

Impediments to Moral Responsibility

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 - Microscopic Vision
 - Self-Deception
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Stanley Milgram

- Nazi guards would participate in horrific activities in the concentration camps.
- Milgram thought this had to do with obedience to authority.

Shock Experiment

- He performed an experiment about memorization and negative reinforcement with shocks.
 - Students and Experimenters were in on the purpose.
 - Teacher read lines, to be memorized by Learner.
 - * Shock upon incorrect response.
 - * Increased in intensity.
 - * Teachers administered intense shocks. Much less so if in the same room.
- Outcomes
 - Brains selectively filter, simplify, and frame data for easier use
 - Moral failures in decision-making are often attributable to narrow or distorted mindsets that preclude consideration of the moral dimensions of our actions.
 - Mental models are unavoidable, but can be changed or made aware.

Universal Acceptance of Authority

- Challenger Issue similar to Milgram's Experiment
 - Thikol told to reverse approach. "Why would it *not* be safe?"
 - Lund was impressed by management
- U.S. Navy Nuclear Program
 - If no criticisms, managers self-criticise

Groupthink

- Tendency of groups to come to an apparent agreement at the expense of critical thinking.
- Symptoms
 - Invulnerability to failure
 - “we-feeling” views outsiders as adversaries
 - An illusion of morality where the group can do no wrong.
 - Tendency of self-censorship.
 - Construe silence as consent.
 - Pressure to go along with the group.
- Solutions
 - Personal courage
 - * whistleblower hotline
 - Encourage dissent

Microscopic Vision

- Tendency to focus on a small detail or task without keeping the bigger picture in mind.
- “losing the forest for the trees”
- Solutions
 - Must encourage dissent to foster imagination
 - Moral imagination

Self-Deception

- Normalizing deviance
- NASA foam shredding not considered serious

Self Interest

- Doing what is best for oneself
- Solutions
 - Maintain a professional mentality

Fear of Retribution

- Fear of punishment can cause professionals to act irresponsibly.
- Antidote
 - Self-confidence
 - Courage
 - Encourage dissent

Ignorance

- Likely to impact managers more, who get simplified information.

- Loss of information as it moves up management.
 - Important details become omitted.
- Antidotes
 - Encouragement of dissent, especially from ground-level employees
 - Personal courage
 - Professionalism

Bias and Discrimination

flowchart RL

prejudice <--> discrimination
 discrimination <--> stereotypes
 stereotypes <--> prejudice

- Origins
 - Categorization
 - Confirmation
 - * Actions that confirm stereotypes are more likely to be noticed.
 - External vs. Internal Attributions
 - * Situation is responsible for ingroup actions
 - * Outgroup is personally responsible for actions
 - Out-group homogeneity
 - * Variability more recognized within a group

Case Study

- Susan Flower at UBER
 - Manager harasses her on first day
 - reported case to HR
 - had to decide to stay on team or leave
 - class-action lawsuit
 - * \$10M payout to 481 plaintiffs
 - * firing of 20 employees including CEO

Impediments Questions

- Concern about impediments to moral responsibility is best considered which kind of applied ethics?
 - Preventative
- Although an overall majority of “teachers” involved in Milgram’s experiment were willing to administer painful shocks to “learners”, gender, social class, and nationality appeared to play a significant role in what types of people demonstrated this willingness.
 - False
- Which of the following are symptoms of ‘groupthink’?
 - Self-censorship

- Construing silence as consent
 - Holding an illusion of morality regarding group actions
- In what way was Robert Lund’s behavior leading up to the loss of Challenger similar to that of the “teachers” in Milgram’s experiment?
 - They were overly deferential to authority
- Which of the following is a definition of ‘groupthink’?
 - A situation in which groups come to apparent agreement at the expense of genuine and independent critical thinking
- ‘Normalizing deviance’ is a good example of the moral impediment of ____
 - Self-Deception
- Which of the following is a possible antidote to ‘microscopic vision’?
 - a robust moral imagination
- The fact that ‘groupthink’ can influence self-deception is an example of the inter-relatedness of impediments to moral responsibility.
 - True
- ‘Microscopic vision’ allows for small details to generate greater awareness of the large issues involved.
 - False
- Which of the following is true of many who choose self-interest over professional responsibility?
 - they often hold a weak conception of professionalism
- A potential solution to impediments of moral responsibility such as uncritical acceptance of authority is to foster a culture of responsible assent.
 - False
- Dr. Harris’s father’s failure to consider the environmental impact of his engineering work is an example of...
 - microscopic vision
- Avoiding the moral impediments of self-interest, groupthink, and microscopic vision is best accomplished...
 - encouraging personal traits to overcome their influence
- Which of the following impediments to moral responsibility played a role in the Challenger and Columbia disasters?
 - uncritical acceptance of authority
 - groupthink
 - ignorance
- Which of the following is not among the antidotes suggested for impediments to moral responsibility?
 - construct mental modes to direct our thinking
- Match the following scenarios to the corresponding impediment to moral responsibility
 - After he was told to “take off his engineering hat and put on his management hat”, Robert Lund reversed his recommendation not to launch Challenger.
 - * uncritical acceptance of authority
 - When NASA management was considering whether to solicit in-flight images of the Columbia, one employee remarked, “I’m not going to

be Chicken Little about this.”

- * groupthink
- Although foam-shredding is outside design specifications for the space shuttle, engineers began to treat this deviant behavior as normal.
- * self-deception
- After NASA-Marshall was “appalled” by the initial no-launch recommendation for Challenger, Thiokol managers asked for a break at the teleconference to reconsider.
- * fear of retribution
- Although Halliburton recommended 21 centralizers for use in the Macondo oil well, BP managers elected to use only 6 centralizers in order to reduce cost and time.
- * self-interest