

PARTNERS IN THE FIELD: PART ONE

Elliot N. Dorff, Arthur S. Elstein, and Barbara S. Stengel

IN THIS CHAPTER AND THE ONE THAT FOLLOWS, we begin our discussion of *A New Agenda for Higher Education* with short narrative accounts of the teaching of six of our partners in the Life of the Mind for Practice seminar, each of whom is an expert teacher in her or his field. Each narrative focuses on a single course syllabus. Each teacher responds to institutional challenges and professional imperatives in order to provide educational experiences that faithfully anticipate the nature of the students' future lives. Each of these narratives, which are spread across the first two chapters of this book, offers a window into one teacher's reflective engagement with his or her own pedagogical responsibilities. The narratives reveal that the practice of teaching for practical judgment is a rigorous but rewarding calling, both intellectually and ethically.

Although each case is unique, these six exemplars are not disconnected from one another. The purpose of these first two chapters is to begin to discern both the uniqueness of each teacher's pedagogy *and* the substantive analogies and family resemblances that bind them. Though these exemplars come from multiple fields, they share in common purposes and respond to similar institutional predicaments. The commitment of these courses to teaching practical judgment runs against the grain of the dominant institutional values of the contemporary academy.

We hope that you will recognize something of yourself in these narratives. That is, we hope that you will discern analogies of situation and purpose between your own pedagogical challenges and those of the

teachers represented here. The narratives offer exemplars with which you, the reader, also concerned for the fostering of responsible judgment in students' lives, may keep imaginative company in your own pedagogical efforts.

We also hope to provide a language for making sense of these exemplars for your own academic life. Through the exemplars, we hope to discern the beginnings of a shared discourse for envisioning a richer conception of faculty formation. For what and to whom will each teacher's students become responsible? How should each teacher respond pedagogically? To what extent do the institutional constraints of each teacher's department or discipline sustain or limit meaningful engagement with these responsibilities? These broader concerns, which we refine in later chapters, are responsive to the demands of responsible judgment. They also speak to the deepest aspirations of the professions and the liberal arts and sciences alike. The six courses discussed here reveal that, at its best, there is nothing more liberal than a professional education toward service to others, and, indeed, there is nothing more practical than a deep and abiding liberal arts sensibility.¹

Educating Moral Guides and the Consequences of Theory

"Issues in Jewish Ethics"

Elliot N. Dorff, Professor and Rector, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, American Jewish University (formerly the University of Judaism)

Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff is a longstanding advocate for the ethical life of Conservative Judaism and has been engaged continuously in studied reflection on the normative meaning of practices in the world. As he points out, the literal meaning of the word *rabbi* is "teacher" (Dorff, 2003c, p. 5). Rabbis provide considered arguments and models for reflection, through which the Jewish community might enrich its ethical orientation toward action in the world in ways that are both creative and responsive to historical tradition.

This professional role is expressed in multiple ways in Dorff's life. His publications, for instance, include a series of three books on Jewish ethics that attend to medical considerations, the personal ethics of intimate relationships, and social ethics (Dorff, 1998, 2002, 2003b). These books present Jewish analyses of important ethical issues and place these analyses in conversation with other traditions of ethical inquiry, both religious and secular.

Dorff's role as a rabbi also involves participation in public deliberation on matters of great importance for the Jewish community and for state and federal policy, such as the Ethics Committee of the Clinton Health Care Task Force in 1993 and the California Ethics Advisory Commission on Embryonic Stem Cell Research. These aspects of the rabbinical role demand not merely immersion in the practices and knowledge of Dorff's tradition of faith; they also demand substantial practices of dialogue, both spoken and written. This is challenging work. Teaching rabbinical students how to engage in this work is no less of a challenge.



How do future rabbis learn to engage in this interpretive practice, which is at once informed theoretically and oriented practically? Dorff's teaching in his course, "Issues in Jewish Ethics," is oriented toward this matter of professional formation. The course, which takes place within a professional department of rabbinical studies, provides students with a guided introduction to the responsible practice of reasoning on behalf of others as moral guides within the larger Jewish community.

Course Content

Dorff's course takes place relatively late in the rabbinical formation of his students, who are typically in their fourth or fifth year of study. They have devoted much of their previous studies, whether at the American Jewish University or in Israel, to Jewish traditions of textual interpretation and debate. These studies are incredibly demanding. Dorff observes that

because so much time needs to be devoted to acquiring the skills to decipher and interpret classical texts (Hebrew, Aramaic, legal reasoning skills, etc.), the moral dimensions of life are not the controlling theme of the curriculum during the first three years . . . while I would hardly call moral issues the dominant theme of the curriculum, it is a recurring leitmotif. (Dorff, 2003c, p. 6)

"Issues in Jewish Ethics" brings these moral issues into sharp relief within the context of students' future roles as moral guides in the lives of others. Dorff's syllabus derives from the academic part of the rabbinical curriculum. As such, it maintains a strong orientation toward the engagement of theory. But the syllabus also proceeds in full recognition that contemporary moral situations emerge from a complex social world that is populated by actors and rationales that are both religious and secular in nature.

In order to remain responsive to the practical demands of students' future professional obligations, "Issues in Jewish Ethics" must bring theory into a mutually illuminating relation with social life and action.

Dorff sets out four goals at the beginning of the syllabus. His students should

1. Gain some knowledge of Jewish and general ethical theories.
2. Learn about the problems and methods of deriving moral guidance from the Jewish tradition.
3. Analyze some specific moral issues from the standpoint of the Jewish tradition.
4. Develop the skills to carry out a Jewish analysis of a moral issue on [their] own. (Dorff, 2003a, p. 1)

Dorff notes further that "Issues in Jewish Ethics" should contribute to the formation of students' powers to discern the salient moral dimensions of situations. Students should also develop an analytical appreciation of the way in which different religious and secular traditions offer unique perspectives and enable different, reasoned stances toward issues of moral importance, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

In order to achieve these ends, Dorff must place the Jewish moral tradition into dialogue with the diverse perspectives that populate practical settings and dramatize the practice of moral reflection and judgment in his students' lives. The syllabus offers "sample ways in which a Jewish perspective can inform attitudes and behavior in a variety of important social and personal areas of ethics" (Dorff, 2003c, p. 5). In other words, the course assumes that analytical insight is engaged *on behalf of* the rabbi's professional responsibilities to others. Dorff reveals that

rabbis are looked to for, among many other things, moral guidance; they are asked to articulate a thoughtful and wise response to such issues rooted in the Jewish tradition. This course attempts to give them exposure to some of the major issues in today's society in a way that not only teaches them about those issues but, more importantly, teaches them how to deal with any issues in the future from a Jewish perspective. (Dorff, 2003c, pp. 4–5)

Course Methods

How does the syllabus embody these responsibilities in practice? Dorff leads his students through intensive class discussions of assigned readings.

These readings are organized in the syllabus into three broad categories: (1) Matters of Life and Death, (2) Problems of Sex and Family Life, and (3) Issues in Social Ethics. These are the same three frameworks that organize Dorff's trio of publications on Jewish ethical interpretation. These frameworks focus attention on a particular sphere of life, whether at the level of policy or personal engagement, and the practical problems that each sphere poses for moral living. Dorff brings these matters of rabbinical judgment to life by drawing substantially from his own professional work on state, federal, and nongovernmental panels and commissions.

Dorff begins each discussion session by asking a student to state the problem or issue at stake in the day's assigned readings. A different student then summarizes the argument and position of the first reading toward the problem. Other students offer corrections or refinements. The students then inquire into the practical consequences of this position for living by imagining the meaning of the author's argument for concrete cases. These consequences provide a lens through which to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the author's argument, upon which it stands or falls.

Dorff maintains a similar rhythm in the discussion of subsequent assigned readings, but with a twist. As each new reading is introduced, Dorff encourages his students to imagine how the various authors would respond to one another's positions and claims. Each author serves as an insightful foil with respect to the others, through which Dorff's students illuminate the core concerns, strengths, and weaknesses of each position. Dorff also asks his students to categorize these positions analytically:

Is this a consequentialist view? A deontological view? A moral character (virtue ethic) view? How is it like and unlike the view of the people who articulated the view in the first place? (Dorff, private communication, 2006)

What is going on here? Dorff's students are learning to recognize and navigate complex networks of argument that embody multiple traditions, both religious and secular. Each of these traditions offers important perspectives and insights toward moral problems of practical significance in the lives of persons. Because Dorff's students are committed to the growth of the Jewish tradition *in particular*, these discussions also illuminate the distinctiveness of Jewish tradition and help students discern the ways in which the Jewish tradition is called to respond to alternative perspectives. Moral theories and traditions are not bodies of premises from which to deduce certain conclusions. They are frameworks for orienting practical

argument and action as expressions of care and concern, for which one must offer public justifications. Dorff notes:

I deliberately chose a reader that juxtaposes opposing viewpoints on topics we consider so that students see clearly that smart and morally sensitive people often do take different sides on a given issue. This prepares them for the fact that although sometimes the good or right thing to do may be clear and the problem is to gain the motivation to make it happen or abstain from doing something, in many cases the good or right thing to do is open to question, and people voice varying opinions, each with its reasons that need to be considered and weighed against the justifications of the opposing views. (Dorff, 2006, p. 160)

Classroom discussions are intended to offer rehearsals in the practices of professional reflection and argument that ought to distinguish the students' final papers. These papers are modeled on the form of rabbinical rulings. Dorff observes that "students see first-hand first how I state, apply, and evaluate a theory and then how their classmates do the same thing until they themselves try their hand at these tasks" (Dorff, 2006, p. 160). By drafting a rabbinical ruling of their own, Dorff's students adopt and reckon with these models for their own action, in order to articulate a defensible position on some issue of moral concern to the Jewish community.

The final paper requires students to articulate a distinctively Jewish judgment on the nature of a contemporary moral problem. In doing so, Dorff's students must be mindful of the arguments and positions that others have offered historically. Their assignment directs them to

choose any moral issue and provide a Jewish analysis of it. Specifically, explain why it is a problem in the first place; then bring to bear any Jewish (classical, medieval, and modern) and general writings that you think are relevant to understanding or resolving the issue, including at least two who would respond to the issue in different ways; and then describe how you would respond to the issue, together with what you see to be the strengths and weaknesses of your approach. (Dorff, 2003a, p. 1)

In this way, Dorff's students must locate, orient, and justify themselves within an ongoing historical tradition of engaged moral judgment.

Dorff assesses his students' final papers according to the thoroughness with which they consider all relevant aspects of an issue. Dorff also judges the extent to which students recognize the fundamental points on which their arguments turn and consider what would happen to their

positions if these core premises were to crumble in the face of criticism from alternative perspectives. In other words, his students must judge the worth and responsiveness of their own arguments for a pluralistic world. The rhythm of inquiry that Dorff exemplifies through classroom discussion provides his students with a model for inquiry, or a “methodology,” that will help them orient and justify themselves (Dorff, 2006, p. 160). “Issues in Jewish Ethics” positions responsible moral judgment at the intersection between keeping faith with a tradition and responding creatively to the demands of unique cases and situations.



Dorff’s syllabus is motivated by a keen sense of what rabbinical judgment is *for*. Rabbinical practical reasoning is always oriented toward the rabbi’s responsibility to provide guidance in the lives of others. These others will make their own decisions and take their own risks, however. Dorff stresses that the Jewish tradition is committed to lifelong learning for everyone—“men, women, and children,” as Deuteronomy 31:12 specifies. So, although guiding others is part of their role, especially in areas where people are unfamiliar with the terrain, as in life-and-death issues, rabbis’ primary task is to teach the community how to use the Jewish tradition in their own moral reasoning. It is very much a *teaching* practice. Rabbinical reasoning can never be a matter of deduction from authoritative principle. The tradition of Jewish moral thought must become instantiated anew in particular lives. Rabbis enable others to come to terms with *what one ought to care about as a Jewish agent, and how*.

Dorff’s scholarly and pedagogical life is unified through a common expression of professional responsibility, whether directly (through his publications, rabbinical conduct, and service on major public commissions) or pedagogically (through the formation of future rabbis). His goal is to model the practice of engaged judgment on behalf of others. This broad purpose demands that academic knowledge be placed in a mutually illuminating relationship with practices and problems that exist outside the academy’s walls.

Case Teaching and the Engagement of Ethical Dilemmas in Medicine

“Ethics and Law”

Arthur S. Elstein, Professor Emeritus, Medical Education, University of Illinois at Chicago

Course designers: Timothy Murphy, Professor of Philosophy in the Biomedical Sciences, University of Illinois College of Medicine; Michelle Oberman, Professor of Law, Santa Clara University School of Law

“Ethics and Law” was team-taught by approximately fifteen instructors at the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Chicago, including seminar partner Arthur S. Elstein, in the early 1990s.

Course Procedures

In a typical episode from the course, second-year medical students were presented with the following situation:

A university medical center wants to undertake an organ transplant program designed to “harvest” the organs of anencephalic babies so that they can be used as medically appropriate for other children around the country. Death is inevitable in this condition. The protocol entails obtaining parents’ permission to place the newborn on life support for up to seven days to maintain the other organs while an appropriate recipient is located. The baby will be checked for brain function every 12 hours, and if none is present, would be declared brain dead and the organs could be donated. To preclude conflicts of interest, the physicians making the final diagnosis of death were unaffiliated with the transplant team. (Murphy and Oberman, 1993)

Should this practice proceed? Students must consider further the following:

Parents of these children frequently request organ donation so that “some good may come of this tragedy.” Yet this program generated considerable conflict in the medical community. It is difficult to diagnose brain death in infants, and traditional criteria of brain death are not readily applicable to anencephalic newborns because they lack higher brain functions. Some opponents fear that human life is cheapened by treating these newborns as “organ containers.” Others fear that the policy risks exacerbating public fears about being declared dead “prematurely” and will inhibit willingness to donate organs. Still others see these newborns as severely disabled, not brain dead, and object to using a vulnerable class of persons in this way.

Is the harvesting of organs of anencephalic newborns morally justifiable, if the parents consent? Why or why not? Is widespread social concern about this policy a sufficient reason to suspend the practice? Is this practice ethically problematic in any other way that should control whether or not it is implemented? (Murphy and Oberman, 1993)

These are difficult questions that promise no single answer. No amount of technical knowledge or diagnostic know-how can determine right conduct in this case. “Ethics and Law” was intended to cultivate medical students’ nascent powers of professional reasoning in a way that was responsive to the *normative* dimensions of professional conduct. Toward this end, students engaged ethical dilemmas drawn from actual medical practice. The course, which was designed by two of Arthur Elstein’s then-colleagues in the Department of Medical Education—Timothy Murphy (a philosopher) and Michelle Oberman (a lawyer)—aspired to form students’ practices of ethical deliberation and justification.

As we saw in Elliot Dorff’s course, “Issues in Jewish Ethics,” normative argumentation occupies a central place in rabbinical practice and education. Dorff’s course revealed a model of rabbinical reasoning that is responsive to the demands of the particular case while committed to the growth of a particular normative tradition. By contrast, the field of medical education struggles often to articulate a discourse and set of practices through which future doctors might learn to stake normative claims and justify their professional actions in response to particular situations. The story of “Ethics and Law” is as much a story about the medical profession’s continuing struggle with the limitations of its own institutions and discourses as it is a story about the power of case teaching.

The second-year medical students in “Ethics and Law” were just beginning to be introduced to clinical practice, through both case-based seminars and supervised participation, after a year of analytical lecture in the biological sciences. They had not yet taken on the responsibilities or specialization of clerkships or residencies. Elstein notes that these students’ professional formation over the next several years would be

strongly practical, although it has substantial didactic components. Training is rooted in the problems of real patients, especially in the clinical clerkships and afterwards. Practical experience and clinical know-how are valued as much or more than “book knowledge.” Yet there is a strong emphasis on the scientific basis of clinical practice which both supports and is sustained by an extensive biomedical research establishment and the intellectual interests of the faculty. (Elstein, 2003, p. 2)

Medical students are often seduced into thinking that ethical issues are only matters of private opinion, particularly as they pass through their first year of heavily scientific instruction.

Making Reasoned Judgments

In recent years, medical educators have realized that medical education must become broader in scope. It is not enough to diagnose and understand the causes of disease. Responsible practice also demands that professionals make reasoned ethical judgments. Like Hessel Bouma, Elstein notes that new medical technologies pose new ethical problems for physicians. “These new capabilities have created choices—and therefore dilemmas—especially at the beginning and end of life” (Elstein, 2003, p. 3). So too must doctors contend with the increasing economic rationalization of their practice. These problems exceed the physiological alone. Physicians must have access to a shared language and standards for forming and communicating difficult medical judgments.

Murphy and Oberman’s “Ethics and Law” was one response to this educational problem. The course’s team of instructors represented a wide array of medical, social-scientific, and humanistic perspectives. Through this enriched network of perspectives, the course focused on

conflicts between parties in the medical narrative (between family and physicians, between one physician and another) or between two worthy moral principles (respect for persons and benefiting others). Although many medical and surgical treatments involve tradeoffs of some kind, the conflicts between competing goals or goods are rarely so explicit. The course exhibits both conflict between parties in a case and between principles, within a single actor. It thus aims to broaden the conception of what the practice of medicine is about by engaging students in cases where clinical practice entails much more than [that which] is the subject matter of the other parts of the curriculum. (Elstein, 2003, p. 5)

In order to illuminate the stakes of such conflicts, the course had to provide students with an understanding of the normative structure, or the core commitments, of responsible medical practice. Elstein describes four widely recognized ethical principles that most courses in medical ethics attempt to instill and bring to life and to which “Ethics and Law” subscribed:

1. [R]espect *for autonomy*, including “the right of a patient to decide upon a treatment, to assent to a treatment plan, or even refuse treatment”
2. [B]eneficence, or “the obligation of a physician to do good”
3. [N]on-*maleficence*, or “the principle that a physician, at a minimum, should ‘do no harm’”
4. [F]airness *and equity*, or “the role of justice and equity in the distribution of medical resources” (Elstein, 2003, p. 3)

The drama of ethical medical practice is most heightened when these commitments conflict in practice, as in the case of infant organ transplantation described earlier. No deduction from these four ethical principles can guide right action with certainty in any particular case. The proper meaning of these core principles for medical conduct in unique situations is *precisely what is at issue*. Students must develop practices for discerning what is at stake in such situations and learn to appreciate a multiplicity of defensible ethical perspectives toward the same problem. By attending to dilemmas of practice and conflicts within the medical narrative, “Ethics and Law” short-circuited students’ drive toward deductive reasoning. It attempted instead to convince students that practical judgment is central to responsible medical practice, not extraneous to it. There are better and worse ethical justifications for medical action. Ethical reasoning is not merely a matter of opinion.

Teaching Ethics Through Writing

Students in “Ethics and Law” came face-to-face with ethical dilemmas through engagement with cases. The students and instructors alike were already familiar with case pedagogy, as case teaching is well established within medical schools. “Ethics and Law” built on this tradition by broadening the scope of student engagement with cases. This expanded case pedagogy highlighted the physician’s ethical responsibility for her conduct and revealed the intellectually demanding nature of ethical deliberation, particularly in cases where any course of action involves a substantive ethical trade-off. If a patient refuses treatment, for example, physicians must chart a course of action that is torn between their obligation to respect patient autonomy and their own obligation to “do good.” Students were challenged to expand their conception of what is *salient* about their action. As Elstein observes, it was “the selection of cases that makes it a course in ‘Ethics and Law’” (Elstein, 2003, p. 6).

What did this look like in practice? Like Elliot Dorff’s “Issues in Jewish Ethics,” “Ethics and Law” shifted student attention back and forth between the demands of particular situations and consideration of broader bioethical discourse and between small discussion groups and large lectures. The instructors hoped that this rhythm would prove “instructive and transformative” in the lives of students (Elstein, 2003, p. 4). Elstein recalls:

The materials for each [ethical] topic consist of a weekly lecture to introduce the topic, readings, a case for discussion, the discussion section itself, and a writing assignment. The writing assignments present another case involving the same conflict or principle or dilemma. Each

assignment poses 2–4 specific questions that the student should tackle in a short paper of no more than 3 double-spaced pages. (Elstein, 2003, p. 4)

One representative case from the syllabus presented students with a situation in which the family of an elderly, incapacitated, and terminally ill woman insists on futile treatment. The woman's doctors "advise limiting any further life-sustaining treatment. Her family insists that all forms of treatment be continued" (Elstein, 2003, p. 7). How should students proceed in this situation, and on what terms can their actions be justified? Should they respect the family's wishes? Or should they, as the doctors in the case do, advocate for a court order in their favor? This case operates at several levels of ethical concern simultaneously:

[A]t one level, the case is about a conflict between the health professionals and the family about continuing or discontinuing treatment near the end of life. At another level, it is about the judgments involved in determining whether the patient's condition is indeed irreversible, but the medical students are not expected to be able to make their own judgments about this. At still a third level, the case is about the allocation of scarce medical resources, since the money spent by the public (hospital, government) treating this patient is not available for other patients. (Murphy and Oberman, 1993)

This case embodies two difficult conflicts between core ethical principles, neither of which is resolved by the diagnostic judgment that the patient's condition is, indeed, irreversible. The students' ethical obligation to "do no harm" conflicts with the equally important obligation to respect the autonomy of the patient or, in this case, the patient's legal surrogates. Students were also faced with a problem of distributive justice regarding fairness in the distribution of medical resources. Should these resources be devoted to the sustenance of the terminally ill patient, or should they be put to more consequential use elsewhere?

Classroom lecture and assigned readings on the topic of refusal of treatment were followed by smaller discussion sections that engaged a case like the one described here in detail. The instructor's pedagogical attention in these discussion sections was oriented toward illuminating the multiple, reasoned ethical positions that might be taken toward such dilemmas. Student judgments were not based on private opinion. Students learned to articulate their ethical judgments through a bioethical discourse that was authorized by the broader medical community. The instructors facilitated the students' growing participation in this practice.

The written exercise that followed presented students with a different case involving an analogous conflict. Through engagement with this new set of particulars, students conceivably found themselves making ethical judgments that were *different* from those they had made in the previous case. The written exercises and small group discussions also constituted a rare moment in the medical curriculum when students came to recognize that they might disagree substantively with their peers about an appropriate course of medical action. Multiple judgments can be recognized publicly as rational and defensible responses to unique situations, provided that they are grounded properly in a full bioethical accounting of a student's reasons for action. This was the point: ethical medical action must engage publicly authorized principles, but these ethical principles are only meaningful insofar as they come alive and are understood through the particular.

Challenging Assumptions

"Ethics and Law" cut against the grain of the dominant medical curriculum in several ways on its introduction, and it challenged incoming students' assumptions about what constitutes "real" medical education.² The course presented ethical reasoning as an intellectually demanding aspect of professional medical practice, contrary to students' frequent assumption that ethical deliberation is a matter of private opinion. The course enabled medical students to disagree substantively yet reasonably with the judgments of their peers. The syllabus also stood out because of its writing requirement. Writing is rarely required within medical courses, much less as a central medium for formative assessment and discovery.

Given that the professional culture of medicine places a high premium on expert specialization, the instructors of the course also had to combat the effects of their own particular forms of medical expertise. The goals of the course could not be realized if any instructor acquired inappropriate and counterproductive *ethical* authority in the discussion of an ethical dilemma that happened to involve pathologies or treatments about which that instructor was considered an authority in the world of scientific research. The instructors took care not to allow the richness of particular cases to be subsumed by any instructor's particular perspective, as if that instructor offered a privileged "recipe" for ethical action. Put another way, the teachers were at pains to ensure that the academic vocation of medical research, which fits so well with Max Weber's famous articulation of "value-free" science as the fundamental concern of the academic practitioner (Weber, 1977), did not trump the course's wider normative orientation toward reasoned professional action.

For this reason, the instructors always taught *outside* their own areas of specialization during the smaller discussion sections. Indeed, one virtue of the cases that populate “Ethics and Law” was that novice medical students could enter imaginatively into the human drama of professional practice *without* prior formation of the technical expertise that would be required for actual medical action. In Elstein’s words: [T]he students are not expected to be technically competent in the problems examined in the cases; that is, they are not expected to be able to perform life-sustaining treatment or an organ transplant” (Elstein, 2003, p. 5).

The instructors of “Ethics and Law” were called to respond to the scientific orientation of medical research and institutional life in yet another way. Like all medical courses, Elstein recalls, “Ethics and Law” was expected to provide students with concrete and testable content knowledge. “Ethics and Law” responded to this imperative by relating widely accepted ethical principles of medical practice to the lived situations through which these principles might be instantiated anew. The course led students through a sustained inquiry into the intimate relation between learning what one ought to care about and participating in an ethical discourse through which one can deliberate publicly with others. As such, the course was an introduction to the demands and art of practical reasoning in action.

Standard bioethical discourse is often ill-equipped to face up to certain institutional and macro-ethical pathologies of the medical industry as a whole, however. Reflecting on the syllabus ten years later, Elstein notes that “Ethics and Law” reveals contemporary medical education’s continuing difficulty in coming to grips with the changing social, economic, and political contexts of medical practice. He writes:

Looking back on the course, I am struck by [the course’s] focus on individual physician-family-patient encounters and its relative neglect of the social context of medical care, problems of access to care, ethical dilemmas in caring for the poor and medically uninsured, etc. For many physicians whom I know personally, the ethical problems of the health care system are better exemplified by cases of unequal access, cases that link socio-economic status to health care. (Elstein, 2003, p. 7)

In retrospect, “Ethics and Law” illuminates the need for medical educators to broaden their conception of how practical judgments are *positioned* within a wider array of constraining, macro-ethical relationships. As such, the course points toward a broader conception of faculty formation and responsibility than is the norm in medical education.

Discernment, Responsiveness, and Pedagogical Responsibility

“Foundations of Modern Education”

Barbara S. Stengel, Professor, Educational Foundations, Millersville University

Like medical education, the domain of professional teacher education is challenged to form students' practices for the critical interpretation of the contexts and institutions of their future action. Barbara Stengel's syllabus for the course, "Modern Educational Foundations," attempts to awaken institutional consciousness in the practical reasoning of future teachers. She encourages her students to reckon with how their future professional role is constrained by others and what possibilities might exist for meaningful action.

Stengel encourages us to imagine the predicament of "an eleventh grade English teacher in an under-funded urban school who must prepare her students for state reading and writing assessment tests set for the spring of the year."

The curriculum says, "American Literature;" the principal says, "Improve test scores." She is unsettled. She feels as though she can't do both. What should she do? She could set aside one day a week for "test prep" and follow her regular curriculum the rest of the time. She could have students read one piece of American literature each week and develop from that a series of reading checks and writing prompts that will develop the skills the testing demands. She could tell the principal that she is working on skills and teach literature as usual. She could reconstruct her curriculum so that it integrates test skills with the regular American literature content. She could teach the first semester as she has in the past and start a full-time test prep program in January. She could collaborate with other English teachers to determine a common plan. She could ask the principal to provide coaching to improve her ability to work with her students on test skills. (Stengel, 2003b, p. 6)

This teacher is in a difficult position. The appropriate course of action is far from clear. There are no ready-made responses to her situation. Much depends on what the teacher values about teaching English and what activities she believes will serve the best interests of her students. She must also consider the institutional demands of her role as an employee of the school, as well as the government mandates that her school must observe politically. How should she manage these conflicting demands?

Stengel goes on:

This array of actions, singly or in some combination, is open to her. There are certainly other possibilities as well. But it is important that she do *nothing*, that she make no response, until she has first asked herself what is going on here? This is the interpretive question. It is a question that expert teachers often ask and answer invisibly, leaving outsiders and novices with the mistaken impression that the question of what to do is the only critical one. (Stengel, 2003b, pp. 6–7)

The teacher must consider the ends that any particular course of action will serve—many of which are not of her own making, much less a fair expression of her own values. She must interpret her position within a complex set of relationships and, through these constraints, determine a course of action that expresses her own values as a teacher.

This is demanding work. Yet, as Stengel insists, this complicated practical reasoning, which expert teachers engage in constantly, is often obscured from public view. It goes unrecognized and unappreciated. Stengel’s students in “Foundations of Modern Education” are unaware of the full intellectual and moral demands of teaching when they enter her course. She is challenged to make these aspects of how expert teachers interpret practical situations explicit.

Teaching Through Practical Experience

“Foundations of Modern Education” is a sophomore-level course for aspiring teachers. It is the only course discussed in this chapter that is part of a larger unit of educational experiences that connects practice, theory, and reflection explicitly. The course is one of three educational experiences in the School of Education at Millersville University. Stengel’s students also take a course titled “Psychological Foundations of Teaching” and participate in an “urban field experience,” or introductory teaching practicum in an actual practice setting. Together, this set of courses provides aspiring teachers with an opportunity to participate in the life of the profession as novice practitioners and to reflect on the salience of their experiences critically and deeply. Stengel notes that these educational experiences are foundational because they teach students how to *interpret* professional situations and form responses that are mindful of the psychological, sociocultural, economic, and political contexts of action. Stengel writes:

These courses make use of theory, research, and contemporary reporting to enable students to “see” more clearly and completely the macroscopic (social foundations) and microscopic (psychological foundations) dimensions of teaching and learning in the schools in which they do their practica. (Stengel, 2003b, p. 10)

Stengel’s students enter her course with a wide array of culturally ingrained, unexamined, and erroneous assumptions about the nature of good teaching. Indeed, her students frequently have a problem “seeing” past themselves. They have been in school for most of their lives and believe they know what teaching is all about. For them, teaching is “a matter of personality” (Stengel, 2003b, p. 1), not a career of practical judgment in response to multiple layers of institutions, competing interests, and diverse stakeholders. The complicated moral and intellectual work of teaching remains opaque to these would-be professionals. They do not understand the real demands of the “educational system whose rules and mores they have mastered” (Stengel, 2003b, p. 3).

The romantic convictions of Stengel’s students are wildly at odds with the example of the high school American Literature teacher detailed earlier, who must navigate a web of competing interests. In order to respond to her situation fully, our hypothetical teacher must form judgments that are mindful of such matters as the history of the school in which she works and the needs of the diverse persons who act within it. She must consider the politics and economics of the school, as well as the educational system of which it is a part. She must decide what counts from a theoretical perspective as meaningful and just learning in her classroom and within a democratic culture. The teacher’s enthusiasm and care—her personality—make a difference only insofar as they are engaged through the multiple layers of concern that constitute her situation.

Stengel must unsettle her students’ unexamined convictions about the nature of teaching. She hopes to awaken them to an alternative vision of responsible teaching that extends beyond the self. This vision values judgment in response to complex situations over the virtue of one’s own intentions. It views responsibility

in terms of the ability to respond to such complex contexts in fitting ways. On this view, responsibility is not about obedience to rules, nor about blaming those who do not perform. Responsibility becomes a form of inquiry, an effort to determine the right response in *this* pedagogical relation and situation. (Stengel, 2003b, pp. 4–5)

Stengel calls this “pedagogical responsibility” (see Stengel, 1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2003a).

Structuring Students' Thinking

Elliot Dorff's "Issues in Jewish Ethics" and Timothy Murphy and Michelle Oberman's "Ethics and Law" featured recurring rhythms of student activity that balanced academic knowledge with opportunities for forming judgments through dialogue with others. This rhythm was practiced over time, in response to multiple areas of professional concern. Stengel proceeds in similar fashion. Her syllabus is organized around a sequence of six themes that gradually enlarge her students' understanding of what is salient for professional action as teachers:

1. Perspective, power and responsibility in teaching and learning, education and schooling
2. Where did our schools come from? Historical perspectives on schooling
3. Equity and diversity: Socio-cultural and socio-economic perspectives on schooling
4. Power and education: Political perspectives on schooling
5. Is this how it ought to be? Philosophical perspectives on schooling
6. Perspectives, power and response-ability revisited (Stengel, 2005, p. 3)

The work associated with each theme is diverse. It includes classroom assignments, readings, discussion, and clinical experiences. These activities, in conjunction with students' teaching practica, *model* the layers and tensions of the teaching situations to which they will be expected to respond as professional teachers. These activities distance Stengel's students from their incoming assumptions about teaching as they begin to appreciate the complexity of their chosen profession. Her students are ushered toward a broader vision of professional responsibility as practical judgment and the expression of one's own pedagogical values through action in response to difficult situations.

How does this work in practice? The fifth theme of the course, which considers the politics of schooling, provides an example of the layered organization of student work. This portion of the syllabus is intended to enable students "to recognize political disputes, institutional structures, and power relations and to locate themselves in that landscape" (Stengel, 2003b, p. 16). Stengel's students explore political theories of power and education, as well as educational policy, legislation, and judicial decisions. They read political histories of the American educational system and inquire into how local school districts have responded to state and federal educational policy. Through an online forum, they reflect together

on their practicum experiences, particularly their struggles to remain responsive to the needs of students while also managing the demands of school bureaucracy. They do all this and more.

These diverse educational experiences model the *layeredness*—institutional, political, historical, economic, sociocultural, and philosophical—of the actual teaching practices to which Stengel’s students aspire. They exemplify the uncertainty and complexity of teaching situations and bring Stengel’s classroom into an illuminating relationship with the ongoing clinical experiences of her students. Her students are challenged to understand that the work of teaching lies in interpreting and responding to the tensions of particular situations in a way that sustains one’s own professional values—in other words, pedagogical responsibility. Stengel’s goal is to “*structure* students’ thinking without *determining* it” (Stengel, 2003b, p. 8)—that is, to reorient her students’ conduct in a more responsible direction. Stengel writes:

[T]he structure of the course *is* the lesson, the point of the journey . . . they *experience* the layeredness, the choice without control, the value conflicts, and the search for evidence. They are invited to pay attention and to name these experiences, thus making professional and personal sense of them. (Stengel, 2003b, p. 20)

The role of philosophical reflection in “Foundations of Modern Education” deserves special consideration. Although Stengel’s students worry continuously about the values expressed through their action, explicit attention to the *philosophical* grounds of their work does not take place until the *end* of the course. Stengel and her students “don’t usually turn in earnest to philosophical matters until the end of the semester when field experience is completed. My own sense is that the philosophical question requires more rather than less grounding in practice and more time to incubate than any of the others” (Stengel, 2003b, p. 17).

This is an important insight. Stengel’s students form meaningful judgments about the normative significance of teaching only through growing participation in the unfolding drama of practice over time. They cannot be predetermined or derived deductively through theoretical reasoning alone.

Using Self-Assessments

Stengel’s students explore the quality of their growth over time through two forms of guided self-assessment. First, they are required to write an essay that reflects critically on their own growth as prospective teachers.

This essay contributes only toward students' final grade in "Foundations of Modern Education." Second, the students compile a comprehensive student portfolio that documents their growth throughout the entire Foundations bloc of educational experiences. These portfolios gather and organize their course work and field work as a whole.

Taken together, these self-assessments provide Stengel's students with structured opportunities to learn how to tell a new story about their professional calling. The goal is for her students to tell a broader narrative of self that aspires to pedagogical responsibility rather than merely personality. In order to understand themselves as professionals, Stengel's students must understand their often conflicting roles as teachers, employees, and agents of state policy.

Stengel's teaching, like that of Dorff and Elstein, is closely related to the ideals that have traditionally motivated liberal arts education. Stengel's vision of the responsible teacher can also be understood as a vision of the liberally educated person, situated anew through particular professional commitments. Stengel writes:

[A] teacher's ability to make sense of recognition, time, evidence, relation, habit, power, perspective, courage and context will determine the power of action in response. The liberal arts educate this as assuredly as my professional course does. (Stengel, 2003b, p. 22)

For Stengel, professional judgment is not only enriched by the perspectives of the liberal arts and sciences. It depends upon it.



In this chapter, we explored the teaching of three of our seminar partners. Across multiple fields, these teachers work to foster and guide their students' developing powers of practical reason and responsible judgment. As we have seen, their efforts share much in common.

Chapter Two presents the teaching of three more of our seminar partners. Their cases continue to uncover common ground and illuminate the analogous barriers that our partners face in their efforts. They also suggest further relationships between the pedagogies of the professions and those of the liberal arts and sciences.

ENDNOTES

1. This sentiment is derived from a set of four "dogmatic assertions" Lee S. Shulman posed during Session Three of the seminar, in December 2003. These assertions included: there is nothing more professional than

liberal education, properly construed; there is nothing more liberal than professional education, properly construed; there is only limited potential for practical learning without engagement in liberal learning; and there is only limited potential for liberal learning without engagement in practical learning.

2. “Ethics and Law” is no longer offered at University of Illinois at Chicago as a single course in the form described here. The ethical and legal concerns that motivated the course are now integrated into a longer sequence of case-based educational experiences. Thus one might argue that education in practices of ethical deliberation no longer runs as strongly against the grain of the university’s dominant medical curriculum as it did previously.