Responsibility and Social Roles

Experiential Ethics 2024

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MORE LIES!

How Not To Teach Ethics (Susan Silbey)

- "The standard model – required in law and medical schools now leaking into engineering and computer science programs with minor variations – teaches ethics as problems in individual decision-making, personal values, and choices. Training focuses on formalized rules of professional conduct, punctuated by appeals for social responsibility. It has not proved to be a successful regimen."

- "Unable to recognize or describe forms of social organization, many adopt a rationalist, often reductionist model of social action that in effect constitutes a powerful and unreflexive orthodoxy."

Social Dynamics

- "Emphasis on *context and social organization* as an antidote to an exclusive focus on individual choice-making activity."
- "Rather than thinking about ethics as a series of anecdotal instances of problematic choice-making, we might think about ethics as participation in a moral culture."
- "Should students leave college and professional training believing that their individual will and personal resources are the major opportunities and limits determining success and failure, they will find themselves frustrated when they butt up against those very powerful, yet invisible social structures."

Practical Activity 1: Social Roles

- Turn-off your camera and take 5 minutes to think about the following questions:

- Think of 3-5 roles that you are occupying this summer.
- How are you currently navigating those different roles, including conflicts that arise within or between them?
- How might you do so differently?

- Full-round of responses.

Practical Activity 2: Roles and Careers

- What is one **specific career you're considering**? What ethical issues arise in that career? What unjust structures is it involved in?

- What ideals are implicit in your future career (e.g. what does a "good role-occupant" look like)? Which of those ideals do you believe in and value, and which do you want to resist?

Practical Activity 3: Roles and Organizations

- Workplace cultures can encourage individuals not to think carefully about their ethical responsibilities. How do you anticipate that challenge coming up in your future career?

- Sometimes workplace conflicts occur between individuals who have different roles (e.g. engineers and managers). What kinds of stresses and pressures might you expect because they're coming from people who are incentivized differently from you? What might (should) it look like to develop effective relationships between the multiple parties that reside in a given workplace scenario?

Forward-Looking Responsibility

- Forward-looking responsibility/accountability asks: How am I positioned to prevent or repair harms in my communities?
- We should ask about:
  - **Power:**
    - What are my job responsibilities?
    - Where do my actions make a difference because of my role? Because of other identities I have?
    - What are some changes I can't make alone, but could with others?
  - **Impact**:
    - Who do my choices impact inside my organization? Outside my organization? In what ways?
    - How am I impacted by unjust structures? In which ways am I advantaged? Disadvantaged?
  - **Options**:
    - What pressures am I under? Are there ways I would act differently without them?
    - What is the incentive structure of my organization? Do I buy into those incentives? (refer back to the Personal Values worksheet!)
    - What is normal for someone in my role, and what is possible?
    - Which avenues for action are available outside my role?

Practical Activity 4: Responsibility

- Work in groups. 8 minutes.

- What are one or two concrete ways you could take accountability for an ethical issue related to your career or another social role you occupy?