



GCPH Seminar Series 6 Seminar 4  
Tuesday 20 April 2010  
Radisson Hotel, Glasgow

***'Code of the street,  
how we should re-interpret morality'***

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**Stephen McLeod:**

A few introductions before I introduce the speaker. My name is Stephen McLeod, I work for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and I've been asked to chair the fourth Glasgow Centre for Population Health seminar. I've been to a number of these seminars and for me these are a way of escaping from the humdrum sometimes of day to day work and actually thinking about bigger things. I was really pleased to see this advertised because David Gustave, who you will hear from in a second, his field of work with youth work, and I started in youth work, I liked some of his examples and am very keen to hear some of his experiences.

Just before I introduce David, let's do some housekeeping. We were going to start just now with David speaking for about 45 minutes and then we'll have some Q&A. When you have the Q&A in I'll ask colleagues to identify themselves and say where they're from because everybody won't recognise the names of people here. It's a great turnout. There may be a few people arriving late, who can find some seats at the back but let's try not to let that disturb us. If you could put your mobile phones off and I'll try to do that too. At the end of the seminar at 5.45pm canapés will be served and we might extend things if it's going really well and we've got some more questions. Please feel free to hang back and have a discussion among yourselves or perhaps get some time with David.

So David, the title I think attracted me to this, *'The Code Of The Street: how we interpret morality'*, and when I looked behind that, I loved the idea of David's experience working with young people and then the contacts that they would make with him, perhaps a few years later you reflected on the experience that you had with them and some of the conversations that you've had with them. That's happened to me and it happened to me a couple of days ago where a young woman met me in the street, she's 22 and she reminded me that I bought her a pencil set for her ninth birthday and she still had that pencil set and how much it meant to her. I had forgotten about the pencil set, but I think that the point was that little, small things and the relationship between adults and children at key points in their life, can leave a big indelible imprint that adults don't really realise and I think through the course of time the imprint can become very significant.

David works for Kids Company and he's going to talk about his experiences working with Kids Company and his experiences of going to Oxford and doing a degree later on and how he's managed to combine his personal experiences earlier on with his academic experiences and turned that back on his youth work. Thank you David.

## David Gustave:

Much of what I'm going to say today is just anecdotal, it can't be verified, it's my opinion, it's my perspective. So what I'm going to ask you guys to do is to use your imagination and to step outside and use your imagination to think about what may be and what possibilities there are out there in terms of interpreting what's going on for our young people. One of my hypotheses is that I read a book while I was at Oxford called Benedict Anderson, I don't know if anybody knows it, *Imagined Communities*, and in it he argues that communities are imagined and nationalism was constructed. I looked at a lot of the stuff that I did in my own life and looked at some of the work I do with the young people and one of the words that a lot of the young people use is they call themselves soldiers. They call themselves regiments, battalions, they also have these elite military connotations and I thought, 'what's this about?'. Then I realised that a lot of the time, their street corners, their neighbourhoods were like micro-nationalisms, like nationalisms of neighbourhoods and I wanted to explore why I felt such an affinity to a gang structure or why I felt such an affinity to the area that I lived in.

So one of the things I'm going to do is to go back and imagine 43 years ago in Peckham, in South East London. I grew up with five other siblings in one room, an Irish mother and a West Indian father, in 1967, so it's pre- a lot of the Equality Acts. We lived in what you would call a hovel, I don't mean Glasgow and the Gorbals, but we did live in a hovel. There were rats, there were mice, it sounded like a... every time I say this to people I think, is this really me. We lived in one room for five years, that was pre-Race Relations Act, so I was a mixed race boy living in a predominantly white area, going to school in a predominantly black area, so I had to translate what it meant to me to travel between these two different worlds.

My father was an alcoholic, my mother was a compulsive eater. I don't mind saying stuff like that. I suffered what you'd call abuse, physical and emotional abuse, racism, all those kind of things. At about the age of seven I retreated into myself and took what I called my imagination or my safe space and actually created a world inside myself that I used to live in books. If anyone remembers *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, that was my favourite book. Maybe this is Narnia, I don't know, a mate for Aslan anyway. That's where I found myself, I found myself in literature, I found myself in a world, I found myself being able to define my world for me. But as with a lot of the young people I work with, I never let anyone know that I was smart, I never let anyone know that I had that type of intelligence, I just kind of retreated into myself.

So for the next 15 years I had a dualistic experience, so at home I would go home and I would take the abuse from my family and then I would go out onto the street and exercise power and control and terror - sorry, I hate using that word - but I was what you call sociopathic, so intelligence mixed with violence means a lot of the time that you can get what you want. So for a long time I felt I was getting what I wanted. I left home at 15, I moved onto a local council estate with a close friend of mine where we got involved in various nefarious activities. I met someone when I was 19, got married at 19 and settled down, moved into a home. I wasn't a very nice person to live with, as you can imagine, with those feelings of omnipotence and power and control that I wanted over my then partner. At 29 a series of revelations came into my life, I left my wife, I found that I had epilepsy, all these kind of things. I then decided that I wanted to go back and study. I was working in a Job Centre at the time. I knew I was smart, I was doing lots of advocacy for other members of staff and luckily my trade union had a scheme where they paid you to take time off work and go and do GCSEs and A Levels, so that's what I did. So I did those secretly as well, no-one knew I was doing that, so all the way along there was this inner world and an outer world which is really important in what I'm going to say later, because they can be both as important as each other but sometimes they never speak. So I did that, conveniently one of the external advisers on my course was an Oxford

don, which doesn't normally happen and read some of my work which I was writing around working class identity. She said I was quite smart, I thought, fine, if you think I'm smart I'll come and have a look.

So she invited me up to Oxford. I looked around the college that I ended up going to at Wadham and thought, this is quite interesting, maybe I'll do a bit of this for three years and that was all it was, it was short-termism. So, as I'm standing here and I'm unravelling it in front of you, it's actually seeming quite weird to me. So I ended up going to Wadham in Oxford for three years. I studied history and my specialism was the Renaissance, which I don't know how I ended up looking at the Renaissance, [laughter] but maybe - I don't why that appealed to me but maybe I was an enlightened man at the time, I don't know.

After that I was thinking, what could I do. I'll explain in my piece later, but the experiences I had at Oxford were quite confusing. I was the only person of my ethnicity in the whole history school, which is about 1,000 students. There were nine West Indian men as undergraduates in the whole of Oxford at the time. Of them, I think there were only four of us that were from state schools, who had a state school background, so we're dealing with not just their generic structures but actually real physical barriers. While I was there, I might as well reveal this, I got stopped on many occasions going into tutorials in Christchurch or into Trinity College as well. I got stopped, I used to get addressed all the time and that was at the same time as I was coming back to London and nobody knowing what I was doing in Oxford and still getting stopped and searched on the street and asking where I was going, so there was an overlap. I'm not asking for sympathy, I'm just saying it's the kind of worlds that people have to negotiate.

After that I did a year working in a school in South Camden Community School as a learning mentor. I don't know what it was, but all along I just wanted to find out, it sounds really clichéd, but who I was and what I was and where I was going and all this kind of existential stuff. But conveniently, I thought it's got to be about young people, it has to be about young people, because I knew that the resilience that I had, I knew that the luck that I had wasn't luck, it was contingent upon the kindness of strangers and randomness. I'd think to myself, 'I can't be the only clever person that I know from my background, I can't be the only person who has that spark, it can't just be me'. I never really shared that with anyone, but I just realised it couldn't just be me, because I grew up with guys and that's where I learnt my intelligence from, that's where I learnt my code of the street, that's where I learnt my - as I'll talk later - Isaiah Berlin and this guy called Mètis, that perpetual innovation, a thing that we're going to need at the moment as the world's changing. Those kinds of skills, the ability to flit between structuralist and culturalist ideas that you want to say in terms of paradigms.

So after I did a year teaching in a school and learning mentoring and then I thought, 'what can I do?' and I thought, Oxford, you know, what about some more status? So I thought, I know what I'll do, history, I'll do the bar, so as you do, you think, I'll become a barrister. What do you do when you go to Oxford and you had the benefit of a good education, you say, well I'll go and get a scholarship, which is the structure. So I went to the Middle Temple, won a scholarship, sat down in front of all these guys, became an Astbury scholar, a Harmsworth scholar, went to law school, still didn't feel I fitted in, still kind of rebelled even though I didn't want to be good at stuff, I was quite good at stuff. I went for pupillage interviews hoping that I would fail, no they liked me, so everywhere I wanted to go, I just didn't want to fit in, but I kept on thinking, well what's going on here.

So won some scholarships there, then took a year out again to go and work in Peckham, the area that I actually grew up in and I worked in a place called the Peckham Youth Training Initiative which was set up actually on the street I was born on, which was very strange. So I ended up

working there for a year, trying to work with the local gangs and the local young guys, trying to get them to see the world the way I thought I saw it and they just told me to 'piss off' and 'look at you, you sell out' and all these kind of things. That really hurt me, I have to admit. One of the things I have to say is that when we're talking about tough love, tough love works on us as much as anything else because the rejection really, really scarred me and actually drove me on to try and look at what I was doing. Because I went there thinking, 'they're going to understand', 'we're safe, we're brothers', 'we're this, we're that, we're soldiers' and they were like, 'piss off man, you're irritating, go away, what do you know man'. I had to really, really think about that. I really had to look into myself and as I was looking into myself I met my boss, Camilla, I don't know if any of you guys know Camilla, but she's a very inspiring person and a very persuasive person and if any of you know her, this is a really bad impression of her, but it's quite accurate, I think.

So I met her and briefly she said to me, 'darling David, you're status driven', and I thought, you're right. What I've realised is that one of the things about material deprivation is material deprivation. You kind of look for the answer in a material world, but if you're actually quite intelligent as well you look for the answer in the cultural capital. What I tried to do was I tried to trade in, instead of going and getting a Beamer or go and get a big house I traded in for an Oxford degree and a career at the bar, hoping that would give me some gravitas and some way of buying my way and giving myself some leverage to move through society. I have to agree, she said come and work here, it'll be challenging, it'll be tough, but you'll learn something about yourself and I thought, do I really, really want to learn something about myself.

So four years ago I started in what we call the Urban Academy which is down in South London, so what I'll do is I'll go back and - does anyone know what Kids Company does or how we...? - I'll give you an overview of what we do. Basically, the mantra of our organisation is 'love is all it takes'. We believe that most of the deficiencies that people say that are in our young people are because they've not been given any love and care. Once they're given love, care and kindness over time they will learn the resilience, they'll learn all the things that we know. I mentioned it in my paper, but we know Wilkinson, all these guys, Layard, they're all saying that happiness and kindness rule natural parts as with **Evan Phillips** book. I never believed that, I have to be honest. I was a sceptic about love because one of the things about surviving, one of the things about - you do become omnipotent, you do believe - and this is one of the things you've got to do, when you deal with young people, you do believe because the testimony of you actually existing, it's proof that you're strong and you can do what you like, so you don't need anyone else. It took me a long time to actually admit what I'm saying to you now, that I have to admit I was a bit sceptical to Camilla for about three years. I've worked there for four years, so if she's listening to this, I'm sorry Camilla but I have to be honest, I was sceptical as well.

What we tried to do in that is we used a holistic approach, so we use Maslow's hierarchy of needs, so I was the key worker and so the first part of Maslow obviously is the consolidating them in a physical world and then give them housing, so we feed them, we advocate for them in the housing system, in the educational system, in the legal system and then we give them unconditional intimacy and unconditional love. Around that we'll bring in massage, so we can reintroduce touch. Art, creativity, so we can start getting them to start using the left side of their brains and also physical exercise. At the time I was thinking, this is like being back at Oxford, exactly the same. It was like a college, it was like an Oxford college where I got fed every day, I got intimacy from my cohort, I had someone who had pastoral care for me. I think this is quite strange, what's going on, it's kind of like a family, a familial unit, a cohort. Going back to the original idea that I posited earlier about soldiers and an army, what we're looking for, membership and all those kind of things.

So I've been there for four years and it's been a hard journey. For two and a half years, they thought I was a paedophile, they thought I was fake, they thought I was a sell out. I could never tell them, I

wanted to tell them, I could never tell them, look man, you can never hate me as much as I hate myself. You can never want to be away from me as much as I wanted to be away from myself. I could never tell them that because as Camilla kept on saying to us, it's not about you, it's about them, about serving them. So for the first time in my life I realised the transforming of power over a relationship as well was within me, because for the first time in my life it was about actually learning to be selfless and not just living in my mind and actually analysing and actually quantifying everything that I was doing and going through the medium of a calculator and saying, what's in this for me, what's the cost, what's the benefit?

I'm going to use some anecdotal evidence before I get on with this, but it's funny, I've run marathons with some of these guys, we've done marathons, we've done crazy things together. We ran in Madrid together, set up training in the gym with these guys and one of the strangest things that's come out of all of this is the fact that they were looking for me to be stronger than I actually was. They didn't want me to be passive, they didn't want me to be patronising, they didn't want me to help them hold onto their pain, they wanted me to be a boundary, they wanted me to be present. I was talking to you earlier about that, about them wanting me to be present, they wanted me to witness them so they could witness me. So the thing I'm really talking about is the metaphysical relationship, the meta-narrative that goes on between us at Kids Company because it's really hard to explain. In those intimate moments when they can reject you and you can just sit there calmly, that's where they learn about resilience, that's where they learn about not being rejected. So the struggle in what we do, in the work that we do, is about where we're in it. So one of the things that I have to do every week, which is quite unique in an organisation, I have to have the supervision once a week with a psychotherapist or an art therapist where I start downloading who I am and why I am so that when I go back into relationships - because it's based on attachment theory, that's a fresh relationship at actually each moment. That's quite unique in what we do, it's about bringing us to be present as we are there are then. Because one of the problems with a lot of organisations, I'm not saying any in here, is that we pay superficial attention to what's going on inside ourselves and Camilla made sure that we all are aware of what we bring and who we are and what we do.

I just want to give you a bit of an introduction now, this is the first time in my life, I'm sharing this with you, I've ever read anything out like this. I never tried to attempt to write anything so these are the musing of an ex-madman as some of the young people would say, so please bear with me, if it's not up to scratch then I don't mind, but it's the first step so I'm going to try, thank you.

The quote that I used at the start is, 'just information is not education. It is culturing behaviour, culturing attitude and the ability to perceive things better. These require the regular use of perception, observation and expression'. This is the true story of many childhoods including mine. Originally I did not intend to present this in any public forum, instead my intention was to rid myself of the little boy I'd once been. For many years I have tried to leave him behind and bury him in the deep, dark recesses of my mind. I tried to pretend he had never existed and went on to become someone he wouldn't recognise. But he was always there in the background haunting me and waiting for his chance to burst back into life and give voice to the pain he endured. I struggled to escape him and finally the effort of expressing him became too much. As I started to write this he exploded back into life and screamed these words, I am his victim, born innocent, a total product of my surroundings. I could have a philosophical debate on the merits of free will or whether our lives predetermined either theologically or scientifically. I have read intention in utilitarian arguments of Bentham, MacMillan that more recently Rawls. I have read the recent scientific approaches to the measurements of happiness in Wilkinson's Spirit Level, or Layard's Happiness and that as a species we require love, nurture, kindness and intimacy. They all made sense to the searching inquisitive boy inside of me who just wanted to belong. It was in that moment that I realised the importance of belonging, the need for connection, the desire to sense feelings that lay outside oneself. I concluded the thing that had kept me safe had been my imagination, the same

imagination that in spite of huge levels of abuse and neglect, inspires ninety seven percent of young people that we work with at Kids Company to improve their own lives. It is in imagination that I found the thesis for which I wish to state that there was a code of the street and that in context directions and attitudes of many young people cannot be simply ascribed to a lack of morality.

Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* states that nationless as well as nationalism are cultural artefacts of a particular kind. To understand them properly you need to consider how they had come into historical being, in what ways their meanings have changed over time and why they command such profound emotional rigidity. He argues that once created they become modular, capable of being transplanted to a great variety of social terrains. He argues that the nation is an imagined political community. He also argues that communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity or genuineness - this is really important to me - but by the style in which they are imagined. It is also imagined as a community because regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that might prevail, the nation or in my instance the neighbourhood or the gang is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.

It is doubtful whether either social change or transformed consciousness [*sorry, I'm going to drink of water, its the first time I've spoken like this. I feel quite professional*] [laughter] which is whether either social change or transferred consciousness in them does much to explain the attachment that people feel for the inventions of their imaginations, why people are ready to die for their inventions. It is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love and often profoundly self-sacrificing love, the cultural products of nationalism, poetry, prose and music show this love clearly in thousands of different forms and styles. And I wanted to make an interjection there because one of the things that when everybody talks about young people and they talk about what influences them they talk about music, they talk about the language they use in it, they talk about those kind of things and trying to see if there's a similarity there. We can talk about this after, but a nice interjection there.

The great wars of this Century are extraordinary in the colossal numbers persuaded to lay down their lives. Nothing connects us effectively to the dead more than language. There is a special kind of contemporaneous community which language alone suggests. Tellingly, Anderson states that the state dialectically engendered the grammar of the nationalisms that arose to combat it. One might go as far as to say that the state imagined its local adversaries as in an ominous prophetic dream well before they came into historical existence. So it's like the kind of thinking about gangs being constructed that way. Neuroscience has clearly demonstrated that there are structural and functional variations in individuals who have been deprived of a caring attachment in childhood.

At Kids Company we're of the view that these young people require re-parenting so that they can complete developmental tasks with strong emphasis on being a service that functions as a good mother experience giving the child the resources to manage emotional energy and their good father experience to give the young person a positive drive towards the outside world. It was then in competing narratives that I saw played out on a daily basis in the media and describing young people and that rarely I saw on the street but I wish to emphasise this talk. Despite their importance and relevance to academic performance, risk variables and cultural pressures alone cannot explain individual behaviour. Many young people still find ways to survive and in many cases to excel. Interesting we know much less about resilience, perseverance and the coping strategies employed by the individuals who lives are surrounded by hardships, than we know about those that succumb and become victims of their environment. Deep in our understanding of how individuals cope with and respond to the social and cultural environments is an important part of finding ways to assist young people with living healthy and productive lives. It is through talking to the young people that we have discerned what they feel they are lacking or require to make their half lives whole.

Britain has one of the worst teenage dropout rates of any developed country with more than one in 10 of those aged 15 to 19 not in school, work or training. Britain also has one of the highest numbers who fail to complete their higher education. Vocation courses are at a particularly low graduation rate. In 2007, 10.7 percent of 15 to 19 year olds were not in school, work or training, moving Britain from sixth to worst on OECD lists. The UK may have formally signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, but are these principles enshrined, not only in our policies but in our culture? The grim reality is many young people's lives will dispute this. Sir Albert Aynsley-Green, the UK's first Children's Commissioner has recently talked about a malaise at the heart of British society.

However, do current statistics of child abuse not suggest a more fundamental antipathy towards children and young people in general? As the UN Convention states, children have rights as human beings yet also need special care and protection. As their guardians, adults are responsible for the safety of their young and yet we consistently let them down, as the statistics reveal. Where does this deep disregard for children stem from and how can it be addressed? Social scientists offer a number of theories to interpret the entrenchment of our disregard for children. Critical medical anthropology sees the root cause of violence in society as anthropology triggered by embedding in equality, which lies at the heart of our class ridden society. Indeed, social mobility has deteriorated and the gap between rich and poor widened over the last 30 years.

Structural violence could be defined as the constraints and behaviour and options imposed by institutionalised inequalities in wealth and power and those who are underprivileged. It could be argued it's built on abuses of power which are most diverting countries with higher rates of relative poverty. In a recent book, *The Spirit Level* by Wilkinson and Pickett that offers both an analysis of what has always been at the core of our unequal society and may be an answer to problems we face. The authors point out that the life diminishing results of value and growth above equality in rich societies can be seen all around us. Inequality equals shorter, unhealthier and unhappier lives. It increases the rate of teenage pregnancy, violence, obesity, imprisonment and addiction and quote: "we find ourselves anxiety ridden, prone to depression, driven to consume and live little or no community life". That's not my life and hopefully it's not your lives but that's what he's saying. Anyway my life's quite happy, I'm quite happy at the moment.

The author argues as to why the removal of economic impediments that feel unvalued such as low wages, low benefits and low public spending on education for instance, will allow a flourishing of human potential. In my point of view aspiration can't just be about something beyond, something that is always being chased, something external. There has to be aspiration in the here and now, improving transport, creating jobs, helping create low carbon communities and building youth clubs. In the social sciences explanations of human behaviour, especially that of the poor, have been the subject of considerable debate. Most often the debate centres on those who favour structural explanations of behaviour and those that prefer cultural explanations of behaviour.

Structuralists generally focus on political economy, the availability of jobs and economic opportunities, class structure and social geography. From this perspective individuals have viewed this product of their environment and changes in individual behaviour are made possible by changes in the structure of opportunity. From this theoretical perspective, holding an individual responsible for their behaviour makes little sense because their behaviour is shaped by forces beyond the control of any particular individual. Drug abuse, crime and dropping out of school are largely seen as social consequences of inequality. According to this view, the most effective way to reduce objective behaviour is to reduce the degree and extent of inequality in society.

In contrast, culturalists downplay the significance of environmental factors and treat human behaviour as a product of beliefs, values, norms and socialisation. Cultural explanations of

behaviour focus on the moral codes that operate within particular family communities or groups. For example, the idea that poor people are trapped within a culture of poverty, which has the effect of legitimising criminal and immoral behaviour - and that's up to you to define what moral is - has dominated the culturalists' perspective of poverty. For the culturalists, change in behaviour can only be brought about through cultural change, hence providing more money to inner city schools will do little to improve their economic performance, since their attitudes towards school are shaped by the culture brought from home and the neighbourhood.

According to this view, culture provides the rationale and motivation for behaviour and cultural change cannot be brought about through changing governmental policy or by expanding opportunities. But in a comprehensive study of teen pregnancy, **Kirsty Anuka\*** demonstrates the possibility for synthesising the two perspectives, structural and cultural explanations of human behaviour that have traditionally been seen as irreconcilable. Teen pregnancy, which for years has been much more prevalent among poor minority girls than middle class white girls, has traditionally been explained as either the product of welfare dependency and permissive sexual mores by culturalists, or as the unfortunate result of inadequate access to birth control and economic opportunities by the structuralists. Through detailed interviews of a diverse sample of teen mothers, **Anuka** [37.50] forward a different explanation that draws from both the cultural and structural perspectives and acknowledges the role and importance of individual choice. She points out that while both middle class and lower class girls engage in pre-marital sex and sometimes become pregnant, middle class girls are less likely to have babies during adolescence because they have a clear sense that it will harm their chances of future success.

In contrast, when confronted with an unexpected pregnancy, poor girls are more likely to have babies because they do not perceive it as negatively affecting their future, since college and a good job are really perceived as being out of their reach. In fact many girls in this situation actually believe that having a baby during adolescence will help them settle down since they will now be responsible for another life and I can verify that because that's what lots of girls that I work with say. Given the importance of individual choice to this particular behaviour, any effort to reduce teen pregnancy that does not take into account the reasoning that guides decision making is unlikely to succeed. Similarly, efforts to improve - this is where, this is my personal thing - similarly, efforts to improve the academic performance of Afro-Caribbean males must begin by understanding the attitudes that influence how they perceive schooling and academic pursuits to the extent that it doesn't happen. Attempts to help black males based primarily on the sensibilities of those initiating it are less likely to be effective and may be no more successful than attempts to reduce drug use or violence by urging kids 'just to say no'. How long have I got left, I just wanted to know? Ten minutes?

**No you've got 20 minutes.**

I've got 20 minutes? [laughter] Ooh, does anyone actually know what I'm trying to posit here? On one level we've got to look at the way we define and the process that we use to observe. At the same time we have to understand that the paradigm that a lot of these young people are living in and the mental space that they're living in, is completely different from the ones that we're in. Even though they're ascribing the same structures, every flat, they do all the things that we do, that's all I'm trying to say. It's the musings of a madman, but I might as well get on with it. One of the things that I'm always asked at events is, is the situation as bad as it seems? I don't know if anyone else asked that question and the thing that's always brought up - I'm dragging out some stuff here, I'm trying to make this last a bit longer - is it Hobbesian, is the situation Hobbesian, is it a war of war against all, are we all living this - are the kids I work with living this kind of nasty, brutal and short life and is there any hope in there?

On the way down - you can see this is handwritten - these are the musings of me thinking about what I learnt about Hobbes and one of the things that I think people forget about Hobbes is there were two perspectives to Hobbes. Hobbes actually said that the first law of nature outside the state of nature, was to seek peace and was to actually do unto others as you wanted to do unto yourself. One of his arguments was that – well, my argument as well - is that the war that he's talking about in the state of nature isn't a war, it's actually a war based on fear. So it's a war of self-protection, it's a constant readiness for fighting. When I read that, particularly when I was at Oxford I thought, hold on a minute, this is the way I've lived my life, this is the way when I'm working with these young people that these young people are working as well. So these are just some of the musings that I've written down on the train, five hours on the train. It's a nice journey. Feel sorry for me please [laughter].

We're always drawn to our Hobbesian account of the lives of our young people, in fact Hobbes is a good place to discern much of what I am discussing. He did suggest that there are two keys to understanding human nature, he even recognised the importance of self-knowledge or honest introspection. As with many contemporary thinkers, Dawkins included, he also believed the general knowledge of science, or in his view physics, would also assist this. No-one is strong enough to ward off all possible - his view was no-one is strong enough to ward off all possible attackers. No-one is so weak that attacking others would accomplish this, if need be. Human beings, Hobbes argues, are not cruel. He quotes, 'that any man should take pleasure in other men's great harms without other ends of his own, I do not conceive it possible'. *Leviathan* 126. But he believed a great importance as a source of war is fear. Thus we come close to the idea of a war in which everyone is fighting everyone else in self-defence. He defines the state of war not as constant fighting, but as a constant readiness to fight, so that no-one can relax. Has he overlooked morality? He states that in the state of nature there is no common power outside the state, so no law. You've got to understand that's the way a lot of my young people see it, they're outside the law, they're outside. So no breach of law, so no injustice. There is a natural right of liberty to do what you want to do to survive. That's the way, when you talk to a lot of my young people, that's the way they will justify it. It's my natural right to protect myself. I don't know who else is going to do it for me.

Please note he argues that the first law of nature is to seek peace, is to do unto others what you wanted done unto yourself. But he does say, one of the contradictions in Hobbes is in the first state of nature he says that war is a rational response, but in law of nature he says that peace and seeking peace is the first law of nature. Now one of the things I wanted to bring here and this is me meshing my mad musings, is 97 percent of the young people that I work with come to Kids Company seeking peace. They'll go back into the world and they'll fight war and they'll do what they have to do, but they'll come back and have a double existence. It's exactly what I was trying to say about my existence. There is no flip, they can be polite to me, they can interact with me, they can do all those things and they come to us and they look but as soon as they leave, they're into that mindset, they're into that first state of nature, the right to protect yourself, the idea of natural living.

I really wanted you to understand that because it's not a paradox for them, it's never been a paradox for me. I still never think we need to do both. That's what I really wanted to share and that's what these musings are about, it's for us to actually see that sometimes what we posit is dichotomy like war and peace, or black and white, or heavier, aren't the same way that our kids are looking at stuff. Because they're actually living in two worlds. There is a narrative and there's a meta narrative and one of the things that comes out of Hobbes which I think people really miss, is that he argues about a collective rationality and an individual rationality. What he actually argued about is collective rationality what is best for each individual on the assumption that everyone else will at the same way act the same way. It's the assumption that everyone will act the same way. My kids don't make that assumption, their assumption is based on personal experience that the world is a horrible

place that's going to hurt them, it's going to attack them, it's going to do nasty things to them. It's ultimately the prisoner's dilemma.

When individual and collective rationality diverge it's very hard to achieve co-operation and a collectively rational outcome, so this is my musing. One way of thinking about Hobbes's argument is that in the state of nature the individually rational behaviour is to attack others. This will lead to the state of war, however the laws of nature tell us that the state of war is not an inevitable situation because another level of behaviour, collective rationality, may also be available. If only we could ascend to the levels of collective rationality and obey the laws of nature, then we could have peace without fear.

Ultimately, I've never really heard anyone argue this kind of stuff before about Hobbes saying, look there are some grains of stuff that we can take out of there, because ultimately the young people that I work with, and this is me musing, this is all going to be out of my head. The young people that I work with, they are actually looking for something. I don't know what it is. We might call it a spirituality, you might call it connection, you might call it grounding, you might call it earthing, but there is something more than them just being biological entities that just consume and produce and just want. They want to love, they want to connect, they want to express and all I'm trying to get out of here is, I'm wheeled out on so many occasions as a paradigm of change and hope and all those kind of things and I don't know if I am. I know for me and I know my individual narrative, I know what worked for me and what didn't work for me, that's all I know. Sometimes the fact I'm standing here, the fact that I've had the life I've had, makes no sense to me. I sometimes flip between that kind of paradox myself.

One of the problems that I think that we have in this country is we're always trying to understand without actually engaging. We're always trying to presuppose and make these assumptions all the time about what it is to be a young person, what it is to live out on the street. But like I say, we never take on board their assumptions and their assumptions aren't the exact references that we have because in their world it is nasty, brutal and short. We know the figures, there are a million young people on the at risk register and there's only enough places for 60,000 people. We know all this, we know it's been disputed, that the UN figure on child wellbeing has been disputed but says that we're now one of the lowest in Western Europe. We have high teenage pregnancy rates, we have all these negative things, but all I wanted to know and the only question I want to posit is why are these young people coming to us, why are these young people searching for things. If it's completely just a dark and unwieldy place, why are huge amounts? - because on a day to day basis at Kids Company alone, we interface with 13,100 young people.

I'm in charge of a department - not in charge, I wouldn't say in charge - I'm in charge of a department within a department which is called Positive Experiences. That's exactly where we're going. We're trying to say, look, let's try and make their lives have much more positive experience, even the things they don't need. So I'm in charge of education, we have somebody's who's in charge of work experience, we have someone who's in charge of somewhere to go out and have experiences. For all those positive experiences that these kids have and all these interactions they have, they can make their own choices, they can write their own narratives.

Do you mind if I read you something, because I was going to take a risk - in my pocket - this is not pre-arranged, I was reading it on the way up. A lot of the time when I go off and I talk to young people, they all say to me, because they call me Gustave, 'Gustave man, why did you study history, why did you study history?' and I said, 'because I wanted to correct my own story man'. That is exactly what I'm trying to say here. It's about giving them the space to write their own stories, to write their own narratives, not for us to impose our own narratives. It's about a mutual co-operation and we're producing it together. So this is my favourite poem that I read to kids. I've been

screamed at sometimes for reading it, I've been abused, but a lot of the time a lot of people come up to me afterwards and say it actually makes sense, so let's see if this makes sense. It's called:

*Unfold Your Own Myth*

*Who gets up early to discover the moment light begins?  
Who finds us here circling, bewildered, like atoms?  
Who comes towards a spring thirsty and sees the moon reflected in it?  
Who, like Jacob, blind with grief and age, smells the shirt of his lost son and can see again?  
Who lets a bucket down and brings up a flowing prophet?  
Or, like Moses, goes for fire and finds what burns inside the sunrise?*

*Jesus slips into a house to escape enemies, and opens a door to the other world.  
Solomon cuts open a fish, and there's a gold ring.  
Omar storms in to kill the prophet and leaves with blessings.  
Chase a deer and end up everywhere!  
An oyster opens his mouth to swallow one drop. Now there's a pearl.  
A vagrant wanders empty ruins. Suddenly he's wealthy.*

*But don't be satisfied with stories, how things have gone with others.  
Unfold your own myth, without complicated explanation,  
So everyone will understand the passage we have opened you.*

*Start walking towards Shams. Your legs will get heavy and tired.  
Then comes a moment of feeling the wings you've grown lifted.*

That for me is the process that I'm trying to get involved in with these young people. It's for them to unfold their own myths, it's for them to create their own structures, it's for them to create their own narratives, their own meta narratives, their own internal journeys, their own codes. Because ultimately I believe that we all share the same kind of values, which is we all want to love, we all want to connect, we all want to be witnessed, we all want to feel good about ourselves and we already do. Because one of the things I have to share with you is, as much as I might say, yes, I've been called a paedophile, I've been called all these things and I've been spat at and I've had things thrown at me, I've had amazing acts of tenderness and kindness and intimacy and things that have changed my life forever and have made me want to stand here and talk about Rumi and talk about the musings of an ex-madman. Because it's not about me, it's ultimately about them. One of the things that I live my life by is the path you spend in the service of others, not just through prayer beads and holy robes and you sometimes see that in the relationships I have with the young people that I work with. That they get something out of a good relationship and out of giving and that's what that's about. It's about us engaging, as I was saying earlier and meeting them where they're at and that means meeting them in places that we might find uncomfortable. Like he said in the poem, our legs might buckle but at some point we'll be lifted up by other inspiration. That's all I wanted to share.

Thank you very much.

[Applause]

**Stephen MacLeod:** We're running out of time, so any last comments or questions? As I said earlier we've got some canapés, so please stay for that...

**David Gustave:** Can I say something as well - I just wanted to say thank you for listening to me, because this is the first time I've ever done anything like this, so I actually sincerely mean that and it's nice to know that - it seems a bit clichéd, but it's nice to have little brothers and sisters now.[laughter]

**Stephen MacLeod:** I don't think I can add to that [laughter], so please stay and I'm sure Gustave will want to stay and talk. The last thing I need to do though is, I trailed it earlier, but the next seminar series is on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May, it's the fifth lecture. It's a man called Adam Kahane who apparently wrote the Mont Fleur scenarios for Nelson Mandela, so he's got a good pedigree. But he wants to come and talk to us about power and love and I think his main proposition is that with our current behaviour where we juxtapose aggression and conflict with negotiation and compromise is flawed. I think he will trail and established tracing some of the ideas where the combination of power and love is actually a solution to that conflict, so please attend if you can. The venue's to be confirmed but the information will be in the Glasgow Centre for Population Health website, so please stay.

Thank you very much.

[applause]