INTRODUCTION

Because the sociology of moral experience is not a staple of the sociological curriculum, some explanation of the topic may be needed. The course is organized around two assumptions. First, it adopts an essentially symbolic interactionist assumption that we are deeply concerned with the meaning of our acts. The second assumption, which is the one around which the course is organized, is that moral evaluation is a central part of what gives acts their meaning. Although some variant of this assumption undergirds much sociological work (for instance in sociological examinations of work, religion, law, deviance, family life, and organizations, to name just a few), the assumption is rarely examined. As sociologists we therefore have not thought very systematically about how moral evaluations, moral training, or vocabularies of motive change from one arena to another. We have not asked how moral evaluations are designed into institutions, how they are taught, or what effect they have. To bring these kinds of questions to the fore, this course will draw on empirical pieces that show what form moral experience takes in a variety of settings as well as on theoretical works that address some of the core questions. The course should be viewed as a collective exploration of a novel topic rather than a comprehensive, synthetic survey of a well established field.

The organization of the course reflects a compromise between two competing principles that might give coherence to the course: processes and concrete locations. We might, for instance, look at moral experience in families, religious groups, war zones, or professions. Or, alternatively, we might focus on how moral thinking is inculcated, how moral violations are punished, or how boundary-making facilitates moral evaluation. Ideally we’d be able to cross-classify processes and settings, but the literature isn’t sufficiently developed to permit that.

Class will be devoted to discussions of the reading material, with the objective being to use the assigned readings as raw materials to construct a sociology of moral experience. To that end, we will follow two routines: students will prepare written responses in advance of the class and the instructor will prepare a written summary of the class discussion each week to keep us from rehashing old material and to set the agenda for subsequent classes. A brief written paper proposal will be due in the middle of the quarter and a final paper at the end of the quarter.

CLASS SCHEDULE

April 4 — Introduction to the course. Moral evaluation and boundaries between groups. Readings: Lamont on race in the US and France, Whyte on sex, Beisel on sexuality and class reproduction, Fraser on boundaries and interpretation of need, Heise and Smith-Lovin on evaluation.

April 11 — Temporal and spatial boundaries, shifting situations, and shifting evaluations. Readings: Parsons on the sick role, Waller on war, Goffman on boundaries between situations, Mills on motives, Pendas on the banality of evil, Hacking on interpreting the past.
April 18 — Moral obligations in interpersonal relations and how they arise. Readings: Heimer and Staffen on responsibility to children, Rossi and Rossi on gender and intergenerational helping, Piliavin and Charn on altruism.

April 25 — Organizations, occupations, and work, part 1—moral experience in professional work. Readings: Shapiro (skim much of the first part on lawyers), Parsons on professions, Bosk on errors, Zussman on medical ethics, Baker on tort lawyers.

May 2—no class; paper proposal due in mailbox by 9AM, Monday 5/6/2002.

May 9 — Organizations, occupations, and work, part 2—moving beyond the core professions. Readings: Rees on industrial morality, Shulman on deception (not in packet), Heimer on universalism and particularism, Jackall on managers, Heimer on insurers.

May 16 — Learning about morality. Readings: Swidler on free schools, Gilligan on gender and moral thinking, Selznick on moral development, Mead on the development of the self, Tipton on religion.

May 23 (Th) — Morality and market institutions. Readings: Zelizer on insurance, Zelizer on money, Wolfe on markets (and introduction).

May 30 (Th) — Morality and the state. Readings: Wolfe on states (and rest of book), Lempert and Sanders on justice, law, and “constitutions.”

June 6 (Th) — Toward a sociology of moral experience: revisions, restatements, reconsiderations, manifestos. Readings: none, unless chosen collectively.

June 10 (M)—papers due to mailbox by 5PM

BIBLIOGRAPHY (big course pack at Quartet Copies; Wolfe at SBX)


Propieties), 198-215 (Chapter 13, Tightness and Looseness), 216-241 (Chapter 14, The Symptomatic Significance of Situational Improprieties), 242-248 (Chapter 15, Conclusions).


