

“Interrogation, Torture and Personal Responsibility” opens with the question “How much responsibility should an individual bear for questionable actions within a system that encourages them?” This question is intriguing, and is my official “difficult question,” but it is flawed and that is part of its difficulty. Firstly, it doesn’t specify the kind(s) of responsibility that it’s asking the questionably-acting individual to bear. For example, Michael Davis¹ identifies nine types of responsibility when constructing the “professional responsibility” of engineers. Secondly, it’s nearly impossible to determine the boundaries of a system, especially when attempting to determine the source of influence(s) on an individual’s behavior. Were the psychologists acting because of their position with a nation-state system (patriotism), the capitalist system (greed), the military system (fear)?

We can resolve the first issue with the question by specifying that we’re talking about responsibility-as-accountability. This is the kind of responsibility that is future-looking: the things that we expect someone to *do* if we find that there is a causal connection between their actions and an unwanted result. The results have happened in the past, so forward-looking responsibility makes the most sense.

The second part of the question - the individual’s presence in an unethical system - is more complicated. The inclusion of the system in the original question implies that their level of accountability is related to the ethicalness of whatever system we determine they are a part of. However, does an individual’s level of accountability

what would the unwanted result in this case be?

¹ Davis, M. (2012). “Ain’t No One Here But Us Social Forces”: Constructing the Professional Responsibility of Engineers. *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 18(1), 13–34.
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change if they knowingly enter a system that encourages questionable actions? This is another difficult question for three (and a half) reasons: first, it's hard to establish an effective way to measure an individual's foreknowledge of the dysfunctional system. Second, how can an individual predict where their job duties might be impacted by the system? Third, how can an individual predict the fluidity with which they can exit the system given new exposure to questionable actions?

The psychologists mentioned that they tried to stop their engagement with the program, but were pressured by the government to continue their work. One could argue that those individuals - the psychologists, guards, and certainly torturers - are also victims of the unethical side of the military-industrial complex. This is a corollary to the third question: if, when trying to leave a dysfunctional system, the immediate safety of you and your loved ones is put at risk, are you then less accountable for your actions within the system?

Given the complexity of disentangling the individual from the system, we may have to answer different, simpler questions: "Does an individual's position within a system influence their accountability for their actions?" If the answer is yes, none of us are fully accountable for anything because we all operate within various dysfunctional systems. If the answer is no, then the psychologists are fully accountable (whatever we determine *that* to mean) and can be expected to act as such. How to hold them *morally* accountable is its own difficult question, since the victims/system failed to hold them legally accountable,

extremely articulate, analytical,
insightful. Best writing yet.
✓+

to what extent
might code of ethics
and
can it
help
here?