Editorial: denying responsibility

As I begin to write this editorial Mr Trump has announced the withdrawal of the USA from the Paris Climate Accord. Immediate assessments of this action vary, from "it will not make that much difference" (many of the related US regulations have already been taken out), to "this will spur remaining countries, states and cities to greater resolve", to "this will contribute directly to the effects of climate change". And, of course, we do not know what the effects will actually be. But this lack of clarity about the future is precisely central to the issue. Republican Senator Rand Paul, in supporting the case set up by the President (www. youtube.com/watch?v=oOavqvGtNas) suggests that we cannot make decisions without "facts" about the future. However, there are no facts about the future, only probabilities. This means that the responsibility of leaders, based on the data we have now, is to make responsible projections about the future. Any interpretation of data needs to include a plausible picture of causal connection, in this case between human action and climate change.

Paul then attempts to destroy the projections of scientists about the effects of climate change, noting alarmist pictures of "hundred foot waves" and so on. In other words he builds a "straw man", casting all scientists in the light of these extreme projections. The majority of scientists, however, offer much less extreme projections about the rise of sea level for instance. The point is that even these threaten as many as eighty landmasses, and many more coast lines. This raises massive questions about the responsibility of leaders for the future. Through the use of the straw man fallacy Mr Paul decides precisely that he, as leader, will take no responsibility for that future. He neither engages the majority of research seriously, nor does he engage the principle of prudence. This is a very basic level of responsibility, which goes like this, "just in case these projections turn out to be right we had better do something". The argument is, if global warming turns out not to be true, attempts to mitigate will simply involve loss of money. If it is true, and we have not prepared, we risk the very planet. This is the principle that has driven some cities in Florida, for instance, to start raising their street levels. At that level, of course, prudence operates as a matter of national security, recognized by the US military. It is the responsibility of leaders for national interest that Mr Paul then swiftly turns when challenged about the responsible use of science.

Before a closer look at that, however, an excursus. Republican Congressman Tim Walberg is quoted as saying that God will address climate change if it is real and that humans can do nothing to help the planet. As a Christian he has faith that "if there's a real problem, [God] can take care of it". (www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/republican-climate-change-god-will-take-care-if-real-tim-walberg-comments-global-warming-a7767346.html).

Jonas (1985) argued that with the age of technology man is faced by the imperative of taking responsibility for the future. Without the technical capacity of modern man, understandably, responsibility for the future was given to God. Now we can't get away with shifting responsibility to the divine! However, I would go further than Jonas's sociological analysis and argue theologically that the Abrahamic religions all demand that humanity take responsibility for the future right now, whatever the technical capacity. This is summed up in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 25-37), and the imperative (in all those religions) to work with the divine as co-creators (Sacks, 2006; Robinson, 2017; Pope Francis, 2015). Leaders who are religious and cast responsibility on to their deity are simply

denying their responsibility, and the demand of God for stewardship of creation. And ignorance ("if climate change is a reality") is no defence. The imperative of religious responsibility is to take seriously all science that helps us to understand creation, so that we can respond appropriately and creatively. And once we have engaged that, once we know what could happen, then we have no excuse, because then the actions of leaders are under judgement, from the divine, to future generations; which means starting to take grandchildren more seriously. There are some religious texts which go further and suggest when we do come face to face with the divine we will be held responsible even for the *unintended* consequences of our actions (Robinson, 2017). The whole point of this remarkable idea is that we are all *now* responsible being aware of how we affect the social and physical environment and for searching together for pathways that will sustain and enhance creation. Hence, Bauman (1989), for instance, writes of the moral self feeling it has never done enough.

This brings us right back to national security. Mr Paul basically denies responsibility for the wider world. Voted in by Americans we have to keep them safe. That's what a good leader should do, goes the argument. He lines up his argument by reference to research and moral principles. The research he uses suggests the loss of six million jobs as a result of following the draconian Paris agreement. The moral principle is one of fairness, which suggests China and India are being allowed to get away with not achieving targets. Using research is always problematic when you have just used a straw man argument to trash the opposite view. It gets even trickier when the research that is used comes largely from the conservative *Heritage Foundation* (www.heritage.org/environment/report/consequences-paris-protocol-devastating-economic-costs-essentially-zero). The key question of a responsible leader in using research is, have you critically assessed it. Responsibility starts from scepticism, checking and challenging. This is proper because all reports will tend have biases of different kinds. There is no evidence of such challenge from Mr Trump or the Republican party. The problem with the fairness argument is that it is built on a logical contradiction in how the Paris Accord is described. It is being characterized as both draconian, imposing targets and regulations, and yet open to negotiation. It can't be both, and isn't. The agreement involves openness for each nation to set their own targets. In other words there is no need to withdraw.

Leaders in the USA have made a decision which has global consequences based on uncritical and untested research, without detailed dialogue with international partners. This reinforces the point that responsibility is no just about moral responsibility, it includes responsibility for ideas, for truth and awareness of the social and physical environment and how we connect. And responsibility involves leaders bringing different factions together, around visions, values, truth and awareness; narrow thinking leads to polarization, Pittsburgh against Paris.

So what can have been the basis for the decision? Politics, interest groups ideology? Haidt (2013) suggests that behind most decisions are basic values that are kept in place by feelings- the importance of negative freedom (not being told what to do) is one that springs to mind. This is clearly at the heart of Trump's decision. No-one is going to push us around. Trump even suggested that America had regained sovereignty. Supporting "evidence" is then speedily assembled to show how the "other" is destroying key goods in America, not least jobs. It matters not that there are many other reasons for the decline of coal. The liberal environmentalists are the enemy who see the decline of coal as collateral damage. The dynamic is fascinating, involving a further denial of responsibility, in effect denial of agency; "We had to do it to save them". Like all denial this also involves declining any challenge to give an account of thinking. Hence, two days after the event there is still a deafening silence about whether the President believes in climate change. It is not

surprising: if he says he doesn't there will be a massive response from the scientific community; if he says he does then he will be held to account for how he answers this phenomenon.

None of this dynamic is new, and it makes it all the more important for all leaders, in business, the professions and religions to stand up and challenge such decisions (see especially Jerry Brown www.latimes.com/politics/essential/la-pol-ca-essential-politics-updates-gov-jerry-brown-on-the-paris-climate-1496347850-htmlstory.html). In effect they are filling the leadership vacuum.

Without such challenge two things will happen. First, our public discourse, how we think and speak about our shared life comes under threat. Good discourse connects and challenges people to share and create reality. This is why Trump's withdrawal feels so unreal. The words he uses do not reflect the reality of different experience, or even an attempt to grasp reality. The second thing is that we lose grasp on the key understanding of what it is to be human. To get that you need to move to metaphor. Here is the opening of Pope Francis's encyclical (2015):

> "LAUDATO SI', mi' Signore" – "Praise be to you, my Lord". In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.

Our relationship to the environment is one of interdependence. Like the trees of the wood-wide web (**********) we flourish when we cooperate. This means liberating justice from the confines of negative freedom and realising how we relate to the wider environment. The cry for justice then challenges the USA, who have around 4 per cent of the world's population and contribute almost a third of carbon emissions globally. The actions of the USA affect not just coal miners in Virginia, but river dwellers in Bangladesh. We are in this global boat together and what each does affects the others, negatively or positively. This is about universal responsibility, taking responsibility for myself, our nation, *and* our world. Mr Trump is much worse than a climate change denier, he is a responsibility denier; believing that the world is not his or America's responsibility. In doing that he doesn't just step on to the side-lines of neutrality, he turns his back on humanity.

This edition of the journal provides a good example of how the practice of responsibility connects these different aspects of leadership and also of different disciplines. It is not often that you find: moral psychology (neo-Kohlbergian perspective) rubbing shoulders with leadership studies (exploring the meaning of responsible leadership); leadership perception of time looking sideways at a communication lens on CSR; the relationship of ideology and values glancing backwards to how you develop criteria for professional practice, and so on.

The point is that global responsibility is not simply the function of a theoretical construct. It is focused in our experience, our identity, even our physical being. As you sit at your office or study desk you are operating in different ways that attempt to make sense of time, and each of these are mediated by the relationships you are involved in. Each of those communicate something about the value of your relationship (instrumental or intrinsic), and therefore something about you, your relationships, you identity, your value. Sternad and Kennelly set us off down this track, with the long term orientation of managers. Of course, we already know this from the credit crisis; short term thinking leads to disaster. But behind that is something about who we are and how we see the world. Treat time as *chronos*, and allow deadlines to dominate our understanding of time, and you literally lose sight of the social and physical environment; there is no time. . ..to engage and understand the rich value of our practice and relationships. Treat time as *kairos* and we link it to core value and

relationships. Time becomes the "right time" to bring together purpose, project and planet. I suspect there is much to come from these authors and time and space and management. One of the great Scottish theologians of the 1960s and 70s was Thomas F. Torrance, the author of *Space, Time and Incarnation*. His perspective was what he called scientific theology, connecting space and time to embodiment (in his case Christ). Our embodiment, what it is to be you and me in this place, is directly linked to time and space.

I purposely used the term value above and not values. Too often we use the word value in a loose way. I am never clear, for instance, what it means to *add* value. As if value is divisible, and you can simply add or subtract this substance; "this project now has fourteen different kinds of value!". However, determining value is matter of social judgment, and as Charles Taylor (1992) reminds us you can't do that without dialogue and comparing different view of value. Hence, Boltanski and Thevenot (2006) write about justification and negotiation of value. This means actually talking about what matters to you, and recognising what matters to others, and that includes ideology. It demands dialogue which also enables us to learn what that value is. Of course, ideology is a contested term. It certainly includes core understanding of value and what this is based on. Hence, values, by which we mean moral values are connected to the underlying value. Turker, Ozmen and Serkan, and Camilleri explore these connections in the context of so called social responsibility.

None of this is a million miles away from moral psychology and the work of Herrhausen which Kipper explores. The Kohlberg tradition, of stages of moral development, is, in effect, focused in the development of responsibility. The person develops through initial stages which focuses on a lack of self-determination, i.e. it is those in power who determine how you think and act, to later stages which focus on the person taking responsibility for articulating and justifying owned values in action.

Part of this involves the truthful and reliable presentation of the self (Aristotle's truthfulness *aletheia*). Hence, as Kpinpuo and Tuokuu note, how we communicate responsibly becomes critical.

The practice of responsibility always takes place in the context of power relations, and so one of the key questions is how the responsibility to stand up to the power structure is fulfilled. Anlesinya and Puni explore how one aspect of this, whistleblowing, is developed in the context of power distance cultures.

Two other articles in this edition explore areas that are relevant to leadership responsibility. The UN Global Compact (Coulmont, Berthelot and Paul) is itself in a position of leadership, with an aim of helping business reflect on global responsibility. This article builds on other work which helps to reflect on how such leadership as effected practice. Finally, Griege Frangieh and Yaacoub develop a literature review of responsible leadership academic work. Literature reviews are always more than useful, both in the development of theory and of practice. I am struck by the way in which the concept of responsible leadership increasingly moves away from systems to the practice of autonomy and authenticity. We lose both when we deny responsibility.

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