Collaborative Ethics

Andy Blunden 2015

This paper relies on my book "Origins of Collective Decision Making" (see a Synopsis here) and Activity Theory. An understanding of these studies is necessary to understand what follows.

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

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

Secondly, I shall demonstrate that a general ethics must have recourse to both collaboration *between* projects and elaborate relevant ethical principles, as well as the ethics of collaboration *within* projects.

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

Social Science and Ethics

In the positivist tradition of science, ethics and science are incommensurable and are kept separate. 'Is' must not be confused with 'Ought'. The only place for ethics in mainstream scientific research is to put boundaries around the activities of scientists to ensure that in their pursuit of knowledge they don't violate the rights of others. But the ethical problems of intervention and research go much further than this.

In the tradition of romantic or emancipatory science, things are not so clear-cut. Hegel, Marx and Vygotsky did not develop separate ethical and scientific theories; their ideas were simultaneously ethical and scientific. And there are good reasons for this. In general, in any society, people do act as they *should* act to the extent that the practical norms of a community not only reflect what people do, but what they ought to do. So the practical norms of a community correspond to the reasons people give for that they do. And people do act for reasons, not because of inhuman forces acting on them from outside, be they economic pressures or the pull of desires.

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

theory of ethics which the researcher brings to the subject matter. The question arises: is that theory of ethics realistic and relevant to the current context?

For example, liberal economic theory bases its science on the presumption of individuals acting as mutually independent, self-interested, rational agents. That is, it proceeds as if this is the *norm* for the behaviour of individuals, and that it is individuals, or groups such as families or corporations acting as if they were individuals, which are the agents in economic life. The fact that agents are neither individual, independent, self-interested nor rational registers as a 'distortion' of the market (as 'friction' or 'rigidity' for example), and as something which needs to be *fixed*. Public service is denigrated and so far as possible replaced with commercial services, public health and welfare sacrificed on the altar of the free market. By making an atomistic society the norm for economics, economists make policy recommendations which have the effect of atomizing society and tending to make this dystopian libertarianism the norm. Education is deemed to be the personal property of the student, so policy is set so that those who want an education pay for their certificate, get what they paid for, and then expect to be duly remunerated for their trouble. The norm of the independent rational economic agent orients both the science and the ethics. Public education is deemed a cost which needs to be minimized. Policies based on these false assumptions reduce public service to administering contracts, managing funds and prosecuting court cases; public provision of health and education is undermined and the people who provide such services are increasingly isolated and demoralized. Before these ideas came to dominate public policy in the 1980s, one could safely say simply that people do not act in that way. However, after 30 years of neoliberal public policy, increasingly people *do* behave in that way.

Neoliberal public policy tends to *produce* a nation of self-seeking individuals accustomed to the disinterest of the community in their welfare. But it is not the people nor the theory itself which is wrong, but the ethical assumptions on which the social theory, and therefore the public policy, is based which is wrong.

Behavioural psychology is based on the ethical principle that people interact with others with the aim of predicting and controlling their behaviour (as if everyone was an amateur behavioural psychologist). The activity of behavioural psychologists serves to promote just such strategic action by the marketers, advertisers and political advisers who purchase their services. The result is universal suffrage coexisting with unprecedented levels of economic inequality.

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

As Anthony Giddens has pointed out, people generally understand the options available to them in their current situation and generally make rational decisions on that basis. It is the distribution of resources or life-chances which is responsible for the different ways people act. That distribution of resources has historical origins, but is reproduced generation after generation thanks to ethical principles embodied in social practice and law. Structural or Functional analysis of a social formation does not reveal anything which compel people to act in one way or another. To understand people we just need to be able to grasp their situation, the specific quandary they are facing, and the ethical principles which are guiding them, and then generally assume that they will act rationally.

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

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

(i) Modern Ethics

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

As part of the Enlightenment project, seeking to place the moral teachings of religion on a rational basis, Kant claimed to prove that as rational beings, we must always treat another person as an *end* and never as mere means (Kant 1780). From this, he was able to reformulate the Golden Rule as the Principle of Universalisability (hereafter the

Categorical Imperative): 'Act according to a maxim which can be adopted at the same time as a universal law' (Kant 1785).

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

Even leaving aside cultural differences and the lack of a shared sacred text, the Categorical Imperative takes no account of the asymmetrical obligations in paternalistic, hierarchical and class social formations. The boss does not expect the employee to do unto him as he does unto the employee. It also violates the basic principle of the market in which *everyone* instrumentalises everyone else. And Kant's commitment to taking others as ends and not means, effectively casts other people as passive objects of one's own actions. There is no 'we' in this ethic.

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

(ii) John Rawls' Political Liberalism

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

A typical example would be an organization with all-male leadership which resists affirmative action to increase female participation, claiming that they only appoint on merit. But obviously they do not. Once the paternalistic features of their organization

have been removed they find that appointment on merit produces 50-50 gender representation. Only a feminist critique could have justified affirmative action, and in the meantime, until systems had been feminized, a lot of men would rightly feel they had been unjustly passed over in favour of a woman. Institutionalized injustices cannot be rectified by consensus. Only a project which succeeds by illiberal means in realizing its ideal, changing social arrangements and creating new facts, can create the basis for reaching a new consensus.

Rawls' reasoning from a supposedly 'original position' is flawed because the original position is original only in relation to the constitution and set of laws being legislated and an individual being inserted into a social position. The original position is not original but belated, because it leaves in place comprehensive world views which reflect taken-for-granted social arrangements and consequential 'facts' which were supposedly still to be instituted. Only real human beings raised in some definite social situation can engage in the kind of thought experiment which Rawls requires.

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

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

(iii) Habermas's Communicative Ethics

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

over some decision with which they claim to be 'concerned' and all are to be treated alike as ends in themselves.

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

(iv) Seyla Benhabib

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

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

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

(v) Amartya Sen

Coming from a study of the measurement and causes inequality, Amartya Sen engaged in a life-long internal critique of Utilitarianism. In successive refinements of measures of social welfare and inequality he successively demolished wealth, income, capability, functioning and voice (Sen, 1999) as measures of what it is in a social formation which ought to be more equally distributed. He (Sen, 2002) finally arrived at the concept of 'critical voice'; it is not enough that some group has an adequate level of functioning and a voice in the making of decisions about social arrangements affecting their welfare –

they need a *critical voice*. This led to his proposal that the foremost measure which was needed to rectify inequality in India was the education of women. It is very significant that critical voice as the substance of justice – not just as a means – arose from a critique of utilitarianism, the ethic underlying modern economic theory.

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

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

(vi) Agnes Heller

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

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

I find this formulation unsatisfactory because it still restricts the domain of action to individuals acting upon one another whereas the far more important domain of activity is what we do *together*, as collaborators, and it is our relationship as collaborators which determines how we consult one another, make decisions and share the blame or credit for the outcome of our collaboration. This Heller never investigated. Undoubtedly individual experiences will always have a privileged position in questions of ethics, but I would contend that individual action can only be approached as a determination of the 'we' perspective which must form our starting point, in theory as it does in reality. Taking collaborative projects to be the essential, concrete practical relation between people, I reformulate the Golden Rule in this way:

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

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

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

Further, the concept of project collaboration should frame our practical relations even with strangers, not just our immediate collaborators. Universal ethical claims, such as the denunciation of economic inequality, can only be made coherent if they are implicitly addressed to either the state or some social movement, or some agent which can, concretely, mediate between me and those suffering. Such broad claims are coherent only to the extent that a mediating project, and thereby the parties addressed by the claim, are made explicit. You can legitimately ask: what is that to do with me?

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

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

(vii) Alasdair MacIntyre

In 1981, Alasdair MacIntyre published *After Virtue*, which, despite the fact that MacIntyre had recently converted to Catholicism, became a reference point for the secular critique of liberalism. MacIntyre was interested in whether the ethical life of Aristotle's ancient *polis*, where 'activities are hierarchically ordered by the *for sake of* relationship' (p. 107), could be recovered in conditions of modernity. MacIntyre looked to the ethical norms operative in 'practices' which he understands much as I understand 'collaborative projects': 'Every activity, every enquiry, every practice aims at some good' (1981, p. 139). MacIntyre distinguished between 'internal goods' 'realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity' (1981, p. 175) and 'external goods' such as prizes, monetary rewards and wages which are used to sustain the practice, and are associated with the transformation of a form of practice into an institution. In this connection, MacIntyre refers to the 'corrupting power of institutions' (1981, p. 181), so we see the potential for 'fossilized projects', that is, institutions – from organizations such as schools or hospitals to entire political communities, 'concerned with the whole of life, not with this or that good, but with man's good as such' (1981, p. 146) – to be both the site for the development of an ethical life or for the corruption of human relationships.

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

Thick and thin ethos

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

due to the penetration of the dense ethos of these institutions by the loose ethos of modernity. The long-held antipathy to hierarchy in particular and institutionalisation in general which has characterized social change movements demands a response to this problem.

So much for the various approaches to formulating a secular ethics to date. Activity Theory, however, provides us with the opportunity of formulating a new *collaborative ethics*, based on really existing practices of collaboration, which have been a proving ground for ethics for millennia.

Collaborative Ethics

Human freedom can only be attained through mediated self-determination, *i.e.*, participation in projects. The interaction between any two individuals is never unmediated, so the question is always to discern which project mediates the specific relation, and thereby the ethical principles which are then relevant to the relation. On the other hand, any stranger is a *person*, and as such is the bearer of ineliminable rights, and this is the case irrespective of any concrete relation I have to the stranger. Whatever relation I have to another person I am constrained by the command that I recognise the other as a person and respect their rights as such. This is the meaning of *human rights*, as opposed to rights which are indigenous to some specific context.

This situation is reflected where there is universal suffrage (based on large, arbitrary geographical electorates) co-existing with a complex web of civil society organisations and businesses in which concrete person-to-person obligations predominate.

The above review of efforts to devise an ethics appropriate to life in modern, secular nation states, confirms my claim that a secular modern ethics has to be based on the presumption of a relationship of *collaboration* between any two people in some project, rather than on the presumption of atomistic individuals as is presumed in systems of universal suffrage. This duality is necessary, because even while systems of collaboration are the necessary condition for emancipation, they are, unfortunately, also the most common context for oppression, exploitation and marginalisation. Collaborative ethics has to be qualified by liberalism. The coexistence of these two contradictory ethics is necessary.

This leads us to a two-step approach to resolving ethical problems. First we must identify the relevant project and the position of the subjects within that project, which specifies the relation between two persons. Failing this, the subjects must be regarded as independent projects with the relation defined as appropriate to the relation between projects. The second step it then to identify the ethical norms indigenous to the given project(s) on the basis of a typology of projects and relations between projects along the lines outlined earlier. For each paradigm there are specific ethical norms. Further, every

project has its own ethics, according to its object-concept; however, not in every case can such norms be endorsed as rational and reasonable. The object concept of the project must first be verified as rational before its norms of collaboration can be validated. Nonetheless, the wide variety of projects in the world define the ethical relations between participants uniquely. Not all projects are worthy of support however. The validity of a project may be judged in terms of the ethics of relations between projects, i.e., from the standpoint of *other* projects.

The final element of Collaborative Ethics is a consideration of the ethics shaping the paradigmatic norms of collaboration outlined above.

Ethical communities are not constructed by theologians and moral philosophers or even by police and judges. Ethical communities have been constructed by people collaborating in projects, essentially by forms of collective decision making together with the collective implementing of those decisions. Theologians and moral philosophers then subsequently rationalise what they see before their eyes.

As I have tried to show, the various rights, duties and virtues which are manifested in social life have their basis in the demands of specific modes of collaboration: Counsel, Majority, Consensus and Laissez faire, and forms of collaboration between distinct projects – negotiation, solidarity, colonisation and normative collaboration. Each of these modes of collaboration arise in specific social conditions.

The virtues and duties we have mentioned above – honesty, good faith, care and responsibility, solidarity, trust, wisdom, attention, equality, tolerance, inclusion and respect – all originate in specific forms of collaboration.

Collaborative Ethics begins from the proposition that you must adhere to the ethics which is indigenous to the project in which you are participating, or cease participating. I have already described the demands of these various relations above.

As I demonstrated above, each mode of collaboration fosters certain virtues (Negotiation fosters honesty and good faith, for example) even while presuming self-interest, and each mode of collaboration specifies certain procedures which are obligatory for participants (Majority fosters solidarity and tolerance and demands adherence to meeting procedure, for example). All projects demand ethical dispositions from participants (Counsel demands modesty and deference to the Chief among the participants, while phronesis and the virtues of leadership in the Chief, for example). Each mode of collaboration is thus a combination of a virtue ethics, a procedural ethics and a deontology, but specific to the given mode of collaboration.

Any attempt to specify an ethics which takes no account of the collaborative relationship in which subject and other are engaged must be abstract and empty.

In any actual project there will be mores which constitute a kind of idioculture, specific to the object-concept of the project. Awareness of and respect for this idioculture is

obligatory on participants. For example, participation in a political party may forbid disclosure of internal information. General rules cannot encompass the infinite variety of such obligations.

In short, the Ethics of Collaboration is the imperative to learn how to collaborate in the concrete circumstances in which you find yourself.

Centuries before the maxim "charity begins at home" was coined, the Prophet Isaiah (58:7) had already said much the same thing. How do we ethically justify that we make great sacrifices for those who are socially close to us but feel no obligation to treat a beggar in India with the same largesse? If we ask what project mediates each relationship we find that those close to us are by definition those with whom we have a close relationship, such as the project of raising our family, or the project of elaborating Activity Theory, for example. But the only project mediating my relation to an Indian beggar is the foreign policy and aid program of the Australian government. As a voter and citizen in Australia, I bear moral responsibility for that policy and my obligation to that beggar flows from my participation in formulating Australian foreign policy (albeit marginal). My duty to the Indian beggar is answered by my duty to promote a more generous foreign aid program, and other measures which moderate global inequality, as a citizen of the Australian national project, *in addition to* the universal duties flowing from liberalism, expressed by Kant as the duty to treat others as ends in themselves. Neither ethic prevent me from jumping on a plane and flying over and giving the beggar something to eat, but I cannot say that I have an obligation to do that. Indeed, my children would rightly complain that I was neglecting my fatherly duty in doing so (if I had children).

If I work at a university, I know that the university operates by a complex mix of collegial committees deciding policy and a line management system operating from the Vice-Chancellor down. I know I am the moral equal of the V-C but also that if the V-C instructs me to do something, directly or via the management tree, other things being equal, I should comply. As a union delegate of course I may choose to *transgress* that obligation, but it remains a transgression and will be judged by history as such. On the other hand, if I am a member of one of those collegial committees, where the Vice-Chancellor sits with academics, admin. staff, deans and such like, I know that these committees use formal meeting procedures as developed by Majority decision making (though always striving to reach consensus). In that forum my only obligation is to adhere to meeting procedure with tolerance and solidarity. The Vice-Chancellor cannot tell me what to say and do and would not try.

And so on and so forth. *One's ethical duties and responsibilities in all cases flow from the norms of the relevant project.* That is Collaborative Ethics.