combines ethical and character evaluation and development elements, focusing on issues of individual character, which are critical for this work, and are explored in relation to the professional contexts, obligations and responsibilities of individuals and the factors that shape and impact their decisionmaking. Through an experiential learning process, the participant explores past conduct and current situations, taking account of core values and principles, moral sensitivity and relational and situational ethics. This deep reflection on past action and current decisionmaking helps build self-awareness, and provides a basis for development of the

## Building the ethical muscle (cont'd)

participant's ethical awareness and their capacity for ethical action and leadership.

Importantly, while recognising, acknowledging and exploring the specific ethical transgression that provided the impetus for the individual to undertake the program, the program is designed with a focus beyond specific decisions and situations in providing a process through which individuals can build ethical decisionmaking capacity on an ongoing basis. For example, one recent client, let's call her Kim, undertook the program following an education order from a registration body. She was a young graduate and relatively new to the profession, dedicated and with a strong work ethic. Kim took over a struggling family health business, and her sense of duty to support her family as well as keep the family business afloat was compromised. She made some unauthorised Medicare claims that lead to a registration board hearing. In investigating her ethical capacity a number of vulnerabilities were identified and explored—including the pressure to not fail in front of the family, the responsibility of managing a business when so new to the profession, and the responsibility to provide for her extended family, all of which contributed to her decision to defraud Medicare. Over the course of the program she came to understand the influences on her ethical decision making, the triggers and pressures that might lead to moral disengagement, the relevance of her professional code and mentors that could assist in business and professional decision making, and the ways in which isola-

and duty could render her vulnerable to ethical blindness. Appropriate strategies were developed in each area that would help in building ethical resilience.

While the reflection on past action helps build self-awareness of the particular issue, including its challenges and the participant's responses to it, the pro-

**"In exploring Kim's ethical capacity a number of vulnerabilities were identified, all of which contributed to her decision to defraud Medicare."**

gram also provides an opportunity to look at current challenges and how learning might assist in developing greater moral clarity and capacity in present and future practices.

The insight gained through self-reflection, facilitated discussion, customised program content and learning resources, helps individuals to better self-assess their capacities and capabilities and acquire the skills and techniques to strengthen their 'ethical muscle.'

Although the impetus to undertake the *Ethics Counsel* and *Executive Counsel* programs may be very different, each program is designed around a common set of pedagogical and philosophical approaches:

- Experiential learn-

tion, responsibility

ing: moving individuals into uncharted and uncomfortable territory that develops and tests leadership capacity;

- Reflection: deep contemplation to build rigorous decision-making capability;
- Socratic method: using and developing the ability to ask the right questions;
- Strategic capacity: big issues, big ideas, hard questions and moral courage;
- A well-developed empirical framework for ethical decision-making: the St James Ethics Centre's ethics framework and ethical decision-making model;
- A blended learning approach: experiential exercises, reading, reflection and discussion;
- Collaborative projects: developed in consultation with participants to provide applied rigour to their learning.

Both programs are delivered by *Ethics Centre* staff and accredited counsellors.

For more information on either program contact:

John Neil, Senior Consultant, The Practice at St James Ethics Centre

D: [+61 2 8267 5779](tel:+61282675779)

M [+61 0406 608 612](tel:+610406608612)

T [+61 2 8267 9477](tel:+61282679477)

<http://www.ethics.org.au/>

## On the Irresponsibility of “Social Responsibility”

Marc Orlitzky

Corporate social responsibility, or CSR, has become a big deal in many parts of the (business) world. Many business leaders and stock analysts are adopting the rhetoric and spirit of CSR, which now comes in more than thirty different guises or definitions: sustainability, triple bottom line, corporate citizenship, stakeholder management, strategic philanthropy, shared value creation, etc. This is understandable; for who does not want to be considered a socially and environmentally responsible actor? In other words, CSR has a certain social desirability behind it. In addition, there is a growing conviction among many managers (and investors) that CSR will ultimately pay off economically—if the rhetoric is to be believed.

However, whenever true believers embrace management fads and fashions uncritically and/or superficially, the unintended negative consequences of those institutional decisions

often remain unacknowledged. Over the years and for various reasons, I have turned from CSR advocate to CSR sceptic as I recently realised how little of the current CSR literature has focused on the dysfunctions of CSR. My changing perspective is partially based on a model that I introduced in the latest issue

“Over the years and for various reasons, I have turned from CSR advocate to CSR sceptic .”

of *Academy of Management Perspectives*. The causal model shows that the long-term impact of the increasingly globalised and standardised CSR movement may be quite harmful because CSR tends to make stock markets

more volatile, that is, it tends to destabilise markets. Given many institutional drivers and pressures, it could even lead to local excess valuations, or stock price bubbles. So, what we typically regard as “socially responsible” corporate practice could also be considered irresponsible when viewed from a broader economic perspective—a behavioural finance perspective—because CSR is, inherently, creating noise (rather than information) in equity markets.

Marc Orlitzky

The article's full reference is: Orlitzky, M. (2013). Corporate social responsibility, noise, and stock market volatility. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 27 (3), 238-254. doi:10.5465/amp.2012.0097

More details about my research program on corporate social responsibility and performance are available from: <http://marcorlitzky.webs.com/biopapers.htm>

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Theodora Issa  
School of Management, Curtin Business School, GPO Box U1987, Perth WA 6845 Australia, Fax: + +61 8 9266 7897  
[Theodora.issa@cbs.curtin.edu.au](mailto:Theodora.issa@cbs.curtin.edu.au)  
or Ruth Wolf, Ph.D.  
[wolfu@walla.co.il](mailto:wolfu@walla.co.il)

"Making the right moves...."

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c/o School of History & Philosophy  
University of New South Wales  
Sydney, NSW 2052, Australia.  
Ph: (02) 9385 2320  
Email: [aapae@unsw.edu.au](mailto:aapae@unsw.edu.au)  
Web: <http://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/aapae/>

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[howard.harris@unisa.edu.au](mailto:howard.harris@unisa.edu.au)

**Michael Schwartz**

School of Economics, Finance & Marketing,  
Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology,  
Phone: (03) 9925-5515  
[michael.schwartz@rmit.edu.au](mailto:michael.schwartz@rmit.edu.au)

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[Joe.Naimo@nd.edu.au](mailto:Joe.Naimo@nd.edu.au)

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