

An Organisational/ Business Ethics Acronym

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Today's news was about some of the largest internet corporations' being named and shamed for tax evasion. In these reports, the presenters rightly used moral language about organisations, attributing blame to them quite freely. Yet from the late 1970s till recently there has been a continuous debate in Applied Ethics about whether collective entities can be said to be moral or immoral, real agents, or even exist, with the negative side insisting that organisations, and presumably states, as in part "organisations of organisations", are "strictly speaking" amoral, not "really" existent, or non-agents. For a sample, see Velasquez (1982); Danley (1999); Miller (2002). It is a debate which should have been long over. States, cities, and organisations, composed of persons, while not persons, clearly exist as their personal effects, and can do good /wrong. Organisations are mainly the focus here. Through their internal structure's role- incumbents, organisations do good and bad things through CEOs and boards, and other internal role incumbents like operators, (managers and workers); enablers (investors and suppliers) in an ideally unified teleological structure. Incumbents can be said to have moral attributes like justice and fairness, relative to the organisation's goal and their role, as can the organisation as a whole, by analogy, to varying degrees, depending on the causality co-exercised by incumbent agents in authorised roles.

As argued elsewhere¹, responsibility for specific actions, composing collective organisational acts, can be sheeted back to the organisation via select individual role incumbents, wielding designated organisational role power and authority, in some respect, to some degree, relative to their role. If a board behaves badly, so does the organisation also, in that way and to that degree. ² Both role incumbents and the whole organisation are agents in different ways with reciprocal responsibilities. This paper retraces some of the arguments which were adduced previously, and deploys them in support of an acronym for organisational ethics, based on the quasi-person model of organisational agency. In the earlier papers, the limitations of both "methodological individualism", and full "corporate personhood" (French (1979);(1992)) for legal and ethical attributions of ethical responsibility, are spelled out. The "imaginative projection model" of Goodpaster and Matthews (Goodpaster and Matthews (1982)) and the idea of organisational action being allowed "in a secondary sense" (De George (1996); Donaldson (1982) Donaldson and Werhane (1977; 2007) are much preferable, and allow for talk about corporate "conscience", "reputation", "citizenship". They also allow for corporate memory, imagination, or perception.

But in these projection /secondary meaning conceptions it is not described in detail how they are grounded in the General Ethics of individual persons, or in Philosophical Anthropology. The alternative Quasi-Personhood Model (QPM) of organisation supports the last two accounts, (projection/secondary meaning) but allows for a fuller and better meta-ethical understanding of the coherence of Organisational Ethics and Business or Professional Ethics as sub-disciplines. It makes possible a more specific template to lay over organisational activity when assessing ethical matters-GREAOS-to be set out below, which identifies which organisational power is being engaged and by whom. And it permits a more coherent stakeholder model. Using Aristotle doctrine of analogy of attribution, it was argued against the reductionist case that the criteria for judging the worth of organised collective/corporate bodies and artificial persons are systematically related to those for judging natural persons to be voluntary choosers responsible for ethical

behaviour exercising capacities at three levels in a context. This paper recaps and builds on the previous argument.

Natural persons have *directing* intellects and wills with objects, like the ingredient goals of wellbeing, which can be symbolised as G; with other *operating* and *enabling* capacities which make up a repertoire, in a architectonic teleological structure, R, with the self's intellect directing operations of perception, sensation, and mobility, enabled by the autonomic system. Persons use ethical decision procedures, like casuistry, E, to choose to perform actions, A, in a context or domain; with consequences for others persons and players, O; and for the wider community/state which enables them, S. If all these features are ethically acceptable, the person's acts are ethical.

Organisations, as artificial persons, have analogues of each of these three levels and six properties. Organisations are personal effects of groups of leading, authorised persons creating an organisational goal G; designing a related role- structure, something like a natural person's repertoire, R, with analogues of the other features of direction, operation, enablement, in the structure; engaging in ethical decision making, E; authorising joint action, A, in a context; with impact on other stakeholders, O; and the communities and organisations represented in and by the state, S. Leader or director groups, (LG) as directing quasi-minds and wills, create lines of authority over operatives (managers and workers) and enablers (suppliers and investors), through which they can act in complex, morally assessable, organisational action or activity.

Once the stakeholder model suggested by the underpinning analogy is accepted, an acronym for organisational ethics, similar to the acronym POLC in management theory (Planning Organising Leading Controlling) widely used to introduce the essentials of Management, can be used to evaluate Organisational Ethics. The suggested acronym is GREAOS, explained in the paper, and defended against the alleged amorality of business corporations, and amorality of organisations in other domains.

A Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics (NAVE), or broadly conceived Natural Law approach (ANL), to ethical decisions, such as is taken here³, selects for adoption only certain of Aristotle's concepts and theses in *Metaphysics*, *Philosophical Anthropology*, *Politics*, and *Ethics*. It adopts, in principle, Aristotle's epistemological realism regarding possible knowledge of the types of sensible subjects, objects/ properties, and of types of ethical action; the possible attainment of truth about being and good in general, and of the common and personal good; the principle of non-contradiction; his broad description of teleological, architectonically structured, species-defining, human capacities in *De Anima*, Book 2, as generic (animal) and differential (reason); and of their optimum perfecting end-states as ultimate goals of wellbeing. Aristotle's broad description of the molar capacities of human nature -the "folk anthropology" of the phenomenon, datum, or explanandum of human nature-has stood up well for two thousand plus years. Our human capacities have correlative needs and need-satisfiers, making up the human good (wellbeing). Virtuous dispositions of capacities tend to result in meeting these needs with cooperation of others for the common good, and so in individual wellbeing. Wellbeing is the basis of his notion of "the common good" as the focus of politics, ethics, and of law.

NAVE/ANL can be extended to include some sort of God. But the ethics and meta-ethics pivots on an account of human wellbeing, and the virtuous means to it, *whatever the highest in the set of goods and beings turns out to be*, and not necessarily God. Some extensions or alternate versions of NAVE, like Thomism, add into Natural law an

analogically described God, complex overlays of Divine law, and a doctrine of revealed Providence to the NAVE /ANL basis presumed here. This entails some important differences from secular ethics in the motive and scope of morality .It is important to the argument that organisations and their incumbents can be moral seekers of wellbeing without the belief in theism and Revelation; that only some shared ethical content and ontology is required to run the meta-ethics of wellbeing and the organisational acronym, not that we accept either Aristotle’s essentially secular ethics or Thomism. We need only show organisational moral agency and ethics to be possible, not give a comprehensive account of it motive/scope.

NAVE recognises enhancement of the personal, higher capacities of intellect and will in knowledge, culture, friendship, and love, in a social/political community, as being at the core of human need-satisfaction and wellbeing. If we graph human independence and age, we can imagine a bell curve graph of age and independence, having low independence points at birth and old age, and high points in the middle of life. Social groups as wholes must organise for the common good and take care of the dependent groups flanking the large centre in order to survive and flourish via cross- generational Ethics, managing survival, perpetuation, science, and culture. Families (parents/elders and children) are the pivotal groups protected by NAVE precepts. What is morally right can still reasonably be taken to be what tends to produce this good: the natural goods of true human wellbeing, as exhibited in the ideal/best “congratulate-able” human lives. ⁴

¹ For the arguments see “A Quasi-Personal Alternative to Some Anglo-American Pluralist Models of Organisations: Towards an Analysis of Corporate Self-Governance for Virtuous Organisations”, *Philosophy of Management* Vol 10, No 3. (2011) pp 41-58; “Presuppositions of Collective Moral Agency: Analogy, Architectonics, Justice, and Casuistry,” Vol 11 no 2 (2012) pp5-28;” A Critique of Some Anglo-American Models of Collective Agency in Business,” Vol12, # 3, pp 5-26 ((2013) “Towards an Acronym for Organisational Ethics: Locating responsible agents in collective entities”, ” Vol16#2 pp137-160 (2017). These will be referred to as papers 1-4

² Paper 3

³ The case for Neo-Aristotelian Natural Law is not made here. Much of it is based on what Aristotle called dialectical reasoning-an informal procedure in which one treats a proposition as not deducible from any more reasonable or credible proposition, but “self-evident to the wise”. For example, the principle of identity or non-contradiction cannot be deduced from other principles more certainly known, but one can show its denial to have unwelcome consequences, like ending further discussion.

⁴ Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian folk anthropologies are of course notionally different but also posit capacities and attribute consciousness and understanding, desire, sensation and mobility, to humanity, so are largely congruent at this abstract level, and analogues of the golden rule appear in all cultures.