Imagining Relationally: A Critical Bridge Between Theory and Practice

Yousef Jalali
PhD Student, Department of Engineering Education, Virginia Tech

Dr. Christian Matheis
Visiting Assistant Professor of Justice and Policy Studies, Guilford College

Facilitated Discussion Session
Type I: Individual Classroom/Project-Level Interventions
Saturday, November 9, 2019
Overview

• Goals and Objectives
• Ethics Instruction: Trends and Approaches
• Application → Ethics Modules
• Quality of Moral Imagination
• Shifting Context → Liberatory Modes
• Group Activity and Reflection
Goals and Objectives

• To foster a conversation about integrating imagination into STEM instruction.
• To discuss the role of liberatory praxis and theory.
• To gather reactions and suggestions for classroom praxis.
Think-Pair-Share

What are your motivations and intentions in teaching ethics?
What are we looking for?

- Meeting the demands of accreditation agencies
- Equipping graduates with some tools to function in different roles as professional careers
- Preparing graduates as members of society---civic purpose of higher education
- … ?
Common Goals and Approaches

Major goals in ethics instruction are often defined in connection with:

- Ethical judgment
- Knowledge about relevant concepts, principles, and standards
- Ethical sensitivity
- Ambiguity and disagreement
- Moral imagination

Common strategies and approaches

- Case studies/case-based discussion
- Moral theory
- Professional code of ethics
- Service learning

Some major development

- Engineering practice--- context and culture
- Macroethics
- Social justice
In your team...

• To what does moral imagination refer?
Transformation Efforts- Learning Modules Centered on Moral Imagination

- National Science Foundation’s Research Experiences for Undergraduates (NSF-REU) program, Summer 2018 and 2019
- Graduate Level Course, Engineering Ethics and the Public

Sample comments:

“...As individuals we cannot turn away to wrong doings even if our society leads us to do so. Also in the scientific community, our research should not negatively impact others, and use engineering as a way to help the public and not hurt it.”

“Good intentions, mindfulness, and being socially aware are extremely important within professional settings. Respect for others and having human decency is extremely important for successful matriculation through personal and professional settings in life.”
In Seeking of Language/Rhetoric…

- What must scientists/engineers consider when trying to make ethical judgments?
- What role does your discipline currently play in diminishing systematic human suffering?
- What role should your discipline play in diminishing and/or preventing systematic human suffering?

This course covers various perspectives in modern and contemporary political theory, and in spring 2016 will focus on the theories of liberation and emancipatory social movements.

Some of the guiding questions in this course:
- How do different theorists implicitly and explicitly refer to liberation?
- How does liberatory theory inform dominant scholarly discourses, if at all?
- What obscures and/or enhances the study of emancipatory thought?
- How does the study of pain, suffering, and indignity in liberatory thought both complement and differ from the study of violence, hegemony, and oppression in political and moral theory?
- How do theories of politics, ethics, culture, society, etc. differ when put more directly into conversation with theories of liberation and emancipation?
Liberatory Struggle Foundations

• Major constituents
  • Relationships
  • Understanding
  • Transformation
  • Solidarity

• Priority
  • Interplay between alterity and commonality

• Objective
  • Diminishing human suffering

“Those who pursue the impulse of alterity or love of the new order in which the poor and oppressed can dwell in justice are transformed, even against their will, into an active principle of destruction of the old order.” (Dussel, 1985, p.61).

“… spiritual activism begins with the personal yet moves outward, acknowledging our radical interconnectedness. This is spirituality for social change, spatiality that recognizes the many differences among us yet insists on our commonalities and uses these commonalities as catalysts for transformation. What a contrast: while identity politics requires holding onto specific categories of identity, spiritual activism demand that we left them go.” (Keating, 2002, p. 18)
Conceptual Foundations

- Imagination as a bridge between theory and practice
- Liberatory purpose---in service of others
- Prioritize alertive modes

Imagination Bridges
Theory and Praxis for Liberation

Alerts to the need for careful moral reasoning
Liberatory Struggle and Interaction of Critical Thinking and Imagination

La mestiza constantly has to shift out of habitual formulations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (Anzaldúa, 1987)

...thus it becomes necessary, not precisely to deny the fact, but to see it differently. This rationalization as a defense mechanism coincides in the end with subjectivism. A fact which is not denied but whose truths are rationalized loses its objective base. It ceases to be concrete and becomes a myth created in defense of the class of the perceiver. (Freire, 2005)

...the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. It is an instant sensing, a quick perception arrived at without conscious reasoning. It is an acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feeling, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide. The one possessing this sensitivity is excruciatingly alive to the world. (Anzaldúa, 1987)

For positive social change to occur we must imagine a reality that differs from what already exists. The wish to repair, to heal our wounds—what I call the Coyolxauhqui imperative—animates the creation of this book, our teaching, and activism,...” (Anzaldúa, 2012)
Reflection- Operationalizing Imaging Relationally

• Addressing power differential
• Seeing and imagining one another
• Taking another perspective
• Considering positive ethics in addition to negative ethics
We have needed to dwell on our ethical skeptics, to experience the real strength of its doubts, in order that we should be able to get new and better methods of construction for our own doctrine. Deep as is the truth that lies at the basis of many ethical doctrines now either doubted or abandoned, one thing always seems definite about their fashion of building. This one defect has made us question their worth as theories. And our theoretical doubts, as we dwell upon it, has become practical. We have seen how that ethical skepticism leads to the gloomiest pessimism. Both the skepticism and the pessimism we must meet fairly and fearlessly. And we must ask them how even they themselves are possible.

1.

Our skeptical criticism of ethical theories has been so far either internal or external. We have criticized each doctrine in itself, questioning either its consistency or its inner completeness; or else we

The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas

From Cruelty to Goodness
In your team ...

Design a class/learning session centered on moral imagination.

- Objectives?
- Resources?
- Pedagogies?
- Assessment?
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Yousef Jalali, youef@vt.edu
PhD Student, Department of Engineering Education, Virginia Tech

Dr. Christian Matheis, matheiscg@guilford.edu
Visiting Assistant Professor of Justice and Policy Studies, Guilford College

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