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Welcome to the Summer Edition of *Australian Ethics*!

2020 has been an extraordinary year. We have seen bushfires, Royal Commissions and an ongoing worldwide crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Yet it is in just these times when ethical thought and action becomes critical. When everything is operating smoothly, we often can get away with cruising along with business-as-usual practices. But disruption and crisis require us to shoulder the responsibility of making ethical decisions, doing the best we can in trying circumstances.

Sometimes, indeed, crisis gives us occasion to see and understand the efforts of others. This is obviously so with health workers and scientists fighting the virus—but even extends to public institutions, with trust in government in Australia currently at near-record levels.

Of course, COVID-19 impacted on the AAPAE too. For the first time, we held a virtual conference. Warm thanks go to Adrian Walsh, Sandy Boucher, Simon Burgess and Alex Dunn, as well as all the team at UNE for a terrific conference, despite all of 2020's challenges. There were excellent keynotes, contributors from a myriad of disciplines, and a topical theme ripe for ethical exploration!

Thanks go too to all the Executive Committee for all their work throughout the year, as they worked under various levels of lockdown, and particularly to our newsletter editor, Charmayne Highfield, for producing another thought-provoking edition of *Australian Ethics*.

This edition begins with Jacqueline Boaks taking us through a fascinating exploration of the ethics of leadership—and of teaching leadership. Next, Alan Chenoweth, Donna McAuliffe and Darryl Low Choy describe the myriad streams of environmental ethics, with their shared theme of extending moral consideration beyond humans. Joe Naimo then recounts the deep ethical concerns with substitute decision-making powers—a case where the very mechanism to protect against abuse can create opportunities for mistreatment. Don Clifton and Tanya Weiler then follow up their terrific article on teaching ethics in the previous (Winter) edition of *Australian Ethics*, illustrating the applicability of key educational tools to the COVID-enforced online environment. Finally, reflecting on the Royal Commission, Theodora Issa discusses the ethical obligations we owe to the elderly.

Wishing everyone happy holidays, and a good start to 2021,

Hugh Breakey

Professional
& Applied

- ◆ BUSINESS
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WHAT SHOULD WE BE TEACHING LEADERS?

Jacqueline Books

There is a very significant focus on leadership, and increasingly on leadership ethics, in undergraduate and especially postgraduate business courses.

While there are many questions of applied ethics covered in MBA programs and in the business literature, what is lacking is the more meta ethical question of leadership. Namely, what is the ethical status of 'leadership', (and by extension the ethical status of aspiration to it) as it is commonly constructed in an organisational setting?

Additionally, and consequently, there is the question of just what is the ethical status of the activity of teaching such accounts? What is required of them to be morally satisfactory rather than say, simply and unreflectively teaching the language and tools of leadership as a practical skill? Or, worse, the teaching in such classrooms of the language and skills of ethics as a kind of sophistry that lacks a substantive ethical commitment?

Those who teach MBA programs know that MBA students regularly talk of leadership aspirations, of their 'followers', in whom they should be and plan to be 'inspiring a vision' and 'managing meaning'.

At worst, and to an egalitarian ear, this can sound very jarring. Explicit aspirations to personal power, without much acknowledged awareness of the realities of coercive, hierarchical organisational power structures might fairly be judged a cause for concern, especially in the absence of a solid grounding in ethics and in the historical abuses of power in and out of organisations and large, organised structures and movements. This jarring quality is especially true of those teaching ethics who have a grounding in the humanities and history, with an awareness of the downsides of such coercive power or charismatic influence, as well as an esteem for the critical faculties of the individual as agent, that clashes with the idea of leaders as 'managing meaning' or shaping the view of reality of their 'followers'.

On the other hand, there is often a genuine and earnest element to such narratives and reflections.

Any MBA instructor knows that in every class there are students—especially those who are more than a little advanced in their careers—and often many of them, who want to conduct themselves well ethically. They routinely face projects, tasks and requirements that produce serious ethical questions—and they often bring to the classroom memories of such ethical challenges that are live questions to them regarding whether they acted correctly or could have acted more ethically. (This 'could' often has not just the hypothetical sense but the capacity sense—that is, was there a more ethical option available to them and what were the skills they would have needed to acquit it in an organisational context?)

It is in this context that the questions of the ethical status of leadership and how it is taught arises. The narrative common in such contexts and in the literature that underpins and reflects it is that 'leadership' as it is conceived in organisational discourse (and generally in contrast to 'management') is ethical to the extent that, and by virtue of the fact that:

- it is voluntary and non-coercive. That is, 'followers' choose to support leaders rather than being required to and leadership is taken to be the manifestation of this ongoing support, which can be withdrawn at any time; and
- on some models, because it serves followers well.

This narrative is strongly reflected in, and driven by, a founding tenet of leadership studies—that is, the distinction between management and leadership. It not only makes leadership seem more benign and benevolent than its rhetorical contrast here—management—it can result in its audience switching off the very critical evaluations of power that are applied to other instantiations and uses of power.

One of the more extreme approaches to this is the Servant Leadership model of Robert Greenleaf,

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whose core functions from the leader include ‘empathy’ for followers, ‘healing’ them (in a spiritual sense, to ‘help make them whole’) and ‘commitment to the growth of people’ (Spears, 2004, pp.8-9). For Greenleaf, this is core to (servant) leadership: “The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is; do those served grow as persons, do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?” (Greenleaf, 1970).

However, not all approaches are this explicit. Others, such as the transformational leadership model—one of the most popular since its introduction by historical scholar Burns in the 1970s—has as its hallmark ‘transforming’ the motivations of followers in order to go beyond their self-interest and embrace instead the goals encouraged by the leader and the good of the group.

In organisational settings, it is taken to be desirable in large part because it is taken to ‘unleash passionate motivation’ towards and to embrace of such goals. The contrast here is stark and requires ethical reflection. In part this is true because while the counterpart to transformational leadership, so-called ‘transactional’ leadership leaves the motivations of followers unchanged—self-interest, so leadership is taken as an exchange for what ‘followers’ are motivated by (financial remuneration, job advancement, better conditions, for instance) in exchange for organisational goals (such as greater productivity, innovation etc.) transformational leadership is ‘transformative’ on many accounts to the extent that it ‘transforms’ the motivations of followers from this self-interest to other goals. For Burns, these goals were ‘higher levels of morality’ as seen in the morally progressive causes such as the civil rights movement. As

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adapted to organisational settings though (or really just transplanted into them without much reflection) this becomes transformation into embracing the goals of the organisations over one’s own self-interests. This calls for serious moral reflection as well as ongoing consideration of what side constraints are ethically required here.

Undeniably though, prudential motivations abound.

Much of the business literature on ethical leadership is both premised on and concludes with the assertion that as a manager in a workplace setting, treating followers well gets results in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Much of this literature

essentially reduces to—employees work better (harder, more efficiently, more innovatively, and for longer) when one treats them well (as one says ‘extra discretionary work effort’ aka unpaid overtime). But this is a prudential, not an ethical claim. That is, it shows that it serves the interests of the manager (leaders) to treat employees well, not that one should do so for ethical reasons. It does no more than argue that one

achieves one’s own goals (getting the most effort and time from subordinates for the same fixed costs) if one treats them with respect and ethically. Ethical claims are, classically, other-regarding. They require us to go beyond our own self-interest.

It may on the whole be preferable for all of us—employees, managers, onlookers alike—if treating people well aligns with the prudential, profit driven reasons of organisations but this is not an ethical claim. It is more akin to suggesting that a higher quality fuel will make my car run better or regular maintenance on factory equipment increasing productivity.

Increasingly, organisational leadership is seen in this way—as benign because non-coercive, re-

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A KANTIAN CATEGORICAL SUSTAINABILITY PRINCIPLE

Senior Australian & New Zealand environmental professionals were interviewed for PhD research regarding the ethics of environmental practice, in an interpretive phenomenological study. In this relatively new field, professional ethics have not previously been subject to qualitative analysis in this manner, nor has the relationship between professional and environmental ethics been explored.

The literature review for this research included moral and ethical theory, including the influence of the 18th Century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who proposed a secular rational basis for morality *viz.* a combination of free-willed action and duty, as directed by reason. Kant also proposed, as a categorical imperative and universalising principle, that a person of integrity ought to act according to the maxim that such actions should become universal law. This deontological principle built upon one of Spinoza's dicta in the previous century that *'Those who are governed by reason desire nothing for themselves which they do not also desire for the rest of humankind ...'* (Pinker, 2019). It also represented a development of several other principles of equality and impartiality (all persons are equal, and one's personal interests should not be prioritised over anyone else's) as previously enunciated by Hobbes and Locke; and subsequently re-interpreted by Rawls and Nagel.

Several ethicists and other authors have tried to interpret or re-

phrase the Kantian categorical imperative to include ethical responsibilities for animals, and for the natural environment more generally, but the most satisfying approach to reconciling Kantian and environmental ethics has been to look at the categorical imperative through a sustainability lens (Mulia, 2018).

The history and evolution of ethical theory has included a progressive widening of moral consideration, to include for example slaves, other races, future generations, animals and more recently (in environmental ethics and 'deep ecology') whole ecosystems and the Earth *per se*. The legal basis for recognising non-human environmental entities and granting rights to trees, species and populations, farmed and laboratory animals, and natural places gained momentum with Christopher Stone's seminal collection of essays in 1974 (Stone 2010), and culminated in 'personhood' being legally granted to rivers such as New Zealand's Whanganui River.

Humanity's ethical responsibilities towards the environment have a long history, from pre-literate societies where survival required respect for and management of natural resources, to the religions that promote mankind's stewardship of a God-given world, and more recent philosophers and environmental writers. The rise of environmental ethics marked a departure from the main Western traditions of ethics (including virtue ethics, Kantian ethics and utilitarianism) in that it questioned or

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... this principle may be re-stated as a 'categorical sustainability principle' *viz.* act only according to that maxim that your actions, if adopted universally, would sustain human society and all forms of life indefinitely.

rejected anthropocentrism *i.e.* that humans are the sole frame of reference, as both the effectors (ethical agents) and the affected. The idea that ethical considerations include the broader environment (non-anthropocentrism) has gained widespread acceptance, notwithstanding debate amongst ethicists regarding its validity. Although some religious traditions have included the concept of stewardship, and although philosophers have long recognised the ethical dimensions of environmental care, these frameworks have been human-centred. For example, John Locke regarded the natu-

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ral world as humanity's property, although he deplored wasteful exploitation of nature; and respect for the environment is derived from those major religions which believe that the earth and the material world are 'good' creations and therefore should be cared for. This is an ancient ideal—in India, one of the Edicts of Asoka, emperor of the Mauryan Empire 268-232BC, whose inscriptions are among the earliest evidence of Buddhism, is *'There is no better work than promoting the welfare of the whole world'* (Bellah, 2011).

Various authors have suggested ethical frameworks that incorporate both religious traditions and more modern concepts of sustainability, social justice, deep ecology and feminist ethics of care. Distinctions and debates have emerged between various strands within environmental ethics and there are areas of incompatibility between environmental ethics and animal ethics, theoretical environmental ethics and pragmatic ethics, and between bio-centric and eco-centric strands of thought. Philosophical 'outliers' which have little widespread acceptance but which nonetheless influence environmental debates include the Gaian philosophy of Earth as a living organism which maintains a complex life-sustaining equilibrium; and calls for a new philosophy which recognises the Earth is now entering a new Anthropocene epoch where all natural processes are affected by, and must be responsibly man-

aged by, humans.

Various authors attempted to cut through these philosophical differences by proposing approaches to practical ethics, such as 'environmental pragmatism' as a basis for natural resource management decisions and policy development, referring back to some of the 1949 ideas of the great American forester Aldo Leopold, a seminal figure in environmental ethics. Pinker (2019) also argues for 'eco-pragmatism', rather than the full agenda of deep ecology, which he regards as a counter-Enlightenment movement incompatible with the progress of humanism.

All the above ethical strands share a common theme of extending moral consideration beyond humans to other living beings, and are accordingly perceived in the public and political spheres as having a similarly subversive agenda. Moral consideration is also extended to future generations through the principles of inter-generational equity, and incorporate justice-based approaches to global climate change.

Kant's deontological categorical imperative, with its emphasis on universalisability, has been re-interpreted in environmental philosophy as the duty of everyone to act in such a way as to preserve the Earth for future generations, consistent with the sustainable development principles of inter-generational equity (Mulia, 2018). Accordingly, this principle may be re-stated as a 'categorical sustainability principle' viz. act only according to that maxim that your

actions, if adopted universally, would sustain human society and all forms of life indefinitely.

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THE ABSURD: ABUSE AND MISUSE OF SUBSTITUTE DECISION-MAKING POWERS

Joseph Naimo

Issues regarding abuse and exploitation of the elderly and the disabled are persistent themes in debates about legal capacity, decision-making and guardianship. These debates serve to inform the construction of laws, models of assessment, oversight requirements or mechanisms, and to empower the institutions needed to govern these legal and community requirements. The emerging laws serve as preventative measures against abuse of persons at risk due to decision-making disabilities. It matters not whether the decision-making disability for a person stems from a cognitive disability or from a loss or diminishing capacity to 'understand and appreciate' consequent risk associated with such loss of capacity.

Under such circumstances the appointment of a substitute decision-maker (SDM) is required to act on behalf of the individual with a decision-making disability. Assigning an SDM might appear to be an appropriate mechanism to ensure minimisation of abuse. Unfortunately, and too often, there is an increase of risk when unscrupulous individuals are enabled to abuse those for whom they hold power over and can hide behind the guise of SDM or Guardianship. Remarkably occurring, in many instances, because the victims are unaware of being exploited, or because they lack capacity of raising concerns against their abusers. More deceptively and morally abhorrent cases of abuse and exploitation occur when individuals under SDM orders attempt to raise concerns but those concerns are instead misrepresented by their SDMs to minimise detection. In practice, to redirect attention drawn to them, under the presupposition of 'best interest' or 'paternalistic' considerations, the individual for whom the SDM order is made is often muffled by the SDM proffering or insisting upon the administration of chemical and physical restrictive practices. These circumstances usually involve service providers and clinicians profiteering from such interpretations and such arrangements, whether inadvertently or unintentionally, it is perpetrated by an abuse of trust.

Currently in Australia we are in the middle of two

significant yet separate Royal Commissions: firstly, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety; and secondly, the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. What we are discovering, and what many advocates have long known, is that the statutory institutions assigned oversight responsibilities to ensure that abuse, neglect and exploitation do not occur, are failing in both their duty of care and due diligence to keep in check the service providers associated with much of the perpetrated harm, as abuse is rife.

Substitute decision-making arrangements should be made when such arrangements are necessary, as a last resort, and subject to safeguards. Yet the safeguards are rather lax, it must be said. Detrimently, the SDM can assert broader powers beyond sensible measures that include thwarting investigations undertaken by family members; remove family members from the life of the person for whom an order is made; 'may inappropriately apply a 'paternalistic' or 'best interest' approach to decision-making where other approaches are required'; 'fail to consider the individual's wishes or make decisions contrary to those wishes'; 'having insufficient contact with the individual'; and, 'sharing insufficient or incorrect information'. Moreover, to subject the individual for whom an SDM order is made to experimental medical treatment in tandem with imposing or condoning severe and harmful restrictive practices is absurd. The possibility for such forms of abuse is indeed enshrined, for example, within the *Guardianship and Administration Act of 1990* of Western Australia and subsequent reviews (the Office of the Public Advocate in WA is responsible for approximately 30,000 Guardianship orders).

The Department of the Attorney General in November 2015 released the *Statutory Review of the Guardianship and Administration Act 1990* allowing the appointment of an SDM to make decisions on behalf, and under the notion of 'best interests of an adult, with a decision-making disability' (2015, p.1).

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However, despite the intention of ‘best interest’, the 2015 Review within Part 5—Guardianship (which outlines permissible parameters), dilutes this objective, specifically:

Recommendation 24:

In support of the amendment it is noted that:

There are instances where a guardian is required to make a decision which is contrary to the wishes of the represented person and which may require some compulsion either in the provision of medical treatment for behaviour management procedures to ensure the safety of the represented person or for the protection of others.

Recommendation 25:

That the *Guardianship and Administration Act 1990* is amended to provide that the role of a plenary guardian can also include the authority to:

- ⇒ make decisions regarding restraint of the represented person including in relation to making decisions about chemical and/or physical restraint
- ⇒ consent to medical research, experimental health care, and clinical trials (2015, p.18).

In light of these recommendations there are additional concerns regarding normalising both chemical and physical restrictive practices that are not only morally abhorrent, but clinically highly questionable, as too often undertaken by service providers and their contracted psychiatrists and treating teams, legitimated or endorsed under authority of a collaborating Guardian or SDM.

Pointedly, the two current Royal Commissions have their inception, partly, in the desire to prevent abuse of persons at risk due to cognitive disability and diminished capacity, which will consequently necessitate broad scale reform to the governance institutions and associated service providers. Insight can be gained by law reformists in other countries that have previously tackled these problems in order to work through the issues. One such example is the Law Commission of Ontario

(LCO) Discussion Paper (2014) which broadly identifies that “issues of abuse through the law and of misuse of the law are connected to every aspect of legal capacity, decision-making and guardianship” (LCO, 2014, p.199). Similarly, the *Vanguard Project Report* of 2009 noted that the “corollary of trust and power is that it always creates a potential for abuse. Thus, ironically, the very instruments designed to protect a person from some forms of abuse also create an opportunity for mistreatment” (p.620). Rather absurdly then, the intention by governance institutions to protect the vulnerable also provides the capacity, and one might go as far to say, promotes, as enshrined in *the Act*, certain forms of abuse whether intentionally or not.

According to the LCO (2014) “abuse and misuse of substitute decision-making powers must be understood in the context in which they occur, which most frequently is that of close personal relationships” (LCO, 2014 p. 203). The Report further elaborates that: “Our close personal relationships are important, not only to our practical needs but to our emotional well-being” indeed that “... family histories of dysfunction will play out in the context of substitute decision-making, just as in any other context” (LCO, 2014 p.203).

In practical terms, what constitutes ‘best interest’ closely parallels that of ‘paternalism’ when dealing with people with decision-making disabilities, since in both cases, it mostly reduces to the interests of an SDM or Guardian, as realised in their decision-making practice, which is the subject of concern. Gerald Dworkin, in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2020) defines paternalism as “the interference of a state or an individual with another person, against their will, and defended or motivated by a claim that the person interfered with will be better off or protected from harm.” The irony here is that in many instances, the perpetrator of harm can be directly traced back to the SDM or Guardian. Do I need to say any more?

References: For a full list of references, please contact the authors direct.

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TEACHING ETHICS ON-LINE: A FOLLOW-UP

DON CLIFTON
TANYA WEILER

In this article, we discuss our experience in teaching ethics in the on-line setting for a third-year undergraduate unit of study ('Course') in an Australian university business school.

In the Winter 2020 edition of this journal, we discussed our approach to teaching ethics to third-year undergraduate business students in the face-to-face setting. In that article we detailed our use of blended learning, flipped classroom, and audience response system (Mentimeter) methods, with a strong commitment to a values-driven approach to teaching as proposed by Cranton (2001). We also discussed how our approach was grounded in a structured framework—that of Rossouw (2002)—which proposes that teaching business ethics has three complementary objectives: cognitive competence, behavioural competence and managerial competence. From there, we detailed how we changed the Course content to be more practical, and less philosophical, in terms of the development of personal and professional ethical skills and how we pitched the business application at the organisational strategy level, with content aligned to this. Other developments we highlighted included (a) the removal of lectures with face-to-face interactions all done through weekly workshops, (b) topic content presented through pre-recorded video

os students were expected to listen to in their own time, and (c) changing the assessments by designing them as the key teaching tool used in the weekly workshops, where assessments shifted from being 'assessment of learning' to 'assessment for and as learning' (Mutch, 2012).

The student group for the Course comprises two cohorts defined as either 'on-line' in that no face-to-face classes are provided or 'on-campus' where face-to-face classes (weekly workshops) are available but attendance is not compulsory. With COVID-19 restrictions in place during the first semester of 2020, all students were placed in the 'on-line' environment with face-to-face workshops also moving to Zoom sessions. In the second semester, face-to-face workshops resumed.

How then do we go about teaching ethics in the on-line setting, COVID-19 restrictions or not?

There is ample commentary in the literature about specific teaching strategies and skills for on-line teaching (Siemens et al., 2015). However, when we first started to think about this as part of the overall development for the Course we have previously discussed, we asked ourselves whether there really is a meaningful difference between the on-campus versus on-line enrolled student cohorts, if their needs re-

ally are different, and if the teaching approach needed to differ.

We considered, for example, that many students who enrol in on-campus mode don't attend their scheduled face-to-face classes so in this sense, these students can be seen as similar to the on-line cohort who rely fully on technology delivered content. We know that many on-line students live interstate or overseas so there is a time-zone issue to consider. Both on-line and on-campus students also live locally and have work commitments that see them have the equivalent of time-zone issues to contend with. Some students enrol on-line because on-campus classes are full, or are overseas due to travel restrictions, or simply cannot get to classes. These reasons differ to enrolling on-line due to some specific preference over on-campus study. In short, we struggled to find compelling reasons to treat the on-line cohort in ways that were materially different to the way we treated those studying on-campus, as we recognised the student profiles had significant overlap.

Some of the key literature proposals as to what good teaching practice in the on-line setting entails include; high levels of support for student-to-student and student-content interactions, cooperative and collaborative learning, the use of structured online

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discussions including instructor involvement and moderation of these discussions, the provision of timely and constructive formative feedback to all students, scaffolding instruction strategies and the use of visually engaging and interactive content (Siemens et al., 2015). Doesn't, however, this apply to good teaching practice anyway?

Arguments have also been presented that the workload on instructors teaching in the on-line setting can be unsustainably high and course design and student interactions can be quite taxing. Again, we asked the 'why does need to be the case?' question. Can't good course design be applied in a way that accommodates the whole cohort (noting our claim above that the on-campus and on-line cohorts are not, in reality, all that different) and in a way that is manageable from a time perspective by instructors?

Drawing on the idea of Universal Design for Learning (Rogers-Shaw et al, 2018), we set about the development of the Course pedagogy with a clear goal in mind—a design that accommodated all students with one added feature—face-to-face workshops for those who wanted to attend them.

In terms of Course design, we discussed the key structural points in our previous article as summarised above. In addition, we added weekly discussion forums for all students, along with weekly quizzes with immediate automated feedback. We included both

'required' and 'additional-optional' resources by way of readings, web sites and videos. In discussion forums, we initiate the conversations and reply to every comment students make. We also conduct weekly virtual classroom sessions that all students can attend—they are not restricted to only those studying in on-line mode—with the sessions recorded and made available on the Course web site. These sessions replicate the on-campus workshops and use Zoom and Mentimeter (we screen-share Mentimeter) where students join a Zoom session and also log-in to Mentimeter which is the primary driver of the session (see our previous article for more on the benefits of using Mentimeter, which apply equally in the on-line setting).

We also use regular communication engagement strategies including weekly personal communications to all students, setting out what they need to do for the week ahead while inviting feedback and questions. On completion of assessed tasks, personal emails are sent to all students congratulating those who did well, encouraging those who passed but did not achieve high grades, and reaching out to those who failed or did not submit, with offers of help. All student responses to these communications also receive a reply of some form, mostly focused on how they can continue to do well or improve their work. Communications inwards from students are almost always answered same day and often within an hour or two of receipt. In short, our communica-

tions with students support the literature recommendations in being proactive, regular, timely and personalised (O' Shea, et al. 2015; Stone et al 2016).

How has it all worked? In terms of results, studies tend to show that student academic performance is similar for on-campus verses on-line teaching (Siemens et al, 2015) and this has been the case for our Course—assessment outcomes across the on-line and on-campus cohorts are indiscernible. The same can be said in terms of student feedback in terms of satisfaction with the Course itself and the teaching experience.

Student specific feedback received from on-line students following the Course deliveries in 2020 has also been very positive. Some examples include:

"As an external student, the tute and lecture records (sic) were clear concise and to the point. There was no 'waffle' simply to occupy the necessary timeslot".

"He sent me a direct email attentively seeking any question I had. At the time I didn't have anything to ask but really liked knowing that teacher was there to help if need be. Especially as an external student".

"[The] feedback and communication (even with external students) is second to none! Honestly, I have never experienced anything like it. His personalized approach and efforts to reach out were comforting and reassuring which made the content easier to understand".

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OUR PRECIOUS ELDERLY: A SERIOUS DISCUSSION

Theodora Issa

I am not trying to reinvent the wheel, which by the way and for those who are curious, was invented by the ancient Mesopotamian people around 4,200—4,000 BC, but instead I wish to amplify the ever-increasing chorus of individuals who are extremely concerned about how we treat our precious elderly and who are calling for immediate action to improve. Though this has been the case for a while, it definitely has become a critical issue because of the COVID-19 situation.

This silent enemy is damaging the health of all Australians. As at mid-December, total known COVID-19 cases in Australia had surpassed 28,000 with over 900 deaths. Certainly, every single individual infected and every single loss of life to this virus is a tragedy.

Indeed, we have seen drastic images in the media providing insights into the suffering of humankind of all races, ethnicities, ages and religions. Similarly, in Australia we saw outbreaks in aged care homes that resulted in increased loss of life. Undeniably, we are in a better position than that faced by many other countries, but the loss of any one life is unacceptable. This is specifically so, as we are a modern country that was supposed to be well prepared to reduce, if not eliminate such situations. However, we as a society have somehow failed to do so, specifically in relation to the care of our elderly.

The business of 'Aged Care' is a formidable force in this country. The flourishing of this industry was achieved through targeted advertising, which exploited the individualistic culture of Australia. The 2018 Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety confirms that trust in the aged-care system was misplaced. As we await the final report, some Western Australian aged-care homes have already been issued non-compliance notices as it has been revealed that more than one hundred elderly Australians are being raped, assaulted and even murdered in care facilities every week. There is clearly a need to enhance the existence of ethical mindsets of those responsible for and who work in this important sector. This can be achieved through en-

hancing aesthetic spirituality, religious spirituality, optimism, harmony and balance, truth seeking, pursuit of joy, peace, and beauty, making a difference and professionalism; the components of an ethical mindset (Issa 2009).

Indeed, all aged-care workers should seek truth in their work, foster joy, peace and beauty in aged-care homes, promote harmony and balance amongst residents and workers, and faithfully act in a professional manner, to make a positive difference to those in their care.

In December 2019, under the title '*Are we really [re] paying this personal debt?*' I reflected on the issue of caring for the elderly, and the need to show respect and to honour them. I reiterate that call and emphasise the need for a change in social attitudes and improved public policy. Certainly, when our parents are unable to take care of themselves, it would be great to have a system that allowed their children to take care of them in the comfort of their home where they have created memories. Public policy should be vast enough to include a system for those who have no children or immediate family members to undertake this type of personalised care.

For me, I would not trust anyone to care for my parent, whilst I am able to do so, though this might limit my movements, my social outings, but it is my duty, and it is what I am required to do through my Christian teachings. I cherish the time spent with my parents as a time to learn from their unlimited wisdom, listening to stories, recalling the good times, going through images together, or other interactions that might bring a smile to their faces—after all they cared for me when I needed care, and it is my duty to take care of them, to somehow repay the debt ... this is life.

I hope this brief reflection adds to the call in our society for better care of the elderly.

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TEACHING ETHICS ON-LINE CONT.

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“The course is extremely well organised and plenty of different options for learning each topic. That is, each topic included audio recordings, tutorials, course readings, lecture slides, links to important websites, you tube videos and zoom sessions”.

Have we created more work that we can reasonably manage? Not really. The hard part was the initial setup and yes, it took a lot of thinking, research and development. We also had to work on efficient methods for communicating with students and respond-

ing to their communications to us. After a while, we were able to build standard responses that applied in most situations and simply do a copy-and-paste with occasional minor tailoring. We were also able to answer many questions by referring students to the materials we provided such as a simple: “No problem—can you have a listen to the VC session recording for week X where I go over that in some detail and let me know if you need anything more?”.

In summary, our approach to on-line teaching is fundamentally no different to teaching students en-

rolled in on-campus mode. To us, good teaching is good teaching, and a well-designed course and teaching approach is required to address the needs of students regardless of what specific study mode (on-campus vs on-line) they are enrolled in.

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WHAT SHOULD WE BE TEACHING LEADERS? CONT.

(Continued from page 3)

specting of persons, and emerging from the voluntary support of followers. But of course this is only true to a limited extent. Undeniably managers at every level have an enormous amount of coercive or at least incentive-based power.

This hints at a division here—the business and management schools where such conversations take place are often separate from those in the university who are engaged with these questions—those in the humanities broadly and those studying ethics specifically. This division prevents important dialogue.

It also suggests an opportunity, for those in universities and outside of them to join in this discussion of what I have called the meta ethical question: the question of the ethical status of this kind of power, framed as leadership in this specific way.

This meta ethical question which is especially pressing for those of us teaching ethics in such fields is—what should we be teaching such students about the ethics of leadership qua leadership?

This goes beyond (or more properly, should likely come before) the discussion of ethics for particular scenarios and how to treat subordinates (followers) well but discussion is called for regarding what it should include. Should it begin with moral philosophy? An epistemic and ethical hubris? To be critical of power structures such as those of the organisation?

What should the balance and emphasis on these be? How should they be framed?

Ethicists and teachers are not exclusively in a position to make this call, nor should they be. Nor should only those who structure and market MBA programs. There should be input from the rest of society, from leaders and students etc. We all have an interest in the ways such power is framed inside MBA programs and how ethics is taught there.

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AAPAE
AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION FOR
PROFESSIONAL AND APPLIED ETHICS

Australian Ethics

is published by the
Australian Association for
Professional and Applied Ethics

ABN: 91 541 307 476

Welcome
2021

AAPAE Charter

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.

However, the AAPAE does not endorse any particular viewpoint, but rather it aims to promote a climate in which different and differing views, concerns, and approaches can be expressed and discussed.



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