# Ideal Engagements Among Collectives and Individuals (Social Contract, Part 7)

### Season 6, Episode 7 – originally released 25 May 2021

*Please note: This transcript has been edited for clarity.*

> *So over the past two episodes in the series on the social contract, I laid out six principles that should guide our efforts to renegotiate it. I started with three principles focused on the ideals of the collective that any solution to significant problems must involve synthesis regarding what is just what is equitable and what is fair. In the most recent episode, I added three more that reflect the opposite orientation from the individual to the collective, the ideal member, and that any solution to significant problems must involve synthesis regarding what are the appropriate duties of members, what members are obligated to provide the organization, what constitutes loyalty? What does it mean to belong? Now it's time to provide the rest of the principles from the collective to the environment and among individuals.*
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> *My name is Tom Galvin and these are my Reflections on Management.*

So there's a combination of aspects in which the principles capture both formal requirements, which go either from the collective to the individual and the individual back [to the collective], that may very well seem to be quite transactional in nature. What the collective provides to the individual is based on what the individual provides to the collective. There's normative aspects which one would say is kind of expectations or what is preferred or desired for members to do, and for collectives to foster the ability of the members to fulfill their obligations. And then there's affect. And this is where we get into how does a member feel about being part of the collective and how does the collective feel about its own members? So this is sort of a trio of formal and informal and effective kind of reminds one of institution theory, particularly the three pillar type of institution theory, which one reads in, say, the work of W. Richard Scott, whose book Institutions and Organizations I've used quite extensively in my work, that has kind of helped think through some of the different ways in which we think about the manifestation of social or organizational issues that have a moral or an ethical component.

Because there are formal aspects that define the ethics or the morality of a situation. From the collective perspective, there's norms that are almost always at play. And there is also how the organization, you know, how the collective and how the members feel about each other and themselves. The nice thing is, is that this helps us think a little bit more comprehensively of all of the different types of principles that may be in play when we get differing views to the table for a negotiation, where do these views come from? And so so I've covered basically two perspectives -- collective to the individual, individual to the collective -- and we have what I think to be two more to

go one being from the collective to the environment and one being individual to individual, regardless of collective. So it's basically any form of interpersonal communication.

So let's start with the collective to the environment, how it takes its own identity as a collective and projects itself -- it projects its image. This is one of those things where the group-ish behavior that Jonathan Haidt in a righteous mind talks about, that we will tend to follow the will of the collective if the collective represents the individual's worldview or wishes to the expense of rational thought over the issue at play. When we make a group emotional decision about what is something that either angers us or violates us, it's very easy to suppress or to basically submit entirely to the will of the collective. Haidt kind of shows this, which then in turn potentially limits the options when it comes to a negotiation with a party who strongly disagree with. So I think it's really kind of important to think about what sort of principles are at play that are important to any collective, regardless in describing what would be the ideal interactions with the environment.

I've identified three principles--one of them is sovereignty, one is representation, and one is social responsibility. Let me first talk about sovereignty. This is sort of the formal aspect of the collective boundary to the environment, because this literally defines the boundary, the existence of a collective. And we're going to have collectives be part of this overall negotiation on social issues. Then there has to be a very clear understanding of how a particular collective defines its boundary, defines who its members are and who are not members, what is in the organization or in the collective versus what is outside the collective and how porous that boundary is.

Some collectives may very well rely on a very rigid, formal boundary that you're either in or out. Or in other instances, it could very well be very, very loose. And you're either in or out. The members are in or out based on their own will and based on their commitments to other organizations, a more permissive environment. It becomes a matter of the collective will -- what do they include and what do they exclude? What do they decide to include and what do they decide to exclude? And how does that manifest in terms of a particular issue, a good example of this collectives having a very porous boundary. You can think about a group that has a small core membership that they're very, very focused on a specific issue such as voting rights, such as anti-discrimination or anti-domestic violence or what have you. Their core membership are those who firmly embody the entirety of the organization. Then when an issue comes in, they might see a ballooning of members -- people interested in the issue who latch on to or join the collective. And then once that particular emergency has subsided, then perhaps active membership shrinks again.

Now, the reason why you'd want to understand this is because in the case of a social issue where I've already discussed that there's no permanent solution, then the question becomes to what extent does the collective really, truly represent the will of the members or just the will of its core membership? And so that brings us to the second one, the second [principle], which is representation. How much is the collective truly representing everyone and how much is the collective allowing individuals, its own members to advocate for it? Is this a matter where individual members can basically present the message, or must it come from solely the the top membership of the collective? How does it handle disagreements with other collectives or how does it handle gaps and

inconsistencies within its own among its own members? All of these would be important parts about how representative the collective is to the outside environment.

Again, with the social issues, this becomes important because if a party is going to be at the table to negotiate on behalf of a rather broad collective of people such as the public, such as a particular racial or ethnic group or other minorities, or a union representing workers or any of those other types of groups, their credibility in terms of how well they represent the views of the members is an important part that helps determine the strength of their advocacy when it comes to doing the actual negotiation.

And then the third one is social responsibility. And this is one that's really going to be kind of touchy because social responsibility has taken on somewhat of a negative meaning because it sort of turned into a fad, some would argue some time ago where organizations or collectives were advocating political issues that were not necessarily tied to their core mission, but were basically there to promote the organization or project an image of the organization being good. And at the same time, by taking a stand and speaking out against a particular injustice, the prestige of the organization was being enhanced or in some ways denigrated because of those who may have taken the opposite view on that particular issue. Now, social responsibility in my use here is a little bit more in general, like a companion to what I talked about member responsibility in the previous episode. The collective should exist to better itself and to better the environment.

So now what I want to do is I want to recap these three principles and show how they come together to describe kind of the idealized collective involved in the social issue. The principle of sovereignty means that the organization or the collective has a firm grasp of its boundary between itself and the environment. The principle of representation determines the extent to which this organization truly represents the interests of its members to the outside. One can see this as a as a choice between very strong centralized control or decentralized autonomy. But again, the point is, is that the organization should have a clear understanding and project the extent to which it speaks for its members. And then the social or social responsibility principle is about how the organization engages with the environment for a purpose beyond the organization's or collective's own mission.

The ideal organization goes a little bit further than just what it claims as its purpose or mission, and in general wishes to bring about positive change in the environment regardless and is willing to accept a certain amount of risk to do so. So there's controversy associated with all three of these, obviously. So and it really comes down to all of the different groups that are going to come forward and be part of the discussion or wish to be part of the discussion on a particular issue. I'm not concerned so much about the formal ones that are established organizations that are that have a very, very clear boundary, very, very clear mission, set of interests, very well known, what they are, what they're about, things like, you know, political organizations, law firms, unions. I mean, you know, any of those that that really have been around for a while.

The greater question comes down to those that that pop up or assemble somewhat on a more informal or an ad hoc basis to represent or certain groups of individuals. On a particular issue, we

should not assume that the principles favor the more formal, long standing organizations, necessarily what it's about is how well does a organization or a collective contribute to the conversation? To what extent are they oriented on positive change in the environment? Ad hoc groups or informal groups may very well have a tremendous advantage in this regard. And the thing is, is that we don't want the conversation to exclude them out of hand. And this is where the principles, I think, really come to play because it provides a basis for understanding what kind of contributions can a particular collective make, even if the collective is only there just for that one issue and then would disappear thereafter. So that's the three principles that work from the collective to the environment.

The other three principles that I want to get into are more interpersonal, and these are ones from individual to individual, regardless of collective. It's basically how we deal with each other as individuals. I think these three are going to be straightforward, so I'll run through them quickly and then kind of talk about, well, what do we do with these all of these principles? The three principles are going to be self-determination, respect and love.

Self-determination [is] that an individual should have a fair and reasonable opportunity to make their own decisions, pursue their own goals. How one defines oneself can be an individual choice. People may very well desire to have the ability to define and redefine themselves. At the same time, individuals subordinated themselves to an extent which each collective that they belong to, but the extent to which that they subordinate themselves would still remain, at least to some degree, a matter of choice.

Now, as an interpersonal principle, self-determination isn't just about how one determines one's self, but what freedom one affords to another individual to determine themselves. And I hear in the news or I hear discussions about individuals saying what's wrong with those whose perspectives are different? A certain question kind of comes to mind. That's that I hear regardless of what the issue is or where the particular individual stands, it is who are you to tell me who I am? That's kind of like the essence of it. When we talk about interpersonal relationships and the acceptance of one's self and the acceptance of other people, the disagreement comes down to, you know, sort of protecting ourselves from being told what to do by those with whom we don't wish to follow. But the challenge we always face is that in the process of defending ourselves, we have to guard against imposing ourselves on the other. Otherwise we haven't actually gained anything. From a moral standpoint. There are simply turns the tables and charges us with imposing our will on them.

Now there is a balancing act that is naturally the case with self determination because sometimes the individual desires will conflict with that of the collective will. I think a clear example of this is social media. So to what extent is the the collective have a say so over what an individual decides to be or do in their social media feeds? The individual may be doing this outside of the workplace. And so to what extent is the workplace have the right to govern an individual's remembers behavior 24/7, 365? That actually depends very much on the type of an organization to which the individual belongs. So that self determination.

Respect is to show each other dignity. And this would seem black and white. Of course, we want everyone to show each other dignity and it should be at all times. But respect is a little bit more nuanced because we still need a competition of ideas to help everyone learn and grow. And of course, it's hard to avoid getting emotional when you're dealing with those whose morals are utterly abhorrent to yourself. The key with this is that we need the competition of ideas to help learn and grow. We need to teach ourselves to not reject ideas out of hand on the basis of where the idea came from. So we're really about here is conflict resolution or the potential for conflict resolution. It's an orientation. You know, it's and it's and it's kind of normative. I mean, we approach conflict through the eyes of seeking opportunities for either reconciliation or mitigation, but not escalation. Can we resolve a conflict without resorting to disrespect? Now, in my mind, this is the interpersonal principle which is the most easily violated because it is so easy to just simply hurl insults. And the thing is, is that it makes for great television. It makes for great reality TV. People love conflict. But unbridled conflict does not resolve tough social problems. We have to be able to agree to disagree and be able to have a respectful conversation if there's any real change, any real lasting change going to come from a decision based on a controversial social issue. We simply have to get away from the insults.

And finally, there's love and I'm not talking love the way we usually mean it. I'm talking a more philosophical version of love, the desire, will, and the ability to promote the good in another person. And that is any other person. And this is a little different from respect because respect is about conflict resolution. Love here is about engagement. How do we engage with others? The admonition to love your enemies is very appropriate here because this is where we cease looking at the other as competition and instead look at them as a human being. Respect only encourages us to sit at the table with them, but we would still potentially turn our back to them afterwards. We should want to grow together as well because we ultimately have to live with the other and with the decisions that we make together to solve a problem. It's an orientation to build bridges. It doesn't necessarily mean that you have to accept their ways or adopt them, but what you should do is allow for the dialogue to take place. Why we see it's so hard in a polarized situation, why we just don't see very much room for real solutions, because real solutions require a certain amount of empathy. There require a certain amount of willingness to look at the good of another side than to denigrate them utterly.

Now, of the twelve principles, respect and love are really the foundations for all of it. If you don't have those two, none of the other ten are possible. I think, you know, in a lot of ways this is where we get into what I said at the beginning of Part 5, that we have to rethink the way in which we compete with each other, the way in which we deal with each other, the way that we deal with our opponents. The principles in toto give us a sense of what right more or less looks like, at least from the ways of getting it done. But what I haven't covered yet is the how to how does the actual negotiation or what does it actually look like? How do we really no-kidding get people to the table and lay out their different perspectives that these on an issue that these principles help us to describe. That is going to be the subject of the final episode of the series coming up next week.

*… And that's all for now. The views expressed are my own and do not necessary reflect the United States Army War College, the United States Army or the Department of Defense. Thank you for listening and have a great day.*

All the Best!

Tom Galvin