

Editorial

As I write, Bret Kavanaugh has just been sworn in the US Supreme Court, and we are a month away from the US midterm elections. There is no time for breath because the President and Mr McConnell are facing America with the stark picture of the radical Democrats who perpetrated the hoax of Professor Ford (<https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/wireStory/latest-trump-allegations-kavanaugh-hoax-58360806>). The true victims are Mr Kavanaugh, the Republican Party and all men, who are now vulnerable to any baseless accusation. The sheer speed of this response is calculated to do three things: create fear; bewilder; divide. There is no time to think about this, you have to decide now which side you are on. Just in case you think this is cynical politics Jerry Falwell reminds that the president is a 'moral person' (www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/oct/09/christian-leader-jerry-falwell-urges-trump-support-hes-a-moral-person).

Pause here and reflect. Part of the response of the President is to claim the moral high ground, the practice of responsibility. Of course, the speed of the response is simply a rallying cry, and along with fear it aims to create anger in the liberals, to provide further evidence of the mob mentality. They hope the "mob" will reinforce their claim of responsible leadership, and from this dynamic focus on an identity that will be the basis of a "win". So how might we explore responsibility in this maelstrom?

Appiah's (2018) recent book, based on the Reith Lectures of 2016, *The Lies that Bind*, might be helpful. Appiah is a great philosopher of identity, and he reminds us that any identity, cultural, religious, national is messy and complex. You might want to nail you moral colours to Immanuel Kant's great moral imperative: but be aware that for all his philosophical genius he was a racist. Despite such complexity there is a human impulse which Appiah refers to as the Medusa syndrome, turning the other to stone, totalising and isomorphising the other. It is the kind of psychology that Haidt (2013) outlines in the Righteous Mind, summed some time before by Private Willis in Gilbert and Sullivan's Iolanthe,

I am an intellectual chap,

And think of things that would astonish you.

I often think it's comical – Fal, la!, la!

How Nature always does contrive – Fal, la!, la!

That every boy and every gal

That's born into the world alive

Is either a little Liberal

Or else a little Conservative!

Fal, la!, la!

And the problem, says Haidt, is that neither can understand the moral universe of the other. And this is because the moral universe is precisely based in identity, and identity



is more than principles, it is about feelings and values and worth and relationship. So how are we going to bridge this gap? That depends of what gap you mean. A rickety bridge between two totalised groups will soon breakdown. It is the essentialism that is the problem, not least because it is expressed in what Fukuyama (2018), in another book about identity, suggests is the assertion of *megalothymia*, “the desire to be recognised as superior”. This is just what the President wants and just what the liberal protester’s want. It suggests a thirst for moral victory in which “victim” and “perpetrator” are both totalised. A remarkable book by Keenan (2012) analyses this in terms of the sexual abuse scandal in the Roman Catholic Church, and argues that:

By casting victims and predators as homogenised groups, each with identifiable symptoms and absolute and unchanging identities, further social injustices are likely to occur, this time couched in the language of social justice (Keenan, 2012).

In other words the social discourse should not be so much about winning a battle and more about recognising both shared and plural identities in ourselves and others. OK, but how do we do this? Appiah focuses on developing different ways of thinking. Fukuyama has a list of recommendation focusing especially on ways of developing a shared identity, such as introducing national service or enforcing state sovereignty. He even suggests creating a European legal identity. Such ‘practical’ attempts have some merit. National service, for instance, ties into the idea of a covenant of service with society. However, too great a focus on this precisely ignores the difficulties with developing identity and the armed forces, exemplified by the problems experienced in transitions to civilian life (Binks and Cambridge, 2018).

It could be argued avoiding the tyranny of identity ethics and devising positive ways of living with plural identity is precisely what developing responsibility is about (Bauman, 1989), and what at least part of this journal should be about. Hence, we want encourage not just “academic papers” but also practical examples and case studies to show effective practice. In this editorial, I will suffice with simply two examples of how this might be done.

There’s no business like slow business

Slow business seems as much an oxymoron as “ethical business”. Yes, I know these are stereotypic ideas, but there is something about slow business that seems to miss the point. We have to be on our toes, ready for the creative opportunity, ready with a team that can take advantage, ready with the finance and so on.

But there is also a danger lurking in this picture, the danger of haste. The precipitate move that does not take account of risk, the haste that leads to Fred Goodwin of RBS acquiring a Dutch bank without checking for toxic debt and so on. Speed has to be based in practice that enables the entrepreneur to understand what they are doing and understand the social and economic environment on which they operate. Being an entrepreneur needs more than a set of narrow skills, and if business schools have any worth they need to provide the foundation of the wider thinking and practice. Michelle Boulos Walker is an example of that rare being, a philosopher who wants to ground her ideas in practice (there I go again totalising philosophers!). Specially, she wants to push back against the corporatism of higher education as a whole, and argues for the need to cultivate slow philosophy.

Much of Higher Education has been taken over by an attitude that take us away from engaging the detail of an argument or a book. ‘Give me a summary’ is the supposed cry from students. Summarise the argument, the pros and cons, so that when

the exam comes I can set these out. Summarise these on a power point and let me have it a week before the lecture, so I can understand what is being talked about. . . .and will have the info even if I don't make it'. The ultimate in this distillation of data is when the CEO or the president says, just give me a side of A4, so I can decide from that what needs to be done. But a side of A4 cannot give you the cultural nuance, the relational ambiguity or the possibilities of extended partnerships. To find that you have to rely on people who have lived with this complexity and understand what they are talking about. In politics that means diplomats. In business that might mean board members who understand the firm and the community. In Higher Education, argues [Boulos Walker \(2017\)](#), in *Slow philosophy: reading against the institution*, it means taking seriously the authors of papers and books. It means, if you are a philosopher, going slowly.

Let's be clear this is nothing new. In the conclusion of her book she refers to the scene in Godard's 1964 film *Bande à part* where three young people run through the Louvre in an attempt to view all the art treasures in less than 10 minutes. In 2018 they would have recorded it all on smart phone and have evidence of what they saw, but no actual awareness of the aesthetic experience or what it meant. As the title of Boulos Walker's book suggests, she is pushing back against universities and business schools who are more concerned with measurement than substance, what [Bauman \(1989\)](#) and others referred to as instrumental rationality; efficiency trumps meaning and value. The job of an academic, and that includes students, is to engage ideas and practice fully; to take the time to read to book fully not just work from the summary. Far from this reinforcing higher education as abstraction it cultivates key academics skills: care for listening, understanding complexity, awareness of different narratives, engagement with and the capacity to hold together difference and ambiguity. She turns, of all people, to Nietzsche (beware totalising!) to sum up these ideas:

But for precisely this reason it is more necessary than ever today, by precisely this means does it entice and enchant us the most, in the midst of an age of 'work,' that is to say, of hurry, of indecent and perspiring haste, which wants to 'get everything done' at once, including every old or new book: this art does not so easily get anything done, it teaches to read well, that is to say, to read slowly, deeply, looking cautiously before and aft, with reservations, with doors left open, with delicate eyes and fingers ([Nietzsch, 1997](#), 5.5).

It is the same skills sets that are required of the engineering student as they are left on the building site to make sense of what is going on, and then report back; taking responsibility for exercising the senses and making sense. It is the same set of skills required in developing a case study; taking responsibility for learning and research, and listening to the different actors and how their narrative informs the 'case'. Far from hot-house philosophy Boulos Walker is arguing for the exercise of basic human skills which are critical to leadership, governance and government. It is worthwhile revisiting the Harvard Business Review fictional critique of a CEO (<https://hbr.org/2002/10/a-letter-to-the-chief-executive>) to see how easy it is for a board to just focus on outcomes and follow what others demand. Far from her work being abstract, she is pushing back at modern Higher Education which has focused in exactly the same way on outcomes, without articulating the worth of the university (cf. [Brink, 2018](#)). In effect she is saying start your work on identity not with grand ideas, but where you are in your everyday practice. Then you can begin to look at ways of pushing back and challenging, not so much against the institution but in the light of the shared core purpose, and how different professional groups might work together to achieve that. The slowness is to

do with understanding purpose and the plural narratives of the project. Based on that speed in decision making becomes easier and more effective.

The mid staffs hospital trust UK

This brings us to the second example, that of the Mid Staffs Hospital Trust ([Francis Report, 2010, 2013](#)). It took five reports to get the bottom of the scandal that resulted in possibly over a thousand unnecessary deaths. And at its heart was identity: institutional, professional, sector (healthcare), political, social, family, patients. Professions did not work together, unable to see how all shared responsibility for the project of healthcare. The nursing profession, especially, turned a Medusan stare on patients and families, concerned precisely for *megalothymia*. Patients and families were seen not just as nuisances, but people who tried to subvert the professionals. Governing bodies gave no time to listen to their constituents, and were unaware of the complexity of their organisations. Push back by whistleblowing professionals was seen as a threat to the institutional narrative; the achieving of a particular financial status. There was a culture of fear which caused different groups to act defensively and to deny responsibility.

The different groups were all operating in different moral universes, each of which had a set of principles and rationale. None of them were able to recognise any sense of *isothymia*, shared dignity or worth, which Fukuyama wants to argue for against *megalothymia*. And perhaps here lies the point that Fukuyama and Appiah do not quite get. Of course, dignity and worth are embodied in the particular other, but this only comes alive once one recognises both a worth which transcends any identity, the worth of humanity *per se* and of health as key element of humanity (a pre moral and pre institutional good), and also that this demands a plural identity in practice. The nurse has both a particular professional value narrative but also a narrative that transcends any group. The practice of phronesis, practical wisdom which reflects on and embodies purpose, is exactly what keeps the professional focused on both narratives.

The dynamics of these area, both Higher Education and Healthcare suggest, suggest then that the big ideas of Appiah and Fukuyama need both bigger ones, going beyond boundaries, institutional, regional and national, but also needs to be more focused in professional practice, in the detail where plural identity is critical to what is professed.

The articles in this edition of the *JGR*, the first time we have had four editions in a year, focus on making meaningful connections in the practice of Corporate Responsibility, in values, attitudes, decision-making and in workplace relationships. As such, CR becomes more focused on the identity of the organisation.

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