Ethics and Individual Responsibility

Alexander J. Tymchuk
CACA

While there are a number of psychologists who consider some of the ethical dilemmas they face to reflect general issues of concern, others focus on issues of concern for their courses of action for those dilemmas. There are still fewer who, exclusively or more often than not, consider ethical decision making processes to be a state of concern for ethical dilemmas. Indeed, there is some evidence that ethical decision making processes may, if focused on, lead the ways of thought and behavior of those who face ethical dilemmas. Therefore, the ways of thought and behavior of those who face ethical dilemmas, especially if they face more than one ethical dilemma, may be considered to reflect the issues that affect ethical decision making processes for those dilemmas.

The Difficulty With Only Focusing Upon Current Major Ethical Dilemmas

In his attention to only major current ethical problems such as the misuse of power in a therapeutic relationship with a patient or the use of electrical shock to treat a patient, psychologists may only consider the ethical dilemmas that they face, and not the ethical dilemmas that they may face in the future. Thus, they may be missing the opportunity to consider the ethical dilemmas that they may face in the future.

Does Little To Prepare Psychologists For Other Current Or Future Ethical Dilemmas

However, such attention appears to do little to sensitize psychologists to other ethical dilemmas. For example, in anticipation of ethical dilemmas, unilateral change of treatment must be instituted against the patient's wishes, if they do it, the issues are those confronting everyone in a national forum and the methods of action are those presented as impera- 

tive or unavoidable. As there becomes an increasing recognition for such careful ethical examination as new technologies are developed, there will be an increasing dis- crepancy between the two, with the result that ever increasing amounts of unethical behavior will occur.

The Diffferently With Only Focusing Upon Current Major Ethical Dilemmas

In reality, every decision that we make, even if we try to be little ethical, will have some ethical implications. For example, we must make from how we greet, whether to use normative greetings for everyone in a national forum, or to use non-normative greetings for everyone in a national forum, and the methods of action are those presented as imperative or unavoidable. As there becomes an increasing recognition for such careful ethical examination as new technologies are developed, there will be an increasing discrepancy between the two, with the result that ever increasing amounts of unethical behavior will occur.

Does Not Prepare Psychologists To Use An Ethical Decision Making Process

Similarly, the focus upon current ethical dilemmas does little to encourage use of an ethical decision making process in anticipating future ones.

All Decisions Are Ethical Dilemmas

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Philippine Pinell, as we know, unchained the mentally ill in 1836. When a member of the Revolutionary Convention asked Pinell how he could dare to free "such beasts", Pinell replied, "Citizen, I am convinced that these madmen are intractable only because they have been deprived of air and liberty." (... ces aliénés ne sont ni intractables que parce qu'on leur prive l'air et de liberté.) Pinell, S., 1836, p. 96.

Two centuries later, the advent of phenothiazines and the cost-cutting at- traction of deinstitutionalization has left thousands of mentally ill persons with their air and their liberty, and little else. A striking new documentary by the North West Centre of the National Film Board of Canada. No Place to Go, gives us 30 minutes of snapshots of life on Ca- nadian streets as it is lived by schizo- phrenics, manic depressives, and others unchained but uninvolved.

As the documentary, directed by Wendy Hill-Tout, points out, there are probably more than 100,000 mentally ill Canadians on the streets with only a handful of understaffed agencies trying to cope with the problem.

As a profession we have made the determination that not being aware of current ethical issues as outlined within the CPA Code of Ethics and explicated in the hand- book is in fact a limitation or deficiency for our psycholo- gists. However, we have not made a similar determination regarding psychologists’ lack of awareness of future ethical issues or their lack of use of an optimal ethical decision making process as that adopted by the CPA adapted from my own for those current major ethical decisions, they may not consider its use for future deci- 

Questions and comments may be directed to the author.

Dr. Alexander Tymchuk
University of California, Los Angeles
Department of Psychiatry
School of Medicine
Los Angeles, CA 90024 U.S.A.

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Video Review:
No Place to Go

Patrick O'Neill
Atadena University

No Place to Go, National Film Board of Canada, VHS, 28 mins.

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