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IMAGING THE VOLUNTARY ACTOR

An exploration of the nature of the voluntary actor and of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action

A Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

At the University of Dublin

Trinity College

by

Andrew O'Regan

2008

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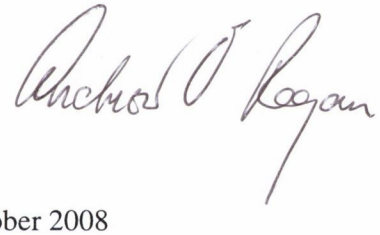
Signed 

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Summary

The emerging academic field of voluntary action, nonprofit or third sector studies is a multi-disciplinary, social science field that addresses the phenomenon of voluntary action as an organised endeavour in society. In this context, this dissertation examines the functioning of the individual as social actor. Specifically, the following questions are addressed:

> *What is the nature of the voluntary actor? And, as an extension of this question, what is the nature of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action?*

A review of the literature in the academic field found that, within this literature, determined or self-maximising conceptualisations of the individual as actor predominated. As a result, the conceptualisation of the role and functioning of the individual relative to the phenomenon of voluntary action appears under-developed. This seemed incongruent given the implication of 'voluntaryness' within the literature and its referencing in definitions, classifications and other elements of the literature's nomenclature.

From among the various disciplines that have been applied to the field of voluntary action, sociology, insofar as it is centrally concerned with the relationship between the individual and society, was identified as the discipline most appropriate to this exploration of the voluntary actor. To place the idea of 'voluntary actor', that is, the individual as social agent, at the centre of the research question, it was necessary to conduct research within a social science paradigm that was consistent with such a conceptualisation of the individual in society. Hence, this research was conducted within the interpretative paradigm, that is, a nominalist onotology, an anti-positivist epistemology, a voluntarist view of human nature and an ideographic methodology.

Consistent with paradigmatic positioning, an interpretative research methodology was used. A social constructionist approach to the collection of life-stories by narrative interviews was utilised. This led to the composition of a series of existential, phenomenological, biographical cases studies of individuals who had contributed significantly to voluntary action over the course of their lives.

These narratives were analysed for instrumental and collective meaning via multiple linked iterative analyses of increasing abstraction. From these analyses a complex and multi-faceted image of the voluntary actor has been developed. Simplified, the details of the image may be noted under the three aspects of (i) a self-enactment in social dialectic, (ii) a personal orientation to social value, and (iii) organised action. Taking these elements together, the image of the voluntary actor arising from this thesis is:

> *The voluntary actor is an individual who, in a process of existential self-enactment, gives organisational expression to his / her personal orientation to the creation of social value.*

When the context and impact of the actor's social environment are included as a necessary condition for voluntary action in society, then a four-part interpretative hypothesis of voluntary action in society can be seen. This is articulated as:

> *Voluntary action in society arises from the individual's existential impulse to self-enactment, developed in a dialectic relationship with the social environment, directed towards organised action for social ends, and carried out within an institutional context that itself recognises and legitimates such organising and such social ends.*

While the image of the voluntary actor and the hypothesis of voluntary action proposed above constitute the primary findings of this thesis, five secondary findings and 16 observations are also detailed.

The thesis concludes with a call for the development of a multi-paradigmatic discourse in voluntary action studies and suggests directions and questions that might be pursued *via* a programme of interpretative research.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is based on research that was collaborative in nature. As such, the research required the full engagement of the participants and their openness to the research process. Without their commitment to this process, the whole undertaking would not have been possible. And so, my first thanks goes to the seven remarkable individuals whose life-stories lie at the heart of this work: Eithne Frost, Ann Louise Gilligan, Catherine Hickey, Sean Love, Pat Nolan, Fergus O'Ferrall, and Patricia Prendiville.

Of course, as well as being an exploration of the human condition, this thesis is a formal academic investigation, conforming to specific institutional requirements. For their wisdom and guidance in helping me to navigate these waters, I thank my supervisors, Dr. Gemma Donnelly-Cox and Dr. Freda Donoghue.

Although it is rarely articulated as such, undertaking a PhD is essentially a selfish pursuit, part of the cost of which is borne, not by the researcher and writer but by those closest to him. And so my final and heartfelt thanks goes to Adrienne, my wife, and to our children, Muireann, Síofra, Daragh and Sorcha, for having supported me, and my demands, during this process.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 An emerging field of academic enquiry

The nature of the literature on voluntary action reflects its emergent status as a field of academic enquiry. The basic building blocks of the discourse, definitions, concepts, and theories, remain under developed and reflective of their disciplinary origins. The attempt at a multi-disciplinary discourse continues to be problematic and at times strained. Nevertheless, these challenges are to be expected when a large domain of social relationships are addressed simultaneously by economists, sociologists, political scientists, social-psychologists, management scientists, social and political historians, amongst others. Further, the energy generated by such a contested discourse is likely to act as a spur towards the resolution of problems. However, as a practitioner coming to this literature first hand and listening to the academic debates in conference my impression was less one of contestation than of consensus. Such consensus was all the more baffling in that there seemed to be a deep disconnection between my experience of voluntary action and the research concerns of the academic community. This disconnection presented a direct problem. If the lived experience and the academic literature were inconsistent with each other, did that mean that either one or the other was false, perhaps naïve, self-deluding, or at least, not reflecting 'reality'. Although life experience alone suggested that the truth was unlikely to lie in such a bipolar contrast, the dissonance between the two worlds constituted an intellectual as a well as a personal dilemma for me. The work in this thesis is concerned with attempting to resolve this dilemma by finding a way of exploring the possibility of the individual as a voluntary sector actor that is consistent with a valid academic framework.

The idea of the third sector, the nonprofit or independent sector, or of civil society, has increasingly entered political and popular and academic discourse over the last three decades. This development in interest has mirrored a growing awareness of the importance of the sector to our social and economic well-being. In the United States, political ideology, a capitalist economy and traditions of self-help and self-reliance have supported a rapid growth of the nonprofit sector in terms of organisational and economic importance. Within a strong legislative and fiscal framework, the nonprofit sector in the United States has developed a substantial institutional presence and delivers a clear articulation of its place and function in society. The economic failures of the welfare state and the emergence of third way politics in many European

countries, the role of civil society in first critiquing and then rebuilding the state in Eastern Europe, the European Commission's engagement with the European citizen and the notion of a democratic deficit, and the growing importance of national and international Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in terms of shaping the public agenda and debate, are all evidence of the increasing influence accorded and attention given to this sector. Concomitant with the spread of globalisation these central themes of civil society as a space for the negotiation of the democratic political process, and of nonprofit organisations as a legitimate route to the provision of services and the delivery of entrepreneurial responses to social problems are finding new audiences in developing countries and in new market economies.

The academic discourse that has tracked and at times led these changes has emerged from a growing interest in the third sector within the social sciences in general. The discourse has drawn on a range of disciplines including economics, sociology, social-psychology, political science and management science. In addition the discourse is also of interest to academics in the humanities in areas such as history and law. As this discourse develops, it is beginning to take shape as a distinct field of scholarship in its own right. This academic institutionalisation is evidenced in international associations, university centres and their associated research programmes, library units, education programmes, peer-reviewed research journals, chairs and so on.

Within the academic literature on voluntary action the investigative emphasis is on issues such as the enumeration and functioning of nonprofit organisations or on their social and political role in civil society. When the question of the individual and the organisation is approached the focus is on the concept of volunteers and typically either (a) their management as an organisational resource or (b) explaining the sociological functions served by volunteering.

Having pursued an educational career in which the notion of the individual as social actor was an integrating theme and having worked in a range of Irish voluntary nonprofit organisations for a decade, I approached the academic literature with a set of preconceptions relative to how voluntary action would be presented in the discourse. To my initial surprise, these preconceptions were not reflected in the academic literature.

The approaches in the literature to understanding the functioning of the individual relative to voluntary action struck me as pursuing a rather narrow approach to understanding the apparent anomaly of non-market actions on the part of individuals living in a market paradigm. At an intuitive level it seemed to me that while social structure explained the shape of sectors in given societies, social structure failed to fully explain the presence of these sectors in societies. Further, at the level of individual action there were some important questions to be pursued that might increase the depth of our understanding of the expressive function of voluntary activity. My intuition was that the origins of voluntary organisations may also be examined in terms of the actions or reactions of individuals to social structure or the consequences of social structure. Of course this suggestion shifts the emphasis of the question from the study of the social structures to the study of the individual and individual action in society.

And so, in undertaking the research for this dissertation, I was interested in understanding the actions and the meanings of individuals who devote a major portion of their lives to activity described as 'voluntary' in everyday speech. Typically, these were individuals who pursued voluntary or non-profit organisational activity as the main, or as a personally-significant, socially-oriented activity in their lives. In some instances these individuals were organisation starters, or organisation transformers - often working in an unpaid or substantially underpaid context (in that similar skills and effort deployed in a for-profit market could reasonably be anticipated to generate a substantially greater remuneration). Such individuals were chosen for my exploration because I surmised that they would be capable of articulating an explanation of their actions with some clarity. Perhaps in such examples of individual action could be found some insights to help understand voluntary action less objectively and more subjectively; to see it as the participants see it; to see it as these voluntary actors see it.

Given the foregoing, my prime research question is:

> ***What is the nature of the voluntary actor? And, as an extension of this question, what is the nature of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action?***

Of course, the use of the word 'nature' in this question was purposely vague because the question is exploratory rather than confirmatory in character. In practice, I was required to pursue a series of related questions rather than approach the research question directly. Hence the detail of the research is concerned with subjective orientations, meanings and intentions, individuals' understanding of the world and their place within it, and the thread of their biographies. These concerns are all elements of the prime question such that it is answered by their composition and synthesis.

It is somewhat ironic perhaps that my initial interest in these questions was spurred by organisational and managerial concerns. I was interested first of all in the problems of nonprofit management. While at one level such problems seemed much the same as the problems of for-profit management and hence amenable to a fairly simple translation of for-profit perspectives to a nonprofit context, on another level the distance between non-profit and for-profit management seemed paradigmatic in nature. This is the case insofar as the for-profit organisation is driven by the logic of profit, which is the logic that makes sense and meaning of the organisation and of the actions of people within it. In the nonprofit sector however, some different logic may pertain, because such organisations are not involved in the pursuit of profit.

I should note at this stage that I came to these questions having following a second level education that emphasised individual action and responsibility, a primary degree in History and Philosophy and post-graduate degree in History. The post-graduate research is particularly relevant to the enquiry in this thesis, for while ostensibly it concerned an examination of local politics in the face of increasing Crown control and centralisation in 16th Century Ireland, the questions it ultimately raised were ones of competing world-views and the sense-making and actions of individuals and social groups who held such views.

It is perhaps inevitable and appropriate to a piece of research like this present one that it adopts or takes on the nature of an intellectual journey, a travelogue of the mind, if you like. I now realise in retrospect that the dissonance between experience and explanation that I felt so evident and so peculiar at the start was the least to be expected from asking questions in an interpretative paradigm while seeking answers in a literature grounded in functional paradigm. The obvious approach to the task is to hold to one paradigm and ask and answer a question within the same conceptual framework.

And while in essence I have sought to do this, I also attempt to examine what one paradigm may have to say to the understandings of another paradigm in relation to this question of the 'voluntary actor'.

1.2 Structure of this dissertation

The structure of this dissertation reflects the shape of the intellectual journey of enquiry referred to above. In Chapter Two, titled *In Search of the Voluntary Actor*, the literature on voluntary action is examined at the level of the sector, the organisation and the individual, with a view to exploring the underlying conceptualisations of the role of the individual as a formative force in relation to voluntary action. It is found that determined models of the human condition appear to dominate the discourse. Thus humans are seen typically as either being predetermined by psychological or biological conditioning or post-determined by sociological conditioning. Such models appear to leave little room for human action that is determined by a reflexive self. However, sociology as a discipline centrally concerned with the nature of the relationship between the individual and society, is open to a variety of perspectives on the parameters of this relationship. In particular, interpretative sociologies appear to offer a route towards the investigation of the meaning of individual action. The approach is complicated by the everyday attribution of concepts of 'free choice' and a 'moral quality' to much action in the voluntary sector. Such concepts are difficult to approach in sociological terms and so are addressed philosophically towards the end of the chapter.

My dissatisfaction with the paradigm-bound and determined conceptualisation of the individual in much of the voluntary action literature moved the question from the literature to a search for an appropriate paradigm in which to pursue the issue of the relationship between individual action and voluntary organising. Chapter Three, *In Search of Method,* is centrally concerned with this and moves from a discussion of paradigm to the examination of a range of interpretative methodologies and of appropriate data collection methods. The chapter concludes with the identification of the choice of paradigm, methodology and method utilised in this research. The later sections of the chapter provide a fuller consideration of the challenge of interviewing as an approach to data collection. In particular the task of life-story development and the role of narration in the process of individual sense making are examined. The

exploration of method is then concluded with a discussion of the ontological and epistemological nature of interpretation.

With the research paradigm, methodology and method identified in Chapter Three, the attention moves to the collection and development of the life-stories of individuals with a substantial involvement in voluntary organising. The procedure utilised in this research is detailed. Synopses of seven such stories, arising from the joint interpretations of the respondents and the researcher are presented in Chapter Four, *Joint Interpretations.* The extended life-stories are provided in the Appendices. These life-stories were secured through a series of interviews. These were transcribed and the transcripts formed the basis of the life-stories as presented. The inter-subjective and interpretative nature of these life-stories is acknowledged. Thus, although positioned as a 'data' chapter within the formal dissertation format, Chapter Four is, in fact, the first iteration of an analytical process aimed at understanding the meaning and sense-making of the respondents.

The full analysis is composed of eight iterative abstractions from the original life-histories and life-stories as told in interview. This analysis runs from Chapter Four through Chapter Eight. Chapter Five, *The Experience of Meaning,* continues the analysis with an examination of lived experience and the identification of emerging themes in the life-stories. Chapter Six, *The Construction of Coherence,* commences with an analysis of the narrative structure and the role of narration in the life-stories. The discussion then moves to an exploration of the manner in which continuity and coherence are constructed via the adoption and development of personal meaning systems. Again, themes that cut across these stories are identified.

In Chapter Seven, *Imaging the Voluntary Actor*, the continuing process of analysis by abstraction serves to identify aspects of the dialectic process between the individual and the social environment through which the self is constructed and expressed. Finally, the particular emphases and orientations relative to the praxis of this dialectic, that appear to be shared by the life-story respondents, are identified. It is now possible to propose an answer to the first part of the research question, *'what is the nature of the voluntary actor?'* and this is detailed in the final section of the chapter.

Having moved to a point in the analysis where an image of the voluntary actor has been proposed, Chapter Eight is concerned with the second part of the research question, *'what is the nature of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action?'* and the nature of this relationship is proposed therein. The discussion then moves to a reconsideration of aspects of the voluntary action literature in the light of these research findings. The chapter concludes with a proposal for the reframing of the voluntary action literature to allow for an interpretative understanding of the voluntary actor, voluntary organisations and the voluntary sector.

In the final chapter, Chapter Nine, a number of conclusions and observations arising from the findings of this research are outlined. These range from the specific, such as the conceptualisation of the 'voluntary actor', to a more general reflection on the potential for broadening the scope of research into voluntary activity.

1.3 A note on nomenclature

Reflecting its range of disciplines and national backgrounds, the developing academic literature on voluntary action is beset by a confused nomenclature. Indeed, it is not possible to sensibly discuss this literature without regard to the nuanced differences in meaning between nouns, ostensibly referring to the same phenomenon but originating in different disciplinary or national settings. And so, at any given point in the discussion, I use language consistent with the literature being discussed. Where I have greater freedom of choice I look to the following scheme:

When referring to notion of sector I utilise the term 'Third Sector' as it identifies the sector as a unit rather than a collection and serves to position the unit relative to the other sectors in society.

When referring to phenomena at the level of the organisation I utilise the term 'voluntary organisation' as opposed to nonprofit or charitable or third sector organisation or any of the other variants of the theme. Of the possible terms on offer, 'voluntary organisation' is the one most consistent with the line of argument in this dissertation.

When referring to phenomena at the level of individual, I use a variety of terms. In relation to the seven research respondents, the terms narrators, story-tellers, and

respondents are used as best fits the particular discussion. More generically I utilise the term 'voluntary actor' to describe individuals active in voluntary organisations. The term carries a number of meaning references and these are outlined in the text below. Suffice to note at this point that the term is to be distinguished from the notion of 'volunteer' as popularly conceived.

When referring to action at the level of the sector, the organisation and the individual, I utilise the term 'voluntary action'.

Although it is somewhat counter to normal practice in academic dissertations, I utilised the personal pronoun throughout the work. My purpose in doing so is clear. The research that is reported on in this dissertation was carried out in an interpretative paradigm. The inter-subjective nature of this work is fully recognised and it is important that the reader is continually alerted to this inter-subjective nature. My use of the personal pronoun is intended to serve as a regular reminder.

Chapter 2 In Search of the Voluntary Actor

Introduction

My general approach to dealing with a problem is to seek to understand it through deconstruction. The process is a straightforward one of asking questions such that they guide towards formulating that question that goes to the heart of a matter. The premise is that such a question directs attention towards the solution to the problem, for such a question is only arrived at as the nature of the problem is understood. And so, I began my enquiry for this thesis research by asking why is there such a phenomenon in society as the 'third sector', or more specifically, a sector in which activity is privately organised and resourced for the benefit of a non-contributing party or parties? How is it that such organisations are able to draw resources from their environment on an ongoing basis? What causes such organisations to emerge? Questions such as these, set at a societal or organisational level, beg the question at the level of the individual, *viz.* why do people engage in behaviour ostensibly for the benefit of others? Such behaviour certainly seems worthy of comment. It appears to run counter to the dominant market paradigm in our society, for example. Yet the willingness of individuals to engage in such behaviour may be central to the origination and maintenance of much of the activity in the non-profit sector. It seemed, therefore, that it would be useful for me to seek explanations at the level of the individual. Indeed, while recognising that intra and inter organisational relationships, as well as the wider socio-political environment, clearly form the context and environment in which this individual action takes place, we may ask do they, in themselves, create, generate or shape the individual action in the first instance?

It was with questions such as these that I turned to the voluntary action literature, seeking answers at the level of the sector, the organisation, and the individual. Indeed, the following review is organised to reflect this increasing focus on the individual through the choice of levels of analysis. The chapter is in two main parts. Part I reviews the literature on voluntary action to identify the understanding of the nature of the voluntary actor and of the voluntary actors' relationship to voluntary action. In order to situate this inquiry the development of the academic field of voluntary action studies is considered briefly (Section 1). In Section 2 the research question is situated within a review of the literature on volunteering. In review, both the background (Section 1) and focal (Section 2) literature is found to lack a conceptualisation of the

individual that is sufficiently powerful enough to identify the relationship of the voluntary actor to voluntary action. This lacuna is seen to have implications for the literature's capacity to generate effective definitions, theoretical sufficiency and integrating conceptual frameworks.

Part II of the chapter (Section 3 and the concluding discussion) is concerned with identifying a conceptual framework that will allow for a focus on the voluntary actor that is open to the possibility of individual agency. As a first step towards understanding this problem, the various conceptualisations of the human condition and of the individual's relationship with society, which underpin various disciplinary perspectives, are identified. It is found that determined models of the human being appear dominant in the social science landscape and, as a logical consequence, the voluntary action literature. Thus humans are seen typically as either being predetermined by psychological or biological conditioning or post-determined by sociological conditioning. Such models appear to leave little room for human action that is rooted in a reflexive self. Hence, the cause of the conceptual lacuna is identified as being paradigmatically based.

Sociology is identified as the one discipline in the multi-disciplinary field of voluntary action studies that offers a conceptual space open to the possibility of individual agency. The individual-society relationship is at the core of that discipline's problematic. It is open to a variety of perspectives on the parameters of this relationship. In particular, interpretative sociologies appear to offer a route forward to the investigation of the meaning of individual action. However, the possibility of human freedom and agency remain contested and challenging for sociology and the parameters of this debate are sketched below.

Section 1 Situating this inquiry

This section is concerned with the development of nonprofit or voluntary action studies as a field of academic enquiry. As such it is concerned with the background literature to this inquiry. Insofar as this dissertation springs from an organisational interest, I have focused on the literature in the nonprofit paradigm in this review. The institutionalisation of this academic interest and its multi-disciplinary nature are noted

first. The discussion then moves to outline the manner in which the multi-disciplinary interests coalesce around organisational and civil society discourses. The conceptualisation of voluntary action is explored, first at the level of the sector, and then at the level of the organisation. This is followed with a brief review of the theories of voluntary action. The section concludes with a reflection on the understanding of the relationship between the individual and voluntary action which informs this literature.

1.1 The institutionalisation of the field

Academic interest in the third sector generally and more specifically in management issues in sector organisations has grown in response to the growth in the economic, social and political importance of the sector. The United States has led the field in this endeavour and now has related research centres and education programmes in many of the leading universities (Wish and Mirabella 1998). Outside the United States the level of activity has been less, although the timing has been similar, with free-standing programmes in Canada (1983), England (1987), Australia (1991). By 1998 programmes in nonprofit management were also available in Sweden, Italy, New Zealand, Switzerland and Argentina (O'Neill 1998). As the research community with an interest in the third sector, nonprofit organisations and voluntary action studies has grown across a range of disciplines, the challenge of shaping the field has hardly diminished. Related academic associations have been either of a broad church variety, e.g., The International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) and The Association for Research on Nonprofit Organisations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA), or focused on specific aspects of the domain such as organisational issues.

Despite this institutional progress the multi-disciplinary nature of the emerging field of voluntary action studies remains challenging (Lohmann 1992). Disciplines generate their own institutional boundaries, referencing different literatures, often addressing different questions to different audiences and using distinct nomenclature (O'Neill 2002). Even setting aside such institutional boundaries, underlying differences in the understanding of the research process and the shaping of quality research constitute a deep challenge to the development of a truly multi-disciplinary discourse (Schneider 2006).

Lyons, Wijkström and Clary (1998) distinguish between two paradigms that have shaped research into the third sector, which they call the non-profit paradigm and the civil society paradigm. The first draws on the disciplines of economics, law and management, and is the dominant paradigm in the United States. In this paradigm volunteering is understood as an act of philanthropy and of altruism although the attention is to its nature as an organisational resource (Macduff 1996). Although the within this paradigm is on larger non-profit organisations delivering a public service, others draw attention to the extent of the grassroots associational element of the nonprofit sector (Milofsky 1987, Horton Smith 1997). The second paradigm, the civil society paradigm, draws on the disciplines of political science and sociology. The focus of interest is on voluntary organisations as contributors to social maintenance and change and to the operations of the political system as conceived broadly. Such organisations tend to be clubs, societies, co-operatives, mutual-aid and self-help organisations rather than organisations offering a public service. This civil society paradigm tends to carry more force in European countries (Powell and Guerin 1997; Giddens 1998). More recently Putnam's (1995, 2000, 2002) work on questions of social capital, associational formation and membership, has served to increase the attention to the manner in which the sector serves as a domain of relationship formation and renewal in society, and as such his work links the interests of the two paradigms.

1.2 The idea of third or nonprofit sector

In 1973 Levitt rejected the conventional division of society into two sectors, public and private, and introduced the idea of 'the third sector' to refer to that wide variety of organisations whose general purposes he held to be broadly similar. As both the government sector and the private sector tend to be more clearly defined the 'third sector' approach can have a slight 'residual sector feel' about it. Rejecting this, Marshall (1996) argued that the issue of boundaries follows from the assumption that sectors of organised action should be distinct, when in fact they are overlapping and intersecting. Moreover,

> 'voluntary action can in fact move across sectors and much of the purpose of such action is to generate change in other sectors, although it also serves to preserve as well as change.' (Marshall 1996, p. 45)

The value of the civil society-sustaining function of the third sector is emphasised by the view (Berger and Neuhaus 1977) that 'the two major political ideologies in the modern world - individualism and statism - both fail to create a meaningful relationship

between the individual and the state' (quoted in Marshall 1996, p. 57). In either context, mediating institutions, which are of a scale and type that enable individuals to relate to their wider community, become vital. Third sector organisations enable the individual to partake in action that is both collective and personal.

Within both the nonprofit and the civil society paradigms the sector is extolled for its capacity for social renewal at both a values and an organisational level (European Commission 1997, Dept. of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 2000). One criticism (Quadagno 1987) of this response capacity is that it results in interference in areas of work that are properly the domain of the state and may serve to support a pro-establishment bias. More recently it has been suggested that the voluntary sector in modern democracies is restricted to problems that are essentially unsolvable (Anheier 1999) and therefore it results in permanently failing organisations.

It may be suggested, however, that the very notion of sector itself remains problematic. If sector membership is based on an organisational form (nonprofit) then such a grouping of organisations may have as much separating then as uniting them. Such an approach also makes comparisons across sectors seem somewhat forced as, for example, when employment in the sector is analysed relative to sectors such as printing or transport (Salamon and Anheier 1996, Salamon et al 1999). Such comparisons seem confused, for these other sectors are not based on an organisational form but on a product base. Indeed, in Ireland the idea of the 'nonprofit sector' in its fullest conceptualisation is almost a linguistic import of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Donoghue, Anheier and Salamon 1999, Donoghue, Prizeman, O'Regan and Noël 2006) and in general and policy discourse a variety of other terms, signifying other boundaries, are used (Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000, National Committee on Volunteering 2002, Government Publications 2007).

1.3 The idea of the nonprofit organisation

The diversity of organisations in the field of nonprofits, together with the variety of interests and disciplinary backgrounds of attending scholars has inevitably given rise to a number of different approaches to distinguishing between categories of nonprofit organisation. Differentiation at a fundamental level was made by Beveridge (1948), who identified the two key impulses to voluntary action as being philanthropy and

mutual aid. Hansmann (1980) also took a fundamental approach with a four-way categorisation of nonprofits on the basis of their financing and control. Kotler (1982) usefully highlights the important distinctions of private / public ownership and profit / non-profit objectives to divide the organisational world into four types, including private non-profit and public non-profit. At a less generic level Kramer (1987) developed a typology of service provider roles for voluntary agencies working in the social services. In the Irish context Hayes (1996) draws on O'Mahoney (1985) who identified the categories of voluntary, professional voluntary, and intermediary bodies and argued that different patterns of classification are required for different purposes. A functional approach to the question of classification is also taken in the International Classification of Nonprofit Organisations (ICNPO) that details 12 broad categories with multiple sub-categories based on the particular area of operations of the organisation (Salamon and Anheier 1992). In contrast to this specifying approach, Frumkin (2002) offers an instructive and more encompassing typology by examining the field in terms of the relationships between demand and supply side dynamics and instrumental or expressive organisational rationales.

Defining a nonprofit organisation

Work on developing a definition of a non-profit organisation has concentrated on the distinguishing characteristics of such organisations. While Kendall and Knapp (1995) argue that there is no single correct definition which can or should be uniquely applied in all circumstances, the requirement for a definition is so basic to the conduct of the discourse that a variety are proffered. Hansmann (1980) identified the non-distribution constraint as the defining characteristic and hence identification is effected under law (Simon 1987). An alternative perspective is to examine the source of a nonprofit's incomeas is done in the United Nations System of National Accounts (Salamon and Anheier 1992). A third approach to the question of definition is to focus on the functions of the relevant organisations (Hall 1987, Hodgkinson and McCarthy 1992). An institutional approach, is utilised by Salamon and Anheier (1992) in their work in the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project to develop the five-part structural operational definition. (Salamon, L.M., Anheier, H.K. and Associates 1999)

Nonprofit organisations and management

The notion that an element of 'voluntaryness' is a distinguishing feature of nonprofit organising is noted in much of the management literature directed at nonprofit

organisations (O'Neill and Young 1988, O'Neill 1998). However, perhaps because of the dominance of the for-profit management literature, the nature and the associated management implications of this 'voluntaryness' are somewhat under-developed. A market orientation in this management literature may have drawn some attention away from the value-related issues and the focus has been rather on the strategic management of the nonprofit organisation in a competitive resource environment (Oster 1995, Anheier 2005). Where the issue of 'voluntaryness' is best addressed is in relation to the impact of organisational and individual values. Hudson (1995) points out that managing in value-led organisations is 'subtly different' from managing in the other sectors, chiefly because in the third sector a different model of transaction applies. Indeed the differences are such that Batsleer (1995) has pointed to the necessity to develop a language of 'management discourse' for voluntary organisations. Interestingly, work in Ireland has found that paid employees in Irish third sector organisations possess work meanings which emphasise the goals of their organisation and intrinsic work motivators such as autonomy, developmental potential and affiliation needs (Basini and Buckley 1999). Such findings obviously have significant implications for the management task but more particularly for the leadership task in voluntary organisations. Work by Jeavons (1992, 1994) addresses these challenges directly, while a more interpretative examination of voluntary organisation leadership is adopted by Kay (1996).

1.4 Theories of voluntary action

For Hall (1994) the first step in seeking to explain voluntary action is to identify the limited value of a historical perspective when addressing the presence of nonprofit organisations in society. For him any attempt at a simple linear historical approach

> 'obscures the important connections between the evolution of nonprofits and the development of the state, the economy, and society' (Hall 1994 p. 4).

In contrast, Smith (1995), writing on the English historical experience of voluntary action, focuses less on institutional arrangements and more on social impulses and draws a strong link between the focus of charitable acts and prevalent contemporaneous social concerns. Andrew (1989) shows how the concerns of London charities in the 18th Century reflected issues in contemporary social conditions. Yet, as the reach of the British state increased in the 19th Century the socio-political space within which voluntary endeavour could take place was, to an increasing degree, politically

delineated. This political delineation increased apace after 1945 with the landslide of the Labour mandate to establish the comprehensive welfare system as proposed in the Beveridge Report (1942). In effect, voluntary action was removed entirely from dealing with the direct financial needs of poverty, with unemployment, and with hospitals (Deakin 1995). The impoverishment of the social role of the individual seemed to cause Beveridge to pause. In his third report, 'Voluntary Action' he highlighted the ideological value of the voluntary sector as 'one of the hallmarks of a free society' (Beveridge 1948, p. 10). The closing years of the 20th century witnessed a substantial growth in the state's reliance on the voluntary sector for the delivery of public goods. New Labour under Blair's leadership, for example, sought to articulate a renewal of social democracy in a 'Third Way' in which 'State and civil society should act in partnership, each to facilitate, but also to act as a control upon, the other' (Giddens, 1998 p. 79).

Economic theories of voluntary action

The discipline of economics has led the way in seeking to offer explanations for the existence of the nonprofit sector (Ben-Ner and Gui 2003) and in particular supports the investigation of the impact of the non-distribution constraint (Hughes 2006). Although the core of the economic analysis is based on the micro economics of the firm, one economic theory of the sector, that of heterogeneity theory (Weisbrod 1977, 1980), may be positioned within a sector-level discussion. In short, nonprofit organisations are seen to function to meet the unsatisfied demand for collective goods that results from the failures of both the market and the state. James (1987 and 1990) distinguished between different types of unsatisfied demand in terms of excess demand for a public good and differentiated demand.

Two economic theories that directly address the economic rationale of the nonprofit organisational form, at the level of the organisation, may be identified; that is (i) trust or contract failure theory (Hansmann 1980, 1987) and (ii) stakeholder or consumer control theory (Hansmann 1987). In the first of these nonprofit organisations are seen to arise where ordinary contractual mechanisms do not provide consumers with adequate means to police producers. In the second the non-profit form serves the purpose of establishing patron control and thus avoids a single owner exploiting a monopolistic power over the patrons.

Another line of theoretical reasoning within the economic literature is concerned with explaining the emergence of nonprofit organisations from the supply side of the demand / supply equation. Specifically the role of nonprofit 'entrepreneurs' in establishing or developing nonprofits is examined (Young 1981, 1983, Badelt 1997). There is some dispute as to whether or not entrepreneurship theories are consistent with the more routine behaviour of established nonprofit organisations (Badelt, 2003, Young 2003) but this is hardly central to the point. Drawing on Schumpeter's (1936) conceptualisation of the entrepreneur as the change agent, this approach suggests that differences in the availability of non-profit entrepreneurship exert a potentially powerful supply-side influence on the size of the non-profit sector between industry areas and geographical regions or countries (James 1987, 1989). Entrepreneurship theories offer behavioral explanations of institutional choice and so are consistent with much of the demand side economic theory of the nonprofit organization (Badelt 1990). In line with this, more recent work has tended to focus on social entrepreneurship as a form of organisational rather than individual behavior and the role of the individual as entrepreneur has become less central to the discourse (Mair, Robinson and Hockerts 2006).

Socio-political theories of voluntary action

Socio-political theories of voluntary action direct their attention to the social and political structures that shape the institutional space occupied by voluntary action. Thus they are concerned with questions of institutional choice at state level and the impact of power relationships within society. In interdependence theory Salamon (1995) argues for the recognition of the mutually beneficial nature of the relationship between the state and the sector. Evidence for this is provided by state funding of nonprofit organisations and the large proportion of state-backed welfare services are delivered by nonprofit organisations (Salamon 2003). The functionality of the relationship is explained in terms of the sector's capacity to be active in a field before the state can mobilise to respond but that in due course the state can make up for voluntary failure (Salamon 1987).

The task of finding an explanatory approach that embraced the international variation in context, scale and scope of national nonprofit sectors, underlies the development of Social Origins Theory. Choices about whether to rely on the market, non-profit sector, or state provision of key services are heavily constrained by prior patterns of historical

development that significantly determine the range of options available at a given place and time. Nonprofit organisations are understood not only providers of goods and services but as important factors of social and political co-ordination. In outlining the empirical evidence for such a contingent approach Salamon and Anheier (1996, 1998) draw most particularly on Esping-Andersen's (1990) categorisation of present day welfare states. These contextual patterns shape developmental 'routes' for the nonprofit sector in a national context.

The capacity of the welfare state classification as set out in social origins theory to explain nonprofit sector variation in international comparison is contested variously, however. Although grounded on the notion of the political and institutional ascendancy of various classes, this is not directly tested by the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Steinberg and Young 1998). The strength of comparative research across a small number of cases and utilising conventional quantitative methods is questioned (Ragin 1998). The structural-operational definition is criticised for excluding important civil society organisations in historical cases studies (Morris 2000).

1.5 Discussion

The background literature to this inquiry has been considered so as to identify the understanding of the relationship between the individual and voluntary action which informs (however implicitly) this literature. For the greater part, a sense of the individual as actor is absent. Despite the emphasis of some writers on the mediating function of the voluntary organisations and of the sector as a negotiating space, the notion of sector is firmly locked to sectoral and organisational levels of analysis. The individual as actor, while implicitly referenced, remains unaddressed.

Within the organisational literature some of the typological work is grounded on differences in the nature of the organisational contract with the individual (Kotler 1982, Hansmann 1987), the functional typologies (Kramer 1987, Salamon and Anheier 1992, Hayes 1996), however, are based on organisational outputs and do not reference the individual. In these approaches the individual per se remains unaddressed. In his work, Frumkin (2002) does highlight the importance of the expressive functions of 'sector' organisations, but his analysis remains organisationally based. In the management literature the distinctive relationship of the individual as staff, volunteer or

financial supporter is recognised but here the tendency is to view the relationship as a managerial challenge rather than being of interest in and of itself. This disinterest is problematic, if for no other reason than that understanding the relationship must be relevant to developing viable approaches to its effective management.

Turning to the economic theories of nonprofit organisation, here the demand-side orientation and the concerns with the market advantage of the nonprofit for, restrict the role of the individual to that of self-maximising consumer. Even in the supply-side theory of social entrepreneurship, the concern is with the market advantage received by the organisation, and as can be viewed as focused on organisational advantage rather than explaining individual action from the supply-side.

Similarly, the institutional determinism of interdependence theory and social origins theory supersedes the individual. Elsewhere, although the individual is clearly referenced in the attention to social heterogeneity and the arguments in favour of mediating institutions, even here the manner in which the individual's presence constitutes an impact on the construction of voluntary action remains essentially unexplored. Hence, the literature presents a variety of theories, providing organizational and sector level explanations, which are focused on institutional or organisational agents. The questions of the individual and of the individual's relationship to voluntary action, remains strangely absent, or obscured and therefore, it could be argued, considered irrelevant.

Yet, there is an inherent contradiction in a voluntary action literature which fails to position the individual as actor. This contradiction is perhaps best exampled by reference to the definitional challenge that arises from the unresolved question of what is intended by the term 'voluntary'. In the structural-operational definition of the nonprofit organisation a 'voluntary' element is identified as a necessary condition. Yet, within the definition the term 'voluntary' is explained in a tautological manner, and as such, is hardly understandable at all. It seems, therefore, that the one of most basic elements of our conceptualising within the nonprofit paradigm, the definition of a nonprofit organisation, is rendered meaningless by its failure to come to terms with the concept of 'voluntary'.

In contrast however the presence of the individual is implicit elsewhere in the literature. Whether the sector is viewed as the outcome of a unique set of social, cultural, political and economic conditions, as a result of a social impulse, as the remnant of an incomplete welfare state project, or as an important element of a new polity, all the explanations contain the implied presence of the actions of individuals relative to the conditions arising from the structures and institutions of their social environment. The explanations all have at their base, therefore, the recognition of the actions of individuals as the wellspring of the 'sector', even if they recognise this implicitly rather than explicitly.

In the following section this review moves to consider the literature addressing voluntary action at the level of the individual and in so doing moves to the focal literature for the research question.

Section 2 Situating the research question

In this section the discussion moves to review the focal theory relative to the research question. Of necessity this concerns the literature on volunteers as volunteering is context within which action which is to some degree 'voluntary' is assumed (within the literature) to take place. Various definitions of volunteers and volunteering are explored. Structural determinants and contextual factors are then examined before considering the motivations of volunteers. While the literature on the determinants and functions of volunteering is sociological in the main, the question of human motivation to action moves the discussion beyond the exclusive concerns of a functionalist sociology. Hence the discussion in relation to motivation reflects lines of thought not only from a range of social science disciplines but also draws on debate within the humanities. The consideration of volunteering has taken, in recent years, what might be termed 'a biographical turn' particularly within the European context. It is argued that when the relationship between the individual and voluntary action is considered within the context of the biography of the individual then the functional distinction between volunteering and other forms of involvement in voluntary action, such as is pursued by paid staff in an organisation becomes less relevant and useful. This 'biographical turn' is considered as offering a focus on the individual which is consistent with the orientation of the research question.

2.1 Definitions of the 'volunteer'

The noun 'volunteer' is widely used in daily speech and has a variety of meanings depending on the particular context. These meanings can vary considerably from a 'person who spontaneously undertakes [a] task etc.; [to a] person who voluntarily enters military or other service' (COD 1982). In the civil society context a number of attributes are generally attached to the term (Dekker and Halman 2003). Thus while the notion of freely chosen action remains this is typically evidenced by reference to no financial remuneration. In addition the action is often noted as being directed towards the benefit of a third party outside the family circle, as in 'without obligation for the benefit of each other or society' (Govaart, Van Daal, Munz and Keesom 2001: 260). In some instances a distinction is made between formal and informal volunteering, that is, whether the action takes place within a formal organisational context or not. In combining aspects of these various characteristics, definitions of volunteering tend towards the descriptive rather than the definitive. For example, the definition used by the Volunteer Development Agency in Northern Ireland and by the Irish Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs notes that

> 'volunteering can be defined as the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society, local communities, individuals outside the immediate family, the environment or causes. Voluntary activities are undertaken of a person's own free will, without payment (except for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses).' (Dept. of Social, Community and Family Affairs 2000, p. 83)

Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth (1996), arguing that the term is too loosely defined for consistent academic and scientific usage, analysed the term using a content analysis of definitions of volunteers from the literature and as a social construct. They identified the four key dimensions of volunteering as being (a) the voluntary nature of the act, (b) the level of financial remuneration, (c) the degree of structuration of the task, and (d) the intended beneficiaries of the action. Expressing these dimensions in terms of continua, with, for example, financial remuneration ranging from none at all to the receipt of a stipend or low pay suggested that

> 'people would be more likely to define as a volunteer someone who met the strict criteria of pure definition rather than the wide-ranging criteria of broad definition' (Cnaan *et al.* 1996 p. 373).

However, there remained the question of how the concept of the volunteer was constructed in the social context. To answer this question Cnaan *et al.* developed an analysis based on the net cost to the volunteer of the act of volunteering. This allowed

for the consideration of a variety of possible rewards of volunteering, such as enhanced social reputation and personal satisfaction as well the relative time-value costs of volunteering to individuals of different backgrounds and life-stages. Empirical research then showed that the concept of net cost is central to the public perception of who is acting, to greater or lesser degree, as a volunteer. This net cost approach was found to hold when tested cross-culturally, except for the proposal that the imputed cost of volunteering was a function of the opportunity cost of volunteering to the volunteer (Handy, Cnaan, Brudney and Ascoli 2000). Interestingly, Liao-Troth and Dunn (1999) found that volunteers and volunteer managers shared similar social constructs of the volunteer and of the relative importance of altruism in their actions.

More recently, Wilson (2000) reviewing the literature found research support for three lines of theorising ; (a) volunteering as a outcome of rational action in the light of a cost-benefit analysis, (b) volunteering as being positively related to situational factors constituting increased social capital, and (c) volunteering as resulting from individual motivation and self-understanding, Hence education, income, work, social networks, marriage, parenthood and age are positively related to the propensity to volunteer. Interestingly, Wilson and Musick note that while human capital, informal social interaction and religiosity is positively related to formal volunteering, informal helping is 'primarily determined gender, age and health.' (1997: 694).

2.2 Determinants and contextual factors

In seeking to explore the causal logics of volunteering a number of avenues have been followed and not all of these have been individually based. Sociological research widens the ground considerably by seeking the social determinants of volunteering. A more functional sociological approach has sought to identify the social functions served by volunteering. In social psychology and elsewhere the motivations to the apparently 'other-directed' behaviour exhibited in volunteering are the subject of a substantial discourse. In the following section these discourses are reviewed briefly.

In reviewing the literature on the social determinants of volunteering Smith (1994) identifies five categories of variables, four of which are sociological in nature. The four sociological variables are contextual variables, social background variables, attitudinal variables and situational variables. His fifth determinant category, personality variables, is psychological in nature. Although much of the research reviewed by

Smith examined but one or two categories of variables he argues that the five categories 'operate in concert' and that in, varying degrees, the evidence supports three theoretical models of volunteer participation. They are (a) the dominant status model (Lemon, Palisi, and Jacobson, 1972) focused on social background variables, (b) the ISSTAL (interdisciplinary sequential specificity time allocation lifespan) model (Smith, Macaulay and Associates, 1980) which utilises personality, attitudinal, situational, social background and contextual variables, and (c) the general activity model (Smith, Macaulay, and Associates, 1980) which highlights the clustering of socio-culturally approved discretionary time activities allied to the specific character patterns.

In the United Kingdom greater propensity to volunteer is associated with higher levels of income and educational attainment (Attwood, Singh, Prime and Creasey 2003). This reflects earlier findings in Ireland (Ruddle and Mulivhill 1999, NCV 2002). While Williams (2003) has noted the greater propensity for involvement in formal volunteering among higher socio-economic groups contrasting with informal volunteering among lower socio-economic groups. However, the evidence does not all point in the same direction and Tiehen (1999) has mapped a decrease in volunteering among married working women between 1965 and 1993. This decline is somewhat offset by a positive correlation between volunteering and educational attainment. Education levels rather than income to indicate propensity to become involved in volunteering across a range of organizations in the US among older adults (Tang 2008). While volunteering is seen to increase after retirement this is seen to dependent on the existence of a positive orientation to volunteering prior to retirement (Smith 2004). Among teenage volunteers in the US there is evidence of the role of dominant status, personal competencies and situational variables in generating pathways to volunteering (Sundee and Raskoff 2000). Reflecting this supply side orientation Grønberg and Paarlberg (2001) found evidence for supply and structural explanations of variation in nonprofit density at county level in Indiana. Similarly, in Japan, Haddad (2004) found that individual characteristics were not predictive of volunteering, but rather that the degree to which there is institutional legitimisation, support and organisation of volunteering determined the rate of volunteer participation. In Canada Reed and Selbe (2000) found that although volunteers were distinguishable by their orientation to helping, giving and participation, wide regional and community based variation existence outside these core traits. In Israel, where national voluntary service is an alternative to military service, volunteers were found to be most influenced by parents

and friends and to cite altruism, idealism and environmental pressure as motivational factors (Sherer 2004). Somewhat in contrast Davis Smith and Gay note that the increased formalisation and structuration of the volunteer experience can be a deterrent to older-people (2005). Such increased formalisation has been found to result from organisational change driven by the funding market (Lie and Baines 2007). Indeed social anxiety has been identified as a block to volunteering (Handy and Cnaan 2007) often leading to a preference to donate and the use of personal introduction by a friend, echoing findings from earlier research in Ireland (Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999). The impact of the relationship between the individual and the nonprofit organisation has also been examined (Pearce 1993), with evidence that both volunteers and paid staff can have a high degree of identification with the organisation (Farmer and Fedor 1999) and worklife (Basini and Buckley 1999) and that processes of organisational socialisation impact individual volunteering trajectories (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2004). Tidwell (2005 has noted that high organizational identification is consistent with the twin prosocial behaviours of volunteerism and financial donation.

The functional orientation in the literature comes to the fore in the work concerned with various aspects of volunteer management. Clary, Snyder and Ridge (1992) utilise a functional strategy to develop an inventory of reasons an individual might engage in volunteering by searching for the motives thus satisfied, the needs meet and the goals reached. Their 'volunteer functions inventory' identifies six primary functional areas, values (acting on personal beliefs), understanding (of an organisation, those served, oneself), career, social, esteem (self-esteem), and protective (self-protection from feelings of negativity about oneself). Later work by Inglis and Cleave (2006) in relation to nonprofit board member motivations was broadly consistent although others have found evidence supporting the addition of control factors and behavioural costs in understanding the decision to volunteers (Greenslade and White 2005). Similar ground is covered in the motivational predisposition distinctions of normative conformity, rational choice and affective bonding drawn by Knoke and Wright-Isak (1982). Puffer (1990) examines the motivations of career professionals who volunteer and the use of a variety of incentives to develop strategies for their management as volunteers. More recent work on the motivations and values of volunteers in Ireland has found that although voluntary activity is stated to have been undertaken for a variety of altruistic, personal and functional reasons, the most frequent motivation offered by respondents is

'belief in the cause'[1]. The rewards cited as being received for the voluntary work included the satisfaction of seeing the results, the feeling that one is doing good and the opportunity for meeting people (Ruddle and Mulvihill 1999). Elsewhere the fact that goals vary the volunteering experience is noted with a decline in the importance of the altruistic goal over time (Tschirart, Mesch, Perry, Miller and Lee 2001). Indeed, the functional analysis of Clary and Snyder (1991) is grounded on the recognition 'that the same action may involve different motives and that different motives will require different satisfactions' (Clary and Snyder 1991, p. 137). They see helping behaviour as potentially serving a value-expressive function, a social-adjustive function, an ego-defensive function or a knowledge function. However, with respect to volunteering, they find clear and consistent evidence for the value-expressive function, clear evidence for the social-adjustive function and least evidence for the ego-defensive function. In their research on motivations for volunteering among Canadians and Americans, Hwang, Grabb and Curtis (2005) note a greater emphasis on collective rather than self-oriented motivations. However, the evidence suggests that motivations to volunteering are multi-dimensional and contextualised to situational and biographical variables that result in changing relationships between collective and self-oriented motivations (Rehberg 2005, Marta, Guglielmetti and Pozzi 2006, Kulik 2007). This diversity of motivational factors has allowed for the enumeration of six psychographic segments of volunteers, typically with different socio-demographic profiles[2] (Dolincar and Randle 2007). Similarly, dispositional clusters have been noted within the 'multiform nature of volunteerism' by Hunstinx and Lammertyn (2004).

Govekar and Govekar (2002) have reviewed the contribution of economists to the determinants of volunteering debate. Utilising Schiff's (1990) analysis of collective and private goods they note lines of reasoning relative to the production of collective goods by the community, to the production of private goods such as skill development and to the social relationships that influence choice. They argue for greater inter-disciplinary discourse on the topic and the cross-disciplinary use of data. This call echoes the earlier exploration by Halfpenny (1999) of the consistencies between economic and sociological analyses of charitable giving where he found complementary frameworks

[1] As an everyday term, 'belief in the cause' is broadly understandable, however what 'belief' constitutes and how it leads to action on the part of the individual is a problem of a quite different order.
[2] The segments are: classic volunteers, dedicated volunteers, personally involved volunteers, volunteers for personal satisfaction, altruists, and niche volunteers.

in rational choice sociology and economics but contradictory frameworks between qualitative sociology and economics.

Finally, it may be noted that the levels and orientations of volunteering varies between countries. Inglehart distinguishes between three different volunteering orientations at national level.[3] While the direction of the volunteering orientation may vary across national contexts he notes that 'Societies that place relatively strong emphasis on Self-expression values rank substantially higher on all three types of volunteering than other socieities' (Inglehart 2003: 70). Further evidence of macro-structural explanations of variations in levels of volunteering across countries is also offered by Salamon and Sokolowski (2003).

2.3 The motivations of volunteers

In social-psychological discourse volunteering may be categorised under an area of behaviour that is termed 'prosocial' and includes helping behaviour generally as well as concepts such as altruism. Core questions centre on the motivation for helping behaviour and how that motivation is to be conceived. Answers range from altruism to the maximisation of self-interest, and from childhood socialisation to evolutionary selected predisposition (Clark 1991).

Altruistic behaviour is defined by Eisenberg (1986) as those prosocial behaviours motivated by other-oriented or moral concerns rather than rewards or the desire to reduce aversive affective states. On the question of the possibility of altruism the main debate fault line is around whether the motivations behind a helping action are, or can be truly, altruistic, that is, based on concern for the other, or whether the motivations are egoistic, that is, based on concern for the self. Rushton (1981) argues for the existence of the 'altruistic personality' characterised by greater empathy to the feelings of others and the internalisation of higher and more universal standards of justice, social responsibility and modes of moral reasoning. Batson and Oleson (1991) in a review of the research on the empathy-altruism hypothesis comes down in favour of the possibility of altruism. That hypothesis is based on evidence that empathy for an individual leads to helping behaviour towards them and posits that the ultimate goal of

[3] These orientations relate to the time of organisation volunteered for. The three groupings are: (i) environment , peace, welfare, health, and international development aid, (ii) political parties, local development, women's issues, and labour unions, and (iii) religion, youth, sports, professional and cultural organisations.

the motivation underlying this behaviour is the benefiting of the person for whom the empathy is felt. Alternate explanations of the helping behaviour suggest that it is motivated by a desire to alleviate particular unpleasant consequences of the feeling of empathy (Batson and Oleson 1991) or by a desire to achieve a mood reward as a result of the helping behaviour (Dovidio, Piliavin, Gaertner, Schroeder and Clark 1991). Thus hypotheses based on aversive-arousal reduction, empathy-specific punishments (self or social), empathy-specific reward (self or social) all propose an egoistic root for helping behaviour (Clark 1991). In contrast to empathy-altruism hypothesis, Dovidio *et al.* (1991) for example, argue that the greater complexity of the arousal: cost-reward model (based on the maximisation of self-interest), although not providing a complete account of helping behaviour, allows for the fact that 'the processes involved in intervening in the problems, crises, and emergencies of others are also complex.' (Dovidio *et al.* 1991 p. 111) However, Batson and Oleson (1991) stake out their ground unambiguously, point out that if the empathy-altruism hypothesis is true then;

> 'not only does it contradict the common assumption in psychology that all motivation is ultimately directed towards the egoist goal of increasing our own welfare, but it also contradicts the underlying assumption that human nature is fundamentally self-serving.' (Batson and Oleson 1991 p. 63)

They later add

> ' to say that we are capable of altruistic motivation is to say that we can care about the welfare of others for their sakes and not simply for our own. And if this is true, then we are far more social animals than our psychological theories, including virtually all of our social psychological theories, would lead us to believe.' (Bateson and Oleson 1991 p. 80)

The psychological debate is heated, the investment is high and the debate remains unresolved. Theoretical models grounded in assumptions about the selfish and selfless roots of prosocial behaviour continue to be advanced. In summarising the position Bierhoff (2002) notes three basic lines of reasoning and investigation; prosocial behaviour as grounded in (i) self-interest, (ii) internalised norms, and (iii) empathy.

Turning to evolutionary biology, it can be seen that the concept of altruism presents a paradox for it runs counter to the drive for individual survival. Even where it is posited that the moral sense arises from a combination of important aspects of natural selection, that is, the human being's intellectual powers and our sociability, altruistic behaviour presents a paradox. For if the most altruistic individuals were to sacrifice themselves for others then they would have no off-spring to maintain the trait. Solutions to the

paradox developed around the idea that evolution occurred through group rather than individual selection. Hence the notions of kin-selection and inclusive fitness appeared to solve the biological paradox (Rushton and Sorrentino 1981). However, rejecting the kin-selection / inclusive fitness explanation, Buck and Ginsburg (1991) point out that it fails to recognise the phenotype - genotype relationships in the processes of natural selection. Instead they posit that there are genetic roots to cohesive social forces and that altruism is a derivative of this phenomenon. The force they identify is spontaneous communication that is based on biologically-structured sending and receiving mechanisms. It can be contrasted with learned and culturally patterned, symbolic communication. Within species this form of communication enables the receiver to have

> 'direct access to the motivational-emotional state of the sender. In this way, the individuals involved in spontaneous communication constitute a biological unit' (Buck and Ginsberg 1999 p. 156).

Further they show how social patterns can over-ride kin-relationships[4] creating pseudo-speciation and they therefore argue that behaviour is based on group membership rather than kinship status. Hence they posit the communicative gene hypothesis, i.e. that

> 'there are communicative genetic systems at the root of spontaneous affective communication, which in turn, form the basis of all social behaviours, including empathic emotions and altruism' (Buck and Ginsberg 1999 p. 163).

Thus they acknowledge their agreement with the empathy-altruism hypothesis adding the social nature of man and other animals

> 'has its roots in communicative genetic systems that have from the beginning directly involved live forms with one another'(Buck and Ginsberg 1999 p. 171).

Anthropological arguments also stress the social rather than the individualistic nature of the human species. Fiske (1991) notes how we are inherently motivated to establish and sustain four basic types of social relationships, Communal Sharing, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching and Market Pricing. In these endeavours the social relationship is an end in itself and '[H]uman nature is *social* in the most fundamental sense of the term.'(Fiske 1991 p. 179). However, specific behaviour in pursuance of these four basic forms of social relationships is culturally bounded and the meaning of

[4] For an examination of the impact on fostering on kin relationships in Late Medieval Ireland see Cosgrove (1985).

an act varies accordingly. Although none of these relational forms entail selfishness, the relational-model theory holds that the

> 'immediate purpose in most altruism and other helping is to initiate, sustain, reinforce, or repair social relationships ... [hence]... in general people will not help a person in distress unless they apply one of the relational models to the interaction'(Fiske 1991 p. 207).

Despite this, Fiske holds that when people interact within the context of these relational frameworks 'they are always prosocial, usually helpful, and often altruistic' (*Ibid.* p. 209).

2.4 The biographical turn

In her study of altruism Monroe (1996) takes issue with the self-maximising / rational choice model of the human actor. She is careful to distinguish between altruism and other prosocial or 'quasi-altruistic' behaviour and objects to the egotistic / altruist dichotomisation of behaviour, favouring instead a continuum. She proposes five concepts as being of critical importance for altruism: cognition, world-view, canonical expectations, empathy/sympathy, and views of self. From an analysis of empirical data using these constructs Monroe proposes 'the altruistic perspective', a way of seeing the world and especially of seeing themselves as individuals linked to others through a shared humanity. Behaviour she argues flows from this sense of self and attempts to act in a manner inconsistently with this sense of self in relation to others incurs great psychological costs. As she outlines her theory (in relation to the case of ethical political acts) key factors are (a) the prime force behind such acts are related to our individual identity rather than conscious choice, (b) in general, our everyday lives do not involve decisions which challenge our sense of self, (c) core identity supersedes and shapes our consciously held moral values, (d) actions which touch our basic sense of self involve self-recognition not choice, (e) in action the individual discovers rather than creates their identity, and (f) behaviour is influenced by the perspective on ourselves in relation to others not the objective existence of a particular characteristic. Although she accepts the utility of the self-maximising / rational choice model of the human actor for interpreting much of human behaviour, for Munroe the importance of the empirical existence of altruism is that it presents an alternative

> 'model of what it means to be a human being, a model that ... is both possible to achieve and richer than the model presented by the predominant theories in evolutionary biology, psychology, economics, and rational choice theory. ... We do good because that is what makes us human, fully

> and richly human, and not just greedy and graspingly self-centered.' (Munroe 1996 p. 238)

Maslow (1971), in his conceptualisation of metamotivations and metaneeds argues for a biological, instinctual basis for intrinsic values. In his terminology, 'self-actualizing individuals', with 'metamotivations', devote themselves to a task outside themselves in which an inner and outer requiredness coincide. Work and play become indistinguisable. Their vocation becomes a defining-characteristic of the self.

> 'The tasks to which they are dedicated seem to be interpretable as embodiments or incarnations of intrinsic values ... The tasks are loved (and introjected) BECAUSE they embody these values. That is, ultimately it is the values that are loved rather than the job as such.' (Maslow 1971, 1993 edition p. 296-7)

In recent years the sociological debate has sought to consider how the condition of late-modernity may be impacting the motivation to volunteer and the style of volunteering this is giving rise to. Eckstein (2001) has drawn attention to collectivistic roots of volunteering and gift giving in American working class communities. Such a dynamic is seen to contrast with the individualistic volunteer orientation identified within American middle class communities (Bellah, Madsem, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton 1985, Wuthnow 1991). The emergence of collective and reflexive styles of volunteering within the European context have been identified by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003), where the motivation to collective volunteering is rooted in a personal responsibility to the community. Central to the discussion of collective styles but more particularly of reflexive styles is an exploration of the role of volunteering as a social expression of the identity of the volunteer. In collective styles social identity is expressed as identification with a specific community. In reflexive styles the act of volunteering is understood within the socio-biographical frame of the individual and their 'permanent self-monitoring of individual life narratives' (*Ibid.* p.169) such that the 'self-reflexive biographical quest becomes the driving force for primarily self-centred volunteering attitudes' (*Ibid.* p.173). A similar concern with understanding the impact of social change on volunteering motivations is displayed in the phenomenological investigations of Yeung (2004). This self-reflexive orientation is implied also in the study by Hailey and James (2004) into nonprofit leadership and individual identity and values and the study by McDonald and Warburton (2003) into volunteers as agents of institutional change.

The idea of a self-reflexive orientation towards a biographical quest may be seen to dissipate the utility of distinguishing between volunteering for voluntary organisations and choosing to undertake paid work in such organisations. While the study by Hustinx (2007) into Flemish Red Cross Volunteers indicated an enduring orientation to paid work she found also that:

> 'the propensity to create more space for volunteering by taking work-related measures is the strongest if the volunteers value highly opportunities for self development through volunteering ... volunteer work has to be a fully fledged activity, that is , encroaching substantially upon one's leisure time and involving considerable task responsibilities' Hustinx 2007: 87.

Such a perspective is consistent with earlier findings by Stebbin (1996). Viewed from an organisation of work tasks perspectives these dynamics may be viewed as being likely to support the conflation of volunteering and work activities. In a similar vein degrees of substitution between staff and volunteer roles has been found in Canadian nonprofits (Handy, Mook and Quarter 2008). Other studies have found no evidence of a commonly presumed adversarial relationship between volunteer and paid staff (Brudney and Gazley 2002). It is unsurprising then that the relevance of for-profit employee motivation theories to non-profit sector (teachers and nurses) should be questioned and intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivational factors (Scherps, De Gieter, Pepermans, Du Bois, Caers and Jegers 2005). Indeed, in some instances the introduction of a merit pay system in a nonprofit has resulted in a decline in the intrinsic motivation experienced by employees (Deckop and Cirka 2000). It may be argued that the attention to the question of remuneration (or lack thereof) in identifying volunteering activity reflects a functionalist perspective of the individual, a for-profit understanding of the meaning of work, and an under-consideration of the capacity for the social differentiation of money (Zelizer 1994).

The condition of late-modernity is seen drive the requirement for the biographical quest through the dynamics of individualization (Bech and Bech-Gernsheim 2002) and globalization (Bech 2000, 2007). For Bauman:

> ' 'individualization' consists in transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' – and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance ... Needing to *become* what one *is* is the hallmark of modern living ... to speak of individualization and of modernity is to speak of the same social condition. Modernity replaces determination of

social standing with compulsive and obligatory self-determination.' (Bauman 2002: xv)

2.5 Discussion

When considering voluntary activity, it is helpful to distinguish between analyses that proceed at the level of the sector, the organisation and the individual. Osborne (1998), drawing on Van Til (1988), notes the concepts of *voluntaryism*, that is, the relationship of the individual and society; of *voluntarism*, organised action in society; and *of volunteerism*, individual action in society. The first of these, voluntaryism, references an ideological position that values a relationship between the individual and society in which all action is freely chosen. The second, voluntarism, although it may be proffered as a modern spelling of voluntaryism, is also used to refer to action at the organisational level and to the role of voluntary or nonprofit organisations in terms of the private provision of public goods. It is in this narrower sense that it is used in this dissertation. Finally, volunteerism is concerned with action at the individual level. It is the necessary corollary of the principle of voluntaryism and hence

> '... voluntary action is a critical aspect of the person who is genuinely alive. It may be seen as the hallmark of both the authentic person and the active society.' (Van Til, 1988, p. 84).

The implied presence of the individual as actor runs through the voluntary action literature like a subliminal theme. Whether at level of the sector or the organisation or the individual, the notion of the individual as actor is raised; the mediating institutions of Berger and Neuhaus (1977), Marshall's marketplace for values (1996), Jeavons' concern with the expression of values in the nonprofit organisational setting (1992, 1994), Buckley and Basini's study of worklife identification (1999), Kay's conceptualisation of leadership in voluntary organisations (1996) all come to mind. While Monroe's (1996) work is less central to the literature it does serve to articulate directly the case of the individual actor. Similarly removed is the debate of the social psychologists regarding the possibility or otherwise of altruism, which is still pitched as essentially a disciplinary concern. More recently, the work on exploring the nature of volunteering in late-modernity (Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003, Yeung 2004, Hustinx 2007) has suggested a substantial change of approach, one in which attention turns to the subjective world of the individual actor.

However, all this work is noticeable for the manner in which it contrasts with the dominant themes in the literature more generally. Viewed in the round the literature on

voluntary action seems relatively devoid of an attempt to engage with the individual holistically and biographically, favouring instead the objectifying of behaviours and the quantification of variables which shape these behaviours. From this perspective the dominant view in the literature of the voluntary actor is of an individual whose actions are determined in some manner or other. By consequence, this determined actor's relationship to voluntary action is understood as being similarly determined.

That such an approach dominates the literature suggests a root cause in an underlying conceptualisation of the human condition. It may be asked therefore what view of the human being is at the basis of the disciplinary-based effort to understand voluntary activity? In table 2.1 below the literature on voluntary action is organised relative to (a) the level in society at which it seeks to engage with the issue of voluntary action, (b) the academic discipline, (c) key explanatory themes, and (d) the underlying conceptualisation of the human condition. Admittedly, the table is formulated to direct attention to this final factor. Nonetheless, its serves to illustrate the degree to which determined conceptualisations of the human condition dominate the discussion. It appears then that my search for the voluntary actor in the multi-disciplinary literature on voluntary action is running against the dead-wall of determinism. If this were to remain the case, then there would be an inherent contradiction within the very notion of a voluntary action literature. However, the recent biographical turn offers anew perspective and an opportunity to place the voluntary actor at the heart of the research question. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to an examination of the varied conceptualisations of the individual and the individual's relationship with society with a view to identifying a disciplinary space wherein I can engage with the possibility of a reflexive and self-determining actor.

Section 3 Conceptualising the Human Condition

In this section approaches to formulating conceptualisations of the human condition are explored (Section 3.1). In Section 3.2, Sociology is identified as a discipline in which both determined and self-determining (to varying degrees) conceptualisations of the human condition find space within the discourse. The challenge presented to the discipline by the idea of agency at the level of the individual is examined. Finally, the Section ends with an exploration of the idea of human freedom in more philosophical terms.

3.1 Conceptualising the human condition

Conceptualisations of the human being may explain behaviour in terms of a human trait or predisposition, as in the economic, biological models and psychological models, or in terms of social contexts and relationships, as in the anthropological and sociological models. In relation to the question of voluntary activity it is noticeable that the concepts of human agency and the possibility of freewill feature rather infrequently in the discussion. Yet these concepts have been so central to the Western intellectual endeavour that even if they are invalid as objective realities they remain powerful social constructs. Indeed, even the etymology of the word 'voluntary' is rooted in the idea of the individual will. Monroe sees her own perspective as building 'on the long tradition in Western philosophy that posits an autonomous and intentional self residing behind the mind' (1996 p. 224). Story (1992) echoes this in his insistence on the primary nature of freedom of choice in the voluntary act and his distinction between the 'self-regarding' and 'other regarding' aspects of the human spirit, which leads him to an exploration of volunteering as an expression of self actualisation or personal growth that is

> 'grounded in our limited but nonetheless genuine capacity to do justice to our stature as human beings' (Story 1992 p. 10).

Broadly presented, there are two defining aspects to the models of the human condition that have underlain the discussion on voluntary action; what determines human behaviour and to what end is it directed? Hence individual behaviour is seen as determined by social or biological forces, as in much of the sociological, psychological, anthropological and biological discourses. The end of behaviour is seen as essentially self-maximising with a social context in economic models (Weisbrod 1977, Hansmann 1987) and in net-cost and functional approaches to understanding volunteering. Alternative views to these determinants and ends are less common within the social sciences and tend to be articulated in that boundary between the social sciences and the humanities (Story 1992, Munroe 1996). It is interesting that these two defining aspects, the determinants and ends of human behaviour, relate centrally to our conception of 'voluntary' and of 'altruism'; and so the notions of voluntary and of altruism, so implicit in the notion of private action for the public good, remain significantly contested.

Models of the human being are not free-standing conceptualisations but are grounded in, and consistent with, specific ontologies and epistemologies. These, in turn, require particular methodologies of inquiry. It is hardly surprising then that approaches to investigating voluntary activity are discipline bound. Research questions in this area become a function of ontological, epistemological and methodological paradigms and their associated models of the determinants and ends of human behaviour. Hence it is particularly difficult to find an approach to examining the question of agency and altruism and their relevance to the phenomenon of voluntary activity. The consensus in the research literature is a consensus borne from shared ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions. This consensus finds expression in not approaching the question of the nature of the 'voluntary' in voluntary action.

Debate on the nature of the human being and how humans ought to live may be as old as our capacity for self-reflection. Rushton and Sorrentio (1981) note three recurring views of human nature, (a) humans are naturally evil and therefore require socialisation, (b) humans are naturally good, evil resulting from social conditions or faulty socialisation and (c) human nature is basic neutral, being moulded by the social environment. Such models of human nature are not just starting points for the behavioural sciences but are at the root of belief systems which have shaped human social life and the social institutions we have constructed to sustain the various manifestations of it. In their review of such 'ideologies', Stevenson and Haberman (1998) point to four common elements of structure in such belief systems: (a) a background theory of the world; (b) a basic theory of the nature of human beings, (c) a diagnosis of what is wrong with us; and (d) a prescription for putting it right. They present ten models and the belief systems that have developed around those elements from the fields of religion, philosophy and psychology. Dominant, though not universal themes are the possibility of human agency or freewill, some form of individual responsibility or of a 'moral' imperative towards actions that are 'good' or which relate to a state or condition of 'goodliness', a focus on an individual's relationships with others and a sense of the individual life as a process of becoming or of discovery of the self. Of the ten presented, only the behavioural models of Lorenz (1963) and of Skinner (1971, 1974) lack these themes. Even Lorenz holds a place for human freedom as developed via an increase in our knowledge that enables us to exercise self-control. Such fundamental issues have been central to the human reflective endeavour for many centuries and hence

> '[H]uman nature as a topic breaks down the traditional boundaries between the sciences and the humanities.' (Stevenson and Haberman 1998, p. 232)

Determined models of the human negate, to varying degrees and at different levels, the possibility of a human agency that is any real sense self-determined. Thus, economic models allow for a freedom of action conditioned by a rational, self-maximising imperative at the individual level, while sociological and anthropological models allow for a freedom of action conditioned by a self-maximising imperative within a social context. Hence there is a distinction to be drawn between determined models of behaviour that cite a given human nature or predisposition and determined models of behaviour that give pre-eminence to social structures and influences. This distinction is perhaps clearer if we utilise some concepts from philosophy, that is, the concepts of essence and existence. Hence we can distinguish between determined models in which the individual's essence is conceived as preceding their existence and determined models in which existence is conceived as preceding their essence.

In table 2.1 above, some strands of the debate on voluntary action are drawn in relation to the links between the unit of analysis, the disciple, key themes and underlying models of human nature. Although the question of human agency remains a foundational one for the social sciences, in many disciplines it appears more implicitly than explicitly. Various social science disciplines are concerned to varying degrees with analyses at macro or micro levels and so their perspective on voluntary action is conditioned by the broader concerns of the disciplines. In certain perspectives, models of human nature are prone to simplification and are one-dimensional. My concern in presenting this table is with focusing on the underlying disciplinary models of human nature. My aim in so doing is to identify a discipline that offers a conceptual framework that might support an investigation of voluntary action from the perspective of the individual that allows for the possibility of degrees of agency. In other words, we might ask ourselves, in the multi-disciplinary field that is voluntary action studies, what discipline offers a route to engagement with the idea of the voluntary actor?

It may be worth noting in passing, the wider historical, social and cultural context of the foundation of the social sciences in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century were such as to favour perspectives on society that emphasised biological or natural science type explanations of social dynamics at a macro level. The conceptualisation of humans as a species with the individual specimen subject to species-specific patterns

Level of engagement	Discipline	Themes	Conceptualisation of human nature
Societal level ***Voluntaryism***	Political Science Economics Sociology Social Anthropology History	Voluntaryism as an ideology / 'Third Way' politics The voluntary / third sector as an economic actor in society Voluntary activity as maintainer of social structure / status quo Voluntary activity as maintainer of social structure Pre-determined dialectic of power	The 'active citizen' : self-maximising /self-determining model Self-maximising : pre-determined model Socially-determined/functional : post-determined model Socially-determined/functional : post-determined model Self-maximising : pre-determined model
Organisation level ***Voluntarism***	Political Science Economics Organisation Theory Management Science Sociology	Civil society organisations and political power in society The 'economic' space for nonprofit organisations Resource dependency / voluntary organisations Volunteers as an organisational resource Functional aspects of formal volunteering in society	The 'active citizen' : self-determining model Self-maximising : pre-determined model Self-maximising : pre-determined model Self-maximising/functional : post-determined model Self-maximising/functional : post-determined model
Individual level ***Volunteerism***	Political Science Psychology Social Psychology Social Anthropology Sociology – functional Sociology - interpretative Philosophy	Civil society, political engagement, active citizenship Pro-social behaviour (explanations of) Pro-social behaviour (explanations of) Voluntary activity as a maintainer of social structure Functional aspects of formal volunteering Voluntary action as meaning laden The 'volunt' question centre stage	The 'active citizen' : self-maximising /self-determining model Self-maximising V altruism debate Self-maximising V altruism debate Self-maximising/functional : post & pre-determined models Self-maximising/functional : post-determined model Socially interpretative being : dialogic model Existential self-determination as a moral imperative

Table 2.1 Social Science disciplines and voluntary action

inherent in the work of Malthus (1826) and Darwin (1859) is reflected in emerging ideologies of race and nationalism in politics, models of a self-maximising *homo economicus* in economics, Marx's historical dialectic, Comte's positivist sociology, and the development of behaviourism in psychology.

If we consider the table we find that it highlights the dominance of determined (pre or post) and self-maximising models, all of which employ very constrained and limited conceptualisations of the human condition. Only in interpretative sociology do we find a conceptualisation of the human condition which is open to a more complex view, capable of admitting a voluntary condition. Philosophy is included in the scheme as one discipline where the notion of 'voluntary' is vigorously addressed. However, it is sociology with its central concerns with the individual / social nexus and the nature of the causal dynamics within the relationship that offers the greatest relevance to my research questions. Three broad positions on the issue may be outlined (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1994). The dominant one in the discipline is that

> 'sociology should only be concerned with social structures which determine the characteristics and actions of individuals, whose agency or special characteristics therefore become unimportant' (Abercrombie *et al.* 1994, p. 10).

The alternate view is that structures are not to be seen as determining but rather that individuals create the world around them. Between these two poles range a variety of attempts to develop conceptualisations that can contain and integrate these perspectives. It is to this debate I now turn.

3.3 The promise of sociology

Within sociological discourse there are competing perspectives as to what constitutes the proper area of interest of the discipline. While these perspectives are not mutually exclusive in that they all relate to the study of society, in their more extreme articulation they may seem diametrically opposed. Stated somewhat crudely, one perspective takes the view that the investigation of social structures and institutions and the manner in which they condition, indeed determine, social life is the appropriate matter of social inquiry. This line of thought may be traced to the founding ideas of the discipline in the work of Comte (1976), whose concern was with understanding and managing the social changes engendered by nineteenth century industrialisation. Comte sought to establish a new positivist science of 'sociology' that would apply the natural science methods of observation and experimentation to the social world. He

saw this new science as one that would give 'man' control over social processes in a manner analogous to the control over the natural world that the natural sciences were achieving. Hence, he was closely concerned with questions of order and disorder in society.

Such concerns were also central to the work of Durkheim (1893, 1895) and his development of functionalism. In this he sought to develop a social science such that the sociological method was to observe, identify and analyse the nature of society by reference to social phenomena that were external to the individual, were objective and were seen as coercive of the individual. Social facts and norms were understood to regulate individuals' behaviour by means of institutionalised values that were in turn internalised by the individuals. Such a science could provide both causal and functional explanations for the social behaviour of individuals. This concern with the shaping and sustaining of social order emphasised social structure and its determining impact on individual and group behaviour and action. An alternate approach to the study of society, that of taking the perspective of the individual and seeking to examine causation at that level has been developed through the work of Weber (1947, 1949), Mead (1934), and Schutz (1967).

Thus from its early days sociology's central concern with the relationship between society and the individual has been driven by two approaches which, in their extreme forms have been diametrically opposite. The discipline struggles with models of human action that are countervailing. In the first, social structure is perceived as the determining factor and properly the subject area of the discipline. In the second, human action is seen as individually determined and social structure no more than a scenic backdrop to such action. This division is fundamental, based as it is on different assumptions about the nature of an objective world, the human ability to develop or communicate knowledge of the world, and about the nature of the relationship between the individual and their environment. Thus a strict positivist, functionalist perspective holds to an object world discrete from the individual consciousness, about which objective consistent or 'hard' knowledge may be known and which, as an environment for the individual, serves to condition, indeed determine their behaviour within it. In contrast, the subjective emphasis of the anti-positivist position holds the world not as a given, external to the individual, but as a product of the individual's apprehension of it.

Knowledge is experiential and personal in nature. Far from being determined by their environment humans are portrayed as creators or arbiters of their environment.

While we may conceive of a continuum between these two perspectives, the underlying assumptions are so radically different in their understanding that they give rise to deep methodological differences in relation to the type of sociological knowledge that may be pursued and how it may be sought. Thus the sociological project becomes on the one hand the seeking of relationships within an objective world and their identification and measurement, while on the other the goal is to understand the individual apprehension of the world and the manner in which it is interpreted and modified. These distinctions are so stark that they are identified as separate paradigms (Burrell and Morgan 1979) or traditions (Collins 1994) rather than differing schools. The implications for the coherence of sociology as a discipline are profound because the positivist and anti-positivist positions are in such contrast as to make a joint discourse difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, the positions have led to the pursuit of two quite separate projects and the wider social implications of either position for the conduct of social affairs are far reaching.

The search for a way across the apparent gulf between these positions has taken a number of approaches. In his structural functionalist work Parsons (1937, 1951a, 1951b) for example sought to develop a conceptual structure for sociology by developing a synthesis of an analysis of social structure or systems with an analysis of individual action. A less ambitious approach, perhaps, has been offered via an analysis of the process, held to be dialogical, through which individual interpretations and actions become institutionalised into social structures which themselves influence and are interpreted at the individual level in turn (Berger and Luckman 1966, Berger 1966). Berger and Luckman conceive of a

> 'dialectical process in which the meanings given by individuals to their world become institutionalised or turned into social structures, and the structures then become part of the meaning-systems employed by individuals to limit their actions' (Berger and Luckman 1966 p. 10).

Adopting an interpretative position, Berger and Luckmann note that unlike other animals, the human has no species-specific environment, no environment firmly structured by their own instinctual organisation and that our relationship to our environment is characterised by a world-openness. The development of the individual takes place both biologically and psychologically in a relationship with their

environment. This environment is both a natural and a human one. The developing human being not only interrelates with a particular natural environment, but with a specific cultural and social order, which is mediated to them by the significant others who have charge of them (Berger and Luckman 1966).

Thus, while it is possible to say that the human has a nature, it is of more consequence to say that the human constructs his or her own nature, or more simply, the human produces his or herself. Central to this on-going process is the experience of the self and of the self in society. Firstly, being human is constituted both by being a body and by having a body and hence we experience the self as both objective and subjective reality. Secondly, the experience of self is the experience of the social self, of the self in society.

> '[m]an's self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. Men together produce a human environment, with the totality of socio-cultural and psychological formations ... Man's specific humanity and his sociality are inextricably intertwined. *Homo Sapiens* is always, and in the same measure, *Homo Socius.*' (Berger and Luckmann 1966, p. 69)

From this perspective humans are seen to experience society as both an objective and subjective reality.

More recently Ritzer (2000) has written of a move (within American sociology) towards a macro-micro rapprochement via attempts at integration of existing macro and micro theories or the development of a theory that provides for the relationship between social structure and individual levels of analysis. In his own analysis, he argues for four major levels of social analysis formed by macro-micro and objective/ subjective dimensions and a concern with the dialectic relationship between these levels (Ritzer 1995). In this he disagrees with Alexander's (1985) multidimensional neo-functionalist orientation and emphasis on collectivist approaches to the explanation of order and Wiley's (1988) emphasis on the subjective self in his conception of the micro-subjective level. Nevertheless Ritzer (2000) does emphasise the commonality of approach to the macro-micro integrative task pursued by Alexander, Wiley and himself in terms of a focus on similar levels of social analysis.

Among European-based thinkers the integrative project has focused on the problems of the relationship between agency and structure (Giddens 1984), social versus system

integration (Habermas 1987), or more broadly between objectivity and subjectivity (Bourdieu 1980/1990, 1989). This literature is characterised by a rejection of the dualism inherent in the positivist / antipositivist debates and a search for an integrative approach which identifies and analyses dualities and the dialectic nature of the relationship between the individual and the social. Such a project inevitably gives rise to new conceptualisations. Both Giddens and Bourdieu focus on the question of practice. In Giddens' structuration theory practice reveals the inter-play of social action and social structure. Practice is both recursive and reflexive and serves to reproduce both consciousness and structure across time and space (Giddens 1984). Bourdieu (1980/1990, 1989) presents his concepts of habitus (internalised structure) and field (relational networks among external objective positions) and the dialectic between them to bridge the objective/subjective chasm. The dialectic between them is that the

> 'the field *conditions* the habitus; on the other, the habitus *constitutes* the field as something that is meaningful, that has sense and value, and that is worth the investment of energy' (Ritzer 2000, p. 537).

Drawing deeply on both action and systems theory, Habermas utilises his conceptualisation of the life-world (the internal perspective of the acting subject) and the system (the external perspective of society as an objective reality) to posit society as being composed of both. Essential to his critique of society is the view that the balance in the dialectic between the life-world and the system is being distorted with a resultant 'colonisation' of the life-world by the system (Habermas 1987).

So we find the problem of the 'voluntary actor' points to one of the fundamental questions within social theory. What is the nature of the relationship between the individual and society? Indeed it may be seen that the adjective 'voluntary' is subsumed within the concept of actor and individual agency. The capacity of a social theory to provide a sufficient analysis of both agency and structure has become the Archer's 'acid test' of a general social theory (1988). For his part, Dawe sees it as *the* central problem:

> 'Here, then, is the problematic around which the entire history of sociological analysis could be written: the problematic of human agency' (Dawe 1978, p. 379).

3.4 The challenge of agency in sociology

Human action may be distinguished from human behaviour in the sense that action is understood as involving purpose, objectives and consciousness whereas behaviour is a conditioned or learned response to an external stimulus. In its more extreme formulations, 'behaviourism' holds that all human behaviour is learned via association with particular environmental conditions (Skinner 1973) and thus introspection has nothing to reveal to us with regard to human behaviour. Although a powerful force within psychological discourse, behaviourism has had a muted influence on sociology, for insofar as sociologists are concerned with the impact of society upon the individual, they acknowledge the relevance of society to the individual at the level of consciousness. In exploring the relationship between the individual and the social structure, sociology is concerned with such issues as how social structure determines what individuals do, and as a corollary of this, how what individuals do relates to the maintenance and creation of structure. However, at a conceptual level, the question of the limits, if any, on an individual's capacity to act independently of structural constraints precedes these two. For a discipline concerned centrally with the impact of this relationship, this problem of causation is fundamental. Observable phenomena illustrate the significance of the relationship. Identifying the pattern of causation however, is a challenge of quite a different order.

This may go some way to explaining the import of sociology's difficulty with the concept of the 'actor' (Abercrombie *et al.* 1984). The term implies a set of attributes such as individual, independence, consciousness and reflexivity. However such attributes are themselves problematic. In sociological discourse an agent may be conceived as an individual actor but agents may also be collectives such as social classes or groups. The independence of any given individual with respect to their social actions is an area of central dispute, and the sociological import of consciousness and reflexivity is subject to the perspective taken with respect to the determining effect of structure.

The positivist tradition in sociology has sought to focus on observable social facts. In his work on suicide, Durkheim (1897) provided sociological explanations for this apparently most individual of acts. Although he identified between four types of suicide, of central importance to all four was the balance of the regulatory impact of society on the individual. His sociological method develops a discourse that refutes

explanations of social action in terms of individual choice. Indeed, for Durkheim human freedom, as a condition to be aspired to, is a freedom over individual passions, a freedom gained by external control and regulation or via the internalisation of a common morality (Ritzer 2000).

Despite his ultimate concern with a systems level analysis, it is Weber's (1947, 1949) initial analysis of social action and his emphasis on the meaning of any given action to the individual actor that provides the entry in sociological discourse to more interpretive approaches in relation to the question of agency. He views the object of sociology as the analysis of action directed towards others and to which the actor attributes a subjective meaning. It is appropriate for sociology to be concerned with the analysis of social action by individuals. His agent is individual rather than collective. His social action theory commenced with the identification of four types of motive to action, (i) traditional action, (ii) affectual action, (iii) value-rational action and, (iv) instrumental action. While any one given action may bear aspects of each of these types, Weber's interest is most focussed on value-rational and instrumental action; that is, actions that are goal oriented in origin.

From Weber, action theory developed in two divergent directions, positivist action theory and hermeneutic action theory. A positivist approach informed Parsons' work. It begins with an analysis of social action in which the actor is seen to be choosing between differing means and ends. This actor operates in an environment in which choice is limited physically and by social norms and values. Social interaction becomes the key focus of interest. Such interaction is not random but is rather structured and systematised. In any given interaction or set of interactions, individuals are seen to choose between four sets of dilemmas a) to judge the 'other' in terms of universal or particular criteria, b) to judge the 'other' by their performance or by their personal characteristics, c) to engage with the 'other' in an affective neutral or affective manner and d) to engage with the 'other' across a range of activities or for specific activities only (Parsons 1937, 1951). Parson's ultimate concern with systems level theorising leads to a relatively simplistic examination of individual motives and meanings and to a macro level focus such that the voluntary nature of the individual choice tends to disappear under the weight of the environmental and social determinants.

In contrast, hermeneutic action theories position subjective meaningfulness to the actor as a central attribute of action. The challenge for the sociologist is to find methods that allow the apprehending of this meaning. Weber's concept of *verstehen* requires a systematic rational approach to the study of actions and their context so as to develop substantive interpretations of subjective meaning. Of course context is both individual and social. The acts of an individual do not occur in isolation but in the context both of their other acts and the acts of others. Indeed it is more appropriate to speak of streams of action on the part of the individual. Our lives are experienced as streams of action and our social lives as streams of interaction. Charon (1979) points to two streams of human action, the external one of observable action and an internal 'stream of covert action' which is reflexive in nature. Individual agency, as a stream of action, emerges from a dialectic process of interaction with others and interaction with self, leading to decision making with respect to the direction of our stream of action (Charon 1979). However this stream of action and stream of consciousness is more typically expressed in terms of individual acts. Acts themselves may be seen to constitute a sort of ordered stream of impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation (Mead 1956) or 'goal, definition, and overt manipulation accompanied by continuous definition' (Charon 2001 p.133).

Acts in a social context are by necessity acts of social interaction and thus, interaction becomes central to an understanding of human action. Hence Blumer (1966) places the interpretation of the action of others as a central part of the perception of the act. He developed Mead's (1934) ideas about the importance of understanding the role of language, symbols and forms of communications in the structuring of social interaction into the approach of symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969). This focuses attention on the ongoing subjective interactive interpreting, which conditions the social interaction of people. Such social action and interaction provides the stream of action in which the individual develops and expresses their identity. Such identity is not an attribution held in isolation but is actively shaped in an ongoing manner through social interaction. In this way we constitute ourselves within society and we create society.

Schutz's (1967) point of departure from Weber (1947) is not conditioned by the social behaviourist approach of Mead (1934) but rather draws on the phenomenological philosophy of Husserl (1928). However Husserl's reduction of phenomena to pure meaning may be contrasted with Schutz's acknowledgement of the existence and

importance of the social world (Burrell and Morgan 1979). Schutz sought to develop a phenomenology of the social world so as to understand the subjective meaning of social action (Schutz and Luckmann 1974). In his existential phenomenology

> 'Schutz argues that consciousness is fundamentally an unbroken stream of lived experiences which have no meaning in themselves. Meaning is dependant upon reflexivity - the process of turning back on oneself and looking at what has been going on." (Burrell and Morgan 1979 p. 244)

Schutz is concerned with the problem of intersubjective understanding and distinguishes

> 'between *the genuine understanding of the other person* and the abstract conceptualisation of his actions or thoughts as being of such and such a type' (Schutz 1967 p. xxv quoted in Burrell and Morgan 1979 p. 245).

Thus, genuine understanding entails a true comprehension of the subjective meaning of the other. Such understanding can only be gained in direct inter-subjectivity.

3.5 The idea of human freedom

In philosophical understanding the conjunction of streams of action, interpretation and choice as an ongoing process of individual creation in dialogue with the self and others finds a clear expression in existentialism. As a movement it is consummately interested in the idea of human freedom, and the world as the environment of the human being. Existentialism propounds a model of the human in which existence is seen as preceding essence. Hence, we are not predetermined by biological evolution or psychological predisposition. Neither are we 'post-determined' by social context but are free to choose. Existentialist thought distinguishes between the character of being that applies to the human being and the character of being that applies to things and to humans only in so far as they are things. Humans, unlike things, are not predetermined and must choose their life. Hence, human freedom and the nature of that freedom has an ontological grounding.

> 'Furthermore, men are conscious of the contrast between themselves and things, of their relations with other men, of their eventual deaths, and of their power to choose and become what they are not' (Lacey 1976, p. 64).

Human freedom is treated as a profoundly practical problem, a question of daily praxis. Specifically, human freedom is the freedom to choose

> 'not only what to do on a specific occasion, but what to value and how to live.' (Warnock 1970, p. 2)

However, the price of such freedom is high, for we must create, by our own choice, our own essence.

> 'For man, to be is to choose oneself: nothing comes to him either from within or from without that he can receive and accept. He is entirely and helplessly abandoned to the insupportable necessity of making himself be, even down to the least detail.'(Sartre, L'Etre et le Neant, p.520, quoted in Copleston 1972 p. 116).

This act of self-creation is purposeful, both for the self and in relation to others. Or as Marcel put it:

> 'I affirm myself as a person in the measure that I assume the responsibility of what I do and what I say. But before whom am I or before whom do I recognize myself as responsible? .... both before myself and before others; this conjunction is characteristic of personal commitment' (Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p. 26, quoted in Copleston 1972, p. 117).

The challenge of the individual life is to live in acts of authentic choice, to realise one's individual freedom and not to deny it by behaving as a mere thing, as something determined. The absolute nature of human freedom is such that choice is neither conditional on an individual's past nor on some set of external values. Humans transcend themselves insofar as they cannot be identified with the past but, through choice, are in an act of continual self-creation.

> 'For Sartre, the philosopher cannot determine a universally valid set of objective values, nor can he tell the individual what his moral choices should be. But he can make clear the inevitability of choice of some kind, the nature of choice, and the difference between authentic and unauthentic choice, so that a man may realise what he is about and commit himself with open eyes.' (Copleston 1972, p. 135)

Or as Blackham puts it;

> '[f]or nothing can be achieved once and for all or objectively established for mankind; human existence is realized in personal being, and personal being is a difficult and precarious individual attainment constantly striven for and never permanently possessed, but upheld, drawn on, and rewarded by the rich responsiveness of an objective world' (Blackham 1961, p. 161).

The being which pertains to humans, and which provides their freedom and separates them from the world has an epistemological consequence. As Blackham points out

> 'the scission which makes the existing individual aware of himself and of the world in which he is makes him a question to himself and life a question to him ... The reason why there can be no objective, universal, and certain answer to them is not merely the present inadequacy of our

> knowledge but because man is and remains in his being a question, a personal choice, and the objective world is and remains in its being a question, open possibility: both are at any time other than and more than anything that can be said of them.' (Blackham 1961, p. 152)

Outside of existential thought the question of freewill is subject to considerable debate. The question has been a central theme of philosophical debate over centuries between proponents of determinism and proponents of free will. Determinism has taken a variety of forms, including, theist determinism, the laws of physics or logic, genetic disposition, social conditioning, or sub-conscious motives. Of course, increasingly, advances in science seemed to strengthen the case for determinism on number of fronts (Kane 2005). More recently however, the philosophical debate on free will has taken a compatibilist turn, that is, proponents of free will have argued that free will is compatible with determinism. While the strict philosophical questions are (i) what is it to act freely, and (ii) what is it to be morally responsible for ones actions, in practice the questions are, (i) are we free agents, and (ii) can we be morally responsible for our actions (Strawson 2000). The following positions are held in the debate; (i) determinism exists and free will and moral responsibility is not possible; (ii) determinism does not exist and free will and moral responsibility are possible; (iii) determinism does not exist, but because the events are therefore indeterminate, moral responsibility is not possible; (iv) determinism exists but this is compatible with free will and with moral responsibility. The compatibilist argument is grounded on the notions of ability and of constraints, and identifying if, in a given situation, a putative agent can be said to possess these (Kane 2005). Hence, given ability and the lack of constraints, one is free to choose. The alternative position, that free will is incompatible with determinism, holds under conditions of determinism one cannot be held morally responsible for one's actions. The philosophical arguments are close and detailed and can seem very removed from everyday experience. Hence Strawson concludes that

> ... in many human beings, the experience of choice gives rise to the conviction of absolute responsibility that is untouched by philosophical arguments. This conviction is the deep and inexhaustible source of the free will problem: powerful arguments that seem to show that we cannot be morally responsible in the ultimate way that we suppose keep coming up against equally powerful psychological reasons why we continue to believe that we are ultimately morally responsible (Strawson 2000, p. 294).

And so, for the purposes of this dissertation's examination of applied human action, the question of the ultimate possible of free will may be set aside. For the

purpose here, the important question is that of the possibility of the existence of an experiential free will, that is, the subjective experience of free will on the part of the voluntary actor.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have reviewed the current literature in the field voluntary action studies. I came to this literature from a humanities background and with a decade of experience in the development of voluntary nonprofit organisations. My initial critique of the literature was that the individual was accorded a minimal explanatory role in the presence and state of the sector. When the question of the sector's existence is posed at sector level it is almost inevitable that the answer will focus on those factors that give the sector a specific form in a given circumstance. Pose the question at an organisational level and the logics of institutional choice, that is, market failure and consumer control, are brought to the fore. But ask the question of the individual; ask why individuals engage in voluntary activity and explanations drawing on the theoretical concepts of economics, political science or social system models seem to lack explanatory sufficiency.

Why pose the question in terms of individual action? At one level it returns us to the question of sector definition. What are the defining characteristics of the sector? Or perhaps more appropriately, what are the defining characteristics of actions in the sector? Such a question moves us closer to the problem of individual motivation. Clearly, voluntary organisations are not established out of the ether. They are not even established because the social conditions are favourable to them. At some basic level they are established because an individual or group of individuals undertakes to do so and these organisations are maintained and sustained by individual commitment. From the perspective of the individual, the existence of the voluntary sector must be explained in terms of individual voluntary acts. In this context voluntary organisations may be characterised as attempts to rationally structure individual voluntary acts. There are structured tools towards specific ends. They owe their establishment to some founding voluntary act by a human actor or actors. They owe their on-going existence to their ability to attract a continuous stream of support voluntary acts. From this perspective the defining characteristic is neither sectoral nor organisational but individual. As Yeung points out

> 'Individual motivation is the core of the actualization and continuity of voluntary work from both a theoretical research perspective and a practical standpoint' (Yeung 2004 p. 21)

Yet, in searching for the individual in the literature I found either that the individual appeared to be ignored, perhaps considered irrelevant, or that fairly simple 'models' of individual behaviour and choice pertained. This seems to result in apparent contradictions. For example, in the academic discourse on voluntary action the terms voluntary and volunteer are widely used. In so doing we implicitly (whether intentionally or not) refer to actions as having been undertaken freely. For the greater part this reference is explicated in terms of finance or time being voluntarily given. But perhaps the question is not whether a donation of money or time was made altruistically, or because of some opaque self-directed reason. Perhaps the question is not one of who is the volunteer? (definitional), or even why do they volunteer (motivational). Perhaps the question to ask is what is it that a volunteer is doing for himself or herself and for society in the act of volunteering? Perhaps the question at the heart of the problem is whether or not human agency is possible to some degree or other and if so, in what manner is it relevant to the phenomenon of the voluntary sector. There seems to be a puzzling reluctance in the sector literature to engage with the concept of agency more fully. Without doing so it is simply not possible to explore the relationship between such putative agency and the presence of voluntary action in society. The apparent dissonance between the academic literature and the lived experience demanded resolution.

Having failed to identify the individual in the voluntary action literature to my own satisfaction, my search for an explanation of this absence brought me to examine the conceptualisations of the individual within disciplinary domains within the social sciences. In sociology, the discipline centrally concerned with the relationship between the individual and society, competing conceptualisations of the individual and of the individual/society relationship are found. At the heart of the debate lie the questions of agency and of the possibility of choice. Such questions are approached variously in philosophy and the broad strands of this debate have been sketched. Yet, sociology, concerned with the nature of the relationship between the individual and society, seems to offer a conceptual space wherein this problem of the relationship between the individual, voluntary action and voluntarism may be explored most fully. In particular, unlike the almost absolute attention to the autonomy of the individual as displayed in

existential philosophy, sociology offers a greater openness to a richness and complexity derived from the dynamics of the relationship between the individual on society. Or to put it very crudely, whereas existential philosophy is concerned with stating the 'ought to' of living and with setting the individual 'free', sociology is concerned with understanding the practice and shaping of daily life in society, of understanding how it is, rather than how it should be.

From this sociological perspective Jones (1983) captures the human dilemma thus:

> 'our humanness, and the relationship between social reality and subjective meaning, are embedded in the tension between two counterpoising tendencies. On the one hand, human beings desire and attempt to express their humanness through their actions on the world. On the other, the world presents itself as an already constituted reality that must be understood and mastered if the potentialities of consciousness are to emerge and develop. In the relationship between these two processes we find the basis of our nature as human beings and of the culture or social reality that expresses that nature.' (Jones 1983 p. 147)

My research aim may be stated as an intention to explore the relationship between the individual as putative agent and the presence of voluntary action in society. On reflection it appeared that in order to explore the nature of the relationship between the individual and voluntary action I needed two elements. The first of these was a map, a map of the conceptual domain wherein this journey was to take place. This place was sociology. My second requirement was for a compass, without which I would surely get lost. A conceptualisation of the individual that was rich and complex enough to negotiate the world that Jones described was my compass; its needle insistent on the integrity and agency of this individual. My sense was that to search for this individual I needed first to find the place on the map where such an individual could exist. For, if such an individual were to be found, it is surely there they would be. And so, for this compass the term 'the voluntary actor', has been purposively formulated. 'Voluntary' is chosen as a reference to the concept of freewill, a constituent of agency. 'Actor' is a reference to an individual acting in society to do something intentional.

Thus equipped with the notion of the voluntary actor, the individual as agent is placed at the centre of the research proposition. The first element of the research task is to find that place on the conceptual 'map' of sociology that is consistent with such a

notion. It is only when such a coherent intellectual framework is identified that the research can proceed. The next chapter, Chapter Three, traces the search for this place.

Chapter 3 In Search of Paradigm, Methodology, and Method

Introduction

In this Chapter the discussion is directed at arriving at a research position that affords a direct engagement with the notion of the 'voluntary actor'. The chapter sets out to clarify the conceptual framework within which the research has been undertaken. This task has four broad elements, *viz.* the identification of the chosen paradigm, methodology and method and the articulation of a research approach consistent with these. The chapter is divided accordingly. In Section 1, the exploration of paradigm, a coherent ontological and epistemological position is established and a set of sociological perspectives, constructs and theories that are consistent with the ontological and epistemological position adopted are explored. In Section 2, the exploration of methodology, research strategies consistent with this ontological and epistemological position and the related sociological constructs are examined. Section 3, explores method and interviewing is identified as the research method appropriate to this research. In Section 4 narration as a form of human sense-making is explored. In Section 5, challenges of interpretation are examined. In Section 6, this five-part discussion is brought together as the choice of paradigm, methodology and method for the pursuit of the research for this dissertation is specified.

Section 1 An exploration of paradigm

In this Section the notion of scientific paradigm as it applies in the social sciences is explored (1.1). The framing of the subjectivist paradigms is noted (1.2) before the interpretative paradigm is examined in greater detail (1.3). The choice of paradigm for the research for this dissertation is identified in the concluding sub-section (1.4).

1.1 The idea of paradigm

Sociological thought has been presented as being compartmentalised along a variety of dimensions, such as the dominant object of study (Marshall 1994), central themes in the particular perspective (Collins 1985), and foundational theorists and schools (Ritzer 2000). From the perspective of paradigm, as formulated by Kuhn (1962), perhaps the

clearest presentation is from Burrell and Morgan (1979). They point to sets of assumptions about the nature of society and about the nature of the social sciences that serve to shape the dimensions of four paradigms in sociological thought. For the immediate purposes here the primary division in Burrell and Morgan's framework is that between subjective and objective ontologies and epistemologies. This division serves to structure two views of the ontological nature of the world and of the epistemological nature of human knowledge so as to generate positivist (functional and radical structuralist) and anti-positivist (interpretative and radical humanist) paradigms. The two of these concerned with the sociology of regulation, the functional paradigm and the interpretative paradigm constitute the dominant paradigms within sociology. The functionalist paradigm is characterised by objective ontologies, positivist epistemologies, determinist views on human nature, nomethetic methodologies and a concern with the regulation of society, while the interpretative paradigm is characterised by subjective ontologies, anti-positivist epistemologies, voluntarist views on human nature, ideographic methodologies and a concern with the regulation of society.

1.2 The subjectivist paradigms

The subjectivist foundations of the interpretative and radical humanist paradigms lie in the idealist writings of Kant (1781, 1785, 1788). Kant was concerned with the nature of human knowledge and its ontological import. He sought to approach metaphysical questions about being and knowing by inquiring into how the human mind knows (Lacey 1976). In so doing he provided a synthesis of Hume's empiricism (1748) with the rationalism of Leibnitz (Scruton, 1982).

Kant argued that human knowledge resulted from experience and reason combined. Knowledge is a synthesis of experience and idea or reason, which gives form to experience. Without reason, experience is formless; without experience, form is contentless. Kant argued for the existence of *a priori* knowledge, that is knowledge which is prior to experience. This does not refer to a concept of innate ideas or of knowledge inherent in the human mind but rather 'it means knowledge which is underived from experience' (Copleston, 1964, Vol.6, Part II, p.13). Such *a priori* knowledge is to be distinguished from *a posteriori* knowledge, that is knowledge whose source is experience. The possibility of *a priori* knowledge Kant evidenced by

the ideas of universality and necessity, neither of which could be gained from experience. Thus Kant commenced his *Critique of Pure Reason* with:

> 'There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience ... But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself' (Kant 1791, B1, trans. by Kemp Smith 1929).

The point is a little clearer if a distinction is made between knowledge and judgements. Kant is primarily concerned here with the nature of judgements (Korner 1955), the nature of human understanding and with the distinction between the experience of phenomena and the apprehension of this experience. Hence our understanding of the world and the knowledge of it that we hold are essentially subjective in nature for

> 'Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts.' (Kant 1791, B31, trans. by Kemp Smith 1929).

Such an epistemological position not only places the individual at the centre of the act of knowing but also makes the act one of apprehension and interpretation as opposed to one of apprehension alone. Objective realities become subjective interpretations and the negotiation of existence becomes a continuous act of interpretation. The import of such an epistemological position for sociological discourse is fundamental as it sets the ontological and epistemological context for the underlying problems of reconciling individual action and social order.

1.3 The interpretative paradigm

A positivist sociological discourse dominated the greater part of the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century and gathering pace into the twentieth century, increasing interest was shown in the subjective perspective, the epistemological problems posed by it, and the challenge to 'objective' inquiry in the social sciences. This turning of attention towards a focus on the meaning or intention of the individual act was crystalised in Weber's (1947, 1949) distinction between behaviour and action and the definition of sociology as a science that seeks to interpret meaning. Dilthey (1976) argued that

> '[W]hereas the natural sciences investigated external processes in the material world, the cultural sciences were essentially concerned with the internal processes of the human mind' (Burrell and Morgan 1979, p. 229).

Hence, cultural phenomena could only be understood from the individual perspective.

Similiarly, through the idea of *verstehen* Weber sought to develop a sociological method that would enable the pursuit of objective knowledge. As a method, *verstehen* seeks understandings of human meanings through a situating within the whole context of the individual and through an approach that seeks to enable researchers to place themselves in the position of the researched.

In contrast to Weber, Husserl's embracing of a subjective epistemology brought him into the realm of metaphysics and the development of phenomenology. In this, Husserl (1928) attempted a methodology which sought the descriptive analysis of meanings or appearances to consciousness (Copleston 1965). The conceptual space set out by Husserl, was exploited by Schutz (1967), who sought to develop a phenomenology of the social world so as to understand the subjective meaning of social action. In his existential phenomenology

> 'Schutz argues that consciousness is fundamentally an unbroken stream of lived experiences which have no meaning in themselves. Meaning is dependent upon reflexivity - the process of turning back on oneself and looking at what has been going on' (Burrell and Morgan 1979).

Thus, genuine understanding entails a true comprehension of the subjective meaning of the other. Such understanding can only be gained in direct inter-subjectivity.

Interpretative sociology took a number of different directions following the work of Schutz and may be broadly categorised under Hermenuetics (Dilthey 1976, Gadamer 1962); Ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), and Phenomenological Symobolic Interactionism (Mead 1934, 1938, Blumer 1969, Denzin 1989B); although the boundaries between these lines of development are at times unclear and disputed.

In hermeneutic approaches to inquiry there is a turning from an explanatory mode of inquiry to one in which the aim is to understand rather than explain. The hermeneutic approach to inquiry is one that seeks an understanding of the sense making and meaning of the agent.

As advanced by Garfinkel (1967), ethnomethodology seeks to uncover how we create order and sensibility through our everyday conversations. The ideas of indexicality, that no word has a final definition, and of reflexivity, that order is structured in conversational processes, are central to the approach.

Symbolic interactionism is concerned with the manner in which humans interact with their social context through meaning creation and meaning attribution. Hence, since meaning is attributed to the environment rather than derived from it, action results from interpretation and reflection rather than from reaction. In outlining symbolic interactionism, Charon (2001) emphasised the role of the human as that of actor in the environment rather than passive or determined reactor:

> 'symbolic interactionism describes the actor as a being who interacts, thinks, defines, applies his or her past, and makes decisions in the present based on factors in the immediate situation. We, in fact, *use* our environment rather than respond to it, *define* our environment in relation to our goals in the particular situation rather than act as passive products of that environment, *define our past* in terms of the present rather than see the present as caused by that past. *We are here conceptualised as active participants in what we do,* even perhaps "free," at least to some extent' (Charon 2001 p. 28).

Interactionist thought forms a bridge between sociology and social psychology to generate a sociological social psychology. This is distinguished by a concern with the social, cultural and historical context of human experience and the manner in which these form the bases of human thought processes. As such, interactionist social psychologists are concerned with the processes by which interpretations or definitions of social reality and of self 'are constructed and negotiated in social interaction' (Branaman p.3). This social constructionism is exemplified by the work of Berger and Luckman (1966).

Section 2 An exploration of methodology

In this section a number of qualitative methods relevant to the pursuit of the research questions are outlined. Section 2.1 provides a general introduction to qualitative and interpretative methodologies. Following this, case studies, phenomenology and biography are examined in turn.

Section 2.1 Qualitative and interpretative methodologies

The design and choice of an appropriate research methodology for addressing any given sociological question is bound by the interconnectedness of ontology, epistemology and method. Within the interpretative paradigm, the nominalist ontology and anti-positivist epistemology point inevitably to a requirement for an ideographic methodology if a coherent logic is to be maintained (Burrell and Morgan 1979).

Guba and Lincoln (1998) argue that the traditional division between qualitative and quantitative methodologies may be unhelpful in that qualitative methods can be used in highly divergent inquiry paradigms. Denzin argues differently, however, and sees qualitative research as being characterised by a commitment to an 'interpretative approach to its subject matter, and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism' (Denzin 1998 p. 8). He distinguishes qualitative from quantitative methods on an antipositivist / positivist basis and sees the search for an understanding of the experience of the 'other' and the use of rich descriptions as stretching disciplinary boundaries.

> 'Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multiparadigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multimethod approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective, and to the interpretative understanding of human experience. At the same time the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions' (Denzin 1998A p. 6).

When qualitative research is utilised in an interpretative / constructionist paradigm, the characteristics of the grounding ontology and epistemology present the researcher with the dilemma of their own subjectivity, that is, the set of personal meanings and biography which they bring to the research act. As Denzin and Lincoln note,

> '[q]ualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry' (Denzin and Lincoln 1998A p.8)

In the interpretative paradigm the acceptance of multiple constructed realities defies the possibility of criteria of trustworthiness (Seale 1999). However, the logic of the constructionist paradigm is such that postivist criteria are seen as irrelevant to the paradigm and other methods for evaluating work have emerged (Lincoln and Guba

1985, Denzin and Lincoln 1998A). Indeed, it is argued that insofar as the chosen research method embodies the personal perspective of the researcher that

> '[I]n this fundamental sense all research methods are at bottom qualitative and are, for that matter, equally objective; the use of quantitative data or mathematical procedures does not eliminate the intersubjective element that underlies social research' (Vidich and Lyman 1998 p. 44).

The domain of qualitative research presents multiple methods and paradigms that have been organised variously by different writers. Creswell (1998) examines five traditions, *viz.* case studies, grounded theory, ethnographical studies, phenomenological studies, and biographical studies. Of these five traditions, case studies , phenomenological studies and biographical studies are identified as appropriate to this research.

2.2 Case Studies

Case studies are examinations of particular wholes, of 'bounded systems' (Smith 1978). They are characterised by specificity, and by an interest in, and focus on, the particular, rather than on general phenomena exhibited within the given case. Stake (1998) identifies three broad research purposes that have an impact on how the data from a case are analysed. Although he regards it as a heuristic rather than a functional division, he notes usefully the distinction between the intrinsic case study that seeks a clearer understanding of a specific case; an instrumental case study where the emphasis is on what the case may reveal about an issue or idea; and a collective case study which seeks insights that may allow for a better understanding relevant to a larger group of cases.

The question of generalisability from cases is deeply debated (Simons 1980, Gomm, Hammersley and Foster 2000). Key issues are grounded in perspectives on the ends of social science and the epistemological problem of information transfer from informants through the researcher to the reader. If the aim of social science lies in the elucidation of universal laws, then case study work is restricted to 'shallow end' pre-theory explorations of phenomena. Others argue that viewing social phenomena as artefactual rather than invariant releases the value of case study work (Hamilton 1980). Of course the paradigm shift here involves deep methodological issues for case study work. These have been categorised as debates over generalizability, causal or narrative analysis, the nature of theory, and authenticity and authority (Hammersley and Gomm 2000).

2.3 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is concerned with stripping away the 'natural attitude' by which we perceive the everyday world as existing outside and separate to ourselves so as to lay bare their essence as experiences. Such experiences form the essential structures of consciousness. In effect, '[A]ll ontological judgements about the nature and essence of things and events are suspended.' (Holstein and Gubrium 1998 p.139). Hence, as meaning requires ongoing interpretation, 'social interaction constructs as much as conveys meaning' (*Ibid.* 1998 p. 140).

The use of phenomenological method in sociology has taken two broad directions that have been termed hermeneutic and existential (Schwandt 1997). The former has been primarily concerned with language, the structure of communication and the collective processes of socio-political life (Gadamer 1959 Ricoeur 1971). The development of this theme by Garfinkel (1967), known as Ethnomethodology, seeks, by attention to indexicality and reflexivity, to detail the method by which people make sense of the everyday activities of living in social interaction. The importance given to language in Ethnomethodology has been further developed in discourse analysis and conversation analysis (Silverman 1993). The latter, existential approach, as represented by the work of Schutz (1967), Berger and Luckman (1966), and Schutz and Luckmann (1974) displays a closer attention to 'describing the experience of everyday life as it is internalised in the subjective consciousness of individuals' (Schwandt 1997 p.115). Data collection is typically by interviews. Data analysis is a complex process of clustering meanings and developing textural and structural descriptions (Moustakas 1994).

2.4 Biography

In sociological discourse 'biography with a concern for the way a specific individual perceives and construes the world also moves the sociological interpreter toward the subject's perspective' (Smith 1998 p. 208). In considering biographical method, Clifford (1970) offers a five-part taxonomy of types ranging across an objective-subjective spectrum and distinguished by the degree of interpretation of evidence and creativity in narration. Hence 'objective biography' seeks a total presentation of all available data; 'scholarly-historical' biography is typified by the selection of evidence but with ' no attempts to interpret the subjects personality'; 'artistic-scholarly' work utilises the same levels of exhaustive research to gather evidence but in the writing the

biographer draws more on his/her imagination. In 'narrative-biography', the biographer's imagination shapes the narrative more substantially and finally in 'fictional-biography' the life is written as a novel. From a subjective perspective, no matter which type of biography is chosen, it remains the work of the biographer rather than an objective record of some individual's life, for it is with the biographer that the choice of inclusion and exclusion of detail, event, emotion and context lies. Smith meets the epistemological dilemmas so presented squarely:

> 'Each biographer carries his or her own conception of personality, or character, as it is called by literary biographers ... From my perspective, and in not so simple a manner, the biographer brings all of his or her own personality, understandings, and experience to the task of creating a view of the individual under study. If that be true, it poses severe problems for traditional social science, for the sources and implementation of creativity can only be bolstered by technocratic procedures, not carried by them. That raises a long and tortuous argument for those of us working in that tradition.' (Smith, 1998, p. 196)

Denzin argues that the biographical writer, in effect, writes him/herself into the life of the subject in such a manner that the resultant text 'is read through the life of the reader' (Denzin, 1989A p. 26). In so doing the biographer may be seen to exemplify the anti-positivist epistemological argument, for if all research is conditioned by the subjectivity of the researcher, then how much more is this the case when the researcher is also subject to the personality of the researched. Already struggling with this problem, Edel (1959) suggested that:

> 'A life must be shaped, but not distorted or made subject to the biographer's eye. The integrity and intensity of the biographer's process, and his ways of proceeding, usually shine through his work. He is far from anonymous. He is present in his work as the portrait painter is present in his.' (Edel, 1959 p. 3)

In the interpretative approach to biography the researcher must be conscious of the impact of their own biographies and concepts on their understanding of the life of the researched (Denzin 1989A) and these need to be surfaced in the research analysis (Cicourel 1972). In framing the biographical research Denzin (1989A) calls for the development of a chronology, the identification of pivotal events or epiphanies, the examination of the meaning of these epiphanies and their linking to the social context in the search for interpretation. Giele and Elder (1998B) identify the four key elements of human agency, linked lives, location in time and space and timing as key factors in an individual's life course.

Section 3 Exploration of Method

In this section the use of the research interview as a qualitative method is examined (Section 3.2). The nature of the interview as a event is explored (Section 3.2) and the requirement for reflexivity on the part of the researcher is consider (Section 3.4).

3.1 Qualitative methods

Dingwall (Miller & Dingwall 1997) points out that asking questions and observation are the two basic methods of gathering information for sociologists. Hence almost any medium by which human understanding or perspective is stored or transmitted becomes a potential data source. Noting the ongoing development of data collection forms in qualitative research, Creswell (1998) argues for four basic types of information, *viz.* observations, documents, audio-visual material and interviews. Of these, I have chosen interviews as the most appropriate route to a subjective understanding of a living voluntary actor.

3.2 Qualitative Interviewing

The generic term 'interview' covers a range of activities. Even within an anti-positivist framework the basic distinction between structured interviews, semi-structured or group interviews, and unstructured interviews masks deep differences in goals and assumptions (Fontana and Frey 1998). Unstructured or open-ended interviews are more typically used to derive very rich data about a particular human experience. Fetterman (1989) has noted the use of open-ended questions during exploratory phases of an inquiry and close-ended questions during confirmatory phases. Omitting structured interviews from their discussion on qualitative interviewing allowed Rubin and Rubin (1995) to characterise qualitative interviews as being distinguished by (i) their nature as 'modifications' of conversation, (ii) their focus on the understanding of the interviewees, and (iii) their openness to content determination by interviewees. In particular, unstructured interviews are utilised to seek a deep elucidation of the understanding of interviewees rather than of causes and hence the data sought are a form of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) that may be synthesised and analysed. This attention to the achievement of an understanding of an event or of another's experiences leads inevitably to the creation of a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee which is grounded in a joint recognition of a common humanity (Spradley 1979).

The face to face nature of interviews create social occasions where the respondents are under a constraint to show their competence and their personal legitimacy, in the context of the interview topic. As Miller and Dingwall note,

> '[T]he consequence is that the data produced by interviews are social constructs, created by the self-presentation of the respondent and whatever interactional cues have been given by the interviewer about the acceptability or otherwise of the accounts being presented" (Miller and Dingwall 1997 p. 59).

When this problem of method is combined with an epistemology that acknowledges the interpretative nature of the researcher's reception of the data, then the inter-subjectivity of the interview becomes highly problematic. Mishler (1986) notes that the joint construction of meaning in an interview may be conditioned, in part, by the dominance of the interviewer in the context.

Symbolic interactionism views the interview situation as a social construct against which the emerging data must be interpreted (Crotty 1998). In elaborating interpretative interactionism Denzin asserts

> 'that meaningful interpretations of human experience can only come from those persons who have thoroughly immersed themselves in the phenomenon they wish to interpret and understand' (Denzin 1983 p. 133)

Hence the researcher is enjoined to take the standpoint of those studied (Denzin 1978).

The practice of qualitative interviewing, particularly in the more unstructured forms, is problematic and places considerable demands on the relational skills and empathetic qualities of the interviewer. The notion of unstructured interviewing as 'art' is a recurring one (Weiss 1994, Rubin and Rubin 1995, Fontana and Frey 1998, Atkinson 1998), embodying notions of experience, skill and interpretative capacity on the part of the interviewer.

Qualitative interviewing is grounded in conversation (Kvale 1996), as such its epistemology is typically more constructionist than positivist. The purpose of a conversation is the interpretation of the meanings and sense making of the respondents. Although qualitative interviewing is commonly used within ethnographic fieldwork (Spradley 1979), ethnography is essentially concerned with lived experience while

qualitative interviews are concerned with the verbalisation of experience. Hence Warren (2004) notes that

> 'researchers often choose qualitative interviews over ethnographic methods when their topics of interest do not center on particular settings but their concern is with establishing common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents' (Warren 2004, p. 85).

Three dimensions that shape the interview process are noted by Hopf (2004): the degree to which questions are pre-formulated, whether the interview has a narrow theme or is open to thematic variation and development, and whether the process is directed by a narrative or the intention of seeking meaning, for this directs the role of the interviewer to that of listener or discussant respectively.

An underlying distinction between structured and unstructured interviewing is the presumption of knowledge on the part of the interviewer in the case of structured interviews and on the part of the respondent in unstructured interviews. The use of pre-formulated questions in structured interviews indicates the presumption that the answers to these questions constitute the relevant knowledge and hence this mode privileges the perspective of the interviewer. In contrast, an unstructured interview with open-ended questions privileges the perspective of the respondent. A problem arises however, when specific information is required in the interview, for how can the process be managed then in a manner that remains open to the respondent's viewpoint? Indeed, this problem is compounded if one considers that the interviewer is unclear, as the privileging of the respondent's perspective indicates, about what the appropriate questions are in the first instance. Of course, these are obstacles that cannot be resolved beforehand but must be dealt with during the interview. They are solved, therefore, within the drama of the interview process.

> 'The answers to these problems are seen to emerge from the interviews themselves, the social context in which they occurred and the degree of rapport that the interviewer was able to establish during the interview. In short, appropriate or relevant questions are seen to emerge from the process of interaction that occurs between the interviewer and interviewees' (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979, p. 40).

The interviewer's capacity to manage the interview process to a successful outcome 'may rest more upon his pre-existing social competence than upon learned skills in interviewing' (Schwartz and Jacob 1979 p. 41). However, such a capacity is not to be taken as applicable to all kinds of interviews but is relevant to a particular population of

respondents for any given interviewer. In other words, the interview is an interactive process and the establishment of rapport, as an outcome of this interaction, is dependent on both parties involved.

Extending the process focus somewhat, Hermanns views the qualitative interview as an impromptu-drama that is 'actively produced by both participants, although the interviewer also has a special task of shaping it' (Hermanns 2004, p. 209). In its most unstructured mode, the method of qualitative interviewing makes personal demands on the interviewer as well as the interviewee (Ellis, Kiesinger and Tillmann-Healy 1997). Douglas (1985) argues that standard approaches to interviewing fail to expose the emotional basis of so much of human experience. In his 'creative interviewing', he calls for the interviewer to remain open to the full development of the interview as a relationship journey involving both participants in a process of deep emotional disclosure.

3.3 The interview as event

Any given qualitative interview is conditioned by the researcher's perspective on the nature of the interview as an event. Two aspects in particular need to be noted. Firstly, is the interview to be understood as a 'speech event' that is to be captured in its totality and analysed *via* discourse analysis (Mishler 1986) or is it to be seen from a constructionist perspective as an interactional process that may be interpreted so as to understand the experience and meaning of the respondents (Warren 2004). Secondly, and related in many ways, is the view of the respondent taken by the interviewer. This point in particular is emphasised by Holstein and Gubrium (1997) who distinguish between approaches that see the interviewee as the 'passive vessel' from which information is extracted and approaches which confer greater agency on the subject. In this latter case the method of interviewing is no longer concerned with the extraction of unbiased information but acknowledges the interview as 'a dynamic meaning-making occasion' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997, p.117).

Framing the interview as an inter-active, constructionist, inter-subjective drama that constitutes a meaning-making process has profound implications for the conduct of the interview, the nature of the interviewer-interviewee relationship and the process of post-interview interpretation. Such a framing typically underlies in-depth interviewing. As a method in-depth interviews tend to involve the development of an open

relationship between interviewer and interviewee so that mutual self-disclosure is promoted. Inevitably, this face-to-face interaction tends 'to involve a greater expression of the interviewer's self' (Johnson 2004, p. 103) and 'a personal commitment on the part of the participants' (Ibid. p. 103) to the goals of the process. For Johnson (2004)

> '[t]he ideal goal is that the informant become a collaborative partner with the researcher in the intellectual adventure at hand' (Johnson 2004, pps. 108-109).

Thus the interactional drama of the interview constitutes a data creation process in and of itself; it is not a data collection activity that must be controlled so as to eliminate bias (Warren 2004). The process is one of inter-subjective collaboration and the understanding thus achieved reflects the subjective perspectives of both the interviewer and the interviewee. Hence to understand the meaning of the drama requires an understanding of the meaning of both the participants.

> 'The interviewer, like the respondent, participates in the interview from historically grounded biographical as well as disciplinary perspectives. Biographical perspectives may frame entire analyses or affect the selection of illustrative quotes' (Warren 2004, p. 97).

Further, the fact that the interview is itself a meaning making interaction has an impact on the lives of both the participants. The openness that must characterise such interviews is an openness to the humanity of the other. Understanding an other's meaning demands a capacity to relate to that other's experience as a subjective rather than an objective reality. The act of interviewing is experienced as being 'about the self as well as others' (Warren 2004, p. 97). Indeed her description of the nature of the interviewer/interviewee relationship is couched in terms that allude to a mutual recognition of the human condition.

> 'In the social interaction of the qualitative interview, the perspectives of the interviewer and the respondent dance together for the moment but also extend outward in social space and backward and forward in time' (Warren 2004, p. 98).

3.4 The requirement for reflexivity

It would seem then that reflexivity at a personal level on the part of the researcher must be central to the interpretative process and its elucidation (Steier 1991). Indeed, Denzin holds that '[I]nterpretative research begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher' (Denzin 1998C p. 335). Or, to borrow from Morgan (1983), in research

as in conversation, we meet ourselves. Inevitably, an existential model of the human being poses particular challenges of reflexivity.

This reflexivity requirement means that there is a call to a constant reflection and ongoing dialogue with the self with respect to how the self influences the interpretation of the research experience. The outcome of this approach is the development of a reflexive social science that identifies the researchers' role as 'active participants in the process of meaning creation' (Hertz 1997 p. viii). A reflexive approach recognises that the researcher's self is brought to every decision in the research process from the identification of topic, method, and respondents, to the choice and interpretation of data. Reinharz (1997) calls the self 'the key fieldwork tool' and posits that

> '... we both *bring* the self to the field and *create* the self in the field. The self we create *in the field* is a product of the norms of the social setting and the ways in which the "research subjects" interact with the selves the researcher brings *to the field'* (Reinharz 1997, p.3, italics in original).

The inevitable implication of researcher reflexivity is a need to find a space for the articulation of the researcher's voice and the distinguishing of the respondent's voice in the presentation of the research text (Elliot 2005). The proposition is not without its critics, whether they are from the positivist view arguing that reflexivity lacks objectivity or from the postmodernist perspective stating that it serves to privilege the powerful in the research relationship. Nevertheless, researcher reflexivity acknowledges the 'myth of silent authorship', confronts the pressures of disciplinary norms and recognises the merit in 'audible authorship' (Charmaz and Mitchell 1997).

Section 4 The Narrative Form

In this section the nature of narration in research is considered. The use of the life-histories and life-stories in social science research is examined in Section 4.1. In Section 4.2 the ontology of the story and of 'storying' as a process is explored. Aspects of the narrative interview are reviewed in Section 4.3.

The life story interview presents an opportunity for the use of narrative in the construction, articulation and expression of identity. The usefulness of narrative in the development of a shared understanding is grounded in common human capacity to constitute meaning via narratives (Mishler 1986). MacIntyre (1981) notes that:

> 'It is because we live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives we live out that the form of narratives is appropriate for understanding the actions of others.' (MacIntyre 1981, p. 197)

The use of the narrative form for the expressing or retelling of a life story assumes the presence of an intelligibility across the spread of the story and so 'identity stability is longitudinal consistency in the life story' (McAdams 1985 p.18). Hence the life story interview, as a social construct, may act to demand of the interviewee that he/she forms a coherent narrative of their life, if they are to maintain legitimacy in their presentation of self as a functioning human. The understanding of the meaning of any given event in such a narrative is subject to this requirement. As MacIntyre observes:

> 'What is better or worse for X depends upon the character of that intelligible narrative which provides X's life with its unity' (MacIntyre 1981, p. 209).

This drive to the construction of a sensible narrative of one's life led Cohler to call personal narratives 'the most internally consistent interpretation of presently understood past, experienced present, and anticipated future' (Cohler 1982 p.207). Their usefulness in the study of personal identity is grounded in their consistency with 'the approach actually used by persons in the successive interpretations or reconstructions of their own history as a personal narrative across the course of life' (Ibid. p. 229).

4.1 The life-story in research

The study of human lives as the experience of individuals across the course of their existence taking into consideration their inter-personal, social and cultural contexts has been used to different ends in psychology, anthropology, history, and literary criticism. In sociology, the terms 'life course methodology', 'life-history' and 'life-story' reflect methodological positions and epistemological assumptions underlying such research. Two basic orientations are noted by Schwartz and Jacobs (1979): the nomothetic approach and the ideographic approach. The first of these seeks theoretical generalisations across populations through the statistical analysis of quantitative data (Giele and Elder 1998A). The second approach, the ideographic approach, seeks an understanding of the subjective experience of individual life-narratives as a valid scientific end in itself (Josselson and Lieblich 1993).

Although often used inter-changeably, the terms 'life-history' and 'life-story' are usefully distinguished and used in conjunction with each other. Thus a life-history may be understood as a chronological account of an individual's life, while a life-story is the individual's own interpretation of the subjective experience of that life as lived. As data, life-histories are of most value when there are autographically based, span a whole life, are detailed and experientially subjective, chronologically accurate and sequentially ordered (Schwartz and Jacobs 1979). The subjective nature of life-stories wraps life-story research in multiple layers of relational and epistemological complexity. Of necessity, in-depth interviewing is the dominant method for the gathering of life-stories (Taylor and Bogdan 1998).

The narrative study of lives is inherently interdisciplinary with interviewers bringing their own disciplinary perspectives to bear on the drama of the interview and on the themes of the interpretation. In short, an examination of the life experience of an individual, as interpreted by that individual, constitutes a valuable element in the understanding of human affairs. Sociologists have used this method to examine the nature of the relationship between the individual and society, for example:

> 'Life stories can help the researcher become more aware of the range of possible roles and standards that exist within a human community. They can define an individual's place in the social order of things and can explain or confirm experience through the moral, ethical, or social context of a given situation' (Athkinson 2004, p. 129).

4.2 The ontology of stories and storying

Of course life stories did not originate as a research method. The narration of our own life stories and of the stories of others is an important element of an on-going process of sense making on the part of individuals and in communities. Such story telling serves to emphasise the universal and the enduring in human experience. Atkinson (2004) notes Campbell's identification of the key functions of myths as 'bringing us into accord with ourselves, with others, with the mystery of life and with the universe around us' (Campbell 1970 in Athkinson 2004 p. 122) and argues that life stories can serve similar functions. He posits life-story narration as a form of human sense making essential to the social and the existential nature of the human condition.

> 'First, stories, with their deeply human elements and motifs can guide us psychologically, stage by stage, through the entire life course ... Second, stories can affirm, validate and support our own experiences socially and clarify our relationships to those around us ... Third, stories can serve a

> mystical-religious function, by bringing us face-to-face with an ultimate mystery ... And finally, stories can render a cosmology, an interpretative total image of the universe that is in accord with the knowledge of the time...'(Athkinson 2004, p. 122).

Alasuutari (1997) notes the distinction between the socio-structural and the socio-linguistic approaches to understanding life stories. In the first, the story is conceived as providing a picture of the real life as lived; in the second, the story is understood as narrating the subjective experience of life as lived by a personality. Distinguishing between stories reflecting and representing reality or stories as a sense making narrative raises ontological and epistemological questions about the nature of life-stories and about the relationship between story and reality. Within the philosophy of history a continuity and discontinuity thesis may be identified. The continuity approach holds that the history and narrative have the same character while the discontinuity approach holds that they have essentially different characters, the history being without structure, the narrative being about the creation of structure. In contrast, Widdershoven (1993) argues for an interlinked or hermeneutic relationship between history and narrative and cites MacIntyre's (1981) conceptualisation of life as an enacted narrative, and Ricoeur's (1983) view that

> '[l]ife has a pre-narrative structure, which is changed into a narrative structure by the plot of a story told about it. Life has an implicit meaning, which is made explicit in stories' (Widdershoven 1993, p. 4).

For Widdershoven, both MacIntyre and Ricoeur place undue emphasis on narration as the location of meaning. Instead he draws on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty to argue that life has implicit or pre-reflexive meaning. Life is the base of all narration, he says, which serves to enrich and add to the meaning of life rather than to form it as a layer or interpretation on a meaningless reality.

> 'Life has an implicit meaning, which is made explicit in stories. Such a process of explication presupposes that there is already something present. What is present is, however, not just there to be uncovered. It is shaped and structured in a process of articulation. A story about life presents us life as it is lived, and as such life is the foundation of the story. In presenting life, however, the story gives life a specific sense, and makes clear what it is about. Thus the story is based on life, but it is not determined by it because it is an articulation of life that gives it a new and richer meaning' (Widdershoven 1993, p. 6)

This hermeneutic interlinking of life and story suggests that in researching lives both the life-history and the life-story are required. But if this duality is to be of value we

need some concept of the functionality of the life-story as opposed to the life history. The purpose of narration appears to be to constitute meaning and coherence so that our lives are seen to possess a unity. Two aspects are noted by Widdershoven, (1993) firstly, that we experience our lives as a sensible narrative and secondly, in narration we may change the meaning of these experiences for ourselves.

> 'Personal identity is the result of a hermeneutic relation between experience and story, in which experience elicits the story, and the story articulates and thereby modifies experience' (Widdershoven 1993, p. 9).

This requirement of personal sense-making in the presentation of the self in social inter-action has both private and public purposes and has been linked to the concept of 'face' (Goffman 1959). In embarking on the articulation of a life-story therefore, the individual is bound to present a consistency in self in order to maintain face (Alasuutari 1997) in social interaction. Hence sense-making in the narrative is contextualised to the present circumstance of the narrator and the narrator's understanding of the specific interest of the audience. As Rosenthal notes:

> 'A life story does not consist of an atomistic chain of experiences, whose meaning is created at the moment of their articulation, but is rather a process taking place simultaneously against the backdrop of a biographical structure of meaning, which determines the selection of the individual episodes presented, and within the context of the interaction with a listener or imaginary audience' (Rosenthal 1993).

In constructing the life-story the narrator selects episodes or events in light of the contemporary context. Episodes may be reinterpreted in this process, as a result. When an interviewer puts forward topics or themes as being of interest or relevance he/she goes some way towards establishing a framework for the selection and interpretation of episodes on the part of the narrator (Rosenthal 1993). In this process the narrator typically utilises a model of 'phenomenal' rather than objective or chronological time; that is, they link events according to the underlying structure of the narrative (Fischer 1982). Indeed, Alasuutari (1997) holds that in narration, personal consistency, despite altered perspectives, may be maintained by 'reconstructing continuity over time' (Alasuutari 1997, p.6). Hence, we are conceived as holding, not individual selves, nor multiple selves, but the capacity to socially construct ourselves to adjust to changing circumstances while maintaining an experience of unity of selfhood.

4.3 The narrative interview

The form of the narrative interview is designed to be worked through a staged process of moving from an open-ended invitation to narrate, through the development of a main narrative, to a period of clarification and extension, and a period of reflection and conclusion (Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997, cited in Hopf 2004). Two broad approaches to the method of the narrative interview, based on the ontological and epistemological framing of the interview event by the researcher, have emerged in research practice. In one, the naturalistic approach, an attempt is sought to provide a space to let the single voice be heard and to let individuals 'speak for and about themselves first' (Athkinson 2004 p. 124). The role of the researcher in this process is to facilitate the articulation of the subjective and experiential narration and to empower the speaker rather than to interact with or to interpret them. An alternative approach as exemplified by Holstein and Gubrium (1995) emphasises the constructionist and collaborative nature of the interview as an event. 'Interviewer and respondent collaboratively construct the meaning of interview narratives' (Holstein and Gubrium 1995 p. 59). From such a perspective the relevance of life stories lies not in their accurate portrayal of a life lived but in the manner in which they are constructed and used in the present to make sense of the past, the present and of a possible future (Gubrium and Holstein 1998; Holstein and Gubrium 2000a, 2000b).

Whether the naturalist or constructionist approach to life story interviewing is adopted, the challenges of the method remain rooted in the inter-subjectivity of the interviewer-interviewee relationship and the requirement to build a mutual trust and respect that allows for an openness in the discourse. Inevitably, the fact that the interviewer brings an agenda, if not an explicit interview guide (Taylor and Bogdan 1998), to the interview event, adds further layers of sense-making complexity. Atkinson (1998, 2004) argues for flexibility and adaptability in the interview context and describes the method as open to a scientific approach but as best pursued as an art. Nevertheless, the interviewer is obliged to proffer some structure and Atkinson does indicate a) birth and family of origin, b) cultural setting and traditions, c) social factors, d) education, e) love and work, f) historical events and periods, g) retirement, h) inner life and spiritual awareness, i) major life themes and j) vision of the future, as broad themes that may be covered fruitfully in a life story interview.

The argument for the privileging of process over structure is maintained in relation to the issue of timing. Life story interviews may be pursued in individual or multiple sittings, in short or lengthy interviews. However, Atkinson (2004) reports that they typically require some three to five hours across a number of sittings, while Johnson (2004) notes Spradley's (1979) use of half-a-dozen one-hour sessions to complete an in-depth ethnographic interview.

Section 5 The Challenges of Interpretation

The act of interpretation begins with the decision as to the manner of recording the 'data' of the interview, as once the interview is over this then becomes the recorded reality of the event. Although the tape or video recording of the interview can present a number of problems relative to the performance of either or both the interviewer and respondent in the interview drama (Hermanns 2004), recording offers a degree of data capture that is difficult to attain otherwise (Holstein and Gubrium 1995, Johnson 2004). The production of a written version of the interview, whether as verbatim or edited text, as transcript or structured narrative, begins the interpretative process. The choice of which to use depends on the perspective of the interviewer and the purpose of the interview. A naturalistic approach will aim for a complete transcript to capture the authentic voice of the respondent, at times even omitting the voice of the interviewer completely. A constructionist approach is more likely to use a transcript to support the development of a structured narrative. The resultant text requires explanation, analysis and interpretation. The process is aimed at the identification and articulation of the meaning of the text and is a task that is shaped, to varying degrees, by a number of factors. The most salient of these are the approach to analysis or interpretation, the position taken on the ontological status of the text, and the openness to an explication of the reflexivity of the researcher. In Section 5 the problems of the practice of analysis and interpretation are examined so as to present the basis upon which the research for this thesis has been conducted. Section 5.1 outlines various approaches to interpretation. A consideration of the text as object is set out in Section 5.2. In Section 5.3 the ontology of interpretation is explored. Finally, the nature of abductive thinking is considered in Section 5.4.

5.1 Approaches to interpretation

Within the qualitative research community there is wide variance as to the appropriate ends of research. One key fault line is between those who seek some degree of generalisability versus those whose attach all importance to the understanding of the particular. For the former the act of interpretation lies 'in the construction of a category that represents the concrete richness of a case' (Bude 2004, p. 325), as science is concerned with the general and the particular. For the latter interpretation constitutes sense-making, not reproduction and therefore each interpretation is particular and not generalisable. As Riessman notes:

> 'those working from social constructionist or performative perspectives approach the issue of truth differently. Verification of the 'facts' of lives is less salient than understanding the changing meanings of events for the individuals involved, and how these, in turn, are located in history and culture. Personal narratives are, at core, meaning-making units of discourse. They are of interest precisely because narrators interpret the past in stories rather than reproduce the past as it is' (Riessman 2004 pps 704-705).

Bude argues that such an exclusive emphasis on the particular resembles art, but falsely so, in that art's concern is with 'the non-substitutable characteristics of the work' (Bude 2004 p. 325). Art is concerned with transcendence of the particular as opposed to detailing of the specific.

Qualitative research is shaped by the paradigms and perspective from which it is undertaken, and the approach to interpretation varies accordingly. Denzin's own view is unequivocal and he states plainly that

> '[T]he age of a putative value-free social science appears to be over. Accordingly, ... any discussion of this process must become political, personal, and experiential ... I believe that the methods for making sense of experience are always personal. Life and method ... are inextricably inter-twined. One learns about method by thinking about how one makes sense of one's own life' (Denzin 1998C, p. 315).

Within the post-structural view, interpretative styles, criteria and themes of interpretation emphasise the immediate concrete experience, attention to the reflexive and emotional aspects of the research experience, and an epistemological perspective that challenges claims to narrative realism (Denzin 1998C). Placing interpretative interactionism within a post-structural framework, Denzin argues for the identification of the epiphanies in the lives of respondents that have changed the meaning and

direction of their life-stories. The interpretative text should be detailed and should capture the emotions and understandings as well as the life-history of the respondents. Life-histories and life-stories should not be asked to stand alone but rather should be contextualised in the social, cultural and institutional milieu in which they were experienced so that the frameworks of sense-making within which the respondent acted are understood.

Most pointedly, however, Denzin sees the interpretative research enterprise as shaped by, and reflecting the researcher. For him '[I]nterpretative research begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher' (Denzin 1998C, p.335). Such a situating of the interpretative act with the self of the researcher is seen to negate any possibility that the process can be objectified. Hence '[I]nterpretation is an art that cannot be formalized'. (Ibid. p. 338) Despite this, Denzin does not regard interpretation as an intuitive, formless process. The aim of interpretation is to illuminate the meanings given to lived experience by utilising concepts and frameworks which are close to and engaged with these lived experiences rather than abstracted theoretical constructs.

5.2 The text as object

Flick (1998) identifies two broad strategies for the analysis of text-data. One involves the division or segmenting of the text to allow for the categorising or classification of aspects or elements presented in the text. Such an approach supports cross-case analysis and, in so doing, is open to the development of generalisations. An alternate strategy involves a more sequential than particle analysis and by focusing on the whole seeks an understanding of the underlying structure or meaning of the text and through it of the case. While cross-case analysis is not excluded in this strategy, it is less relevant as the analysis is case specific and generalisations from cross-case comparison are more problematic. As a starting point it may be useful to note the distinctions between three approaches to sequential analyses, viz., conversation analysis, discourse analysis, and narrative analysis. These are now examined briefly in turn.

Conversation analysis is centrally concerned with the detailed study of real-life conversations so as to examine both aspects of the social-relations of the participants and the nature of the rules underlying and structuring conversation. Analysis is typically sequential and focused on the manner in which conversational structure serves

to construct social reality. While early work such as that by Schegloff and Sacks (1974) and Sacks and Schegloff (1974) sought to identify the structuring of everyday conversations, later attention turned to formal social situations with asymmetries of power. Conversation analysis has been challenged for this failure to engage with subjective meaning and for the manner in which focus on conversation structures tends to lead to the analysis of increasingly smaller pieces of text with decreasing reference to the overall context (Flick 1998).

Discourse analysis is an approach in which the content of communication and its subject matter is analysed from a social rather than a linguistic perspective of conversation analysis. The method typically examines the construction of the interpretation of events or social phenomena *via* the shaping of the discursive formation (Potter and Wetherell 1987, 1998).

Narrative analysis proceeds from the identification of a given statement or discourse as constituting a narrative. More broadly, the individual life is conceived as being a constructed narrative and life-stories are procured so as to trace this biographical process (Flick 1998). The ontological nature of the life-story or life-narrative has been viewed as essentially a reproductive recapitulation of a past experience. An alternate view is based on acknowledging the constructed and interpreted nature of the original experience and hence the reconstructed nature of the narrative of that experience. From this position life-histories are understood as narratives that are constructed in the present and shaped by present context and cultural forms (Bruner 1987).

As the narrative event is viewed as a temporal constructive process, approaches to interpretation seek to situate the elements of the narrative within the wider context and formation of the narrative event. This intention leads to an analytical process that moves from the development of the text to an alternating examination of text segments and the whole text in an iterative unfolding of meaning (Denzin 1989B, Rosenthal 1993). The process is challenging, not least because layers of meaning and understanding from the segment, the whole text, the context of the narrative event and the researcher's subjectivity and reflexivity overlie and interact with each other. Attempts to develop segment level clarity through the grouping of segments into themes that may be analysed across cases may be pursued but this may lead to the loss of contextual richness and individual identity (Mauthner and Doucet 1998).

McCormack (2004) notes the problematic nature of the process of coding and thematising in narrative analyses and offers an alternate approach of 'storying stories' through which she seeks to remain true to context, complexity, constructive process, multiple voices and interpretations. In addition, she argues for a valuing of interpretative stories, the output of her method, in that they 'open to the reader the possibility of multiple interpretations' (McCormack 2004 p.233). It should be noted, however, that the realisation of this possibility lies in an interactional process between the reader and the story in that the reader constructs meaning in the active choice of an interpretative pathway through the story. Following this line of argument through to its inter-actional, processual and subjective conclusion, she notes that

> '[I]nterpretative stories also open to the reader the possibility of re-storying their life ... Searching for the individual and collective aspects in stories encourages readers to examine and question their own experience by searching for commonalities and differences in the experiences of the storyteller' (McCormack 2004 p. 233).

In highlighting the subject nature of the interpretative process in narrative analysis, McCormack prompts a move from a focus on analytical method to a questioning of the nature of interpretation as a human action. If we consider the interpretation of the story of an other not as an intellectual exercise in the positing of multiple explanations of an other but as an intersubjective attempt to grasp the human interpretative experience of the other, then we must be concerned with the question of the nature of human understanding or sense-making.

5.3 The ontology of interpretation

Accepting that the construction of the narrative itself constitutes an interpretative process does not go far enough in identifying the nature of interpretation as a process. Widdershoven (1993) notes that the nature of interpretation as an action is contested and instances Collingwood's (1946) enactment theory, Gadamer's (1960) dialogical approach and Derrida's (1972, 1988) intertextual perspective. Collingwood conceives of story-telling as a re-enactment or mental re-construction of a historical event that enables the participants to re-experience essential aspects of past events. For Gadamer, interpretation is a form of dialogue between the text or story and the audience such that while the story has a meaning of itself, this is viewed or interpreted by the audience from their own perspective and context. Thus the interpretive dialogue produces a new meaning for the audience. In Derrida's view, interpretation places the story in a

different context, but as life is inter-contextual, this process is on-going. All attempts at unity are contextually bound and serve only to create a new divergence in ceaseless cycles.

Such a perspective brings us into the realm of hermeneutics, for, although initially concerned with textual understanding, hermeneutics struggles with the challenge of objectivity in human knowledge and with the separation of knowing from the knower. Dilthey (1976) asks

> '[h]ow can an individually structured consciousness reconstruct – and thereby know objectively – the distinct individuality of another' (Dilthey 1976 p, 249, quoted in Burns 1992 p. 2).

The fundamental nature of such a concern results in hermeneutical thought having relevance and application across a range of human intellectual endeavour. Hence hermeneutics presents a disparate body of literature. For the purposes of this dissertation, a useful start might perhaps be made by drawing attention to the distinction between the transcendental hermeneutics of Husserl and the 'ontological turn' of Heidegger. In his transcendental hermeneutics Husserl (1929) held that understanding was constituted by the apprehension of the universal in the particular. Hence his method of phenomenological reduction sought to identify these universal meanings that transcend and thereby enable the understanding of the particular across time and space by separate individuals. Husserl's transcendental epistemology may be contrasted with Heidegger's perspective in which understanding is not constituted within an abstracting consciousness but by an engagement with and involvement in the world. Hence understanding is an internalised expression of being in the world rather than an externalised expression of transcending it. Understanding arises through this situating in the world, as meaning is conditioned by a relativity to the world. Understanding and interpretation are driven by connectivity and intimacy rather than by objectivity. For Heidegger

> '... an interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us. If, when one is engaged in a particular kind of interpretation, in the sense of exact textual interpretation, one likes to appeal [beruft] to what 'stands there,' [but] then one finds that what 'stands there' in the first instance is nothing other than the obvious undiscussed assumption [Vormeinung] of the person who does the interpreting' (Heidegger Being and Time pp 192-193 quoted in Burns 1992 p.3).

Hence, understanding is viewed as essentially an ontological condition rather than an epistemological achievement. Humans understand as a necessity of their existence because we must make sense of our environment to survive. Furthermore, this understanding is based on being in the world and the infinite possibilities to which this gives rise. Human understanding therefore is 'a mode of being rather than a mode of knowledge' (Bauman 1978 p. 148). Given this position, it follows then that the hermeneutical circle

> '... is an ontological movement between the text and our situation as interpreters of it.' (Burns 1992 p. 4)

This conceptualisation of human understanding as a central aspect of our ontological condition has profound implications for the subject-object construct of much epistemological thought. If our understanding cannot be separated from our being in the world then neither must we seek to separate an 'object' from its' situatedness in order to apprehend it. Since our understanding of the external world is grounded in our being in the world then our apprehension of reality 'is merely a mode of man's interpretation of the world' (Gelven 1970 p.128). While the physical world exists independent of our apprehension of it, that apprehension is an interpretation based on our situatedness or our being in the world. Furthermore, this being in the world is about an inter-connectedness rather than a separation. 'Being-in-the-World is, from the outset, being with and existing with' (Heidegger Being and Time para. 24).

Since our understanding is based on being in the world or on connection rather than disconnection, this understanding is pre-reflective. Reflection becomes necessary to our existence when this connection is ruptured. Such ruptures occur when alternate possibilities arise or when something is seen to be other than it was previously. At such a juncture reflection is necessary for sense-making. Theoretical knowledge becomes necessary not because of actuality but because of possibility. If all possibilities were identical with reality then reflection would not be required. As Bauman has it,

> '[w]e can put it this way: the problem of knowledge, articulated by most epistemologists as the passage from emptiness to fullness, Heidegger re-phrases as the question of passage from pre-reflective (but full all the same!) existence to an existence which includes self-reflection' (Bauman 1978 p.161).

Heidegger's location of understanding as a mode of being rather a mode of knowledge is used by Schutz to identify the interpretative procedures by which we constitute meaning as the proper object of sociology. Meaning is constituted inter-actionally in interpretation. It is constructed through interpretation in social inter-action. Further, insofar as meaning is ontologically grounded in the human condition, the process by which meaning is constructed in everyday life and the process by which it is constructed in the practice of sociology is essentially the same.

> '...it is suggested that there is only one kind of understanding, applicable to both 'ordinary' members of society and to their specialised and trained students; both cases of 'making sense' can be described in identical terms. The project of understanding sociology is feasible exactly for this reason; and remains feasible as it is conceived in a form which may grounded on this essential identity. The superiority of sociologists over interpretative procedures operated matter-of-factly by the ordinary members of society may consist only of their operating the same procedure consciously and in a methodical way. This difference, however, is not of the kind on which a claim to a privileged access to truth could be founded. Truth as it were, is not an issue' (Bauman 1978 p. 181).

In his work Gadamer (1962) criticised the objectification of the subject in research. While arguing that understanding was an ontological condition rather than an epistemological act, he was concerned to develop a hermeneutic method that might serve to avoid an arbitrary subjectivity in the interpretation of other. Gadamer's emphasis on the dialogical nature of the research act is supported by Habermas (1967). They both argue that traditional interpretative methodologies are prone to the objectification of their subjects on three broad grounds. Firstly, these approaches view the interpretative task as a methodological challenge of scientific technique. One tendency of this perspective is to encourage a separation of meaning from the action in the method. Such a position runs counter to the ontological view of understanding. Secondly, traditional interpretative methodologies tend to privilege the subjective meaning of the individual at the expense or exclusion of the contextual subjectivity of the wider social reality. Thirdly, they criticise traditional interpretative methodologies for failing to embrace and unfold sufficiently the reflexive character of interpretation because such reflexivity is viewed as inimical to objectivity. Such an approach reduces the dialogical relationship between the parties in the research act to a one-sided seeking of an interpretation of the other, whereas positing an ontological status of understanding in human relations implies that all understanding is necessarily a joint inter-active endeavour.

In his development of hermeneutics, Ricoeur placed the text at the centre of the stage. A written discourse, as a text, is freed from and moves beyond the intention of the author or the meaning of the dialogue, or as he puts it, 'the text's career escapes the finite horizon lived by the author' (Ricoeur 1971 p. 532). In this form the text may address audiences across space and time. In a similar manner, meaningful action may be seen to assume an objective existence that separates the original subjective meaning from the action. Hence action is open to alternate interpretation in different social and temporal contexts. This autonomy of meaning

> '... allows the potentially unlimited re-appropriation of the meaning of an action, i.e. their continual practical interpretation, in the course of present praxis. Just as the meaning of a text, the meaning of an action is open-ended and awaits to be determined ever anew' (Bleicher 1980 p. 231).

5.4 Thinking abductively

Whether the interpretative process is constituted in inter-subjective dialogue or through engagement with the autonomous textual meaning, the degree to which the process is identifiable and follows rules, conditions any judgement about the status of the interpretation. In other words, what claims may be made for an interpretation that may distinguish it from random subjectivity? Since Peirce's (1992) explorations on the nature and utility of abduction it has been increasingly used in the field of qualitative research. Central to the appeal of abduction is its apparent capacity to straddle the gap between the logical and rule-following requirements of scientific method and an intuitive or insightful space. Hence while deductive reasoning subordinates the specific to the general and inductive reasoning proposes the general from the specific, abductive inferencing reassembles parts to propose a new possibility. In so doing, the process achieves a movement that appears external to the rules of logic. As such, it is without logical method, nonetheless the opportunities for abductive inferencing may be promoted through the situating of appropriate conditions for the abductive leap. Reichertz (2004) notes Peirce's use of strategies that displace the researcher so that he/she are no longer engaged with their normal paradigmatic modes of reasoning. This stepping away from old modes of thought is designed to remove the logical frameworks normally employed by the consciously reasoning mind.

> 'Abductive inferencing is not therefore, a *mode of reasoning* that delivers new knowledge, and neither is it an exact method that assists in the generation of *logically ordered* (and therefore operationalizable) hypotheses or some new theory. Abductive inferencing is, rather, an attitude towards data and towards one's own knowledge: data are to be taken seriously, and

> the validity of previously developed knowledge is to be queried' (Reichertz 2004 p. 163).

For Bude (2004), the adoption of an attitude open to abductive inferencing offers an important aspect to approaching both the interview situation and the later interpretation of resultant documentation. The interpretative, meaning-seeking dialogue of the interview provides a moment of openness wherein the existential experience may be revealed. The researcher must be open to the significance that may emerge from such a contingent context. Similarly, in approaching text material, an open attitude is called for. He terms the reading style required as one of 'methodological stupidity'. Additionally, Bude (*ibid*) draws on Wolff's (1976) conceptualisation of the interpretative process as one of 'surrender' and 'catch' to argue for an opening of the self to the text in order that its underlying structures may be revealed. Hence the researcher is personally as much as methodologically involved in the interpretation.

> 'In the act of interpretation the distanced reader, buried in the text, turns into an engaged *ego* concerned with him or herself. Hermenuetic philosophy speaks of a *draft quality* of understanding in which the the futurity of a self-understanding *ego* may be found' (Bude 2004 p. 324).

Section 6 Framing this Research

Three linked points follow from the choice of position outlined above. Firstly, the identification and use of a model of the human condition serves to acknowledge the individual, social and cultural context of all research. Secondly, the model of the human condition is proposed as a bounded universal, that is, it implies, of logical necessity, that the conditions of the model attach to the researcher as much as to the respondents. There can be no privileging of the investigator in this regard. Thirdly, the judgement of the epistemological status of the research output is a function of the interpretative nature of the human condition and the collaborative nature of the interview as interaction. Research data is not constituted as object, as the ontology of what constitutes data lies in an interpretation. The data are spoken for before they are collected, or put more explicitly, data are created in an act of interpretation.

The foregoing discussion serves to outline the parameters within which this research has been developed. The research design represents an integration of paradigm, methodology and method that is ontologically and epistemologically consistent. The

broad parameters of the research question aimed to identify and understand the sense-making of 'voluntary actors'. This necessarily implied an interpretativist or constructionist approach to inquiry wherein the aim was to understand 'the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it' (Schwandt 1998 p.221). The proposed starting point is a model of the individual that is existential in nature. This model assumes an ontology of the human being in which existence precedes essence and an epistemology which is relativistic. Further, the model assumes the purpose of human action to be that of continuous self-realisation or self-creation in social interaction. This social interaction constitutes a process wherein meaning is collaboratively produced in a dialogic process. These assumptions create methodological implications that demand an ideographic approach and one that takes cognisance of the subjectivity of the researcher.

While the research question focuses on the meaning of lived experience and the intentionality of consciousness, it does so assuming that this meaning and intentionality is impacted by the life history of the individual. The focus is on how voluntary actors interpret the world and develop inter-subjective social constructions of meaning. Given this, it would seem that a variety of interpretative research traditions are relevant to the work.

The biographical tradition is an obvious starting point. In considering Clifford's (1970) five-part biographical taxonomy and looking for an approach consistent with the ontological and epistemological position adopted, it would appear that his 'artistic-scholarly' type offers the most appropriate match. However, even the artist-scholarly biographical tradition may be deemed to offer insufficient visibility to the voice of the other, to mask the degree of interpretation the part of the biographer, to fail to acknowledge the problems of representation, and to ignore processes of post-hoc sense making in the present (Charon 2001) in a respondent's narration and the co-creation of meaning in the researcher-respondent dialogue.

Aspects of what this work is attempting to reach may be amenable to a phenomenological research approach. A phenomenological study focussed on an element of voluntary activity (Creswell 1998) would be valuable in capturing the meaning of specific voluntary activity depending on the activity chosen but it may not capture the act of self and meaning creation that it is proposed is taking place in the

overall life context of the voluntary actor. That is, a phenomenological focus on understanding the meaning of a 'voluntary action' may miss possible historical or life story contextualities which serve to cause variation or fluidity in this meaning.

A case study approach was also considered. While an immediate issue is the question of the extent to which an individual's narrative account of their sense-making through their social-interaction may be considered a 'bounded-system', this may draw attention from other valuable contributions of case-study literature. Stake's (1998) distinction, as a heuristic device, between intrinsic, instrumental and collective cases is relevant.

I have combined elements of biographical, phenomenological, and case study approaches in the development of a methodological approach for this research. In doing so, the research has been constituted by a series of existential, phenomenological, biographical, case studies.

The production of a series of life story narratives of 'voluntary actors', with particular emphasis on a phenomenological examination of the meaning of their 'voluntary activity' for these respondents, was carried out. These narratives were collected by opened-ended, unstructured interviews involving an iterative process of interpretation and follow-on dialogue. Documentary data was used where available and considered relevant by the respondent or researcher. The life course narratives were produced as individual texts.

The resultant series of narratives lent themselves to analysis as a set of case studies. Each narrative was seen to have an intrinsic value. Together they also held an instrumental and collective value. However, these possibilities only became evident as the narratives unfolded in the course of the interviews.

It is recognised that the epistemological status of the resultant texts is conditioned by (i) the ontological status of the interview conversation as a co-creative act of meaning construction; (ii) the post-hoc, sense making of the respondent in the interview context; (iii) the interpretive perspective of the researcher; and (iv) the interpretative perspective of the reader.

Prior to entering the field, the proposed set of narratives was conceptualised as a series of co-interpretations, each sharing one common interpreter. These co-interpretations were considered to have a certain artistic character. There were conceived of as meditations or compositions on a theme; a series of portraits that may have something to communicate about specific interpretations of particular examples of voluntary action, or some collective insight to venture about the sense making of the 'voluntary actor'.

The interview was conceived as both event and process. As event it was situated in time, place, the biography of the participants and a socio-cultural meaning structure. This situatedness provided the context against which the interview process unfolded. The unfolding was an emergent process of inter-subjective interpretative meaning making. The dialogical interview process sought a sense making of the past, present and possible futures. This sense-making was both individual and joint in that for each party the interview was a life event that needed to be interpreted or made meaningful at the individual level and as a dialogue.

The narrative act was conceptualised as a core human mode of sense-making. It was always narration from the moment, in that present sense. It was an interpretative process by which the individual presented his/herself to the world, made meaning of their experience of the world and made sense of the world both to him/herself and to others. Hence, narration provided the storying of a life in a given context. Like the interview, the interpretative aspects of narration were always conditioned by the situatedness of the narrative moment. In this research a constructionist approach is taken to the narrative mode, such that the narration was developed with a view to capturing the meaning and sense-making in the interview event, because a life-story rather than a life-history was sought.

The goal of interpretation was to disclose the constructive process of meaning making. Due to the situated condition of the world and of humans in the world, interpretation was conceived as the ontological condition of human existence rather than as an epistemological process. Interpretation is an existential condition of being human and therefore all interpretation has an ontological impact on the interpreter. The life-story interview was seen as a reflexive process for both parties in the dialogue.

The situated, iterative and ontological nature of interpretation means that it remains an ongoing process in which no conclusion or unity is possible. In addition the interpretative moment, once committed to text, is separated from the subjective intent of the originator, and assumes an autonomy of meaning freed from the original horizons which bounded it.

Finally, the potential value offered by abductive inferencing in analysis was acknowledged and an openness to the abductive moment in the act of interpretation was adopted.

This search for a research paradigm reflected the inductive nature of qualitative research, that is, it has been stimulated by observation and reflection on lived experiences (Gill & Johnson 1991). This in turn has shaped the research question; which itself implied a particular ontology and epistemology. And so, the research question, like all research questions, was paradigm bound at birth. Further, it is grounded in the researcher's biography and ontology as one of Schwandt's 'interpretative beings'. From a positivist position the epistemology of the methodology is unsupportable. As Kolakowski summarised,

> '[W]e are obliged to reject the assumption of values as characteristics of the world for they are not discoverable in the same way as the only kind of knowledge worthy of the name ... Consequently, we are entitled to express value judgements on the human world, but we are not entitled to assume that our grounds for making them are scientific; in other words, the only grounds for making them are our own arbitrary choices' (Kolakowski 1972 p. 17).

But for me as an individual researcher or interpreter, why people choose to act, in a manner apparently inconsistent with a pervasive market paradigm, is the first and chief question to ask of individuals engaged in 'voluntary action'. If it cannot be asked in a positivist paradigm, if the positivist paradigm allows no way of addressing it, then other approaches must be used. For the possibilities of indeterminism, of free-will and of the purposive ends of action are foundational issues in any discussion of voluntary action. From an existentialist perspective at least, they are central to an understanding of the origins, meaning and impact of voluntary action. The manner in which these concepts are perceived and dealt with conditions how we can think and talk about volunteerism, voluntarism and voluntaryism. If the questions we allow remain ontologically and

epistemologically bound (in a positivist sense), we may not only confine ourselves to mundane questions but may also fail to pose ones that really challenge us. Arguing the case in a different context Janesick (1998) urged that we make the choice:

> 'Somehow we have lost the human and passionate element of research. Becoming immersed in a study requires passion: passion for people, passion for communication, and passion for understanding people. This is the contribution of qualitative research, and it can only enhance educational and human services practice. For too long we have allowed psychometrics to rule our research and thus to decontextualize individuals. In depersonalizing the most personal of social events, education, we have lost our way. Now it is time to return to a discourse on the personal, on what it means to be alive.' (Janesick 1998 p. 51)

Chapter 4 The Storying of Seven Lives

Introduction

In this Chapter the process of gathering and analysing the life-stories that are at the core of this dissertation is outlined. In Section 1 the research process is detailed and the analytical process utilised to arrive at an interpretation is outlined. Section 2 provides a synopsis of each of the seven life-stories gathered in this research. These synopses are brief life-histories in which particular attention is paid to the respondents' organisational involvement. The bare, factual nature of these life-histories is relieved in Section 3, where a reflection on the intrinsic value of these life-stories is offered.

Section 1 The Research Process

In this Section the research process utilised in this work is considered. The approach to the choosing of the respondents is detailed first. The use of pilot interviews to test the interview process and structure is then reported. The research process is then discussed in some detail. The analytical process which followed the life-story interviews is identified. The Section concludes with a consideration of the impact of the researcher in the process.

1.1 The choice of respondents

The task of identifying respondents for this research was shaped by a range of considerations which may be broadly categorised into 'ideal' and 'engagement' considerations. Ideal considerations are those which relate to the life experience of the person, while engagement considerations are concerned with the possibility of entering into a collaborative research process with me specifically. Hence the ideal considerations were:

- Individuals whose voluntary contribution has been exceptional; exceptional in any of a number of ways, for example, in their level of commitment, in an apparent paradigmatic shift in life story, or in articulating a countervailing value system. Individuals whose involvement in voluntary activity or in voluntary organisations, appeared from the outside, to be central to their personal identity. Drawing on an ethnographic analogy, I chose individuals most likely to fit Fetterman's (1989) conception of a *key actor.*

- Individuals whom I had reason to believe were reflective, inquiring and critiquing in their practice of voluntary action. Such individuals as might be characterised as reflective practitioners (Schon 1983).

The requirement for exceptional experience was based on my expectation that in these lives distinguishing elements and aspects would be most clearly displayed and therefore most easily identifiable. I anticipated also that having made such public commitments, with all the value statements this implied, that these individuals would know where they stood, and be comfortable and clear in their articulation of the same. In other words, these ideal considerations relate to identifying individuals, not because they are exceptional in their individuality but rather because I believed they displayed particular aspects to a marked degree. And it was these particular aspects I wished to explore with them.

The engagement considerations were:

- I was concerned to identify individuals whose public profile was limited in scope and intensity as I feared that a high public profile might limit the willingness of individuals to move beyond the mere re-articulation and reinforcement of their public persona.

- I believed it was important that the respondents were from an Irish background and were active in an Irish context as this would mean their conversation with me commenced from a point of a substantial degree of shared experience and understanding of the social, cultural and historical context in which they had lived their lives.

- Most importantly, I needed to feel that I would be able to form the required collaborative research relationship with them, that it, that not only would they be comfortable in articulating their experiences but also that, on a relational level, I would be able to hold that conversation with them.

It follows that, to a greater or lesser extent, I has some personal acquaintance with all the respondents prior to engagement in the research. Indeed, these prior relationships eased the task of securing agreement to their becoming involved in this research. It perhaps also follows that there were certain elements of common experience with the respondents that facilitated the collaborative engagement at a relational level. At the very least there was the common experience of the Irish social and cultural environment. To this might be added a certain generational aspect in that all of us (researcher and respondents) were born within a 15 year period or thereabouts. This meant that we all grew up in country undergoing some slow but nonetheless radical change. This change was driven by an economic and social opening of Ireland to the world. With this came a long drawn out challenging and questioning of institutionalised values. This shared experience undoubtedly supported the type of engagement and comfort with the line of questioning which the research involved.

I chose people who appeared to have come to their voluntary activity from a number of paths; business people turned voluntary actors; people in religious life pursuing voluntary endeavours; employees of nonprofits who have become personally identified with their organisation; individuals who, following personal experience of a social need, have established an organisational response to that need; and individuals who have arrived at a path to voluntary action by way of an intellectual analysis. In the event, it happened that all had been closely involved in establishing nonprofit organisations or in lead major change within existing organisations. However, identifying such organisational leaders was not my prime concern but rather the choice resulted from the ideal and engagement considerations noted above.

The seven collaborators in this research are:

- *Ann Louise Gilligan:* whom I had observed at close hand imbue an organisation and its people with a clearly articulated value.

- *Pat Nolan:* who had turned from a very successful business career to pursue voluntary action and whom I knew to be interested in research as an educational endeavour.
- *Catherine Hickey:* whom I knew from college days and who had been suggested to me by someone who knew the Irish nonprofit sector and its people very well.
- *Eithne Frost:* whom I knew to be highly regarded for her personal commitment and her capacity to get things done for those who dependent on her organisation.
- *Sean Love:* whom I had witnessed him in a number of formal settings being open, frank and clear about his experience and personal development in voluntary action.
- *Fergus O'Ferrall:* who had published a critique of the state/nonprofit sector relationship in the Irish health system and whom I knew to be concerned with the development of voluntary action in Ireland.
- *Patricia Prendiville:* whom I had known as a mature research student colleague and noted close quarters as a research student (mature) her commitment to a value position and action in the world while maintaining a capacity for a reflective critique.

1.2 Piloting the interview structure and process

The challenges of life-story interviewing are such that I judged it prudent to undertake two pilot interviews to test my own competence in the interviewer role, to gain insights into the flow of the interview as drama, and to develop a sense of the appropriate avenues or themes of questioning.

The two pilot interviewees were Ann Louise Gilligan and Pat Nolan. Each respondent was interviewed twice, with each sitting lasting approximately two hours. During the interviews I took hand-written notes. I decided against using a tape recorder primarily on the basis that it generated an illusion of 'data collection', but also because I believed it would reinforce the social construct of the interview process as one of researcher and subject. I gave the interviewees the choice of interview location and timing.

At the commencement of the first interview with each person, I spent approximately 20 minutes outlining the nature of the research process we were embarking on and the focus of the research question. This reprised discussions I had with them previously when I was securing their involvement in the research. I also gave a short review of my own life and of influences upon me. I used this review to make sense of why I had chosen this research question and why I was approaching it in this manner.

In the first interview I asked them to tell me about their own life story. They both did so using a chronological sequence and sought to trace a reasoning or explanation in that sequence.[5] In the second interview I clarified points of information and the chain of events as detailed in the first interview. Then I turned the conversation to key life changes, anecdotes, patterns or themes which had emerged in the first interview so as to examine their understanding, and my understanding of their understanding, of these events and influences in their lives. In both cases the interview data were supported by relevant secondary literature including material written by the individuals themselves as well as material by thinkers who had influenced them or on matters that were important in their lives.

My own learning from the experience of these pilot interviews was in relation to the interview process and the emergence of underlying themes. In terms of the process three aspects may be noted. Firstly, the practical experience was that the tape recording of interviews was a basic requirement for efficient information capture. In addition, the very act of note-taking was not invisible and was itself intrusive in other ways. It drew attention to the response that triggered the note-taking, it diverted my attention away from the immediate on-going conversation and it broke the eye to eye contact between the interviewee and me. Secondly, it became evident that the process might be strengthened by explicitly structuring in a reflective component. Thirdly, the intersubjective, relational nature of the process is integral to it and inescapable. It must be embraced rather than have the researcher attempt to avoid or limit it. On the thematic side I would draw attention to two aspects. The first was the ease and capacity with which the respondents utilised narrative to recall, structure, reflect on and interpret the experience of their lives. Admittedly, the interview process and topic was introduced in such a manner as to signal that a narrative was anticipated. Nonetheless, there was absolutely no resistance on the part of the respondents to the choice of the

[5] In doing so they followed the lead I had provided in my introductory life review.

narrative structure on my part. The approach appeared to be understood as being natural, obvious and reflective of experience. Finally, both respondents left me, as a listener, with an overwhelming sense of being with individuals whose experience of life lived was highly relational. However, this relatedness was experienced as a duality of relating to the self and to others, of introspection and 'extra-spection'. This reflective and relational capacity seemed to enable them to be concerned with the self and with others in a manner that combined and reinforced rather than divided and separated.

1.3 The research process

I use the word 'dialogue' to describe a research process between the researcher and the researched so that the understanding of the topic emerges from an iterative process of discussion, reflection, and discussion. Thus, while the researched person constitutes a 'subject', the researcher's own subjectivity is also seen to influence the derived understandings. I developed a group of five life-story conversations in which the respondent and I sought to understand the nature of 'voluntary activity' as experienced at a personal level over the course of a life. I construed such conversations as moving through three stages, a narration of a life course, a personal reflection on its meaning, and a collaborative interpretation and articulation of its perspective. The first two of these stages enabled the voice of the voluntary actor to be heard; the third captured the collaborative sense-making of the interview event. Although in practice the process had many iterative aspects it was helpful to think of it as a linear one. Hence, I proposed a series of three interviews per respondent; the first to illicit the life-story narrative, the second to reflect on the personal meanings contained within the narrative and the third to develop, if possible, an agreed interpretation of the human experience. It follows that the design calls for a naturalistic approach from the interviewer in the first interview, moving to a constructionist approach in the third interview. I anticipated also that this staging of the life-course conversation would support the development of the necessary rapport between respondent and interviewer.

I decided to use audio-tape to record the interviews and to enable a transcription of the same for the purposes of referral by interviewer and respondent. As noted earlier my experience was that handwritten notes distract the listener, suggested the attribution of a relevance or importance to certain responses, and hindered the interviewer in the adoption of a discussant role.

In respect to the conceptualisation of the interview as research event and to the use of a related language, it may be noted that the framing of the activity as research and use of the concept of data, of the dualities of interviewer and interviewee or even of the term respondent, may be seen to reference a positivist view of science and a power relationship which privileges the scientist who places the other under the metaphoric microscope. This is problematic on a number of fronts. Firstly, given a social constructionist perspective on the activity, the concept of research as data extraction is inappropriate and finding a language to identify the roles, the activity and the constituent elements can be difficult. Secondly, a language was required to convey to potential life-storytellers the ontological and epistemological nature of the activity being proposed. The first problem I addressed by recourse to such descriptors as 'research conversation'[6], and 'life-storyteller'[7], as opposed to interview, interviewer/interviewee or respondent. I addressed the second by clarifying with potential life-storytellers the perspective from which the work was being undertaken.

The nature of the qualitative interview and the life-story conversation as an art form has been discussed variously in Chapter Three above. Despite the recourse to such terminology there is little attempt in the literature to outline or explain what the word 'art' is meant to convey in this context. Its meaning would appear to be anticipated as being self-evident. However, it is not so, especially insofar as it is being contrasted with research method as a 'science'. My reading of the use of the word art in this context is that it is related to 'art' as 'craft'. That is, the practice of qualitative interviewing is conceived of as a learned skill requiring constant contextual adjustment to the relationship (*qua* material) at hand to produce appropriate, if one-off results. In contrast, I propose that in the social constructionist approach to the research conversation, the art analogy is more appropriately understood as referencing the interpretative and the creative aspects of the process. From this perspective the research conversation is conceived as moving through a process of narration and reflection to a joint interpretation, firstly, of an individual human experience and secondly, of its relevance to the experience of others. The end of this process constitutes a sense-making, a creation of a meaning or a human interpretation of an empirical experience perceived subjectively. This creative act of subjective sense-making of objectively lived experience is 'artistic' by nature of its interpretativity and

[6] Echoing the use of 'conversational partner' by Rubin and Rubin (1995)
[7] Utilised by Atkinson (2004)

creativity. To paraphrase Schwandt (1988), to be human is to interpret, and so, being an artist of meaning is an essential part of the human condition.

The interview process led to interview transcripts for each life-story teller. The subject matter of these broadly reflected the life-story, single voice interpretation, joint interpretation pattern of the interview stages. With interviews ranging from one and a half to more than four hours, the transcripts were lengthy. Across the life-stories the length of the completed transcripts varied between 25,000 and 115,000 words. The transcripts were provided to the life-storyteller for comment should they so wish.

From these transcripts I developed life-story texts. These texts are broadly shaped in two parts; part one presents a life history, a chronological account of the respondents' life; part two presents a reflection on the meaning and values which have impacted that life. The resultant texts are presented in the Appendices in the order in which the interview discussions commenced.

The interview process developed as I grew in practice as an interviewer and in confidence with the three-part interview format. The process became less structured around the progressive life-story-clarification-reflection model as I moved through the respondents. This inevitably allowed a more natural conversational form and may have impacted the ease with which respondents enjoined the process and the pace and depth to which they brought to the exploration. In practice it meant that certain conversations moved through the process of narration and reflection quickly and only two interviews (Fergus O'Ferrall) or a single extended interview (Patricia Prendiville) were engaged in. In other cases the narration proved quite detailed and the conversation ran over four extended interviews (Eithne Frost). However, this extended case resulted from the respondent's detailed narrative style rather than the three-stage process; three of these interviews being required to generate the life-story.

The fullest possible engagement of the respondents was central to the successful conduct of this collaborative research. To help secure this engagement it was important that each respondent understood the aims of the research project, the collaborative nature of the process and the interpretative nature of the findings. Of course, trust remains the underlying requirement, not only trust in the process but also trust in the researcher. For such trust is a necessary prerequisite to an open engagement with

where the process might lead. While part of such trust rests within the self-knowledge and confidence of the respondent, part of it rests on the respondents' knowledge and judgement of the researcher. The process of open engagement in such collaborative research is a profoundly reciprocal one, in which to varying degrees, the researcher must make the first disclosures and show a willingness to open their own human experience to the other. In the case of this research, the very act of explaining the intent of the research project and the collaborative and interpretative aspects entailed a degree of self-explanation on the part of the researcher. The extent of this self-explanation by the researcher varied from respondent to respondent depending on the degree to which both parties knew each other beforehand. In addition it might be noted that such reciprocal trust is not gained and held once and for all but has to continually sustain and reaffirmed throughout the dialogue.

Despite the collaborative nature of the research process, it remains essentially driven by the researcher, for it is by the researcher that it is initiated, shaped and conducted. While each life-story and its immediate attendant interpretation is a collaborative process, insofar as the analysis and interpretation presented in this dissertation are derived from these life-stories taken together, then this analysis and interpretation moves far beyond the boundaries of the collaborative process. Indeed the very act of moving from the interview moment to a transcription and then to a life-story-text serves to create a textual presence which itself increasingly becomes the focus of interpretation. Figure 4.1 below illustrates diagrammatically the limits and scope of co-production in this research.

1.4 The procedure of analysis

The analytical framework presented in the following chapters developed from a process that operated via an iterative analysis in which I moved continually between the specific detail, the life-story, and the totality of the life-stories. While my reading of interpretative methodology influenced the analytical categories that I identified, for the most part the categories utilised have been developed from the stories themselves. Of course this was an emergent process at first before it became consciously analytical. That is, as I went through the interviewing process, initial ideas and themes presented. However, these themes subsequently developed and deepened and additional ones emerged, as the full group of life stories were gathered and considered.

Analysis proceeded from a deep engagement with the storytellers in the interview context, followed by a personal immersion with the interview transcriptions. Thus my orientation of questioning moved from the individual in interview, to a focus on the transcripts, which in effect, then constituted the locus of meaning (Ricouer 1971, Derrida 1988). These transcriptions were revisited in an ongoing process so that analytical frameworks and categories emerged consecutively. In this manner the analysis proceeded abductively through a series of increasing abstractions.

The chronological narrative or life-histories constitute a first step of abstraction. A second step of abstraction is performed with the interpretation of values and meaning in relation to the life-histories. This serves to move the text from life-history to life-story and draws on life-stories the interviews and interview transcripts combined. These life-stories are presented as appendices to this dissertation text.

In contrast to a fascination with the close encounter of the detail of these lives, a third step of abstraction enabled me to grasp some of the patterns and similarities that join these lives. These are detailed in Chapter 5, Section 1, *The lived experience*. That such similarities emerged among the lived experience of these individuals suggests that there may be a tendency towards particular characteristics in the biography of the voluntary actor.

The identification of some of these characteristics was sought through a fourth step of abstraction undertaken in order to explore the emergence of common themes running through these experiences. These are detailed in Chapter 5, Section 2, *Emerging themes*. What has emerged from this third level of analysis is the identification of a set of possible characteristics of the biography of the voluntary actor that move towards a transcending of time and place and reflect an existential orientation on the part of the individual.

From there, a fifth step of abstraction allowed for a consideration of the manner in which continuity in these life-stories is constructed in the narration. The act of narration was seen to serve to construct, relative to the moment and context, a sensible continuity in the life. Without this narrative structure a life dissolves into a temporally linked collection of events. The storying of a life is central to the capacity to construct a self

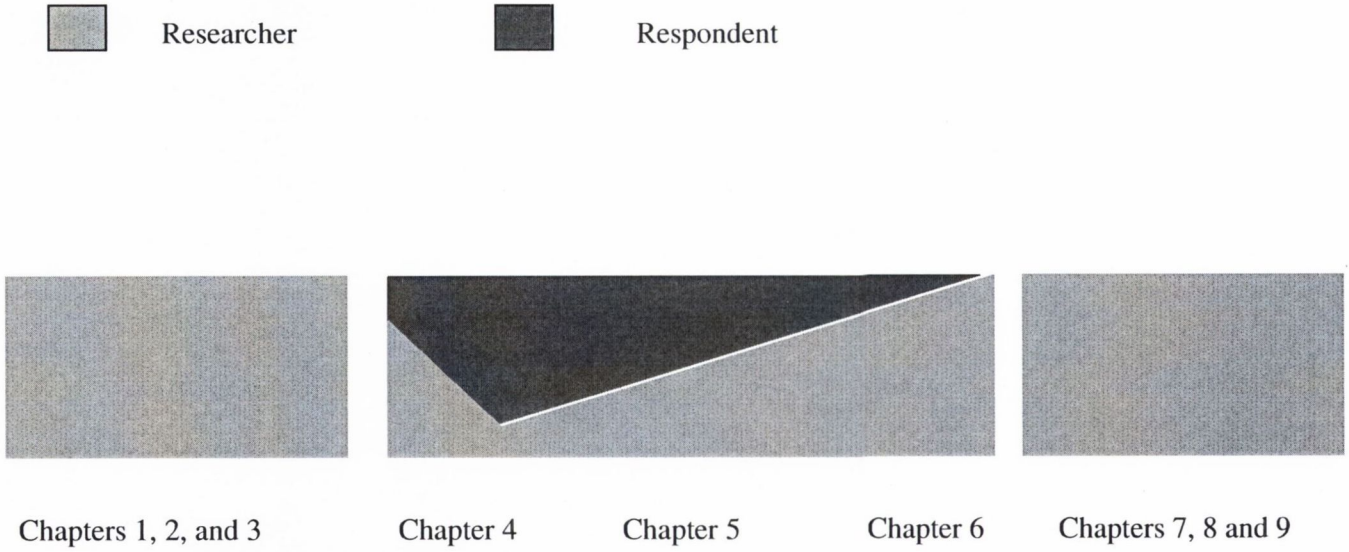

Figure 4.1 The limit and scope of co-production in this research

at the centre of the experience. The course of the narrator's life was made sensible to the narrator and the listener against a set of expectations of sensibility. The narrative was structured around a temporal logic that placed the narrator as the agent and set the narrator's values as the guide to action. In the context of explaining the logics of an entire life, the narration served to articulate a sense-making at a number of levels. These are detailed in Chapter 6, Section 1, *The construction of continuity.* In relation to the voluntary actor it was evident from the respondents that this capacity to story their lives was an essential attribute.

This then led to a sixth step of abstraction which revealed the manner in which these action guiding values and belief systems were individually constructed from the actors' own reflection on their life experience and from coherence systems extant in their social environment. Hence, despite the personalised nature of these individually-held belief systems, certain positions were found to be common across all of the personal belief and meaning systems. These are detailed in Chapter 6, Section 2, *The construction of coherence.* The storytellers were found to construct personal belief and meaning systems that made their experiences sensible and served as a guide to their acting in the world by utilising, adapting and synthesising coherence systems present in their social context.

A seventh abstraction served to identify the dialectic process between the storytellers and their social environment through which the self was constructed and expressed via a search for, and the creation of, meaning over the course of the life. The individual life was seen to be experienced as a becoming through a search for meaning and this search and becoming was exhibited as a dialectical process between the individual and their experience of the social world. This dialectical process draws attention to the specifics of the institutions and structures that shapes the social environment that serves to influences the lives of these storytellers. This analysis is detailed in Chapter 7, Section 1.1, *Reflecting on the instrumental.*

Finally, an eight stage of abstraction was used to suggest that, viewed collectively, it appeared that 'voluntary actors' shared particular emphases and orientations relative to the praxis of this dialectic. These are detailed in Chapter 7, Section 1.2 *Reflecting on the collective.*

Table 4.1 outlines the questions that framed this analytical process and details the individual analytical iterations.

1.5 The impact of the researcher

Inevitably, the analytical process and the resultant interpretation is profoundly impacted by the subjectivity of the researcher. Such subjectivity is not to be considered or identified as a 'bias' in the corruptive sense. The method is not set so as to eliminate or control researcher bias. Quite the contrary. The method is rather to embrace the subjectivity of the researcher and the respondent, to embrace, the experience of both, to abandon to the process. Subjectivity is indulged as a route to knowledge, not knowledge of a positivist kind but knowledge of human interpretative understanding.

However, with the acceptance of subjectivity in the process must come also an acceptance of the epistemological boundaries of an interpretative output. Specifically, the following must be recognized:

- The research output is particular to the researcher and respondents and although the process is reproducible the outputs are open to confirmation via reproduction.

- The experience of these life-stories and the attendant analysis remain open to contrasting or indeed conflicting interpretations.

- There remain real challenges of the transferability of knowledge. The degree of understanding of an other arrived at in the interview context is a function of a range of elements apart from the specifics of the verbal communication. While the importance of a shared experience of the wider social context has already been noted above, human communication in interaction is also subject to various visual and audio emphases and clues, both intended and unintended. The researcher is therefore privilege to an experience of the respondent which offers a knowledge which in its fullest sense is non-transferable.

- Undertaking this style of research requires a kind of surrender to the process, that is, a willingness to commit to a research journey which is open ended and

Framing Questions	Analytical Iterations
What is common across the life stories?	*Ch 5 S1 The lived experience* Identifying common experiences across the life-stories *Ch 5 s 2Emerging themes* Identifying the (subjective) meaning attributed top these experiences
How is the self as actor constructed through the life-story? *(central to the shaping of the experience of personal agency)*	*Ch 6 S1 The construction of continuity* Explicating the construction of continuity in a life-story – going from singular events to a narrative – linking these events as a sensible narrative *Ch 6 S1 The construction of coherence* Framing the subjective meaning and belief systems that gives intellectual, conceptual, moral coherence to this as a story – that makes the actions and choices sensible
What of this is relevant to the voluntary actor?	*Ch 7 S1 Reflecting on the instrument* The existential condition
What of this is characteristic of the voluntary actor?	*Ch 7 S2 Reflecting on the collective* Attributes of the voluntary actor

Table 4.1 The iterative process of analysis

where the destination is unknown. This requires a willingness on the part of the researcher to accept uncertainty of goal, of outcome, and of the acceptance of method, analysis and interpretation by ones colleagues.

While the notion of researcher bias is rejected as being paradigmatically irrelevant, that is not to say that the subjectivity of the researcher is not relevant to the reader. Indeed, central to the acceptance of the researcher's subjectivity is the requirement that it be surfaced for the reader so as to support the reader's own interpretative journey. I have already referred to aspects of my own life-experience in the introductory chapter of the dissertation but would both reiterate them here and note some additional aspects also. Specifically, the following aspects are identified as pertinent:

- A received value-set from my parents that emphasised truthfulness, the individual value of each, and the idea that one's work should be of benefit to society.

- A second level education strongly influenced by a Benedictine perspective on education, the assumption of personal responsibility, and an orientation to non-material values.

- The experience of a chronic, potentially terminal health problem.

- At third level the experience of the challenge and limitation of discipline and an insight into divergent views of the world and their capacity for making apparently contradictory actions sensible.

- The observation of the expression of personal values within nonprofit organisations and the search on the part of organisational staff members to have their values reflected in their organisational experience.

- The personal observation of various examples of value–based leadership in nonprofit organisations and the apparent capacity of such leadership to make organisational actions meaningful for others.

- The personal observation of organisational leadership arising from an individual's search for value and meaning and its expression in voluntary action in society.

- The choice of topic and methodology for this dissertation as reflecting a personal need for the undertaking to offer an opportunity for personal learning in addition to professional training.

These elements in my experience were important influences on the subjective self which I brought to this work as a researcher.

Section 2 The Seven Lives

The fuller versions of these life-stories are presented as appendices. The life-stories are obviously central to the development of this dissertation. By necessity they are detailed and in this manner reflect Geertz's (1973) call for thick description. These life-stories are embedded in their social and cultural background and were narrated on the presumption of shared socio-cultural knowledge, meanings, understandings, and experiences. Placing them within the middle of the dissertation's line of argument would serve only to distract and perhaps confuse the reader not equipped with this experiential and cultural stock of knowledge. Locating them in appendices is not to suggest in any manner whatsoever that they are secondary to the work. Their centrality is undisputed but it is their instrumental and collective value rather than their intrinsic value that is the subject of the core analysis of the dissertation. Accordingly very brief synopses of the individual life-stories are presented in this section. These synopses introduce the storytellers, provide the bare bones of their life-stories, and indicate their involvement in voluntary organisations. In addition to these synopses, the use of extracts from the interview transcripts, within the presentation of the analysis, provides a more direct access to the personality of the story-tellers.

2.1 Ann Louise Gilligan

Ann Louise is a middle child of three, having an older sister and a younger brother. She had a Dublin middle class upbringing that she described as being a radiantly happy family life. Ann Louise received her primary and secondary schooling at Loreto,

Foxrock.[8] Towards the end of her school years she developed an awareness of poverty and privilege and saw entering the order as a way of doing good. In 1963 Ann Louise entered the Loreto Order in Rathfarnham[9], where she spent a total of eight years. After the novitiate, she was assigned to Loreto on the Green, where she taught in the Junior School and studied music in University College Dublin. From her second year there, through her third and fourth years, she went to Mater Dei Institute.[10] There she attended a full-time course for the training of secondary school teachers in religion and one other subject. After this training she returned to Loreto Rathfarnham where she was put in charge of the younger age groups in the boarding school (aged 12 – 14).

After leaving the Loreto Order in the early 1970's Ann Louise went to a secondary school run by the Mercy Order[11] in New Ross, Co. Wexford, to teach Religion, English and Music. Mercy New Ross was a big school with a mixture of urban and rural children. After two years in New Ross, Ann Louise went to the Institute Catholique in Paris to pursue a Masters in Religious Science and Psychology.

In April of her final year in Paris, she was appointed to a position as a lecturer in St. Patrick's College[12] in the Department of Religious Studies. After five years in the post she went to Boston College (A Jesuit University) to pursue a PhD in Education and Theology, by course work and dissertation. This involved two years intensive study followed by a return to St. Patrick's. She wrote her dissertation from there, while returning to Boston College for four months every summer. These periods in Boston were an extremely formative one for her in terms of liberation theology.

In 1985 Ann Louise was appointed Head of the Department of Religious Studies. The then Archbishop of Dublin attempted to veto the appointment. An attempt to block a College appointment had never happened before. Ann Louise fought with the support of the union. Finally Ann Louise was appointed for four years. After that she moved to the Department of Education in St. Patrick's.

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[8] The Loreto order is an international Order of Roman Catholic nuns. Foxrock is a suburb of Dublin.
[9] Rathfarnham is a suburb of Dublin.
[10] The Institute was established in 1966 as a third-level Catholic College of Education specialising in the academic and professional formation of Religious Educators and Teachers for post-primary schools in Ireland.
[11] The Mercy Order is an Irish Diocesan Order of Roman Catholic nuns.
[12] St. Patrick's College is a college of education for primary school teachers.

Ann Louise had met her partner Katharine while she had studied in Boston, where they were both involved in community work. They were both passionate about the idea of a home-based liberation education, and in so doing, making concrete the studies they had engaged in. Katherine came back with Ann Louise in October 1983. So Ann Louise and Katharine felt they had to do something themselves if they were to live with integrity with their ideals. In Liam Murtagh, the Parish Priest of Jobstown, West Tallaght, they found a man of 'real integrity and awareness that the poor were disenfranchised and estranged from the Church' and he provided the contact into the community there. In 1985 they bought a house, 'The Shanty', in the countryside some few miles away and commenced to develop their project.

In establishing 'The Shanty Educational Project', their central tenets of methodology were based in action emanating from reflection. This approach had been lectured in Boston College, although not carried out in living by those lecturing it. The success of The Shanty Educational Project was the success of the group who formed around the idea. While Ann Louise and Katharine provided the leadership, others formed a community with them and grew in their own leadership capacity.

As the Project grew and developed, the challenge became one of sustaining it and centering it within the community. This has been achieved through the establishment of An Cosan (the pathway). Through An Cosan the Shanty's methodology was brought to the West Tallaght community and a purpose designed women's and community education centre was built in Jobstown. An Cosan has continued to develop and grow. Organisational leadership has increasingly been taken up by members of the local community and Ann Louise has stepped away from her leadership role by the time of writing.

2.2 Pat Nolan

Pat came from a poor household and this experience left him with an early sense of poverty and of its negative effects. His father was very committed to social justice and was a follower of Connolly and Larkin[13]. Indeed he was intermittently unemployed because of union commitments. His mother was a great manager, having to manage a household in poor circumstances, with six children.

[13] James Connolly and Jim Larkin, two leaders of Irish labour in the early twentieth century

Pat was the fourth child and from the age of 12 his mother confided in him regarding the financial problems of the household. This gave him a very serious outlook on life from an early age. Aged 14, in the mid 1950's, he had to go to work for Willwood.[14] He was angry about missing secondary school as he had a great desire for education, so he did his Leaving Certificate while working.

During this period Pat developed an interest in the Jesuit Order. The discipline and the educational focus of it appealed to him. He was accepted into a late vocational college in Middlesex in England that involved full-time education which he loved. Following this, he entered the Irish Jesuits and was based at their establishment in Emo, Co. Laois. It was a very intense period and after two years he decided that it was not for him. However, he has kept the Jesuit spirituality that he learned in those four years. He views it as having fashioned his life very fundamentally and as having provided him with a way of looking at the world.

Leaving the Jesuits, Pat went back to Willwood's, where he became a salesman. Within a year he met his wife and so for the rest of the 1960's he developed his career and concentrated on his marriage. He moved into management in 1971 as the marketing manager. He moved to Twinings[15] in 1974 and spent five years as Managing Director. He became well known outside the company, becoming one of the two representatives from the Irish Tea industry to go to European meetings. In 1979 he became Chairman of the Marketing Institute of Ireland.

In 1980 Pat was head hunted as CEO for Goldstar Meats. Goldstar Meats had set up a plant in Glasnevin six months previously and it was losing money. He demanded an equity stake in the company and total control, leaving the owners as sleeping partners. This enabled him to fashion it in the manner in which he felt a company should be run. Goldstar Meats was in debt to the bank, wages were low and the staff demoralised. The first thing Pat did was to dramatically increase wages. Productivity shot up, unit costs went down and sales grew. He notes that he did not create a hierarchical structure but set out to develop a community and the company grew rapidly. In 1990, unable to persuade his equity partners to give an equity share to the employees and wanting to work in an area of social justice, he left Goldstar.

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[14] A confectionery manufacturer
[15] A tea importer and blender

In 1980 Pat had begun working for the Jesuit Order in a voluntary capacity. From 1982 to 1990 he acted as Executive Chair of Irish Messenger Publications and from 1985 he chaired the Jesuit Solidarity Fund. This fund was applied to the support of areas of long-term unemployment. In 1986 Pat became involved in a management and consultancy capacity with the Ballymun Job Centre. Pat also served on the board of Belvedere College and acted as Chair from 1992-1995 during which time he put in place a major development plan.

In 1993 he was asked by Crosscare[16] to chair a Board tasked with developing a response to problems associated with living with HIV-Aids. This resulted in two years of research, meetings in Jesuit Head Office and the discovery that a variety of Orders were interested in becoming involved in the work. The result was that six Religious Orders and the Diocese came together in a collaborative effort to establish Open Heart House[17]. Pat continues to act as the Executive Chairman of Open Heart House.

Pat has also been central to the establishment in 1998 of Fastrack to Information Technology[18] (FIT), a cross-sector, multi-agency initiative that provides training in IT skills to unemployed people.

2.3 Catherine Hickey

Catherine was born in Dublin in the early 1960s. She is the eldest of a family of eight and has two sisters and five brothers. Her father was a member of the Irish Judiciary. Catherine attended a Catholic girls' primary and secondary school. When she finished her schooling Catherine went to University College Dublin (UCD) to pursue a Social Science Degree, graduating in the early 1980s. There followed two jobs over a six-year period in caring type roles in nonprofit social service organisations. The first of these was with the St. John of God Hospitaller Services[19], the second was a post as a house

[16] Dublin Diocesan Welfare Services

[17] Open Heart House 'is a HIV Positive (HIV+) member-led organization with a mission to empower and enhance the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS.' (www.openhearthouse.ie)

[18] 'The mission of FIT is to meet the recruitment needs of industry in the area of IT, through providing training, support and career opportunities for unemployed people, so that they can achieve their true potential and contribute to the Irish economy.' (www.fit.ie)

[19] 'In Ireland St. John of God Hospitaller Services provides mental health services, care for older people and services for children and adults with disabilities.' (www.sjog.ie)

parent for the Rehab Group.[20] During her years with Rehab she undertook postgraduate training in management, earning a Masters Degree in Business Studies.

From Rehab, Catherine was appointed as Director of Muscular Dystrophy[21] Ireland in 1990, a post she held until the year 2000. In 1992 she joined the Board of the Disability Federation of Ireland[22] and acted as the organisation's chair from 1998 to 2000. Muscular Dystrophy Ireland was based in Carmichael Centre[23] and Catherine played a leading role on the Management Committee of the Centre during these years. She also served on the founding committee of the Centre for Independent Living (CIL)[24] in Ireland. When it was established in 1992, the CIL represented a radical departure in its approach to the support of people with disabilities. During the latter part of the 1990's Catherine undertook a Bachelor at Law degree at night. This reflected an increasing interest in the law and justice related aspects that contribute to the marginalization of individuals and groups in society.

In 2000 Catherine was appointed as Director of the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)[25]. She has led the organisation through a substantial period of development of its services. FLAC has recently completed a review of its direction and operations. Building on the organisational growth of recent years, a new strategic approach is being developed that will combine service delivery and law reform. Catherine has chosen to focus on the service delivery side of the organisation's work and in the new organisational structure is moving to the position of Development Director. In undertaking this role she is committing to leading the expansion of fulltime Free Legal Advice Services to marginalised communities nationally.

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[20] 'The Rehab Group is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which provides training, employment, social care and commercial services for some 30,000 people each year in Ireland and the UK.' (www.rehab.ie)

[21] 'Muscular Dystrophy Ireland provides support to persons with neuromuscular conditions and their families though the provision of a range of support services' www.mdi.ie

[22] 'Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) is the national support organisation and advocate for voluntary organisations in Ireland who provide services to people with disabilities and disabling conditions' (www.disability-federation.ie)

[23] Carmichael Centre 'is a Centre for small national voluntary organisations working at the cutting edge in areas such as disability, illness, education, the arts, the environment and social care.' It provides facilities that include 'office space, administrative support, IT assistance, management training and organisational support at moments of crisis.' (www.carmichaelcentre.ie)

[24] 'CIL is a grassroots organisation, which was established in 1992 by people with disabilities. Our main aim is to empower and enable people with disabilities to achieve independent living, choice and control over their lives and to achieve full and active participation as equal citizens in society.' (www.carmichaelcentre.ie/cil/index.htm)

[25] 'FLAC is a nongovernmental organisation which campaigns for full and equal access to justice for all and which promoes and operates a range of services to meet the legal needs of those living in poverty' (www.flac.ie)

2.4 Eithne Frost

Eithne was born in 1947, the eldest of two sisters. Her parents were both teachers, her mother in primary school and her father was an Irish teacher at post-primary level. Reared in Waterford City, Eithne tells of a childhood that in many ways reflects the quiet insularity of 1950's Ireland, although in her case this was punctuated by her parents' independence of mind and community engagement.

Eithne attended a private primary school and later the Ursuline Secondary School in Waterford, spending her last year there as a boarder. There she was encouraged to think and speak independently on social and religious issues. After secondary school she went to UCD to study Irish and French. She became heavily involved in College Societies. At the time UCD had the ethos of a very Catholic University and had small classes, with 45 in French and 14 in Irish.

After her degree Eithne did the Higher Diploma in Education UCD in 1967- 1968. Following this she took a post in Ballyfermot Community College. In September 1969 she moved to the Regina Mundi school in Cork. In Cork, she met her husband Noel within a month and married him two years later. She became deeply involved in her local community council.

In April 1975 Eithne had her first child, Cliona, and in June gave up work; although she kept up the community council involvement and worked a little in a private tuition capacity. In September the following year, her second child, Dermot, was born. Early in 1977 Noel's hands were beginning to give him trouble. By June his voice was beginning to make telephone work difficult and by the summer has was dragging a leg. Noel diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease (MND) in September 1977. The disease progressed very quickly and Eithne tells a story of the challenges and heartbreak of this time. She experienced a very poor response to her and Noel's need for support from the health and religious institutions. Noel passed away two years later in October 1979.

Noel's illness had necessitated Eithne's return to teaching and shortly before Christmas 1979 she handed in her notice as she had decided to move to Dublin. She quickly got a post in Cabinteely Community School and by March 1980 she had moved to Dublin and started work. Cabinteely Community School was a growing co-educational school

serving a socially-mixed catchment area. Outside of her teaching role she also became involved in Club Conrad hna Gaeilge and in the local Labour Party.

With things becoming more settled in her life, Eithne felt an increasing need to do something in relation to helping others involved with MND in their lives. In February 1985 a letter from three women was published in the national newspapers asking if anything could be done to help a friend of theirs who had MND. Eithne was one of five or six people who rang the telephone number given saying they had experience of the disease. It was decided to hold a public meeting in the hope of maybe 20 or 25 turning up. Again, this was simply announced by way of a letter to the papers. Some 65 people turned up and when a man whose brother had MND suggested that an organisation be established and a fund set up, Eithne's mother put down the first £10.

Eithne was closely involved in the new organisation from the start. A part-time secretary was recruited. Around the country people began to do small fundraisers for them and there was a little continuous income. With no national register of MND sufferers, there was no way of knowing the full extent of the demand. The operation was reacting to demand on a case-by-case basis. In 1989 Eithne took a career-break to work fulltime for the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association.

At the end of Eithne's three-year career break the organisation was well established. It was supporting about 80 patients around the country. Every month brought patient deaths and new diagnoses. Eithne applied for and got a second two-year career break and resigned from her teaching post when her five year career break came to an end in 1994. Eithne continued as Director of the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association until her retirement in 2006.

2.5 Sean Love

Sean was born circa 1960 and reared in Dublin, as the middle child in a family of seven. He remembers his parents as both being very hard working. There was a strong family ethos, good academic ability, and the children variously moved through the education system and on to university. Within the family there was a strong sense of what was right and fair, and the children all developed into strong-minded individuals, with often diverging political views.

Sean attended the local Belgrove National School for his primary education. From Belgrove he progressed to St. Paul's, Raheny, a boys' secondary school run by the Vincentian Order. In practice, the teaching staff was a mixture of religious and lay teachers. After Secondary School, Sean followed his brothers and sisters in choosing to go to UCD. Following this he did a variety of things including working and living in New York for a year. Returning to Dublin, he and his partner, a horticulturalist, established one of the earliest organic farms in the country in County Monaghan.

Back in Dublin in the early 1990s, a series of events served to draw Sean into deeper involvement with Amnesty International. The Balkan wars and high profile events such as the rape of Vukovar and mass disappearances in Srebrenica were quickly followed by the Rwandan genocide. In all cases it appeared as if the international community was unwilling to act decisively. Joining the Dublin Central Amnesty International Group, Sean quickly became heavily engaged, coming on to the national Board for about six years, and acting as Chairman for four or five years. This commitment was facilitated by his work-life. Having done a Higher Diploma in Information Studies, he worked in a number of university libraries, first in the College of Surgeons, then in UCD and finally in St. Vincent's University Hospital. There he was running the Library Information Department on behalf of UCD. While his role as Amnesty Chair was demanding in terms of time and travel, perhaps up to 30 hours a week, relative independence at work and supportive superiors enabled him to fulfill such a schedule.

Sean had retired from the Board of Amnesty when the Director informed him of her intention to step down and suggested he consider applying for the post. He was taken somewhat by surprise by the suggestion, as it had not occurred to him as a possibility. Having given it deeper consideration he felt that in terms of where his own mind was, the role was perfect, and he has been delighted with the opportunity.

Under his direction Amnesty International Ireland played an important role in the international organisation in promoting the acceptance of own country work. Now Amnesty in Ireland works about 40 percent on own country work and 60 percent on international work. He retired from the post in 2008.

2.6 Fergus O'Ferrall

Fergus was born in 1948 and reared on the family farm in Co. Longford. One of three boys, his mother was a primary school teacher. His family were members of the Church of Ireland and his mother taught in the nearest Church of Ireland primary school, which Fergus also attended. In 1960 Fergus went as a boarder to Wesley College in Dublin, a co-educational, multi-denominational school. From Wesley, Fergus went to Trinity College Dublin in 1967, to read History and Politics. In College he became very involved in the debating societies, particularly the Historical Society and it was not until his Sophister years that he became engrossed with his chosen subjects. A developing interest in adult education led him to do a Higher Diploma in Education during which time he was provided with teaching practice in the English Language Institute and given immediate experience of adult education. Pursuing his interest in the links between education and civic engagement, Fergus undertook a PhD on O'Connell's role in the development of a Catholic public life in Ireland.

As he finished his PhD, Macra na Feirme[26] was establishing a national team of adult education guidance officers and Fergus was taken on to cover the northern half of Leinster. Fergus moved quickly through the organisation in Macra, being promoted to manager of the education team and then being seconded in 1983-85 to the Department of Labour as a Youth Advisor to the Minister. He returned to Macra in 1985 to take up the role of Chief Executive, staying there until 1988.

During the 1980s Fergus's church and religious commitments had grown and when the Bible Society[27] advertised for a Director in 1988 he sought and was offered the post. Fergus worked with the Society for five years leading it through the development of a new constitution, the establishment of an inter-denominational group of Patrons, a board, and the reconstruction of the Society's Dublin shop. The Irish Branch became of interest worldwide because of the effective relationship it had developed with the Roman Catholic Church in a predominantly Catholic country. Fergus's time with the Bible Society deepened his own religious interest and formation so that shortly after leaving the Society he went on to train as a Methodist local preacher and commenced

[26] 'A national voluntary organisation for young people between the ages of 17 and 35. It promotes agricultural and rural development and the personal development of its members.' (IPA 2003, p. 356)
[27] 'The National Bible Society of Ireland 'is a voluntary organisation with the purpose of making the 'Holy Scriptures available to all as effectively as possible.' (IPA 2003, p. 371)

practising in 1996. The chief role and gift of the lay preacher is to link the world of work with the communication of the gospel.

While with the Bible Society, Fergus was invited onto the Board of the Adelaide Hospital Society. At the time that Society was struggling to maintain the specific ethos of its health care provision, as the state sought to develop a national health service on the pre-existing denominational structure. The question was a contentious one and took some ten years to resolve. As the possible shape of a solution was emerging, Fergus left the Bible Society and became the full-time Director of the Adelaide Society in 1993. In 1996 the new voluntary structure and charter for the combined Adelaide and Meath Hospitals was agreed. Two years later the move to the present-day facility in Tallaght took place. The first phase of Fergus's work in his new role was focused on negotiating and managing the legal transition so that the charter was revised in a manner which would encompass both the Meath and the Children's Hospital while retaining the crucial elements of character and tradition.

More recently, Fergus has been active in the establishment and development of the network organisation of Irish voluntary organisations, know as The Wheel.[28]

2.7 Patricia Prendiville

Patricia was born in the early 1960s, the fourth child in a family of two boys and three girls. The family lived in Kilorglin, a small town of a little over 1,000 inhabitants, in North Kerry. Both her parents were from a farming background, although her father was a veterinary surgeon and her mother had spent seven years in the Civil Service in Dublin prior to her marriage. The nature of her father's work and her mother's involvement in the local community council and the Irish Countrywomen's Association suggest a couple deeply embedded in the local community.

Patricia followed in the steps of her siblings to the local national co-educational school for her primary education. When it came time for her secondary education she went to a Loreto Convent boarding school in the nearby county town of Killarney. After her Intermediate Certificate, Patricia decided to return to Kilorglin for her Leaving

[28] The Wheel is 'a resource centre for community and voluntary organisations. Provides information and support services while advocating for an environment that supports community and voluntary activity.' (IPA 2003, p. 378)

Certificate cycle. She attended the local secondary school, which a privately owned and co-educational school, funded by the State. The ethos of the school placed a strong emphasis on the individual achieving their personal potential and this included an aspect of encouraging individual leadership. On finishing school in 1978 Patricia went to University College Cork (UCC) to study dentistry. She pursued the course for a year and a half, at which point she transferred to study psychology. In psychology she found a programme increasingly oriented towards the application of the discipline, which reflected her own particular interest. As she finished the three and half year programme she determined to do postgraduate work in women's studies. This choice necessitated going to England, as no such programme was offered in Ireland at the time.

During her Master's programme Patricia took a year out to work with young people, doing personal development as a means of social change. When she finished her Master's in 1987, she was eager to return to Ireland to contribute to the women's movement here. Back in Ireland she connected with the newly started Women's Studies in University College Dublin and delivered various elements of teaching with them. She got a job with an SES Scheme in the Lourdes Project in Sean Mc Dermot Street, where she taught office skills for about eight months. From there she moved to a young women's project in Sheriff Street. This period she sees broadly as one of beginning to bring theory from her various degrees into action.

When the funding was withdrawn from the Sheriff Street Project, Patricia began working as a freelance trainer and facilitator. By this time it was becoming evident that the Department of Social Welfare was willing to fund another regional support agency in Dublin. After some hesitation over the implications of a move from the personal freedom of free-lance work, Patricia and two partners founded Meitheal[29] in 1994. The Department contract grew rapidly and in 1995 they recruited two women whom they had previously trained in personal development facilitation to offer a ten-week facilitation skills training programme. Thus began the shaping of the self-perpetuating 'Meitheal Model', one aspect of which was that employees were developed so that they could assume leadership within the organisation. As the organisation grew there was a

[29] 'Meitheal is a community development support and training organisation. Our mission is to create change through working for equality and social justice. The way we work is guided by the values of community development, equality and feminism.' (www.meitheal.ie)

conscious policy of seeking to employ individuals it had trained either in full-time positions or on a panel of trainers. Meiteal's leaders saw this approach as articulating in action something they felt was missing in Ireland in the early 1990's.

Patricia spent ten years with Meitheal. The factors that led to her leaving were a combination of restricted funding for the organisation, the logics of the Meitheal process, and a realisation on her own part that within the Meitheal set-up she was no longer going to be able to pursue the work she wished to. Within the organisation the process of ongoing development of individuals meant that those the founders had trained were now in a position to take over.

As she departed Meitheal in the spring of 2004, Patricia was clear that she wished to make her future contribution around the lesbian, gay, equality agenda. She moved to Brussels, in the role of Director of the International Lesbian and Gay Association-Europe (ILGA-Europe) in September of that year. The Brussels base and European focus of the job served to create a very clear departure from her Irish work. She is clear how she wishes to focus the work of ILGA and intends that her length of time there will be a function of the degree to which she is enabled to do so.

Section 4 The Intrinsic Value of these Life-stories

Considered intrinsically, these life-stories may be read as the self-expression of individual voices.[30] As such voices, they offer straightforward stories structured around a beginning, 'these were my origins and influences', a middle, 'this was my journey of discovery of self and of others', and an end, 'this is where I have ended up, where I am, and where I am going'. Whether told through a series of closely described events or through the structuring of an education and career, whether presented as an existential struggle or a series of serendipitous connections, or whether an interpretation of the experience is voiced or not, the learning to be drawn from them lies not so much in the life-histories but in the life-stories. The life-histories offer little more than a series of events connected by temporal relationships. On the other-hand, the life-stories offer an interpretation of these events as human experience. Such interpretations are constituted by the attachment of meaning. The reporting of fact has no meaning; meaning is in the

[30] That is to say, the self-expression of individual voices, apart from the manner in which my interpretation of their communication has influenced these voices.

storying, and it lies in the interpretation; an interpretation which is done by the story-teller in the first instance. Of course, such meaning may be both personalised and individualised. And so, it is not that each case stands or falls on its own merits, for there are no objective criteria by which to judge it. Each case is as remarkable or as unremarkable, as complex or as simple as one's interpretative frame will allow. And yet, in offering life-stories rather than life-histories, in attaching meaning to their experiences, these voices insert a river in their lives. They present a river of meaning that serves to transform the series of events connected by temporal relationships into a coherent past, a sensible present and a guide to a potential future.

What then are the rivers of meaning that these story-tellers use to integrate their narratives? What meanings and what learning do these voices offer to us? While all the rivers have a story of birth, change and development, each offers a distinct theme that serves to integrate and create coherence in the story.

Through her story of the headlong pursuit of truth and meaning, Ann Louise gives examples of the challenge of a life lived at that point where personal intellectual integrity and daily praxis meet. Placing love as her central guiding principle, her story explores the contrast between the abject failure of human institutions to cherish and the empowering capacity of individuals as relational beings.

Pat's story is one of the contrast and personal choice between the life offered by the dominant market paradigm and the challenge of a Jesuitical theology of a Christian practice in a social context.

For Catherine, the telling of her life-story offers an opportunity to explore her search for a social space, or a community, wherein she feels at home and can make her personal contribution in her own terms. Her clear identification of the voluntary sector as such an organisational space may point to an important facet of the attraction of the sector as a work-life location.

Eithne's narrative recounts the deeply personal trauma of living with a debilitating and terminal illness of her life-partner while in her prime. This was a life lived with an enduring sense of loss so that as she said 'your dreams die as well'. Yet through it all runs a deep unspoken love such that Noel, her life partner, is still a continuing presence

in her life. From this experience springs a powerful capacity in Eithne for empathy in praxis.

For his part, Sean's story is one of commitment to truth and personal integrity in praxis and is an example of the challenge of the individual responsibility to act in the face of injustice.

Meanwhile, Fergus's story is one of an unfolding commitment to adult education, the ideals of a civic republicanism, and the pursuit of a rational theology, held by a central concern with the advancement of the right socio-political conditions for the flowering of the individual in community.

Patricia's narration threads the story of a search for personal identity and of a mode of expressing this with integrity in her life as a social being. Personal identity, for her, therefore, becomes a public as much as a private concern insofar as all relations are seen to commence in the personal being.

In engaging with these stories, the speaker, the re-teller and the reader are all involved in a process of multiple interpretation in which their own subjectivity influences their interpretation. The process is hermeneutic, as the meaning of each story is subjective for each reader because of the way he or she interprets the story. Furthermore, the reader influences what is said by the speaker by acting subconsciously as gatekeeper of the conversation. There is therefore, a hermeneutic circle, as the meaning lies in the interpretation by the reader. This interpretation is subjective to the reader by virtue of what he/she brings to the reading and what he/she will allow to be said by the voice. Thus, these can be remarkable stories of an open and full engagement with the human condition, or tiresome tales of the petty tribulations of middle-class angst. They could also be interpreted as fascinating insights into the complex nature of the individual search for meaning in a post-modern Ireland stripped of normative sureties, or merely examples of a socially-determined pursuit of career, that happen to be played out in a work context with poorly-developed career path structures. They could end up being stories to challenge and perhaps inspire the reader or, by contrast, be regarded as an unexceptional recounting of mundane and everyday lives. Yet, these stories are all and none of these things at the same time, for whatever their meaning as attributed by the narrator, the meaning drawn by the reader rests within the person of the reader. And

so, taking an inter-textual perspective (Ricouer 1971, Derrida 1988), these life-stories are now but texts which present a point of departure for the subjective interpretation of the reader, or as McCormick (2004) suggests, texts which offer a path to self-reflection.

Chapter 5 The Experience of Meaning

Introduction

The individual life stories recounted by the storytellers within the context of the three-part interview structure offer a tapestry of detailed individualised elements. However, as in all tapestry, the individual pattern is shaped upon the weft and warp of the underlying cloth. Following this fabric analogy, the lived experience of the storytellers may be understood as the weft and their reflective construction of meaning as the warp. Across the life stories common or recurring elements and themes are seen to emerge. This chapter and the next serve to identify and illustrate these elements and themes in the weft of the lived experience of meaning (Chapter 5) and the warp of the construction of meaning (Chapter 6).

In this chapter I present an initial analysis of the storytellers' life-stories. The aim of the analysis is to identify the experiences that have been influential in shaping their lives and to explore the meanings attributed by the storytellers to these experiences. Given the richness of the life-stories presented by the storytellers, such an analytical approach could become lost in detail if each life-story were taken separately. While there is undoubted value in such a case-by-case approach, for the purposes immediately at hand a cross-case perspective is adopted. Consistent with a cross-case approach the analysis is presented as a series of elements or experiences (Section 2) and emerging themes (Section 3) that recur across the narratives. So, following on from the analysis of the lived experience in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 serves to bring the discussion to a further level of abstraction by examining the manner in which the storytellers have constructed meaning systems for their lives.

Central to the discussion presented here and in Chapter 6 is the notion of meaning, or more exactly, the notion of attributed meaning. That is, what have the storytellers experienced in their lives and what meaning have they attributed to these experiences? Phrased in this manner, such attribution seems an objective and rationalised action, whereas the meanings attached by the storytellers to their experiences appear as subjective and arising from a combination of intuitive and reflective action. Thus, in this context the term 'meaning' is to be understood as 'emotive meaning' rather than

descriptive meaning. In highlighting this distinction between descriptive and emotive meaning, I follow Phillips (2000), who has noted that:

> '[t]erms have descriptive meaning if they do the job of stating facts: they have emotive meaning if they do the job of expressing the speaker's emotions or attitudes, or exciting emotions or attitudes in others' (Phillips 2000, p 238)

This chapter is set out in two main sections. Section 1 explores recurring elements in the experience of their lives, as recounted by the interview storytellers. Section 2 sets out emerging themes in the storytellers' attribution of meaning to their experiences of life. Although in both Sections 1 and 2 the particular issue under discussion is illustrated through extensive extracts from the interview transcripts, the categories utilised in this analysis have been identified and chosen by me as being relevant to my search for the 'voluntary actor'. As such, the analysis reflects an analytical engagement with the interview transcripts rather than any self-analysis on the part of the storytellers.

Where these extracts from the interview transcripts are presented, they are referenced by storyteller initials, interview session number, and transcript page number. So, a quote identified as 'SL, S1, p. 2', is from the interview with Sean Love, Session 1, page 2. In a number of instances the same quote is used to illustrate distinct and separate points. This reflects a combination of the multi-dimensional nature of meaning as expressed in conversation, a multi-level analysis, and an underlying relatedness across elements in the analysis. Wherever a quote is used on more than one occasion, this fact is referenced in a footnote. In the final element of the chapter, a short conclusion is presented.

Section 1 The Lived Experience

Within the lived experience recounted by the storytellers, common or recurring elements may be presented as (i) the presence of early significant others in their lives; (ii) early reflexive experiences and a sense of difference; (iii) the experience of epiphany; (iv) the search for work that supports the expression of self; (v) the rigorous and on-going testing of values with experience; (vi) a willingness to undertake personal responsibility for making change happen; (vii) an ability to give organisational

expression to a values enactment; and (viii) in their lives, regularly reaching and recognising a time to move on. These elements are presented and considered below.

1.1 The presence of early significant others in their lives

All storytellers variously identified the important of the impact of other individuals on their lives, particularly in relation to values' formation in childhood or in the development of a critiquing eye during their later education. Ann Louise spoke warmly of her father's sense of justice and of Mother Imelda's treasuring of the individual; Pat noted the closeness of his relationship with his mother and his recognition of the burden poverty placed upon her; Patricia detailed her mother's work in the community; while Fergus was quick to identify key influencers of his thinking during his university education. However, despite all this and more, the identification of specific individuals as being influencers of substance was more muted than I had anticipated. Indeed, storytellers, rather than identify such individuals, were more likely to highlight significant early experiences, a developing awareness of significant thought, or cognitive and interpretative systems later in life. While the expectation that such significant others would be identified by the storytellers lay in my own biases, it may be that their relative absence is due to the narrators' preference in using incident as a way of encapsulating meaning. However, within the scheme of their lives it seems more likely that the tendency not to identify single influencers reflects the degree to which the storytellers have struggled with value systems and worked to develop their own during their life course.

For example, Sean, in talking of the value basis within his family noted:

> 'But we would all have, I think share a common sense of a, of the obvious things, of right and wrong, of fairness. So I presume my parents imbued that into us. They were classical Fianna Fáil supporting, De Valera, devout, Catholic Church, all of that. I think, presume what would be your classic Irish parents who came through that era. So we would have a very strong ethos within the family of what is right, of what is fair. As I say, politically we'd have totally different perspectives, but broadly looking to the same.'
> SL, S1, p.2

And later, in speaking of his education:

> 'I think again if I glance back I learned most in my view, I suppose I was shaped most in Primary School and had some particularly outstanding teachers. I remember them with huge fondness now ... I had a particular teacher when I was in first and second class who was just fantastic. You

learned, I mean you really did learn, but I so looked forward to going to school ... So I think that had a significant impact. So what he did, certainly not in a direct sense, he didn't, that I'm aware of, give us any strong sense of justice or human rights, but I guess indirectly he probably was doing so.'
SL, S1, p2

Patricia, in telling of the ethical influence of her father said:

'... and then the story about my father and his family, they didn't have so much of it actually, or maybe I don't know as many stories about it, but they would have had things, always farmers would have had to have had workers because you never would have been able to do it yourself when the children were small you see, and they did, the stories were about being fair to workers and treating them properly and then hearing stories about people who weren't, and just abuses of people. So they definitely passed that on, a sense of integrity, and my father was very clear, ... but I am trying to get this thing, that there was this thing in the house, of ethics, and of being ethical, or having integrity or something, so he, for example, would never make a farmer pay if he knew the farmer wouldn't have the money. Never! And that was a thing about him, that he was very decent and people experienced him as decent and that he would go out of his way ... I suppose that maybe I am a bit full of that, because that time five years ago when he died we heard all those stories again, because that's what everyone was reminding us of, the decency of him ...'
PP, S1, p.3

And in relation to her secondary education:

'I think they had some really good teachers and it was a private school in the sense that this guy Joe O'Dwyer had inherited the school from his father who had set it up, but obviously the state was paying for it and everything. So private schools in Ireland are not the same as private schools elsewhere. But anyway so it wasn't a convent, or it wasn't an order of anything. So again there is a bit of, I think, I think that is interesting in all of Killorglin the education system is non-religiously run, even though both schools are definitely Catholic, and this guy Joe O'Dwyer was Catholic. Well, he and his partner Barbara, they had a very strong ethos. They were very into leadership, only I didn't know it at the time that's what they were into. They were into developing citizens and that's part of the school, that is part of it, you know, what do you, can you be your best, they didn't put it that way, that sounds so American, but that was part of the thing is that, like, when he would, at any time query, for example, a student, it was around because they thought that the student wasn't doing their best and what was happening the student during that time, how come they weren't able to do their best ...'
PP, S1, p.6

And then acknowledging the influence of one of her early work colleagues, she said:

'... so then I worked in the youth project in Sherriff Street with a woman called Theo Ryan and she was really inspirational, that's what I would say,

to me. And I think maybe it's just that I identified with her. She was a country woman like myself that had come to the city and then had put her money where her mouth was and worked in a very, very, very run-down area and worked on literacy and worked on personal development, and worked on making a difference to young people who had left school early, you know, in a city.'

PP, S1, p.3

In the cases of other storytellers, although no individuals who directly influenced their early development were identified, particular characteristics or role models relative to their adult lives were highlighted. For example, Catherine spoke of individuals she admired:

'Well I have great admiration, I have tremendous, tremendous admiration for people who set out to make a difference. There are a lot of people that would give you encouragement. I would have been very positive over the years about Adi Roche as a person and her enormous contribution to Chernobyl, but then I might hear then that in Chernobyl they don't like the fact that the infrastructure isn't being made up from people from the area. So there can be issues too, you know. I have tremendous admiration for her determination and her single-mindedness in raising the amount of money she did to bring in help and to bring out the children for medical help and those things, but I do realise that there are issues. I have great admiration for people that I know, and it wouldn't have been just one single person. A number of people from an organisation that was called Babies of Romania, who basically went out to the orphanages in the early 90's, gave a huge amount of time and raised money to upgrade orphanages. That model which involves ...

AOR: Supporting local initiatives which

CH: Local initiatives yeah and people who have, Vincent Cronin a solicitor and Maria Shannon a girl from College, you know, ordinary people who are involved in making a big difference.'

Again, in identifying a specific individual, Catherine says

'I suppose a significant factor for me was that a person with muscular dystrophy, Martin Naughton, who has been a person of the year and who I nominated for that and who got it in '95, he was a very very dynamic person and always worked to help others, but not in a paternalistic way or patronising way it was always with a genuine interest in seeing somebody get on. *(CH, S1, page1)* ... His vision and how he could see maybe five years ahead: it's worth this fight now and in five years time it will be a service provided by Government. You know, he had this ability to see ahead. And one of my Directors in FLAC as well has vision and I have great regard for him, Peter Ward. So it's not something that I have a great deal of myself and when I meet people who have it I have a lot of time for them, a lot of regard for them. So I mean in the course of my work there aren't people that would have, I haven't actually have had exposure to

people that would; I suppose I haven't really got out very much to conferences and big occasions and really seen where …'
CH, S3, p.4

Even when prompted to reach back to early influencers, Catherine maintained her focus on contemporary public figures:

AOR: 'Well, for me it would have been a particular teacher at a particular time in my life who influenced me strongly in terms of how I looked at the world.

CH: Sure, I think I have an awful lot of regard for the likes of Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese. They would be two people I'd have a lot of regard for, huge regard for; because even though they are very legally minded. They are academic legal people. What they have in terms of their ability to connect with the NGO sector and the community is just extraordinary. You know, they have gifts in different ways. I'd be very taken with both of them. And I have met Mary Robinson on a number of occasions, including in Ballymun this year. And they are two very different people as well. Mary Robinson approaches things from an intellectual perspective and Mary McAleese, when she is with people approaches it more from an inter-personal connection with people. Yet, they are still doing a lot about making communities or NGOs, valuing their work. Yeah, it's about valuing.

AOR And where would you say your own kind of personal strengths lie, or your own, if you take those two poles, intellectual analysis and the inter-personal?

CH Oh, it would definitely be on the inter-personal, without question. But certainly as lawyers, they would be two people I would greatly admire. I also admire Catherine McGuinness, she is a Supreme Court Judge now. She has over the years taken a lot of part in activism. And she has a very, you know, herself and Niall Fennelly, who is on the Supreme Court, I just think they are two very unique judges and they have a perspective that is social, and social justice orientated.'
CH, S1, p.21

What these extracts illustrate is the importance of significant others to the value formation of, or as personal exemplars for, these storytellers, whether as someone experienced in a personal relationship or as someone whose values, thought and actions had a profound effect on the storyteller and had, in that way, become 'significant' for them.

1.2 Early reflexive experiences and a sense of difference

The storytellers variously recalled a childhood sense of being different or of seeing things differently from others. This sense of difference was not expressed as a conclusion in hindsight but as a recall of a reflexive awareness at the time. Such reflexivity was coupled with strong childhood sensitivity to aspects of the human condition and, in teenage years, to aspects of the social environment. For example, Ann Louise described herself as being 'a very spiritual child'. Eithne was conscious of her parents being older and standing somewhat outside the dominant political and religious consensus of Waterford in the 1950s. Catherine spoke of how her teenage interest in charitable work distinguished her from her friends. Fergus noted how his family's denominational affiliation placed his childhood experiences apart from those of his Roman Catholic peers. Here he recalls the impact of denominational education for a scattered community:

> '... so I went to national school and my mother was a teacher. So [a] one teacher school! So she taught, one thing was slightly different, because she was teaching not in her neighbouring school, she was teaching in Rathdown, which is on the border of Westmeath and Longford. It's quite a little drive, but she brought us with her instead of us going to the local school in Keena. So that was a difference. So the people who attended that were of a broader remit than your local parish ...'
>
> FOF, S1, p.4

And he later spoke of the impact of this on his involvement in local activities:

> ' ... because of the social situation, we spent a lot of our time, as I remember, going back and forth to primary school, to travel, it was about 15 miles each way ... no , I mean there were, Wesley Burrows last eleven. I mean you know, we needed eleven for the vestry and we only had eleven! The little church we went to in Muldoon has since closed. It was really down to a handful of families, and it was struggling..
> FOF, S1, p.6

And speaking of the ethos of the rural Church of Ireland community at the time:

> ' ... obviously you went to a different school, and in our cases particularly marked out because we didn't even go to the local school. So, that was special and so I, yes, I think there was no doubt about it, particularly in the 1950s there was a sense of being different, and a certain sense of being a little bit embattled as well, that a lot of people my father and mother would have known who were in farming emigrated or left or sold out. And some of them went to Australia and some of them, in the '50s generally in the country, there was emigration and things weren't good anyway. But it's hard to say

AOR: Different locations?

FOF: Yes, different location maybe but it probably wasn't any worse, maybe. But it felt, maybe because we were such a minority anyway, it felt worse. My mother worked in a one-teacher school, so she lost a family. And she did. Before she taught in Rathowen, we went up and we stayed with her, she was the teacher in Street, which is the neighbouring town, village to Rathowen, and she actually lived there in the school residency. And we were small so we stayed there rather than driving up and down. And there were so many families of Butlers in the local directory used to call it Butlerstown. And of course with a small school like that and you lose a number of families, then it gets critical. Later on, the population actually improved a bit in Rathowen and she was on the borderline and they had two teachers and they amalgamated Street and Rathowen. But yeah, it was different, you would certainly, you mixed differently, there was no doubt about it. And at that stage very much the Church of Ireland, when you got a bit older and you were going to dances, ran their own socials in the church hall and so on and so there was very much a fear of inter-marriage between Catholics. So there were certain restrictions on young people mixing, in case they would end up. And inevitably they did end up married!
FOF, S1, p.6

Catherine related her sense of difference to her early interest in charitable work:

' ... what I saw as being different was that I was interested in doing charitable work, or whatever. I think it would have been charitable work would have been my philosophy at the time. You know, at an early stage, a much earlier stage than friends. You know, friends would come along and then they would drop out because maybe they just weren't really interested. But it would have, there would have been a charitable philosophy at that stage. That's what we were told about, you know.

AOR: Was that something that was reflecting an ethos in your family or an ethos in the school or

CH: I think, I just liked it. Once I started doing it, I just liked it and I thought 'I like this'.'
CH, S2, p.4

These examples illustrate an early sense of self, of self in relation to others in society, and of a distinction or difference between that self and others, in terms of perception of the world or of personal interests.

1.3 The experience of epiphany

Denzin (1983, 1989) uses the concept of epiphany to describe singular events that have an impact on the lives of individuals by changing their perspective on some aspect of their experience of the world. In the telling of their stories, the storytellers in this

research often referred to particular events with such an emphasis. Pat recounted how on a trip to India as part of his tea-related business he found himself assaulted by the dissonance between the luxury of his hotel and a bundle of rags he stepped over in the street outside, before realising it was a living human. Similarly, Ann Louise recalled her shock at the reality of Dublin poverty when, as a schoolgirl, she was deputised to deliver food in Deansgrange to struggling families. For her part, Patricia instanced a childhood event relating to the treatment meted out to a particular child in her primary school and her experience as an adult of the community's reflection on her father's life at his funeral. However, the notion of sudden and momentary revelation that is within 'epiphany' may be too restrictive. If we consider Eithne's experience with the slow decline and loss of her husband Noel, Ann Louise's struggle with the institutional Church, Patricia's search for an expression of her sexual orientation in society, then perhaps we see that personal revelation can come 'dropping slow'. Taking such a longer temporal view might suggest that epiphany is a crystallising moment in a more complex and longer process of perspective and value change. Here, first Sean and then Patricia recall childhood incidents:

> **SL**: 'I can remember a particular kid in our class when we were five or six who was, to use the then terminology, a total little gurrier, and he didn't pick on me but he did pick on some others and I decided to be the policeman pretty much. I can recall that. Kind of doing the "somebody had to stand up to him type of approach".'
> *SL, S1, p.4*

> **PP:** '[I] would say that really what keeps me pushing all the time is thinking "are things fair"? And that just goes back a long time and I can tell stories from an awful long way back when I thought things weren't fair and even though, I have a story of when I was in fourth class and I remember a teacher saying something to another pupil and eh, it really grating on me, and I remember going up home and telling my mother and saying why was this young woman, girl, girl, we were whatever, child what age are you when you are in fourth class, I don't know but anyway, she, the teacher was doing a class distinction thing between me and this girl, so this girl was also not bright. So she was working class, quite a poor family, not only just working class but they were poor and she wasn't very bright and here am I one of the brighty ones but also of a family that is, you know, considered in the community and there was this awful thing of being allowed to stay in wet clothes and having to sit at the back of the classroom and miles from the fire and it not mattering. And then, you know, the rest of us being brought up to the front so anyway I went home and I must have been very unsettled about that ...'
> PP, S1, p.1

Sean identifies for his part, a series of events over a longer timeframe that served to draw him deeply into Amnesty International:

> **SL:** 'I have to say at that point I didn't know much about Amnesty and I kind of joined because I was asked to join. And I had heard of Amnesty, it would been the late 1980s, I had heard of Amnesty. It was a very loose knowledge. I think I knew of Sean McBride's involvement, of an Irish connection, and that it was about human rights, but not an awful lot more. It was only after coming back to Dublin in 1990, or thereabouts, 1990, 1991, coming back to Dublin, and there were a few things happening, the wars in the Balkans, a couple of years after that the Rwandan Genocide, and there were a couple of signature events happened that I can identify that really got me much more heavily involved and one was the rape in Vukovar and Srebrencia and some of those places. That combined with the mass disappearances in Srebrencia especially. But the general awfulness of the war in former Yugoslavia and everybody sitting on their hands incapable of doing anything about it. And then Rwanda happening, so I became very active in Amnesty from about 1993.'
> SL, S1, p. 7

Whether the experience of 'epiphany' is singular and distinct or long and laboured, the central characteristic remains similar, that is, the storytellers have experienced a sense of seeing the social world differently to how they had previously viewed it. Further, this new perspective brings them to reassess their own relationship to the social world and thereby influences their actions in it.

1.4 The search for a work context that supports the expression of self

While it may not have been formally expressed as such, all the storytellers displayed a concern with the pursuit of activities which were consistent with their values and which supported their personal development in some manner. Given the realities of economic life and their own financial resources, this concern, for most of them, inevitably meant a close attention to their work context. While Pat's success in business life gave him a freer hand in this regard after he had retired from Goldstar Meats, it is evident that even there his leadership was concerned with creating an economic and business success shaped by his espoused values. For her part, Ann Louise's lectureship provided a position of security from which she was able to devote time and energy to The Shanty Project. However, for the others the desire to pursue value-driven activities has had to be managed in the context of making a living as well. Nevertheless, it is clear that the wage requirement is the subservient need and that for the storytellers their own

identification with their work-life is a central requirement of their commitment to their employment.

In this first extract, Sean talked about what working with Amnesty International has meant to him:

> **AOR:** 'In terms of where you are and what you are doing, what sense if any do you have of doing something which is really reflective of who you are and what you believe and being at peace in that space that you are in.
>
> **SL:** [I] am, probably, probably best when I meet people from cultures and backgrounds who perhaps have been the focus of our work. I mean people from other countries who have been former Amnesty focus people. But I don't think it has to be that dramatic, it can just simply be connecting with both Amnesty people and others in other countries from a totally different cultural background and you find this common ground of, that we are about the exact same thing. That's a huge, huge,
>
> **AOR:** Sorry, is that we as Amnesty or
>
> **SL:** Yes
>
> **AOR:** We as humans
>
> **SL:** We as Amn.., well me anyway, I guess different people get different things out of Amnesty and we work them but me as a person that's probably the biggest plus of the work and how it fuels me. And I have a great faith in people and you can find such, you just meet so many people who are so brilliant, from whom you can feed and obtain so much. And hopefully you are doing it reverse as well ... I'm not a zealot, I'm well able to relax and be a cynic. But there is a great strength in finding, I suppose it's about, there is something in which there is no selfish motivation. You just know you are doing something that is right and good and that there is an awful lot of people that you can have an instant connect with, that you have never met before and very quickly connect with. And you are on the same wave-length. I suppose on top of that is the fact that, I don't have many heroes, I don't tend to eulogise people but there are one or two people who I find, through history or more contemporary, remarkable people who can serve as what you can aspire to. And I include the likes of Mandela in that. And I can work from the view that what we are doing is what he is doing and I know what he is doing is right, type of approach, and the strength you can draw from that.'
> SL, S1, p. 14

Catherine, in one of her interviews identified her appreciation of the personal acceptance she finds in her work environment:

> **CH:** '... when people get to know you, and there would have been some very strong people out in Ballymun, from the area, who wouldn't have liked

people using the term marginalized about the area. But when they get to know you and they see what skills you have or you can offer, they're very accepting really, you feel more acceptance than maybe you feel in other circumstances, where people are just more reserved.

AOR: By other circumstances?

CH: For example being in say a community development project like out in Ballymun, but once you get over the initial thing, you're not from Ballymun and this sort of thing and when they recognise your strengths and skills and work with you, it is more of a pleasure to work with.

AOR: I understand what you were saying about the ... I wanted to know who you were identifying in 'other circumstances'?

CH: Yes, being in sort of a legal environment or something, meeting with lawyers or something, where people are just more reserved. Or working on a sub-committee with a statutory body. Just more reserved and a different way of acknowledging people's contribution maybe.
CH, S1, p.22

Later she emphasised the satisfaction of the work, her personal identification with her work-life and reflected on the relative unimportance of the financial remuneration she received.

CH: 'Definitely I want to be associated with projects that have a community benefit. I'm pretty definite about that. And I suppose a lot of the work that I do I would do it if I were not paid. A lot of the work that I have done, I wasn't paid for, because it was voluntary, but I made a choice to do it; but if I was going to get paid for doing it or get expenses I would still have done it; but the work that I normally would do, I suppose it's. You know, some of the voluntary work that I would do, you know, visiting people that I still visit from years ago, who have disabilities and that, you know, quite often I'd have done a shift with them or whatever, but I wouldn't have got paid and had my circumstances been different may be I would have given up my job and worked with them. So a lot of what I do voluntarily I enjoy doing anyway. So it's a good marker for me.

AOR: Whether you enjoy doing it or not?

CH: Absolutely, yeah, absolutely. And it's the same probably in my current role, even if there was no salary I would probably do some of it. So I suppose for me it's just a marker of my own, maybe contentment, or level of contentment with the area that I'm involved in or working in

AOR: The financial aspect is a necessary incidental?

CH: It's a necessary incidental, absolutely, yeah. But it just shows you, when I had a chance to think about it, how far away on the scale I am from certain realities, in that you know, maybe I'm in quite a privileged position. Okay, I'm not in a high paid job or anything like that, but I'm getting paid for something I love doing.'

CH, S3, p.3

In this following extract Eithne acknowledged her need for involvement and her interest in social engagement and recognised the manner in which her work-life provides an opportunity for meeting this need.

> 'I also think, quite early on in my twenties, realised about myself that I needed to be doing things, that I needed to be in a busy environment or place, that I needed to be learning, that I needed to always to be in a situation where I was hearing or learning something new, or experiencing something new. ... So, I think that I have always, probably without even realising myself, been concerned with people and with how people manage if you like and how people live their lives and how things work out if you like, for people. I have also been interested in, kind of, organisational stuff, mainly to do with education and social issues as well. Yeah, I have always been very interested in things like that, and in the broad sense of the word, while I wouldn't have been a very good stay-at-home mother with small children. And I acknowledge that.'
> EF, S4, p.28

This search for a work-life that is consistent with an expression of self reflects one dimension of a concern that the fullest enactment of one's life is consistent with the expression of self. To the degree that individual participation in society is organised around formal work settings, then the concern with ensuring a consistency between work-life and self-enactment simply reflects a context specific example of a more embracing concern.

1.5 The rigorous and on-going testing of values with experience

As the storytellers detailed their lives, in the course of the interviews, a recurring pattern of rigorous and ongoing testing of personally-held values with personal experience was recounted. Hence the development of personal values is shown as an ongoing, experiential, reflective, and reflexive process. In the following extract, Patricia explored the personal struggle involved in taking the decision to leave Meitheal:

> 'And I am struck by the comment I made today out in the corridor in just explaining in where am I now and sort if in a way that whole decision to leave Meitheal was a value-laden thing, totally value-laden. So I was struck by it, because I would say that I am very unaware of how much values in fact are informing my decisions as they are coming up. And when they are in the pot, that's what helps me make the decisions is a set of values. But I kind of, that's not making an awful lot of sense. But in the coming up to the

decision to leave Meitheal there was all sorts of things bothering me and then when I was looking to see to make the decision, then all the values got named. But before they got named

AOR They were impacting and pushing?

PP Yeah. It's like my reality was pushing against what I knew was my set of values. It took me quite a while, six or eight or ten months, or I could go back further, you know, and sort of say "well when was it when I started to have a clash between me and the organisation, or me and what I thought it was about and what have you," '
PP, S1, p.1

This testing of values and experience is also experienced as a continual interrogation of the self to ascertain if ones actions and place in the world are consistent with the values one holds. This process may be discerned also in, for example, Ann Louise's passing from her religious vocation or Pat's regular returning to the meditating process practice by the Jesuits.

1.6 A willingness to undertake personal responsibility for making change happen

All storytellers displayed a desire to contribute to, and a strong belief in their own capacity to generate, organisational and social change. Their orientation towards social reality is characterised by socially-directed action and a determination to effect change. This belief in their own capacity is reflected also in an ease with assuming responsibility for organising action. Their self-belief is not expressed in an egotistical manner but as a strong commitment to their values and the position of these in their lives. Their capacity for effecting action seems to derive from the central position of their values in their lives. In the following quote Eithne identifies her orientation to practice:

'... And I don't have any misgivings or reluctance at the time to involve myself in something that maybe somebody feels that I could do or I could help out with or be part of or whatever. Do you know? ... I don't feel easily stymied, I don't get easily stymied, I won't say never, but I don't. Even faced with Noel's diagnosis and prognosis. It was awful but I actually wasn't stymied in coming to grips with the practicalities of it.'
EF, S4, p.5

The sense of belief in oneself can also be seen in Catherine's desire to be actively contributing:

'But I still think that the bottom line is that whenever, even in the 1970s, that I wanted to be a contributor, that that was where I was at. Even when I was 15 or 16, volunteering in a school for the deaf, working with travellers or whatever as a kind of very junior assistant. It was to be contributing.
CH, S2, p.2

For Eithne, her personal needs were met by being involved in something:

'... feel that you are involved in something that has a certain urgency about it at the moment, that something needs to be done about it, and even if you can help in a very small way that, that is a useful thing to do. And I don't think that is terribly high falutin'. I mean I, I'd have to look at that, but I just found myself, that came into my head again this morning. But I thought that. I don't know if that gives you any insight into where I am and still would be. Certainly if I retire in the next year or two, kind of officially from work, I mean I certainly won't be sitting at home doing nothing and I certainly won't be playing bridge, nor playing golf. Whatever I will be doing I don't know, I haven't the remotest clue, but I certainly won't be doing any of those things. And I certainly won't be running around with a duster and a hoover every morning either, because I would actually be quite a bad housekeeper! Do you know what I mean, in the traditional sense of housekeeping, do you know. I wouldn't be the kind who would say "between 10 and 11 every morning I will clean my house", I would not be able to do it like that.

AOR: well that wouldn't interest you probably

EF: No it wouldn't, and I wouldn't be able to live like that, I mean I would think "Christ this is drudgery. This is ridiculous. What am I doing this for? It is going to be dirty again tomorrow or at least by next week." I mean it really has to be very visible before I say, out of shame, "Christ I can't have anybody coming in here until I take that hoover out". I mean that is the way, and that is the way I have always lived my life. So I really. My mother always reckoned I would be a very poor housekeeper. She was right. Eh, so as I say I don't know if that gives you any kind of different, or maybe the same insight or adds to what you thought already, eh...

AOR: Well I think it very much reflects the kind of person you are and the kind of present engagement which is always where I feel you are at. What needs doing now and how can I

EF: Yeah, and can I do anything about it, yes

AOR But even that, can I do anything about it, it might seem obvious and straightforward to you but a lot of people don't actually have that kind of, don't move into that "I can do something stage" about it...

EF: Well, you see, is that, is part of that at least, maybe not the whole lot of it, but is part of that at least, Andrew, a want or a need in me to be needed and wanted? ... I sometimes wonder is it part of that.'
EF, S4, pps. 4-5

In contrast to Eithne, Catherine is very clear that she is about addressing a very real social need on the part of others:

> **AOR:** 'I mean you're setting yourself a very ambitious set of targets, things that you seem compelled to do and I'm just wondering why do you feel compelled?
>
> **CH:** It's because I've identified that there is a huge amount of unmet legal need; that people don't have access to the law; that there are barriers, psychological barriers too as well. I'm sure if one is from a poor community, and I didn't grow up in one, the Gardai, there is fear of the law, you know, rather than an understanding of law, and certainly the education system is not good about tell people about their rights. You know, their rights even in employment, their rights as a tenant, their rights, whatever you need to function in daily life. I think people don't always have the information that they need. Okay there are CICs[31] there now and I think they are great, I mean they are really really good. But they don't have an outreach function. Somebody has to go into a CIC and make the step and people do it and its fantastic, they do it in their thousands. With a Law Centre, I suppose, like what I believe is that it will support somebody through an issue, like somebody has had their social welfare taken off them because they believe, Social Welfare believe that they were working and not declaring. And you find that the people are actually, are practically starving and they can't pay their rent and you know they are in a terrible situation. Well there's no legal aid, there's no legal aid available for social welfare appeal and, you know, somebody mightn't know how to get a lawyer, but a community law centre is there in the community and by word of mouth and by advertising people will find out that maybe, maybe they can get help here. So, there are people at the bottom of the line who actually, are missing out ...'
> CH, S1, p.13

Patricia meanwhile, in talking about returning to Ireland from Brussels, said she was also clear about the direction she wants to pursue and the social impact she intends to make:

> 'I would want to come back. It's the motivation for going. It was all. There were five or six things going on but one is, I really wanted to push forward the agenda on lesbian and gay equality because I thought "well, in Ireland, it is one of the next steps". I mean we have not achieved equality in most of the ground, in any of the ground in fact, but this one wasn't even much on the agenda. So, I suppose I thought I would like to make a contribution to this and maybe the European level is useful. And so my analysis now is the European level will have some benefit at national level.'
> *PP, SI, p.26*

[31] CICs is the acronym for Citizen Information Centres. These are state-funded public information centres.

These extracts illustrate the storytellers' intentions to generate change as well as their comfort in assuming this task as a personal responsibility. In addition, the extracts also suggest that the commitment and drive to act in this manner in society stems from both other-directed and self-directed motivations. Thus, while the action for social change is directed specifically at a social reality, it is also directed at an expression of self that is consistent with personally-held values.

1.7 An ability to give organisational expression to the enactment of values

All the storytellers displayed an orientation towards acting in a manner consistent with their espoused values. Additionally, all had played and were continuing to play central roles in the establishment and leadership of non-profit organisations. In some cases this took the form of providing leadership, at times transformational leadership, to extant organisations, for example, Catherine in FLAC, Sean in Amnesty International, Fergus in both the Irish Bible Society and in The Adelaide Society. In other cases it involved storytellers establishing new organisations, for example, Ann Louise with The Shanty, Pat with Open Heart House, Eithne with the Motor Neurone Association of Ireland, Patricia with Meitheal. Of particular interest is the link between a set of personally-held and espoused values and the value basis and mission of the organisations the storytellers chose to be associated with. In this manner, these organisations may be viewed as an organisational expression of personal meaning. The storytellers may be seen to give expression or force to their values not only through socially-oriented action but also specifically through formally-organised expressions of values. One of the results of establishing such organised expressions is that their personal value systems are provided with a social space through which these value systems can be communicated to, and enacted for, others. Indeed, the ability to articulate and communicate to others the attribution of meaning in action appears to be a crucial force in the storytellers' capacity to initiate and to develop organised action. The storytellers variously gave evidence of this capacity to generate meaning in an organisational context for others. While this is most clearly exampled in those cases where the storytellers were individually central to the establishment of organisations and hence articulated the founding values of those organisations, the ability to communicate the integration of values and action with others is likely to have been important wherever and whenever storytellers led organisational change.

1.8 In life, regularly reaching and recognising a time to move on

In tracing the pattern of their life-stories all the storytellers recounted the experience of reaching a time when they felt or knew that they needed to move on from what they were doing and to walk away from achievement, position and organisations in which they had a very considerable personal investment. This dimension is exampled by the departure of Ann Louise from her leading role in An Cosán, of Fergus from Macra na Feirme and the Bible Society, of Patricia from Meitheal, of Pat from Goldstar Meats and by Eithne looking beyond the assurance of her role in the Motor Neurone Disease Association of Ireland. This recognition of a time to move on was always explained in personal development terms rather than in terms of the requirements of a given organisation. As such, it seems to indicate an orientation to the self rather than to the organisations. Given the storytellers' central involvement and personal identification with the relevant organisations this capacity to separate the self from the organisation is noteworthy. Indeed, it is noteworthy that such a lack of conflation of self and organisation is not always achieved in the nonprofit or other sectors. In their presentation of their stories the storytellers show little, or perhaps no, evidence of a need for organisations to provide self-affirmation. For example, in the following extract, Patricia was clear about the time to depart from Meitheal:

> 'Because it is or was me, or whatever. Because then Meitheal wasn't me anymore. It was that I needed to go. It was time to go and I stayed possibly 12 months longer than I was ready to go. But I couldn't go then because the other co-founder was away and I couldn't go then.'
> PP, S1, p. 31

In a similar vein, Sean described himself as not requiring the theatre of organisation:

> '... I am quite certain in my case I am a reluctant engager I mean definitely I don't queue up looking for these type. I didn't come looking for this job I have. And I don't mean that I am a missionary either I really would be delighted not to be doing the job I do.
>
> **AOR**: To go to France and read your book
>
> **SL:** Exactly! I really would. That would be my preferred. I do intend to write a book, you know what I mean ...'
> SL, S3, p. 10

This point about not requiring an organisation for self-affirmation is a rather nuanced one. Insofar as the organisation is central to the value expression in action of the individual, then the organisation is seen to be central to the individual's expression of self in society. As such, the organisation is important to the individual storyteller, but

not as an organisation, rather as a vehicle for the expression of values. Hence, as the individual's need to express or to emphasis particular values changes, the degree of personal fit with the organisation can change also. Since values remain as the central personal driving force then the personal relevance of the organisation becomes diminished and the individual looks to direct their action elsewhere.

Section 2 Emerging Themes

In this section of the chapter themes that recur throughout the life-stories are explored. In the interviews such themes typically were seen to run through the life-story, to reflect an approach to social engagement, or to characterise perspectives on the human condition. They may be distinguished from the recurring narrative elements outlined in Section 1 above in that they are not specific to an event or time. As presented here, they are abstractions from the stories and are identified in analysis by me as the researcher rather than by having been specified in interview by one or other of the storytellers. They are presented and discussed below under the headings of (i) a capacity for empathy, (ii) the nature of the relationship with the self, (iii) the nature of the relationship with the other, (iv) the expression of self in action and in community, (v) the relationship with religious belief, (vi) the interpretation of the relationship between living and dying, (vii) a spiritual nature, (viii) a search for meaning and for place, and, (ix) the experience of life as a self-creative process.

These first four themes of (i) a capacity for empathy, (ii) the nature of the relationship with the self, (iii) the nature of the relationship with the other, (iv) the expression of self in action and in community, may be seen to combine to shape the storytellers' orientation to the social world. The remaining five themes of (v) a struggle with religion, (vi) the interpretation of the relationship between living and dying, (vii) a spiritual nature, (viii) a search for meaning and for place, and, (ix) the experience of life as a self-creative process, are illustrative of the storytellers experience of the human condition as essentially spiritual rather than material. They may be seen to combine to shape the storytellers' orientation to the metaphysical world.

2.1 A capacity for empathy

In speaking with all the storytellers, I was left with a sense of their deep capacity for relating with empathy to others. This capacity was expressed also as a profound sense of a common humanity, a common human condition, or, in some instances, a sense of a common thread in all life. Such orientations also support a sense of justice, particularly social justice and a motivation towards actions on related issues. In this extract, Catherine speaks of absolute and relative poverty in Ireland:

> **CH:** 'I think the poverty was more overt. You saw kids out in the street and the clothes were, it was obvious they were hand-me-downs. And maybe they didn't have a coat going to school and you know, you see them shivering out. I just think it's a different, it's a different amm, there are different social problems, now there is money there for, there are better social welfare benefits so that children actually, these kids who were. Like, forty years ago the kids you saw who were poor actually have the Nike shoes now, and they have all the tracksuits and they have all the gear. It's a different poverty: people who have mental health and psychological problems. And either through, you know, caused by whatever,
>
> **AOR:** Addictions
>
> **CH:** Or their own frailty or whatever, and trying to manage family and children, you know on the borderline of homelessness and eviction all the time.'
>
> CH, S2, p.12

In the following excerpt, Sean explores the roots of his sense of justice:

> **AOR:** 'Is the justice piece an intellectualising or a conceptualising or a theorising in a non-emotional mode of an empathy or an ability to see and understand where somebody else is; and by the same token imagine where some animal is.
>
> **SL:** I think that is a fairer, closer representation. And I think partly also, you see rather than it being about a detached sense of what is justice, I think certainly there is a component in there of wanting the violator, and in that case it was just a kid acting the maggot, but in another scenario, the violator to be named, to be caught and to be told "imagine this was you".
>
> **AOR:** That's a justice piece, that's a type of justice piece
>
> **SL:** Okay, well that is true for me as well.
>
> **AOR:** But so is the
>
> **SL:** Yeah
>
> **AOR:** Two sides of the

> **SL:** Yeah, but I think probably the other one, the empathy with the, empathy is wrong because I have never been a victim, I can't pretend that I have ever been a victim, I'm sure I have been picked on occasionally, but I'm not a victim and I wasn't. But sympathise certainly, if not empathise. And yeah, I think too, that's sounds, that sounds, whatever word you used there, of feeling like if I was in that person's position, how that would feel to me. That's very real and I still do that.'
> SL, S1, p.12

The capacity for empathy for others expressed and displayed by the storytellers is an important dimension of how they relate to the social world in which they find themselves. What is particularly notable is the manner in which the empathetic orientation appears to arise from the integration of the generic and specific, that is, their understanding of the human condition and their sensitivity to the specific place in which an other finds him or herself. Hence, what is expressed is not just a concern for the plight of an other, but also a concern for the plight of this other as a human being.

2.2 The nature of the relationship with the 'self'

Encountered as individuals, the storytellers each projected their own sense of themselves that seemed grounded in a deep self-knowledge, which can be seen in section 1.2 above as an awareness they had from a young age. I would describe this as being 'self-possessed' - not in the self-absorbed sense - but in their strong focus on their ways of being in the world. In proposing the term 'self-possessed' I have in mind two meanings here. Firstly, I intend it to encompass the idea of 'possession of oneself', as in owning oneself; that is, the person is not determined by another's or society's value system. Secondly, I intend it also to encompass the idea of 'being possessed by oneself', as in being owned by the self; that is, a kind of possession by the self such that one's actions are always predicated on the self. The term self–possessed is deliberately chosen for this duality of meaning, for such a duality is exhibited to varying degrees among the storytellers. On the one hand, they are self-possessed in the sense that they own themselves; they possess the self. For example, they are not driven by externally-generated impulses, such as the wants and needs of a consumer society. On the other hand, they are self-possessed, in the sense that they are owned by themselves and they are possessed by the self. They are never free of an insistent demand to be consistent with themselves, to maintain an integrity between their beliefs and their actions. From this imperative it appears that there is no escape, nor indeed, any desire to escape, so

that there is an underlying and constant tension between the repose of self-containment and the restlessness of constant search.

This characteristic of self-possession may be observed in a variety of forms. There is an evident comfort with the self as these are individuals who are at ease with themselves. In interview Ann Louise offered that she was 'absolutely happy on her own' (ALG, S.2 interview notes, p 4). The manner in which the storytellers engaged with the research process, as well as their capacity to do so, also point to this ease with the self. This ease may partly stem from a belief in themselves as well as a belief in their capacity to achieve and to generate change at some level in society. Perhaps serving to strengthen this belief in a capacity to effect change is a belief in the moral appropriateness of their position. For example, Fergus at one stage spoke about his not giving adequate consideration to the atheistic position

> 'I would be humble enough to say that I haven't given atheism as a thought-out position, a great deal of thought, because, as I said to you, it seems to me not a credible faith position'
> FOF, S2, p.12

This self-belief is not expressed as a blind, fanatical, or arrogant abrogation of moral authority. This belief is derived from deep reflection, and while it is strongly held, it remains open to the hearing of an articulated challenge. For example, in the following extract, Sean recognises the risk of an element of bullying in his wishing to see the perpetrator of an abuse brought to book:

> 'I'm not suggesting I would have always have got it right and I'm conscious as well that the type of person who reacts to bullying undoubtedly may well have the same components in them.'
> SL, S1, p.1

More broadly, this acceptance of critique is evidenced as a kind of openness to the world. There is little or no defensiveness in their conversations and there is also a clear recognition of their own individual fallibility.

The alternative aspect of self-possession is apparent in the internal requirement to act at all times in a manner consistent with one's espoused values. Here, Sean expressed the requirement to maintain an integrity between his beliefs and actions:

> **AOR:** ' ...that responsibility to act and the degree to which that acting keeps a personal integrity with yourself, would I be correct in assuming that you, if push came to shove, couldn't envisage acting any other way and maintaining

that integrity, and to breach that integrity would be too uncomfortable a space to go into.

SL: Yeah I think you are right in that I wouldn't breach the integrity, that's certainly true. I couldn't, and I would be thinking of worst case scenarios. I still think I couldn't, regarding what the scenario was, it would have to be something quite extraordinary, I couldn't envisage a scenario where I would.'
SL, S3, p. 9

In a similar manner Patricia expressed the internal demand for an honesty and integrity in the relationship between personal values and personal action;

' Well yeah, I suppose that you, when you are called to put your money where your mouth is, you know, that you act what you talk, that you,

AOR: and is that being good to yourself or is that being good to?

PP: No, it is being good to yourself because it satisfies what you want. Sorry, ... me, what I believe in, so if I believe in being equal then people treating me equally then I must work to treat other people equally. It is good. It is a good thing that even when I am challenged that I have to then work that out. And while that might be hard at times, you know, cos I can be as ageist or as racist as the next. But I want to. And I actually want to, as well as I must. You see that's the thing. And then language gets in the way but I want it that I would.

AOR: That's an internal must rather than an external must, yeah?

PP: Yeah, I must do it because if I don't it's like that yucky feeling, back to the one

AOR: Yeah it's a breaking of the integrity of who you are and how you are.

PP: Yes, how I am in the world or how I see myself. You see actually how I am in the world doesn't really matter, it's how I see myself in the world.
PP, S1, p.34

The particular nature of the relationship with self, displayed by the storytellers, is central to their orientation to the world. In a manner of understanding, the world becomes the theatre in which they write, direct and perform the play of their own lives.

2.3 The nature of the relationship with the 'other'

The perception of a shared humanity is another of the threads running through the storytellers' interpretations of their experience of the world. This perception seemed to be strongly based in empathy or sympathy. Ann Louise articulated it as empathy, while Sean used 'sympathy' having rejected his initial choice of 'empathy'. As a personal

disposition, it appears to be evident early in life and is to be found reflected in references to a childhood sense of difference (see section 1.2 above). For example, this can be seen in Patricia's discomfort with the unequal treatment accorded to some children in her class in her primary school (See Appendix 7), and in the impact on Ann Louise of her experience of families in poverty in Deansgrange (See Appendix 1). This sense of a shared experience of the human condition serves to create bonds with all and in that way it breaches the barrier between the individual and the other. Ann Louise articulates this relational capacity as a core attribute of humanness:

> 'the depth of one's capacity to be human is measured by the capacity to love and to relate to others'
> ALG, S2 notes, p 4

Living therefore becomes a relational act and the measure of a life is relationally based. While it may be argued that living is relational for everyone, what stands out for the storytellers in this research is their awareness of this relational aspect and of its importance to them. To illustrate this, for example, in the following extract Patricia recalls her childhood feelings of discomfort at the perceived mistreatment of others:

> 'What would I say? Well, what comes into my mind, and I am sure this is not what you are looking for at all in terms of conceptual, but it's like I just knew it was wrong. But I didn't have language nor frameworks nor anything when I was a child. It just, was not right and it felt, it felt ach, and some of it was discomfort actually, some of it was discomfort.
>
> AOR: Personal discomfort?
>
> PP: That I felt that somebody was being, well I could say mistreated, but I saw somebody not getting the same treatment than me and it was rougher treatment, or lesser treatment, or they got less, and I actually was uncomfortable about that. And that can still go on, I get personally uncomfortable.'
> PP, S1, p.28

In this next extract Sean is speaking of the emotional basis of his relationships with others:

> 'Well I think I always give, I think I'm very open, I'm very trusting, and I hope, certainly to a far way down the track, I show an awful lot of respect to all people, and try not to underestimate anyone at any point. And so my overall approach to people is that they have to go a long way before I would fall out with them, or lose trust in them ... I suppose again not unlike most people, when you see somebody vulnerable, it has quite an emotional impact on me to see vulnerability in people, no matter who they are. I mean, vulnerable and in danger might be a better way of putting it, to have an emotional impact on you. But obviously, there, I'm speaking about children or old people or whatever, people who, mental illness or instability

> or intellectual disabilities or all of that. I suppose I feel protective towards anyone who's vulnerable. And it isn't peculiar to those groups I've mentioned, but they are the ones who most obviously manifest it. But I have discovered increasingly in the work you can meet ostensibly very tough-looking men who are very vulnerable and who can demonstrate it. And then clearly with women who have suffered and all the rest of it. I think I am good at seeing that or recognising that and sympathising or empathising with that and it really strikes an emotional chord every time.
> SL, S1, p.11

For her part, Catherine pointed, in the following extract, to a baseline of respect that is unconditionally offered to others in the course of her work:

> 'The bottom line is, no matter who the person is, there is just a basic sort of respect, you know, and that's the starting block. But it mightn't, the interaction mightn't, require that much empathy or, you know, getting into their shoes or anything like that. Sometimes it can just be a transaction or, you know. But the respect enables or facilitates whatever communication is necessary. You know, sometimes it's just information that somebody wants, they don't want to disclose anything'
> CH, S3, p.6

The manner in which the storytellers relate to others in their social world is conditioned or shaped by an orientation to all that is grounded in 'honouring' their individual humanity. This orientation reflects their sensitivity to the impact of their relationships with others on those others, which in turn is based on a empathy or sympathetic capacity.

2.4 The expression of self in action and in communion with others

Linked to the themes of 'relationship with the self' and that of 'relationship with the other' is a pattern of self-expression through inter-action and social engagement. Thus while some of the storytellers actively sought time for introspection and reflection, as exampled by Patricia's studies or Pat's involvement with the Spiritual Exercises, all returned to social action as the location of expression. Self-expression for these storytellers is achieved through action in and communion with, the community outside of the familial circle. Meaning is not an introverted experience but is found by these storytellers in engagement with others, hence we can see the importance of the external object or other event in their experience of meaning. In apparent contradiction to this social orientation however, the storytellers are self-reliant and self-contained and do not need to be in a communal space. For example, Sean noted:

> 'I suppose my greatest enjoyment is just sitting on my own with a book, somewhere in the sun. Do I need people around me, I suppose I do. I like people. I don't feel desperate if they are not around me.' SL, S1, p. 19

For her part, Eithne remarked that she was uncomfortable in large group social occasions where small talk is required (EF, S4, p.32).

2.5 The relationship with values and belief

Questions about the storytellers' religious belief and practice elicited a variety of responses in the interviews. For Sean, the religious practice of his upbringing had been left aside by him with little emotion, while for Patricia, institutionalised religion constituted a socially and personally oppressive structure. Ann Louise, having struggled with the idea and practice of religious vocation arrived at a similar position to Patricia's. For Pat and Fergus, in contrast, their respective denominations provided theological frameworks for their personal relationships with God. Meanwhile, for Catherine and Eithne, questions of religious belief appear unresolved. In the following two quotes, first Catherine and then Eithne, variously articulated the unresolved nature of their religious positions:

> **AOR:** 'You mention prayer there in relation to the Jesuit support for communities. Is that something you do much or, how do you keep yourself centred?
>
> **CH:** I should do more. I think my beliefs are unfaltering. But, I mean I don't pray enough and that's kind of bad really, that I don't.
>
> **AOR:** Bad, in what way?
>
> **CH:** There is just no excuse for it really when I know
>
> **AOR:** It would be helpful?
>
> **CH:** Yeah, absolutely.
>
> **AOR:** In what way would it be helpful?
>
> **CH:** Well I suppose I'd feel I'm keeping my part of the bargain anyway, by praying, you know. Because I know regardless anyway, I know regardless, I just believe that God is looking after me anyway.
>
> **AOR:** Your part of what bargain?

CH: Well, I just keep my part of the bargain. Well I think, you know that, it's just part of it. I think that, well if God is there and he's looking after me, well I think the least I can do is, now and again, well,

AOR: Acknowledge it?

CH: Well yeah, and thank him for it?

AOR: Well, would that mean that prayer was that kind of a relationship, that thanking, as opposed to anything else?

CH: Yeah, absolutely yeah ... and there is also the rosary, which I have dropped as well. I do, I mean, I suppose I believe there is power in prayer. Maybe that's the bottom line too. But the fact that I believe and don't really act on it, isn't saying an awful lot about me, but.

AOR: When you say, when you say power in prayer, what do you mean?

CH: Well, I think they probably can be answered, you know. I haven't got proof of that now, do you know what I mean, but,

AOR: Sure, sure, yeah,

CH: Yeah,

AOR: That they may be answered by being not answered

Laughter

CH, S2, pps 7-8

In the following excerpt Eithne captured her experience of, and revolt from, the institutionalised practice of her teenage and young adult years.

> 'I also felt quite strongly about a lot of the Vatican II stuff not having been implemented and particularly not moving on about married couples, and women in the church and things like that. I was actually quite annoyed and irritated by that. I was extremely annoyed and irritated by *Humane Vitae* and, you know, I was just at that age, that 21-22 age, young woman, and I was also very horrified at the church's reaction in 1967, again I was just at that age, - the church's reaction and the awful sermons against those in the British government and bringing in abortion laws and things like that, and the horror idea of girls running from Ireland and Spain, good Catholic countries, running to London for abortions, and all over-stated rubbish and that. I think there were things like that, that really did turn me off it I have to say, you know. So I suppose there is a bit of me that feels that I am not into organised religion as organised by our holy mother of the Catholic Church but that doesn't mean that I wouldn't have time to maybe pray or talk and to be. In a way, there would a certain spiritual side to me, I wouldn't say it's very well developed being honest, you know. I think I probably was also put off by the fact that when I was in secondary school I was told that I wasn't worthy to be a child of Mary and I was struck off the

kind of steps of the child of Mary. I had got to the very last step and I was cut off about nine days before.

AOR: Sorry what is a child of Mary?

EF: This is a big thing that women, girls, became a child of Mary. I don't know if you ever saw it or heard of it, I didn't see your declaration, processions in the church, Corpus Christi things in the church they would always be the women with the blue. What do you call them, things over their, shawls? And sometimes they wore white. In some places they wore white mantillas. And it was a big thing about girls who were educated, and educated in decent Catholic schools, became children of Mary just before, when they were on the brink of adulthood.

AOR: And why didn't you make the cut?

EF: Because I was just so awful! Mother Ambrose decided I wasn't worthy, and that was the word she used to me – you are not worthy.

AOR: In what ways were you so awful?

EF: 'You are not worthy dear.' And that really did stick with me. She also told me that I was 'notorious' at school. And I didn't really know what notorious meant, I remember having to have to go to the dictionary to find out what notorious meant and I knew it was something bad but I wasn't sure. I thought it was a bit funny then when I found out what it was and it wasn't awful, awful. And that I wasn't worthy and that I certainly wouldn't be becoming a child of Mary and that was an awful thing too ... So you know, I think that definitely turned me off religion and turned me off the trappings and all the silliness, certainly, certainly it did.

EF, S4, pps18-19

In contrast to the foregoing, Fergus articulated a clear basis for his religious belief and practice:

'I would be humble enough to say that I haven't given atheism as a thought-out position a great deal of thought, because as I said to you it seems to me not a credible faith position and I do think it rests totally and utterly, as does Christianity, on faith. Now obviously it's the way you are informed by different kinds of knowing or knowledge that makes you one or the other. And that's why I think Cardinal Newman and others have made a great contribution. Obviously you can use your reason, you can use your imagination, you know what I mean, in terms of knowing things and it's the combination of both generally gives you whatever certainty or confidence you have. So that is a faith position, it is not an irrational position or an unreasoned position, in fact it is governed by reason and the evidence you can produce for it, but it is also informed by other faculties and other ways of knowing, obviously in simple terms through imagination or through other faculties that you have, so that's my query about the word faith. Because sometimes people use the word faith as being asked to believe six improbable things before breakfast and faith in my book is a much firmer

> outcome of actual knowing through your own reasonable reasonability, I mean, taking an example, some people would say 'oh well Jesus Christ is a myth'. My reason tells me, as a historian, for example that there is sufficient evidence to know that there was a historical personage of Jesus who did X, Y and Z, and we have as much information that would confirm that information the same as I know that Daniel O'Connell lived, different kinds of evidence but the same type of historical evidence as it were. So that's a reasonable approach. Then, there are other certain imaginative ways that you know and encounter a personality like that, and the same would operate in a historical reconstruction of somebody like Daniel O'Connell. But a similar process is at work in relation to a superb thinker like Jesus because you have the evidence, you have his stories, you have the poetic way he talked and so forth. That's what I am saying. When you talk about faith, in my book, you are talking about the, something that is built on knowledge. Now it's not something that is built on empirical knowledge and science but that's a very limited way of knowing, and you can only know a certain amount of things with science that you can't know. Maybe, in my book, and I am not scientist, these are less important things that you discover through it. And sometimes people say 'oh well this is not scientific', thinking that science can answer the sort of, these other type of questions. And it can't, you know. So, that's a long way around, but I just think that's important.'
> FOF, S2, p.12

Whether it resulted in deeper engagement with, or in the rejection of, institutionalised religious observance, the struggle with and deep reflection on religion mirrored the storytellers' deep and continuing engagement with a search for values by which to guide their lives. While their individual level of engagement with this dimension varied substantially, my enquiry into the relative importance of the religious dimension of their lives was treated with equal regard by all the storytellers. They had all been born and reared in a society in which religious belief constituted the dominant espoused value basis for individual and social action. Given this, it was perhaps inevitable that each would have a story of personal engagement with this religious belief as a potential value system. The various paths this engagement took reflected the basic possibilities open to them, that is, (i) challenge and rejection, as exampled by Ann Louise, Patricia, and Sean; (ii) embracement and exploration, as we can see in Pat's and Fergus's life-stories, and (iii) disenchantment and relative disengagement, as Catherine's and Eithne's life-stories show. Nonetheless, these stories, whether of engagement, disenchantment, or of rejection, are instructive of, on the one hand, the previous dominance of religious belief in Irish society, and on the other, of the storytellers vigorous personal engagement with the question of values.

2.6 The interpretation of the relationship between living and dying

As in any discussion on religious belief, the question of the nature of the relationship between the life lived and the mortal condition constituted a fulcrum and all the storytellers exhibited deep awareness of the relationship between living and dying. In broaching this topic in interview it was noticeable that it was not responded to with the rhetorical air that a twenty year-old might adopt. All the storytellers were older and had enough experience to deal with the question forthrightly and personally. In the next extract below Patricia outlines her view of the relationship between a life as lived and the notion of immortality.

> '... now, god don't get me wrong but you know I would sometimes, one of my, Jane was reared a Protestant and we would joke about that, we would have joked about that. And one time we were doing work on 'what do you want to do in your life' and I was saying I would quite like to think I would lead a good life. So she said 'oh Jesus, how Protestant is that?' And there was a bit of a misunderstanding because she saw it as, from her rearing, she saw that as a very particular thing, whereas, but from my Catholic rearing there is no injunction to live a good life, I don't think there is an injunction to live a good life in Catholicism – much. You can do what you want, it is quite a la carte–ish. Whereas her school of Protestantism was you must do certain things or you must live a good life. So then I think I am really Puritan
>
> **AOR:** What you mean by a good life and what did she understood a good life to be by that conversation?
>
> **PP:** Well she understood it to be externally driven and that somebody else is telling you, whereas what I think is a good life is that I live by my own values and my own lights, I have done what I should do, I have done the right thing – that is so unarticulated isn't it?! God almighty!
>
> **AOR:** And so, where, if any space, is there a spirituality in any of that? It's funny because you said twice that 'I'd die happy if blah blah blah' and you said 'how long do I want to live' and they both prompted in my head...
>
> **PP:** When will I let myself die?!
>
> **AOR:** Yeah, what do you believe in those kind of terms?
>
> **PP:** I believe and it got very strengthened after my dad died and of course this is the emotional, every time, bloody hell, I believe, how would I put it, I don't believe in heaven and I don't believe in immortality in that sense of like going off to another place or whatever. But I believe that you make a difference in the world and that's your immortality. That's what I believe is immortality. Because you have affected people, you have been decent, you have not been cruel, you have been honest, you have been fair in as much as you can, you have not done anybody down, you know. And that, then, that all, all together, ends up being good. Then you have lived a good life, you

have been fair to yourself, and you have been fair to other people, and then you are known for that because, because that's a bit different.
PP S1 p33-34

In the following lengthy extract Eithne struggles with the dissonance between the raw realities of human experience and of the human condition and doctrinaire positions on ultimate causality and immortality:

AOR: 'Well given, if we go, if we bring forward then to MNDA and, you know, the difficulties and traumas that you see people going through in that context, how, if in any way, did you make sense of all of that? Or put it another way, how do you see other people making sense of it? Because you must see a fair bit of that too?

EF: You do, and you see right around the spectrum how people make sense of it or don't make sense of it, accept it or don't accept it, how people kick against the thing, how people are very angry, I suppose I mean I certainly see a very broad spectrum of people. I certainly haven't probably even yet worked out what it is all about, why people in their prime be struck down and why should have this awful lack of progression and why, what is it all about, on a spiritual level I suppose. If there is an all just and all loving God why do these things happen to people? But then, I suppose, once you are aware of horrible accidents happening, even when you are a child, you are already questioning that, you know. Why does all powerful God who can do anything or change anything and who is supposed to be all just and all loving as well, why should he allow small children die in road accidents? Why should small children drown at the seaside? I mean, and those things have been agitating my mind since I was very young ... and you see I don't know really, Andrew, how this is going to pan out before I have kind of come to the end of my life, or you know how it is going to pan out for me if I have much longer. I don't know ... because I think I have learned a lot from people in these situations, I have seen different people cope in different ways. I have also seen women falling apart basket cases in the first six weeks, who really bounce back and come back in a wonderful way and give great care and then losing track of them when the husband passes away and maybe coming two or three years later, they come to a memorial service and they are strong ... So I don't think that I have any solution for myself as to why this awful thing happens to people or why awful things in general, horrible road accidents, drowning, because nobody can fathom out of the family ... So as I say I haven't worked it out and also part of my work would be I would be saying to people, 'scientifically we don't know why people get it', we have no reason, we have no markers, except that there is a very small minority who have it in the family, - and that brings its own problems when you have kids - I really dread that, but for this, for adult people, which is the vast majority, we have no answers about anything. And I have no answers about the religious side of it any more than I have about the scientific side of it. I really haven't. I mean, I know it's very easy to say that life is full of ups and downs, or life is a bitch, or some people seem to get more than their fair share of misfortune, but I don't think, I don't think there is an easy answer. I don't think there is any answer. I think we all have to take it as it comes really and try to accept it

as best we can. I saw myself when I got ill that I wasn't sure how I was going to deal with it, and I actually found myself somewhere out there looking back down at myself and kind of saying this is really going to be a huge test, because have I actually been quite glib at times, quite trite with people about their loved ones who have terminal illness. (EF, S4 pps (21-22)

...Yeah and is there a, I mean it also brings us back I suppose to what is living life about? And what, and does it ultimately make any difference what way a person lives their life? And, I would still, about the hereafter, I would still be vacillating between, hopefully I might say, something that is good and nice and what have you and the other bit of me says 'for Christ sake get a grip on yourself woman, there is nothing, over'. And I am still in that frame of mind. I think this is the thing that has given me the most difficulty and I have actually been discussing it with priests and theologians on and off since my mid, no, late teens, because I was in college when I started. But the big doctrine that I have problem with is - it sounds daft - is the resurrection of the body. I have serious problems with that, I really do, because I think that it is a madness. It's a lunacy, lunacy. I mean, to have all people who die at 92 to come back at 92, won't that be hilarious? Eh, you know, the resurrection. And nobody has ever given me a satisfactory answer to the resurrection of the body ... but it is there as a basic tenet of our Church ... So Christianity expects up to accept that and I am sorry but I am at odds with that ... and I have had priests give me daft explanations, like 'oh you come back, you'll come back at the time when you are at your best and your most radiant' and, no seriously, I have had people say that to me

AOR: Do you mind if I come back six feet tall!

EF: Yes exactly, yeah. You know. And then I remember getting really up the goat of a priest once by saying something like 'well actually I would like to come back as a cat the next time I think!' And that doesn't go down very well either. So, I like to think, and all I can say is I like to think and that is all I can say, I can't say with any definite, with any great conviction to be honest, I like to think that there is something there that is left of one that has some, I am a bit worried about using the word influence because that can be pejorative word, it can have a pejorative meaning, but have some meaning, some influence or some place or some interaction, I am not getting the words very well, on who comes afterwards or who is left behind after us, if you want to put it that way.

AOR: But that's the after, if you like, that's an afterglow of one's life as lived.

EF: Yes but I have to be careful that I don't mix that up in my head and that I don't convey it to anyone I would be saying it to that I am not also thinking about, that's why my words are not very good, that I am not, also conveying what is very basic genetic stuff that will be inevitably be left behind

AOR: yes, yes

EF: that will be inevitably be passed on

AOR: that's not what you are talking about

EF: that some man in the future will have my hammer toes, we'll say or whatever, you know, eh, so that is not what I mean by that

AOR: yes but you don't define yourself by your hammer toes?

EF: no

AOR: and that's not what you mean, you mean your person

EF: your essence

AOR: your values attitudes

EF: attitudes

AOR: the impact of your actions and so on

EF: Yes.

AOR: Yeah but that, as I say, that seems to me as I hear it, that's an afterglow? You know, that is the impact of your life as you lived it carried on after you have passed away? Which isn't the same thing, no, no.

EF: So therefore what happens then? Eh, you see, I am not convinced of anything being honest. I mean there is a bit of me that likes the idea and this is the romantic bit of me. That likes the idea of souls or essences floating around somewhere up there which of course is completely looney, noodley and daft and stupo and all those things. I mean, you know, I accept that. But there is a bit of a romantic and that is a romantic notion if you like. But you see no matter how practical I might be or how logical I might be in lots of things that doesn't stop me, when I am sitting above in Beaumont in December and I just got my diagnosis, that I wasn't shouting out saying 'Noel you old fucker why did you leave me here on my own'?

AOR: Yes, to face this.

EF: To face this? You know bloody well I need you here now. So I have some feeling that he is there somewhere and that he really knows that I am very cross. I don't have any doubt about that. I know this will sound utterly daft and it is daft I am sure that there were times when I had, and thank god I didn't have many but there were times when I had moments with the kids in teenage years when I really resented being on my own and saying why do I have to make these

AOR: Endless decisions

EF: Endless decisions and unpopular decisions and is it that I am a scaredy cat and that I won't let them go such and such a place and won't let them do

this and what have you. And where I would be saying 'Noel please give me some indication of what I should be doing?', and I have to say that it didn't happen often, it maybe happened a dozen times, thankfully, but that I actually felt by allowing myself that much that it just cleared my brain or helped me. But I certainly got some help out of it. And as I say I know it sounds nutty.

AOR: No, no, it doesn't sound nutty at all

EF: But certainly I would have, certainly I would have experienced that. As I say, there is, there is that, I have that notion, not with me all the time, not by any means, I don't have a notion that - somebody recently I was having a conversation with them about it - loads of souls that don't really, that are nothing but are all bashing into each other flying around, you know, and I mean, and that just – no

AOR: like metaphysical dodgems going on or something?

EF: yes exactly, yes, eh...'
EF, S4, pps 25 – 26

This search for an interpretation of the relationship between living and dying, shows that death, and how to make life sensible in the face of death, or death itself sensible, remained an existential mystery of deep concern for these storytellers.

2.7 A spiritual nature

In varying degrees all storytellers expressed a view that they had a spiritual side to them. For some, such as Ann Louise, Pat, and Fergus this was articulated as a central aspect of their orientation towards existence. It provided a, or perhaps *the,* medium of interpretation. As such, it structures the logic of their personal meaning, their personal engagement with the world. A value in the human, beyond the physical or economic, is claimed by these storytellers. Indeed, the chief value in the human individual is seen by them to lie in the possession of a spiritual dimension. Through their spiritual nature, the lives of Ann Louise, Pat and Fergus appear as an ongoing search for spiritual expression. Spirituality is not understood as an addition to human existence but rather as lying at the very core of it. Spirituality is described by them as the essence of being human and the search for spiritual expression is seen as central to human existence.

For the other storytellers the articulation is neither so clear, nor so centrally positioned within their lives. Sean is very vocal about his love of being in a natural environment, of animals and of being empathetic with their plight. Catherine and Eithne both

maintain that they have a 'spiritual side' to their persons. In this extract Catherine is insisting:

> 'I mean definitely, you know, I do have a commitment to a spiritual dimension in my life. I mean that is unquestionable.'
> CH, S3, p.5

For Patricia, although she railed against institutionalised religion, she finds a way of claiming a spiritual element through the testimony of her friends and seems to find her spiritual connection with the world particularly strong in a natural environment. She said that:

> 'There is something that, going back to the spirituality question, people have said to me and I don't espouse any great religion or spirituality but people have said to me that they find me very spiritual and I think it's because I try to do this other thing, you see, it's because I meet them as they are there.
>
> **AOR:** This kind of engaging with people where they are?
>
> **PP:** Yes and then because I really like being out in the world in nature, but I don't mind cities, I never mind where I am at, but I love being out in the country and I get a great space in myself and reflection and going up mountains in particular, just like an opportunity to touch back with me. So anyway friends of mine who are spiritual they say that you know, it's kind of hocus pocus to me, but that is what has been said to me. ... Yeah well again this other friend of mine she says I am the strongest defender against my spiritual nature that she has ever come across that I just won't admit it and I won't, because of its connotation to religion.
> PP, S1, pp 36 and 38

While recognising that, for these storytellers, the importance of their spiritual engagement with the world is very varied, the common spiritual thread is all the more remarkable given the range of religious, agnostic and atheistic positions. Perhaps this could be taken to reflect the influence and pervasiveness of religious beliefs and institutions in their social world. However, the rigorous testing of values with experience, noted earlier in the discussion, could be taken to indicate that such a reflection of their social environment is not the cause of this emphasis on spirituality. Rather, it seems that a degree of spiritual attuning to the world is a common aspect of their orientation to their social and physical environment.

2.8 A search for meaning and place

One of the most insistent themes emerging from these life-stories is of the experience of what might be characterised as a restless search for meaning, or of life being experienced as such. Indeed, Ann Louise stated that 'the search for meaning is central to being human' (ALG, S1, notes p. 4). This restless search for meaning can be seen in Ann Louise's vocation and renunciation, in Pat's vocational consideration, his search for a management style and his turn to social entrepreneurship, and in Fergus's growing commitment to the development of a civic space equal to the possibilities of the individual. It can also be found in Sean's deepening involvement in Amnesty International, Eithne's role in establishing the Motor Neurone Association of Ireland, Catherine's search for a different community, and in Patricia's enactment of her values. It is easily identifiable in all the life stories and it is linked to a search for a place where this meaning is recognised and celebrated. Whatever the cause of this restlessness, obviously felt to varying degrees and at varying times in the passage of the individual lives, it finds a foil in a dissatisfaction with the normative, institutionalised explanations presented by the contemporaneous society. This dissatisfaction seems grounded in an experiential and interpretative dissonance; a dissonance between personal experience and interpretation on the one hand, and normative, institutionalised explanations offered on the other. For example, at 17 years of age Patricia knew she would not, indeed could not, enter into marriage as a social institution and determined on a professional training that would offer financial independence:

> 'I remember thinking that, I need something that will have me financially independent and, you know, into a lifestyle that I knew I wanted as well, and that I was not going to be getting married so I didn't see how. I suppose, in a way I was seeing myself as single at that point, I certainly wasn't, I wasn't getting married. So then I didn't see what other partnerships were there, because I hadn't identified as lesbian at that stage.'
> PP, S1, p. 7

The nature of this search for meaning is not a flippant tripping from moment to moment or from value to value. There is evidently an intention and practice of rigorously interrogating proposed values. Further, values are not subject to a single examination but are continuously tried and reflected on in lived experience over and over again, as we saw in section 1.5[32] above. We also saw the consequences of that in section 1.8[33] above. Hence we find Ann Louise, Pat and Fergus all relating stories of moving

[32] 1.5 The rigorous and on-going testing of values with experience
[33] 1.8 In life, regularly reaching and recognising a time to move on

through an ongoing religious and spiritual search. Consistent with this ongoing relating of values with experience and action, or action and experience, storytellers displayed considerable 'freedom of thought' in these journeys.

2.9 Life as a self- creative process and a journey of self-realisation

Across all these life-stories runs a theme that remains largely unarticulated by the storytellers, that is, the notion of the individual life as process or journey of self-creation or self-realisation. Viewed as such, life constitutes a process in which the individual must rise to the challenge of being human. Part of this is the challenge of living; part of this is the challenge of finding meaning; part of this is the challenge of making one's own life meaningful. Life becomes a challenge to be embraced, not a challenge to seek protection from. This demands a degree of creativity, as the challenge lies in creating the human in the living moment. In doing so, meaning is created for the self and others. From this arises the importance of choice and action, for it is in the choice and action that meaning and value are identified and given presence. What commences as a search for a set of meanings that is consistent with experience may become in later life the creative development of meaning. So, for example, we find Ann Louise's disenchantment with the institutionalised Church giving way to the praxis of a different spiritual expression in The Shanty Project and the enactment of personally-held value systems in Pat's leadership of Goldstar Meats and Patricia's establishment of Meitheal.

Linked to the human challenge of engagement with the creation of the self, a number of the storytellers articulated a specific commitment to education as an important enabler of the freedom of thought and creativity of imagination deemed necessary for the full expression of an individual's potential. For all the storytellers, education was and remains an important route of personal development. For Ann Louise, Fergus, and Patricia specifically, the education of others was an important expression of how they wished to relate to others. Indeed, as characterised by them, education is essentially relational in character. In the sense that education is about enabling personal fulfilment in others, a care for and practice of the education of others, can be seen as an expression of love. We could argue than that education is therefore essentially relational in character. For Ann Louise 'education is about love' and hence about the 'essence of human existence which is love' (ALG, S2, notes). Hence, the purpose of education must be to realise the creative capacity of the person and this creative

What is common across the life-stories?

The Lived Experience	**Emerging Themes**
Early significance others	Nature of relationship with others Capacity for empathy
Early reflexive experience and sense of difference	Nature of relationship with self Nature of relationship with others Capacity for empathy
Experience of epiphany	Capacity for empathy Nature of relationship with self Nature of relationship with others
Search for a work that supports the expression of self	Expression of self in action and in community Search for meaning and place Experience of life as a self-creative process A struggle with values and belief
Rigorous and ongoing testing of values with experience	Interpretation of relationship between living and dying Search for meaning and place Experience of life as self-creative process Spiritual nature A struggle with values and belief
Willingness to undertake personal responsibility for making change happen	Search for meaning and place Experience of live as a self-creative process Nature of relationship with self Nature of relationship with others
Ability to give organisational expression to values enactment	Expression of self in action and in community Search for meaning and place
Regularly reaching and recognising a time to move on	Expression of self in action and in community Experience of live as a self-creative process Search for meaning and place Spiritual nature

Table 5.1 Linkages between the lived experience and emerging themes

capacity is understood as being closely linked to the faculty of the imagination. For all the storytellers, the enabling power of education is directed not just towards an education of the individual but towards the education of the individual as a member of a human community. This orientation is evidenced by Fergus's work in Macra na Feirme, Patricia's in Meitheal, and Ann Louise's in The Shanty Education Project. In the following quote, Fergus references this individual and communal role for education:

> '... then there are other influences like I was always very interested in Tomas Davis and I did my little, my mini-mini dissertation in my H.Dip. Ed. that you had to do, on Tomas Davis and that led me into O'Connell. Actually, indirectly, the interest in adult education because Davis was an advocate of 'educate so that you might be free', very interested in things that would encourage a public life in Ireland which he felt had been damaged and eroded very greatly.'
> FOF, S2, p 3

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined common elements in the experience of emotive meaning by these seven storytellers. In Section 1, the lived experience, the analysis identified aspects of their lives that were shaping of, or shaped by, the meaning they attributed to their experiences. These aspects are all related to direct experience, and so, whether of sort of long duration, there were of the moment. In Section 2, emerging themes, the analysis has sought a perspective abstracted from the temporal focus of Section 1, so as to identify and articulate aspects that were more of a consistent pattern during the course of the lives of these storytellers. In short, what I have sought to do in this analysis is to identify common and repeated patterns across the life experience and the attribution of meaning of these storytellers. The linkages between the experiences as identified in section 1 and the subjective interpretation of meaning relative to these experiences as identified in section 2 are not specific and exclusive but are interactive, reinforcing and integrated. Nevertheless, for the purposes of explicating the general direction and tenor of these linkages and to maintain a clarity in the overall analysis, table 5.1 indicates the relationships between life experience and interpretation.

Taken together, the analysis in Sections 1 and 2 might be summarised as identifying a concern with the expression and enactment of self through action in society consistent

with articulated and espoused values. This orientation on the part of these storytellers might be characterised as being existentialist in nature. For the purposes of this dissertation however, what is particular about this group of individuals is that they have been closely and continually involved in organised voluntary activity over the course of their lives, either as founders or leaders of organisation. It seems therefore, in the case of these storytellers, that the personal requirement for values enactment in society acts as an impulse towards involvement in value driven organisations. For it is in such social value oriented organisations that they find or can create the social space for self-enactment consistent with their articulated and espoused values.

Of course, the forcefulness of this impulse and drive to self-enactment via value consistent organisation, and its importance relative to voluntary organising, are grounded not in the moment but in maintaining continuity and coherence of this over a life course. In other words, having a range of experiences and interpretations is but one aspect of the voluntary actor. The generation of the self as actor throughout the life-course is greatly dependant on an individual's capacity to construct a cogent and consistent story of the self during and throughout the life course. Explicating how this is achieved, how the self as actor is constructed through the life-story, is the next step in this analysis. The process is one of constructing continuity and coherence. And it is to the analysis of this process I turn in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 The Construction of Meaning

Introduction

In this chapter the manner in which the storytellers' recounting of their life stories serves to reveal how they construct continuity and coherence in their lives is explored and discussed. Returning to the tapestry analogy introduced in Chapter 5, where the lived experience and the meaning attributed to that experience is represented by the weft of the underlying fabric, the construction of continuity and coherence can be seen as represented by the warp of the fabric. Hence, while the richness and variety of the tapestries of the individual life-stories are acknowledged, the discussion in this Chapter is focussed on the common underlying structures that can be found across the different stories. The identification and discussion of these structures are split into two parts. In Section 1 the construction of continuity via the narrative is explored. In Section 2 the construction of coherence, the manner in which the storytellers adapt and develop personalised belief systems that shape their enactment of their lives, is discussed. Combined, Sections 1 and 2 analyse the manner in which the self as cogent actor is constructed over the life-story. Finally, a brief conclusion to the discussion in this Chapter is presented.

Section 1 The Construction of Continuity

In the construction of their personal narratives, the storytellers may be seen to move the re-telling of their lives from an indiscriminate collection of experiences and events to a coherence of connection shaped by temporal causality and an individualised logic of choice. The purpose of this section is to explore this mode of sense-making through the construction of continuity. The discussion of the underlying structure of the narrative that now follows is in four sub-sections: (i) the impact of the interview context, (ii) the structure of the narration, (iii) aspects of the narrative, and (iv) narration as sense-making. Within each of the sub-sections, particular topics are signalled via the use of italicised headings.

1.1 The impact of the interview context

The narration of the life stories, presented in a synopsised form in Chapter 4 and in the Appendices, was influenced by the context in which they were told. This being so, the narration may be considered as having been shaped by the social context of the interview and its temporal place within the life of the storyteller. Three aspects of this context may be noted: (i) the social context of the interview, (ii) the moment in the life of the storyteller, and (iii) the dynamics of the interviewer-storyteller relationship. These aspects are explored below.

1.1.2 The social context of the interview

The interview process was understood by the storytellers as being part of the research undertaken towards a PhD in a university with a strong reputation for academic performance. This may have generated a sense of 'seriousness' about the interview process among the storytellers. Such a willingness to approach the interview with a seriousness of intent may have been bolstered by a personal orientation towards being helpful to others in general (which was evidenced in the content of the interviews outlined in Chapter 5 above) and, therefore, to the researcher in this specific context. All the interviewees were university graduates, three held doctoral degrees, while the other four held postgraduate degrees. They clearly took the process seriously, came to it in a committed fashion and sought to engage with the interview questions rather than to avoid or sidestep them. Perhaps because of their familiarity with the university context they were more comfortable with the idea of being a 'research subject' than otherwise might have been the case. Nevertheless, they were also conscious of the voice-recorder on the table, although this does not seem to have been a particularly inhibiting factor for the storytellers. For example, Sean while reflecting on the personal space afforded him by his librarian career intervened with: ' ... because librarian [work] is simple, if you publish this I'll be shot of course' (*laughter*) SL S1, p15.

Other factors that may have contributed to such an open and positive approach on the part of the storytellers were the discussions held during the storyteller recruitment process and the signalling of seriousness of intent that the audio recording of the interviews provided. This served to set boundaries on the range of potential discussion topics and thereby helped to keep the storytellers on track in the discussion. Catherine, for example, moved into a different, but nevertheless related, conversational topic once the 'formal' interview had been concluded and the voice-recorder switched-off.

Additionally, the three-stage interview format specified an expectation of a reflective and reflexive narration on the part of the storytellers. This requirement was clarified during the initial request to the storytellers to participate in the work and also again during the interview process.

1.1.2 The moment in the life of the storyteller

The sense-making in the narratives presented was perforce structured towards the particular moment in the storytellers' lives. In this, they accorded with the symbolic inter-actionist position (Charon 2001) that all sense-making is predicated on the present circumstance. The age of all the storytellers meant that each had extensive lived experience that required to be made sensible for the purposes of my enquiry. Thus, storytellers were required to deal with a substantial portion of a life lived rather than to propose possible directions for a life to come. In addition, such length of life-experience made the request for a reflective narrative sensible in that they had a body of experience to reflect opon. It may be that the prompt to reflection was sensible also because the storytellers were individually at life-stages that were receptive to the personal requirement for this.

1.1.3 The dynamics of the interviewer-storyteller relationship

The construction of sense and meaning by the storytellers, in the inter-subjective interview context, was influenced by the person of the researcher and by the nature of the relationship between the storyteller and researcher. Aspects such as their degree of trust in him, their understanding of his positions and perspectives, and their conceptualisation of what he was requesting or required of them, inevitably help to inform their narrative approach. As the interviewer I had considerable experience in the voluntary organisations, and I knew personally or had worked with the storytellers in varying degrees prior to requesting their involvement in the research. In simple terms, a narrative request from a different interviewer, for a different purpose, may have produced a narrative different in tone, colour, and emphasis.

1.2 The structure of the narration

The interview context was also shaped by a series of implicit understandings, which the storytellers appeared to bring to the event. The central understanding related to the act of story telling, of narration and the creation of a linear logic and the temporal pattern of cause and effect. The concept of a life-story and the legitimacy of requesting such

were never questioned by the storytellers. It was accepted as a reasonable approach to explaining the more general requirement to make their lives sensible. In one instance, a storyteller (Ann Louise) suggested that the request for a life-story could be approached thematically or biographically, but went on to offer a biographical story albeit told with a thematic orientation. However, while the legitimacy of the life-story concept provided a foundation, the interviews are also facilitated by other assumptions on the part of the storytellers. The basic structure and format of the life stories did not have to be negotiated. While one storyteller (Catherine) did struggle a little in seeking to maintain the boundaries between personal biography and career, the basic assumption that the story needed to be told over the full length and breadth of the life as opposed to the individual's voluntary or nonprofit career was never questioned. For the most part, however, it seemed that this was not the first telling of these stories, if only because the narrative flow was so smooth. This fluency suggested that these are stories, elements of which have been told many times over, to the self and to others, in an ongoing task of creating meaning. Further, there were assumptions that the questions I asked of them were reasonable and sensible questions to ask. This seemed to reflect an agreement about underlying conceptualisations of the individual, self-direction, key influences or influencers and a pattern of growth, change, and development. Finally, there was a core assumption, displayed by all storytellers, that moral reasoning presented a legitimate basis for choice; such that while choice was explained partially by reference to circumstance and opportunity, moral reasoning remained the final justifier. It was noticeable that a key aspect of this moral reasoning was a requirement to remain true to themselves, to their beliefs, and to maintain an integrity between belief and action, as we saw in chapter 5 above.

The request to partake in the research and the three-part interview structure outlined to storytellers reflected the structuring of the life-story form as detailed by Atkinson (2004). He presented a four-part structure consisting of (i) an open invitation to narrate, (ii) the development of a main narrative, (iii) a period of clarification and extension, and (iv) a period of reflection and conclusion. These structured elements are now discussed and illustrated with interview extracts.

1.2.1 Open invitation to narrate

Although the purpose of the interview in terms of generating a life story had been clearly identified to the storytellers before they came to the initial interview, at the

commencement of the first interview the invitation to narrate was non-instructive and open. In practice, storytellers tended to react to this open invitation to narrate by situating themselves in the present in the first instance. The following examples come from the beginning of the first interviews with Sean and Patricia. This first extract is from the opening interview with Sean:

> **SL:** 'No starter questions for one.
>
> **AOR:** No real starter questions for one.
>
> **SL:** Okay. Well, I suppose trying to view myself and why, well I'm working in a very specific area of NGO work, human rights, and it is about justice and I suppose when I trace myself, when I look back to even the earliest days in school, now I'm forty-five at this stage, so going back forty years, I can recall and it's a constant theme through my development, is that I have always reacted to bullies and would always seek to intervene in what hopefully was always a constructive way on the part of whoever was being bullied.'
> SL, S1, p.1

This second example is from the interview with Patricia:

> **AOR:** 'So really what I am looking for in this first session is your life story
>
> **PP:** Right
>
> **AOR:** Or whatever way you want to tell it, now we have already gone through this process before talking about what the research is about and so on. Now, people have gone into this at all sorts of different locations
>
> **PP:** Okay
>
> **AOR:** So I am very specifically not prompting
>
> **PP:** Okay alrighty. Because what comes to my mind is almost to work backwards from where I am now to go back and look at my life backwards rather than starting or something but I don't know.'
> PP, S1, p. 1

1.2.2 Development of main narrative

The structured nature of the interview was aimed at eliciting the main narrative in the course of the first interview. For some storytellers, such as Catherine for example, this main narrative constituted the whole of the first interview and the first interview was concluded when the narrative reached up to the day of the interview. In other cases, the first interview moved into a period of clarification and extension. In still others, for example, Eithne, the detail of the main narrative required three lengthy interviews.

Nevertheless, in developing the narrative of their lives the storytellers broadly structured it in terms of relating a linked series of events in a continuous narrative. While elements of explanation of choice came into the narration, it was more to maintain the logic within the sequencing of events rather than to offer in-depth interpretations of choice during the course of the narrative.

1.2.3 A period of clarification and extension

Within the interview process a period of clarification and extension served two purposes. On the one hand I wanted it in order to ensure I had the basic narrative information I required, on the other hand, it provided the storyteller with an opportunity to consider their overall presentation of the narrative and to comment on it as they deemed appropriate. To illustrate this, the following exchange comes from the closing moments of the first interview with Fergus.

> **AOR:** 'Right I am very conscious of the time
>
> **FOF:** Yeah, are you happy enough?
>
> **AOR:** No, no, there is a section at the end in your involvement in the Wheel and all that
>
> **FOF:** Yes and giving expression to it, and you are very happy to pick that up the next day
>
> **AOR:** Yes, yes, I will give you a transcript of this as soon as I can and it can probably make you think where you want to emphasise
>
> **FOF:** Yes, right enough we haven't mentioned the Wheel which came from '99/2000 onwards with Mary'.
> FOF, S1 p.16

1.2.4 A period of reflection and conclusion

The detailing of the initial narrative, followed by a period of clarification and extension, served to open the discussion into a period of reflection and conclusion. In the case of Sean, this reflection and conclusion occupied the whole of the third interview. In other cases, the discussion was a little more circular. For example, Fergus moved to this phase at the end of interview 1, returning to a period of clarification and extension for the first half of interview 2, picking up on the reflection and conclusion thereafter. The following extract comes from the end of the first interview with Fergus by which time he had provided a basic narration followed by a substantial amount of clarification and extension:

FOF: 'Well I don't know whether it all amounts to a consistent whole or not, but I think it does. In Methodism there has always been a politically-conscious aware, 'left-wing' even, sensibility if you like or theology, and they talk of martyrs and all that and Labour party in Britain, part of that in the early days, Methodism. I think that's why trade-union branches are chapels - they were based on the same democratic thing of ordinary people taking control, and I believe that is very much part of civic republicanism, what now I know to be civic republicanism. But if you look back on what we were trying to do in the youth council and the youth policy, there is a strong theme of active participation in society, all the way through, even in my studies on O'Connell, was about how people get involved. That was really, if there is a common core in all of it, is about people, individual people and people flourish best by being actively able to contribute to a common good and people are more and more impoverished if they are excluded from that, and become dependent on others for services and are not able to be an agent in their own right. So, it's the human personal flourishing by being empowered to do things for other people, much more than it is being dependent on others for. So part of the human flourishing is that it's a social involvement and connectedness and that goes right back, as you know, to Greek thinking.'
FOF, S1, p.15

1.3 Aspects of the narration.

In pursuing this narrative form, storytellers displayed a number of aspects in common. These are discussed below as (i) the movement between work-life and personal life, (ii) the manner in which the narration was directed at the self, and (iii) the manner in which values are presented as the arbiter of action.

1.3.1 Movement between work and personal life

In general, there was little resistance among the storytellers to moving between a discussion of their work and their personal life. This may imply an expectation that personally-held values should be reflected in one's work life. Indeed, their explanations of their work-life choices were typically made sensible by reference to their personal values. As such, the distinction between work life and the personal was diminished and work life and personal life tended to be integrated in the narrative. Taken more broadly it suggests an assumption among the storytellers that a consistency should naturally exist between value and action in one's life. Viewed in this light, the dynamic is less of an ease of movement between various 'lives' or compartments of lives, and more the practical result of understanding a life as a cohesive drama, underscored by an integrating set of values. The one exception to this integration, at least within the context of this discussion, was displayed by Catherine. However, this separation of

work-life and personal life was contradicted elsewhere in her interview insofar as she spoke of the vocational nature of her work-life. Viewed in the fuller context of her narrative, the urge to separation suggests a personal reticence rather than a deep separation of work and personal life. The following exchange comes from the third interview with Catherine:

> **AOR:** 'I suppose what I'd like to do now for maybe the remainder of this session is to move to the final piece. In very rough terms I saw the first session as me finding out what your life story was.
>
> **CH:** Yeah
>
> **AOR:** And the second session as saying, 'look what are the values here that are driving some of this?' And the third session is, if you like, another further level of abstraction. So how do you see the human condition more generally, or how do see life or how do you understand life or? You used the word 'journey' a number of times and we have, even by picking up the idea of a life story, it kind of has that idea running intrinsically through it. And I was just wondering had you any kind of thoughts running around that?
>
> **CH:** I do; but I wasn't quite sure whether you meant journey in terms of my career or journey generally; that's one thing I was a bit confused about.
>
> **AOR:** Well, let me put it another way. You started early in this present conversation telling me that even if you weren't paid for it you would do it anyway?
>
> **CH:** That's right , yeah
>
> **AOR:** You have accepted a line in here of work life as vocational rather than career?
>
> **CH:** Yeah, absolutely
>
> **AOR:** So, I'm not sure where the distinction is there. And I suppose at root I suspect that for the kind of people I'm talking to there isn't necessarily much of a distinction; that in their work-life they are expressing something that has a deeper meaning than work for them – a set of skills that are being applied to a particular activity for a set number of hours – it is a set of life choices as much as a set of work-life choices. So I'm not presuming necessarily a distinction. Now I can see that one would, you know, you might like to have a distinction between your work life and your personal life, and a lot of people like to keep the two very separate. But then there is also this aspect that you are making a set of work life choices that are about who you are and what you believe. So to put it another way, your work life is not a sale of a labour into the market. It's choosing what you want to do and being in a fortunate position of being able to be paid for it, which is pretty much what you have already said to me. So if I have blurred the boundaries, it's on purpose, it's because I don't necessarily see them as distinct.

CH: Okay, so it's around work and voluntary work-life then, is it?
CH, S3, pps 6-7

1.3.2 Narrator addressing self

Within the interview context the capacity to articulate a consistency between espoused values and the enactment of those values to another's satisfaction (in this instance, the interviewer's) may have carried a particular importance to the storytellers. In other words, one's capacity to make sense to others can present a kind of reality check on the legitimacy of the sense making to one's self. This is quite different from suggesting that the storytellers sought affirmation from the interviewer to any discernible degree. Certainly, as the interviewer, I did not form the impression that this was the case. Undoubtedly Goffman's (1959) notion of 'face' and 'stage' is relevant to the interaction between the storyteller and the researcher but it was not evident that it was a pressing concern on the part of the storytellers during the interviews. Of course, if it were a central concern, then the life–stories would be open to the criticism that they offered a reflection of the relationship between the storyteller and the interviewer rather than a reflection on the part of the storyteller of their life lived. But if the storytellers are held by a need to remain consistent to themselves, then their stories are more shaped by this requirement rather than their likely expectations of the interviewer's reactions.

Certainly, in the more reflective passages of the narration, there were times when I had the feeling that I, as a researcher, was not being addressed so much as I was acting as a surrogate self for the storyteller. The narrator was not so much involved in making sense to me as in making sense to him or herself. The narrative flow then became a process of self-examination and self-construction in the social context of the interview. It was as if the prime audience for a life story was the self in the first instance. As such, therefore, the stories were presented, by the storytellers, as works in progress. This applied on two fronts: firstly, the assessment of the past was not fixed, and, secondly, the future remained open to possibility, so that the storytellers' interpretation of the past was integral to their making sense of a future intention. Hence the past was being told with an eye to both the present and the future.

Insofar as all life stories are told from the present they serve, at one and the same time, to make sense of the past and of possible or imagined futures. In the excerpt below,

Patricia reassessed an explanation presented earlier within the course of the interview. In this reassessment Patricia reveals the degree to which her narration is essentially directed towards herself. She is ultimately concerned with the sensibility and integrity of her narrative to herself and she is concerned with clarification for herself. I, as interviewer, merely acted as a foil in this self-examination.

> **PP:** 'Yeah, and I suppose in a kind of a way, you were asking earlier, was it the housewife thing that I was rebelling against when I was saying I wouldn't get married? When I think about it there probably was, I didn't want. You see, what I was fighting, what I saw I was fighting with him and her both about was, I couldn't see myself in it. But, yes, then, I was fighting against the institution that they had set up. So that was then railing against housewifery as I saw it and it was being very criticised I suppose at the time in some of the media. So, in fact, I change what I said earlier that no it wasn't but it was more that I could not see myself in that kind of set-up.'
> PP S1 P 11

For these storytellers the life-story interview served as an opportunity for self-reflection and for a personal interrogation of their own interpretation of themselves. As life-story interviewer I proffered a mirror and in that space between the self and the reflected self, the storytellers' negotiated and constituted their own meaning of themselves.

1.3.3 Values before acting

The temporal structuring of the narration utilising an historical and biographical approach was also mirrored by a narration of the development and articulation of values, typically first as an idea and then in action. In other words, for the storytellers, all action is presented as premeditated and sensible; as seen for example in Ann Louise's development of The Shanty and Fergus's move to the Bible Society. In the sense-making of narration, the idea is presented as the mid-wife of the action. Of course the alternative, some type of *post hoc* rationalisation, does not make for good narration, perhaps because it appears to diminish the agency of the actor and to suggest a structural or psychological determinism. While there were examples of storytellers reassessing their motivations for particular actions, at particular times, arguably, this is not post hoc rationalisation. Rather, it suggests that action is driven by the search for consistency with beliefs, meanings, interpretations, even if these have yet to be explicitly articulated to the self and so the action becomes increasingly sensible in retrospect. Nonetheless, the normative demand to present oneself as a sentient, self-directed being remains, but in the case of these storytellers, as an imperative to the self

rather than to the construction of a public face. By placing the articulation of values before the recounting of action in these narratives, the storytellers clearly place their values at the centre of the logic of their actions. Further, insofar as their actions are a function of their values and hence their actions are sensible only through their values, then the logic or meaning of their lives is seen to lie in the values they espouse.

1.4 Narration as sense making

Within the narrative mode utilised by the storytellers in the telling of their life-stories, a degree of sense-making emerged. In a very immediate manner, the act of narration served at times to enable a storyteller to see a linking logic of which they had been previously unaware or had been unconsidered. Within the broader context of the overall narrative sense-making may be seen to be directed at a number of levels. Atkinson (1998) identifies the four levels of sense-making in storytelling, viz; (i) making sense of one's life experience; (ii) making sense of social relationships; (iii) making sense of our existence and mortality; (iv) making sense of our place in the universe. Life-stories are somewhat different, however, in that, unlike fiction and myth, they are bound to a greater degree by actual historical events and hence their capacity to stretch across the range of levels identified by Atkinson is constrained. Nonetheless, in the interpreted experience as narrated in these life-stories, these four aspects of sense-making may be identified. The manner in which this four levels were addressed in the narratives, together with sense-making in the moment, are described below under the headings of (i) sense-making in the moment, (ii) making sense of one's life experience, (iii) making sense of social relationships, (iv) making sense of our existence and mortality, and (v) making sense of our place in the universe.

1.4.1 Sense-making in the moment

The sense-making of storytellers within the moment and context of the interviews can be seen in the following extracts. In the first one, Fergus is seen to react to his to reading of the manuscript of his first interview.

> **FOF:** 'Eh, yeah, I suppose reading over the transcript it's interesting! One of the things that comes out now and, in hindsight obviously, is that I have always had an interest in active participation by people in things in society and so on and whether that is a research interest in history or whether it was a practical interest in the Youth Council or wherever.
> *FOF, S2, p.1*

In the next extract below, we can see Patricia forging a link between her sense of social injustice and the dissonance she observes between socially-constructed inequality and the inherent beauty of the natural world around her.

> **PP:** 'And as I say that, I remember that 20 years ago, more than 20 years ago, when I lived down in Caherdaniel, there was a beautiful walk from the office where I worked and I lived just next door to where I worked. And it was a beautiful walk across a road, an old mass pass to Derrynane beach. And eh, what's his name Daniel O'Connell's house is there and he had a chapel of course so that people could go to mass there. So this pass across lovely terrain with the sea there and beautiful - they are not cliffs but rock, seashore rock, whatever you call it, a beautiful walk. And I took to doing this walk before work and my boss said to me one day 'oh I see you walking over, and dah, dah, dah, dah'. And I said 'oh yeah it's lovely' and I said, 'I love this time of the year', we'll say it was autumn. I don't know what time of the year it was, anyway. And he said 'oh do you, would that be your favourite time' and I said 'yes', and then I said, 'oh I really like the winter as well, but oh no hold on now I really love the summer.' And I had them all. I really like them all and he said 'god that's a really nice way to be that you like them all'. And it's true I do like everywhere in the end. So, I think going back to that, is that fundamentally and I suppose this is something someone else said to me, fundamentally I think I had a very happy childhood and a very secure childhood and the inequalities I saw were a bit shocking to me and so that can't be right because the world is actually lovely. So these can't be right, it can't be right you know. Now I am only after putting those two things together now, so there you go, this is what you get for having me have a long conversation with myself.'
> PP, S1, p 37

1.4.2 Making sense of one's life experience

Atkinson has said that 'stories, with their deeply human elements and motifs can guide us psychologically, stage by stage, through the entire life course' (1998: 9). Among the storytellers this type of sense-making was most clearly displayed in Eithne's detailed, and at times harrowing, account of her life, which she told with an immediacy and presence. In her recounting it appeared both seamless and integrated, revolving around the fulcrum of Noel's diagnosis, decline and death. In the following quote Eithne recounts the reaction of her children (aged 5 and 3) to the death of their father.

> **EF:** 'His was quite a classic case. Now I know that, you know. Starting off with limb problems, followed by, quickly by speech, followed by swallowing problems and some breathing problems, quite classic. But unusual that he was only 31 and he was 33 when he died, that wasn't,
>
> **AOR:** It would normally be later?
>
> **EF:** It would normally be about 20 years later, maybe more, lots of people are in their late 60s and 70s but certainly the classic case wouldn't

be beginning usually until the early 50s, you would expect him to have been at least 20 years older than he was. So. So then it was just mayhem, or as Dermot said we had a great party when Daddy died. Because of all,

AOR: The Irish fashion

EF: In that typical three year old way!

AOR: Yes, yes, because that's what it would look like.

EF: Because of all the people coming to the house, it was a great party, all the people who came, it was brilliant, it was great, people were great, yeah, they were great with the kids and. And I had a lot of dilemmas about what to do in those early days with the kids, would I bring them to the funeral and what have you. And the advice at that age was not to, that they were that bit too young.

AOR: Just wouldn't be able to comprehend?

EF: No, and that it could be difficult, in fact a friend of mine who I had been at school with and who I had met up with again, probably around the year Cliona was born. I bumped into her purely by chance, when I was actually living in Douglas and she had been very supportive in lots of little ways, often when I would have a free class I would call over to her for a cup of coffee. Things like that. She lived very close to the school, nearer to the school actually than we did. And she took the kids on the day of the funeral, she came over and stayed in the house the evening of the removal, and it was beginning at that time, to say it was dangerous to leave the house empty, if there was a funeral announced in the paper, that was beginning at that time.

AOR: Really?

EF: Yeah, that was beginning. So, Ruth came and stayed in the house and then on the morning of the funeral Frances and Mary were in the house and were getting a bit of grub for everyone when they'd come back and I brought the children down to Ruth's house and she kept them all day. She didn't drop them back until after five. And then my friend Anne Devlin - who had a social science degree - and had some idea about psychology more than I had, anyway, said to me that I needed to tell them quite quickly what had happened.

AOR: Yes, yes

EF: So I told them that evening.

AOR: What had happened in terms of a funeral?

EF: No that he had died. Cliona had decided it, and had announced to me and to people who were in the house the night he died that Daddy had gone to hospital.

AOR: Okay

EF: She had decided that herself and I think that was her way of protecting herself and letting herself down. I think she knew bloody well you know but, I let that pretence go on until Tuesday afternoon was over and then on the Tuesday afternoon at about five or six o'clock, about half five in the kitchen, I told the two of them. And Cliona just looked at me and said 'it's not true, it's not true, you are telling lies, you are telling lies, my Daddy is not gone to heaven, my Daddy is not dead, he's not, he's not, you're a liar, you're a liar'. And screamed her head off and ran into the dining room and sat with her face to the corner, to the corner, and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed. Dermot just looked at me and said what does that mean and I said 'Daddy is gone to heaven', and 'when is he coming back', and I said, 'he won't be coming back Dermot', and he said 'that's alright'. And then he looked at my mother and said 'Grandma what are we having for tea?' And my mother said 'would you like a banana sandwich Dermot?' and he said 'yes', and he got his banana sandwich for his tea. But that's a three year old.
EF,S3, pps 39-40

1.4.3 Making sense of social relationships

'Stories can affirm, validate and support our own experiences socially and clarify our relationships to those around us' (Atkinson 1998:10). This function of stories can be seen, for example, in Catherine's discussion of the public perception of her organisation role and the professional standing of the 'charity manager'.

AOR: 'So you mentioned a few times that your parents might have found some of your career choices not the most obvious ones to make given your capacity; and I was asking you about your brothers and sisters to get a sense of, you know, where you were in that kind of comparison that inevitably goes on in families. Do you see yourself as having taken a different career trajectory to them or similar in many ways or what's your, what's your sense of...

CH: It's funny, I wouldn't really have compared them in many ways, I think I've just taken my own journey as I see it, and a ... I just see family members that are doing well, if they are doing well that's nice. And people find their niche, I suppose, so. I think my parents might have been worried that I wasn't using my.... relations might have wondered, you know, because basically I'm a charities, the bottom line if you want to look at it from a certain perspective, I'm a charities manager and that's it and you know they just wouldn't have seen that as a job, you know.

AOR: Or not as a career

CH: A career yeah, you know. So, 'what is she doing'.'
CH, S1, pps 14-15

In a more pointed manner Ann Louise's recounting of her struggle with the institutional Church in relation to her academic post at St. Patrick's College (see Appendix one) also served to illustrate and make sensible her position relative to the Church. As part of the storying of their lives the narrators validated the social relationships they had constructed throughout their lives.

1.4.4 Making sense of our existence and mortality

Atkinson has noted also that stories can serve a mystical-religious function, by bringing us 'face-to-face with an ultimate mystery' (1998, p.10). Such a function is evidenced in PP's reflection on death and the value of a life lived following the experience of the loss of her father.[34]

> '**AOR:** And so, where if any space is there a spirituality in any of that?... It's funny 'cos you said twice that I'd die happy if blah blah blah and you said how long do I want to live and they both prompted in my head...
>
> **PP:** When will I let myself die?
>
> **AOR:** Yeah, what do you believe in those kind of terms?
>
> **PP:** I believe and it got very strengthened after my dad died and of course this is the emotional, every time, bloody hell, I believe, how would I put it, I don't believe in heaven and I don't believe in immortality in that sense of like going off to another place or whatever. But I believe that you make a difference in the world and that's your immortality, that's what I believe is immortality because you have affected people, you have been decent, you have not been cruel, you have been honest, you have been fair in as much as you can, you have not done anybody down, you know. And that then that all, all together ends up being good, then you have lived a good life you have been fair to yourself and you have been fair to other people and then you are known for that because, because that's a bit different.
> PP, S1, pps 33-34

1.4.5 Making sense of our place in the universe.

Stories may also help us to make sense of our place in universe. Atkinson notes that 'stories can render a cosmology, an interpretative total image of the universe that is in accord with the knowledge of the time...' (Atkinson 1998, p. 10). In the following two excerpts we find first Ann Louise and then Sean placing their lives as humans within the context of an integrating life force, to which human action should accord. For example, Ann Louise states:

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[34] See also Chapter 5, Section 3.6, The interpretation of the relationship between living and dying.

AL: 'I am, as a human being, spiritual in my essence, that there is a life force in and through me that is connected to the beyond in my midst. Trying to nurture this is a central part of who I am and necessary for balance. I am a much better human being when I give time to this for stillness, reflection, quiet, needed…'
ALG, S2, notes

Sean, although now avowedly irreligious, had something similar to say about a link to a dimension that connects all life:

'**SL:** Well if you were asking why is it the right thing to do, why is it right, well I believe in morality, I think I said to you previously I don't particularly have any religious conviction, I don't have a sense of particularly of whether there is a god or what, but if there is a something, there's a, some form of moral balance in the universe and we can't ignore it.

AOR: And is this?

SL: And the sense or right and wrong is there, we all know it's there, when I think, it's there for as far back as you can go in your own personal life. (SL, S3, p. 4)

And then later,

AOR: And how might you read what you are saying in terms of a moral authority or a moral force? Is it something external to humanity or is it something you conceive of as being just to do with all life in some way or is it something that humans have originated themselves? Do you have any take on that?

SL: Well I have takes but I think it is representative of all life. I have no particular concept of how it's manifest, what the root is, but I do, I think it's a form of life. It's a life force, eh, and with regards to how people, I mean the only thing about humans is that they are just far and away the most advanced form of life, extraordinarily developed and all the rest. And I suppose, you know, we have a consciousness that, it would seem, most other life forces don't have and the responsibility that comes with it. But eh, it is interesting to see in all other forms of nature if you leave us out of it, it's very rare to find any other element of nature that does something for badness, you might put it. I mean you will find the occasional examples but it's usually because we're here. So a fox getting into a hen run will lose the run of himself and kill them all. But the hen run only exists because we put them there. So, you know, so, generally, I am well aware nature is brutal, nature is cruel but it's, you couldn't differentiate it into right and wrong, nature is just nature. So, for example, if I talk about, I am a vegetarian, I have made that choice I completely understand and accept people who eat meat, that's their decision and if they are able to do it – good, because that's what animals do…
SL, S3, pps 6-7

How is the self as actor constructed through the life-story?

The Interview Context	The Narrative Process	Aspects of the Narration	Levels of Sensemaking
The interview as social moment The social context of the interview The moment in the life of the respondent The interviewer/respondent relationship	Open invitation to narrate Development of a main narrative Clarification and extension Reflection and conclusion	Movement between work-life and personal-life Narrator addressing the self Identification of values before action	Sense-making in the moment Sense-making of life's experiences Sense-making of our existence and mortality Sense-making of our place in the universe

Table 6.1 The analysis of the narrative process

1.5 Conclusion to Section 1

The act of narration may be seen as a mode of human sense-making that both explicitly and, more powerfully, implicitly, offers a path to sense-making of the human experience. In the narration of the individual life-story this sense-making may move back and forth between the individual experience of the moment, of the life as a continuum, of the social relationships encountered, and the generic existential experience of existence and the human place in the universe. In this breadth of explanation, emerging from the request to the storytellers to narrate their lives, can be seen a human imperative to make sense of one's being by making sense of one's being in the world. For these storytellers therefore, this metaphysical imperative is given physical form and resolution by self-enactment (one's being) in social action (one's being in the world). Narration as a mode of sense-making across a life course is centrally concerned with the interpretation of the lived relationship between the self and the world. The self is only sensible relative to these relationships. For these storytellers, these relationships are central to how they act in the world. Table 6.1 serves to outline the stages and elements of the foregoing analysis of the narrative process.

Section 2 The Construction of Coherence

In this section, the construction of coherence is discussed, that is, the manner in which the storytellers adapt and develop personalised belief and meaning systems that shape their enactment of their lives. Thus a direct relationship between personal belief, interpreted meaning, and personal enactment in a social context, is forged and sustained. The section is in three parts. In the first part the nature of a personalised belief and meaning system is explored. Secondly, the specifics of the storytellers' individual belief and meaning systems are identified. Finally, the extent to which these individual belief and meaning systems contain shared underlying elements and ideas is examined.

2.1 Personalised belief and meaning systems

In her discussion of sense-making in a social context, Linde (1993) introduces the idea of the use of coherence systems such that people are seen to use socially-extant cognitive systems to structure their meaning. Cognitive systems are constituted by

specific value systems and related literatures. Linde offers the example of an interview storyteller referring to early childhood experiences to explain actions and behaviour in adulthood. Linde argues that the storyteller is using, albeit implicitly, a coherence system based on Freudian psychology. She points out that, within the context of that particular interview, this Freudian coherence system is used for interpreting human behaviour and is understood by both the interviewee and the interviewer as a shared or common reference system. Thus, she says, coherence systems are external to the speaker and to the listener, are widely referenced, and are therefore part of the stock of knowledge that is utilised in social communication. Coherence systems are many and varied, however, and one such system therefore, may not be the central or sole coherence system used by a speaker.

In contrast to this idea of a coherence system, I conceive of a 'personalised belief and meaning system' that may be distinguished from such a coherence system in that it is held internally by an individual rather than existing externally. It articulates an individual's understanding of the world and of his or her relationship to it. Such personalised belief and meaning systems may be derived or constituted from coherence systems or elements thereof, but it is the quality of internalisation that provides them with a power and imperative for the individual. As such, these personalised belief and meaning systems are not concerned with communication with others and the referencing of common stocks of knowledge but instead are about internalised beliefs and perspectives on the world and one's place in it. These personalised belief and meaning systems therefore are used to guide and inform the actions and life choices of the individual.

Although personalised belief and meaning systems may be constituted by existing coherence systems and indeed are inevitably based on and shaped by them, the storytellers in the research for this thesis displayed an evident capacity to adapt, reconfigure or construct their own personal belief and meaning systems rather than accept a socially-given and external coherence system. In practice, personalised belief and meaning systems vary, are mixed, fissured, and, at times, inconsistent. Examples of different orientations in these personalised belief and meaning systems that can be seen in the life-stories are varied and include the intuition of Sean, the reasoned faith of Fergus, and the intellectualised position of Ann Louise. As presented by the storytellers in their life-stories, personalised belief and meaning systems may be

viewed as individually constructed belief and meaning systems rather than a set of individual choices of preset meaning systems offered by their social environment. They are contextualised in the experiences and the lives of each and are sensible against that background. Typically, they trace an ongoing development process that is an aspect or function of their life experience and of their reflection upon that experience. Each belief and meaning system represents an articulation of the individual trying to make sense of that individual's life experience. Therefore there is a clear linkage between a particular belief and meaning system and the individual's life experience.

Such individual sense-making is not a disembodied mental exercise but rather is forged in an engagement with life as experienced, as witnessed, as reflected upon, and as mediated through a socially-expressed set of coherence systems. Furthermore, individuals adopt, adapt and integrate coherence systems to formulate personalised belief systems consistent with the sense they are making of their life story, of their past, present, and of possible or desired futures. We can see instances of adoption, adaptation, and integration across all seven life-stories in this research. Adoption of a coherence system is evident in Ann Louise's and Patricia's embracing of a feminist critique. Furthermore, adoption of a coherence system is not exclusive to one system as can be seen from Patricia's combining of feminist and equality perspectives. Adaptation, meanwhile, can be seen in Sean's explanation of his vegetarian stance, which combines (i) a moral precept towards humans ('do unto others as you'd have them do unto you', SL, S1 p 8) together with (ii) the idea of individual responsibility (he could not bring himself to kill and prepare an animal for food) and (iii) an expressed love of animals. Finally, the integration of coherence systems can be perceived in Fergus's religious and political positioning. In the following extract Fergus articulated such an integration:

> **AOR:** 'And as that faith developed and deepened, what impact is it having on how, I suppose on your developing political philosophy? I suppose I have some sense that these two go hand in hand, that you express them in two different theatres
>
> **FOF:** Yeah, yeah,
>
> **AOR:** One is almost a spiritual manifestation as distinct from a political manifestation?
>
> **FOF:** I certainly haven't moved to the stage of articulating how they differ.

AOR: No, but I mean

FOF: They do relate obviously very closely, I suppose it's about, I mean there is a phrase I can't remember now, something that the early church fathers said about the glory of god is a flourishing human being or something like that.

AOR: Yes

FOF: You probably know it

AOR: No I don't

FOF: Do you know, there is something along the lines

AOR: In Catholic discussion, yes

FOF: But there is that sense within, I have come to life so that I can have it to the full, there is that tradition in the Jesus story if you like in the Christian faith.

AOR: Yes, yes

FOF: That it is about joy and love and connection and responsibility for others and so on. And to some extent the motivation, as I understand it, is certain strands of civic republicanism is the same motivation, is about the wholeness of human development. Because if you erode that public connection and core responsibility for each other, you privatise and individualise people and you diminish their growth and their moral being almost, if you like. So there is a very close link in the two philosophies as I would understand it and they are both centred around how do people flourish best – it's the old Greek question really – what is the best context for people to be born?
FOF, S2, p.5

Insofar as socially-presented coherence systems constitute the basic building blocks of personalised belief and meaning systems, how does one coherence system relate to another in the sense-making process? As the life-stories have been related in interview it seems that coherence systems are sensible when they are seen to accord with or to be consistent with an individual's experience, that is, when they enable an individual to make sense or order of the world as he or she is experiencing it. This means that the impact of their life experiences on individuals results in their constant negotiation and appraisal of their personal belief and meaning system; as we saw in section 1.5[35] in chapter 5 above and which forms an explicit of these storytellers' life-stories. It is

[35] Ch. 5, Section 1.5 The testing of values with experience

evident that life experiences serve to move storytellers to reassign positions they may have held previously. For example, for Ann Louise, radical humanism made sensible her experience of a chauvinistic, patriarchal church and society. Similarly, in the face of experience, Patricia has become more accepting of the *bona fides* of people in religious life and has gained some understanding of people's desire to accumulate a financial protection against personal poverty in old age (See Appendices 1 and 7).

In journeying to these new perspectives, storytellers have utilised their original education and its related coherence systems. They have not abandoned a previous position but rather have used the concepts of that position to find, create and develop a new set of meanings and a new way of being in the world. Thus, because their belief and meaning systems are rooted in their original understandings, they can be viewed as integral to their past rather than a break with it. This temporal and experientially-informed development of their personalised belief and meaning systems on the part of the storytellers is made possible by an openness to change and a willingness to question. As such, the continuity in change characteristic of the development trajectories of their personalised belief and meaning systems may be seen to reflect the concern with personal integrity which was discussed in Chapter 5.

2.2 The individual positions

The personal belief and meaning systems held by the storytellers in this research have previously been detailed in Chapter 4, Section 2 and in the Appendices. These personal belief and meaning systems are by their nature individualised and experiential. Further, they are under constant review relative to the storytellers' ongoing experience in society. For the immediate purposes here, however, it is sufficient to be reminded of the variety of coherence systems upon which the storytellers have drawn in order to form and articulate their personal belief and meaning system. Utilising very rough labels, these coherence systems are:

Ann Louise	Radical feminism, post-structural perspectives on individual and community empowerment
Pat	Catholic liberation theology, radical Christianity
Fergus	Civic republicanism, Christianity
Patricia	Feminist analysis of power relationships and their impact on equality

Catherine	Social justice, practical engagement
Sean	Human rights and the idea of truth
Eithne	Practical engagement from social justice background

The extent to which such labelling simplifies and obscures nuances is acknowledged. Its purpose here is solely to identify coherence systems identified or alluded to by the storytellers rather than to represent the complexity of their personal belief and meaning systems. For example, in the following extract Patricia explores the framing of her feminist perspective.

> 'For me feminism is like a serious cut of analysis. That's how I look at things. And I, and my form of feminism actually would sort of say, 'yes, where is disabled?, where is age?,' It actually includes everything else as well as gender. It's not just about women in all of those. It's what kind of society have we got? And I think I am a very old-fashioned kind of feminist, because a lot of feminists subsequently have just. Maybe not subsequently, I shouldn't say that. It doesn't matter. Mine looks at the whole of society, would be better if you took a feminist analysis, which actually isn't about equality between women and men, it's about power relations in society. And then that covers everybody. So that's where I come from and that's why the two work together.
>
> **AOR:** Yes,
>
> **PP:** But for me, socialism didn't do that because then they didn't look properly at women. Or republicanism wouldn't do that for me because it wouldn't look at anything else bar the nation state or whatever - well that's a bit simplistic, but anyway. So, I only use, I use feminism as my way of understanding power relations in society and out of that then can look at any of the disadvantaged groups. You can name me anybody and I can see how, I see a structural analysis of the creation and perpetuation of the inequality. Now capitalism has a big part to play in that, that's just the system of the world but we could have another system if we wanted.
> PP, S1, p29

2.3 Underlying themes and ideas

Although the belief and meaning systems articulated by the storytellers present distinct analyses and perspectives, it may be argued that these belief systems have much more in common than in difference. Differences in position, such as an acceptance of social structure versus a demand for social reform and social revolution, or the divide between religious surety, agnosticism and atheism, may be more apparent than real, in that they draw attention away from common meaning system building blocks. This seems to the

case particularly when we look to the implications of the belief and meaning system for individual action. For when individual action is considered, the shared premises underlying these belief and meaning systems are identifiable more easily. All the storytellers are centrally concerned with the proper ends of human existence and in particular with the role of the individual and individual action in giving effect to these ends. We can see then how this central concern provides the context within which a series of cross-cutting positions are framed. In this section these common premises are identified and the extent to which these belief and meaning systems contain shared underlying elements and ideas is examined. Specifically, the following shared elements are proposed, (i) radical perspectives on social structure, (ii) the idea of moral difference as a criterion for individual choice, (iii) the notion of selfhood and of individual responsibility to self and others for one's actions, (iv) the positioning of love as the central human capacity and as the prime mode of engagement with others, (v) the notion of life as a developmental process, and (vi) the concern with an expression of individualism characterised by communion with others. These shared elements in the personal belief and meaning systems of the storytellers are explored below.

2.3.1 Radical perspectives on social structure

It is noticeable that the interpretations and perspectives of these storytellers present radical challenges to the social structures in which they find themselves. Although this radicalism was expressed in varying degrees by the individual storytellers, all articulated or evidenced a critique of social structure and norms. While the articulation of this critique varied in its intensity and depth of analysis, the critique was commonly directed at the impact of social structure and norms on the life of the individual. Specifically, the critique was aimed at the manner in which social structure and norms can serve to constrain the individual's capacity to realise him /herself. In the following quote Sean starts by noting the utility of structures but goes on to assert the need for the individual to be given far greater importance and for the imbalance between structures and the individual to be addressed.

> **SL:** '... my bottom line on that is structures are there to serve us. We are not there to serve structures. So, of course you need structures, you know, if schools are to happen, if health care is to happen. Of course you need a system. You need structures, so long as the balance is always that the system or the structure is there to serve us. Not vice versa. One of the great problems an awful lot of the social difficulties we have is that we are serving
>
> **AOR:** The system?

SL: The system

AOR: So you would put the individual, you would position the individual in primacy?

SL: Yes, yeah, that's one of the problems. We all know them. When you hear examples of quite extraordinarily stupid things done through a bureaucratic system where nobody has taken individual responsibility for what is happening, even though every one of them must know that it is stupid. And I find that extraordinary.
SL, S3, p9

This concern, on the part of the storytellers, with the effect of structure on individual development sets one criterion for action and grounds it in practicality. In this extract Catherine acknowledges the limitations of her own capacity to deliver change:

CH: 'Yeah, I suppose I'm in the voluntary sector and I'm stuck with some things I don't like you know. And I think some things I have to live with, that I can't change them, there is not much I can do about them.

AOR: Okay, so what you can't change, you won't rail against?

CH: Em, I think the question of limited energy

AOR: And being practical?

CH: Em, maybe utilising whatever energy and skills that I have in a way that will have an impact'
CH, S1, p.23

3.3.2 The idea of moral difference as a criterion for individual choice

The storytellers' belief in the need to critique social structures and norms can be seen to be premised on the view that there are real consequences of structure and of norms for individuals and that these consequences have a moral dimension. Thus, the idea of the possibility of good and bad outcomes, and by reference to outcome, the idea of right or wrong action, are core foundations of the storytellers' belief systems. In the first of the following four quotes, Patricia uses the notion of 'fairness' to judge the moral quality of context and action.

PP: 'I mean that could be the end of my life story, is it fair? Are things fair? And out of that then I would make decisions. Because I did. The whole Women's Studies thing. So I went off and I did psychology in college.

AOR: Where do you get your idea of fair from?

PP: Now I don't know. Sometimes, I remember talking to somebody else about this one time, and I would think my parents were very fair people. They would have had an inherent notion. But what is inherent? Where did they get it? Like, they got it from somewhere too, but we got it almost like the air. And I can see my four siblings, we are very fair minded, there is an involvement in community and there is an involvement in politics and there's an involvement with interacting with society – well most of us.'
PP, S1, p.2

In this second example, Sean asserts the presence of a moral order;

SL: 'Well if you were asking why is it the right thing to do, why is it right, well I believe in morality. I think I said to you, previously, I don't particularly have any religious conviction. I don't have a sense of particularly of whether there is a god or what. But if there is a something, there's a, some form of moral balance in the universe and we can't ignore it.

AOR: And is this?

SL: And the sense of right and wrong is there, we all know it's there, when I think. It's there for as far back as you can go in your own personal life.

AOR: And how do you make that judgement as to whether something is right?

SL: How do you make the judgement?

AOR: Yeah.

SL: Well it's interesting, in my own case I can't get back far enough to know, but I have very, very young kids now so I observe and I mean, I don't.

AOR: I wasn't asking you how did you learn to make the judgement but how do you, you know ?

SL: How do you decide what's right and wrong?

AOR: Yeah.

SL: Well, I think you know, let me see.

AOR: Well, what you've set up for me is that there is right and wrong, okay?

SL: Yeah.

AOR: Now there you are, you have to make a choice.

SL: Well, I can only base it on what I said to you previously, which is my most fundamental tendencies, you don't do onto others what you would not want done unto you. As far back as I can go, that's where I operate from, with total conviction, and I have to say, unless somebody has a particular chink in their personality, everybody comes from that perspective, nobody wants to be hurt. So if you even just come from there I think then you develop it from that point on.'
SL, S3, p.4

In the third example, Eithne positions one's relationships with others at the centre of the moral question and therefore her position is consistent with Sean's focus of attention on the impact of one's actions on others:

EF: 'I suppose that from quite early on I would have had - I am sure - taught to me by my parents, I don't remember, but certainly that whatever you do, don't do any harm to anyone else. That anything that you do, or say, must not harm anybody else, even if that person is the girl that you are not talking to at the moment. And it was done in very small ways like that, you know. You can't stand her this week and she is not talking to you and you are not talking to her, that doesn't give you permission to say horrible things about her. And that is on a very practical level, I am sure my mother didn't want another mother up to the door and giving out and what have you. And also partly because knowing kids they will be the best of friends next week again. And therefore you don't want to be, you know, finishing everything. So I suppose certainly not in any conscious way to do any harm to anybody or anybody's character and good name. I think that, I think that probably I would, the morality that would guide me would be very much looking at society as a whole and seeing if we can make life's journey better without - not meaning in any hedonistic way - but just making it a bit more bearable and a bit more even pleasurable for the people you come in contact with.
EF, S4, pps 27-28

In the fourth example, Fergus asserts the requirement for a transcendent being as a source of moral meaning. In this lengthy extract he explores the relationship between reason and faith and asserts a transcendent being as the ultimate source of meaning.

AOR: 'One last question because we agreed on a time frame, and I suppose I have circled around it a little bit and I am only trying to work this through myself, I think I hear you implying that the final source of moral direction is faith as opposed to anything else, yeah, I mean I never

FOF: I'm not sure what you mean by faith now.

AOR: Okay maybe if we go back to the atheists.

FOF: I think it rests ultimately on knowledge, I think you need to get into the area of, there are different kinds of knowledge, faith is one kind of

knowledge, I mean Cardinal Newman would be the great thinker I suppose, you need to be careful with the language here.

AOR: Let me think what I am trying to say, eh

FOF: Are you thinking of faith as a leap in the dark?

AOR: No, no, no, I am trying to say the source of moral knowledge is essentially in the, in, I am trying to get the right word now, but in the faith or in the religious perspective and I just, I have been trying to get to a point in the discussion where I was able to work out whether you saw an atheist as capable of making moral choices or not and I just wasn't quite sure if you were according that, you dodged the question, well you didn't dodge the question but you took a different angle...

FOF: I would be humble enough to say that I haven't given atheism as a thought-out position a great deal of thought, because as I said to you it seems to me not a credible faith position and I do think it rests totally and utterly, as does Christianity, on faith. Now obviously it's the way you are informed by different kinds of knowing or knowledge that makes you one or the other and that's why I think Cardinal Newman and others have made a great contribution. Obviously you can use your reason, you can use your imagination, you know what I mean, in terms of knowing things and it's the combination of both generally gives you whatever certainty or confidence you have. So that is a faith position, it is not an irrational position or an unreasoned position, in fact it is governed by reason and the evidence you can produce for it, but it is also informed by other faculties and other ways of knowing, obviously in simple terms through imagination or through other faculties that you have, so that's my query about the word faith. Because sometimes people use the word faith as being asked to believe six improbable things before breakfast and

AOR: No, no

FOF: Faith in my book is a much firmer outcome of actual knowing through your own reasonable reasonability, I mean taking an example, some people would say oh well Jesus Christ is a myth, my reason tells me as a historian for example that there is sufficient evidence to know that there was a historical personage of Jesus who did X, Y and Z, and we have as much information that would confirm that information the same as I know that Daniel O'Connell lived, different kinds of evidence but the same type of historical evidence as it were. So that's a reasonable approach, then there are other certain imaginative ways that you know and encounter a personality like that, and the same would operate in a historical reconstruction of somebody like Daniel O'Connell but a similar process is at work in relation to a superb thinker like Jesus because you have the evidence, you have his stories you have the poetic way he talked and so forth, that's what I am saying, when you talk about faith, in my book you are talking about the, something that is built on knowledge, now it's not something that is built on empirical knowledge and science but that's a very limited way of knowing, and you can only know a certain amount of things with science that you can't know, maybe, in my book, and I am not

scientist, these are less important things that you discover through it, and sometimes people say oh well this is not scientific, thinking that science can answer the sort of, these other type of questions and it can't, you know, so that's a long way around, but I just think that's important.

AOR: You said two things, you said you know, one was and I will misquote this Fergus but it was a quote about a flowering human it was.

FOF: Oh yeah, the glory of god is a flourishing human being.

AOR: And the other was this will be judged solely at the end by love or capacity to love or having loved.

FOF: Yeah, that's a quote from St. John of the Cross.

AOR: Yeah, and both of those placed the result of the quality and the quality in very religious, in clear religious terms and I suppose that's what I was saying, is this at the root of moral choice, or can it, can it, a flowering human or love, exist outside of, within an atheist framework, that's I suppose the root of my question because we are talking about action stemmed from values and I am trying to get at the root of the value basis and what I hear you telling, what I think I hear you saying is that value is based in faith however you define it...

FOF: Well it is for me but I have known people who are certainly agnostic and they have been enormously important exemplars of living out care for other people, would put anybody Christian to shame, and Jesus knew that, so I mean certainly agnostics can have, they are not claiming certitude in a way that I believe is possible for Christians to do but they are certainly very much influenced by the values and their approach to relationships with people and so on, I am not at all sure that the same is possible for atheists

AOR: Logically

FOF: Logically, yeah, I really think they have a real difficulty because their difficulty is one to do with meaning and ultimate source of meaning and when you discount totally, an agnostic doesn't discount totally, when you discount totally the idea of a transcendent being anything is possible and anything is legitimate and you really have gone into the absurd at that stage.

AOR: Or the abyss?

FOF: Or the abyss, and ultimately therefore you end up, because somebody who is a bigger bully than you or I is going to come along and maximise their opportunities there. And I think that's the tragedy of atheism and, as I say, when people stop believing in transcendence, they don't stop believing, they believe all sort of other absurd things. The bigger the propaganda spin wins that battle. So, I have all sorts of problems with atheism as a source of moral being and I really think there are huge problems in that area. And I think all of the great moral exemplars that I can think of, were hugely informed by what you are calling religious values. In fact, they are motivations from what you call religion not necessarily Christian.

AOR: Or is hugely informed by a concept of the transcendent.

FOF: Yes absolutely.

AOR: That might be a common language that we could use?

FOF: Yes, yes. So I don't know if that answers your questions!'
FOF, S2, pp. 11-13

2.3.3 The notion of selfhood and of individual responsibility to self and others for one's actions

At an individual level all storytellers exhibited a strong concern with the moral implications, in a broad sense, of how they lived their lives. This was particularly the case in relation to the impact of their actions on others and it was typically expressed as a strong sense of personal responsibility. The notion of selfhood, and of the self as an individual agent with a concomitant responsibility for the effect of one's actions, is inherent in the position. In the following quote Sean explains his decision to become a vegetarian in terms of his sense of individual responsibility:

SL: 'It was yeah, my mother again still, you know we were brought up on the meat and two veg and we were well reared, I mean my brothers and sisters are all big horses. We were well fed. I'm not quite sure why. Well I do know why I did it but trying to look at myself, its amm, I certainly didn't do it to impress any individual. I didn't discuss it with anyone. But my own personal reasoning for doing it is I couldn't kill an animal and prepare it to eat. And that is where I'm coming from, I had no difficulty at all in eating meat, I loved meat. I absolutely loved the taste of it. My favourite food. And if I could shoot a wild rabbit or shoot a bird or catch a fish and do all the business you've got to do, I would be delighted to eat it. But I can't do it. And because I can't do it, I'm not going to eat it. That's my reasoning.
SL, S1, p6

In this extract Patricia expresses her own need for self-affirmation based on the impact of her actions on others.

PP: 'So then that would be another thing that I would say that would motivate me – is this a good thing? Am I contributing a good thing? Am I working at something that is making something a little bit better even? I mean I have given up trying to change the whole world but I like to make sure that what I am getting paid to do is contributing to a purpose that I agree with, or a good, or a movement that I think is right.'
PP, S1, p 20

Of course the notion of individual responsibility, when combined with a view on the shared nature of the human condition, implies an individual responsibility to consider the impact of one's actions on others. Sean reflected this a little later in the discussion:

> **AOR:** 'Now, how has your thinking around justice and human rights evolved from the kind of basic gut instinct whether expressed towards humans or whether expressed towards animals in your vegetarian decisions, evolved into more political activism
>
> **SL:** I think that trying to find the threads of that is difficult. The old, I think it's a Catholic or a Biblical one, about do unto others as you'd have them do unto you, is probably the one that has lived with me most. So long as you don't hurt other people you should be able to do whatever you want to do. That's broadly speaking. And animals, treat with respect, that's up to an including, if you are going to kill and eat animals, do it with respect. That would be where I would be coming out of.
> SL, S1 pp 8-9

Among all storytellers the idea of personal responsibility for the impact of their actions on others finds an enlarged and deeper expression in terms of a more general responsibility in relation to others. In this strong expression of personal responsibility, the imperative is to consider not just the impact of their actions but also to act in a positive manner relative to their individual capacity and ability. Thus the moral imperative is increased from a focus on their own actions *per se,* to a focus on their own potential actions relative to the needs of others. Again we hear from Sean in the following extract:

> **SL:** 'Eh, well I mean yeah, to go straight to these questions: Do you feel a personal responsibility to act, etc? Eh, probably I am best in conveying through examples, and that's particularly immediate and relevant because, okay my immediate answer to it is yes, I do. That's how I operate, and eh, I think it is probably true to say in my life I haven't avoided things. Sometimes I just haven't engaged with things but I haven't, I haven't pro-actively avoided something that tugged at my conscience, let me put it that way. But in the very recent past, actually just yesterday evening, for an assortment of reasons, maybe we spoke about this before, my kids are in an Educate Together school in Navan which is very fledging, really struggling, wonderful little school, wonderful teachers, kids are very happy, I think it's great and eh, but I think ... with all such very democratically-run schools, they have a lot of, or whatever small voluntary groups, they have a lot of different opinions and clearly they have their strife, and if they didn't have enough external problems they row internally. So anyway, to cut it shorter, I was asked over the weekend, would I make myself available to go onto the board of the local school, which in itself is not a huge deal, it's not a huge ask but in the context of my work and the amount of time I am away from

home and even the conflict of managing a voluntary organisation and then being involved in another one – it's not a great mix. For lots of reasons, all sensibilities told me no, you can't, because it would be stupid and, eh. But, the other side of it was, yes. And again I am not trying to martyr myself, I can imagine how goody goody it sounds, but I understand from the people who asked, they didn't have an option, they wanted someone with my, whatever I would bring to it. And eh, and there was a strong sense of personal responsibility, both because I want the school to succeed ,I want it to do well, my children are in there, they are very happy all of this is important. So, I mean, we see this with Amnesty as well, okay? It's very difficult to engage people, and the real huge thing to get at this point in time in voluntary organisations, is their personal commitment and it is the easiest option to say, 'no, but I will give you money'. Which is very welcome too. But anyway, the short of it is I went along last night and got sucked onto the board of this, knowing that I am going to regret it but knowing I couldn't not do it.

AOR: Not do it?

SL: Yeah, and I think I've met that scenario, and I don't particularly mean in an organisational sense, it's just in human sense a lot of times and that would be a strong motivational force for me if I see something, whatever it is, and actually written about, you know if it's an animal or a human and it's in trouble and I can help, eh, I think I always try to engage. So do I feel a personal responsibility to act? Yes, and what is its nature? Well it depends what the situation is. But to do my best, to give whatever I can give - if I can give some added value.'
SL, S2, pp 2-3

As expressed by the storytellers, the nature of individual agency is such that, (a) the decision to act rests with the individual and, (b) the choice of action or inaction has consequences both for the individual actor and for those towards whom the action is directed. Thus the responsibility to choose to act or not is a responsibility held by the potential actor both to themselves and to others. Again we hear from Sean:

AOR: 'And is that a responsibility to oneself or is it a responsibility to others?

SL: That's a very interesting question, I think for me. Well I think it has to be both. Because I know with my own kids, I couldn't live with myself so therefore it is a responsibility to myself. I would be, eh, haunted to varying degrees depending on the scale of what I had dodged so I think there is no escaping that. But I also don't, the reason to do it, in my case anyway, isn't the sense of personal blackmail or bad conscience, just because it's not that much to ask of me and I can do it, and maybe I am the only one that can do it, eh, and so I guess yeah that's where I come from on it.
S2 p 3

And so, when viewed at a more generic level, the individual responsibility to self and to others may be viewed as both a personal and a generic statement of how a human life may be lived. Here Sean pursues the idea to a conclusion:

> **AOR** '... there is an individual responsibility to show everybody else how to be human, now that' s basically what's happening. Now if you then throw up somebody like Mandela
>
> **SL:** Yes
>
> **AOR:** I suspect that's the root of the admiration
>
> **SL:** yes, oh I agree completely yes and it's not just Mandela, it's Jesus Christ as well, insofar as if the representation is true. It's the same representation, and in every, through history, anybody who is, there are lots of people who fall broadly into that category and what they stand for is very clear and it's that. It's a respect for what it is to be human. I think it's the same model in all cases, Thomas Paine, you can work through them all, it's the same model and all the other varieties that appear, eh, the kinks in it, the Hitlers and all the rest of them who appear are, eh, serious misrepresentations of what it is to be human or whatever has happened to those people, whatever has damaged them in the process. And you can know, you can see historically, there is no, you can't find any intellectual justification for the actions of any of those figures, any acceptable intellectual justification. But you can always find it for the people who have championed humanity, I think it is the same thread throughout.'
> SL, S2, p. 6

For these storytellers selfhood, agency, and responsibility to self and to others combine in such a way that attention to the self becomes oriented to attention to one's relationships with others. One's being, and one's being in the world, become one and the same thing. They judge the quality of their being by the quality of their being in the world.

2.3.4 The positioning of love as the central human capacity and as the prime mode of engagement with others

At the heart of the notion of individual responsibility to self and to the human family for one's individual conduct as a member of that family is the idea of the capacity for love as a key distinguishing characteristic of the human being. Of course this conceptualisation of love is not of the romantic kind but of a treasuring and nurturing kind. Insofar as the individual both develops and expresses themselves in relations with others then an enabling love becomes the prime mode of engagement with others. Ann Louise articulated the position simply as 'the depth of one's capacity to be human is measured by the capacity to love and to relate to others' (ALG, S1, p 4). In the

following extract, Fergus is seen to present the notion in both religious and political terms:

> **AOR:** 'I suppose an atheist perspective on that as opposed to a political or a theological perspective might be that humans learn to be humans in interaction with other humans.
>
> **FOF:** That's right, that's right. But obviously the Christian view would be, and to some extent the civic republican view would be, you have to attach meaning to that interaction, there has to be some meaning, or some context in which that meaning is derived. It's not just about interacting
>
> **AOR:** No, no, no, but the interaction is about choosing something
>
> **FOF:** Yeah,
>
> **AOR:** I mean to interact you have to choose how to interact
>
> **FOF:** That's right yeah.
>
> **AOR:** what, it means you have to place some values.
>
> **FOF:** Absolutely, so the critical one would be you would choose. Like the big test was - I was in prison and you visited me, I was sick and you came and, you know, you did something for someone who was vulnerable or worse off, or outcasts particularly. It is about inclusion and that is the, it's not just about interaction and saying I was well off and I have a yacht and I am interacting with my yacht club. So it is about choosing.
>
> **AOR:** Yeah, yeah
>
> **FOF:** But the test is the quality of the choices that you make depends upon the quality growth that is happening there.
>
> **AOR:** Living the values that you hold.
>
> **FOF:** Yeah, living the values that you hold, yes absolutely. And St. John of the Cross said, it was a saying, at the end of our lives we will be judged on love, that will be the quality of the relationship, that's the only thing that is going to be eternal or valued or useful. And I think it's the same sort of motivation in civic republicanism. And I say that because if you look at the Christian sort of social thought, it's about the common good, it's very much at the centre and it's about how do humans as you say relate to each other in order to maximise the common good. And I, to that extent, now I haven't done any thinking about it and maybe I should, about trying to relate them more structurally, but if one did think about it, it's the way we are, I think there would be very close relationships between certain kinds of Christian social thought and political thought and certain strands in civic republicanism as I now know it.
> FOF, S2, p.6

The positioning of love as the prime mode of engagement with others is expressed also, by the storytellers, as a concern with the needs of the individual and with what is required to enable individuals to realise themselves in their lives. There is an underlying commonality in all of the interviews in treasuring the individual, or the individual in communion with others. This treasuring of the individual is expressed as the loving of the individual in the sense of wanting the fulfilment of that individual. In practice this means working to remove or negate obstacles or blocks to that fulfilment, and in the etymological sense of the word is a philanthropic impulse to action. Here is Fergus talking about the links between his political philosophy and his religious position:

> 'They do relate obviously very closely, I suppose it's about, I mean there is a phrase I can't remember now something that the early church fathers said about the glory of god is a flourishing human being or something like that. You probably know it.
>
> **AOR:** No I don't
>
> **FOF:** Do you know, there is something along the lines
>
> **AOR:** In Catholic discussion, yes
>
> **FOF:** But there is that sense within, I have come to life so that I can have it to the full, there is that tradition in the Jesus story if you like, in the Christian faith, that it is about joy and love and connection and responsibility for others and so on and to some extent the motivation as I understand it is certain strands of civic republicanism is the same motivation, is about the wholeness of human development because if you erode that public connection and core responsibility for each other you privatise and individualise people and you diminish their growth and their moral being almost if you like. So there is a very close link in the two philosophies as I would understand it and they are both centred around how do people flourish best – it's the old Greek question really – what is the best context for people to be born…
> FOF, S2, p.5

2.3.5 The notion of life as a developmental process

Against this backdrop of attention to what they regard as the 'proper ends' of human existence, *viz.,* individual agency, moral choice and the responsibility to self and others, life is envisaged by the storytellers as a developmental process offered to both the self and to others. And so the notion of a 'human being' is essentially relational rather than existential, this, it is existentially relational. It is the condition of 'being in the world' rather than of being *per se*. Humans express themselves as human in their action and choice rather than in their physical presence. This then becomes a case of 'I am in

being' or more specifically, 'I am in being with others', rather than of 'I am'. For the storytellers, this was closely linked to the idea of a gap between the present reality and the future possibility of every individual and so, for them, the expression of love in the relational act is often directed at supporting others to reach towards that possibility.

For many of the storytellers, education, as we saw earlier, was an enabler of this individual development and so we find the pursuit of their education or supporting the education of others as a recurring theme within their life-stories. It is in this context that Ann Louise states that 'education is about love' (ALG, S1 p3) and hence linked to the 'essence of human existence which is love' (ALG, S1, p3). Fergus's lifetime interest in adult education is similarly linked to the enabling of individual fulfilment, which is why he referred to the call by Thomas Davis 'to educate that you might be free' (FOF, S2, p.3).

2.3.6 The concern with an expression of individualism characterised by communion with others.

What appears at one level to be a kind of individualism therefore, albeit one attuned to the impact of one's actions on others, can be seen to be a perspective in which the individual can only be expressed in communion with others. The tension that can exist in such a dichotomy, however, is acknowledged directly by some of the storytellers. In the following extract Fergus explores some of the implications of this:

> **AOR:** 'And where does the individual sit in all of this, how do you conceive of the individual?
>
> **FOF:** Eh, I am not quite sure, how do you mean?. I mean obviously the individual is supremely important. On one level every individual, and the best, and their own best development is in their relationships to other people. So institutions like families, communities, neighbourhoods and schools and all of them are crucially important to individual development. But you never get to the point, - sometimes you do in Catholic ethics - to say that the individual's needs are less than the community needs. You certainly, in the Protestant spectrum, they balance towards the individual.
>
> **AOR:** Balance towards the individual?
>
> **FOF:** Absolutely because of the amoral being, in other words, if we as a community decide that Andrew O'Regan shouldn't have a vasectomy, for the sake of argument, we are deciding that for all the good reasons in the community, we are diminishing you, because you need a vasectomy.
>
> **AOR:** It's my choice

FOF: You have to decide that, in Christian terms. You do that in your own relationship with God and you must do that. Otherwise if other people decide, then you are diminished. So, that's the Protestant spectrum. So the individual can become supreme to the neglect. And that's what's happened in western culture of the we-ness of the Catholic thing saying that community is very important and that these are more important than just individual community preferences, or individual preferences. And again, that's, maybe we need to go back to that balance again, like the communitarians are saying.
FOF, S2, p. 8

Similarly, the individual is not divorced from the system, but must recognise that their choices act either to sustain or change the extant structures. In the first of the following quotes Fergus explores this reality in relation to the provision of health services.

'**FOF:** That arises for society as a whole. You are absolutely right, and society is making choices about what it is doing with the wealth it has. I mean in some societies like in the USA they are spending up to 15 per cent of their GDP or whatever it is on health care - now not very effectively in many cases. Other societies are spending five, six or seven per cent like ourselves. It's a societal choice, whether it is done on an individual basis like in America or whether it is done at governmental level in our system. Societies have choices and we can. It's like the argument about the Third World, the fact is at the moment at least, we have the resources to do, to provide the care that is needed but we are not doing it, so it's not like we have run ultimately up against the final buffers that we simply, no society in the world can afford, I think we are a long way from that. But you are absolutely right we are making the choices, the choices we are making in Ireland is that we like our second holiday and we like our second car! We like a bigger mortgage or the new house or whatever and that's at individual level. But it is also affecting political choices, we want lower taxes, we don't want to care for.'
FOF, S2, p.11

In this second quote Sean relates the same idea to the question of the unequal distribution of world resources.

'**SL:** So but I think it is intellectually logical to say, if you just operate from the basis that you don't hurt other people okay

AOR: Yes

SL: Eh, I think once you start engaging with that, you discover that sometimes things that you do will inadvertently hurt other people, you may not even be aware of it and I won't go into a big lecture about development policies and all the rest of it but we know that, you know, the quick-fix solutions of giving grant money to places is not the answer. You know it's.

How is the self as actor constructed through the life-story?

Personalised belief and meaning systems, informed by:	Underlying themes and ideas
• Radical feminism, post-structural perspectives on individual and community empowerment • Catholic liberation theology, radical Christianity • Civic Republicanism, Christianity • Feminist analysis of power relationships and their impact on equality • Social justice, practical engagement • Human rights and the idea of truth • Practical engagement from a social justice background	• Radical perspectives on social structure • The idea of moral difference as a criterion for individual choice • The notion of selfhood and of individual responsibility to self and others for one's actions • The positioning of love as the central human capacity and as the prime mode of engagement with others • The notion of life as a developmental process • The concern with an expression of individualism characterised by communion with others

Table 6.2 Aspects of the construction of coherence

> The bottom line is that we all have very comfortable lives because we are screwing other people in other parts of the planet. There is no escaping that, eh, for us. And if we want a level-playing field, so we are hurting people, we may not like to think it but we are, eh, because we support unfair structures in the world that make life miserable for a lot of other people.'
> SL, S3, p.5

2.4 Conclusion to Section 2

The six themes common to the personalised belief and meaning systems discussed above, namely, (i) radical perspectives on social structure, (ii) the idea of moral difference as a criterion for individual choice, (iii) the notion of selfhood and of individual responsibility to self and others for one's actions, (iv) the positioning of love as the central human capacity and as the prime mode of engagement with others, (v) the notion of life as a developmental process, and (vi) the concern with an expression of individualism characterised by communion with others, illustrate the degree of agreement or unity in the individual positions held by the storytellers. This agreement is not so much based on commonalities between analytical or ideological perspectives as between fundamental conceptualisations of human beings, their relationship to the world, and their relationship to a moral order. That these fundamental conceptualisations are shared by the storytellers suggest that they constitute important building blocks of the type of belief and value systems that may give rise to voluntary action in society. Consistent with this observation, it may be noted that there is an inter-relatedness in the six themes from the personal belief and meaning systems identified above, such that taken together they create a logic of action in the world. Insofar as social life is understood as an ongoing process, framed by the gap between present realities and future potentials, then the logic of individual social engagement is to create change so that individuals (in society) can reach towards their human potential. Table 6.2 serves to outline the elements identified in the foregoing analysis of the construction of coherence in these life-stories.

Conclusion

Whereas Chapter 5, The Experience of Meaning, examined the storytellers' interpretation of their life experience and their attribution of meaning to that experience, Chapter 6, The Construction of Meaning, has examined how these

experiences and these interpretations are made sensible as a stream of linked events, interpretations and experiences. Chapter 6, therefore, presents an analysis of the construction of this continuity and coherence within the individual narration. This analysis has explored the impact of the context of the narrative moment, the structure of the narrative, characteristics of the narrative and, levels of sense-making within the narrative. However, the underlying coherence of the narration is seen not to rest within these elements but within the personalised belief and meaning systems of the storytellers. Yes, the lives of the storytellers are sensible as life-stories in a narrative sense in that the action follows a direction that is sensible in terms of action following action. However, a deeper and ultimately more sensible and satisfying meaning is to be found in an understanding of the personalised belief and meaning systems of the storytellers. Thus the life-stories are sensible in a narrative sense as life-story, but are sensible in an emotive meaning sense as the stories of these lives. They are sensible and coherent ultimately, not as stories of temporally linked actions, but as the development and enactment of these personal belief and meaning systems. In short, whereas narration constructs continuity, personal belief and value systems construct coherence. The two are combined such that the narration is consistent with the personal belief and value system and the narratives are sensible against the value systems. Furthermore, the values systems are sensible against the narratives. Action in the moment is sensible or meaningful, that is, full of meaning, by reference to the combination of experience, interpretation, narration, and belief.

Chapters 5 and 6 have presented a type of analysis of these life-stories via an uncovering of layers of interwoven experience and meaning. This analysis commenced with the lived experience, moved through the attribution of meaning, to the structures of meaning within the narrative form, and came to an examination of the personal belief and meaning systems which, by guiding and shaping the enactment of the self in the world, constitute the core of sensibility at the heart of these stories. In the next chapter, the relevance of the analysis presented in Chapters 5 and 6 to an understanding of the voluntary actor is considered.

Chapter 7 Imaging the Voluntary Actor

Introduction

This chapter presents the final element in the analysis of these seven life-stories. Whereas Chapters 5 and 6 examined the experience of meaning and the construction of meaning by the storytellers, in Chapter 7 their life-stories are considered as a group of case studies. Following Stake's (1998) heuristic suggestion, the use of instrumental and collective approaches leads respectively to a consideration of (a) what the cases may reveal about an issue or idea, and (b) what the cases may reveal relative to a larger group. Following this analysis, the second section of the chapter is used to gather the image of the voluntary actor that has emerged from the analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. The chapter concludes with a commentary on two possible critiques of the image of the voluntary actor which has been arrived at via the analysis.

Section 1 The Life-stories as Case Studies

1.1 Reflecting on the instrumental

In adopting an instrumental perspective, the discussion moves from a consideration of the individual life-stories to a reflection on cross-cutting themes which may be identified within the life-stories at a deeper level of abstraction. While acknowledging the limitations to interpretative direction set by the notion of the text as a point of departure for the individual reader, three themes are offered below for specific consideration. The first of these is the notion of the search for meaning as a central theme of the human condition. The second theme, is that of a life as 'a becoming' rather than a temporal 'being' over a given span. The final theme to be considered relates to the contextualised process within which this search for meaning and this structured becoming is played out.

1.1.1 A search for meaning

One of the most insistent themes emerging from these life-stories is of the experience of what might be characterised as a restless search for meaning, or of life being experienced as such. Indeed Ann Louise states that 'the search for meaning is central to being human' (ALG, S1, notes, p. 4). This search for meaning can be seen in Ann Louise's vocation and its renunciation, and in Pat's vocational consideration and his

search for a management style consistent with his values and his turn to social entrepreneurship. It can be perceived also in Sean's deepening involvement in Amnesty International, Eithne's role in establishing the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association, Catherine's search for a different community, Patricia's enactment of her values, and in Fergus's growing commitment to the development of a civic space equal to the possibilities of the individual. This search for meaning is identifiable in all the life stories therefore, and is linked to a search for a place where this meaning can be recognised and celebrated. Whatever the cause of this restlessness, obviously felt to varying degrees and at varying times in the passage of the individual stories, it finds a foil in a dissatisfaction with the normative, institutionalised explanations presented by the contemporaneous society. This dissatisfaction seems grounded in an experiential and interpretative dissonance; a dissonance between personal experience and interpretation on the one hand and normative, institutionalised explanations offered on the other. For example, at 17 years of age Patricia knew she would not, indeed could not, enter into marriage as a social institution and she determined on a professional training that would offer financial independence:

> 'I remember thinking that, I need something that will have me financially independent and, you know, into a lifestyle that I knew I wanted as well, and that I was not going to be getting married so I didn't see how, I suppose, in a way I was seeing myself as single at that point, I certainly wasn't, I wasn't getting married so then I didn't see what other partnerships were there, because I hadn't identified as lesbian at that stage.'
> PP, S1, p. 7

The nature of this search for meaning is not a flippant tripping from moment to moment or from value to value. There is evidently an intention and practice of interrogating proposed values rigorously. Further, values are not subject to a single examination but are continuously tried and reflected on in lived experience. Hence we find Ann Louise, Pat, and Fergus all relating stories of moving through an ongoing religious and spiritual search. Consistent with this ongoing relating of values with experience and action or of action and experience, the storytellers displayed considerable freedom of thought on these journeys. In whatever way meaning was being individually articulated, the central characteristic for all the storytellers seems to be a requirement for a consistency between personal experience, emotion, values and action. As such, the search for meaning is conditioned by the need to maintain an integrity between the internal and external life.

1.1.2 Life as a becoming

Across all these life-stories runs a theme that remains largely unarticulated within the stories themselves, that is, the notion of the individual life as a process or journey of self-realisation or of self-creation. As such, the search for meaning may be understood as a mode of becoming. Self-realisation is effected through the search for the meaning of the lived experience concurrent with the development and maintenance of a consistency between belief and action. Viewed as such, life is constituted as a process in which the individual must rise to the challenge of being human. Part of this is the challenge of living; part of this is the challenge of finding meaning; part of this is the challenge of making one's own life meaningful. Life becomes a challenge to be embraced and not a threat from which to seek protection. This demands a degree of creativity, for the challenge lies in creating the human in the living moment. In doing so, meaning is generated for the self and others. From this we can see the importance of choice and action, for it is in the choice and action that the meaning and value are identified and given presence. Choices and actions, therefore, are important. What is chosen and the action that follows that choice serve to create meaning and, furthermore, give that meaning a presence or existence. For these respondents, what commences as a search for a set of meanings that is consistent with experience may become in later life the creative development of meaning. So, for example, we find Ann Louise's disenchantment with the institutionalised Church giving way to the praxis of a different spiritual expression in The Shanty Project or the enactment of personally-held value systems in Pat's leadership of Goldstar Meats and Patricia's establishment of Meitheal.

1.1.3 The dialectic between the individual and the social environment

The experience of life as both a personal search and a becoming arises from a relationally-based process of on-going interpretation and sense-making within a given social environment. The act of narration serves to articulate this process in terms of an iterative dynamic of 'I saw, experienced this, I thought, interpreted, imagined this, so I acted thus'; which gets reiterated in turn *ad infinitum*. The process therefore is iterative and reiterative and is variously presented in the narration in term of multiple moments, events, temporal passages but also as a single lifelong cycle. This articulation expresses reflexive human agency relating with a social environment. Expressed as such the process is consistent with the social constructionist dialectic as conceived by Berger and Luckmann (1966).

> 'The dialectic by which humans engage the objective, socially created external world, and in turn internalize and act on that external reality provides a highly dynamic model of the interactive power of institutional structures and individual consciousness and meaning in the construction of social life'
> Dillon, M., in Bryan S. Turner (ed.), 2006 p.36

The point of balance in this dialectic between the individual actor and the institutional structures is subject to negotiation on the part of the individual and indeed it may be argued that the point of balance is open to differing resolutions in individual cases. In contrast, existentialism demands of the individual that they constitute the sense-making within themselves, in other words that it is wholly a subjective or internal process. However, all of these narrators engaged in sense-making both internally and externally, as detailed in Chapters 5 and 6 above, and hence can be said to be both internally and externally influenced but not externally determined. The process is one of negotiation between the self and the environment, not a determinism effected by the environment. Thus the concept of there being a 'dialectic' in these cases may be supported by apparent evidence. Jones (1983) captures the human condition thus,

> 'our humanness, and the relationship between social reality and subjective meaning, are embedded in the tension between two counterpoising tendencies. On the one hand, human beings desire and attempt to express their humanness through their actions on the world. On the other, the world presents itself as an already constituted reality that must be understood and mastered if the potentialities of consciousness are to emerge and develop. In the relationship between these two processes we find the basis of our nature as human beings and of the culture or social reality that expresses that nature.'
> Jones, G., in G. Morgan (ed.) 1983, p. 147

1.2 Reflecting on the collective

In adopting a collective approach to a consideration of the prospective learning arising from these life-stories, the underlying assumption is that the narrators belong to some identifiable collective and attention turns to what may be revealed by their stories relative to a larger group. It could be suggested that the identifiable collective in this instance is that of 'voluntary actors', that is, individuals who, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, are individuals who pursue voluntary or non-profit organisational activity as the main, or a personally significant, socially-oriented activity in their lives. Albeit that such a collective is very loosely defined, what can be drawn from these life-histories that may inform an understanding of such a group of voluntary actors? Four broad areas can be identified and will be discussed below. Firstly, the

concern with personal integrity is addressed. Secondly, a distinction is drawn between analytical and intuitive approaches to the interpretation of meaning. Thirdly, common conceptual building blocks underpinning personal value systems are explored. Finally, particular aspects of the functioning of the individual-society dialectic are proposed.

1.2.1 The integrity of self

The idea of being true to the self, of attaining and maintaining an integrity of self, indeed the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of acting otherwise, is a recurring, underlying thread in the discussions. It is implicit in all the explanations given by the respondents of their personal choice, as though its explanatory power is self-evident. Hence, for these individuals it is simply not possible to act other than they do, for to do so would be to deny the self. In their presentation of self within the context of the narration there is a constant concern with a consistency across the experience-emotion-interpretation-values-action process. By maintaining this integrity, a single identity is constructed and offered by the narrators in their stories. The narrative they present does not allow for fractured or multiple identities. Indeed, they present this concern with the integrity of self as a kind of moral imperative. A notable effect of their adherence to this moral imperative of integrity of self is their presentation of the experience of agency and of becoming over the course of their lives.

This dynamic of the moral imperative of the integrity of self echoes that aspect of Munroe's (1996) altruistic perspective in which core identity supersedes and shapes consciously-held moral values and in which actions that touch the basic sense of self involve self-recognition, not choice. For his part, Maslow (1971) sees personalised intrinsic values as part of the full definition of human nature. In his 'self-actualizing subjects' at least, these values, just as much as the individual 'lower' needs, are part of the full human. For Maslow, the biological and instinctive nature of such values means that he rejects any comparison to an 'arbitrary existentialism in which the self is created by fiat' (Maslow 1971, p. 304). On the other hand, an existential approach challenges individuals to find personal values in acts of 'authentic choice'. The absolute nature of one's freedom therefore is such that choice is neither conditional on one's past nor on some set of external values. Individuals transcend themselves insofar as they cannot be identified with the past but, through choice, they are involved in an act of continual self-creation.

> 'For Sartre the philosopher cannot determine a universally valid set of objective values, nor can he tell the individual what his moral choices should be. But he can make clear the inevitability of choice of some kind, the nature of choice, and the difference between authentic and unauthentic choice, so that a man may realize what he is about and commit himself with open eyes.'
> Copleston, F., 1972, p. 135

Or as Blackham put it:

> '[f]or nothing can be achieved once and for all or objectively established for mankind; human existence is realized in personal being, and personal being is a difficult and precarious individual attainment constantly striven for and never permanently possessed, but upheld, drawn on, and rewarded by the rich responsiveness of an objective world'.
> Blackham, H.J., 1961, p. 161

The concern with maintaining the integrity of self displayed by the respondents is a concern to maintain a consistency between personally-held values on the one hand and personal choice and action on the other, so that the internal and external expression of self are consistent with each other. These personally-held values are not a set of external ideals to which the individual narrators have given allegiance. Rather, these values are better understood as expressions of the self, so that to act counter to them would be in some way to act counter to oneself, or to one's identity. It would be to attempt to be other than one is, and as such, that would constitute a self-negating and self-destructive act. The importance of this dynamic for an understanding of the lives of these narrators can hardly be over-emphasised.

1.2.2 Analytical and intuitive approaches to the interrogation of experience

Among the life-story narrators, the approach to making sense of their experience has both intuitive and analytical aspects. While all the narrators utilised both intuitive and analytical elements in their explanations, particular individuals, to varying degrees, appeared to lean towards either intuitive or analytical modes of explanation. Hence, at the level of these narrators, the collective may be seen as displaying both intuitive and analytical approaches to the interrogation of experience but at an individual level as displaying an orientation towards just one of the two modes. This orientation towards either an analytical or intuitive approach to the interrogation of experience is noticeable in the manner in which it gives rise to degrees of clarity and complexity utilised in articulating a meaning system by the narrators. Thus we find some narrators using

relatively simple axioms to express the approach they use (as exampled by Sean, Catherine, and Eithne), while others, (as exampled by Fergus, Patricia, Ann Louise, and Pat) reference complex schemes of sociological, political, philosophical or theological thought.

1.2.3 The patterning of life stages

While the notion of birth and growth has been referred to above as an aspect of all these life-stories, it is perhaps worth asking if there is a recurring pattern to this as a process. Obviously, the very act of physical growth and its temporal passage is reflected in notions of childhood, adolescence and adulthood or paralleled in the structures of formal education and these developments are reflected variously in the narratives. Another important part of growing up, evident in the narratives, is the development of self-awareness and an awareness of others. When we examine the narratives, we can see a pattern of awakening to the first and of a development towards the second. The growth of the individual narrators through self-awareness to an awareness of others is not exhibited in the narratives as a linear pattern but as a dialogical and iterative process. The fact that it is presented as a dialogical and non-linear process is not just an artefact of the storytelling process alone but it reflects the ongoing dialogue that these individuals have engaged in throughout their lives. The capacity for empathy, which is normally experienced on an individual, one-to-one level, may be experienced also at a generic, conceptual level. From a consideration of the life-stories, four identifiable aspects may be proposed:

(1) Self-awareness: the development of a reflective and self-reflective capacity, which is necessary for the conscious experience of agency. It is exhibited as a sense of self relative to others, of being aware of one's position socially and of responsibility for one's actions. This was exampled in the storytellers' early reflexive experiences (Chapter 5, Section 1.2)

(2) Other awareness: a growth through self awareness to awareness of others. This is exhibited as a capacity for empathy (Chapter 5, Section 2.1) with others and with a concomitant concern with the impact of one's actions on others. This was exampled in the nature of the relationship with the others (Chapter 5, Section 2.3).

(3) Generic awareness: an awareness and understanding of the common aspects of the human condition. This is exhibited as a sense of sharing a common humanity, an empathy to the human condition and hence a philanthropic (as in 'loving one's fellow

man')[36] or altruistic (as in a regard for others as a principle of action)[37] orientation. This generic awareness was reflected in the common themes and ideas underlying the storytellers personalised belief and meaning systems (Chapter 6, Section 2.3).

(4) Self-awareness as generic awareness: an understanding of the self relative to one's generic awareness such that one is responsible for one's actions as an individual and as a representative of humanity. This is exhibited as an individual responsibility for the enactment of ways of being human for the self and for others. It is an individual responsibility to the generic; which is upheld by the individual articulating through praxis how humans can and should be. This orientation was implied throughout the life-stories and explicitly expressed in the repeated manner in which the storytellers spoke of striving to be human.

These different aspects of awareness are not to be understood as categories but as stages. They are not so much achieved and moved on from as layered and iteratively integrated.

It may be noted that Monroe (1996) argues that altruistic behaviour is influenced by the perspective of the self in relation to others and cites perceptions of a common humanity as being at the heart of altruism. In existentialism the act of self-creation is purposeful, both for the self and in relation to others. Or as Marcel put it;

> "I affirm myself as a person in the measure that I assume the responsibility of what I do and what I say. But before whom am I or before whom do I recognize myself as responsible? ... both before myself and before others; this conjunction is characteristic of personal commitment"
> *Homo Viator,* p. 26, quoted in Copleston (1972) p. 117

1.2.4 The socio-conceptual context[38]

In Chapter 6 above (Sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3), the specifics of the personalised belief and meaning systems of the narrators and of the themes shared across these belief systems were identified. In the shaping of personal belief systems socially-presented coherence systems as varied as Roman Catholic theology and post-structuralism were utilised by the narrators. Linking these personal belief systems were notions of (i) radical perspectives on social structure; (ii) the idea of moral difference as a criterion

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[36] COD
[37] COD
[38] By socio-conceptual context I mean that body of coherence systems and institutionalised ideas which frame and sustain the society in which these narrators enact their lives (see chapter 6 above).

for individual choice; (iii) the notion of selfhood and of individual responsibility to self and others for one's actions; (iv) the positioning of love as the central human capacity and the prime mode of engagement with others; (v) the notion of life as a developmental process; and (vi) the concern with an expression of individualism in communion with others. However, if we move the frame of reference from personal belief systems and distinct coherence systems to the fuller set of coherence systems extant in the socio-conceptual context of these narrators' lives, we may then consider if there are important conceptual institutions that are central to the socio-conceptual context within which the dialectic process of self-realisation is enacted by these narrators. In this wider frame of reference four foundational ideas may be identified that seem to be basic components of the personal belief systems of these narrators. Indeed these concepts may be deemed as foundational requirements for the personal belief systems of these narrators. For without these concepts it is difficult to see how their personal belief systems could have been constructed in the form, and productive of the ends, that they have been. These concepts are:

(1) The idea of the individual as an autonomous being. This autonomy is conceptualised as freewill and is practically constituted in individual agency.

(2) The idea of a metaphysical source beyond the individual that creates or serves to distinguish order from disorder, or establishes a moral frame.

(3) The equal value of each individual in the light of this metaphysical source and moral frame.

(4) These foregoing ideas (1 + 2 above) serving to structure the act of personal choice into a moral imperative, so that a freely-enacted agency is not without consequence but by contrast is centrally concerned with consequence for self and for others.

While these ideas find a resonance in many overarching belief systems worldwide (Stevenson and Haberman 1998)[39], they perhaps particularly reflect that western intellectual tradition (Bronowski 1960) that stems from Classical Philosophy and its interaction with Judaeo-Christian theologies and finds a later secular reflection in democratic political discourses of the Enlightenment and still later in equality critiques of post-modernism. And so, it appears that despite apparent differences in the individual belief systems held by the narrators, by virtue of a dialectic conducted within a context specific socio-conceptual framework, they shared common conceptual bases.

[39] Stevenson and Haberman identifies a set of linked ideas underpinning major world religions and coherence systems including Confucianism, Hinduism, Christianity, Classical Greek thought of Plato and Aristotle, and thought of Kant, Marx, Freud, and Sartre.

As identified here, these bases appear to constitute a basic conceptual requirement for the impulse, ideas, and practice of voluntary action as practiced by these narrators; without which bases it is difficult to see how this voluntary action would have emerged.

1.2.5 The socio-structural context[40]

While foundational ideas of the western intellectual tradition form part of the socio-conceptual landscape within which the dialectic process of the narrators' meaning making is enacted, the socio-structural landscape is formed by the specifics of the Irish context. In others words, the Irish socio-structural context may be seen to influence the manner in which the socio-conceptual context is enacted in praxis. This is perhaps best illustrated by reference to the divergence between the shape and concerns of the voluntary sector in Ireland and those European countries in a social-democratic tradition (Salamon and Anheier 1998). Some of the specifics of the Irish socio-structural context, during the first decades of the lives of the storytellers have been referred to in the Appendices. Of particular note was the degree of cultural, religious, ethnic and economic homogeneity, allied with low levels of social mobility. It is perhaps worth noting that, against this rather controlling socio-structural background, each of the narrators projected the story of a life in revolt, even if it was not always articulated in strident terms (see also Chapter 6, Section 2.3.1 *Radical perspectives on social structure*). This could be seen in Patrica's struggle to express her self-identity, Fergus's turn to adult education as an emancipation or his defence of a minority's ideological independence, Catherine's concern with amelioration of social injustice and the judiciary as a force for change, and in the radical nature of Ann Louise's social and religious critique. It could also be perceived in Eithne's identification with the socialist tradition in Irish politics, Sean's disengagement from a 'hypocritical' national politics, and Pat's orientation to liberation theology as praxis. All of the narrators variously chose to act in opposition to the dominant socio-structural institutions, and the limitations on the development and enactment of themselves and others as individuals that these socio-structural institutions imposed. Of course, the corollary of this constraint is found in the degree of support for voluntary organising that these same socio-structural and socio-conceptual institutions provided.

[40] By socio-structural context I mean the specific social structures, and their economic, political and cultural bases, that characterised the Ireland in which these narrators lived their lives.

1.2.6 Aspects of the dialectic relationship between the individual and their social environment

In this sub-section a number of aspects of the dialectic process noted above are identified and explored. Three elements in particular are addressed. Firstly, the personal nature of the dialectic is noted, secondly different layers of functioning within the dialectical process are identified, and thirdly a number of expressions of creativity within the dialectical process are proposed.

1.2.6.1 The dialectic as a personal process

While we may conceive of the social construction of reality as a macro process, within these life-stories the process is presented in a highly personalised form. Although all the narrators at times commented on, or critiqued aspects of the social structure they encountered, their experience of social structures was typically expressed at the level of their personal relationships. Thus, while social critiques may have been voiced in the abstract, they were typically evidenced in terms of personal experience. In such expressions of personal experience the relational nature of the human condition comes to the fore. Hence, although from a macro perspective the social construction of reality may be understood as a generic process, for these voluntary actors its daily praxis is deeply personal and individual. Adopting such a micro perspective on the dialectic process supports the analysis of the process at an individual level. Such an analysis is proposed in the next two sub-sections.

1.2.6.2 The functioning of the dialectic

An analysis of the life-stories has been offered in Chapters 5 and 6 above. Elements of this analysis included (i) the lived experience and the attribution of meaning, (ii) the construction of personal belief systems, (iii) the narration of coherence, and (iv) the patterning of becoming. Central to this analysis was the notion of a dialectic process between the individual and their social environment. How does this dialectic process operate for these voluntary actors? We can analyse the functioning of this dialectic in a manner that is consistent with the foregoing analysis of the life-stories. And so, four layers of functioning of the dialectic may be noted. Each of these layers corresponds to an element in the analysis of the life-stories. The four layers are: (i) a dialectic of sense-making in experience and action, wherein we see the narrators' experience of their social world and their actions within it (Chapter 5, Section 1, the lived experience); (ii) a dialectic of sense making in conceptualisation, wherein we see the

narrators engagement with the coherence systems present in their social world and their adapting and development of these into personal belief and meaning systems (Chapter 6, Section 2, the construction of coherence); (iii) a dialectic of sense-making in a reflexive narration, where through the storying of their lives and the construction of a reflexive narrative, they attribute meaning and construct a coherence over their life course (Chapter 6, Section 1, the construction of continuity) ; and (iv) a dialectic of sense making in becoming, wherein the daily praxis of choice and action is seen to enact the self in a meaningful manner over the life-course (Chapter 5, Section 2 emerging themes, and Chapter 6, Section 2.3 underlying themes and ideas).

1.2.6.3 Creativity in the dialectic process

The capacity on the part of these voluntary actors to attribute meaning to experience, to form personal belief systems and to construct coherence and sensibility in the narrative stems from a participation in the dialectic that is reflexive rather than reactive. Such reflexivity is a foundational element of human agency. Indeed this agency can find expression in human creativity, that is, the purposeful production of something new. Within the life-stories four types of creativity can be seen. The first of these is a creativity of choice. Choice follows an act of reflexion and hence is grounded in the attribution of value. The very act of choosing contains the capacity to cause change, that is, choice is creative in nature. The second of these is a creativity of the imagination. Central to the work of all these voluntary actors is the ability to conceive of something being different than it is, that is, to imagine a different future, and a future for which they can strive. The third of these is a creativity of meaning-making. This finds expression in the capacity to create meaning for the self and others; to make a particular interpretation of the world sensible. The fourth of these is a creativity of organisation; that is, the capacity to construct and maintain an organisation based on an interpretation of the world. Hence, as can be seen within the life-stories of these voluntary actors, there is evidence of human agency finding expression in a (i) creativity of choice, (ii) a creativity of the imagination, (iii) a creativity of meaning-making for self and others, and (iv) a creativity of organisation.

The aspects of the voluntary actor, identified from the instrumental and collective reflection above, are set out in Table 7.1.

What of this is relevant to the voluntary actor?	*What of this is characteristic of the voluntary actor?*	
Reflecting on the instrumental	**Reflecting on the collective**	**In Detail**
A search for meaning Life as a becoming The dialectic between the individual and the social environment An existential orientation	The integrity of self Analytical /intuitive approaches The patterning of life stages The socio-conceptual context The socio-structural context Aspects of the dialectic - as a personal process - the functioning of the process - creativity in the process	- Self-awareness - Other-awareness - Generic-awareness - Self-awareness as generic awareness - The individual as autonomous being - A metaphysical moral frame - The equal value of each - Personal choice as a moral imperative - In experience and action - In conceptualisation - In reflexive narration - In becoming - Creativity of choice - Creativity of the imagination - Creativity of meaning making and communication - Creativity of organisation

Table 7.1 Aspects of the voluntary actor

Section 2 Imaging the Voluntary Actor

From the foregoing analysis of the life-stories as presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 above, an image of the voluntary actor is seen to emerge. We can see the voluntary actor interpreting experience, expressing values, and acting with intent, in a dialectic process of engagement with the socially constructed environment. The nature of this dialectic process between the actor and the environment is such that even if free will and voluntary choice are not possible in the absolute sense, (insofar as we are shaped and influenced by our social environment), free will and agency exist in an experiential sense. Indeed, the very act of interpreting experience can be seen as offering the possibility of free will and individual agency.

The term, *'the voluntary actor'*, has been purposively formulated in this thesis. 'Voluntary' has been chosen as a reference to the concept of experiential freewill. 'Actor' has been selected as a reference to (a) agency, that is acting in society in order to do something intentional, and (b) acting in the creation of the individual self, and acting one's own part on a social stage. The act of choosing is central to this individual enterprise of self-creation. If one does things at random it is not an act of choice. Hence, choice is intentional and it implies a comparative evaluation. In choosing to do an action, as opposed to any alternative, one implicitly or explicitly attributes value to that action over the other. By their actions, voluntary actors attribute a value system and take individual responsibility for that. By their actions, voluntary actors create differentiation and in creating differentiation create meaning. In other words, voluntary actors create meaning through their action and whatever meaning they attribute to that action. The world, in and of itself, does not have meaning without this. In thus creating a subjective reality, the voluntary actors create meaning in their lives. Meaning is not created in isolation, however, but in relation to others because one's choices are fundamentally about how to relate to other humans, as we saw in chapter 5 above.

Existentialists argue that the individual should constitute their sense-making only within themselves, yet, as we have seen, all these voluntary actors sought their sense-making both internally and externally. That is, they looked to a set of ideals lying beyond themselves. These voluntary actors were both internally and externally influenced therefore (not determined), which suggests that there is a dialectical process at play, as has already been argued above. This emerging image of the voluntary actor

is consistent with the idea of the human condition as being interpretative, of the human and of humankind, and as being relationally interpretative both individually and collectively. That is, the individual interprets his or her experiences and actions in relation to and with his or her environment, and in relation to and with others. Such a perspective contrasts with that of the human as being purely socially determined or of the human as being absolutely free. In other words, the human individual combines aspects of both and, furthermore, negotiates both in the process of being human. Of course, presented in this manner, 'the voluntary actor' is a condition that may be attributed to each and every human.

The term 'voluntary', however, carries another and secondary meaning, in which it is associated with voluntary action, voluntary organising, and the voluntary sector, as more generally conceived. When this secondary meaning of 'voluntary' is also attributed to the term 'voluntary actor' we arrive at a meaning of the term that combines the notions of freewill and of agency, with the notion of sector. The dialectical process at the heart of the formation of the voluntary actor requires both the notion of individual agency and a specific institutional environment that shapes the specific expression of this agency. Viewed in this manner, the voluntary actor represents a particular way in which the existential dilemma of becoming, is resolved within a social context characterised by particular socio-conceptual institutions and particular socio-structural arrangements. And so, it becomes evident that a given social context wherein the notion of the voluntary sector is institutionalised within the socio-cultural, socio-political, and socio-economic frameworks, is a basic requirement for the 'voluntary actor' to emerge.

The image of the voluntary actor that emerges from the analysis of these seven life-stories is complex and dynamic. The image has been unfolded slowly across the forgoing Chapters 5, 6 and 7 in a series of stages of increasing levels of abstraction. In summary the image is composed of:

Similarities a lived experience (Chapter 5, Section 1)
Similarities in the lived experience were seen in the life stories presented in terms of (i) early significant others, (ii) early reflexive experience, (iii) epiphanies, short and long, (iv) the search for work that supports the expression of self, (v) testing of values with experience, (vi) undertaking responsibility, (vii) expressing values organisationally, and

(viii) in the life story, a time to move on. That such similarities emerged among the lived experience of these individuals suggests that there may be a tendency towards particular characteristics in the biography of the voluntary actor.

Common themes through life (Chapter 5, Section 2)

These common themes running through these life-stories were: (i) the search for a work context that supported the expression of self, (ii) the nature of the relationship with self, (iii) the nature of the relationship with others, (iv) the expression of self in action and community, (v) the nature of the relationship with religious belief, (vi) the perspective on living, dying, and the relationship between them, (vii) a spiritual nature, (viii) a search for meaning and for place, and (ix) a view of life as a creative process. This section of the analysis has enabled the identification of a set of possible characteristics of the biography of the voluntary actor that move towards a transcending of time and place and reflect an existential orientation on the part of the individual.

Sense-making through the storying of their lives (Chapter 6, Section 1)

In the context of explaining the logics of an entire life, the act of narration served to articulate a sense-making at a number of levels, *viz;* (i) sense-making in the moment, (ii) making sense of life experience, (iii) making sense of social relationships, (iv) making sense of existence and mortality, and (v) making sense of a place in the universe. In relation to the voluntary actor, it was evident from the storytellers that this capacity to narrate their lives was an essential attribute because such narration is central to the construction of a sensible continuity in life. The storying of a life is central to the capacity to construct a self at the centre of experience. The act of doing so seems an inevitable manifestation of the existentialist orientation.

The development of personalised belief and meaning systems underpinned by shared conceptual elements (Chapter 6, Section 3)

The voluntary actor was found to construct personal belief and meaning systems that made their experiences sensible and served as a guide to their acting in the world by utilising, adapting and synthesising coherence systems present in their social context. Hence, despite the personalised nature of these individually-held belief systems, certain positions were found to be common across all of the personal belief and meaning systems. Specifically, the following were identified: (i) having a radical perspective on social structure, (ii) the idea of moral criteria as a guide for individual choice, (iii) the

notion of self and individual responsibility for actions, (iv) the idea of love as defining human capacity and the prime mode of engagement with others, (v) the notion of life as a development process, and (vi) the individual in communion with others.

The experience of aspects of the existential nature of human condition (Chapter 7, Section 1.2)

The life-stories of these voluntary actors are seen to reflect aspects of the existential nature of the human condition. Three aspects in particular were highlighted. Firstly, they all displayed the experience of life as a search for meaning. Secondly, their stories of their lives were told as journeys of self-realisation or self-creation. Life was experienced as a 'becoming' rather than as a 'being'. Thirdly, life as both a search for meaning and as a personal becoming was experienced as a relationally-based and dialectic process of on-going interpretation and sense-making in a social environment.

Aspects of the relationship between the individual and the social environment characteristic of the voluntary actor (Chapter 7, Section 1.3)

The image of the voluntary actor is characterised by the following emphases and orientations relative to the praxis of this dialectic of interpretation and sense-making in the social environment. These are, firstly, a concern with nurturing and maintaining their personal integrity. Secondly, the use of analytical and intuitive approaches in their reflective engagement with experience. Thirdly, a patterning of stages relative to the development of social awareness. These stages were identified as (i) self-awareness, (ii) other awareness, (iii) generic awareness, and (iv) self-awareness as generic awareness. Fourthly, the orientation towards the dialectic process is framed by concepts of (i) the idea of the individual as an autonomous being, (ii) the idea of a metaphysical moral order, (iii) the equal value of each individual in the light of this moral order, and (iv) personal choice as conditioned by a moral imperative relative to the self and to others. Fifthly, the relationship with the socio-structural environment is characterised by an orientation towards creating change or changed outcomes for individuals. Sixthly, the relationship with the social environment is experienced as an intensely personal one that functions as (i) a dialectic of sense making in experience and action, (ii) a dialectic of sense-making in conceptualisation, (iii) a dialectic of sense-making in a reflexive narration, and (iv) a dialectic of sense-making in becoming. Seventhly and finally, voluntary actors imbue this dialectic relationship with their social environment with a mark degree of creativity. This creativity, which is a

reflection of their agency, finds expression in (i) a creativity of choice, (ii) a creativity of the imagination, (iii) a creativity of meaning-making for self and for others, and (iv) a creativity of organisation.

Across these elements three mains themes are identifiable. These are (i) self-enactment, (ii) social value, and (iii) organisational expression. These elements, identified as formative of the voluntary actor / voluntary action relationship, may be regrouped as:

Self-enactment

The expression of self in action and community
Life as a developmental process
Creativity of sense-making to self
Responsibility to self
Recognition of a time to move on
Moral criteria for individual choice
Dialectic as intensely personal
Making sense of one's life-experience
Making sense of one's existence and mortality
Making sense of one' place in the universe
The dialectic of sense-making in experience and action
The dialectic of sense-making in reflexive narration
The dialectic of sense-making in becoming
The creativity of choice

Self-enactment is seen to be the basic driver of voluntary action. It is essentially concerned with the voluntary actor's continuous active engagement with their social context. The ongoing nature of this self enactment in a dialectic engagement with the social context leads to continuous movement and change. This movement and change is infused with a creativity grounded in the agency of the voluntary actor.

Social value

Radical perspective on social structure
Responsibility to others
Love as the prime mode of engagement
Creativity of meaning-making to others
Making sense of one's social relations

The dialectic of sense-making in conceptualisation

The creativity of the imagination

A concern with the delivery of social value is central to the nature of the personal orientation that informs the direction of the self-enactment of the voluntary actor. This orientation also finds expression in the creation of meaning for the self and for others relative to the perception of social value.

Organisational expression

Search for work that supports the expression of self

The undertaking of responsibility

Giving organisational expression to values enactment

The creativity of meaning making for self and for others

The creativity of organising

The personal need to find a social space consistent with their values attracts the voluntary actor to engagement within the value-driven space that is the voluntary sector. A personal determination to have social impact and to create social change draws the voluntary actor into organisationally based activity, as organisations offer the necessary degree of scale and functionality to generate the desire impact and change. Such organisations may exist within the individual's environment or he or she may choose to found and lead an organisation. In this organisational context, the capacity to give organisational expression to values is creative in nature; that is, personal belief and meaning systems are used to shape and drive organisational processes and ends.

The image of the voluntary actor that emerges from this research is a complex and dynamic one, involving the range of attributes identified above. For ease of presentation, however, the key attributes may be shortened to those of an existentialist concern with self-enactment, an orientation towards social value, and a capacity for organisational expression. Given this, a working descriptor of the voluntary actor may be proposed.

The voluntary actor is an individual who, in a process of existential self-enactment, gives organisational expression to his / her personal orientation to the creation of social value.

Existentialist concern with self-enactment	An orientation to social value	Capacity for organisational expression
• The expression of self in action and community • Life as a developmental process • Creativity of sense-making to self • Responsibility to self • Recognition of a time to move on • Moral criteria for individual choice • Dialectic as intensely personal • Making sense of one's life-experience • Making sense of one's existence and mortality • Making sense of one's place in the universe • Dialectic of sense-making in experience and action • Dialectic of sense-making in reflexive narration • Dialectic of sense-making in becoming • Creativity of choice	• Radical perspective on social structure • Responsibility to others • Love as the prime mode of engagement • Creativity of meaning-making to others • Making sense of one's social relations • Dialectic of sense-making in conceptualisation • Creativity of the imagination	• Search for work that supports an expression of self • The undertaking of responsibility • Giving organisational expression to values enactment • Creativity of meaning making for self and for others • The creativity of organising

Table 7.2 Imaging the voluntary actor

The elements of this imaging of the voluntary actor, as identified above, are set out in table 7.2.

Now we might pause for reflection and ask ourselves how then might this image of the voluntary actor relate to the present literature on voluntary action studies? Can the voluntary actor, as conceived herein, have any place within such a literature, which I noted in chapter two was functional in its orientation? In the next chapter we turn our attention back to this literature and seek to reframe it relative to this image of the voluntary actor.

Section 3 Critiques of the image of the voluntary actor

Apart from the epistemological difficulties which are integral to work in the interpretative paradigm as noted variously above, there are two obvious critiques which may be directed at where this discussion of the voluntary actor has now arrived. They need to be considered before the discussion may move on.

The first relates to the position of the researcher relative to the interpretation of the voluntary actor. Put succinctly, it may be argued that image of the voluntary actor is a product of the experience of the researcher rather than the respondents, that a type of 'over-interpretation' of the respondents experience. At its most extreme this view might argue that the researcher has set out to illustrate his own pre-existing conceptions.

To a great extent this is a judgement call to be made by the reader. However, in reaching that judgement I would remind the reader that no attempt has been made to disguise the hand of the researcher, rather some care has been taken to highlight the researcher's subjective involvement in the interpretation. Specifically I would note the following:

- The collaborative and ontological nature of the research has been consistently explicated (Chapters 3 and 4).
- The social constructionist rather than a naturalistic approach to the interviews has been identified (Chapter 4, Section 1.3).

- The scope and limits of the collaboration in the interpretation have been discussed (Chapter 4, Section 1.4).
- Pertinent aspects of the researcher's own life experience have been identified (Chapter 4, Section 1.5).
- The image of the voluntary actor as presented above has moved considerably from the absolute freedom enjoined by the existential model of the human condition adopted as a starting point for this interpretative journey (Chapter 2, Section 6.3).

Rather than an 'over-interpretation' having taken place, in which the resultant image of the voluntary actor is a product of the researcher's rather than the respondent's experience, I would argue that an alternative position might be proposed. Firstly, that the interpretation is a product of the collaborative experience of the researcher and the respondents. Secondly, that in this collaboration, the researcher's experience places him in a position to recognise the underlying themes and patterns across the respondent's life-stories. The researcher's experience support the analytical process as it moved beyond the individual narratives. In a method where the researcher becomes the chief tool of research rather than the wielder of a research instrument, this reliance on the experience will always be central to the effectiveness of the tool. Of course this identity between the researcher and the research instrument is one reason why such research is ultimate irreproducible.

The second critique revolves around the choice of respondents and the articulation of a generalised interpretation on this basis. The reasoning behind the choice of these respondents has been rehearsed already (Chapter 4, Section). There are a number of possible objections to any claim for transferability of these findings. Firstly, insofar as these respondents are 'exceptional' it is not at all clear in what manner they are exceptional. Are they exceptional in terms of intensity, that is, displaying characteristics to a marked degree which are held by a wider population? Or, are they exceptional in a distinct degree, that is, display characteristics which are particular to a specific and narrow population. Secondly, to what extend do the interpretations of these actors hold across the course of their lives. Indeed the very argument for the experience and interpretation of life as a self- realisation process implies that their interpretations would change over their lives. Thirdly, do the interpretations of these respondents hold across their performance of specific organisational functions. The

research method, by virtue of its whole life framing of the question did not support an investigation of this. Although I have argued that such a framing reflects the paradigmatic positioning of the research, at least one of the respondents seemed more comfortable in separating work and non-work life in making an interpretation. Fourthly, it should be note that the respondents were all active in the social and human sub-sectors of the non-profit sector. So, are the findings relevant outside of these sub-sectors, or, is there a type of value-driven action that is specific or particular to these sub-sectors. Fifthly, the respondents shared generational and contextual attributes which may combine to shape them as a cohort with particular characteristics. This last point is of particular interest to me as its goes to the heart of the question of the dynamic of dialectic. For the most part the social and cultural environment has been an acknowledged but unexplored presence in this research. Uncovering the contextual specifics and identifying their part in shaping the trajectory and outcome of the dialectic presents a separate research challenge. However, even a cursory consideration of a) the ongoing social reassessment of values in the Ireland in which these respondents have lived their lives, and b) the variation in the structure and concerns of sectors of voluntary action between national contexts, suggests that the socio-structural side of the dialectic dynamic merits substantial attention. Such questions serve not to discount the interpretation arrived at in this exploratory research but rather act as a prompt to further inquiry.

Chapter 8 Reframing the Literature

Introduction

The research question entered into in this dissertation was composed of two elements. Firstly, what is the nature of the voluntary actor, and secondly, what is the nature of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action in society. The first element of this question has been answered through the cumulative analysis detailed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, and synopsised in Chapter 7, Section 3. The second element of the question has been answered in part within the same analysis, for the reason that the relationship of the voluntary actor to voluntary action is, by necessity, a function of the nature of the voluntary actor. Thus, by analysing the nature of the voluntary actor, central aspects of his/her relationship with voluntary action are also identified. However, in the analysis presented up to this point the nature of this relationship has not been examined specifically. That examination is undertaken in this chapter, and is presented in three sections. Section 1.1 reviews the degree to which the description of the voluntary actor, proposed at the end of Chapter 7, reflects aspects of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. Section 1.2 explores the formation and influence of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action. Section 2 examines how this analysis enables a re-thinking of aspects of the functional literature on voluntary action so as to provide additional insights. Section 3 proposes a reframing of the voluntary action literature so as to provide the space for an interpretative stream within this literature. The section concludes with a consideration of some of the research directions such an interpretative stream might take.

Section 1 Voluntary Actors and Voluntary Action

1.1 The voluntary actor

At the end of Chapter 7 the following descriptor of the voluntary actor was proposed:

> **The voluntary actor is an individual who, in a process of existential self-enactment, gives organisational expression to his/her personal orientation to the creation of social value.**

As detailed then in Chapter 7, this descriptor is focused on the core attributes of a perspective on the voluntary actor that is complex and detailed. While it is not proposed to re-state this detail here, the degree to which this fuller description is consistent with elements of the voluntary action literature will be outlined in the following section. Eleven points from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, that are reflective of the image of the voluntary actor that has been developed in this research, are noted below.

1. The image of the voluntary actor is consistent with both the collective and the reflexive styles of volunteering identified by Hustinx and Lammertyn (2003). They found the motivation to collective volunteering as being rooted in a personal responsibility to the community. This motivation has been identified in the personal perspective of the storytellers in this research and noted as *the expression of self in action and in community* (see Chapter 5, Section 2.4). Further, they noted that reflexive volunteering is identified with the 'permanent self-monitoring of individual life narratives (*Ibid.* p. 169) and that such a 'self-reflexive biographical quest becomes the driving force for primarily self-centred volunteering attitudes' (*Ibid.* p.173). This orientation to the biographical quest has been the defining dynamic identified in the foregoing analysis of these life-stories. This orientation could be seen in *the nature of the relationship with self,* (Chapter 5, Section 2.2) and in *life as a self-creative process and a journey of self-realisation,* (Chapter 5, Section 2.9).
2. The reflexive orientation and a concern with the integrity between individual identity and values enactment, identified in this analysis, is consistent with the findings of Hailey and James (2004) relative to nonprofit leadership. This could be seen in *personalised belief and meaning systems,* (Chapter 6, Section 2.1) and also in *the search for work that supports an expression of self* (Chapter 5, Section 1.4) .
3. The image of the voluntary actor, with its perceptions of a common humanity and of action flowing from a need to be true to the self, is consistent with Munroe's (1996) articulation of 'the altruistic perspective'. We could see this in *the nature of the relationship with the 'other'* (Chapter 5, Section 2.3), and in the requirement for maintaining an integrity with the self in *the nature of the relationship with the 'self'* (Chapter 5, Section 2.2).

4. The agency theme in the image of the voluntary actor is consistent with the investigation by McDonald and Warburton (2003) into volunteers as agents of institutional change. This was evident in *a willingness to undertake personal responsibility for making change happen* (Chapter 6, Section 1.6) and in *an ability to give organisational expression to the enactment of values* (Chapter 6, Section 1.7).

5. The importance of the capacity for empathy on the part of the voluntary actor that was identified in this research is consistent with support given by Batson and Oleson (1991) to the empathy-altruism hypothesis for pro-social behaviour. I found this in the storytellers' *capacity for empathy* (Chapter 5, Section 2.1).

6. The image of the voluntary actor that I have constructed is consistent with Story's (1992) view of volunteering as an expression of self-actualisation. This can be seen in *the expression of self in action and in communion* (Chapter 5, Section 2.4).

7. From a functional perspective, Clary, Synder and Ridge's (1992) identification of the functions of volunteering as including those of acting on personal beliefs, of seeking self-esteem, and of seeking self-protection from feelings of negativity about oneself, are consistent with the findings from this research. This was seen above in *the nature of the relationship with the 'self'* (Chapter 5, Section 2.2).

8. The capacity of the story-tellers to move on in their lives and to walk away from organisations they had built or transformed can be seen as consistent with Maslow's (1971) description of 'self-actualizing individuals'. Such individuals adhere to particular tasks because those tasks embody the values they, as individuals, hold. Since it is these values rather than the tasks that are loved, it is possible for them to move to other tasks that they deem to embody similar values. This could be seen in *the recognition of a time to move on* (Chapter 5, Section 1.8).

9. The concern shown by the storytellers is consistent with the moral choice aspects of existential philosophy as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 6.3. For example, this could be seen in *the idea of moral difference as a criterion for individual choice* (Chapter 6, Section 3.3.2).

10. The manner in which all the storytellers experienced personal responsibility for their choices and actions is consistent with the philosophical notion of experiential freewill, as outlined in Chapter 2, Section 6.3.
11. The image of the voluntary actor as constructed in this thesis is consistent with the nominalist, anti-positivist and voluntarist framework of interpretative sociology as outlined in Chapter 3, Section 1.
12. The identification of and emphasis on a dialectical process of social construction is consistent with the sociological theory of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann as referenced in Chapter 2, Sections 6.1 and 6.2.

The image of the voluntary actor as explicated in Chapter 7 and their relationship to voluntary action are offered as the main conceptual contributions of this dissertation. What emerges from these life-stories is a reflection of the individual as participant in voluntary action which is complex, multi-faceted and closely attuned to the subjective perception and expression of self. As such it is in contrast to the functional analysis which objectifies the individual as volunteer, staff member, board member or donor. From a subjective perspective the specific functional status of the individual in the organisation is of limited concern. The extent to which the image of the voluntary actor reflects aspects of the literature as noted above suggests that the image does not represent a radical departure from but rather builds on existing themes in the literature. And to an important degree this is undoubtedly the case and these links constitution one argument that this image has a claim to consideration.

However, I would argue also that, in terms of scope and detail, the image of the voluntary actor, as outlined in this dissertation, is substantially more developed and fleshed out that what is present in the literature. In other words, it moves substantially beyond extant views of the complexity of the individual in relation to voluntary action. As such, the image also constitutes a radical departure, for whereas the extant literature identifies individual complexity, it does so while holding, in the greater part, to the determining agency of institutions and thus diminishes the import of individual complexity. In contrast, the image of the voluntary actor being espoused in this dissertation moves to challenge the balance of this relationship and emphasise the agency of the individual in interaction with the complexity of the institutions. In doing so it argues for the importance of understanding the role of the value or meaning dimension in the action of individuals. So, not only does it argue for a re-assessment of

the point of balance between the individual and structure in relation to voluntary action but it also posits a rationale of individual action which is focused on existential sense-making rather than rather than a rational self-maximisation in a market context. The conceptualisation of the individual and of the individual's relationship to voluntary action is thus enriched. Further, I would argue that the image is rich enough to facilitate a consideration of the question of voluntary action by placing the image at the starting point of the analysis. What is called for is a re-envisioning or a re-imaging of the role of the individual and of the importance of the values dimension in the conceptualisation of voluntary action. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with taking this image and illustrating how it can usefully inform and stretch some of the conceptualisations present in the literature. For this purpose elements of both the background theory (Chapter 2, Section 2) and the focal theory (Chapter 2, Section 3) are considered. The point in doing so is to emphasise the claim of value and legitimacy being made on behalf of the image of the voluntary actor and illustrating its value in opening up new perspectives on basic conceptual units in the literature. It is to such an analysis that I now turn.

1.2 Voluntary action

In this section the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action is explored. In Chapter 7 above, the three conditions of self-enactment, social value and organised action, were identified as core to the voluntary actor. What is not picked up in these three conditions is the voluntary actor's relationship to the social environment and the manner in which it both acts as the foil to the individual in the dialectic process of social construction and also serves to establish the context within which voluntary action is supported and enabled. Aspects of this socio-conceptual and socio-structural environment have been explored already in Chapter 7, sections 1.3.4 and 1.3.5 above. Of course, the socio-conceptual and socio-structural environments are inextricably linked and mutually informing. It may be noted in that Social Origins Theory (Salamon and Anheier 1998) is strongly oriented towards the socio-structural environment and Hall's view of the nonprofit sector in the United States as

> 'originating 'under a particular combination of ideological, political, social and economic conditions which are in turn, the products of a unique set of historical experiences' (1987, p. 3)

combines both socio-structural and socio-conceptual elements. Nonetheless direct attention to the impact of the specifics of the socio-conceptual and socio-structural factors in comparative international settings is limited in the literature, in general.

When the socio-conceptual and socio-structural environment are added as a necessary condition for voluntary action, a four element model of the formation of voluntary action in society can be seen. These four elements are:

1. self-enactment in social dialectic
2. a personal orientation to social value
3. organised action
4. a context legitimating and enabling of social value and of nonprofit organising

Taking these elements together, a four-part interpretative hypothesis of voluntary action may be proposed, such that:

> **voluntary action in society arises from the individual's existential impulse to self-enactment, developed in a dialectic relationship with the social environment, directed towards organised action for social ends, and carried out within an institutional context that itself recognises and legitimates such organising and such social ends.**

If voluntary action arises in this manner, how might it function at the level of the organisation and the sector. In other words, how does this process work through the system from individual to organisation to sector?

Adopting such a proposition places the combination of the self-enacting individual, in a dialectic process with their social environment, as the agent of voluntary action and the social and institutional structure as the shaper of the institutional outcomes of this action.

The voluntary organisation then is positioned as an outcome of the functioning of these relationships. Voluntary organisations are positioned as an expression of a collective enactment held by a degree of value consensus. They are made possible by shared values and an agreed view of how to act in the pursuit of social ends relative to these values.

The voluntary sector then becomes understood as both (i) the field of such organisations and as (ii) a space for organising the expression of such collective values, that is, the civic space of civil society, or Marshal's (1996) marketplace for values. Thus, the interpretative hypothesis of voluntary action, as proposed above, is seen to allow for both the nonprofit organisation and the civil society paradigms, as identified by Lyons, Wijkström and Clary (1998), within the voluntary action literature. The dialectic, iterative and integrated functioning of these relationships between the individual, the organisation and the sector, may be represented graphically as in Figure 8.1 overleaf.

In the section that follows, 'Rethinking Aspects of the Functional Literature', these relationships between the individual, the organisation, and the sector are explored in more detail.

Section 2 Rethinking Aspects of the Functional Literature

The functional literature on voluntary action was reviewed in Chapter 2 and critiqued for its failure to address the question of human agency relative to voluntary action. In the literature, a type of reductionism evidences this failure, so that conceptualisations of the voluntary individual, the voluntary organisation, and the voluntary sector are objectified and functionally schematised. Thus voluntary individuals become objectified as volunteers, association members, organisation staff, board members, donors, etc.; voluntary organisations become categorised by INCPO classification, sources of income, type of governance, or other functional characteristic; and national sectors are distinguished according to the structure of the political system. My ultimate criticism of the functional reductionism in the literature is its failure to produce a theory of voluntary action that integrates analyses at the level of the individual, the organisation, and the sector. In this section the image of the voluntary actor as detailed in Chapter 7, Section 2, combined with the hypotheses on voluntary action proposed in Section 1 above, are used to rethink aspects of the literature at the level of the individual, the organisation, and the sector. Firstly, the notions of the 'volunteer' and of the 'social entrepreneur' are examined; secondly, voluntary organising is re-conceptualised; and thirdly, the idea of the sector is revisited.

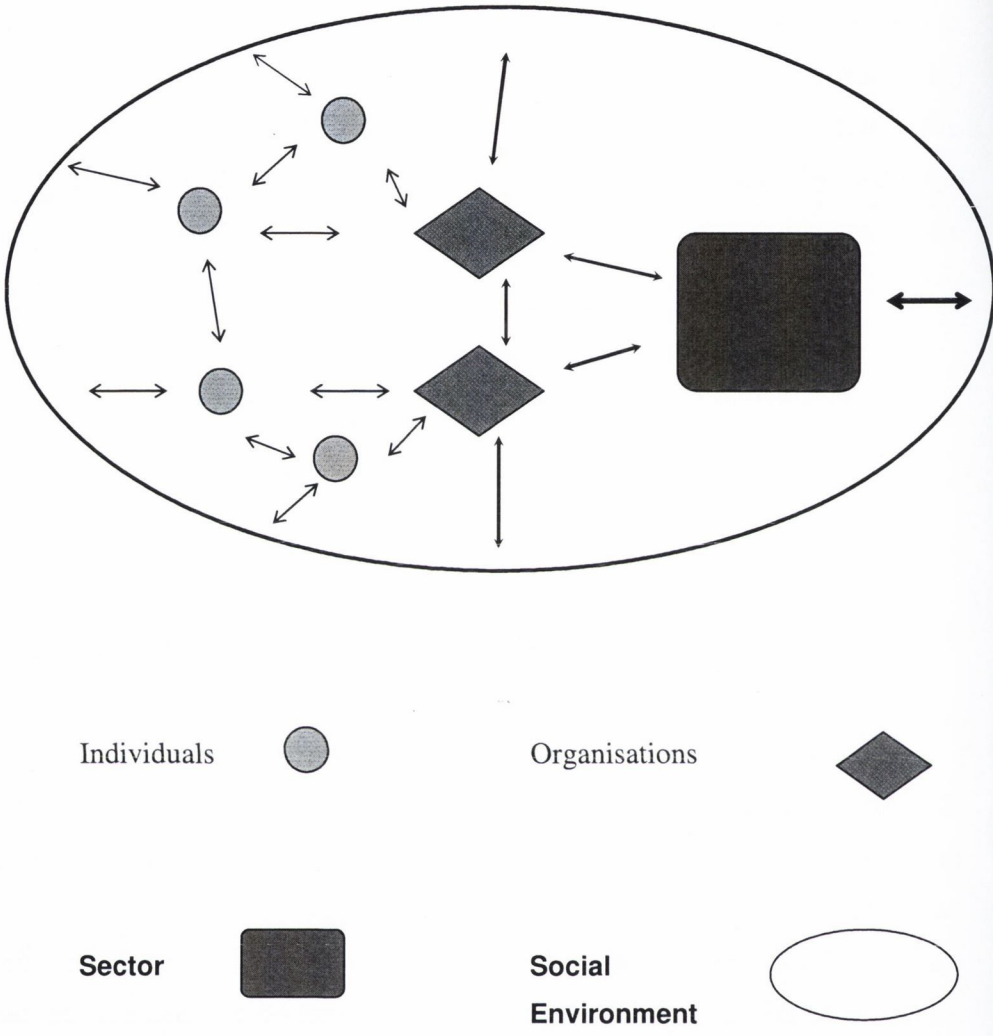

Figure 8.1 Actor / Organisation / Sector relationships

2.1 Imaging individual voluntary action

How might the image of the voluntary actor, as set out in Chapter 7, Section 2, influence our understanding of the nature of voluntary action at the level of the individual? Specifically, two conceptualisations found in the functional literature, which are useful for our analysis, that of the volunteer and that of the social entrepreneur, may be reconsidered.

2.1.1 The 'volunteer'

The life-stories in this dissertation have illustrated individuals who have acted on a voluntary basis, either in setting up voluntary organisations or in formal volunteering for voluntary organisations. These life-stories have also shown us examples of individuals who, although holding salaried positions, are conscious of specifically choosing to work in nonprofit organisations and who perceive a vocational as well as professional aspect to their work. The distinction, if any meaningful distinction exists, between the personal interpretations of the 'volunteers' and the 'staff', is not at all clear. Indeed, in the examples of Eithne Frost, Sean Love, and Catherine Hickey, individuals were seen to have filled both 'volunteer' and 'staff' roles at different times. Financial remuneration does not seem to be a driving element in choosing to pursue a specific course of action. Rather, the presence of financial remuneration is the element that enabled the pursuit of the course of action in a full-time mode. Financial remuneration is a facilitating rather than a driving factor; it is a means rather than an end in itself. For example, Sean and Eithne moved to salaried executive roles in Amnesty International and the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association respectively, after having served as board members. Similarly, Ann Louise noted how her academic career provided her with the financial security and work-time flexibility to enable her to undertake her work with the Shanty Education Project.

However, the apparent irrelevance of financial remuneration in explaining the nature of volunteering in these cases is problematic if we adopt the functional approach to the definition of volunteering (Darvill and Mundy 1984, Clary *et al.* 1991, Cnaan *et al.* 1996, Govaart, Van Daal, Munz, and Keesom 2001). For functionalists, the absence of remuneration (apart from associated expenses) is cited as one of several defining characteristics of volunteering. Further, to judge from the findings of Handy *et al.*

(2000) it appears that the absence of financial remuneration is a key consideration in the social construction of who is considered more or less of a volunteer. How may these apparent contradictions, between the lived lives of these narrators and the functional understanding of the term 'volunteer', be reconciled? Or are such contradictions to be expected when functionalist and interpretative perspectives are brought together? Such contradictions may be more apparent than real however. If we consider the functional perspective, it may be understood as seeking a set of objective criteria by which an observer may identify the presence or absence of a volunteer. On the other hand, the interpretative perspective seeks a subjective understanding of how an individual conceives of their own actions. In the first, the functionalist perspective, the observer seeks external manifestations of an intention and lack of remuneration seems to be used as a proxy for other-directed behaviour. In the second, the interpretative perspective, the internalised intention of the actor is sought. Rather than being viewed as diametrically opposed, these two perspectives may be deemed as the two faces of the same coin; such that a functional perspective seeks an explanation from a point external to the volunteer, while an interpretative perspective seeks an explanation from a point internal to the volunteer. Both are concerned with identifying an action, or more properly, the meaning of an action, one through the objectification of the actor, the other through the subjectification of the act, by uncovering the meanings of the actor. Viewed in this manner, the net-cost approach is seen as a measurement of respondents' calculation of the subjective internal intent of an action via the use of external and objective proxies.

The definitional problem remains however. From a functional perspective, the observer, searching for criteria that will serve as proxies for an other's motivation and intention, or criteria by which the attribution of 'altruism' on the part of an other may be judged, reaches for the universal unit of marketable value. Does the resort to this approach reflect anything other than the difficulty, if not the epistemological impossibility of knowing an other? On the other hand, an interpretative perspective does not define who is or is not a volunteer but seeks to understand the nature of 'volunteering action'. Rather than objectifying volunteering in order to facilitate enumeration, it seeks to interpret a type of human action.

The image of the voluntary actor proposed above identifies a type of human action that may take place in multiple domains and in multiple forms. Perhaps this is why some of

the narrators found the nomenclature I used to describe the sector relatively 'meaningless'. They saw their actions not as a context specific human action (volunteering) but as a generic human behaviour; they saw themselves as enacting 'being human' rather than as a human being acting in a specific and socially prescribed manner. It is as if, for them, voluntary action was consistent with self-actualisation in an experience/sense-making dialectic and therefore was indivisible from the human condition. Volunteering action can then be placed within the academic literature as a self-enactment activity within a specific social-cultural structural and formal organisational context.

To conceptualise the 'volunteer' and the act of 'volunteering' in this manner, it is necessary to identify the meaning attributed to such action both by the individual as well as by social structures and institutions. Only in so doing do we remove the limitations to our understanding of the action placed on us by the institutional specification of the term 'volunteer' as an object. From the social constructionist perspective of this dissertation, a fuller understanding of the volunteer and of volunteering is developed that combines both sides of the dialectic, that is, the individual, personal side of self-enactment, and the structural, institutional side of volunteering in a formal, organisational and institutional setting. From this perspective, a descriptor of volunteering may be proposed such that:

> **Volunteering may be described as social action in which an individual undertakes, within a formal organisational setting, a set of activities which is expressive of their own social values.**

2.1.2 The 'social entrepreneur'

A number of different understandings of the idea of social entrepreneur were examined in Chapter 2. The concept remains contested (Mair *et al.* 2006). If we utilise the image of the voluntary actor, as detailed above, we can move the discussion, from being overly concerned with the activities of entrepreneurial practice, to a consideration of (a) the ends of those activities, and (b) the social context of those activities. Thus, the central concern in understanding the social entrepreneur moves from one of examining business activity for nonprofit ends, to examining activities concerned with values, sense and meaning-making in a social and organisational context, towards social value ends. If we posit sense-making within a values framework rather than

within a framework of 'profit', we can see social entrepreneurial activity as positioned in a social context and having a social end. In this instance we attribute 'social' to mean not merely the location of the action but also the way in which the social context is understood in social value terms. In other words, the social entrepreneur is concerned with reconfiguring the social value understandings of a collective or group so as to provide for the establishment and resourcing of a new social value organisation. The organisation must be made meaningful to a sufficient number of individuals or institutions, to ensure its resourcing. Given this, the task becomes one of generating sensible and acceptable meanings of a particular need and the related organisational response across a sufficiently broad constituency to provide the required resourcing of the organisation. In the context of a voluntary organisation, such meaningfulness cannot be framed by the concept of profit, or of public agency, and so must rest, to a greater or lesser degree, on the meaning attribution of individuals and agencies in the organisation's environment.

The interpretative image of the voluntary actor is consistent with a conceptualisation of social entrepreneurship that focuses attention on entrepreneurial action directed towards the achievement of meaning enactment. If meaning is created by a logic and consistency in values and enactment, then adopting this approach allows us to focus on the way in which meaning, created for others, enables the resource (human and financial) procurement which is required for organisational action. Insofar as the social entrepreneur is acting through organising, he or she generates an important bridging point between voluntary action at the individual and the organisation level. Sense-making in this organisational context, therefore, may be seen as an exercise in social meaning making, because it is expressly directed at others and is concerned with influencing them to act positively towards the organisation and the values it purports to be enacting.

This discussion of social entrepreneurs moves the focus from the supply side concerns of James (1987) and the organisational concerns of Mair, Robinson and Hockerts (2006) to the domain of the individual as actor. It creates a very specific focus to the individual capacity to create meaning, that is, to be entrepreneurial with social meaning and to harness that meaning to organisational action. Social entrepreneurship is therefore not merely a question of organisation, but is firstly and indeed primarily a

question of social meaning. From this perspective, a descriptor of the social entrepreneur may be proposed such that:

> **A social entrepreneur is one who, through social meaning making, influences and harnesses the social values and understanding of others, to create organised action to social ends.**

One of the particular strengths of this interpretative perspective on the social entrepreneur is that it offers a theory of the social entrepreneur that not only explains what the social entrepreneur is doing but also why the social entrepreneur is doing it. While this approach may be critiqued for conflating the conceptualisation of the voluntary actor and the social entrepreneur, I would argue that, on the contrary, this is its strength. For the distinctiveness of the social entrepreneur lies in the degree of leadership, risk taking, communicative capacity and organisational ability displayed, rather than these being seen as absolutely distinctive characteristics held solely by the social entrepreneur.

In Chapter 7, Section 1.3.2, it was noted that two approaches to the interrogation of experience, relative to personally held belief and meaning systems, were adopted by the life-storytellers in this research. I labelled these approaches the analytical and the intuitive approaches. If we are to consider the possible effects of adopting one or the other modes of interrogating experience, then an individual capacity to articulate and express a rich and flexible meaning may have consequences for the organisation. Mindful that the ability to give organisational expression to one's meaning system has already been identified as an underlying characteristic of these narrators (see Chapter 5, Section 2.7), it may be asked to what extent does an analytical or intuitive approach influence this ability? On first consideration it may be suggested that an analytical approach, by enabling a fuller and clearer articulation, supports the communication of meaning to others and thus facilitates the drive to organisational enactment. This is not to suggest that the intuitive approach may not be found in individuals who actively establish organisations but rather that they are unlikely to be in a position to equip the organisation with a distinctive and empowering meaning system. However, it may also be the case that the use of an analytical or intuitive approach simply serves to support the development of distinct organisational cultures which appeal to different potential support constituencies. Nevertheless, it may be that in those who pursue an analytical

approach, such as that which leads to the development of an evolved social critique allied to a personal belief system, there remains a tendency towards the establishment of an organisation to give the belief system expression, if partly because those voluntary actors have difficulty in finding an extant organisational home for their values enactment.

As the particular characteristics of the organisational involvement of the storytellers did not form part of this research, it is not possible to move beyond mere conjecture on this point. However, it may be asked if the orientation towards an analytical approach displayed by Ann Louise, Pat, Patricia and Fergus is related to their respective involvement in the establishment of the Shanty Education Project, Open Heart House, Meitheal, and the articulated defence of the independence of The Adelaide Hospital? Similarly, is the intuitive orientation displayed by Sean, Catherine and Eithne related to their respective involvement in the establishment of the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association, the development of Amnesty International, the Centre for Independent Living, Muscular Dystrophy Ireland, and the Free Legal Advice Centres?

2.2 Imaging voluntary organising

In this section an inductive approach is used to move from the consideration of action at the level of the individual to the consideration of action at the level of the organisation. From an interpretative position, a logical consistency is best maintained between action at an individual level and action at an organisational level via a consideration of the action of individuals within and without organisations rather than some kind of anthropomorphic conceptualisation of organisations as actors in themselves. Given this position, this section sets out an examination of aspects of voluntary organisation and related management theory by positioning the image of the voluntary actor as an underlying element in conceiving of, or in theorising on, voluntary organising. This leads to making a number of observations regarding voluntary organising that are explored below. Firstly, the question of the definition of voluntary organisation, previously addressed in Chapter 2, is revisited. Secondly, voluntary organising is conceptualised as 'collective values enactment' and this is utilised to link to generic concepts of resource dependency and institutionalisation as found in organisation theory. Thirdly, the management challenges of the requirement for values enactment consistency in voluntary organising is explored. By doing so, a

voluntary organisation is seen not as an actor in and of itself, but as a collection of actors and as the organised expression of these actors.

2.2.1 The problem of definition

The problem of defining voluntary or nonprofit organisations was explored in Chapter 2. As noted then, of particular concern was the tautological approach to an explanation of the meaning of 'voluntary' as utilised in the structural-operational definition. In that definition, as developed for the Johns Hopkins International Comparative Sector Project, nonprofit organisations were defined by five characteristics, one of which was:

> '*Voluntary*, i.e. membership in them is not legally required and they attract some level of voluntary contribution of time and money' (Salamon, Anheier and Associates 1999, p.4).

If we utilise an interpretative perspective on voluntary action, the voluntary provision of time, services, goods or money may be understood as expressions of, or symptomatic of, a dialectic enactment on the part of the individual. As such, the gifts themselves are at best proxies for a set of subjectivities that we can label 'voluntary'. Recognising that this is the case, we can still use the structural-operational definition but re-phrase the wording of the 'voluntary' characteristic. By emphasising the voluntary enactment perspective on voluntary organising, my criticism of the structural-operational definition for its failure to articulate a sensible meaning for 'voluntary' can be resolved by the development of a structural-operational-expressive definition. The following alternative articulation of 'voluntary' is proposed:

> ***Voluntary:*** **The organisation is resourced, to some degree, by private actions that express the personal commitment of these individuals to the articulated values and ends of the organisation.**

2.2.2 Voluntary organising as values enactment

The proposal to reject an anthropomorphic conceptualisation of organisations as actors in their own right may seem a type of existentialist inspired anti-organisationalism. That is, it may seem based on a view of organisations as constraining individual choice and as instruments of normative enforcement. However, by placing the individual and individual enactment at the centre of the discourse, organising can be seen as a tool and

organisations, therefore, as outcomes of social enactment. Taking such a perspective, it can be seen that the voluntary organisation offers a specific context for values enactment. This is perhaps easiest to illustrate in the case of a start-up service-oriented organisation. An individual or group identifies some issue or need in relation to which it wishes to act. Such action is not baseless but is grounded in an understanding or interpretation of some set of values. The resulting organisation presents its case to wider society for support on the basis of action towards meeting a need, and that action can be seen to originate in a particular set of values. The interpretation of these values shapes the particular approach to meeting the stated need, therefore. As the organisation grows, a network of relationships develops sharing, to varying levels, a degree of common interpretation of values and sense-making through these values. This network includes the organisation's governance, staff, volunteers, service users and funders as well as the wider community more generally. The organisation is grounded on the interpretation of a value system and the enactment of a set of discrete activities in relation to it. In this context it is worth noting that recent research in Ireland has found that nonprofit organisations describe one of their most important organisational functions as being value expression (Donoghue, Prizeman, O'Regan, and Nöel, 2006).

Obviously, this perspective is most appropriately applied to a 'donative nonprofit' (Hansman 1980), as here the organisation is dependent on receiving resources from entities outside of its control, in order to sustain its activities. Hence, the organisation is dependent on a constant exchange with resource providers, driven by the agreed value system and the specific response of the organisation to particular circumstances in light of an understanding of the imperatives of the value system. There is, if you like, an unspoken 'compact' among the organisation's stakeholders – be they funders, staff, volunteers, or service recipients – based on the interpretation and enactment of values. While typically many voluntary organisations go to some lengths to articulate their underlying values, this compact is not just about articulation but is more concerned with an exchange relationship based on value expression and enactment.

If we interpret the relationship with the task environment as concerned with meaning-making (the interpretation of experience and the attribution of values) and sense-making (actions based on these values) in order to deliver resources to the organisation, then we can examine the way in which the organisation's values and actions are

perceived by actors in its exchange environment. In considering the life-stories of the participants in this research, we find that their personal concern for integrity between values and action in their lives is brought directly to bear on the organisations they choose to become involved with. Their ability to develop and maintain congruence between organisational ends and processes is directly linked to their concerns for personal integrity. In their search for a social space consistent with their values, and for an organisational space wherein they can have an impact relative to their values, we see the process by which their need for self-enactment becomes a creative force in the establishment and development of voluntary organisations. The transfer of this personal concern for the integrity of values and action to the organisational sphere also serves to help these organisations forge the necessary relationships in their task environment that will enable the organisation to attract the human and financial resources required for organisational development. In short, the personal focus and commitment to values enactment of these individuals enables and empowers their leadership in this sector.

By placing the image of the voluntary actor as the basis of voluntary organising and therefore as one of the cornerstones of voluntary organisation theorising, voluntary organisations can be seen as communities of value-based sense-making. That is, they can be seen as communities that derive meaning from, and make sense of values and values enactment. These communities are both internal and external to the formal organisational boundaries. From this perspective, descriptors of voluntary organising and of the voluntary organisation may be proposed such that:

> **Voluntary organising may be described as a process of collective values enactment, and a voluntary organisation described as the formal structure at the core of a community engaged in collective values enactment.**

Viewing voluntary organising as the operationalisation of a 'values compact' between core stakeholders offers a perspective in which a consideration of the organisation and its external and internal task environment relationship becomes central. We can then reconsider voluntary organising through key concepts and literatures in organisation theory. Specifically, the resource dependency approach (Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976, Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) in contingency theory (Thompson 1967) and the concept of

institutionalisation (Meyer and Rowan 1977) as applied to organisational development (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) can be seen as related to values enactment on the part of stakeholders and other environmental actors.

Interestingly, such a perspective also serves to link these generic organisational theories to the internal as well as the external organisational environment insofar as the maintenance of congruence between values and enactment is of similar importance within the organisation. More specifically, the resource needs of the organisation may be considered in terms of finances and human resources that are supplied by actors in the organisation's task environment. The decisions of these actors to act to sustain the organisation, whether through donations, voluntary effort or, in the case of the organisation's staff, a high level of work-life identification (Basini and Buckley 1999), is grounded in the degree to which the organisation is seen to fulfil the enactment of values important to those actors. In short, the attribution of personally held values to the actions of the organisation results in the increased attribution of legitimacy to the organisation by these actors. Using Suchman's (1995) three-way categorisation of legitimacy into pragmatic, moral and cognitive forms, allows the analysis to consider the institutionalisation of the organisation as action is taken to develop a legitimacy with a wider and more varied group of task environment actors, whether these be individual or agencies (O'Regan, Donnelly-Cox and Hughes 2005).

2.2.3 The challenge of leadership and governance

Imaging voluntary organising as collective values enactment is consistent with the argument for the distinctiveness of 'nonprofit organisations' (O' Neill 1998). Further, it serves to draw attention to the management challenge presented by a core element of that distinctiveness. This image of voluntary organisations as communities of collective values enactment implies that the congruence between values and enactment must be an important management concern in the development of an integrated approach to the management of both external and internal task environment relationships. In the following sub-sections two aspects related to the congruence of values and enactment are considered, namely, the nature of (i) the leadership task, and (ii) the governance role in voluntary organising.

The leadership task

Kay argues that the leadership task in voluntary organisations must be conceptualised as a socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-cognitive process of meaning making. As such, leadership is less about formal authority than about a sense-making capacity, about the ability to generate acceptable interpretations of events and actions. Fostering leadership therefore permeates throughout the whole organisation as sense-making is provided by multiple actors within their relevant organisational spheres (Kay 1996). Insofar as voluntary organisatons are understood as resource dependent (Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976, Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) and involved in an exchange relationship with their task environment then a key element in the exchange process is the creation of acceptable meaning between the organisation and those upon whom it relies for resources. Given this, the leadership task becomes one of generating sensible and acceptable meanings of a particular need and the related organisational response and transmitting these to a sufficiently broad constituency in order to attract the resources required to sustain the organisation.

When we view the leadership function as such a simplified task, the requirement of voluntary organisation leadership seems straightforward enough. In practice, however, the multiple external and internal stakeholders (whether individual or organisational) of a voluntary organisation are themselves not empty vessels waiting to be shaped by organisational leadership but each bring their own values to the relationship. For the relationship to work, some fit or alignment between their values and those of the organisation needs to be established. When disaggregated into its constituent parts, the leadership task therefore is a managerial problem with multiple meanings and many associated tensions. In such a situation organisational action at any level is open to interpretation at multiple levels. In contrast, in a for-profit environment the dominant meaning is clear and singular (profitability). In a voluntary organisation, however, not only may interpretations be multiple but higher levels of work-life identification (Basini and Buckley 1999) may also serve to increase the stakes between the internal players. It becomes ever more important, therefore, that multiple stakeholders are aware of the congruence between ends and process in the organisation, and getting this message across successfully is thus a central part of the leadership challenge. We can suggest that this may be one reason why charismatic leadership is so often exhibited within the field of voluntary organising, primarily because it is required in the generation of that important message.

The practice of governance in voluntary organisations

Inevitably, given the task commonalities, the prescriptive literature on voluntary organisation governance reflects the practice and concerns of corporate and public agency governance generally (Carver 1990, Oster 1995). Indeed, increasingly, this is embedded in admonishments to nonprofits to be more business like. Certainly, core governance duties of fiduciary responsibility and stewardship are common across organisations, irrespective of their sector designation. The question should be, rather, what, if any, difference there is in the voluntary organisation context? While all organisations are grounded in value systems and their actions are shaped by these systems, in a donative voluntary context the organisation is making a moral claim for access to resources. The claim is based on the articulation and interpretation of a value system, its orientation towards specific social phenomena, and the mode of organised enactment directed at it. The organisation's capacity to sustain this moral claim is closely tied to the ongoing perception by its stakeholders of the consistency between the espoused values and the organisational enactment of these.

The governance role in this values' leadership task is both central and problematic. If we argue that the distinctive feature of non-profit governance lies in the values dimension, this dimension must be recognised as inextricably linked to resourcing the organisation because the claim for resources is mission or values based. However, the dynamics of resource dependency within an organisation pose a continual risk of the conflation of mission and organisation (Donnelly-Cox and O'Regan 1999), that is, survival and development of the organisation is conflated with addressing the mission. Given this conflation risk, maintaining clarity about the separation of ends and means and ensuring the integrity of the organisational compact with stakeholders is a core leadership task within the governance function. While this task permeates the organisation in that all stakeholders have an ongoing role in interpretation and enactment, it is the board that is specifically tasked with the formulation of mission and purpose and acts as the point of final accountability for the actions of the organisation (Harris 1996). By adopting an interpretative perspective on voluntary organising and conceptualising it as a form of 'collective values enactment' sustained by the generation and maintenance of integrity between the organisation's espoused values and organisation's actions, the important governance role of ensuring this integrity is highlighted.

2.3 Imaging the voluntary sector

Given the foregoing discussion on the definition of the voluntary organisation, it would appear that the functional idea of the 'sector' as a field of organisations is now seen to rest on a definition of organisation that is problematic in being tautologically based. However, utilising the rewording of the explanation of the 'voluntary' characteristic to state a structural-operational-expressive definition, this problem is avoided and the idea of 'sector' as a field of organisations holds. Further, the insertion of the expression characteristic moves the conceptualisation of sector towards the notion of voluntary action in society, with its openness to shifting boundaries, as proposed by Marshall (1996). Hence the structural-operational-expressive definition provides a basis for the conceptualisation of sector as a field of organisations which serves to link with the civil society paradigm's notion of the sector as space.

When an interpretative image of the voluntary actor is adopted, the individual as an actor in the sector is not objectified as volunteer, board member, staff, donor, or service user. Rather, the individual is conceived of as existing independently of the sector space, but in the process of self-articulation in relation to society, becoming involved in acting in that sector space. By implication of this externality, the actor retains a certain creative freedom from this socially-shaped voluntary sector space and this finds expression in the creativity of meaning making.[41] For example, it may be noted that the interpretations and perspectives of the life-storytellers, both implicitly and explicitly, present radical challenges to the social structures in which they find themselves. They seek social change. Under such circumstances it is difficult to fit their actions and the organisations that they have founded into many of the theories of the sector (Salamon and Anheier 1998), whether they be economic (heterogeneity theory, supply-side theory, trust theory), political science (welfare state theory, interdependence theory), or sociological (social origins theory) theories of the 'third sector', that are essentially concerned with explaining the functioning and maintenance of current structures.

[41] Such a positioning of these individuals serves to support the EU's characterisation of voluntary organisations as ... 'seed bed or 'gene pool' from which future social and other policies may eventually grow but also the political, social and intellectual climate in which change comes to be seen as desirable on a wider scale.' (European Commission 1997: 7.2)

Turning first to economic theories of the sector, these offer an explanation of the economic space inhabited by 'nonprofit' organisations. The nature of the goods provided by these organisations is identified, as are the various 'failures' that drive the demand for these goods. Economic explanations, while rich at the organisational level, are less satisfactory when examined from the individual and sector level. Economic explanations are essentially instrumental in nature, that is, concerned with the production of physical goods and services and not concerned with the expressive function of voluntary action. Notwithstanding this instrumental orientation, however, insofar as such an orientation is understood as originating in an expressive position, economic explanations of the organisational outcome of the expressive function at societal level can be offered, although such explanations focus attention on the symptom rather than the cause. Similarly, economic arguments approach a consideration of the supply of human agency and its value basis in the form of theories of social entrepreneurship and the supply of volunteer or vocational labour (James 1987). However, to the extent that human agency at both individual and societal levels is expressive in nature, economic explanations appear insufficient.

The structural concerns of political and socio-structural theories focus their explanatory power on power relationships between groups in society. Nevertheless, concern with the structuring of the relationship between the individual and the state in political theory does serve to draw attention to the role of sector organisations as mediating institutions between the individual and the state (Berger and Neuhaus 1977). Implicit in such an approach is the utilisation of a more complex model of the individual than that evidenced in economic discourse. However, insofar as the concern remains with the power dynamic in the relationship between groups, the approach is less focussed on the expressive function of the voluntary sector relative to the individual and therefore is not aligned with the interpretative image that is being posited in this thesis.

Theories of the voluntary sector that provide explanations at the level of the organisation or at the level of the socio-political structure fail to account adequately for the impact of individual agency in a social dialectic in relation to voluntary action. In addition these theories fail to take appropriate cognisance of the socio-cultural, socio-moral and socio-structural context, thereby implying that a voluntary sector is a function of specific economic or socio-political conditions. While it is possible to accept that such economic or socio-political conditions may be necessary for the

emergence of voluntary organisations and a voluntary sector, it is difficult to see how, by themselves, they constitute sufficient conditions for the emergence of such structures. As such, the development of a sufficient theory of the sector in its totality remains problematic.

This discussion raises a question about the capacity of current theories of the third sector to offer explanations at the levels of the individual, the organisation and the sector. Any theory is constructed within a paradigmatic and disciplinary framework and thus emphasises particular perspectives and levels of approach to the problematic. It may be argued that the requirement for theoretical sufficiency would suggest that a theory of the sector is needed which offers an approach to explaining the totality of the phenomenon. A challenge for theoretical sufficiency arises as a result. By way of example, the following three queries are proffered:

(i) Does a given theory offer a sufficient explanation of voluntary action at the level of the individual?

(ii) Does a given theory offer a sufficient explanation of organisational establishment in the sector?

(iii) Does a given theory provide an account of the formative function of the socio-conceptual and socio-structural aspects of the environmental context on the structure of a national third sector?

Table 8.1 overleaf has been constructed in order to focus attention on how different disciplines frame their conceptualisation of voluntary action. What is particularly noticeable is the manner in which an interpretative approach differs from the others in terms of the nature and complexity of the individual's relationship with society, the engagement at the level of the individual, the agency and supply-side explanation of the sector and sector organisations, and the capacity to offer an approach that provides a degree of integration between explanations at the level of the individual, the organisation and the sector. I suggest that in contrast to economic and political and socio-structural theories of the sector, an interpretative perspective, grounded in a conceptualisation of the individual as interpreting (sense-making and reflexive) and relational, allows for an explanation of the sector which carries greater integrating explanatory force across the individual, organisational and societal levels. Such an approach enables one to ask why, given the market (economic) and mechanisms (political rights and social structures), do voluntary sector activities arise in human

societies? Posing the question in such a manner takes it beyond the problem of economic space and socio-political structure. Adopting human agency as a starting point serves to characterise the sector as the outcome of an expressive requirement and the shape of this outcome as a function of the environmental conditions of its enactment. Such an explanatory turn takes the discussion back to (i) the nature of human agency (even if such is itself socially constructed and experientially based) (ii) the socially constructed nature and shape of the socio-conceptual and socio-structural systems operational in society (environmental conditions) and (iii) the nature of the dialectic between human agency and these elements.

Section 3 Reframing the literature

A conceptualisation of voluntary action as a specific example of the praxis of a dialectic between a) individual agency and its enactment, and b) social structures and institutions, challenges us to think differently about our understandings of voluntary action at the level of the individual, as a form of organising, and as an action in a social space. If we place this dialectic at the core of our theorising, we are prompted to reach towards a new set of images of voluntary action, voluntary organising and the voluntary sector. The image that emerges from this research of the voluntary actor as interpreting, sense-making, value-expressing, and self-enacting in a dialectical engagement with the socially-constructed environment is different from that offered via a functional perspective for example. Conceptualising both individual action and organised action in the sector in such an interpretative manner challenges us to re-consider voluntary action at the level of the individual, the organisation and society. While at first sight the subjective nature of the image may seem prone to solipsism and therefore have nothing to offer in terms of understandings beyond the individual, the dialectic with the social structure suggests otherwise, in that it moves us away from the consideration of the pure subjectivity of the individual. Thus the image of the voluntary actor proffered in this dissertation provides a starting point for inductively developing an interpretative perspective on voluntary action, nonprofit organising, and the voluntary sector.

A functional perspective tends to lend itself towards an analytical approach that seeks to identify definable units and variables, and to measure the relationship between them.

Discipline	Paradigm	Individual's relationship with society	Level of engagement	Theories	Evidence	Organisation Origins	Explanatory Power	Integrating Power
Political Science	Functional	Structurally determined	Sector	Interdependence Social Origins	Welfare structures	Preferred mechanism Socio-Pol Institutions	Descriptive Descriptive	Low Low
Functional Sociology	Functional	Structurally determined	Sector Group	Social Origins Determinants of volunteering	Welfare structures Surveyed relationships	Social Institutions	Descriptive Predictive	Low Low
Economics	Functional	Self-maximising	Sector and Organisation	Heterogeneity Consumer control Trust theories Supply-side theories	Market evidence	Market Advantage	Descriptive and Predictive	Medium
Organisation Theory	Functional	Self-maximising	Organisation	Resource Dependency Organisational Institutionalism	Field evidence		Descriptive and Predictive	Medium
Interpretative Sociology	Interpretative	Self-enactment via dialectic engagement	Individual	Social Constructionism	Life stories	Collective values enactment	Descriptive	Medium/High

Table 8. 1 Theories of voluntary action in society

Conversely, the interpretative perspective lends itself to an analysis that is discursive in nature, contingent, and suggestive rather than conclusive. Relations are understood as being in constant interplay, where elements are temporary, transitory, and perspectives are a function of the individual actors rather than of group classifications. Some argue that a conversation between the interpretative and functional perspectives may be pointless, without mutual comprehension, indeed impossible, and would become less of a dialogue and more the performance of two monologues in separate orbits (Burrell and Morgan 1979). I would suggest that such exclusivity of perspective is self-limiting. Indeed, having critiqued the functional literature for just such a fault, it would be strange to argue instead for the value of an exclusively interpretative perspective. The multidisciplinary nature of the field of voluntary action studies reflects the scale and scope of the social phenomenon under investigation. This multi-disciplinarity, with all its challenges, is to be welcomed. But, if the field is really to be multi-disciplinary, it must embrace what is perhaps the greater challenge of multi-paradigmatic discourse. I would argue that the field needs to be more open to the development of a discourse in the interpretative paradigm, and in conjunction with this, to support the development of a programme of interpretative research. All this is not to reject the value and legitimacy of the functionalist approach but to suggest that the exploitation of different paradigms offers multiple perspectives that can be overlaid to develop an understanding that is both richer and more encompassing. In the following sub-section I propose some of the directions such a research programme might take.

3.1 Directions for interpretative research

The aim in this chapter has been to consider the relevance of the potential learning from the analysis of these life-stories for an understanding of voluntary action. I have suggested that an interpretative perspective on voluntary activity is not confined to understandings at the level of the individual but that it also supports engagement with concerns at organisational and societal levels. In addition an interpretative perspective grounded in the individual agency and social dialectic offers an approach that can be one route to the integration of conceptualisations at the level of the individual, the organisation, and the sector. Such an approach offers both simplicity and complexity; simplicity in terms of the base point of individual agency in social dialectic; and complexity also in terms of the three-parts of individual agency, value systems, and dialectic; complexity in the contextual richness of the socio-cultural, socio-moral and socio-structural environment.

From the perspective of the individual, the existence of voluntary organising must be explained in terms of individual voluntary acts. Voluntary organisations can be seen to be attempts to rationally structure individual voluntary acts; they are structured tools towards specific ends. They owe their establishment to some founding voluntary act by a human actor or actors. They owe their ongoing existence to their ability to attract a continuous stream of supporting voluntary acts. From this perspective I would argue that the defining characteristic of the organisational field is not so much organisational as individual.

Similarly, from the perspective of the individual, the existence of the voluntary sector must be explained in terms of individual voluntary acts. Such a perspective also serves to identify the sector as expressive of the relationally-interpretative nature of the human condition under the specificities of a given socio-cultural, socio-moral, socio-political and socio-structural environment. This contrasts with the functional idea of the sector as an organisational space within which actors' actions are determined by structurally based relationships in society. Rather, from an interpretative perspective, the sectors expressive function comes to the fore and may be more in line with how voluntary actors themselves view their organisations (Donoghue, Prizeman, O'Regan and Nöel 2006)

3.1.1 Research in relation to individual voluntary action

The interpretative attention to values, engagement, and the understandings held by the individual or group provide a focus on the subjective meaning of individual or group interpretations and actions. Hence, unlike functional perspectives, it does not facilitate the objectification of classifications and the enumeration of categories. Given this focus in the interpretative paradigm, viable directions for interpretative research relative to individual action in the voluntary sector may be concerned with understanding the nature of the relationship between the individual and society that is being expressed via voluntary action. Two aspects in particular are immediately attractive as research questions. The first is the question of the nature and functioning of the dialectic process of experience, interpretation, choice and action with respect to individual action in the voluntary sector. The research undertaken for this thesis indicates that life-story studies in the interpretative paradigm offer one approach to examining this question in a manner that is open to understanding the development of

the individual's 'philanthropic biography' over the course of a life. The second question is that of the specific case of the individual acting in a fashion that is social entrepreneurial in character. Such individuals can be seen as creating meaning in an organisational context for others in society, such that the organisation is sustained by the actions of these others. The manner in which this organisational enactment of values is achieved suggests an interesting research topic. Further, it may be asked if there are particular characteristics of social entrepreneurs, such as the analytical and intuitive approaches to the development of personalised meaning systems, which impact the style and effect of their organisational involvement.

3.1.2 Research in relation to voluntary organising

The conceptualisation of the voluntary organisation as a type of values enactment on the part of a number of individuals serves to draw attention to individual meanings and the subjective intention of individual actions within the organisational setting. As such, the approach avoids the anthropomorphic view that regards the organisation as an actor in its own right. Further, by drawing on theories of resource dependency and institutionalisation, the conceptualisation of voluntary organisations as communities of meaning is extended to the community beyond the formal organisational boundaries and suggests that there is an individual level dynamic within the application of institutionalisation. Finally, the idea of a community of meaning serves to identify a key challenge for leadership and governance involuntary organisations that span multiple audiences within and without the formal organisational structure. The manner in which this community of meaning is constructed and maintained suggests an area of particular attention for future research into voluntary organising. Further, as an extension of this investigation into the organisational dynamics of the formation of communities of meaning, an exploration of how voluntary organisations function as social actors in the maintenance and change of social value systems is also pertinent. In essence this is a question of the sociology of the management of voluntary organising.

3.1.3 Research in relation to the voluntary sector

There remains the problem of theoretical development in relation to voluntary action in society. As argued above, the present literature offers theories that are specific to particular levels of engagement with the phenomenon of voluntary action in society. It is difficult to see how this emerging field of studies can maintain coherence without an understanding of voluntary action that offers an insight into the phenomenon of

voluntary action at the level of the individual, the organisation, and the society. At present, the predominance of a functionalist literature in the field leaves the theoretical understanding of individual voluntary action under-considered. Yet, it may be argued from the research in this thesis, that conceptualisations at the individual level offer an important route to understanding some of the foundational dynamics driving voluntary action. Interpretative research into voluntary action may offer one of the more productive ways of addressing this problem of developing an integration theory of voluntary action in society.

The identification of the theoretical challenge of developing a theory of voluntary action that integrates explanations at the level of the individual, the organisation and the sector, reflects the wider problem in sociological theory of offering a theory that integrates micro, meso, and macro dimensions. Viewed in this light, a theoretical problem apparent in the emerging field of voluntary action studies may offer a contribution to a debate central to the discipline of sociology. At the very least, the field of voluntary action studies, by so centrally juxtaposing the relationship between the individual and society, provides a space wherein this problem may be addressed in a particular light. In this regard, the capacity of research in the interpretative paradigm to place the individual at the very centre of the theoretical challenge is a valuable starting point.

3.1.4 The potential contribution of the narrative study of lives

The world of voluntary organising is full of variety and diversity. In Chapter 7, Section 3 above the unresolved question of whether the respondents in this research were 'exceptional' in terms of relatively distinct aspects of character or experience or in terms aspects expressed or experienced in particular intensity. Or, put more crudely, were they exceptional in terms of quality or of quantity of character or experience. In addition, the human and social service exclusivity of their experience was noted, as were particular generational and contextual (Ireland) aspects. To these considerations may be added many others, such as the fact that the respondents were making sense of their whole life as and from the moment of the interview. It may be that if it were possible to interview them at different points in their life, then their sense-making of that particular time or life-stage might indeed be different from that which they expressed in interview. Hence there is a question of understanding the stages of the biography of the voluntary actor. Similarly, because the respondents were asked to

account for their life in voluntary action in the round, it is not clear if different understandings would have been expressed had they been asked to examine discrete elements of their voluntary activity, such as acting as a board member, as a staff officer, as an organizational volunteer.

The use of a research method for this research based on the narrative study of lives raises the question of the value of the method for the further investigation of voluntary action within an interpretative paradigm. It seems reasonable to argue that for the purposes of exploring the limits of transferability of the findings of this research to voluntary actors in other nonprofit sub-sectors, national contexts or generational cohorts, the method has promise. Indeed it is difficult to see how the development of an interpretative research programme into voluntary action would not count the narrative study of lives within its methods. Despite the fact that the biographical approach implicitly rejects the compartmentalisation of elements of an individual's life I would argue that, in a counter-intuitive manner, the narrative study of lives might also support the development of conceptualisations around such functional categories as board member, staff member, donor and volunteer. For, insofar as narration remains a core mode of human sense-making, then the individual sense-making of institutionalised roles may be articulated and explicated in narrative.

I would propose therefore, that one contribution of this dissertation is to example the potential of the narrative study of lives as a method for the study of voluntary action. As has been well rehearsed earlier in this work (Chapters 3 and 4) the method presents deep challenges of practice, reproducibility and epistemology. However, as a method it offers a degree of openness to possibility which makes its ideally suited to the purpose of exploratory research. In particular, it offers a way of unpacking the detail and complexity of the recent biographical turn in the study of volunteering and voluntary action and of moving our understanding beyond institutionalized frameworks.

Moving from the researched to the researcher, it might also be added, following the lead offered by Harris (2001), that turning a reflexive light upon the role of self as researcher and upon the constructed nature of research knowledge has a particular relevance in the field of voluntary action studies. For this is surely a field, which although it is worked for the greater part with a positive plough, attracts at least some share of researchers who walk the furrow for a discrete set of subjective reasons.

Chapter 9 Findings and Observations

Introduction

This final Chapter serves to gather the conclusions emanating from this research, to specify the contributions to the literature in the field, and to make a number of proposals regarding directions for further research. These comments are set out as two primary findings relative to the research questions, six secondary findings that arise as a consequence of these primary findings, and seventeen observations on varying aspects of the dissertation. In the discussion below, these primary findings, secondary findings, and observations are organised in the flow in which they have developed during the course of this thesis, so as to maintain their logic and relatedness.

Embarking on this dissertation (Chapter 1), I set out my research question as:

> ***What is the nature of the voluntary actor? And, as an extension of this question, what is the nature of the relationship between the voluntary actor and voluntary action?***

This question was prompted by my critique of the multi-disciplinary literature on voluntary action. In this critique, I argued that this literature seemed relatively devoid of an attempt to engage with the individual holistically and biographically, favouring, instead, the objectifying of behaviours and the quantification of variables ***(Observation 1).***

My analysis of why this should be the case indicated that the root cause lay in the conceptualisation of the human condition in the relevant disciplines. This apparent block to engagement with the problematic of the individual as agent, the 'volunt' question within the literature, was paradigmatic in nature ***(Observation 2).***

To find a conceptual space wherein it was possible to engage with the individual more fully required a paradigm shift to an interpretative stance. By thus shifting the research frame of reference, I have been able to place the individual at the very centre of the research question and thereby engaged with the 'volunt' question directly. I argued that working in the interpretative paradigm is a *sine qua non* of addressing this question (Chapter 2).

In this dissertation, by seeking the individual's own conceptualisation of his or her own intent, experience and meaning, I have placed the individual at the centre of the research question. Such intent, experience and meaning have been considered by seeking to hear how the individual understands his or her 'voluntary action' through the course of his or her own life. And so, I utilised life-story interviewing to pursue this research aim (Chapter 3).

Through this method, seven life-stories were collected from individuals who had substantial involvement in voluntary action. These stories were analysed through immersion with the texts. Analytical categories emerged via an iterative process of increasing abstraction (Chapter 4). These life-stories were, at the same time, both remarkable and mundane, both unexceptional and exemplary. To each life seemed given little more than the mundane fair of existence, and yet within the individuality of each, lay a great complexity of achievement and choice, of opportunities taken, of others discarded. For in each action taken, a thousand other possibilities were rejected and set aside. Herein lay one of the necessities of undertaking the interpretative work conducted for this thesis. From a distance all lives seem the same, it is only in a close-up gaze that their uniqueness can be grasped. The life-story approach exposes directly the limited understanding of the individual actor that arises from the objectification of the actor as a functionary in voluntary action.

Similarities in the lived experience of these story-tellers was seen in (i) early significant others, (ii) early reflexive experience, (iii) epiphanies, short and long, (iv) work that supports an expression of self, (v) the testing of values with experience, (vi) undertaking responsibility, (vii) expressing values organisationally, and (viii) in the life story, a time to move on. That such similarities emerged suggests that there may be a tendency towards particular characteristics in the biography of the voluntary actor ***(Observation 3).***

Themes that presented within these life-experiences were: (i) a capacity for empathy, (ii) relationship with self, (iii) relationship with other, (iv) the expression of self in action and community, (v) a struggle with values and belief, (vi) living, dying, and the relationship between them, (vii) a spiritual nature, (viii) a search for meaning and for place, and (ix) life as a creative process. What has emerged from these experiences

and themes is the identification of a set of possible characteristics of the biography of the voluntary actor that move towards a transcending of time and place and reflect an existential orientation on the part of the individual (Chapter 5), ***(Observation 4).***

The act of narration by these storytellers, was seen to serve to construct, relative to the moment and context, a sensible continuity in their lives. The storying of a life is central to the capacity to construct a self at the centre of the experience. In the context of explaining the logic of an entire life, the narration served to articulate a sense-making at a number of levels: (i) sense-making in the moment, (ii) making sense of life experience, (iii) making sense of social relationships, (iv) making sense of existence and mortality, and (v) making sense of a place in the universe. These individual narratives was structured around a temporal logic that placed the narrator as the agent and set the narrator's values as the guide to action (Chapter 6) **(Observation 5).**

These action-guiding values were seen to derive from personalised meaning and belief systems. The storytellers were found to construct personal belief and meaning systems that made their experiences sensible and served as a guide to their acting in the world by utilising, adapting and synthesising coherence systems present in their social context. These were individually constructed from the actor's own reflection on their life experience and from coherence systems extant in their social environment. Hence, despite their personalised nature, certain positions were found to be common across all of the personal belief and meaning systems. Specifically, the following were identified: (i) having a radical perspective on social structure, (ii) the idea of moral criteria as a guide for individual choice, (iii) the notion of self and individual responsibility for actions, (iv) the idea of love as the central human capacity and the prime mode of engagement with others, (v) the notion of life as a development process, and (vi) the individual in communion (Chapter 6) **(Observation 6).**

An instrumental analysis of these life-stories was used to identify the dialectic process between the individual and their social environment, through which the self was constructed and expressed via a search for, and the creation of meaning over the course of the life. The individual life was seen to be experienced as a becoming through a search for meaning. This search and becoming was exhibited as a dialectic process between the individual and their experience of the social world. This dialectic process

draws attention to the specifics of the socio-conceptual and socio-structural world that serves to influence the development of the voluntary actor (Chapter 7) ***(Observation 7).***

A collective analysis of the life-stories identified that the storytellers sharing particular emphases and orientations relative to the praxis of this dialectic, *viz;* (i) the integrity of self, (ii) analytical and intuitive approaches, (iii) a patterning of stages, (iv) the conceptual–structural context, (vi) the socio-structural context, (vii) dialectic as intensely personal, (viii) the role of creativity in the dialectic (Chapter 7) ***(Observation 8).***

These multiple stages of analysis identify the 'voluntary actor' as interpreting experience, expressing values, and acting with intent, in a dialectic process of engagement with a socially constructed social environment. Life is understood as a continuing process of self-enactment. This process is constituted by actions informed by values and acting is preceded by choice. In choice lies subjective differentiation. In differentiation lies subjective meaning. Hence, by acting, the voluntary actor creates meaning. This meaning is not created in a subjective isolation but is created directly in relation to others, as the actors' choices are centrally concerned with how to relate to other humans. This process of self-enactment was experienced by the storytellers as a personal search and becoming, arising from a relationally-based process of on-going interpretation and sense-making within a given social environment. The intentionality of individual choice bestows it with an element of creativity. In this creativity the individual may act upon the social institutions of structure and meaning. Characteristic, if not necessarily distinctive, of this emerging image of the voluntary actor, is (i) a concern with personal integrity, (ii) the utilisation of analytical or intuitive approaches to value-based choice, (iii) an orientation towards the other, (iv) the intensely personal nature of the dialectic experience, and (v) the role of personal creativity (Chapter 7).

Across these elements of analysis three main themes are identifiable. These are (i) self-enactment, (ii) an orientation to social value, and (iii) an organisational expression. Given this, a working interpretative descriptor of the voluntary actor is proposed.

The voluntary actor is an individual who, in a process of existential self-enactment, gives organisational expression to his / her personal orientation to the creation of social value.

(Primary Finding 1)

I noted that elements of this composite image are reflective of aspects of the voluntary action literature. Eleven points of consistency between the image of the voluntary actor, which has been developed in this research, and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, were identified (Chapter 8). ***(Secondary Finding 1)***

Taking this interpretative image of the voluntary actor and integrating it with the voluntary actor's social environment enabled a four-factor model of the formation of voluntary action in society to be arrived at. The elements are:

5. self-enactment in social dialectic
6. a personal orientation to social value
7. organised action
8. a context legitimating and enabling of social value and of nonprofit organising.

Taking these elements together, a four-part interpretative hypothesis of voluntary action is proposed, such that:

voluntary action in society arises from the individual's existential impulse to self-enactment, developed in a dialectic relationship with the social environment, directed towards organised action for social ends, and carried out within an institutional context that itself recognises and legitimises such organising and such social ends.

(Primary Finding 2)

Placing this interpretative image of the voluntary actor at the centre of a conceptualisation of the idea of the 'volunteer', suggests that the focus in the functional literature on the presence or absence of financial remuneration misses the point. I have argued in this thesis that remuneration is but an external and objective proxy for an internal and subjective dimension. From an interpretative perspective, volunteering becomes identifiable as a mode of self-enactment within a specific socio-cultural-structural context wherein it is institutionally recognised as 'volunteering'. To

understand volunteering we must look both to the meaning given to this action by the individual and to the meaning given to it by the social institutions (Chapter 8). From this perspective, a descriptor of volunteering is proposed such that:

> **Volunteering may be described as a mode of self-enactment in which an individual undertakes, within a formal organisational setting, a set of activities, which is expressive of their own social values.**
>
> ***(Secondary Finding 2)***

In the specific case of the social entrepreneur, the interpretative image of the voluntary actor is consistent with a conceptualisation of social entrepreneurship that focuses attention on action directed towards the achievement of meaning enactment. The focus is on how such entrepreneurial action serves to create meaning for others, so as to enable an organisation to attract the human and financial resources that are required for organisational action (Chapter 8). From this perspective, a descriptor of the social entrepreneur is proposed such that:

> **A social entrepreneur is one who, through social meaning making, influences and harnesses the social values and understanding of others, to create organised action to social ends.**
>
> ***(Secondary Finding 3)***

In the cases of the story-tellers encountered in the research for this dissertation both analytical and intuitive approaches to the engagement with experience were identified. Further, it was noted that there may be a relationship between the individual's approach to engagement with experience and the manner and impact of their involvement with voluntary organisations. Specifically, it was suggested that those with an analytical approach may be more likely, than those with an intuitive approach, to lead and shape the articulation of values for a voluntary organisation. In particular examples this leadership may find expression in the establishment of organisations.

(Observation 9)

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Placing the interpretative image of the voluntary actor at the centre of a conceptualisation of the process of voluntary organising implies a concern with the actions of an individual or group rather than of the organisation conceived of as agent.

Such a perspective serves to draw attention to the deficiencies with the structural-operational definition of the nonprofit organisation with respect to the tautological explanation of voluntary contribution. By inserting a clearer articulation of 'voluntary' into the structural-operational definition we may develop a more satisfactory approach to the definitional problem through the application of a structural-operational-expressive definition. The following alternative articulation of 'voluntary' is proposed therefore:

> ***Voluntary:*** **The organisation is resourced, to some degree, by private actions that express the personal commitment of these individuals, to the articulated values and ends of the organisation.**
>
> ***(Secondary Finding 4)***

By placing the interpretative image of the voluntary actor at the foundation of the conceptualisation of voluntary organising and by rejecting the anthromorphological view of the organisation as agent, voluntary organisations may be conceived as both the tools and the outcomes of the social enactment process. Hence voluntary organisations may be understood as communities of collective values enactment, and such communities are both internal and external to the formal organisational boundaries. From this perspective, descriptors of voluntary organising and of the voluntary organisation are proposed in this thesis such that:

> **Voluntary organising may be described as a process of collective values enactment, and, a voluntary organisation described as the formal structure at the core of a community engaged in collective values enactment.**
>
> ***(Secondary Finding 5)***

Such a conceptualisation of voluntary organising and of the voluntary organisation is shown to support the utilisation of generic organisational theories of the task environment, resources dependency and institutionalisation in theorising about voluntary organisations (Chapter 8) ***(Observation 10)***

Viewing voluntary organisations as the tools and outcomes of social enactment processes on the part of individuals, serves to highlight particular aspects of the

challenges of management leadership and governance in these organisations. Specifically noted is the management task of the alignment of multiple constituencies around acceptable interpretations of events and actions, the creation of congruence between ends and processes in organisational enactment, and ensuring the maintenance of the integrity of the organisational compact with its community of meaning. This perspective thus serves to identify a key aspect of the distinctiveness of voluntary organisations relative to the management problematic. ***(Observation 11)***

Placing the individual at the starting point of the enquiry serves to characterise the sector as the outcome of individual expressive requirements. The shape of this outcome is a function of the environmental conditions of its enactment. By paying attention to the expressive function of the sector, the formative impact of the socio-conceptual structures in the environment are highlighted. By adopting such a perspective, the socially-constructed nature rather than the structurally determined nature of the sector is brought to the fore. This conceptualisation of the sector as one space for the social construction of values and their organisational expression focuses attention on the role of action in the sector relative to the construction, maintenance and change of important elements in the regulation of society (Chapter 8) ***(Observation 12).***

A consideration of the interpretative image of the voluntary actor in relation to functional theories of the third or nonprofit sector raises a question about the theoretical sufficiency of these theories relative to individual voluntary action. Specifically, the functioning of the dialectic of experience and meaning appears absent from these theories. The individual is reduced to object, for example, to volunteer, board member, staff, donor, or service user. Drawing attention to the way in which the dialectic operates, serves to highlight the institutionalised value and meaning systems that exist within any given social context. This attention to value and meaning systems may be contrasted with the attention to power relationships within the social origins theory of the sector, or the attention to market structure in the economic theories. By understanding the social, cultural, historical nature of the underlying meaning systems we may be able to identify and distinguish new forms of contextualisation within national sectors. This would assist in understanding the extent to which the sector is the outcome of a human expressive requirement shaped by the institutional conditions of its enactment rather than a distinct product of liberal-capitalism or a generic element of

national economic infrastructures. In view of the foregoing the following queries are proposed as tests of a theory's applicability:

(iv) Does a given theory offer a sufficient explanation of voluntary action at the level of the individual?

(v) Does a given theory offer a sufficient explanation of organisational establishment in the sector?

(vi) Does a given theory provide an account of the formative function of the socio-conceptual and socio-structural aspects of the environmental context on the shape of a national nonprofit sector?

(vii) Does a given theory provide an account that integrates explanations at the level of the individual, the organisation, and the sector.

(Observation 13)

It is offered that the interpretative approach by placing individual agency at the start of the theorising offers a route to the development of such an integrative theory.

(Observation 14)

The growing institutionalisation of the field of voluntary action studies may serve to establish a socially-constructed set of boundaries grounded in a single intellectual paradigm, which sets limits to the type of questions that we may ask and the type of answers we may find. In contrast, voluntary action is constituted by a set of complex, multi-faceted and multi-level phenomena. The enquiry into voluntary action as a phenomenon in human societies needs to be open to multiple disciplines and multiple paradigms. If each perspective adds a new thread to the cloth then the emergence of a tapestry of knowledge requires variety and distinctiveness. Limit the perspectives and the tapestry is impoverished. Opening the discourse to multiple voices, while acknowledging specific strengths and weaknesses of individual disciplines and paradigms, cannot but enrich and make it more rewarding. The development of a multi-paradigmatic discourse in voluntary action studies is proposed therefore, arising from this research.

(Observation 15)

In view of the potential for work in an interpretative paradigm to offer an approach to engagement with the fundamental question of individual agency and its relationship to

the conceptualisation of individual voluntary action, voluntary organising, and the voluntary sector, there is a clear argument to be made for the establishment of a programme of interpretative research into voluntary action. Such a research programme would support the development of an interpretative literature of voluntary action, and nonprofit organising, that would develop concurrently and inform, as well as be informed by, the nonprofit organisation and civil society literatures. While the core questions for such a research programme remain to be identified, the following arise from this study:

(i) At the level of the individual, research may be concerned with the functioning of the dialectic process of meaning system construction and the internalisation of values at an individual level relative to individual involvement in 'voluntary activity'.

(ii) At the level of the organisation, research may be concerned with the mechanisms and processes by which the community of meaning that is the voluntary organisation is constructed and maintained. In short, an interpretative sociology of voluntary organising requires to be developed.

(iii) At the level of sector, research may be concerned with the identification of the key socio-conceptual institutions of moral value and meaning that inform and support the emergence of a voluntary activity and the manner in which these institutions shape the resultant voluntary sector. In addition, their remains a requirement for the development of a theory of the sector, sufficient to provide an interpretative and integrative explanation of voluntary activity at the level of the individual, the organisation and the sector.

(Observation 16)

The emerging field of voluntary action studies needs to have an eye to the coherence of its body of literature if it is to move from a multi-disciplinary area of social science investigation, where voluntary activity is investigated within the framework of separate disciplinary concerns, to an inter-disciplinary field which is based on identified concepts. In this context, there is a requirement for the development of an applied philosophy of voluntary action that would serve to position an intellectual framework for an interpretative engagement with the proposition of a human agency, however that agency is qualified.

Observation 17

Conclusion

This thesis began with a reading of the academic literature in the emerging field of voluntary action studies and as seen in Chapter 2, it was suggested that the functional explanations of the third sector, nonprofit organising and voluntary action failed to address the subjectivity of the individual and its relationship to voluntary action. I argued therefore, that the functional literature, while detailing the particular shape and structure of the sector, sector organisations and individual involvement effectively, failed to offer a sufficient explanation of the very presence of the voluntary activity in human society. It was noted that the level, societal, organisational or individual, at which the phenomenon of voluntary activity is approached not only impacts what is investigated but also implicitly designates the level at which legitimacy of explanations of action is seen to accrue. The problem was symptomatically evidenced in definitional dilemmas about the concept of the volunteer, the voluntary organisation and in the demanded-sided limitations of functional theories of the sector. At the core of this problematic was a paradigmatically based inability to address the notion of human agency.

The field of voluntary action studies as it is emerging currently is developing as a literature that is written in a functional paradigm for the greater part. In a literature and in a field becoming increasing institutionalised, the near-exclusive use of a functional paradigm for research and theory runs the risk of becoming self-enforcing. Although there are a scattering of voices, where the notion of the individual as a value-oriented actor is heard (Jeavons 1992, 1994, Kay 1996, Marshall 1996, Munroe 1996, Hustinx and Lammertyn 2003, Hailey and James 2004), these tend to be isolated and not gathered as a coherent and alternative voice. Hence, the challenge these voices present is not articulated at a paradigmatic level and so the paradigmatic break that they constitute is not picked up. The enquiry into voluntary action as a phenomenon in human societies needs to be open to multiple disciplines and multiple paradigms. Opening the discourse to multiple voices, while acknowledging specific strengths and weaknesses of individual disciplines and paradigms, cannot but enrich it and make it more rewarding.

Appendices

The seven life-stories are presented in these Appendices. The general format for each is simple. A brief introduction outlines who the individual is and how I came to involving them in this research. This is followed by a life history. Then the discussion moves to an exploration of the meaning that the respondent accorded to their life and to their articulation of the values that they have identified as having helped to shape it. Of course, the entire life-story is shaped also by my interpretation of these interviews and my role as the scriptwriter. These seven life-stories are presented below in the following order:

Appendix 1 Ann Louise Gilligan
Appendix 2 Pat Nolan
Appendix 3 Catherine Hickey
Appendix 4 Eithne Frost
Appendix 5 Sean Love
Appendix 6 Fergus O'Ferrall
Appendix 7 Patricia Prendiville

Appendix 1

Ann Louise Gilligan

I first met Ann Louise in 1997 when the organisation she had established, The Shanty Educational Project, was the subject of an organisational case study I was working on. The case study was part of a larger project involving 14 organisations and utilising a practitioner informed method. When I asked Ann Louise to partake in this research she readily agreed.

Life history

Ann Louise is a middle child of three, having an older sister and younger brother. She had a Dublin middle class upbringing which she described as being a radiantly happy family life. She was a leader by personality. She was the wild one while her older sister was an angel. She remembers herself as a very spiritual child. Her father was a very quiet man with a very strong sense of justice and a deep capacity to affirm the individual. He had a profound sense that nobody should do you an injustice nor should an injustice be done by you.

Ann Louise received her primary and secondary schooling at Loreto Foxrock.[42] There, as a young child between the ages of four and seven, she was greatly influenced by Mother Imelda. Imelda died when Ann Louise was seven. In fact Ann Louise took Imelda's name when she entered the Loreto Order herself. As her mother's name was also Imelda, many presumed that this was the reference. Ann Louise remembers how Imelda loved, hugging each child each day. Imelda taught religion and talked about God and love. Ann Louise remembers her as a person of holiness, filled with love and spirituality. She paraphrases her as saying that, seeing as God loves us so much, isn't it amazing that anybody would sin.

In her childhood and adolescence, spiritual dimensions in the traditional Catholic sense fascinated and appealed to her. In fifth year of secondary school, following a carol singing collection, she was deputised to make a delivery to families in economic need in Deansgrange. She was horrified with the reality of the poverty she witnessed.

[42] The Loreto Order is an international order of Roman Catholic nuns. Foxrock is a suburb of Dublin.

Despite this, she was careful to distinguish her childhood as not being 'sheltered', noting, for example, that she went to France as an au pair in the summer, had a lot of freedom generally, and 'saw a lot of life'.

Having developed an awareness of poverty and privilege towards the end of her school years, she saw entering the Loreto Order as a way of doing good. But as well as a deal of innocence in her choice, there were also other factors. Her best friend was also planning to join but she changed her mind after a year in a continental finishing school. As Loreto Foxrock had never had a girl enter the Order before Ann Louise, she wonders if there was something in her decision to enter about giving expression to being different.

Ann Louise entered the Loreto Order in Rathfarnham[43] in 1963 and spent a total of eight years there. She recalls mounting the big steps up to the front door of the convent, pressing the bell, looking back down the avenue and asking herself, 'what return can I make to the Lord for my privilege?'.

She described religious life in the Order at that time as being 18th Century in style. Although interested in serving in Mauritius and asking to be sent there, she was told she was needed for the Order's work in Ireland. She now thinks that she didn't have the belief in the Catholic system that was required. Ann Louise spent three years in the novitiate, after which she took first vows. After the novitiate, she was assigned to Loreto on the Green, where she taught in the Junior School and studied music in University College Dublin. From the second year there, through third and fourth year, she went to Mater Dei Institute of Education.[44] There she attended a full-time course for the training of secondary school teachers in religion and one other subject. After this training, she returned to Loreto Rathfarnham, where she was put in charge of the younger age groups (age 12 – 14) in the boarding school.

After leaving the Loreto Order in the early 1970's, Ann Louise went to a secondary school of the Mercy Order[45] in New Ross, Co. Wexford, to teach Religion, English and Music. Mercy New Ross was a big school with a mixture of urban and rural pupils.

[43] Rathfarnham is a suburb in south Co Dublin.
[44] The Institute was established in 1966 as a third-level Catholic College of Education specialising in the academic and professional formation of Religious Educators and Teachers for post-primary schools in Ireland.
[45] The Mercy Order is an Irish Diocesan order of Roman Catholic nuns

She recalls that the Principal there, Sister Perpetua Kilroy, was the finest leader she ever saw, greeting all the teachers in the morning with an affirmation. She had a remarkable capacity to lead in a gentle and effective way. For Ann Louise it was the first demonstration that leadership needs to be relational if you are to work with people.

The Mercy Order was Diocesan based (taking instruction from the local Bishop - unlike the international Loreto Order) and worked with people from 'more ordinary circumstances'. Ann Louise was very keen to immerse herself in the local community and got involved in Macra na Feirme[46], the local drama group, the local junior chamber of commerce, and so on.

After two years in New Ross, Ann Louise went to the Institute Catholique in Paris to pursue a Masters in Religious Science and Psychology. She was enabled to do this under a scholarship provided by the Diocese of Dublin. The nuns in New Ross had wanted Ann Louise to go to University College Dublin to become a career guidance teacher for New Ross. While in the Mater Dei Institute, Ann Louise had written an essay on creativity and the imagination. In Paris, her Master's thesis was on non-verbal expression and resurrection theology, essentially an exploration of imagination and creativity.

In April of her final year in Paris, she was appointed to a position as a lecturer in St. Patrick's College[47] in the Department of Religious Studies. She had been asked to apply by a priest who knew her from her time in teacher training there. She was appointed to the post and started in October 1976.

After five years in the post, she went to Boston College (a Jesuit University) to pursue a PhD in Education and Theology, by course work and dissertation. This involved two years intensive study, followed by a return to St. Patrick's. She wrote her dissertation from there, while returning to Boston College for 4 months every summer. This period in Boston was an extremely formative one for her in terms of her exposure to liberation theology. The PhD course work consisted of core areas and electives. Boston College was part of a consortium of Boston Universities that enabled her to choose courses in

[46] Macra na Feirma is 'a national voluntary organisation for young people between the ages of 17 and 35. The organisations aims to promote agricultural and rural development and the personal development of its members.' (IPA 2003, p. 356)
[47] St. Patrick's College is a college for the training of primary school teachers.

Harvard and elsewhere. In her electives she focused on liberation education and education towards creativity. Once back in St. Patrick's College, Ann Louise had a lot of freedom in relation to the teaching of liberation theology.

In 1985 Ann Louise was appointed Head of the Dept. of Religious Studies. The then Archbishop of Dublin attempted to veto the appointment. An attempt to block a College appointment had never happened before. Ann Louise fought with the support of the union. Finally, after an extremely fractious period, Ann Louise was appointed for four years, after which time she moved to a position in the Dept. of Education at the College.

When I asked why she remained in St. Patrick's, she said that she often thought about this. She adores teaching, she loves the students, and they are training in primary school education, work she sees as being very significant. Also, there is the requirement for financial security. In the mid to late 1980's student numbers in St. Patrick's collapsed and that allowed her to invest more of her life in the Shanty Educational Project (see below).

Ann Louise had met her partner Katherine, while she was studying in Boston. There they were both involved in community work at a shelter for homeless women and children that was built around the principles of liberation education. For example, there was a contract with residents involving an education programme. Katherine came back with Ann Louise in October 1983. Returning to Ireland, they were both passionate about the idea of a home-based liberation education, that is, making concrete the studies they had engaged in. So Ann Louise and Katherine felt they had to do something themselves, if they were to live with integrity with their ideals. In Liam Murtagh, the Parish Priest of Jobstown, West Tallaght, they found a man of 'real integrity and awareness that the poor were disenfranchised and estranged from the Church' and he provided contact into the community there. In 1985 they bought a house, 'The Shanty', in the countryside some few miles away and commenced to develop their women's education project.

In establishing 'The Shanty Educational Project', their central tenets of methodology were based in action emanating from reflection. This approach had been lectured in Boston College, although not carried out in lifestyle by those lecturing it. The success

of The Shanty Educational Project was the success of the group who formed about the idea. While Ann Louise and Katherine provided the leadership, others formed a community with them and grew in their own leadership capacity.

As the Project grew and developed, the organisational challenge became one of sustaining it and centring it within the community. This has been achieved through the establishment of An (the pathway). Through An, the Shanty's methodology was brought to the West Tallaght community and a purpose-designed women's and community education centre was built in Jobstown. An Cosán has continued to develop and grow. Organisational leadership has increasingly been taken up by members of the local community and Ann Louise has stepped away from her leadership role.

Values and meaning

Ann Louise is strongly critical of the institutional Church and notes the institution's failure to attend to the lives of the poor and the marginalisation of women. She recognises that there are people who on their joining managed to preserve their own goodness which they brought with them on joining.

Her own philosophical framework she describes as being Post-modern, Feminist, and Radical. The Post-modern orientation she describes as her awareness about difference and the notion of normativity, which has bred so many oppressions. She argues for a new respect for difference but notes that there are differences, such as poverty, which are profoundly unjust and have to be addressed. She is not comfortable with the word individual because it can slip into a liberal agenda whereas she sees human existence as being relational. Her Feminist orientation is concerned with her awareness about the past and present oppression of women. It has a strong political dimension in terms of a commitment to act. It is directed towards a goal of mutual relationships and not towards the inversion of the gendered oppression. Her Radical perspective is concerned with the need for systemic change. She instanced the question of educational disadvantage, noting that if we really want to offer equality of opportunity and access, then we require radical change to the system and institutions.

She remains excited about her lifelong search for the creation of meaning and sees maintaining an open mind as an essential element in this process. The search for meaning is central to being human – the answers are less so. For her, orthodoxy engages in the manipulation of the mind.

Imagination

The human imagination is a key tool in this creative search for meaning. An educated imagination allows us to image the transformation and do it. She reflects on Ricouer's observation that the quality of our being and our epistemological capacity are profoundly shaped by the development of our imagination. She sees the imagination as a human faculty that needs to be developed and nourished. Hence she is concerned with the education of creativity and speaks of the courage to live the unique creative expression of our creativity. Within each one of us there is a huge variety of ways of being and the relational is a way of giving presence to this variety.

For Ann Louise, 'education is about love', it is 'about the essence of human existence which is about love'. The depth of one's capacity to be human is measured by the capacity to love and to relate to others.

Ann Louise is a vegetarian by principle and she feels a strong connectedness with all life. At a spiritual level she views life as one.

When I asked her about her understanding of 'spirituality' she noted that the notion is much broader than religion. Various world religions try to put a framework around this. None of the world religions singularly have a message of universal significance for the present world – for humankind today. She would 'never adhere to any religion solely again.' She sees religious life as being preoccupied with rules and regulations, and as leaving no room for the individual.

She is a 'person deeply interested in spirituality ... I am as a human being spiritual in my essence, that there is a life force in and through me that is connected to the beyond in my midst. Trying to nurture this is a central part of who I am and necessary for balance. I am a much better human being when I give time to this for stillness, reflection, quiet, needed.'

Appendix 2

Pat Nolan

Pat is a retired business leader and active social entrepreneur. I first met him in the context of his undertaking doctoral research at the School of Business, Trinity College Dublin. He readily agreed to participating in this research.

Life history

Pat came from a poor household and this experience left him with an early sense of poverty and of its negative effects. Both his father and mother served as two very strong influences in his early life. His father was very committed to social justice and was a follower of Connolly and Larkin[48]. Indeed, he was intermittently unemployed because of union commitments. His mother was a great manager, having to manage a household in poor circumstances, with 6 children.

Pat was the fourth child and from the age of 12 his mother confided in him regarding the financial problems of the household. This gave him a very serious outlook on life from an early age. Aged 14, in the mid 1950's, he had to go to work for Willwoods.[49] He became very aware of social inequality. His job in Willwood's included buying messages for the Chairman's wife. The Chairman was living down in Athy, Co. Kildare and ran two limousines; one for the 'goodies' and one for the Chairman.

He was angry about missing secondary school, as he had a great desire for education, so he did his Leaving Certificate[50] while working. Pat saw education as a passport and also as something he wanted to pursue for itself. He had to lead a very disciplined life in order to pursue his education; having to start his study after work in the evenings and by getting grinds for himself. He lived like a monk and climbed mountains at weekends. He is proud of getting his Leaving Certificate and Matriculation outside of the system.

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[48] James Connolly and Jim Larkin, two leaders of Irish labour in the early twentieth century
[49] A confectionery manufacturers
[50] The Leaving Certificate is the state examination taken at the completion of secondary school

During this period Pat took an interest in the Jesuit Order.[51] The discipline of it appealed to him and also the Order's educational focus. He read about the early life of the Society of Jesus and was very attracted in the way of life centred on education and learning. Pat started to talk to a Jesuit in Dublin about joining. The Irish College sent him to the English College, who sent him to a late vocation college in Middlesex. There he pursued a two-year course in English, French, Greek and Latin. It was full-time education and he loved it. In the second year he decided two things, firstly, to apply to the Irish College and secondly, that he would go to the Holy Land, as St. Ignatius[52] had done. Having no money, Pat wrote to wealthy Catholics in Dublin asking for money to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. He set out in June 1961 but made it only to Rome. On his return, he entered the Irish Jesuits and was placed in their house in Emo, Co. Laois. His time there was a very intense period and after two years he decided that it wasn't for him. However, he has kept the Jesuit spirituality that he learned in those four years and regards it as having fashioned his life very fundamentally. It has provided him with a way of looking at the world. His Jesuit friends have remained his closest friends and he has maintained an on-going interest in learning.

Pat went back to Willwoods where the manager gave him a job as a relief salesman for the summer. It provided him with a car, the country to roam and space to think. He decided to do law in UCD but hadn't the necessary finance and went back to work and developed his career as a salesman. Within a year he had met his wife and so for the rest of the 1960s he developed his career and his marriage. He moved into management in 1971 as the marketing manager for Willwoods.

In November 1974 he had received an offer to head up Twinings Tea[53] in Ireland and took it. He spent 5 years in Twinings as Managing Director. They wanted a driving marketing approach and the position gave him great general management experience. It was a great period for him with a lot of independence. He was reporting to the Group Managing Director in Andover (UK). He became well known outside the company, becoming one of the two representatives from the Irish Tea industry to go to European meetings. In 1979 he became Chairman of the Marketing Institute of Ireland.

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[51] The Society of St. Ignatius Loyola, otherwise known as the Jesuits, is an international Roman Catholic order of priests.
[52] The founder of the Jesuit Order
[53] A tea importer and blender

In 1978 he went to India on behalf of the Irish Tea Industry, as a guest of the Indian Government. Pat went with two other individuals from the Irish industry. They landed in Bombay and stayed in the Palace Hotel, a leading and very expensive hotel. Before breakfast on the first morning, Pat went for a walk in the streets around the hotel. On his walk he came across what looked like a sack in the gutter but saw legs sticking out as he passed it. He presumed it was a dead body until he touched it and it moved. It was somebody sleeping in the gutter. On returning to the hotel he found himself sitting by the pool having breakfast on the other side of the wall from the person sleeping in the gutter. He couldn't get the image out of his head. He found India a very spiritual country. For example, the largest tea plantation they visited was run by three Hindus who meditated for an hour every morning before work. Pat found this integration of spirituality and work very appealing. When Pat returned from India he began to see a Jesuit friend more often.

In 1980 Pat was head hunted for Goldstar Meats. The company had set up a plant in Glasnevin six months previously and it was losing money. Pat could see a lot of problems with the operation but also the opportunity to make substantial profits. He demanded an equity stake and total control, leaving the owners as sleeping partners. This enabling him to fashion Goldstar Meats in the manner in which he felt a company should be run. Goldstar was in debt to the bank, wages were low and the staff demoralised. There was low productivity so the product cost was high. The first thing Pat did was to dramatically increase wages. Productivity shot up, unit cost went down, and sales grew. Pat had learned the lessons in Twinings of really valuing people and of the motivating influence of money. He didn't create a hierarchical structure but set out to develop a community. The company grew to fifty employees in two years. Pat identified with the workers' background in West Cabra and Finglas. They were a very highly rewarded group of people who were looked after in all kinds of ways. Pat looked to develop fits between personal desires of the staff and the organisational aspirations of the company. The training of people was heavily encouraged. At Christmas the company delivered hampers to elderly people living alone.

In March 1981, a Jesuit friend of Pat's, Phil Harnet, looked for help in running a weekend with an Order of nuns around re-organisation and mission. On the way back

from the weekend, Phil asked him had he thought of doing the long retreat[54]. Pat had done it while in Emo but not since then. The long retreat is normally of 30 days duration but it can also be done as exercises in daily life for 1-2 hours per day, seeing your director once a week. So from January to November 1982 (which was the period during which Goldstar took off) Pat was doing these spiritual exercises. He came in to work and did an hour's meditation. The principal thing about the exercises is that they are oriented; they are really about freedom, about freeing yourself psychologically; to see oneself in terms of creation, in terms of the whole of creation and to understand yourself in this context.

At the end of this, in 1983, Pat began to make choices around social justice, with some emphasis on the corporate world. By the mid 1980's he was thinking about leaving business life. He was persuaded by 3 Jesuit friends to stay where he was on the basis that he could have greater influence within the business community than outside it. Goldstar Meats had been divided 40 / 30 / 30 between the three partners and in 1986 Pat asked that they move to a 25 / 25 / 25 / 25 split with the final 25% going to a staff equity scheme. But the other partners simply couldn't cope with this as a concept argued on the basis of social justice. Wanting to work in an area of social justice and inequality, Pat decided in October 1987 to leave Goldstar Meats in October 1990. So he planned his succession and left behind a very successful and growing company. Pat views the 1990 move from Goldstar Meats as a clear career change, although he stayed on the Board of Goldstar Meats and also remained with the Marketing Institute.

In 1980 Pat had begun working for the Jesuit Order in a voluntary capacity. In 1986 Phil Harnet became head of the Irish Province of Jesuits for a six-year term. From 1982-1990 Pat acted as Executive Chair of Irish Messenger Publications and from 1985 he chaired the Jesuit Solidarity Fund. The fund came from the proceeds of the sale of one of the Order's properties. This fund was applied to the support of areas of long-term unemployment both in Dublin and around the country. The experience of Jesuits living in these deprived communities was that there was a lot to be learned there. In 1986 Pat became involved in a management and consultancy capacity with the Ballymun Job Centre. Pat's involvement in this work had served to confirm his belief that this was where he wanted to be.

[54] The long retreat is a series of spiritual exercises as laid down by St. Ignatius.

When Pat left Goldstar Meats in 1990, Phil Harnet convinced him to work full-time (unpaid) for the Jesuit Order as an internal consultant and he was given an office on Eglinton Road. During this time he gained a great understanding of the Order, of the Church, of religious administration in general and particularly of needs around re-organisation and re-generation. His was also a planning role. He devised a yearly action plan for the organisation; the PAAP - the Province Annual Apostolic Plan. Pat also served on the board of Belvedere College[55] and acted as Chair from 1992-1995 during which time he put in place a major development plan. He maintained his links with Ballymun Job Centre throughout this time.

In 1993 he was asked by Crosscare[56] to chair a Board tasked with developing a response to problems associated with living with HIV-Aids. There followed two years of research, meetings in Jesuit Head Office and the realisation that a variety of Orders were interested in becoming involved in the work. The result was that Six Religious Orders and the Diocese came together in a collaborative effort to establish Open Heart House[57]. In 1995 Pat walked from Malin to Mizzen (417miles) and raised IR£200,000 from the business community for Open Heart House. This was influential in the Orders committing IR£100,000 for each of 3 years. It also enabled Pat to go to the Archbishop for a building. Pat continues to act as the Executive Chairman of Open Heart House.

Pat has also been central to the establishment and development of Fastrack to Information Technology[58](FIT), an innovative approach to providing a route into skilled employment for the unemployed. FIT is a multi-agency initiative, that brings together the interests of state agencies in supporting employment and those of private sector IT companies in recruiting a skilled workforce, in order to provide targeted IT skills training for unemployed individuals. Over 5,000 people have availed of FIT training as a route into the IT industry. Pat is the current co-chair of FIT.

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[55] Belvedere College is a leading Jesuit run boys secondary school in Dublin City

[56] Dublin Diocesan Welfare Services

[57] Open heart House 'is a HIV Positive (HIV+) member-led organization with a missionto empower and enhance the lives of people living with HIV and AIDS.' (www.openhearthouse.ie)

[58] 'The mission of FIT is to meet the recruitment needs of industry in the area of IT, through providing training, support and career opportunities for unemployed people, so that they can achieve their true potential and contribute to the Irish economy.' (www.fit.ie)

Values and meaning

In his great desire for education Pat felt he was different from the rest of his family. As a child he was always seeking to discover, he was avid about knowledge. He loved books although he was not especially a bookworm. His primary education was in a Christian Brothers' school. The structure of education and the physical situations around it, made him fearful. In fact he had a fear of the classroom. Pat was left-handed and the determination of others to eradicate this from him and force him to write with his right hand caused him to stutter.

Part of his experience in business life was marked by a negative energy, for example, in terms of how management looked after themselves, and this influenced him. He notes that his own concern with social justice in the business context was not a popular line and that he was considered 'a screwball'. However, he believes that bringing spirituality into business is about creating a harmony. If you do it correctly it results in better business and better profits. He felt that between 1980 and 1986 that he proved this. He was learning as he proceeded. Rewarding people well is a great motivating factor. One of his passions is in getting the wealth creators to feel and experience the inequality and do something about it.

Jesuit spirituality, as Pat understands it, is grounded in the exercises – the ratio studiorum. These are undertaken to generate a type of transformation. Pat acknowledges that they were fundamental to him. He has undertaken them three times, in 1961, 1982 and 1990. For Pat the exercises are around the creation of a freedom of choice, that is, a freedom from prejudice and all the other influences in your life, so that you can choose. In the early weeks of the exercises you are focused on creation. The exercises are an experience. In some very real way you are moving outside of yourself and becoming aware of other parts of creation. This is freeing of the self via a focus on the other. This 'other' can take many forms, for example, other people or God. This freedom is experienced as a growing, a freeing from self. In these exercises Ignatius wanted the person to achieve this freedom and to choose for God and for Jesus as an expression for God. There are underlying assumptions that you are a Christian and that you accept the person of Jesus as God. For members of the Jesuit order the exercises are generally done on entry and again in their early 30s.

For Pat, being a Christian, without being involved in some very exercised way with poverty in the world and the questions and issues around poverty, didn't make any sense. 'I wouldn't want to be doing anything else, because it just has meaning for me ... All the time it is just making more sense to me'. (PN interview notes)

While in his voluntary work the buzz is very intermittent, it runs very deep. Occasionally in Open Heart House somebody tells him that 'this place has saved my life' (PN interview notes). In Open Heart House you are dealing with life in all its chaos. But it is very holistic, very real, life in the raw. His experience there is not pleasurable. The building itself is dowdy and unattractive. Yet there is an internal compass that drives and moves him on. There is perhaps also a spiritual thing about all things being transient, so that you don't become attached. 'Not that I want to get out of Open Heart House but it's the bigger fruit thing' (PN interview notes)

Appendix 3

Catherine Hickey

I first met Catherine in the early 1980s when we were both attending as undergraduates at University College Dublin (UCD). At the end of the decade we met in UCD again, this time as postgraduates taking a Master of Business Studies degree on a part-time basis. I next encountered Catherine in the late 1990's in her role on the Management Committee of The Carmichael Centre, 'the first and largest shared facility for charities in Ireland' (www.carmichaelcentre.ie).[59] Since then our paths have crossed occasionally, almost always in the context of a gathering related to some aspect of nonprofit organisation matters.

When I was considering undertaking this research I spoke with various individuals with knowledge of the nonprofit sector in Ireland and the active personalities within it. One particularly well-informed and influential individual identified Catherine as someone who had evidenced exceptional commitment over a long period to a number of organisations. She readily agreed to becoming engaged with the research project when I approached her.

Life history

Catherine was born in the early 1960s and is the eldest of a family of eight. She has two sisters and five brothers. The family background was middle class. Her father was a member of the legal profession and was a member of the Irish Judiciary. The family religion was Roman Catholic and the family ethos emphasised the value of education.

As Catherine was growing up they lived in a number of locations of increasing affluence in the middle class suburbs on the southside of the city. She attended a private kindergarten until she was eight. From then until she left school at the end of the second level she went to the school of the Society of the Sacred Heart at their convent at Mount Anville, Goatstown. The school, which was for girls only, had a

[59] Carmichael Centre 'is a Centre for small national voluntary organisations working at the cutting edge in areas such as disability, illness, education, the arts, the environment and social care.' It provides facilities that include 'office space, administrative support, IT assistance, management training and organisational support at moments of crisis.' (www.carmichaelcentre.ie)

mixture of day pupils and boarders. Catherine attended as a day pupil and continued to live at home.

When she finished her schooling at the end of the 1970's Catherine went to University College Dublin to pursue a Social Science Degree, graduating in the early 1980s. There followed two jobs over a six-year period in caring type roles in nonprofit social service organisations. The first of these was with the St. John of God Hospitaller Services[60], where she acted as an instructor. The second was a post as a house parent for the Rehab Group.[61] It was during her years with Rehab that she undertook postgraduate training in management. The first of these was a Postgraduate Diploma in Business Studies (DBS), which she followed with the Masters Degree in Business Studies (MBS).

From Rehab, Catherine was appointed as Director of Muscular Dystrophy[62] Ireland in 1990, a post she held until the year 2000. In 1992 she joined the Board of the Disability Federation of Ireland[63] and acted as the organisation's chair from 1998 to 2000. Muscular Dystrophy Ireland was based in Carmichael Centre and Catherine played a leading role on the Management Committee of the Centre during these years. She also served on the founding committee of the Centre for Independent Living (CIL)[64] in Ireland. Indeed she was the only person without a disability on the Committee. When it was established in 1992 the CIL represented a radical departure in its approach to the support of people with disabilities. During the latter part of the 1990's Catherine undertook a Bachelor of Law degree at night. This reflected an increasing interest in the law and justice related aspects that contribute to the marginalization of individuals and groups in society.

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[60] 'In Ireland St. John of God Hospitaller Services provides mental health services, care for older people and services for children and adults with disabilities.' (www.sjog.ie)

[61] 'The Rehab Group is an independent, not-for-profit organisation which provides training, employment, social care and commercial services for some 30,000 people each year in Ireland and the UK.' (www.rehab.ie)

[62] 'Muscular Dystrophy Ireland provides support to persons with neuromuscular conditions and their families though the provision of a range of support services' www.mdi.ie

[63] 'Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) is the national support organisation and advocate for voluntary organisations in Ireland who provide services to people with disabilities and disabling conditions' (www.disability-federation.ie)

[64] 'CIL is a grassroots organisation, which was established in 1992 by people with disabilities. Our main aim is to empower and enable people with disabilities to achieve independent living, choice and control over their lives and to achieve full and active participation as equal citizens in society.' (www.carmichaelcentre.ie/cil/index.htm)

In 2000 Catherine was appointed as Director of the Free Legal Advice Centres (FLAC)[65]. She has led the organisation through a substantial period of development of its services. FLAC has recently completed a review of its direction and operations. Building on the organisational growth of recent years a new strategic approach is being developed that will combine service delivery and law reform. Catherine has chosen to focus on the service delivery side of the organisation's work and in the new organisational structure is moving to the position of Development Director. In undertaking this role she is committing to leading the expansion of fulltime Free Legal Advice Centres to marginalised communities nationally.

Catherine doesn't necessarily see herself working in the voluntary sector indefinitely. She believes that her ongoing developmental work in FLAC will have a substantial positive impact in the coming years. Looking beyond that time she is interested specifically in a role that relates to law reform and the interface between the State and the community. While she recognises that her experience and legal education support such aspirations she is also attuned to the value of some targeted education in public service management in positioning her for such a career move.

Values and meaning

In speaking of her life and the influences that have helped to shape it, Catherine traces her attraction to socially oriented service activities to her teenage years. She appears never to have felt particularly comfortable within the social milieu she found within her school. While she had her own circle of friends she was not part of the predominant social group, marked out by particular values, affluence and a high networking capacity. Although she discussed the possibility of moving school with her parents, it was decided she should remain at Mount Anville, as no better outcome could be guaranteed. This sense of not being at home within these social surroundings carried also into her experience of the suburban community in which the family lived. In practical terms, a residential layout of detached houses in individual plots seemed to her to work against rather than for the promotion of community. Her sense of being different or of having a somewhat different perspective was evident to her certainly from her late childhood. A perhaps related aspect was an increasing consciousness of,

[65] 'FLAC is a nongovernmental organisation which campaigns for full and equal access to justice for all and which promoes and operates a range of services to meet the legal needs of those living in poverty' (www.flac.ie)

and sensitivity to, the issue of social marginalisation and the circumstances of the marginalised. She articulated an awareness of this from the age of 12 or 13.

These sensitivities were afforded a certain practical expression in the work of the School's Social Work Committee of which Catherine was a member. The Society of the Sacred Heart carried out both an educational and a social engagement mission and the Order had a programme running with the Traveller Community[66] in West Dublin. In line with the Order's mission, the School's Social Work Committee was involved with Travellers and also with a School for Deaf Boys. Catherine found herself enjoying these activities, particularly their participative element. In so doing she was very much within the minority within her school peer group. While others also became involved they tended not to maintain the involvement over time.

Her home context provided a number of not dissimilar opportunities in that she had a number of elderly relatives either resident in nursing homes or admitted to hospices at various times. At her mother's instigation she visited these Aunts on an on-going basis. What she initially regarded as an imposition she increasingly found rewarding and something she looked forward to. While at the time she identified this activity and those linked to the School's Social Work Committee as 'charitable activity'; she later came to understand it as borne of a personal need to be a contributor, to be making a difference. Such a commitment to making a social contribution via direct action was not an underlying norm within her family and her brothers and sisters were not so engaged. When her youngest brother was born with Downes Syndrome, as Catherine turned 17, the utter paucity of support services within the Irish social services system was brought home to her very forcibly.

In making her career choice towards the end of her time in secondary school, the family commitment to education indicated a University education. Reflecting back on the choice now, she considers that given greater encouragement from the Order, she would have seriously considered a religious life. At school, English had been her love and indeed she did give thought to it as a subject of third level choice. In discussion with her parents it was felt this amounted to an idealistic aspiration and that a subject choice

[66] 'Travellers are a small indigenous minority, documented as being part of Irish society for centuries. Travellers have a long shared history and value system which makes them a distinct group. They have their own language, customs and traditions....Travellers ..[are].. a minority group experiencing exclusion and marginalisation.' (www.paveepoint.ie)

of more practical focus was more appropriate to her orientation. Medicine was also considered and rejected. And so she chose a social science degree in UCD. The college choice appears to have been a simple function of the economics of proximity.

College life was an emancipation for Catherine. The variety and opportunity of social outlets and the openness of individuals from a range of social and geographical backgrounds to accepting individuals as they presented themselves struck her. The manner in which intellectual ability acted as an alternative value system to that of social status and connection also served to free her from the normative framework she had encountered in her school community. Within her coursework Catherine particularly enjoyed social policy, with its focus on practical impact. Theoretical discussions in social theory she found less engaging. This practical focus and intent may be seen in her decisions relative to all the third level educational activities she has undertaken. The choice of B.Soc.Sc. was explicitly made on practical grounds. The DBS and MBS were pursued to support a move from applied to managerial work within the social services. The BL degree she explains in terms of a growing interest in social justice issues and an intention to position herself for a career move from the area of disability to the area of rights and justice.

When asked about individuals who have influenced or impressed her over the course of her life, Catherine tended to identify individuals with a high national or international profile. A common thread running through them however is an evidenced commitment and capacity to make a direct difference to the lives of marginalized individuals or groups. In her teenage years her she was attracted by the work of Mother Theresa of Calcutta, although that appreciation would be more reserved now. The founder of the Centre for Independent Living, Martin Naughton, is somebody Catherine speaks particularly highly of. Martin, a man with Muscular Dystrophy, believed in people's capacity to move from a life of dependence to one of independence; a personal journey he had forged himself. He received the National Person of the Year Award in 1995, following his nomination by Catherine. His philosophy of individual respect and empowerment has been an important influence and anchor for Catherine during her period of working on issues of disability. What seems to have impressed her most pointedly was Martin's capacity to develop a vision about a possible future state and to work tirelessly towards it. This envisioning capacity is something she particularly admires.

Another aspect she has admired in people is the identification of a specific social need, a determination to do something positive to address that need and the entrepreneurial ability to make a real and sustained difference. Examples Catherine instanced with respect to these attributes include Adi Roche of the Chernobyl Project[67], and the work of the organisation, Babies from Romania[68]. The final group of personal influencers noted by Catherine were a series of individuals who combined a forceful legal talent with an orientation towards social justice, and in some instances a deep capacity to engage and communication with people across a wide social spectrum. Judges Catherine McGuinness and Niall Fennelly of the Irish Supreme Court and Irish Presidents Mary Robinson and Mary McAleese were noted in this context; all four for their legal intellect and the latter two for their interaction with the voluntary sector and the community. Again, in this choice Catherine acknowledges that it reflects her admiration of their legal ability.

Catherine speaks of the trajectory of her work-life in two quite different perspectives. On the one hand she characterises it as a non-career and notes a type of presentational difficulty in the 'charities manager' description. It lacks the clear professional definition or the evidence of financial remuneration that other career choices would have provided her with. Her sisters and brothers appear to have chosen routes with greater definition in either professional or monetary terms. Both her sisters are solicitors in leading practices, while her brothers hold senior positions in financial institutions. On the other hand she has identified key influencers in terms of the contribution or difference they have made in the lives of others rather than in terms of the position they have achieved, albeit that in a number of instances their capacity to effect change has been related to the positions they have achieved. Indeed the future career she is envisioning first at FLAC and later in an alternative capacity speaks clearly of somebody determined to have an impact through their work-life. From this perspective her career trajectory is evident and has impact. Additionally, despite its career limitations, Catherine is clear that she has consciously chosen to work within the voluntary sector. She prizes its innovative capacity and the creative energy she finds there. She is not attracted to working in the commercial field and has no particular

[67] '...the Chernobyl Children's Project was established to help alleviate the suffering and to offer hope to those most affected by the Chernobyl explosion, namely the children of Belarus, Western Russia and the Ukraine' (www.adiccp.org/abouttheproject/default.asp)

[68] Now called Health Action Overseas

interest in financial reward. She is motivated by association with projects that are of real community benefit and with project delivery of a high standard.

This commitment to direct benefit and effective delivery reflects a very strong practical orientation in her work-life. In organisational terms this finds expression in a focus on the interface with the service recipients or client group. Her distaste for organisations that become self-serving or distracted with their internal affairs is evident. She recognises however that at times she may have been overly focused on the client group to the neglect of the organisation and notes that service provision in the voluntary sector is a relatively thankless task for those engaged in it.

Similarly, a direct engagement perspective is evidenced in her thinking on the social changes resulting from the Irish economic boom. She is appalled by the seemingly relentless consumerism that the economic growth has spawned and fed and illustrates its overpowering impact by referencing the demise of the distinctiveness of Sunday. Linked to this she emphasised the value and importance of the family as a social institution. However, her real attention is drawn to the new experiences and expressions of poverty to which the increasing economic disparity within Irish society has given rise. She is more inclined to look for direct methods of alleviating such problems, whether by State or voluntary intervention, than to call for substantial system change. Such a position is consistent with her view on the community development movement, which she sees as being prone to exclusivity by virtue of its theoretical frameworks. Further, this exclusivity can lead to poor service delivery because the necessary skill base is simply not there among those actors deemed legitimate by such frameworks.

In many aspects the role of religion in Catherine's life is reflective of her Roman Catholic upbringing. She acknowledges that it has a role but notes that it is not paramount. She has a strong commitment to a spiritual dimension in her life. In terms of practice, formal religious observance is linked to Church service attendance on Sundays. But this is not necessarily every Sunday nor is it to a given denomination. Hence her religious affiliation is more to a broad Christian perspective than to a specific Christian denomination per se. Fundamental to this perspective is a belief in the individual and a valuing and respecting of the person. This position has been arrived at through personal reflection and experience rather than as the acceptance of a

revealed principle. Hence it is heavily imbued with a humanitarian rather than a religious sensibility. Such an orientation acts as a basic guide in her work relationships. While she does pray, it is to a limited extent. Nonetheless she feels she might indeed benefit from increased prayer in that she believes in its power.

In speaking of her life, Catherine was very clear in identifying a separation of work and career from private life. Hence she tended to speak of her work-life in career rather than vocational terms although she readily agreed to the vocational characterisation when I raised it. Similarly, she saw her interactions with clients as being appropriately conditioned by a professional approach rather than requiring an understanding grounded in empathy. Nonetheless, she does speak of there being an element in the caring motivation of seeking to look after others as one would wish to be cared for oneself.

Appendix 4

Eithne Frost

One of the founders of the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association (IMNDA), Eithne was Director of the organisation from 1989 to 2005. Under her leadership the IMNDA became recognised as one of the leading MND Associations worldwide. She readily agreed to partake in this research. Following our first interview, Eithne received a diagnosis of a life-threatening cancer. She conducted the later interviews while undergoing the successful but debilitating treatment this diagnosis necessitated.

Life history

Eithne was born in 1947, the eldest of two sisters. Her parents were both teachers. Her mother a primary school teacher and her father an Irish teacher at post-primary level. Reared in Waterford City, Eithne tells of a childhood that in many ways reflects the quiet insularity of 1950's Ireland, although in her case this was punctuated by her parents' independence of mind and community engagement. With her parents active in their respective teacher unions, Eithne recalls an early familiarity with the stuff of organisation, meetings, minutes, committees, guest speakers, and the gradual realisation that her parents engagements were somehow different from the family life of her friends and school friends. In addition to the union activities, her father served on the local Vocational Education Committee, was much involved in Irish language affairs in the City and in the 1960s was a key member of a lay-based group that explored theological debates in the post-Vatican II era. Indeed such activities led Mr. Cahill into a degree of conflict with the local Roman Catholic Bishop, over the Bishop's view on the suitability or otherwise of invited guest speakers. For example, Eithne remembers the visit of Hans Kung causing a particular furore. Inter-denominational relations of a social nature were also subject to the Bishop's gaze and Mr. Cahill had to face Episcopal disapproval for attendance at Protestant marriage and funeral services. For her part Mrs. Cahill was ambivalent about institutionalised religion and her strong socialist republican political position reflected an independent personal orientation. Her position as a Primary Teacher made her more vulnerable to the disapproval of her Church employers, and she was less engaged in the work of organisations on an on-going basis. An orientation towards practical action to better people's living conditions is evidenced in her being one of the founder members of the

Waterford Friends of the Mentally Handicapped. Eithne often accompanied her parents, particularly her father as her mother minded her younger sister at home, in these engagements, playing a supporting role, typically in the catering end. It is clear that by the time she was an early teenager she was comfortable in the social context of organised activism as well as in the music club and tennis club hops of her peers. Lively, intelligent and probably precocious, Eithne was clearly close to her parents growing up.

Eithne attended a private primary school after which she went to the Ursuline Secondary School in Waterford, spending her last year there as a boarder. There she was encouraged to think and speak independently on social and religious issues. After secondary school she went to University College Dublin (UCD) to read Irish and French. There she became heavily involved in College Societies. At the time UCD had ethos of a very Catholic University and had small classes, with 45 in French and 14 in Irish. At Christmas in her second year she returned home saying she wanted to do social science because she wanting to work with adults, not children as teaching implied. Her parents came to Dublin and spoke with her Professors and the advice was that she should finish her degree. So this is what she did.

In her second year in College Eithne joined the Labour party, becoming more involved after the 1969 election. Eithne was supportive of the Civil Rights campaign in the North, and was up on the Civil Rights March that ended in Burntollet.[69] She spent the summer of 1969 in Waterford helping Northern refugees who had gone there for the marching season. While not particularly involved in the emergence and development of the Women's Movement in Ireland she did go to Belfast on the contraceptive train[70]. She was a supporter of the Irish language movement, being active in supporting the protest hunger strike held at the GPO[71] at the time.

After her degree, Eithne did the Higher Diploma in Education UCD in 1967-68. Then she took a post in Ballyfermot Community College. In September 1969 she moved to the 'Regina Mundi' school in Cork. Within a month of arriving in Cork she had met Noel and married him two years later. In Cork she became deeply involved in her local community council.

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[69] A civil rights march suppressed by the RIC at Burntollet
[70] A protest against the unavailability of contraceptives in the Republic of Ireland at the time
[71] General Post Office, site of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic

In April 1975 Eithne had her first child, Cliona, and in June she gave up work, although she kept up the community council involvement and worked a little in a private tuition capacity. In September 1976, her second child, Dermot, was born. In February 1977 Noel's hands were beginning to give him trouble. Initially the problem was misdiagnosed and he was sent to a rheumatologist. By June his voice was beginning to make telephone work difficult and by the summer has was dragging a leg. Following ten days of tests in hospital in September, Eithne was called in by the consultant to be informed that Noel had Motor Neurone Disease or Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, that he would get progressively disabled and had two years or a little less to live. Noel was referred to a Dublin based consultant, who confirmed the diagnosis and told Eithne not to inform Noel of this. Indeed Eithne kept the diagnosis from Noel right to the end of his life, as she had been advised. At this stage Cliona was two and a half and Dermot was just gone one.

Although Noel's employers were very supportive of him, by the end of March 1978 he was no longer able to drive himself to work and had to resign. Eithne started doing substitution teaching in the local all-boys Community School and secured a full-time post there the following September. As the disease progressed and his functionality slipped from him, Noel required increasing levels of care from Eithne. Neighbours arranged a support rota to help with lifting and turning Noel. It became necessary to convert the garage so that Noel could sleep downstairs. Surgery for a flaring gall bladder problem Eithne had was postponed because of the home situation and she eventually had her surgery in January 1979. While she was in hospital Noel was taken to his mother's house to be cared for.

In October Noel's conditioned worsened. Coincidently, an old school friend of his, now a missionary priest, was home on holiday and came to see him on a Thursday evening. Having spent time with Noel, he told Eithne that he felt Noel was passing. The next day, Noel didn't get up. On the Saturday, Eithne sent for Noel's mother. On the Sunday morning, October 7, with Eithne, Paul his brother, and Catherine his mother, at his side and Cliona and Dermot playing on the floor, Noel slipped away.
Eithne tells a grim story of the challenges and heartbreak of this time. She experienced a very poor response to her and Noel's need for support from the health and religious institutions. Eithne only coped with the close support of family and friends.

Shortly before Christmas of that year she handed in her notice as she had decided to move to Dublin. She quickly got a post in Cabinteely Community School and by March 1980 she had sold the house in Cork, rented in Dublin and started work. In June Eithne bought a house and had moved before school re-opened in September. She took in an au-pair to provide support in the childcare duties; an arrangement she maintained for the children's primary school years.

Cabinteely Community School was a growing co-educational school serving a socially mixed catchment area. Originally a girls' school it had started taking in boys about three years before Eithne arrived there. Together with a number of the other teachers Eithne was involved in establishing a programme of activities to help broaden the curriculum. With up to 900 pupils in attendance and the use of class streaming, the School had no shortage of difficult and low achieving classes. Eithne found herself repeatedly assigned to these classes. Outside of her teaching role she also became involved in Club Conradh na Gaelige and in the local Labour Party. In 1982 her parents moved from Waterford to Dublin, where they were closer to their children and grandchildren.

By late 1983, with things becoming more settled in her life, Eithne felt an increasing need to do something in relation to helping others involved with Motor Neurone Disease in their lives. She rang the MS Society asking would they be in a position to establish a support group and while they didn't feel they could do so, they agreed to take her name. The following May Eithne received a call from them asking her to speak to another woman, whose husband was very ill with MND. Eithne spoke with her several times, never being quite sure what she could offer and struggling with a series of mixed-up emotions herself.

Then in February 1985 a letter from three women, Mary Callinan, Carmel Ross and Cathy Feeny, was published in the national newspapers asking if anything could be done to help a friend of theirs, Mary Murray, who had MND. Eithne was one of 5 or 6 who rang the telephone number given saying they had experience of the disease. Emily Wallace was another. It was decided to hold a public meeting in the hope of maybe 20 or 25 turning up. Again, this was simply announced by way of a letter to the papers. Some 65 people turned up to the Quaker Hall on Churchtown Road, from across the

country. When a Waterford man, whose brother had MND suggested that an organisation be established and a fund set up, Eithne's mother put down the first £10. Eithne described the scene vividly;

AOR: And was the sense in the room like, oh I thought we were the only ones. Was there that kind of story line coming out.

EF: There was, there was, eh, there was kind of. Mary Murray was there, she was brought she was on a kind of stretcher she came in an ambulance from the Richmond, she was in the latter stages that took an awful lot out of me because I hadn't seen anybody at that stage we are talking about five and a half years on.

AOR: Revisiting it.

EF: That took an awful lot, it was, the look and the sounds, I found it all, quite overwhelming, there was also a young woman behind me, who came on the committee and she was chair later and she just sat and she wept and she wept and she wept and she wept and cried and cried and my mother said you have got to talk to that girl, and my mother said she looks like a nice girl, I am sure she is a teacher, my mother kept saying and she was right! There she was the poor pet and her husband had died the previous August, it had only been ten months since he had died and she had her second baby since then, and you know it was really amazing the people who met each other there.

AOR: Yeah, and for those who came who had it or were in early stages, must have been a bit of a shock too.

EF: It was to see Mary Murray there who was in the latter and yeah to meet each other.

AOR: And to feel the grief that was floating around the place.

EF: Oh yeah, I always remember there was a man who came up from Newbridge and he was in fairly early stages and he had been to some maverick fellow in Germany who was taking metal filling out of his teeth because it was supposed to be mercury that was causing it and he had been twice or three times and he gave a big lecture on that they should have their fillings taken out, you must throw out all your aluminium pots and pans and you know, he was a very nice man and the lovely wife but it really wasn't something that we needed to be going on that night. I always remember that, that they were there, and there was also another fellow who was, had been a horse trainer and by this time was into greyhounds and he was there with his partner and they had some other theory about, and they had been sold the snake venom theory, which I had also been sold from California and they had been to California and he had have five doses or four doses or whatever it was of napalm and he still wasn't getting any better and he was kind of ranting! (EF S3 p. 19)

Mary Murray died within a month of this meeting, with Emily's husband dying a week later. The MS Society gave the new Association the use of their office in Sandymount for evening meetings. They met every fortnight for 18 months. The meetings ran for hours and involved a lot of sharing of individual stories and getting to know each other. In the Autumn of the year they were offered, via personal connections, the premiere of the Irish-made film 'Eat the Peach' as a fundraising. It prompted them to incorporate the association in February 1986. The event in the Savoy in March netted the Motor Neurone Disease Association a sum of £14,000. The previous day they had a total of £300 in the Association's account. This windfall meant that they were now able to start providing tangible support for people. At the same time the publicity around the event raised both public awareness and demand from sufferers. They recruited Dr. Michael Hutchins, a consultant neurologist in St. Vincents, as the first medical patron. They set up an office in Mary Callinan's house and received advice, information and brochures from the British MNDA. With Mary acting as a full-time volunteer they began fielding calls from around the country looking for support. Each case was gone through by the Committee in detail, looking to see how to support them and how best to approach them. As Eithne recalled:

> **EF:** I remember one of the first families was a family in xyztown, where the husband had motor neurone and he was in his early forties, early fifties I'd say and his wife rang and she had seven children, the youngest only a baby, the eldest maybe only 14 or 15, all still in school, she had nobody earning any money, and not only did she have her husband with motor neuron in the house she also had two single brother-in-laws who lived in the house as well, so I mean it was the real country farm situation and what did she need most? And I always remember having this discussion at a meeting and we, in a way, sometimes our discussions would cover was it alright to spend whatever it was £200 I think it was, on a washing machine for her, because that was the thing she needed most to make life any way bearable for her and I always remember we bought the washing machine for her and Emily went down with it and Emily had remained in contact with her, all the time, always stayed in contact with her.' (EF S3 p. 23)

Two years down the line, Mary retired from her role and the Association needed to move their office from her home. Approaching Dublin Corporation along with five or six other organisations they were given office space near Christchurch as part of the Community Services Project. A part-time secretary was recruited. Around the country people began to do small fundraisers for them and there was a little continuous income. With no national register of MND sufferers they was no way of knowing the full extent of the demand. The operation was reacting to demand on a case-by-case basis. When

the secretary left suddenly in April 1989, the Chair asked Eithne if she would take a career-break and come and work for the Association. With her children in the early stages of secondary school, she replied that while interested, she needed to maintain her salary. In fact the Association only had the finance to cover her salary for six months. Nevertheless, Eithne took the opportunity and commenced on August 1. It took three weeks to open and reply to the backlog of post. The immediate requirement was threefold; to develop a database of sufferers and local health personal, to strengthen the Association's fundraising activities, and to learn from the British MNDA. In September Eithne went to visit the British MNDA, which by then had developed into an organisation with some 28 staff. She quickly developed a good working relationship with their CEO, Peter Harding. Shortly after this visit, their marketing manager came to Ireland to provide advice and to offer the Association a loan of £10,000 per annum for three years. This money, together with locally raised funds, provided the Board with the security to ask Eithne to stay on for another year. Her School Principal insisted she take two years, to allow for proper substitution, and the Board agreed.

At the beginning of 1990 the Community Services Project was threatened with expulsion from the Christchurch offices by the Dublin Corporation. Following a street protest and negotiations with the Health Board, new accommodation for the Project was provided in Carmichael House. In this new space, called the Carmichael Centre for Voluntary Groups, the Association began to systematise and develop its services. Following advice from the British MNDA, a model of good practice was developed whereby all equipment and related supports were only provided for patients following an assessment and request from the appropriate healthcare professional; typically this was an Occupational Therapist, a Public Health Nurse, or a Speech and Language Therapist. Ownership of equipment remained with the Association. It was still being operated on a shoestring, with Eithne full-time, the Treasurer acting in a voluntary capacity one and half days a week and a part-time secretary. The nature of the disease being such as to generate a relatively small number of high demand cases, organisational knowledge around cases and related healthcare professionals in the primary field tended to be personalised and held by Eithne.

In 1990 Peter Harding suggested that the three Associations in the British Isles, the Irish, the British (England, Wales and Northern Ireland), and Scottish Association jointly hold a medical and scientific conference. This was held in Birmingham in 1990,

1991 and 1992, quickly becoming a big international conference. It led in 1992 to the establishment of the International MND Association Alliance with Eithne as the founding Chair for the first three years. In 1995 the International Symposium was held in Ireland in recognition of the Irish Association's 10th Anniversary.

The Association struggled to gain support among the hospital consultants. However, a Dublin Doctor, Orla Hardiman, training in Boston as a neurologist, was working under a world authority on the disease and was interested in the work of the Association. Coming back to Dublin in 1991/92 , to a lecturership in UCD, she made herself know to Eithne. When she gained permission to run a neuromuscular clinic in Beaumont in 1994 she asked Eithne to sit in on the MND cases in order to assist with the patients' primary care needs. When Dr. Hardiman became a consultant at the Hospital, Beaumont opened a dedicated MND Clinic.

At the end of Eithne's three year career break, the organisation was well established. They were supporting about 80 patients around the country. Every month brought patient deaths and new diagnoses. Eithne applied for and got a second two-year career break and, under prompting from Peter Harding, approached the Board about establishing some pension provision. The Board agreed and with this in place she was in a position to resign from her teaching post when her five years came to an end in 1994. By this time both her children were in College and life was becoming a little less hectic for her.

Eithne continued as Director of the Irish Motor Neurone Disease Association until 2005.

Values and meaning

In reflecting on the pattern of her life, Eithne first contrasted it with the lives of friends who in their college years had identified a particular professional career that they wished to pursue and had simply gone and followed that path. She noted that she never fitted that particular model, although there was clearly an aspiration, if not an expectation, on the part of her parents that she would do so. She seemed to always hanker after other possibilities and certainly her mother doubted if she would fulfil her potential. To what degree this lack of focus reflected the wrong subject choice at

University is unclear. From her mid-teens her abiding interest has been in the lives of people, real people. Her preference in reading is for biography rather than fiction. Her conversation is littered with people rather than ideas. Typically they are described in some detail rather than just identified as actors.

Despite her parents' expectations she admits her own sense of unfulfilled potential was quite muted, instancing that she was comfortable with giving up work while in Cork. While many times after Noel's death she felt she should change her career, she didn't know what to do, she was worn out physically and emotionally, and was responsible for her children. Her mother had an idea that Eithne might become a barrister and Eithne herself considered nursing or social work but the lack of income that re-training entailed, simply meant that it wasn't an option financially.

Listening to Eithne tell her story is to be struck by her remarkable capacity to assume responsibility, to refuse to be overwhelmed by events but to search always to identify what can be done in the present to survive or alleviate a situation and to do it. This characteristic holds true across her personal and work life. She seems to have always exhibited a high energy and high capacity for engagement. She typifies this as a need to be busy and says of herself that she has absolutely no interest in social outlets such as golf or bridge, both of which she considers a complete waste of time. She is not comfortable in larger social occasions and finds the required chit-chat a trial. Of course this busy-ness is not undirected and seems to be always aimed at some place where she can be helpful. She suggests herself that this may reflect a need to be needed. Even in the context of the interview series, against a background of ongoing cancer treatment Eithne was concerned to think through how she might maintain a helpful engagement with the world ...

> 'and to feel that you are involved in something that has a certain urgency about it at the moment, that something needs to be done about it, and even if you can help in a very small way that that's a useful thing to do.' EF S4 p. 4

Eithne grew up in an era of strict religious observance while living in a household where the actual practice of and adherence to the institutionalised Church was 'peripatetic' (S4 p 15). Her mother was determined that Eithne knew her catechism and her father that she knew the expectations of the world. But the actual practice of religion within the house tended to be for public consumption. Eithne did go through a

period around the age of 12 when she became very religious, daily attending early morning Mass on her own. It is indicative of her parents' openness that no attempt was made to dissuade her. While she admits to enjoying the element of striking out on her own which this involved, she also liked the ritual and the ceremony of the services. In school, however, she was refused permission to become a 'Child of Mary' on the basis of 'not being worthy' and recalls with distaste a certain elitism within Church institutions. In the 1960's she became disenchanted with the slow pace of implementation of the reforms arising from Vatican II, the inability to move on in relation to married couples and the role of women in the Church. Her reaction was compounded by the approach promoted in Humane Vitae and the propaganda that ensued in the debate over birth control. Nonetheless she still recognises that

> 'there would be a certain spiritual side to me, I wouldn't say it's very well developed being honest' EF S4 p18.

Through her own life experience and in her work life Eithne has faced, or witnessed in others, considerable pain, loss and bereavement. Organised religion does not seem to have offered anything to support an accommodation with this side of the human experience. Now, faced with the possible implications of her own cancer diagnosis Eithne relies on her own resources.

> '... I have no answers about the religious side of it anymore than I have about the scientific side of it, I really haven't, ... I think we all have to take it as it comes really and try to accept it as best we can, I saw myself when I got ill that I wasn't sure how I was going to deal with it, and I actually found myself somewhere out there looking back down at myself and kind of saying this is really going to be a huge test. ... That having been through the awfulness of serious and terminal illness and death and bereavement in a very close relationship and also with a feeling at the time of not just this is awful and it can't be happening to me and it is happening and all the stuff you go through but also a certain feeling of anger and resentment that you are not only losing your partner and your spouse but that you are actually losing your whole future. You are actually losing all your hopes and dreams for the future, that, is that about as much as any one person can be expected or can expect themselves to come through and be sane at the end of it. That doesn't mean that you are actually in a less good place let's say, psychologically maybe and spiritually maybe, but psychologically especially when you are told yourself that you now have something that may be life threatening, now one part of me feels that it leaves you better equipped that you have been there and you have kind of come through it, but this time you have to remember and I had to pull myself up several times, that this is not something if it does turn into a terminal illness, it's not something that I am going to come out of, and that's what really hits you.
> EF S4 pps 22-23

Eithne struggles with the idea of an afterlife, certainly as it has traditionally been presented within the Catholic Church, in terms of resurrection of the body, for example. Indeed she is not convinced of there being anything more than the passing impact of one's life lived. Nevertheless, it is clear that Noel has been an abiding presence in her life.

> ' but you see no matter how practical I might be or how logical I might be in lots of things that doesn't stop me, when I am sitting above in Beaumont in December and I just got my diagnosis, that I wasn't shouting out saying Noel you old fucker why did you leave me here on my own to face this, you know bloody well I need you here now, so I have some feeling that he is there somewhere and that he really knows that I am very cross. I don't have any doubt about that. EF S4 pps 26-27

Eithne's moral compass reflects her concern with and need for engagement with people. From her parents she learned 'certainly that whatever you do you don't do any harm to anyone else' (S4 p27). Moving this maxim from a point of neutrality to a more positive impact shapes her approach to her life and her engagement with the people around her.

> the morality that would guide me would be very much looking at society as a whole and seeing if we can make life's journey better without, not meaning in any hedonistic way but just making it a bit more bearable and a bit more even pleasurable for the people you come in contact with. ... So I think that I have always probably without even realising myself, been concerned with people and with how people manage if you like and how people live their lives and how things work out if you like, for people. I have also been interested in, kind of, organisational stuff, mainly to do with education and social issues as well, yeah I have always been very interested in things like that, and in the broad sense of the word, while I wouldn't have been a very good stay at home mother with small children and I acknowledge that. ... So I suppose, coming back to what guides me, I suppose is to be involved. ... So I don't know Andrew what kind of drives me or guides me I mean basically it would be not to wittingly do any harm to anybody to keep myself involved with people. ...And I think that probably what would be the thing that I would hate most would be to find myself, for I don't know what kind of reason there would be, but to find myself where I didn't have access to people.'
> EF S4 pps 27 - 29

Appendix 5

Sean Love

Sean Love is Director of the Irish Branch of Amnesty International. Prior to this staff role, Sean was Chair of the Irish Branch of Amnesty. It was in his capacity as chair that I first met him when he attended a seminar series on nonprofit management in which I was involved. After that I had very little contact with him until some years later when I approached him about taking part in this research. He readily agreed.

Life history

Sean was born circa 1960 and reared in Dublin, as the middle child in a family of seven. His father, a native of Co. Fermanagh in Northern Ireland, had come to Dublin in his late teens. He joined the Irish Army during 'the Emergency'[72] and later worked with CIE, the Irish State Public Transport Company. There he progressed through the company structure, retiring as a Depot Inspector. Sean describes his parents as strong Fianna Fail supporters, in the Roman Catholic tradition; very much of a generation. He remembers his parents as both being very hard working. There was a strong family ethos, good academic ability, and the children variously moved through the education system and on to University. Within the family there was a strong sense of what was right and fair, and the children all developed as strong-minded individuals, with often diverging political views.

Sean attended the local Belgrove National School for his primary education. He remembers it with great warmth and affection, as the teachers made learning fun. He identifies one teacher in particular who taught him in first and second class as being 'just fantastic'. From about aged seven to ten he acted as an altar boy at the local Parish Church. It was at primary school that he started playing Gaelic football. Within his class they had a team that played and grew up together, starting in School but developing in Clontarf GAA Club right up to senior level, forming life-long friendships in the process. Several from the group went on to win All-Irelands with Dublin.

[72] 'the Emergency' is the term used in Ireland to refer to the impact here of World War II

From Belgrove he progressed to St. Paul's, Raheny, a boys' secondary school run by the Vincentian Order. The teaching staff were a mixture of religious and lay teachers. While he doesn't speak of the school with the same enthusiasm as he does of his primary school, he notes that he did not have any bad experiences at the school. On the contrary, he recalls a wonderful trans-European trip in fifth year, led by two priests. Noting that the order didn't 'hard sell' religion in the school, and distinguishing the Missionary ethos of the Vincentian Order from the Diocesan approach within the Catholic Church, Sean cannot identify a core set of values inculcated in the school. Nevertheless, he acknowledges an underlying theme of being concerned with rightness and the valuing of others. He instances being involved in volunteering to help in the provision of respite care for children with intellectual disabilities, which was run in the School over the summer months. As a teenager however, Sean notes that despite such moments of unselfishness, he was pretty much 'as bad a teenager as bad can be in many ways' (SL S1 p. 3). In later life he has come to know the Vincentians and other Catholic Missionary Orders as strong supporters of Amnesty's work.

From about aged 11 onwards Sean and his friends operated a relatively lucrative garden maintenance business in the summer holidays servicing the many large gardens around Clontarf. The work was taken pretty seriously, with investment in equipment to boost productivity. The money earned served to pay for summer camping holidays down the West of Ireland.

At 18, unprompted by anyone, Sean decided to become a vegetarian. It did not reflect a distaste for meat, in fact he really enjoyed meat. His personal rationale was that he knew he was incapable of killing an animal and preparing it to eat. And because he could not do so he wasn't going to eat the end result. The reason he could not do it was that he loved animals. The family always had pet dogs and cats about the home and Sean loved them.

After Secondary School, Sean followed his brothers and sisters in choosing to go to University College Dublin. Since most of his classmates had chosen Trinity College, due to its geographical proximity, he found himself developing a whole new circle of friends. He read history and economics but suggests that he really viewed UCD as an opportunity to extend his social education and his football. He became deeply involved in writing and playing music, classical, jazz and rock, an interest that remains a

significant part of his life. Indeed for a period after College he played in a band around Dublin although it failed to take off commercially. Following this he did a variety of things including working and living in New York for a year, where he worked as a bar tender and played football.

Returning to Dublin, determined not to do a Higher Diploma in Education and pursue a teaching career. He met a horticulturalist, and together they established one of the earlier organic farms. The story is almost serendipitous. Together they noticed an advertisement in the back of the Irish Times inquiring if anybody was interested in taking over a gate lodge and gardens. Answering it, they found themselves in Hilton Park, Co. Monaghan, a great old Anglo-Irish estate, complete with a five-acre walled garden and an old variety apple orchard of some ten acres. Combining her expertise and his labour, they ran a business supplying Belfast and Dublin restaurants and outlets for some five years. After this time his partner, although they were not practising Catholics, decided she wished to go to South America as a lay missionary with the Columban Order to work with AIDs victims. While she and Sean have remained great friends, it was not a direction his wished to take and he returned to Dublin.

Hilton Park was significant for others reason however. Situated beside Annamakerrig,[73] house guests regularly included writers of national and international repute. This gave Sean an opportunity to meet people such as Eugene McCabe, Colm Tobin and Joe O'Connor. The owners, Lucy and Johnny Madden, were members of Amnesty International. Indeed Lucy Madden had set up a local group and Sean joined when invited by her to do so, although he admits he had only a loose knowledge of the organisation and its strong Irish connections at the time.

Back in Dublin in the early 1990's a series of events served to draw Sean into deeper involvement with Amnesty International. The Balkan wars and signature events such as the rape of Vukovar and mass disappearances in Srebrenicia were quickly followed by the Rwandan genocide. In all cases it appeared as if the international community were unwilling to act decisively. Joining the Dublin Central Amnesty International Group, Sean quickly became heavily engaged, coming on to the national Board for about six years, acting as Chairman for four or five years. This commitment was facilitated by his work-life. Having done a Higher Diploma in Information Studies he

[73] An artists' retreat centre

worked in a number of University Libraries, first in the College of Surgeons, then in UCD and finally in St. Vincent's University Hospital. There he was running the Library Information Department on behalf of UCD. While his role as Amnesty Chair was demanding in terms of time and travel, perhaps up to 30 hours a week, relative independence at work and supportive superiors enabled him to fulfil such a schedule.

Sean had retired from the Board of Amnesty when the Director informed him of her intention to step down and suggested he consider applying for the post. He was taken somewhat by surprise by the suggestion as it hadn't occurred to him as a possibility. Having given it deeper consideration, realising it meant a total change of work-life direction, believing that despite a mix of professional skills and voluntary experience he might not be the ideal candidate he decided to put in an application. Nevertheless he felt that in terms of where his own mind was, the role was perfect, and he has been delighted with the opportunity.

Sean notes that the role of Amnesty Director is far more stressful than that of Chair. Despite the formal authority of the Board, the Director really holds the responsibility for the organisation. Given the status and reputation of Amnesty International, the necessity is to get it right at all times. He pays particular attention to the Chair – Director relationship, seeing it as a crucial relationship for the effective functioning of an NGO. He tends to segregate himself to a degree and sees it as right that he should do so. He sees himself as a good leader, who instigates a lot but only after consultation with people whose views he trusts, both within and without Amnesty. Under his direction Amnesty International Ireland played an important role in the international organisation in promoting the acceptance of own country work. Now Amnesty in Ireland works about 40% on own country work and 60% on international work.

Values and meaning

In speaking of the values he holds and by which he guides his actions, Sean points to a tendency to react to bullies and to intervene in what he hopes will be a constructive manner. He distinctly remembers a schoolyard incident as a 5-year old where he stepped in to challenge an aggressor. And so, he sees himself being moved by justice and injustice and can trace many examples over his life of wanting to react to stop bullying in any form. In such action he is also motivated to see the perpetrator named,

albeit that he is sensitive to the danger of transgressing their rights. The work of Amnesty International he characterises as dealing with such issues on the a global and most serious scale, but at the same time concerned with broad issues of injustice to people, of not being allowed to voice an opinion or do as they are entitled.

Reflecting on the operation of political power in Irish society, he finds himself angry at the clientelism of the system and the abuse of the loyalty to party and creed displayed by his parents' generation, despising the hypocrisy and dishonesty of it all. There is an element in this that might equally be expressed as a concern with truth and integrity. In a different field for example, his approach to football had always been to play the ball rather than the man, not always to the approval of his coaches. Despite his Dublin GAA linkages, he holds no great county loyalty and instead points out that he is an admirer of the beautiful practice of a sport, instancing Kerry football and Italian soccer. More recently, he has had cause to object to the darker side of local tribalisms when they were used to try to silence objections to motorway developments in Co. Meath.

For Sean the root of his concern is sympathetic and connected rather than theoretical and intellectualised. In dealing with people his approach is to be giving, open and trusting. He enjoys connecting with people and particularly likes working with people where he can find a common thread with them and where he receives something back intellectually. He finds he works well with teams and believes this is grounded in a capacity to empower people and to genuinely value people. He tries not to under-estimate anybody at any time. While being sociable and gregarious he is equally comfortable on his own. In his Amnesty work he finds a place most reflective of who he is and where he wants to be. This is particularly so when he meets people from other cultures and backgrounds and finds he shares with then a common ground of belief.

He loves the outdoors, nature, the countryside, and having moved there from Dublin in the search of space for a growing family, now shudders at the thought of returning to the boxed-in constraints of urban and suburban life.

In his life Sean feels a personal responsibility to act. While he notes that he is in fact a reluctant engager, he finds circumstances may leave him with little option. He illustrates this with an example of being asked to go on the board of the local 'Educate

Together' school his children attend. Although not requiring a huge commitment, it is an extra addition to an already busy schedule. However, sensing the organisational need, what he could bring with his own experience, and his own sense of strong personal responsibility, he agreed. This action reflects his personal requirement to engage and to do whatever he can, to do his best, to support another being needing help.

His sense is that in practice many people fail to engage or seek to avoid engaging, that most of us don't stand up and get counted. He sees the requirement to do so as both a responsibility to oneself and a responsibility to others. While he would suffer bad conscience for not acting, the avoidance of such is not a motivational force for him. Rather, since he is capable of acting and the need is apparent, then he should and must act. It is important to do so simply because it is the right thing to do. Thus, this imperative may be constituted as a requirement to maintain a personal integrity that he couldn't conceive of breaching.

Asked to identify the basis of his moral reasoning, Sean notes that he doesn't particularly have any religious conviction but feels that there is 'some form of moral balance in the universe' (SL S3 p.4). He grounds his choice between right and wrong in this balance on his fundamental tendency not to do unto others what you would not want done to you; a position he operates from with total conviction. From this point he may develop his position relative to his social engagement. His international perspective enables him to move from the inter-personal to the systemic. Hence personal responsibility challenges the legitimacy of gaining from a global system that impoverishes so many.

Following the logical consequences of this line of reasoning leaves him conscious of an individual responsibility facing us all to show each other how to be human. He sees this 'respect for what it is to be human' as a common thread running through all the moral exemplars in history.

> **AOR:** 'well, cos at one level, you know, you are saying you are making a whole set of choices about, about how a human should live but at the same time saying this should be reflected in society more widely, so that has, so in working out your own challenge of how to be human individually you're also pushing that vision out into society more widely. I suppose this comes to the root of how I see it, people engaged in that

> are in praxis making a statement of how to be human in a social context. That, that's what's going on. So then that's kind of how do you conceive of the individual in the world that's, there is an individual job to show, this sounds perhaps a bit way over the top, there is an individual responsibility to show everybody else how to be human, now that's basically what's happening. Now if you then throw up somebody like Mandela, I suspect that's the root of the admiration
>
> **SL:** yes, oh I agree completely yes and it's not just Mandela, it's Jesus Christ as well, insofar as if the representation is true. It's the same representation, and in every, through history, anybody who is, there are lots of people who fall broadly into that category and what they stand for is very clear and it's that, it's a respect for what it is to be human, I think it's the same model in all cases, Thomas Paine, you can work through them all, it's the same model and all the other varieties that appear, eh, the kinks in it, the Hitlers and all the rest of them who appear are, eh, serious misrepresentations of what it is to be human or whatever has happened to those people, whatever has damaged them in the process. And you can know, you can see historically, there is no, you can't find any intellectual justification for the actions of any of those figures, any acceptable intellectual justification, but you can always find it for the people who have championed humanity, I think it is the same thread throughout.' (SL S3 p. 6)

This moral force as expressed in mankind reflects human consciousness and reflexivity, but it is representative of all life, a force underpinning all life. In humans it is present as a responsibility and evidenced by common moral positions on basic rights and issues. In his Amnesty work he finds such common positions expressed across cultures and societies.

And so while social structures and systems are central to the functioning of society, Sean always accords the individual the primacy in the relationship. Structure and system are there to serve the individual, not the individual to serve the structures. The limit of human freedom in action is properly bounded by the requirement to do no harm to others.

Appendix 6

Fergus O'Ferrall

Fergus O'Ferrall is the Director of The Adelaide Hospital Society.[74] I first met him in 1998 when he was undertaking research as part of an MSc in Health Services Management. In this context we had a number of conversations regarding the role of the voluntary sector in Ireland. He later published *Citizenship and Public Service; Voluntary and Statutory Relationships in Irish Healthcare* (Dundealgan Press 2000). He received his PhD from TCD in the late 1970s for work on Daniel O'Connell and the development of a Catholic public life in Ireland in the second quarter of the nineteenth century and titled 'The Growth of Consciousness in Ireland: 1823 – 1847'. In 1985 he published *Catholic mancipation, Daniel O'Connell and the Birth of Irish Democracy 1820-1830.* More recently he has written on aspects of healthcare and edited (with Kenneth Kearon) *Medical Ethics and the Future of Healthcare* (Columbia Press 2000). When approached, he readily agreed to partake in this research.

Life history

Fergus was born in 1948 and reared on the family farm in Co. Longford. One of three boys, his mother was a primary school teacher. The family were members of the Church of Ireland and accordingly his mother taught in the nearest Church of Ireland primary school. Given the small size of the Church of Ireland community in the locality, this was a single teacher school some 15 miles from home and Fergus remembers the time spent travelling on a daily basis. Indeed the small nature of the Church of Ireland community meant that his mother spent a period living in the teacher's residence at another school as it was too far from home.

His father's passion for horses and the related social engagements around hunting, shows and point to points brought him into a social circle which crossed the denominational boundaries in the Ireland of the 1950s and 1960s. Although noting that perhaps it was hard to distinguish from the general experience of Ireland in economically stagnant 1950s, Fergus recognised that the Protestant community in his area felt somewhat embattled. Emigration to Australia and elsewhere, on the one hand,

[74] 'The Society evokes public support throughout Ireland for a public voluntary teaching hospital which provides the highest quality of healthcare especially for the poor of every denomination.' (IPA 2003 p. 165)

and the implications of inter-denominational marriage on the other, combined to threaten an already marginal community.[75]

In 1960 Fergus went to boarding school in Wesley College, then situated on St. Stephen's Green in Dublin. Although the intake was predominantly Methodist in the co-educational school, Wesley drew from a range of Protestant denominations, among others; reflecting the realities of denominational education in a predominantly Roman Catholic State. Fergus's mother had been to Wesley and although formally of the Church of Ireland, had a Methodist orientation and they had often attended Methodist services in Longford. Typical of the time, the school's ethos was quite sheltered.

From Wesley, Fergus went to Trinity College Dublin in 1967, to read History and Politics. In College he became very involved in the debating societies, particularly the Historical Society. It was not until his Sophister years that he became engrossed with his chosen subjects. As he came to the end of his primary degree he developed an increasing interest in adult education. This was partly stimulated by exposure both in Wesley and while at College, when he attended the Eustace Street Quaker House, by the ideas and practice of Quakerism in relation to adult education and formation. Moving on to do a Higher Diploma Education, Fergus was provided with teaching practice in the English Language Institute and given immediate experience of adult education. His interest in adult education and the ideas of Thomas Davis, his disciplinary orientation to history and the provision of a grant to pursue postgraduate research, led him towards exploring the importance of O'Connell and his pioneering in Ireland of the strategy and techniques of mass mobilisation. During these years (1971-78) Fergus also developed and taught a course on Irish politics at the People's College, a Trade Unions college.

As he finished his PhD, Macra na Feirme[76] was establishing a national team of adult education guidance officers and Fergus was taken on to cover the northern half of Leinster. While the education officers covered their geographical areas, they also worked as a team on the training events. Much of the work was directed at the

[75] Roman Catholic Canon Law stipulated that children of inter-denominational marriages be brought up as Catholics.

[76] Macra na Feirma is 'a national voluntary organisation for young people between the ages of 17 and 35. The organisation aims to promote agricultural and rural development and the personal development of its members.' (IPA 2003, p. 356)

education and training of club officers, county chairs and national officers; effectively providing a support resource to the voluntary structure. The work brought Fergus into every parish in his remit and into contact with a range of individuals who would later emerge in leading positions in agriculture and politics. Fergus moved quickly through the organisation in Macra, being promoted to manager of the education team and then being seconded in 1983-85 to the Department of Labour as a Youth Advisor to the Minister. He returned to Macra in 1985 to take up the role of Chief Executive, staying there until 1988. By then he was really reaching the upper end of the organisation's age group and felt he needed to move on from it.

During the 1980's Fergus's church and religious commitments had grown and when the Bible Society[77] advertised for a Director in 1988 he sought and was offered the post. Established in Ireland since 1806, the Bible Society was seeking somebody to lead them through a modernising phase. While the Society had emerged from a Protestant Missionary background and ethos, the increasing interest of the Roman Catholic Church in the vernacular after Vatican II had led to an increasing engagement between the two. By the time Fergus came to the Irish branch there was a well-established model of how a national Bible society would serve every church. Simply put, the Society focuses on providing people with access to the Bible in a format they can utilise. This can include education support in the use of the Bible. The Society does not purport to teach doctrine, but to serve every church at the point the church wishes. Fergus worked with the Society for five years leading it through the development of a new constitution, the establishment of an inter-denominational group of Patrons, a board, and the reconstruction of the Society's shop in Dublin. The Irish Branch became of interest worldwide because of example of an effective relationship developed with the Roman Catholic Church, in a predominantly Catholic country. Fergus's period in office with the Society also coincided with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the opening up of China, with a concomitant explosion in world demand for Bibles, involving him in substantial international travel. During his time there he also undertook a Diploma in Biblical and Theological Studies.

During this period Fergus was invited onto the Board of The Adelaide Hospital Society. In common with other private denominational hospitals, The Adelaide had

[77] 'The National Bible Society of Ireland 'is a voluntary organisation with the purpose of making the 'Holy Scriptures available to all as effectively as possible.' (IPA 2003, p. 371)

become substantially funded by the State as the State had sought to develop a national health service on the pre-existing denominational structure. State investment in hospital infrastructure in Dublin in the 1980s and 1990s led to the closure of many older 19th Century buildings and the establishment of large modern facilities in suburban centres, wherein smaller hospitals were amalgamated. Within this context the policy proposal was to bring together three city hospitals, including the Adelaide, and relocate them in the suburb of Tallaght. For the Adelaide Hospital Society, with its tradition and commitment to a specific medical ethic, the challenge was to maintain the capacity to continue their particular contribution to healthcare. The underlying question was the entrusting of voluntary bodies with running public services and the manner in which this was operationalised in governance structures. In a previous case, on the other side of the city, the older hospitals had been closed and the State had established the new hospital and appointed the hospital board. The question was a contentious one and took some ten years to resolve. As the possible shape of a solution was emerging, Fergus left the Bible Society and became the full-time Director of the Adelaide Society in 1993. In 1996 the new voluntary structure and Charter for the combined Adelaide and Meath Hospitals was agreed. Two years later the move to the facility in Tallaght took place. The first phase of Fergus's work in his new role was focused on negotiating and managing the legal transition so that the charter was revised in a manner which would encompass both the Meath and the Children's Hospital while retaining the crucial elements of character and tradition. Once the move to the new facility had been completed the task became a developmental one in terms of enhancing the hospital and ensuring that the Board continued to influence the character of the institution.

More recently, Fergus became active in a voluntary and community sector networking organisation called The Wheel. The organisation has sought to develop by utilising a participative process and avoiding hierarchical structure. While the process has been slow, it has succeeded in keeping the organisational agenda open and attuned to issues which cross-cut across the sector more broadly. Fergus has been involved at a number of levels, including acting as a member of the organisation's board.

Fergus's time with the Bible Society deepened his own religious interest and formation so that shortly after leaving the Society he went on to train as a Methodist local preacher and commenced to practise in 1996. The system has its origins in the

structures John Wesley set up in the 18th Century, such that ordained ministers and trained lay preachers share the leading of services within a circuit. Services for a circuit are planned quarterly in advance by the relevant group of eight or nine preachers. Such lay control and involvement represents what is regarded as one of the core strengths of Methodism. The chief role and gift of the lay preacher is to link the world of work with the communication of the gospel.

Values and meaning

In speaking of the origin and nature of his values, Fergus notes the consistency between the politically conscious democratic sensibility of Methodism, the valuing of the individual in Quakerism, the ideas of civic republicanism, the nature of his work and experience in Macra na Feirme, the focus of his research interest in O'Connell's civic engagement of people and Thomas Davis's call to adult education. Reflecting, he suggested ...

> 'if there is a common core in all of it, it is about people, individual people and people flourish best by being actively able to contribute to a common good and people are more and more impoverished if they are excluded from that, and become dependent on others for services and are not able to be an agent in their own right so it's the human personal flourishing by being empowered to do things for other people, much more than it being dependent on others for, so part of the human flourishing is that it's a social involvement and connectedness and that goes right back, as you know, to Greek thinking.' FOF, S.1 p.15

When I looked to clarify whether he was speaking of adult education as the development of the individual or the group consciousness, he replied that it was both, arguing however that there was a group experiential dimension which was perhaps stronger than the individual experience.

Exploring the link in the Protestant tradition between the education of the individual and the expression of religious belief in the actions of ones life, Fergus noted the degree to which it was inherent in Protestant churches. Education was seen as necessary to gain access to the scriptures and indeed in both his primary and secondary education he was formally examined on his knowledge of the scriptures. He felt that within Protestant culture there was a heavy emphasis on the literate and educated, contrasting somewhat with the catechetical emphasis in the Catholic tradition. When asked to explore how this was reflected in his own life he replied

'....although I was very interested in religion obviously and I was absorbing I think things from Quakers and from my own background and so on, and from the Methodist church and Methodist education and if you like Wesley and stuff like that, it was really only in the 1980s that I became really personally, that I had a personally strong commitment that would have maybe, that would have influenced choices in a sharper way than it would have done earlier so but yes it would. So from then on I would have certainly dated more consciously taken choices about what I do. I would have been informed by my faith if you like rather than just absorbing things more unconsciously (FOF S2 p. 5).

He went on to instance his decision to join the Bible Society as being 'consciously made on a faith based motivation' (FOF S2 p.5).

Turning to the relationship between his developing political philosophy in civic republicanism and his deepening religious convictions Fergus explained that

'[T]hey do relate obviously very closely, I suppose it's about, I mean there is a phrase I can't remember now something that the early church fathers said about the glory of god is a flourishing human being or something like that. You probably know it.

AOR: No I don't.

FOF: Do you know, there is something along the lines

AOR: In Catholic discussion, yes.

FOF: But there is that sense within, I have come to life so that I can have it to the full, there is that tradition in the Jesus story, if you like, in the Christian faith. That it is about joy and love and connection and responsibility for others and so on and to some extent the motivation as I understand it is certain strands of civic republicanism is the same motivation, is about the wholeness of human development because if you erode that public connection and core responsibility for each other you privatise and individualise people and you diminish their growth and their moral being almost if you like. So there is a very close link in the two philosophies as I would understand it and they are both centred around how do people flourish best – it's the old Greek question really – what is the best context for people to be born...'

Going on to emphasise the central importance of attaching meaning to the interaction between people and the context from which that meaning is derived, FOF identified the critical importance of the quality of choices one made in that interaction and the degree to which this reflected or promoted personal growth. One measure of this quality is the consistency between values and actions;

'... living the values that you hold, yes absolutely. And St. John of the Cross said, it was a saying at the end of our lives we will be judged on love that will be the quality of the relationship, that's the only thing that is going to be eternal or valued or useful. And I think it's the same sort of motivation in civic republicanism and I say that because if you look at the Christian sort of social thought it's about the common good it's very much at the centre and it's about how do humans as you say relate to each other in order to maximise the common good and I, to that extent, now I haven't done any thinking about it and maybe I should about trying to relate them more structurally. But if one did think about it it's the way we are, I think there would be very close relationships between certain kinds of Christian social thought and political thought and certain strands in civic republicanism as I now know it.' (FOF, S. 2, p. 6)

From both a political and a moral perspective the balance between the individual and the community is a central and ongoing question which requires to be continually debated and judged in the light of changing circumstances of human society and knowledge. While in simple terms Protestant and Catholic ethics appear to inhabit opposite ends on this balance, the Protestant view erring towards the individual, the Catholic towards the community, in practice individual freedom or authoritarianism exists on both sides.

'I think certainly the Catholic view of the community or the church needed to be the governing instrument if you like. Laying down what informs your conscience is one. And then the Protestant individual is the other end. So they are on a spectrum, and I don't think one is right and one is wrong necessarily, they need to be constantly engaged and balanced so the best kind of Catholic and some would say Ratzinger has set this out as well is that at the end of the day you have to decide. So you almost come around to a Protestant view and similarly the Protestant thinking would say it's not an individual choice simply to maximise your own pleasures, it's qualified by what scripture has taught us about choice' (FOF, S.2, p 9).

The human or moral requirement to meet the need of others, the act of putting into practice a care for others, Fergus sees as something under increasing pressure in Irish society, his healthcare experience being a particular point in question. He notes that the Adelaide Society is committed to medical care delivery at the point of need, rather than via some rationing system, such as the market for example. More widely, he noted the nature of choice in society, whether at the level of the individual or government, regarding the allocation of resources, and in the Irish context, the relatively low level of GDP allocated to healthcare.

Drawing on the idea of choice and Fergus's earlier reference to the importance of attaching meaning to the interaction people, I asked about the basic source of moral

direction, suggesting that in his case it was faith. To open the discussion further I queried whether he saw the atheist position as being capable of moral choice. This interaction followed:

AOR: One last question because we agreed on a time frame, and I suppose I have circled around it a little bit and I am only trying to work this through myself, I think I hear you implying that the final source of moral direction is faith as opposed to anything else, yeah, I mean I never

FOF: I'm not sure what you mean by faith now

AOR: Okay maybe if we go back to the atheists…

FOF: I think it rests ultimately on knowledge, I think you need to get into the area of, there are different kinds of knowledge, faith is one kind of knowledge, I mean Cardinal Newman would be the great thinker I suppose, you need to be careful with the language here…

AOR: Let me think what I am trying to say, eh

FOF: Are you thinking of faith as leap in the dark?

AOR: No, no, no. I am trying to say the source of moral knowledge is essentially in the, in, I am trying to get the right word now, but in the faith or in the religious perspective and I just, I have been trying to get to a point in the discussion where I was able to work out whether you saw an atheist as capable of making moral choices or not and I just wasn't quite sure if you were according that, you dodged the question, well you didn't dodge the question but you took a different angle…

FOF: I would be humble enough to say that I haven't given atheism as a thought-out position a great deal of thought, because as I said to you it seems to me not a credible faith position and I do think it rests totally and utterly, as does Christianity, on faith. Now obviously it's the way you are informed by different kinds of knowing or knowledge that makes you one or the other. And that's why I think Cardinal Newman and others have made a great contribution. Obviously you can use your reason, you can use your imagination, you know what I mean, in terms of knowing things and it's the combination of both generally gives you whatever certainty or confidence you have. So that is a faith position, it is not an irrational position or an unreasoned position, in fact it is governed by reason and the evidence you can produce for it, but it is also informed by other faculties and other ways of knowing, obviously in simple terms through imagination or through other faculties that you have, so that's my query about the word faith. Because sometimes people use the word faith as being asked to believe six improbable things before breakfast and faith in my book is a much firmer outcome of actual knowing through your own reasonable reasonability, I mean taking an example, some people would say oh well Jesus Christ is a myth, my reason tells me as a historian for example that there is sufficient evidence to know that there was a historical personage of

Jesus who did X, Y and Z, and we have as much information that would confirm that information the same as I know that Daniel O'Connell lived, different kinds of evidence but the same type of historical evidence as it were. So that's a reasonable approach, then there are other certain imaginative ways that you know and encounter a personality like that, and the same would operate in a historical reconstruction of somebody like Daniel O'Connell but a similar process is at work in relation to a superb thinker like Jesus because you have the evidence, you have his stories, you have the poetic way he talked and so forth, that's what I am saying, when you talk about faith, in my book you are talking about the, something that is built on knowledge, now it's not something that is built on empirical knowledge and science but that's a very limited way of knowing, and you can only know a certain amount of things with science that you can't know, maybe, in my book, and I am not a scientist, these are less important things that you discover through it, and sometimes people say oh well this is not scientific, thinking that science can answer the sort of, these other type of questions and it can't, you know, so that's a long way around, but I just think that's important.

AOR: You said two things, you said you know, one was and I will misquote this Fergus but it was a quote about a flowering human it was…

FOF: Oh yeah, the glory of god is a flourishing human being.

AOR: And the other was this will be judged solely at the end by love or capacity to love or having loved.

FOF: Yeah, that's a quote from St. John of the Cross

AOR: Yeah and both of those placed the result of the quality and the quality in very religious, in clear religious terms and I suppose that's what I was saying, is this at the root of moral choice, or can it, can it, a flowering human or love exist outside of, within an atheist framework, that's I suppose the root of my question because we are talking about action stemmed from values and I am trying to get at the root of the value basis and what I hear you telling, what I think I hear you saying is that value is based in faith however you define it…

FOF: Well it is for me but I have known people who are certainly agnostic and they have been enormously important exemplars of living out care for other people, would put anybody Christian to shame, and Jesus knew that, so I mean certainly agnostics can have, they are not claiming certitude in a way that I believe is possible for Christians to do but they are certainly very much influenced by the values and their approach to relationships with people and so on, I am not at all sure that the same is possible for atheists, logically. I really think they have a real difficulty because their difficulty is one to do with meaning and ultimate source of meaning and when you discount totally, an agnostic doesn't discount totally, when you discount totally the idea of a transcendent being anything is possible and anything is legitimate and you really have gone into the absurd at that stage.

AOR: Or the abyss?

FOF: Or the abyss, and ultimately therefore you end up, because somebody who is a bigger bully than you or I is going to come along and maximise their opportunities there and I think that's the tragedy of atheism and as I say when people stop believing in transcendence they don't stop believing they believe all sort of other absurd things, the bigger the propaganda spin wins that battle, so I have all sorts of problems with atheism as a source of moral being and I really think there are huge problems in that area. And I think all of the great moral exemplars that I can think of, were hugely informed by what you are calling religious values in fact they are motivations from what you call religion not necessarily Christian.

AOR: Or is hugely informed by a concept of the transcendent

FOF: Yes absolutely

AOR: That might be a common language that we could use?

FOF: Yes, yes. So I don't know if that answers your questions!

AOR: Yeah, thank you very much, that's great.

FOF, S. 2, pps 11-13

Appendix 7

Patricia Prendiville

Patricia is the Executive Director of the International Lesbian and Gay Association Europe (ILGA Europe), a post she took up in October 2004. I first met her when she was pursuing postgraduate research in voluntary organising at the School of Business, Trinity College. She readily accepted my invitation to partake in this research.

Life history

Patricia was born in the early 1960's, the fourth child in a family of two boys and three girls. The family lived in Kilorglin, a small town of a little over 1000 inhabitants in North Kerry. Both her parents were from a farming background, although her father was a veterinary surgeon and her mother had spent seven years in the Civil Service in Dublin prior to her marriage. Her father's professional standing provided material security and a certain social position within the town. Neither of parents were natives of the town, although they were Kerry born. While this positioned them as outsiders to the town, the service nature of her father's work and her mother's involvement in the local community council and the Irish Country Women's Association suggest a couple deeply embedded in the local community.

Patricia followed in the steps of her siblings to the local national co-educational school for her primary education. When it came time for her secondary education she went to a Loreto Convent Boarding School in the nearby County Town of Killarney. This choice was based on the fact that the local secondary school did not offer science subjects and that her two older sisters had gone to a boarding school in Tipperary. Patricia did not wish to go to the same school, having suffered years of unfavourable comparison in national school.

After her Intermediate Certificate, Patricia decided to return to Kilorglin for her Leaving Certificate cycle. She attended the local secondary, a privately owned co-educational school, funded by the State. The ethos of the school placed a strong emphasis on the individual achieving their personal potential and this included an aspect of encouraging individual leadership. By this time Patricia and her brother were the only ones at home with the older siblings in Dublin.

On finishing school in 1978 Patricia went to University College Cork (UCC) to study Dentistry. She characterises the choice as meeting a need for future financial and geographical independence. She pursued the course for a year and a half, at which point she gave it up, despite finding the course material interesting, because she knew she did not wish to follow a career in the profession. Although changing University choice mid programme had a track record in her family, Patricia was conscious that it represented a certain privilege. Determined that her parents wouldn't be keeping her in what she terms her 'revolt', she did a secretarial course as a means to immediate financial independence. Taking a position for a year as secretary to an architect based in Caherdaniel in West Kerry, Patricia explored the possibility of developing a career in personnel management. Realising that the traditional entry route of working in a company was being replaced by the expectation of a degree, she decided to take a Psychology Degree. Applying to University College Galway as a means of avoiding the perceived humiliation of return to UCC, she was informed that, as she had first registered in UCC, she should reapply to UCC.

Taking Psychology in UCC she found a programme increasingly oriented towards the application of Psychology. This reflected her own particular interest. At the time, in the early 1980s, a lot of research was focused on exploring and exploding assumed differences between the sexes. Against this College background Patricia found herself becoming increasingly articulate about her developing feminism. As she finished the three and a half year programme she determined to do postgraduate work in Women's Studies. This choice necessitated going to England, as no such programme was offered in Ireland at the time. Her longer-term aim was to work as a therapist, the personnel management goal being rejected as too engaged with a capitalist orientation that conflicted with her feminist-socialist position.

In the summer of her degree in psychology Patricia came out to herself in relation to her sexual orientation. Moving to England and taking Women's Studies in Canterbury provided the space for a different way of knowing herself than she had in Cork. Thereby began a period where she describes herself as being quite out there as a feminist and socialist in England, while back home in Kerry at Christmas and for a month during the Summer she wasn't out as a lesbian and her radical politics were less

expressed. Perhaps inevitably, the internal tension found release at home in arguments about the traditional institutionalised set up in the family home.

During her Masters programme Patricia took a year out to work with young people, doing personal development as a means of social change. When she finished her Masters in 1987, she was both tired of being foreign in Thatcher's Britain and eager to return to Ireland to contribute to the women's movement here. Back in Ireland she connected with the newly started Women's Studies in University College Dublin and delivered various elements of teaching with them. She got a job as a trainer on an SES Scheme in the Lourdes Project in Sean Mc Dermot Street, where she taught office skills for about 8 months. From there she moved to a young women's project in Sheriff Street. This period she sees broadly as one of beginning to learn to apply into action the theory from her various degrees.

When the funding was withdrawn from the Sheriff Street Project, Patricia began working as a free-lance trainer and facilitator. Beginning with doing some training of Youth Leaders for Voluntary Service International, she became explicitly involved in training and facilitation work. Increasingly she delivered more women's studies programmes at community level. Where her work was directed at a single organisation she found herself moving towards a role as an organisational consultant as she looked to input her own perspective rather than simply facilitate a group's internal discussion. While free-lancing she found herself working at times in collaboration with Jane Clarke, with whom she had previously worked in the Lourdes Centre. Asked to do a workshop for a women's weekend, they worked on it together and were invited afterwards to run a longer programme. Both of them felt the demand within the City was beyond their individual or collaborative capacity but that there were a lot of women who could be brought to a point where they could deliver training. They secured money from the Combat Poverty Agency and the Department of Social Welfare to run a 'personal development tutor training course' and had it accredited by St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Following on from the success of this they were asked to run a women and management training course.

By this time it was becoming evident that the Department of Social Welfare was willing to fund another regional support agency in Dublin. After some hesitation over the implications of a move from the personal freedom of free-lance work, they brought

in a third partner and founded Meitheal[78] in 1994. The Department contract grew rapidly and in 1995 they recruited two women whom they had previously trained in personal development facilitation to offer a ten-week facilitation skills training programme. Thus began the shaping of the self-perpetuating 'Meitheal Model' wherein individuals were developed to replace those who supported their development. As the organisation grew there was a conscious policy of seeking to employ individuals they had trained either in full-time positions or on a panel of trainers. Such an approach they saw as articulating in action something they felt was missing in Ireland in the early 1990's.

The Departmental funding maintained organisational stability for Meitheal and enabled members to become involved in other work that reflected their concerns with issues arising from their feminist and gender equality analyses. From this starting point Meitheal also became involved in gay and lesbian concerns and in examining the question of racism and anti-racism in Ireland. This provided Meitheal with a particular identity within the community development networks.

Patricia spent ten years with Meitheal. The factors that led to her leaving were a combination of restricted funding for the organisation, the logics of the Meitheal process, and a realisation on her own part that within the Meitheal set up she was no longer going to be able to pursue the work she wished to. On the financial side the company failed to secure funding for developments in lesbian and bisexual women's related work. This had been the area Patricia was most interested in. A number of redundancies were required. Within the organisation the process of ongoing development of individuals meant that those the founders had trained were now in a position to take over. In her time there Patricia had moved from responsibility for the administration to the development of facilitation skills to organisational development. In each area she had trained her replacement and moved on. She took a three-month break and on her return the reality that she no longer had a place in the organisation was clear to her. However, as the other remaining founder also wished to leave, they left together.

[78] 'Meitheal is a community development support and training organisation. Our mission is to create change through working for equality and social justice. The way we work is guided by the values of community development, equality and feminism.' (www.meitheal.ie)

As she departed Meitheal in the Spring of 2004, Patricia was clear that she wished to make her future contribution around the lesbian, gay, equality agenda. In addition she had promised Meitheal not to take free-lance work in Ireland for a period. She moved to Brussels, in the role of Executive Director of ILGA Europe in October of that year. The Brussels base and European focus of the job served to create a very clear departure from her Irish work. Working closely with the European Commission is, of course, in many ways a different world to the world of Meitheal and Patricia finds that the job does not present the opportunity to be open in naming her values in quite the same way as her Meitheal role did. As we discussed her new post a little under a year after she had taken it up, it was evident that she was a little frustrated with the institutionalised nature of the Commission and the clear prioritisation of economic development over the social aspect of the Lisbon Agenda. Nevertheless she is conscious of the value of work at the European level and the increasing recognition of the necessity for the recognition of multiple discrimination and the requirement of a positive duty on government and statutory bodies not to discriminate. She is clear about how she wishes to focus the work of ILGA and intends that her length of time there will be a function of the degree to which she is enabled to do so. In the longer term she anticipates returning to work in Ireland in advancing the lesbian and gay equality agenda here.

Values and meaning

When asked to reflect on her values Patricia is both comfortable with the topic and clear about how she wants to respond. For the listener, the impression given is of one who knows where she stands and how she has arrived there. She relates an early sensitivity to inequalities in society and cites her acute discomfort in fourth class (circa 10 years old) when witnessing the preferential treatment of pupils based on social status and educational achievement distinctions. Similarly, a year or two later she recalls hating the iconic status of the Virgin Mary in that it was implicitly contradictory of motherhood, a contradiction which she saw as profoundly unfair. So she characterised herself as essentially concerned with whether or not the treatment of people and the opportunities afforded them were fair or not. She notes that her parents were similarly grounded and engaged in their relationship with people.

The equality perspective that she held as a teenager found a theoretical articulation in her developing feminism in her College years. She emphasised, however, that her

feminist perspective serves to provide a route into critical analysis of power relations in society. This facilitates a structural analysis of the creation and perpetuation of inequality. While capitalism is viewed as a system grounded in such perpetuation, it is merely one such system, with other systems typically being equally asymmetrical in their power relationships.

Viewed over its course, she notes a pattern in her life story of an iterative process of reflection and action that is tied to an evolving value system and active engagement with its implications for how she lives her life. In practice this means that as her work no longer fulfils her, she seeks to move on. When I interpreted this pattern as reflecting an approach to work-life as being about who and where Patricia is at the time rather than the organisation, she agreed. As a founder of Meitheal the personal and the organisational were somewhat conflated. Nonetheless, as the organisation and its members developed and as Patricia's own concerns became focused on gay and lesbian issues, she came to a point of departure from Meitheal. In ILGA, she is aware that her personal position is qualitatively different and, during the interview period, she was still thinking through the appropriateness of the fit between herself and the organisation.

Over time she has come to an increasing recognition of and ability to provide space for the complexity of the realities of life. In doing so she recognises that she is perhaps less capable of allowing herself this space than she is of offering it to others. For example, while a staunch critic of institutionalised religion, she recognises the capacity for others to live through religious values with integrity. Similarly, in a more affluent Ireland, she notes the rationality of financial investment for one's economic security in old age, although she struggles with the practice in her own case. She seeks to bring an honesty and an openness to her relationships with people and in applying the same metric to her relationship with herself. She notes her changing perspectives from earlier years and wonders does this reflect being in a different place in her life or something more compromising. Nevertheless she describes herself as being fundamentally content. She attributes much of this to a secure and happy childhood, grounded in family and community. She contrasts this with the unhappy, negative radicalism she sometimes encounters.

Patricia doesn't believe in the ideas of heaven and immortality in the sense an after-life journey to another place. She sees ones life lived as ones testament and 'immortality' grounded in the positive difference one has made in the world of people. Pushed to explain her conceptualisation of 'good' in practise, she refers to personal integrity and to treating people equally and fairly. This question of personal integrity is an internal imperative for her, she must be true to herself in the world. In engaging with the world she is conscious that she finds life beautiful. She exults in the seasons and landscapes of the year, is at peace in solitude or is happy to be engaged with people. Inequalities and the barriers put against people to fully engage with themselves and the world are self-evidently wrong against such a backdrop. On the other hand, when asked about her own spirituality, Patricia struggles somewhat. She notes that friends of hers remark on her spiritual nature but she herself seems to both acknowledge and deny it in conversation; dismissing it as 'hocus pocus'. Her real stumbling block seems to be a critique of the structural inequality of institutionalised religions. This critique together with the religious absorption of the language of spirituality prevents her from 'going towards it'. Indeed, she relates that a friend

> 'says I am the strongest defender against my spiritual nature that she has ever come across, that I just won't admit it and I won't, because of its connotation to religion' (PP, S.1. p. 38)

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