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Teaching Workplace Ethics

By Michael Davis

This paper has four parts. Part One briefly introduces the paper's subject by explaining how the paper came to be. Part Two analyzes five misconceptions ("the Five Fears") that can get in the way of teaching workplace ethics. Part Three applies the insights gained in Part Two to a specific classroom situation. Part Four consists of four sample problems suitable for the classroom.

Though the focus of this paper is teaching *workplace* ethics, much of the analysis should apply to teaching ethics of any sort. One way to read this paper, then, is as another paper *about* teaching ethics. But I hope it will sustain another reading as well. I offer it as an example of how philosophers can make themselves useful to teachers.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

About three years ago, the Fel-Pro/Mecklenburg Foundation of Chicago and the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions, Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), agreed that something needed to be done about teaching ethics in the workplace. Though IIT does not have a school of education, Fel-Pro did not err in thinking we knew something about workplace ethics. We had been teaching professional ethics since 1976 (as well as developing teaching materials for courses in the ethics of various professions). The profession we know best is engineering. Since most engineers work for ordinary businesses rather than for themselves or other engineers, teaching engineering ethics seemed a good start on teaching workplace ethics generally. That, as it turned out, was not nearly as true as it seemed. But it was true enough to keep us going.

Once our center agreed to do something about workplace ethics, we did a literature search. The search turned up a lot on "value clarification" and "values education", a little on teaching ethics or morality (mostly quite abstract)[2], but virtually nothing on teaching workplace ethics. The number and variety of education journals made the scarcity of literature on our subject seem ominous.

Because we found almost nothing published on teaching workplace ethics, we decided to approach the subject as we had other areas in which we knew little and could find little in the literature. We decided to ask those who must know more about the subject than we did, the practitioners. We decided to talk to vocational teachers.

My colleague, Fay Sawyier, and I then went about Chicago public schools interviewing vocational teachers, co-op coordinators, and vocational education administrators. Our original purpose was to collect problems of workplace ethics students brought up in class. Such problems are the natural raw material for teaching applied ethics. Once we had a substantial collection of such problems, we could, we felt sure, figure out what the central problems were and how they might be handled. We would be well on our way to writing a text or preparing other useful teaching materials.

Our attempt to collect problems was not as successful as we had hoped. But the attempt led to two discoveries. One discovery was that vocational teachers seemed both interested in workplace ethics and well equipped to teach in the subject. This seemed odd given our other discovery: almost none of those we interviwed felt comfortable teaching ethics. Some said so frankly. Some said teaching ethics was unnecessary or hopeless. Some thought themselves unfit to teach the subject. ("I know a little about philosophy of education, but nothing about ethics.") Some lectured us on the importance of teaching ethics, sprinkling the lecture

with references to Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Kant, to utilitarianism and deontologism, to pragmatism and existentialism. One showed us the two brief paragraphs in the text he used in which ethics was metioned.[3] But only a few could remember an ethics problem coming up in class. Of these, very few were happy with what they did with it.

I must admit that at first I didn't know what to make of these discoveries. In time, I began to notice certain patterns in what my interviewees said. Eventually, I identified five concepts, attitudes, beliefs, or blocks—what I now call "The Five Fears"—that seemd to disable otherwise qualified teachers from teaching a subject about which they knew a great deal. The Five Fears are: (1) the fear of not being value neutral, (2) the fear of subjectivism, (3) the fear of relativism, (4) the fear of impotence, and (5) the fear of shades of gray.

All these fears are ultimately philosophical. Their power to disable comes from beliefs ordinary evidence alone cannot refute, from beliefs that can be refuted only by understanding better the concepts involved. The Five Fears can only disable those lacking an adequate concept of workplace ethics. Because the Five Fears are ultimately philosophical, a philosopher like myself is an altogether reasonable candidate to help dispose of them.

PART TWO: THE FIVE FEARS

Can things really be that simple? Perhaps not. But "you" (that is, anyone who wants to teach workplace ethics) are the ones to answer that question. My approach will be to describe each fear, explain why it might disable a teacher in the classroom, and then explain why it would not interfere with teaching workplace ethics.

1. Value Neutrality

One thing that can stop a teacher from trying to teach workplace ethics is the fear of not being "value neutral." This is a fear every well-trained teacher brings to the classroom. "I am," he says, "not supposed to impose my values on my students." Because people often—but mistakenly—equate taching ethics with teaching values generally, this first fear naturally seems to stand in the way of teaching ethics. Why should it not?

The answer is that teachers cannot, as teachers, be value neutral; nor should anyone want them to be. Every time you grade an exam, correct a student's mistake, or send a student down to the principal's office for discipline, you are not value neutral. You are showing that you value the right over the wrong, the good over the bad. Indeed, though schools are often criticized for not teaching the difference between right and wrong anymore, I have yet to find a school that fits that description. Teaching the difference between right and wrong is what schools spend most of their time doing.

So, the value neutrality teachers are supposed to exhibit in the classroom cannot be neutrality with respect to *all* values. If some sort of value neutrality is a good thing in teachers (and I think it is), the neutrality must be with respect to *certain* values, for example, with respect to various religious or political values, *not* neutrality with respect to values as such. What then is the difference between those values with respect to which teachers (in the classroom) should be neutral and those with respect to which they should not be neutral?

Let us define right and wrong in this way: *The right consists of those acts, words, or practices that, all things considered, satisfy the appropriate standard.* The wrong consists of those that do not. So, for example, "4" is the right answer to the question, "How much is 2 + 2?" because 2 + 2 is 4 according to the appropriate standard, the principles of arithmetic. So, too, the right answer to the question, "Can an employer legally discriminate against someone because of race? "No." Why? Because the appropriate standard of legality is the law and the law says she cannot.

These two examples have one thing in common that most religious or political standards would not share. In both, the standard of right and wrong is not itself in dispute. Whether I am Muslim or Jewish, Republican or Socialist, I will accept the principles of arithmetic as the standard for doing sums and the law as the standard for what is legal. The neutrality we expect of teachers thus seems to be a neutrality with respect to values *competing* in *their* community, not with respect to values about which there is no dispute. If ethical standards are as uncontroversial a guide to conduct as arithmetic is to correct addition, then a teacher can teach ethics and still be value neutral in the appropriate sense, that is, neutral with respect to *competing* values.

2. Subjectivism

Here the second fear enters the classroom, the fear of subjectivism. "How," it asks, "can ethics be as uncontroversial as arithmetic or law? Isn't ethics just a matter of how you feel about things?" What makes this second fear so chilling is that it rests on an obvious truth. Ethics is in part a matter of feeling. How, for example, could we believe stealing is unethical without having negative feelings about stealing? Luckily, we need not deny this obvious truth to teach ethics. We need only deny that ethics is "*just* a matter of feeling".

This, I think, is the place to define ethics. I have found the following definition useful: *Ethics consists of those standards of conduct that, all things considered, every member of a particular group wants every other to follow even if their following them would mean he too has to follow them.* Acting ethically is acting according to the appropriate ethical standard.

This definition makes ethics (in part) a matter of feeling. What our ethics are will depend in part on what we *want*. But that is not all our ethics will depend on. The definition also makes our ethics depend on what *everyone else* (in the group) also wants. The question I am to consider when deciding what it would be ethical to do is not what I happen to feel toward a certain act but whether the act is right according to a standard everyone, myself included, wants everyone else in the group to follow.

If all this sounds familiar, that is not surprising. New inventions or discoveries are rare in a field as old as ethics. The definition I am suggesting is little more than a restatement of the Golden Rule. The fundamental idea is certainly the same: we are to figure out what we should do by treating what other people want as equal to what we want. The difference between this definition and the Golden Rule, though small, may nonetheless make a big difference in teaching. The Golden Rule focuses attention on two-person relations. You are told to put yourself in *the* other person's place. The definition offered here focuses attention on the *social* practice, on what we want *everyone* else (in the group) to do even if it means doing the same ourselves. The definition reminds us not to forget third parties, the big picture, how our acts might appear to others, and similar matters the Golden Rule allows us to forget all too easily. We are led to think of ethics as an inherently social enterprise.

3. Relativism

This said, it may seem that I have quieted the second fear only to rouse a third, the fear of relativism. "With so many different groups in a society like ours," this new fear asks, "how could more than a few of us agree on anything like a standard of conduct?" Have I explained what ethics is at the cost of making it impractical? I think not.

Consider some facts so obvious they generally go unnoticed. While we *are* different and *dis*agree about *much*, we do not disagree about *everything*. For example, we seem to agree that arithmetic provides the standard for doing sums—even if we sometimes do not do our sums that way, whether by mistake or design. More relevant here is that we also seem to agree about certain rules of conduct. For example, the rule against murder seems to be the common property of everyone—or at least of those not plainly too young, too feeble-minded, or too ill mentally to count as rational.

We might call these universal ethical standards *morality*, saving the word "ethics" for those (morally-permitted) standards that apply *only* to particular groups. Morality applies to "everyone"; but Catholic ethics applies only to Catholics, business ethics only to those engaged in business, legal ethics only to lawyers, and so on.[4] Membership in an ethical group is not arbitrary. An ethical group is defined by the practice everyone in the group wants everyone else to follow. Insofar as people are rational, they will want to include in the practice in question everyone whose participation will be beneficial. Something similar explains the special status of moral rules.

Why is there so much agreement about moral rules? Consider the moral rule, "Don't kill."[5] Why does everyone want everyone else to follow it? One important argument for the rule is this: Each of us would be safer if everyone else abstained from killing. That safety has its *costs*, of course. If I follow the rule, "Don't kill," I can't kill you just because I would benefit form so doing. We are, however, generallly willing to give up the opportunity because we are generally more worried about being killed than we are about carrying out plans that involve killing others.

I said "generally". This suggests that moral rules have exceptions. We must admit that much. We need not panic—so long as the exceptions are as open to the same analysis as the general rules themselves. I think they are. For example, one exception to "Don't kill" is certainly "self-defense". Why? Well, if we did not allow people to defend themselves against attackers who sought to violate the rule against killing, the moral among us would be in more danger with a rule against killing than without it. Morality would not be a rational practice. On the other hand, with the exception, we are even safer than without the rule. Potential attackers have a reason to abstain from attacking that they would not have if self-defense were not an exception to "Don't kill" or if there were no prohibition of killing. Potential attackers must take into account the possibility that even a perfectly moral victim will defend herself.

You have probably noticed that this argument appeals only to reasons of self-interest. No doubt self-interest has much to do with the universal appeal of "Don't kill" and certain of its exceptions. But there are less-universal reasons for the rule as well. For example, some people might want the rule in part at least because their religion or culture has such a rule. Such differences in reasons are consistent with agreement on the same standard of conduct. Moral standards are neutral between such competing values.

I have, I hope, now convinced you that morality, a universal ethics, is at least possible. If so, you should be convinced that ethics in the narrow sense is *possible* too. But you may still wonder whether workplace ethics—in any interesting sense—is more than a mere possibility *here*. How much agreement could there be on ethics in a place as diverse as, say, Chicago? Though this question is all that's left of the fear of relativism, it is probably enough to disable most teachers. Here, I think, social scientists have something useful to tell us. I will

give two examples.

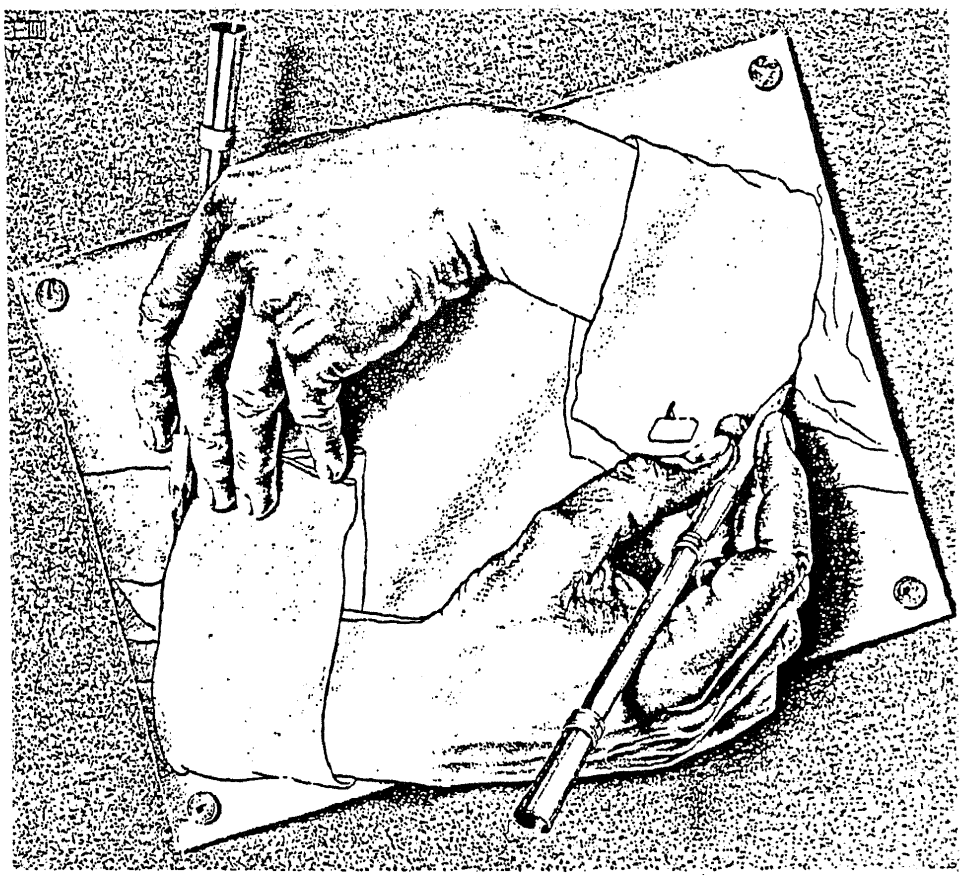
The first concerns ideas about justice. Tom Tyler, a social psychologist at Northwestern University, has been conducting surveys in Chicago trying to compare the attitudes towards justice of various groups. He has found no significant differences on such questions as whether a judge should be impartial or a police officer should take a bribe. Adult Chicagoans of all classes, races, and ages seem to have a common conception of justice.[6] His findings are consistent with similar research done elsewhere.[7]

My other example of what social scientists have to tell us comes from a field in which I have a special interest, punishment. Over the last twenty years, researchers have conducted major surveys in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe asking people to rank crimes according to seriousness. They report some differences between social groups. For example, the poor tend to rank property crimes somewhat lower than the middle-classes do. But such differences are small. For example, no economic, racial, or age group considers bank robbery a minor offense or petty theft a major one.[8]

The conclusion I draw from such empirical evidence is that, *as a matter of fact*, the differences among your students on *basic* ethical questions is probably not worth worrying about. There will be some ethical disagreements, no doubt, for example, concerning whether using cocaine is morally wrong. The empirical evidence I have pointed to does not rule out such disagreements. What it does is undercut the inference from the fact of such disagreements to the conclusion that we can agree on little of importance. Our disagreements seem better explained by incomplete information, different experiences, and the like than by differences in basic moral principles. You need not fear relativism.

4. Can Ethics be Taught in High School?

We have now reached the fourth fear, perhaps the most incapacitating, the fear of impotence. "How," it asks, "can a high school teacher hope to teach near adults what they should have learned on their mother's or father's knee? If they don't know right from wrong already, what can I do?



What makes this fear so incapacitating is that you can*not* hope to teach near adults what they had ample opportunity to learn long ago. If teaching workplace ethics really were teaching students what parents have already tried to teach for many years, teaching workplace ethics would be either unnecessary (since the students would already know what was being taught) or hopeless (since students so stupid as not to learn the basics after years of being taught them at home are probably not going to pick them up in one class).

How can we dispose of this fourth fear? One way might be to point out that moral development is a continuing process. At a certain age, a child may only be able to absorb arguments that refer to what parents, teachers, or others in authority say or will do. Later, the child will find other arguments convincing as well, first those that refer to what the groups he belongs to believe and then those that refer to universal rationally-defensible principles. Hence, parents can only do so much at an early age.

While the theory of moral development is an important contribution to our understanding of moral education generally, it cannot, I think, dispose of the fear of impotence. Even allowing for the limits the concept of moral development places on what children can learn and when they can learn it, parents still seem better placed to teach their children ethics than any teacher is. Moral development is primarily a theory of reasons for conduct, not of what conduct is right or wrong. Parents could therefore teach even young children the rules of workplace ethics—even though they could not teach them as *ethical* rules. Only if teaching workplace ethics is teaching something substantively different from what parents generally teach would there be no reason to fear that teaching workplace ethics is unnecessary or hopeless. Is teaching workplace ethics different? Let's think about right and wrong again.

I have already pointed out that schools spend most of their time teaching the dif-

ference between right and wrong. Yet, teaching the difference between right and wrong is also something that parents do. Are the schools wasting their time? Of course not. Though most children entering kindergarten know the difference between right and wrong in a general way, they certainly do not know all about right or wrong. Indeed, none of us does. So, for example, a child entering kindergarten would normally know the difference between putting his shoes on wrong and putting them on right. But he would have to wait a few years to learn the right answer to 22 + 97. What is true of right and wrong in arithmetic may be true of right and wrong in workplace ethics too.

What do parents teach their children about ethics? They generally teach them the basics, of course, what we have called morality: Don't kill; keep your promises; don't steal; don't cheat; and so on. They also generally teach them more local rules; for example, the ethics of their family, such as: don't take money out of the cookie jar without leaving a note; or be home for dinner by six. Even those who break such rules will generally know of them and not treat them with indifference. There are exceptions, for example; the so-called sociopaths. Such persons may well be beyond the help a teacher can offer in the classroom. They are, after all, often beyond the help psychologists and social workers can offer. Even a prison may not change them. A teacher can only do so much. We must focus on what teachers can do.

Let's then suppose (what I think is true) that students enter your class reasonably well informed about morality and about the ethics of their family, neighborhood, religion, and school. And let's suppose as well (what I also think is true) that most of your students mean well. They don't want to kill, break promises, steal, cheat or otherwise do anything they regard as wrong. What's left for you to teach them? The answer is: plenty.

A business is not a family, neighborhood, church, or school. Though businesses differ much among themselves, they are generally less personal than a family, neighborhood, church, or school, less interested in the individual, and more committed to an outcome to which the individual has only an instrumental connection. Businesses are, in short, organized around "the bottom line" in a way few other institutions are. Anyone not raised in a business environment is likely to underestimate the difference between business and the institutions they are familiar with. They are certainly unlikely to know in advance the particular standards governing conduct in a workplace. For example, how can a student guess that promptness would be more important in the workplace than in his family, neighborhood, church, or school? The workplace is a new environment with new standards of conduct.

So, teaching about the workplace, especially teaching a vocational course in how to get and keep a job, is necessarily teaching right and wrong of a sort most students will find useful. Is teaching such things also necessarily teaching workplace ethics? The answer, I think, is no. This may seem odd, given what I have already said. But, in fact, it is not at all odd—and understanding why is important for understanding how to teach workplace ethics. There are at least three ways to teach right and wrong in the workplace: the way of prudence, the way of morality, and the way of ethics. Only the last two teach ethics. Let me explain.

The first way to teach right and wrong in the workplace is the way of prudence (or self-interest). You explain right and wrong in terms of what the boss wants and what he will do if one does not do it. You might, for example, explain why an employee should be prompt in this way: "If you don't want to get fired, arrive on time."

The second way to teach right and wrong in the workplace is the way of morality. You explain right and wrong in terms of a moral rule. For example, you might say, "You should arrive on time because taking the job is an implicit promise to be prompt and you don't want to break a promise, do you?"

The third way to teach right and wrong in the workplace is the way of ethics (in the narrow sense). You explain right and wrong as determined by standards everyone involved wants everyone else to follow, even if that means having to follow them too. You might, for example, tell your students, "You should arrive on time. Other employees depend on you to do so and you depend on them to do the same. You will all be better off if you all arrive on time than if each arrives at his own convenience. Do your share since the others are doing theirs."

You can, I think, easily see that the three ways are different. Each gives a distinct interpretation of right and wrong in the workplace, though only the second and third are ways of teaching ethics in the broad sense. You can also see from this example that the three ways *can* be consistent. Sometimes prudence, morality, and ethics all favor the same act.

You may, however, find the first two, the ways of prudence and morality, more familiar. You may also have realized that the way of ethics is likely to be the hardest to follow. So, for example, the way of prudence required only that you know what the boss wants (and what he can enforce). The way of morality required something more, that you know what is implicit in the employment contract. But the way of ethics required as well that you know a lot about the workplace. Who depends on whom? How much? What would happen if someone did or didn't do this or that?

Once you see how much you must know to teach workplace ethics, even if you rely only on the way of morality, you can see as well how you can teach right and wrong in the workplace without teaching workplace ethics. More important now, you can see why teaching workplace ethics (in the narrow sense) can add something to your students' understanding of the workplace. Teaching workplace ethics stresses relationships among employees rather than the relationship between the employee and boss.

Still, you may wonder whether teaching your students workplace ethics can change their conduct. Here psychologists have something to tell us. Thanks to Lawrence Kohlberg and his successors, we now have substantial empirical evidence that discussing moral problems in a classroom can change the moral judgments students make.[9] Common sense suggests that conduct should change more or less as moral judgments change.[10] Though I shall soon explain

why that should be so, you should already be able to see that you have no reason to fear impotence.

5. Shades of Gray

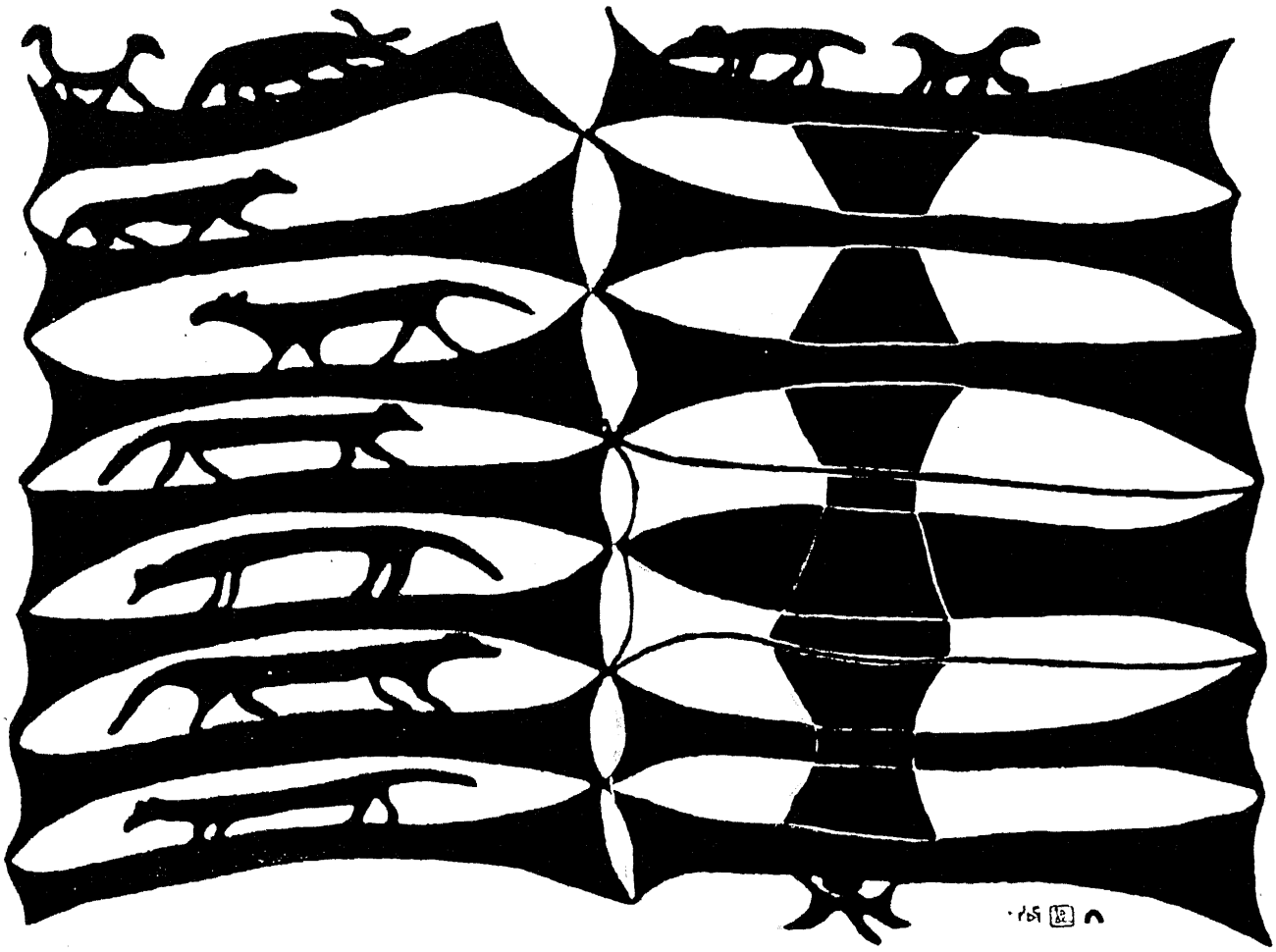
So far (it might be thought) I have only shown that you can teach your students *some* workplace ethics. I have not shown that you can teach them much. Problems of workplace ethics (it may seem) are of two kinds: a) the black-and-white problems, the ones for which only a word or two of explanation is enough to get even the least well-informed student to see what he should do; and b) the shades-of-gray problems, the ones likely to make even a philosopher scratch her head. In short, you can only teach your students the workplace ethics they would pick up at work in a few minutes anyway. So, why bother?

Such thoughts can bring on the last fear, the fear of shades of gray. This fear is, I think, founded in the actual experience of teachers. When you look over ethics problems you might discuss, you will probably find that they are exactly as described. The answers to most will seem obvious. The reast of the problems will seem to have no consideration at all. Consideration will weigh against consideration, moral rule against moral rule.

While we must recognize this experience, we must not be too quick to draw from it the conclusion that there is not much workplace ethics to teach. The experience is not uncommon elsewhere in teaching. Consider, for example, what geometry looks like to an experienced geometry teacher. Most (if not all) of the problems in her text have solutions obvious to her. She could (as we say) "do them in her sleep." Yet, each year a new generation of students will find them hard—until they get used to thinking in geometric terms, in the terms that have long since become second nature to her.

The same, I think, is true of workplace ethics. What is obvious to an experienced teacher may well take a student a lot of background knowledge and thinking to see at all. Teachers need not apologize for teaching what they find obvious—so long as experience has taught them that their students do not find it so. My impression from talking to vocational teachers is that their students do indeed find much about workplace ethics hard to grasp.

But what of those problems so hard that even an experienced teacher can only distinguish shades of gray? A few of these problems may in fact be situations in which even the best solution is bad. Human life is not without tragedy. Still, even most of these hard problems will, I believe, eventually yield to the careful deliberation of someone familiar with the actual conditions under which the problem might arise. (Society has a low tolerance for institutions with a tendency to produce tragic choices.) Problems look easy only once we see how to solve them. Until then, they are as dark as caves and as crowded with fears. That is no less true of problems in geometry than of problems in ethics.



PART THREE—PENNY,S CASE

Let us now apply the foregoing analysis to a possible classroom situation:

> The reading you assigned for today includes a discussion of pilfering. You summed up the text in this way, "Some employees think nothing is wrong with taking little, inexpensive things. But that's pilfering and pilfering is a kind of theft. So, don't do it." As you finish, Penny raises her hand. She is plainly unhappy. Her question makes clear why. "I work at Fat Boy Pizza," she sais. "There are always too many Fat Boy pencils around. Even the manager wonders why we get so many. Everybody takes a few home now and then. That's not wrong, is it?"

How should you respond? The simplest way is to appeal to prudence, for example, by pointed out that Penny is technically pilfering and that the manager could use that fact as an excuse for firing her any time he wanted to. "Pilfering," you might say, "is a tactical blunder in the game of keeping your job.

Though that is the simplest way to respond to Penny's question, it may not be the most persuasive. You are asking Penny to think of her manager as an opponent, as someone who might any day decide to fire her and then go looking for an excuse. She might find this characterization of *her* manager unrealistic. Even if she accepts the characterization, she still might conclude *not* that pilfering is wrong but that pilfering doesn't matter. Once a manager wants to get rid of someone (she might reason), he can find an excuse; so, why worry about giving him one?

An appeal to ethics (in the narrow sense) may also seem unlikely to succeed. If everybody really does take home a few pencils now and then and no one at Fat Boy's is inconvenienced, what ethical standard could Penny be violating. If Penny has her facts right, her pilfering should be consistent with all the special standards of conduct her co-workers accept. I will come back to Penny's facts later. But, for now, let's take them at face value.

The Way of Morality

If Penny has her facts right, the way of morality is the only alternative left to you—apart from silence. But you have already pointed out that pilfering is theft, and Penny's question suggests that she knows theft is morally wrong. What more can you say? What about some question like this?

"Penny, you agree, don't you, that theft is wrong?"

Seeing her nod, you might continue, "And you agree too that taking what does not belong to you is theft?"

Suppose she answers, "Yes, generally." Now you have a problem. The "yes" shows she understands what theft is; the "generally" that she thinks taking Fat Boy pencils belongs to some category of exception. What now?

One approach is to try to *bring the implied exception out into the open.* "Penny," you might say, "are you suggesting that what you're doing isn't really theft, that it's more like taking something given to you, or like picking up something someone else has thrown away?"

Let's suppose Penny answers, "Yes, like picking up something someone else has thrown away." Now all you need to determine is whether what she is doing comes under that exception.

So, you might continue, "Okay, that's plain enough. Now, what makes you think Fat Boy meant to throw away the pencils? Did you check with the manager?" If Penny did check with him and he said she could take a few pencils now and then, she is morally all right (though the manager may have a problem).

But, if (as seems more likely) Penny must admit that she did not check with the manager, you can ask, "Penny, tell me this: would you want a guest in your home taking something of yours without permission just because you left it out where he could get it and he thought you had so much you wouldn't mind?"

Let's suppose Penny agrees she would not want that. Then you might try to bring the discussion to a close with a question like this, "Well, if that's so, Penny, don't you think it would be a good idea to ask the manager's permission before taking any more pencils?"

That might end the discussion. We can easily imagine Penny nodding her head in agreement. But what if, as students sometimes do, Penny resists the argument? What if she answers your question, "No, I don't see why. What does what I would want guests to do in my home have to do with what I should do in a business?" What do you say now?

You might try getting Penny to explain how her moral status in a business differs from that of a guest in her home. You might, for example, say something like this, "Look, Penny, you must admit that there are *some* similarities. You must admit that your home is no more your guest's home than Fat Boy's is your business. You must also admit that you could have too much of something just as Fat Boy's does. So, don't you owe us an explanation of the *difference* between your home and Fat Boy's that could make what would be theft in your home merely taking what Fat Boy's has thrown away?"

Perhaps Penny would think this last question answers itself. But let's suppose she is still not convinced. Let's suppose she responds, "Well, isn't the difference obvious? A business is a business; a home is not." What should you do now?

You should *not* panic. Penny is simply trying to distinguish between exceptions that apply to businesses and exceptions that apply to homes. There *might* be such a distinction. But just because there *might* be, Penny is not entitled to conclude that there *is*. To show that she is not really pilfering, Penny must show that *everyone* would want (or *at least* would be willing to allow) everyone else to treat taking from a business like Fat Boy's as one thing and taking from a home like Penny's as another.

One heavy-handed way to get Penny to see that she probably cannot show that is the familiar technique of asking her to put herself in the other person's place. "Penny," you might say, "I can see why *you* would want to have your things at home treated differently from the way things in a business are treated. You don't own a business. But what if you did? Would you still be willing to let business property be up for grabs? Look at it from Fat Boy's point of view."

Let's suppose Penny agrees that if she owned a business she would want her business property respected in much the way she now wants her property at home respected. You could then try to con-

clude with the rhetorical question, "So, don't you agree that the right thing to do is to treat Fat Boy's property with the same respect you would want a guest to treat yours?"

2. Why Morality Can be Taught This Way

We can, I think, still imagine Penny rejecting your conclusion for various reasons. We must nonetheless end the discussion here. The reasons Penny could now offer would be much like those we have already imagined her to offer. You could respond to them much as we have imagined you responding to the others. Penny's case has *already* illustrated all it can. I would stress three points:

The first is that the way of ethics and the way of morality are *not* equivalent. You may well be able to use the way of morality when you can't use the way of ethics. In Penny's case, for example, we had no trouble using the way of morality even though (assuming Penny had her facts right) we could not see any obvious way to use the way of ethics.

A second point I want to stress is that you should not just assume you know why a student has gone wrong. Penny might have pilfered because she wanted to steal ("an evil will"); because she gave into temptation ("weakness of will"); because she fooled herself into thinking she wasn't stealing ("self-deception"); because she didn't put together what she knew already ("mistake"); because she didn't know crucial facts ("ignorance"); or because of some combination of these. You could not know which without investigation.

Penny's question itself tells us something. She probably would not ask it if she were not concerned to do the right thing. So, she probably has a good will. Her question also suggests that neither weakness of will nor self-deception played much of a part in her pilfering. A weak-willed person knows that what she is doing is wrong and so would not need to ask Penny's question. A self-deceiver probably would not want to ask Penny's question for fear of being told what she is trying to forget. So, a question like Penny's is a good indication that mistake, missing fact, or some combination of these is the cause of wrongdoing. This is just as well. Our method is not designed to deal with an evil will, weakness of will, or self-deception. Indeed, it is, I think, an open question whether the classroom is the appropriate place to try to remove such barriers to good conduct.

Though Penny's question itself told you much, it did not tell you the relevant mistake or missing fact motivating her. To identify that, you had to ask questions of your own. The first questions we imagined you to ask revealed that Penny's wrongdoing rested on a mistake. She supposed that taking the pencils fit under an exception to the rule against theft. Your questions then identified the relevant exception. We could imagine the discussion going on indefinitely because we could imagine any number of possible exceptions she might have had in mind. While in theory the number of possible exceptions is infinite, in practice there are few and a few questions will ordinarily allow you to identify the one the student has implicitly assumed.

Once you have identified the exception, there are at least three possibilities. I have illustrated two of them. One possibility is that the exception does *not* excuse the act. For example, the exception might actually require Penny to check with the manager first. The second possibility is that the identified exception might *not* be defensible. It might not actually be an exception. For example, once Penny put herself in the place of a business owner, even she could see why such a person would reject her distinction between property in the home and property in a business. She could understand why her exception could not be a standard everyone wants everyone else to follow.

Though I have not illustrated the third possibility, it deserves mention. The same questions that we imagined to help Penny put together the information she had in a way that changed what she thought about pilfering might instead have changed what *you* thought. Penny might have been able to identify a defensible exception excusing what she did.[11] We must always be ready to learn from our students. Moral argument is no exception.

The last point I want to stress is related to this second and concerns what you can hope to accomplish by a discussion like the one we imagined. You are, I think, justified in hoping to change for the better how someone like Penny will act in the workplace. Penny's question showed that she wanted to do the right thing. If your questions lead her to see some act as caused by a mistake, she will not want to repeat it. You can actually change the conduct (and the moral views) of a student like Penny. There's no magic about it. You need only understand her thinking well enough to identify the mistake that caused her to go once you have made her thinking ex-

plicit. But you may have to use all your skill as a teacher to make it explicit.

This description of the method may make it seem coldly intellectual. It need not be. We must remember how personal an exchange between teacher and student can be, even in a large classroom, the pressure, the excitement. Logic and emotion can run together in a wild stream.

3. The Way of Ethics

So far we have been assuming that Penny has her facts right. She may not. And you, an experienced teacher, are likely to know enough about Penny's workplace to know whether she does have her facts right. So, let's change the problem a bit. Let's assume that Penny is *not* the first student to tell you about Fat Boy pencils, that you first heard Penny's question some years ago (including the part about even the manager wondering why he had so many pencils), and that you then made suitable inquiries of the manager and others. Here is what you found out:

There is a problem with shrinkage in the inventory of pencils. The primary cause seems to be forgetting to return pencils at the end of a shift rather than employees actually taking them intentionally. A few employees even accumulate them at home until they remember to bring them back and then bring back a handful all at once. Whatever the cause, shrinkage is a small problem. According to the manager, so few pencils disappear that, even at the rate of one per employee per year, no more than a quarter of the staff could be guilty of keeping one pencil a year. The manager doubts very much that "everyone does it". He admits that Fat Boy's does have a lot of pencils around, but he denies ever wondering why. Company policy is to have enough pencils out that no employee will ever have to take time to hunt one up. The company limits the number of pencils a manager can order or have in stock. If employees pilfered too many pencils, the manager would have to check each employee before letting him or her out the door or risk a drop in productivity by making employees work with too few pencils. Company policy does not allow using pencils without the Fat Boy logo.

With this additional information, you would be in a position to handle Penny's question in a very different way. If ignorance caused Penny's pilfering, just reciting these facts should change her mind or at least convince her to check the facts before taking any more pencils. But, let's suppose these facts do not change her mind. However unlikely, let's suppose that Penny simply shrugs her shoulders and says, "Well, I still don't see what's wrong with taking a few cheap pencils now and then."

You would have two options. One is the way of morality we already discussed. But the other is the way of ethics. By a series of questions much like those we already imagined, you would try to get Penny to see that her having a pencil at work when she needs it depends in part on other employees not pilfering as she does. If the other employees did what she does, there would soon be a shortage of pencils. Unless the manager then cracked down, all employees would be inconvenienced. So, everyone, including Penny, has an interest in a practice in which employees abstain from taking pencils the way Penny did. Penny's pilfering is ethically wrong. You can, I think, easily imagine a series of questions that would lead Penny to that conclusion.

4. Conclusion: Helping Students Think about Ethics

The approach sketched in this Part depends on students asking something like Penny's original question. If you are like many of the vocational teachers I interviewed, you may be saying to yourself, "But my students never ask questions like that in class. How I wish they would!" So, you might also be wondering whether I have any suggestions for getting your students to ask questions like Penny's.

The answer is that I do have one. Students of engineering, law and other professions generally seem to believe that ethics, like sex, is a personal matter irrelevant to the workplace. Your students may come into class with much the same attitude. If so, you will have to do what teachers in professional schools have to do if they want their students to raise ethics questions in an ordinary course. You will have to let them know that such questions are legitimate. The simplest way to do that is to raise such questions yourself early in the semester, discuss them with some care, and encourage the class to participate. Once you break the ice, you may be surprised at what happens next. Here are some problems I collected that you might find useful ice breakers.

PART FOUR:
FOUR PROBLEMS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Justin Major is the present holder of a part-time job that has been available to your students for a decade now, a wonderful job compared to the usual fast-food placement. Justin must work two hours each evening painting industrial steel to be used the following morning for construction. His hours are flexible. He can start anytime after 3:30, so long as he finishes by 7:00. His job is important. The paint requires almost eight hours to dry. If Justin fails to do his job on any day, the construction gang will not be able to do its job the next day.

You thought Justin understood all this. But that was last fall. Justin's boss called you a few minutes ago to tell you that Justin didn't show up last night. When you asked Justin why he had not, he said that he didn't think he was getting paid enough for the job he was doing. So, he took off a little time. Is there anything you can say to Justin that might change his mind. If he misses work again, he will be fired, but he is just six weeks from graduation. [Ask your class for advice.]

2. Most of your co-workers at Fishy-Wishy's are drug-free. But some are, you think, on one sort of drug or another. You know for sure one of them is, because you have seen him sniffing cocaine in the kitchen during a quiet moment. While he was once pretty good in the kitchen, he is increasingly prone to confusing orders. That makes your job up front harder. So far you and the other staff have covered for him. But you're getting tired of that. The manager doesn't seem to have noticed anything wrong. You are tempted to tell him. Should you? What if he asks?

3. When my friends come to King

Fries, I like to show them that I appreciate them. So, when they order a large fries, I give them what they ask for but charge them for the small. Sincere there is no way to check the order sheets against the cash for the day, no one is the wiser. I save each friend a quarter or so; but the fries really only cost the company two cents and my friends probably would only order small fries if they couldn't get the extra fries free. Really, my friends wouldn't come in at all if I weren't there. So, where's the harm? You can't call that stealing.

4. The first rule we were taught during orientation was that you should never leave the cash register without locking your cash box. Never. Never. Never. If you come up short, you will be fired. No excuses.

a. One day my manager says to me, "Please go into the backroom and get me four boxes of No. 2 rolls." So, I say, "Sure, as soon as I lock my cash box." But he says, "No time, just do it. I'll watch the register." What should I do?

b. Suppose I did what the manager said, leaving him with the unlocked cashbox. Suppose too that that evening my cash comes up $20 short, that I don't have $20 to slip in, and that he says, "You're fired." What should I do then?

NOTES

[1] A version of this paper was presented as part of a mini-seminar for the Illinois Cooperative Vocational Education Coordinators Association on May 18, 1988. I should like to thank those present for their warm response, helpful suggestions, and good examples.

[2] The best of these is, I think, Thomas F. Green, "The Formation of Conscience in an Age of Technology", *American Journal of Education* 93 (November 1985): 1-32. For something more typical of work in this area, see Matthew Lipman, "Ethical Reason and the Craft of Moral Practice", *Journal of Moral Education* 16 (May 1987): 139-147.

[3] Grady Kimbrell and Ben S. Vineyard, *Succeeding in the World of Work*, 3rd. (McKnight Publishing Co.: Bloomington, Ill., 1981), p. 77. (Of course, ethical terms such as honesty and loyalty appear throughout the text, but they are not acknowledged to be ethical terms at all. They often serve in place of an argument for the recommended conduct.)

[4] For an application of this analysis to the professional ethics of teachers, see Michael Davis, "Vocational Teachers, Confidentiality, and Professional Ethics", *International Journal of Applied Philosophy* 4 (Spring 1988): 11-20. For the generalized version of this analysis, see Michael Davis, "The Moral Authority of a Professional Code", *NOMOS XXIX: Authority Revisited*, ed. J. Roland Pennock and John W. Chapman (New York University Press: New York, 1987), pp. 302-337.

[5] For a full defense of analyzing morality in something like this way, see Bernard Gert, *The Moral Rules* (Harper Torchbooks: New York, 1973), esp. pp. 76-82.

[6] Tom R. Tyler, "What is Procedural Justice?: Criteria Used by Citizens to Assess the Fairness of Legal Procedures", *Law & Society Review* 22 (1988): 103-135.

[7] See, for example, S.E. Merry, "Everyday Understandings of the Law in Working Class America", *American Ethnologist* 13 (1986): 253-270.

[8] See, for example, V. Lee Hamilton and Steve Rytina, "Social Consensus on Norms of Justice: Should the Punishment Fit the Crime?", *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (March 1980): 1117-1145.

[9] See, for example, Moshe M. Blatt and Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Effects of Classroom Moral Discussion Upon Children's Level of Moral Judgment", *Journal of Moral Education* 4 (1975): 129-161.

[10] Though the connection between judgment and action seems obvious, it is surprisingly hard to prove. Real life tests of the connection are hard to arrange. "Laboratory experiments" have their own problems. For example, Blatt and Kohlberg, in the work cited above, used a paper and pencil examination to test student honesty. The number of students cheating on the exam *increased* from 47% before the twelve weeks of classroom moral discussion began to 61% at the end. Blatt and Kohlberg quite plausibly attribute this awkward result in part to the fact that the students had realized that cheating was not being discouraged. Many who before had been afraid to cheat, seeing that they had nothing to fear, now joined the more daring. Blatt and Kohlberg also attribute this awkward result partly, and less plausibly, to the fact that only one student was at the highest level of moral development, Kohlberg's "universal ethical principle orientation". (I say "less plausibly" because many moral philosophers might consider the cheating to have been so widespread that everyone was excused from the moral obligation not to cheat. After all, moral rules seem to presuppose certain background conditions.) "The Effects of Classroom Moral Discussion", p. 149. The literature on professional ethics and business ethics also seems to suffer from a lack of direct evidence that *changing* what people think about conduct *changes* what they do.

[11] Radicals may find this approach to teaching workplace ethics altogether too smug. Why not raise questions about the legitimacy of the boss's wealth and power? Why implicitly assume that stealing from business is morally wrong? To such radical questions, I have two responses. First, a course in how to get and keep a job has a practical mission, to help students get and keep their job. I doubt the radical critique of education is consistent with that mission. Second, and more important, my method does not rule out consideration of questions a radical might raise. The method simply leaves it to the student to raise them by, for example, denying that it's appropriate for Penny to try to put herself in her boss's place: "I'm never going to own a business." My impression is that this is not a time when students, especially students like Penny, raise such questions. As a philosopher, I miss the days when students did raise such questions. But, as someone trying to help teachers get over their fear of teaching ethics, I can't help remembering the difficulty I had finding a moral argument in Marx. I think the radicals owe the rest of us a justification of their enterprise that is not itself a form of mystification. Until we hear that justification, we may, I think, teach ethics as I have suggested in good conscience. We might even remind the radicals that showing students that morality is something about which they can reason is itself liberating in a society where far too many people suppose morality to be a fact like gravity, a god's command, or an inexplicable custom.