

A Deontological Analysis of Peer Relations in Organizations¹

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ABSTRACT. Using practical formalism a deontological ethical analysis of peer relations in organizations is developed. This analysis is composed of two types of duties derived from Kant's Categorical Imperative: negative duties to refrain from the use of peers and positive duties to provide help and assistance. The conditions under which these duties pertain are specified through the development of examples and conceptual distinctions. A number of implications are then discussed.

Introduction

Every day literally millions of peers interact in work organizations throughout the world. When this phenomenon has been studied, the typical concern is with the *quality* of these interactions. Organization theorists study the relationship between peer interactions and measures of organizational effectiveness (e.g., Goodman et al., 1987). Other social scientists are concerned about the effect of quality peer exchanges on human physical and social well-being (e.g., Litwak and Messeri, 1989). However, there has been little attention paid to the *moral* quality of peer relationships.

Of the three broad categories of relationships that have been the focus of business ethics: organization-external claimant relations, organization-employee relations, and employee-employee relations, the latter has received the least development. This is problematic in two respects. First, employee-employee relations, or more particularly peer relations, consti-

tute a molecular unit of interaction within and across organizations. As such, they are the logical starting point for analysis rather than simply a special case. While organization-claimant relations are frequently analyzed as a market mechanism and organization-employee relations a hierarchy mechanism (Williamson, 1975), peer relations necessarily follow neither. Rather, the nature of peer relations is based on the equality of the partners. In a profound sense, though, all parties to any intra- or inter-organizational transaction are between equivalent persons (corporate and otherwise), and any revisions in the acceptable treatment of one's counterpart owing to the inequalities between parties (e.g., between managers and subordinates) requires justification. Accordingly, the limited treatment accorded to peer relations in business ethics limits theory development at these more macro levels of analysis.

A second problem with the limited treatment of the ethics of peer relations is that there is little consensus about how one ought to deal with one's peers in organizations. True, there seems a general disapproval for such practices as inappropriate blame-shifting or credit-taking, unhealthy competing over turf rather than positive team playing, withholding, concealing, or distorting information for improper purposes (Josephson, 1989), and intentional lying and deceit (Bok, 1978). As compelling as these intuitions may be, they often lack adequate conceptual foundation. For people facing actual moral problems on a daily basis one of the most influential tasks of any ethical analysis is to clarify, and draw forth the implications from, our basic intuitions about what constitutes proper conduct. The many and complex issues involved become more tractable if they are subjected to careful conceptual development. This enables important dis-

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inctions to be drawn and cases to be explored that demonstrate how ethical principles relate to practical circumstances (Brady, 1988). The lack of such a foundation inhibits the examination of the full range of moral issues involved and leads to uncompromising, commandment-like solutions insensitive to the specific circumstances. Ultimately, this thwarts the development of crystallized norms governing peer relations in actual organizations (Jackson, 1966) and leads to moral bewilderment when individuals face situations not addressed by these “commandments” (e.g., Bellah et al., 1985; McCoy, 1983; Waters, et al., 1986).

This paper takes a deontological perspective. Accordingly, it is an attempt to clarify the moral *duties* that employees owe their peers. We employ *practical formalism*, a methodological approach proposed by F. Neil Brady (1988) based on Kantian ethical theory (Kant, 1788). This method constitutes attempts to develop moral laws based on foundational values

... through a cyclical process of (1) articulating principles which are intuited in (2) actual or conceived cases in order to give application to a constitution-like set of core values or ideals (Brady, 1988, p. 164).

We chose this perspective because we are persuaded by those who argue that a most common method used in business ethics to analyze issues in organization-external claimant relations — utilitarianism — cannot properly accommodate our intuitions about the duties one has to one’s organizational counterparts (e.g., Davis, 1984; Williams, 1973). The paper begins with a series of assumptions about the nature and domain of peer relations. This is followed by a discussion dealing with the moral restraints on employees when they find themselves in conflict with their peers. This leads to a section covering one’s moral duties when one cooperates with peers. Finally, the implications of this analysis are outlined.

Assumptions about peer relations

The conceptual and etymological root of the word *peer* is the idea of equality (*Oxford English Dictionary*). One owes certain moral duties to a peer as a fellow human being. There is a rich tradition in the field of social ethics that guides such transactions, but how this applies to work organizations is not entirely

clear. There the meaning of the term *peer* is more restricted because of the practice of work specialization. Here we generally refer to peers as those who have no authority over one another and who are located at equivalent levels in the chain of command. As such, peer relations are synonymous with lateral relations, and there is no requirement that peers report to a common supervisor.

There are two critical features of peer relations in organizations. First, each peer member has some duties to the organization determined by the employment contract. And second, peers are inexorably interdependent.

Moral duties arising from the employment contract

The contract between the employee and the organization binds the employee to carry out certain tasks in return for certain rewards from the organization.² Although in ethics these moral duties are often termed “special duties,” to indicate they are restricted by the terms of the contract, they remain bound by important Kantian moral principles. To qualify as moral, any contract must have the following attributes:

1. both of the parties to a contract must have full knowledge of the nature of the agreement they are entering;
2. neither party to a contract must intentionally misrepresent the facts of the contractual situation to the other party;
3. neither party to the contract must be forced to enter the contract under duress or coercion;
4. the contract must not bind the parties to an immoral act (Garrett, 1966).

While employment contracts are between the organization and the employee, they influence the moral features of peer relations in one important respect. Although peers, as we have defined them, cannot have duties to exert authority over their peers, their contractual duties may influence the nature of peer relations either by putting peers in conflict or by requiring that they help or assist one another. In certain instances these contractual duties might be different from the moral duties otherwise owed to peers. For example, if the terms of the employment contract require two employees to

perform in a competitive tournament to determine which one is more suitable for another position (e.g., assessment centers, tryouts in professional sports), then this helps delimit the moral duties these peers owe one another. For example, under other circumstances such peers may have a moral duty to help and assist one another, but these structural conditions (if indeed based on a morally acceptable employment contract) absolve each peer from any duty to avoid competition. Similarly, an employment contract that requires that a peer cooperate with another in some specific way extends the duties that peer has beyond that which another peer may be otherwise entitled. For example, if an electrician agrees to train her peers as part of her job responsibilities, then she owes it to her employer to carry out those duties even though her peers may not otherwise be entitled to such help. In general, then, the terms of the employment contract may influence the moral duties peers owe one another in certain profound ways. We will return to the issue of the *morality* of such contractual duties that influence peer relations later in this paper.

The inescapable interdependence of peer relations

The constellation of individual employer–employee contracts defined many different types of formal peer relationships. The most common way to characterize these relationships in organization theory is along a scale of interdependence (Kelley and Thibaut, 1978; Victor and Blackburn, 1987). At the low end of this scale, peers are not required to work together on common tasks nor is the work of any employee contingent on the work of any peer. Yet, as Thompson (1967) points out, there is always some interdependence among peers because they share scarce resources. This includes work space, tools and equipment, rewards, supervisors, and ultimately a macro-budget. Thus, peers in organizations are always interdependent in some sense no matter how the nature of workflow is defined by all the employee contracts with the organization.

The inescapable interdependency of peers is essential to the development of an ethical analysis of peer relations for two reasons. First, the structural context of peer relations may affect the degree of moral responsibility peers owe one another. Inter-

dependence creates a coordination problem in which each party to a peer relationship may be motivated to cooperate, compete, or both (Raven and Rubin, 1985). The organization's formal structure and system of governance may assist (or confound) the efforts of peers to solve this coordination problem. Formal systems like hierarchic referral or rules and procedures may minimize communication and contact between peers. Formal horizontal communication systems may also help or hamper such contact. Where communication is so constrained that an employee has no knowledge of a peer, or his or her needs, and additionally, such an employee has no practical way of gaining that knowledge, one would certainly not hold such an employee to any greater duties than one owes a stranger. Two employees of a large, multinational corporation, then, might be peers, and are certainly interdependent, but without knowledge of one another and some ability to communicate, they cannot be held to the same duties as peers who have knowledge of one another and whose jobs are more closely linked through a structure of mutual adjustment.

A second implication of the interdependency of peers is that when they choose to become a member of an organization, employees cannot enjoy a perfectly independent existence. Instead they choose to become part of a collective in which the actions of others affect their own welfare. This is significant, for one standard objection to some of the formulations that follow is that individuals can choose a totally independent life (Sidgwick, 1966). Peers in organizations cannot enjoy such *total* independence. Therefore, they have duties that extend beyond those that one might have to total strangers. For example, if while walking down the street one is asked by a stranger for a match, one might not be thought to have a *duty* to comply. However, if an employee asks a peer for help in fixing a machine they both rely on, even indirectly, the moral obligation is, as we will see, stronger.

Classifying peer relationships

One way of classifying the moral aspects of peer relations is between those involving conflicts and those involving cooperation. While this distinction does not capture the full range of mixed-motive

situations, it is a useful distinction for illustrative purposes.³ Conflicts between peers typically deal with *negative duties* (i.e., the duties to refrain from certain actions), and in addition to negative duties cooperation between peers also deals with *positive duties* (i.e., the duties to perform in giving help or aid). Thus, peers in both conflict and cooperation situations are morally restrained from certain actions, and cooperative situations create additional moral duties.

Duties to peers in conflict situations

Because conflict over ends is common, peer relationships can be viewed in transactional terms; in fact there is quite a long tradition of doing so in organizational analysis (e.g., Barnard, 1938; Krupp, 1961). Included are all those attempts to settle differences about what work should be given priority as well as those that serve to resolve personal differences quite separate from the demands of the work.

Conflicts between peers can take many different forms. The paradigmatic situations we will examine are first, mutually defined conflict situations, and second, situations in which one party perceives the conflict and the other does not. This distinction is important for our purposes since the latter case provides some strategic advantages to the more perspicacious party (e.g., Kotter, 1977). This can be realized by the person controlling when the conflict surfaces, building power over the counterpart without the counterpart's knowledge, or eliciting a decision by an authority in place of a negotiated outcome without the counterpart's ever having the opportunity to lodge an objection.

The ethical principle

The Categorical Imperative was Kant's (1785) attempt to capture what he avered were basic, commonly-held intuitions about morality. When dealing with peer conflicts, the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative — never treat a person as a means only, but always at the same time as an end — is more helpful than the purely formal considerations like universality. This particular formulation of the Categorical Imperative has recently received

renewed attention and is regarded as especially useful in understanding one of the most significant insights of Kant's ethics — that is, that our most basic moral intuitions require a respect for persons (Hill, 1972; 1980).

It should be noted, however, that in suggesting a prohibition against *using others as a means only* the Kantian principle is not of course suggesting that it is always morally wrong to use someone to achieve one's ends. Such a reading would imply incorrectly that the Categorical Imperative suggests it is immoral to hire an employee, or retain an attorney, since doing so is obviously using someone to achieve one's ends. The Kantian principle, however, simply enjoins against using others as a means *only* which would not apply to merely hiring an employee, so long as he or she is not, for example, forced to work under unsafe conditions. To use others as a means *only* is to disregard their nature as autonomous agents. It is to use them as you might use an animal or a tool without any respect for their standing as independent, rational agents.

In situations in which one peer enjoys an advantageous power position, in spite of equivalent authority, the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative argues against entrapping or exploiting the other party (Blum, 1973). In organizations, where peers are inexorably interdependent, the Categorical Imperative clearly entails certain restraints on the part of those who enjoy relative power advantages. But just what are the duties accruing to those who enjoy such advantages? And what factors if any limit this responsibility? To address these questions we will first deal with exploitation; after that the focus will be on entrapment. Each discussion will require us to contend with some of the many forms of exploitation and entrapment, each of which has unique implications for an account of morally responsible peer relations in conflict situations.

Exploitation

Let us turn now to just what constitutes an exploitative use of advantageous power in peer conflicts. Clearly, not all conflict situations where one party has more power than another necessarily result in the use of others by way of exploitation. Take the case of a line manager negotiating with a computer

specialist about how long it will take to complete a software project that would provide the line manager with important information. The specialist's advantage in this case is her expertise (i.e., expert power) regarding what is required to complete the project. However, just because the specialist has this advantage does not mean that she will use it to exploit the line manager into agreeing to a schedule suitable only to her needs. In peer conflicts exploitation is a result of a bilateral exchange rendered morally illicit by one party's denial of another's status as a freely choosing, rationally valuing person. There is the potential for exploitation any time one party to a conflict is advantaged, but advantage does not necessitate exploitation. Moreover, the existence of a duty not to use others does not entail that they always *act* rationally; only that they have a potential for rationality that is to be respected. Let's begin with several examples and examine our moral intuitions with respect to each.

Arnold works with Darla and a group of other co-workers. Their firm has the policy of basing all promotions on peer evaluations, and Arnold and Darla both want to receive a promotion. Realizing that Darla is a very lonely person (suppose she has just lost her best friend in a tragic accident), Arnold immediately begins to fawn over Darla both during these discussions and during his leisure time with the intention of inducing her to give him the rating he wants.⁴ Darla responds favorably to what appears to her to be the genuine friendship she longs for and consequently gives Arnold a strong positive evaluation. Armed with the promotion, Arnold "breaks off" the relationship with Darla.

To those familiar with power dynamics, this might seem in some ways just a bilateral exchange based on Darla's reward power and Arnold's referent power (French and Raven, 1959). What makes it exploitation is that Darla's ability to act as a freely choosing, rationally valuing individual has been compromised. Arnold used her *purely* as a means to his ends. In this case he has failed to treat her needs and desires as if they were genuine or important, which is ultimately to treat her as if she had subordinate status as a person. While it is true that Darla's endorsement of Arnold may have violated her contractual duty to her employer to provide an impartial judgment, that does not absolve Arnold from the moral responsibility to avoid using her.

Active and passive exploitation. Exploitation can take at least two forms. One is active and may be understood as inducing someone to act in a certain way for one's own benefit by resolutely taking advantage of the other's relative power deficiencies. The passive form of exploitation involves taking from someone something which his relative power deficiencies causes him to give, freely and without prompting, but which one ought not to take (Wilson, 1978).

How would our evaluation of the case above change if in light of her loss, Darla was infatuated with the normal attention Arnold gave her and Arnold did nothing special to garner her support? Here the question of moral responsibility rests more with Arnold's knowledge of Darla's inclination. We certainly could not hold him responsible for this passive exploitation if he was not at all aware of Darla's unique situation. Though in such a case one may be more forgiving, Arnold has still knowingly benefited from the relative weakness of another, and some might suggest Arnold has a duty to not exploit Darla's plight. With knowledge of Darla's vulnerability, Arnold might have acted somehow to try to convey to others that her evaluation might have been influenced by her special circumstances. Again, here Arnold can only be held morally responsible if he is aware of both (1) Darla's relative powerlessness and (2) the benefits to be gained by doing nothing. Passivity is in itself no excuse for the use of others.

Volitional powerlessness. Carrying the Arnold-Darla case one step further, how would the situation be different if Darla's actions were entirely under her control? How would our evaluation of Arnold's duties change if Darla's penchant for being attracted to Arnold's charms was not in any way pathetic or pathological, but rather was arrived at by a considered free choice? Here our intuition is that the case has not necessarily been made defective by exploitation. Clearly Darla is not injured by supporting Arnold's interest in achieving his end — i.e., his end is not furthered at the expense of hers — because, in part in this case, his interests, can plausibly be construed as part of her chosen interests as well.

Paternalistic exploitation. There are even situations in which an employee might respond to a conflict by using his or her advantage over a peer for what is thought to be the peer's own benefit — a kind of

paternalistic exploitation. Richard and Louise work together as co-buyers of a line of women's fashion merchandise for a retailing firm. Their job charters require them to agree on what pieces of merchandise to buy before orders can be filled. They are equally compensated on the basis of the economic efficacy of their joint decisions. The economic efficacy is ultimately dependent on the actions of the marketplace, but an intermediary dependency is the goodwill between the buyers and the managers of the relevant departments of the retailer's outlets throughout the country. If these managers are unconvinced of the wisdom of the buyer's decisions, they will devote insufficient floor space and promotional support for the goods acquired by the buyers. Less experienced than Louise, Richard does not correctly appreciate the importance of this intermediate dependency and does not realize how financially and politically consequential it is to ignore the department managers' concerns.

Their differing perspectives create a serious conflict between Louise and Richard over buying decisions for particular lines of merchandise. One summer-season line Richard advocates purchasing constitutes a radical departure from the type easily "sold" to local department managers, and Louise is concerned that if he gets his way, it will fail to satisfy them. Louise does not like defending a position she knows is correct, so she *goes out of her way* to orchestrate a situation in which Richard will learn, the hard way, the lesson that she has tried to teach him. One day when one of the most important and judgmental department managers is visiting the buying office, she asks Richard to tell this manager of the lines he is considering for the summer season. Louise knows this particular manager well and realizes that the line Richard advocates will be totally unacceptable especially to him. Richard makes the presentation and as Louise foresaw is humiliated by the way this particular manager communicates to him that his selection is totally unacceptable.

This might seem a modest cost for Richard to bear to reap the benefits of the insights Louise has provided. But that is, of course, not the only moral issue involved. Louise has used her superior power position to assure an outcome that she herself controlled. Relevant to this and other similar cases, John R. S. Wilson (1978) suggests:

Although in any particular case someone else may, by virtue of his specialist knowledge, or his greater experience or insight, or his awareness of the factors distorting the judgment of the other, feel confident that he sees more clearly than the person concerned what is best for him, he should surely expose his assessment to the other's rational scrutiny before acting on it. To impose upon another, even by the gentlest and most loving pressure, a conception of his good which does not command his rational assent suggests a kind of dangerous arrogance. Failure to convert someone to a view of what is best for him must always cast doubt on it and any such view must always be in doubt until exposed to this test (p. 314).

It is therefore morally significant that Richard did not in any way appreciate the impact of Louise's plan. Whether chosen largely for Richard's benefit or not, Richard was deprived of the choice about how to acquire information about the importance of department managers to buyer decisions. Louise is responsible for both the outcome of the situation and the harsh way Richard learned his lesson. This provides a further example of the use of a person as a means only because Louise brought about what can only be seen ultimately as *her* own ends for Richard, not his.

How then might Louise have persuaded Richard of the errors of his ways without using him? There are countless ways Louise might have influenced Richard without pushing her vision of his good onto him in this way. Other, more credible buyers could have been asked to testify to the importance of the intermediaries. Louise might have asked her boss to counsel Richard on the subject. One key is seeking Richard's consent to any "tests" of his inexperience.

Manipulation. A particularly subtle behavior that an employee can enact in a conflict with a peer is manipulation (Haring, 1975). Manipulation generally refers to the practice of making desired behavior seem irresistible based on some advantage one person has in understanding the motivation of another (Rudinow, 1978). Thus, manipulation requires the manipulator to have a better understanding of what motivates the target than the target himself. Manipulation is not the same as coercion. Coercion requires that the incentives are, at some basic level, irresistible, for example, the coercive force of the threat of grave physical injury or death. Manipula-

tion makes incentives seemingly irresistible to the subject being manipulated; this view is based more on a deficiency of the subject than reality.

Consider the case of a conflict over the transfer price to be used between two divisions of a corporation. The negotiation pits Victor, the purchasing manager of Division A against Carol, the sales manager of Division B. Carol is a discerning judge of character and has come to know, without Victor realizing it, he becomes guilty and overly conciliatory after he has lost his temper. Accordingly, she intentionally arouses his anger during a negotiation and capitalizes on his subsequent guilt.

With manipulation of this sort, we see another clear case of *using people as a means only*. As Joel Rudinow has observed:

To attempt to manipulate someone is to attempt to elicit his behavior without regard for — and with a will to interfere with — his operative goals. Insofar as a person regards the selection of goals as rightfully within his sphere of autonomy and the freedom to pursue his goals as a *prima facie* right, it is little wonder that he finds attempts to manipulate him objectionable. So it is, in addition, that being manipulated is so frequently assimilated to being used, treated instrumentally (p. 347).

To be used “instrumentally” is to have one’s own capacity for rational planning treated as if it did not exist, which is to treat one like a child or an animal and not a fully rational and autonomous individual. To do so is to fail to provide the full respect due any rational agent, in the end to fail to respect their human dignity.

Entrapment

Employees can also use their peers through entrapment. Entrapment is based on a unilateral awareness of conflict (Hall, 1983). As we indicated earlier, formal organizational systems are available to employees as a means of helping them solve their coordination problems. Hierarchic referral, policies and rules, goals and objectives, and mutual adjustment are samples of the sort of systems that might be in place (Van de Ven *et al.*, 1976). When one party becomes aware of a conflict with a peer, he or she is advantaged to the extent that he or she can choose

the system most likely to serve his or her needs only. While the possibilities are of course endless, there are two paradigmatic cases we would like to consider: unwanted negotiations and unwanted non-negotiations. Negotiations imply some mutual adjustment while non-negotiations include such acts as preemptive escalation of issues to authorities or resorting to rules or objectives.

Unwanted negotiation. One form of entrapment is unwanted negotiation. Here an employee who unilaterally identifies a conflict with a peer negotiates at a time or on an issue that the peer would not have chosen if he or she had full information. Take the case of Paul, a divisional line manager who wants to fill a vacancy in his organization with Mary, a very competent employee. Nancy, a corporate human resources manager has an interest in Mary’s career development; she has targeted Mary to serve in a post at corporate headquarters as a candidate for the corporation’s rapid career progression program — a fact unknown to Paul. Corporate policy requires that Paul clears all personnel changes through the human resources department, and when he follows procedures, Nancy alone becomes aware that she has a conflict with Paul. This knowledge puts Nancy at a power advantage, for she can choose the time at which this issue is bargained or determine the way the issue is framed (e.g., against the backdrop of policies or objectives). Ultimately, Nancy delays the emergence of the issue until an inopportune time such that Paul finds himself with no other practical option but to fill the position with a far less qualified candidate than Mary.

The tactic of inducing a peer into an unwanted negotiation may involve coercion or manipulation, but neither is necessary. The moral issue here turns on whether the peer induced into an unwanted negotiation is used by another to their own advantage. There is no clearly significant moral difference between the manipulation of people and the manipulation of circumstance if the end result of both is a violation of a peer’s freedom to choose.

Unwanted Non-negotiation. Employees who have exclusive knowledge of the presence of a conflict with a peer may also exert their undetected influence to transform a potential negotiation into a non-nego-

tiation. For example, realizing that an employee would have to incur costs as a result of negotiation, one might strive to effect a resolution before the other party has access to the issue. Escalating issues to authorities that traditionally have been negotiated, administratively orbiting issues until they are extinguished (Miles, 1980), and the orchestration of *faits accomplis* are all means at the disposal of employees who wish to transform their privileged knowledge of a conflict to a suitable resolution without the consent of a peer or respect for his or her interests.

Mark and Joe are both reference librarians working the same shift. By convention they negotiate when they will take their morning breaks each week in order to insure coverage of the reference desk. This appears to Joe to be an amicable arrangement and it is a tradition at this library. However, Mark secretly believes he should receive first choice of when to take his breaks because he has two days more seniority. A new head librarian is appointed, and Mark discovers that she has received a charter to make wholesale changes at the library although this charter includes nothing as trivial as break-time criteria. Suspecting that the librarian will want to send a signal that more significant changes are in the making, Mark advocates a new policy that break preferences be determined by seniority. The head librarian agrees to the change. The ethical argument here need not turn on the question of equal access to the new head librarian. Rather, it is again centered on whether the advantage is employed as a way of *using* the other party, with a disregard for his or her own ends.

Accidental and meritorious advantage. Intuitively, some people find meaningful the distinction between power advantages that are assiduously cultivated at no one else's expense (meritorious) from those that accrue serendipitously (accidental). In the literature on power much has been made of the need of employees to build their power in anticipation of conflict (e.g., Kotter, 1977). If advantages are created through these efforts, though, one is no more excused from using less advantaged peers, even though these peers may have had the same opportunity to accumulate advantage. The moral issues involved in the physician-patient relationship (due to the physicians' meritorious advantages) are similar to those in the parent-child relationship (accidental advantage).

Just because an individual has accumulated advantage by virtue this does not free one from an obligation to its responsible use. Advantage is dishonored by uses that are not appropriately diffident and self-restrained. At the same time, our intuition leads us to tolerate outcomes from peer conflicts (where no immoral entrapment or exploitation has occurred) which tilt in favor of those who have acquired advantage in a meritorious fashion. One often hears of situations favoring a party who "paid his dues," "punched the right tickets," or "did his homework," and this outcome may be acceptable if it is not tainted by the unethical use of others.

Exploitation and entrapment — a matter of degree

We have characterized entrapment as the purely self-interested, unilateral definition of a conflict situation with a peer, and exploitation as the selfish exercise of one's advantageous power position over a peer. It is undoubtedly difficult to justify either practice. Clearly, an employee's moral duty to his or her peers demands standards which rule out such actions. However, the question arises: are all instances of exploitation and entrapment equally objectionable? On this question, there is room for reasonable disagreement. However, one important point that seems relevant here is that some conflicts are more consequential to an individual's sense of self than others. In some cases, the investment of the parties' sense of self-esteem is quite small, as in the case of an employee asking a peer to exchange sandwiches at lunchtime. In other cases, the investment of one's sense of self-esteem is quite significant. Consider, for example, the conflicts between two peers arising over a merit pay award. In this latter case, both peers have much more of their sense of self-worth at stake. The additional vulnerability that is created by this greater investment must be given appropriate moral weight (Marietta, 1972). This is not to say that peers engaged in unimportant conflicts have no duty to refrain from exploitation or entrapment, only that the extent of responsibility is greater the more one's counterpart has invested in the conflict. Perhaps this explains why our moral judgments of the actions of the users in the cases above range from "tacky" to "reprehensible."

Organizationally sanctioned exploitation and entrapment

To this point we have argued that using peers as a means only is never justified. One is not released from this negative duty by passivity, by peers who are themselves acting irresponsibly or irrationally, nor by the degree of control over the outcomes (i.e., arguably manipulation is more predictable than entrapment). However, we have so far also been assuming that the employment contract binding peers to one another is itself a moral one, which is to say that no use of one's peers is officially or implicitly required. If we relax this assumption, we can conceive of many situations in which an employee is expected to use a peer and to do otherwise would jeopardize his or her employment status. Take the case of a employee who is ordered to entrap a colleague by his manager in an effort to get the colleague fired. Alternatively, consider organizational cultures in which using peers is so commonplace that acting otherwise would place one at a severe political disadvantage. While such arrangements do *not* diminish the moral obligation to refrain from using peers, they may place any employee in a classic moral dilemma. To judge such actions without a measured consideration of the sanctions in place would be unjust indeed.

Duties to peers in cooperative situations

So far we have dealt only with the negative duties that govern peer relations. But what about the positive duties owed to peers when they are in need of aid? Here the issue seems intuitively different. It is one thing to *refrain* from exploiting, entrapping, or manipulating a peer, but it seems quite another to be *duty-bound* to give aid and succor to a peer in need. If we open ourselves to the possibility of having a duty to aid, we may wonder just how far that duty extends. Do we owe our peers help even when they don't ask us for help? And, are peers entitled to help when their needs are not work-related? Or, when they require of us great sacrifice? These are poignant issues, and we will grapple with them in this section.

Cooperative situations in the workplace arise any time one employee has needs that another peer can satisfy (Brickman *et al.*, 1982). Sometimes needy

employees realize their need but are unaware of the ability of a peer to satisfy them. Other times employees are cognizant of the potential help a peer might give but are unable or unwilling to communicate their need as an effective request for assistance. From the standpoint of the employee who is aware of a peer's need, however, the potential duties are rather clear.

The ethical principle

Generally, the First Formulation of Kant's Categorical Formulation is most relevant to the positive duty to give aid. Simply stated, the First Formulation holds that an action is morally right for a person in a certain situation if and only if the person's reason for carrying out the action is a reason that he or she deems to be rational to wish to have every person act on, in any similar situation. Thus, to meet this standard, a positive duty to help must be universalizable, that is, rational to wish that it was universally performed by all relevantly situated individuals.

There is of course some debate about what form positive duty to help should take to meet this condition (e.g., Elfstrom, 1983; Engstrom, 1986; Feinberg, 1961). One nagging problem is that it seems possible that an individual might rationally choose a totally independent life in which he or she never wanted help of any kind (Sidgwick, 1966). Under these circumstances a positive duty to help would fail the requirement of universalizability. Since the independent person does not *want to be* helped he or she seemingly has no commitment to a universal principle to provide it to others. Yet, even independent persons may find themselves in a position of grave vulnerability escapable only by the assistance of another. Accordingly, Alan Gewirth has argued that strangers owe each other mutual aid under what is termed the Good Samaritan Principle (GSP). This entails a stranger's duty to give aid to another person when:

1. the person has serious injuries requiring immediate attention,
2. the stranger just happens to have knowledge to relieve the plight of the person,
3. the person is not in a position to look after him/herself, and

4. the person can be presumed to want the stranger's help (Gewirth, 1978)

The GSP has been offered to demonstrate people's most basic duties — e.g., to throw a life preserver to a drowning person. It is derived from the risks even the most independent person faces, risks that in spite of one's desires to be socially detached may befall an independent person.

This however raises a second nagging question that has plagued those who have wrestled with the duty to help: namely, when one confronts another in need, how much help is one duty bound to give? The GSP offers us some guidance in dealing with strangers. It indicates that one concern is with the severity of the stranger's need (nothing short of serious injuries requiring immediate attention qualifies for assistance), but it does not directly indicate the limits established by the cost to the helper of providing the needed assistance (what if a stranger confronting a drowning person risks drowning in the attempt to provide the life preserver?).

Thus, the GSP is not fully sufficient for dealing with peer relations in organizations on two counts. First, it does not account for a peer's responsibilities to give assistance beyond survival needs. And second, it does not specify the extent to which one must go to aid a peer in need.

Employee needs. In cases where an employee requests help from a peer, the peer's duty depends in part on the strength of the employee's needs. The duty applies in cases where the employee has a true need. In an organizational context, one might distinguish two types of true needs: "basic" needs and "adventitious" needs. To say someone has a *basic* need for *x* is to say: the loss of *x* (or the loss of a significant opportunity to gain *x*) would result in a considerable decrease in one's prospects for survival, or basic well-being. Included here are physiological needs together with fundamental psychological needs (such as the need to have some minimal level of self-esteem necessary for one's participation in society). In contrast, adventitious needs are those which come and go with particular projects. For example, if one is to type a research paper, one *needs* a typewriter. While this is not a basic need, it is certainly a need in the sense that it is not possible to complete the project without a typewriter. This distinction might well

have its limitations, and it alone might not differentiate every possible case, but some difference between basic needs and adventitious needs seems clear (Braybrooke, 1987). The frustration of an adventitious need that is not directly linked to a basic need may indeed cause substantial remorse (and a diminution of individual happiness), but it would not necessarily result in a marked loss of one's chances for fundamental well-being. Typically losing one's job would differ in this regard from having one's car break down on the way to work (unless of course the breakdown resulted in one's having to walk ten miles in a blizzard).

The GSP seems to restrict one's duty to a stranger to cases where the stranger's *basic* needs are at stake. Our intuition is that in the case of peers, who are interdependent, the duty to help extends into certain adventitious needs as well. Recall that employees, duty-bound to their employer, will have adventitious needs to complete projects in areas that are prescribed by the employment contract (e.g., to put out fires if the employee is a fire fighter). Given these conditions, our intuitions lead us to conclude that any adventitious need an employee has that emanates from his or her employment contract constitutes a claim on peers to give aid. If a professional baseball player asks a teammate what pitch he has just struck out on, the teammate has a duty to provide such information (i.e., help) if the player has a reasonable need for such information to discharge his own obligations to his employer (to be proficient batter). In contrast, if the request for help is part of a project that will have no effect on the requester's contractual obligations (as in the case of a furniture salesman asking a peer for help in buying a new car for personal use), then as a peer one has no duty to help in response to this adventitious need.

Costs of giving aid. The GSP defines a duty to strangers that may involve considerable personal costs. Taken at its face, the GSP would absolve no one who was able to sense or respond to the stranger's cry for help. In this regard, our intuitions reach beyond the GSP because it is not reasonable to ascribe a duty to risk one's life to come to the aid of a drowning stranger. In fact, such an action would be no less irrational if a *peer's* basic need were at stake. For example, coal miners are not *required* to give assistance to a peer during a cave-in if in doing so they risk their efforts

to save their own lives. In such cases assistance would be virtuous, indeed heroic, but it is unreasonable to ascribe to heroism the status of a duty. Thus, there are at least two conditions under which an employee is freed from the moral duty to give help to a peer: when the peer's adventitious need does not involve projects defined by the employment contract and when the cost of giving help involves frustrating our own basic needs or important adventitious needs. Legitimate excuses for not helping do *not* include inconvenience or other helping acts recently done (Herman, 1984).

In order to explore further the peer's duty to mutual aid, we first examine the case of solicited help from a peer and then deal with the issue of unsolicited help.

Solicited help

Solicitations provide a *prima facie* indication that an employee has a true need that a peer may potentially satisfy. In this section, we shall examine two types of situations that arise in this case.

Solicited help in response to a peer's true needs. Consider the case of Bill and Frank, two reporters working on different assignments for the same newspaper. Bill is comparatively inexperienced and is concerned that the investigative article he has just completed will not be considered satisfactory by the editor who is known to be very judgmental and difficult to satisfy. Knowing that Frank is more experienced, Bill phones Frank at home and asks him to review the article before he submits it. In this case since Bill has a work-related adventitious need, Frank has a positive duty to help Bill unless Frank is himself engaged in fulfilling a true need (say, his son is ill and is utterly dependent on his father for uninterrupted care). In short, then, employees may limit their helping activity toward peers with legitimate needs only when it puts them in a position of needing help themselves or when helping would prevent them from doing something else they had a moral duty to do (Herman, 1984).

If an employee solicits help from a peer based on an adventitious need that does not arise from the employment contract, then the peer is not duty-bound to help. Thus, if Bill's request to have Frank

review his work was motivated solely by a desire to impress the editor — for the purpose of ingratiating himself to the editor — over and above doing good work for the newspaper, then Frank might legitimately refuse Bill's solicitation.

Solicited help from a dependent peer. A special case of solicited help occurs when the needy employee is in a position to help him/herself. Clearly, one does not have a duty to help peers who can and should help themselves. The habitual dependent who makes such requests is, in effect, *using* the prospective helper, and the helper should not sanction such action by complying with the request.

Bob and Betty both work in the registrar's office of a large university. Part of their responsibility is to make judgments about waiving certain student fees in emergency situations, e.g., when a student is so ill that he or she must register late for classes. While this task is sometimes complex, Bob asks Betty for help in determining what he should do in virtually every case, even when the facts of the particular case make a decision rule quite clear. *Even though* Betty can provide this help at little cost, she owes no duty to Bob to do so. In fact, we would argue against such compliance, for it may interfere with Bob's attaining full status as a rational individual, a subject we dealt with earlier as paternalistic exploitation.

Unsolicited help

In order to be considered truly deserving of help, it is unnecessary that the person in need be burdened with the responsibility of calling for help. Peers owe each other a duty to assist whether or not a peer accurately and effectively requests such aid. However, there is an important dilemma that arises with unsolicited help that does not exist when help is requested. Namely, any time an employee intervenes without the peer's request, unjustified paternalism may result.

Non-paternalistic unsolicited help. Consider the case of two sheet metal workers, Irene and Phil. Phil spends his lunch hour working on a toy boat for his nephew with some tools in the shop he has permission to use. Knowing that one of the tools has a dull blade that may cause injury, Irene intervenes and alerts Phil to

the hazard he is unaware of. In such a case, Irene is morally required to give this helping advice. It is not just virtuous; she is duty-bound to offer the help even though Phil has not requested it. While Phil's project is not work-related, his need is basic, and Irene must alert him to the perils he is ignorant of. Such intervention is not undue paternalism.

Paternalistic unsolicited help. Earlier, we dealt with paternalism as it arises in conflict situations between peers. Paternalism can also pertain to unsolicited help. As Herman (1984, p. 602) suggests:

We should not meddle and we should be wary of impulses to paternalism not because they may bring more harm than good . . . but they go against the grain of the respectful help we are morally required to give.

Thus, paternalism is not respectful help and in some cases may even result in humiliation on the part of the person one offers to help. Dave and Paula are both mechanics in an auto repair shop. Paula is much more experienced than Dave, but Dave is conscientious and able. One morning while taking her scheduled break, Paula notices Dave inspecting the gaps on a set of spark plugs with a tool that was not designed for that purpose. If such a practice creates no danger to Dave nor does it demonstrably affect the performance of his responsibility to his employer, Paula should not intervene. Dave is apparently having no trouble, and he should be permitted to develop his own ways of performing this task even though they appear to Paula, because of her experience, unconventional.

In summary, employees owe their peers a positive duty to aid when such help is based on their true needs. This duty does not arise in situations in which the help constitutes paternalism, when the help is requested from a person enslaved by their own irrational dependence, nor when giving help deprives the helper of his or her own true needs.

Conclusions

Using practical formalism based on the Kantian Categorical Imperative we have argued that peers owe to one another both positive and negative duties. Peers ought not diminish the autonomy of others. This conclusion leads to a number of im-

plications. First, it invites theoretical development of a broader formulation of organizational ethics. For example, when organizational *unequals* (like managers and their immediate subordinates) interact, do similar ethical norms apply? Second, how does this characterization of peer relations compare with other characterizations in organization theory, and which better reflects fundamental values in our culture? And finally, this formulation has practical moral implications for practicing managers especially when they find themselves in the position of adjudicating conflicts between employees.

Theory development

This analysis can be theoretically extended in three major directions: negotiator ethics, the ethics of organizational politics, and the ethics of relations between organizational unequals.

Contemporary approaches to negotiator ethics have to this point concentrated on the ethics of lying and deceit (e.g., Barach, 1985; Carr, 1968; Carson *et al.*, 1982; Michelman, 1983). We have tried in this paper to investigate a more fundamental moral concern that creates the need for avoiding deceit in the first place. We believe this perspective has value in extending the analysis into broader negotiation contexts. In particular, what about the ethics of negotiation when the parties are not bound through shared membership in an organization? For example, do negotiating partners debating over the terms of an LBO owe any duties to one another? Is the use of one's partners justified in such situations? Again, a unified theory of negotiator ethics requires attention to the differences, if any, between the ethical norms that apply in hierarchies versus those that apply in markets (Provan and Skinner, 1989; Williamson, 1975).

Second, existing formulations on the ethics of organizational politics are also extended by the analysis in this paper. Cavanagh and his colleagues developed a normative scheme that made use of utilitarian, justice, and rights standards applicable to particular political behaviors (Cavanagh *et al.*, 1981). The treatment in their model addressed moral duties only insofar as they related to a series of rights the authors ascribed to fellow employees, i.e., peers. This paper is much more explicit in articulating the

duties peers have to one another and is not based on any declaration of rights beyond those emanating directly from the Categorical Imperative. In addition, by remaining within a deontological perspective, it avoids the problem of combining fundamentally different ethical perspectives as the Cavanagh *et al* model did (Brady, 1985).

Third, what changes in the foregoing analysis are necessary in order to accommodate organizational relations between those of dissimilar authority as between managers and their immediate subordinates? Such relations have conventionally been viewed as variations on the theme of organization-employee transactions. However, they are after all inevitably human transactions where using and denying help to persons may compromise our most basic moral standards. Is it ever acceptable for a manager to *use* a subordinate, say in the service of that manager's superior authority? Is there something in the role of manager as agent (Eisenhardt, 1989) that allows certain legitimate uses of subordinates? Related to this, can this analysis be extended into situations of *nearly* equivalent authority as in the case of the relationship between a service provider and a client in an intensive service encounter? These are poignant questions, and they await analysis.

Characterizations of peer relations in organization theory

One important object of Kantian analysis is to reflect and enlighten our sense of fundamental societal values. Here we think our analysis contrasts rather profoundly with characterizations that are extant in the organizational literature. Namely, there is a common tendency for organizational scholars to use a game metaphor to characterize relationships between peers (Allison, 1971; Bardach, 1977; Mintzberg, 1983; Riker, 1986). This characterization is quite consistent with what Morgan (1986) has observed:

Many American corporations and their employees are preoccupied with the desire to be 'winners' and with the need to reward and punish successful and unsuccessful behavior . . . From an American perspective, industrial and economic performance is often understood as a kind of game. And the general orientation in many organizations is to play the game for all it's worth . . . [p. 119].

What is often lost upon those who employ this

metaphor is the equally salient value that we place on *fair play*, that moral rules are necessary to keep gamesmanship in bounds. Here we think our account provides a system of meaning that more accurately reflects core values than game-metaphoric treatments alone.

In this context, it is not surprising that we are witnessing the parallel development of two lines of research in organization theory: agency theory (Eisenhardt, 1989) with its egoistic overtones and research in pro-social behavior (Brief and Motowidlo, 1986; Organ, 1988) with its altruistic overtones. As Robert Bellah and his colleagues discovered, this represents the classic polarities of American individualism: . . . the deep desire for autonomy and self-reliance combined with an equally deep conviction that life has no meaning unless shared with others in the context of community . . . (Bellah *et al.*, 1985, 150). This paper, enlightened by Kant's ethical formulations, attempts to address the characteristically American moral dilemma defined by this polarity. Clearly, one can be individualistic and moral without the necessity of altruism or the excesses of egoism.

Practical implications for adjudicating employee conflicts

Evidence from many sources indicates that managers are frequently called upon to settle conflicts between their subordinates (e.g., Mintzberg, 1975). While the terms of the employment contract (via formal job duties) certainly play an important role in adjudicating these conflicts (Sheppard, 1983), ethical considerations would seem no less significant. For example, if two employees are engaged in a conflict over the alleged failure of one to help another, moral as well as contractual issues are raised. While it is in no way presumed that managers are always more ethically sensitive than their subordinates, these occasions would seem to be ripe opportunities to convey an appreciation for ethical principles.

Waters and his colleagues (Waters, 1988; Waters and Bird, 1987; Waters *et al.*, 1986) have proposed that one remedy to the moral bewilderment about organizational affairs is ethics talk. We concur. If individuals are not encouraged to discuss their moral concerns and share their intuitions about ethical matters, then attempts to create organizational cul-

tures based on a respect for persons seem doomed. We do not believe the intuitions we have outlined in this paper ought to be the ending points of these conversations. Rather, we hope they will serve as helpful beginning points.

Notes

¹ The authors wish to thank Martin Cook, Jacques Delacroix, and Phil Zink for their helpful comments on various drafts of this paper.

² We mean to include implicit contracts as well as those governing work in volunteer organizations.

³ Our purpose here is to investigate paradigmatic situations. In doing so, we are cognizant that we are by necessity not able to address the full range of possible situations that might present themselves.

⁴ Please note that in this case and in all cases that follow, we have ascribed clear and unambiguous motives to the person whose behavior we are examining. Relaxing these ascriptions would raise other, more complicated moral issues that are beyond the scope of the paper. We raise this issue because it is indeed tempting to excuse villains and indict victims on attributional grounds.

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