Self and professional role. On the moral dimensions of *déformation professionnelle*

Lisa Herzog, Institut für Sozialforschung

and Cluster 'Normative Orders', Goethe University Frankfurt

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Introduction

Moral agents in today's world encounter many moral questions not as private individuals, but from within professional[1] roles. The engineer who has to decide about the safety of a machine, the manager who has to decide between two suppliers, or the teacher who is involved in the process of hiring new colleagues: they can be confronted with moral questions, or questions that have a moral dimension, but which they cannot answer by drawing exclusively on their private moral principles or intuitions, as they act within roles that come with expectations and norms of their own. In contrast to roles such as being a parent or a spouse that are narrowly intertwined with an individual's personality, the more or less formalized professional roles we find in today's labour market allow at least *prima facie* for a conceptual distinction between the individual-as-a-private-person and the individual-as-occupier-of-the-role.[2] Many individuals do in fact draw such a line. Sometimes the separation can take on dramatic forms. As a therapist who sees clients from the financial sector put it in an interview: 'Clients actually talk about their 'corporate coat' or 'business persona'. 'I wear my fake face as soon as I enter the workplace...'[3]

Sociological theories have long recognized the central place of roles in our societies.[4] Dahrendorf's classic definition describes them as 'bundles of expectations directed at the incumbents of positions in a given society'.[5] They are 'a constraining force on the individual'[6]: there are different forms of sanctions, from hard legal sanctions to social exclusion or unpopularity, that individuals incur if they violate the expectations connected with their role.[7] Roles help us to navigate a complex social world, because we can rely on individuals doing certain things. We thus know what to expect when we deal with a manager, a teacher, or an

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[1] Despite the terminology, the question is not limited to what is described as 'professions' in English. Also, no bias towards jobs with higher social status, or higher up in organizational hierarchies, is intended. In such jobs, there may be a *greater* responsibility to think about the questions discussed here (because there is more room for shaping the organization according to one's own ideas rather than just receiving orders), but at lower levels, where the concrete work gets done, there is usually some room for shaping the ways in which it is done (one can fully endorse, or secretly sabotage, orders from above, or do anything in between.

[2] At the background of this question is the assumption that our social world is split into different spheres in which different norms are taken for granted (See e.g. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice. A Defense of Pluralism and Equality.* New York: Basic Books, 1983). I come back, below, on the question of how individuals can deal with this complexity.

[3] See http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/joris-luyendijk-banking-blog/2013/may/16/coach-therapist-banks-karin-peeters

[4] See in particular Ralf Dahrendorf, *Homo Sociologicus*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, vi: 'the crystallization of rules into roles is the basic fact of society'.

[5] Ibid., 18.

[6] Dahrendorf, *Homo Sociologicus,* 20.

[7] Ibid., 21ff. Dahrendorf distinguishes between ‚must'-expectations, ‚should'-expectations, and ‚can'-expectations, according to how central they are to the role and what kind of sanctions are connected to violations.

accountant.[8] While the degree of formalization in roles varies, *professional* roles, on which I here focus, are usually more or less formalized, facilitating the delineation of role behaviour from other forms of other behaviour or other parts of one's life.

Philosophers have not discussed social roles a lot. One exception is an exchange about the normative power of social roles. In a 1994 paper Hardimon defended the normative force that 'flows from the role', which leads to what he calls 'role obligations'.[9] Such obligations, he holds, have long been misunderstood – and hence rejected –, but they can be made sense of as being neither 'comprehensive' (defining *all* moral duties) nor 'transparent' (involving no conflicts or unclear situations). In a reply, Simmons rejected this argument, holding that all *normative* force – in the sense of justification – of social roles is external, stemming either from the fact that individuals enter them voluntarily, or because they are derived from other non-voluntarist duties that bind us in general, such as the duty to help the needy.[10] Another strand of the discussion on social roles can be found in virtue ethics. Cordell has recently discussed social roles from the perspective of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, taking up a number of earlier contributions.[11] His discussion mirrors the Hardimon-Simmons-debate in that he describes the divide between an 'internalist' and an 'externalist' perspective on roles, depending on whether moral claims should be taken as coming from within the role or as external to it. Cordell argues that neither position is satisfactory: internalism 'overdetermines' and externalism 'underdetermines' the demands of social roles.[12]

Rather than focussing on the justificatory structure of roles, the guiding question of this paper is how individuals and the organizations within which they work should deal with the fact of professional roles: how closely should individuals identify with their roles? How much identification should organizations expect? From the individual perspective, one can derive a critical perspective on organizations, asking what features organizations need to have in order to allow individuals to relate to their professional role in morally permissible ways. In any answer that one can give to these questions much will, of course, depend on the characteristics of concrete cases. Nevertheless, there are some features that can be generalized across contexts. Neither complete independence from (section II), nor complete identification with (section III), one's professional role, are likely to create a situation in which one can act as a responsible moral agent. Rather, what is needed is a process of on-going self-examination and reflection in order to find the right balance between adaption to the requirements of one's role and independent critical judgments (IV). This means that certain expectations and institutional arrangements in professional life, which do *not* allow individuals to enter into this process of reflection, can be criticized from a normative point of view: they undermine the conditions of the possibility of moral agency (V).[13]

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[8] As Andre notes, fulfilling other people's expectations is 'a prima facie good thing', although its moral weight can be overridden by the content of the expectations ('Role Morality as a Complex Instance of Ordinary Morality', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28(1) (1991), 73-80, 75).

[9] Michael O. Hardimon, 'Role Obligations', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 91(7) (1994), 333-363, 334.

[10] A. John Simmons, 'External Justification and Institutional Roles', *The Journal of Philosophy* 93(1) (1996), 28-36.

[11] Sean Cordell, 'Virtuous Persons and Social Roles', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 42(3), 2011, 254-272.

[12] Cordell's solution is to point to institutions, and I will come back to his account from the – somewhat different – perspective of this paper below.

[13] This paper is part of a research project in which 32 one-hour qualitative interviews with practitioners about morality in complex organizations, as well as ethnographic research within one selected organization, are analysed from the perspective of moral philosophy. What is striking in this empirical material is that many individuals who agreed to give such an interview, and who clearly understood their jobs in moral terms (without there being any possibility of evaluating their statements, given the nature of the study), seem to stand in an interesting tension between their private and their professional selves: there seems to be both identification with the job *and* critical distance from it. This prompted me to explore this issue.

Before I start, some clarifying remarks are in order. My approach is 'non-ideal' in that I do not ask about an ideally just society, but rather start from the situation we are in, i.e. a social world in which there *are* different social spheres and different social roles. I do not consider the possibility of a radically different world, e.g. one in which there are no social roles at all, or in which every individual is fully absorbed in one single role. I nonetheless assume that roles, and the contexts in which they are found, can to some degree be shaped by human agency, individual or collective. Individuals can relate to their roles in different ways, and can either leave them as they are or try to change them, and organisations can be designed in different ways, with different cultures predominant in them. My focus is not in the first place on extreme cases, in which great moral tragedies happen;[14] rather, it is on asking how we should relate to our professional roles in order to *avoid* sliding into situations that are deeply morally problematic. I assume, in what follows, that the organizations under discussion are not *completely* morally bankrupt, nor perfectly moral – I assume that they are of some of the shades in between of which our social world normally consists.

II Why complete independence is problematic

There is a certain picture of human agency, whether moral or otherwise, according to which individuals are fully independent and autonomous, and not affected by the social contexts in which they stand. Their moral understanding and their willpower are independently given; their preferences and their identity are stable over time. Kantian approaches and rational choice theory show a surprising family resemblance when it comes to this general perspective on human agency. One can ask fundamental questions about how adequate it is to human nature, or which theoretical functions it might fulfil even if one thinks that it is not very adequate. When it comes to professional roles, however, at first glance this model seems attractive: shouldn't we aspire to a world in which morally autonomous individuals who are fully in control of themselves carry their moral convictions into their professional roles? In fact, from this perspective professional roles are nothing but bundles of – more or less spelled out – contractual obligations that individuals can fully evaluate and voluntarily agree to or reject.

But at a second glance, there are questions whether this model is useful for understanding how moral agents should relate to their professional roles, or whether it in fact hides crucial moral questions. First of all, it is psychologically unrealistic that one remains completely unaffected by an activity and a social context one spends a great part of one's time in. As Aristotle famously held, what we do influences who we are: 'by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust'; and: 'states of character arise out of like activities'.[15] The norms we follow in our professional role are likely to become habitual to us: they appear normal, and we internalize them, at least to some degree. This phenomenon seems to be widespread enough to deserve its own term, coming from French and taken over in other languages: 'déformation professionelle.'[16]

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[14] In fact, there is a lot of research on professional roles in the context of studies about totalitarian regimes. See in particular Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing And The Psychology Of Genocide*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.

[15] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Transl. W. D. Ross.Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908, Book II Section 1.

[16] To illustrate, here are two passages from interviews: First, one interviewee who worked in financial trading although he held that this business was rather immoral, answered the question of how he relates to his and whether he was a different person on the job: 'I think you don't realize it any more. Because I also try to make money with every piece of news, of course… *Q: So you'd say that you have to conform to the imperatives of the system?* Exactly. It's a process of adjustment.' (January 2012, translated from German). Secondly, this is how an interviewee described her reaction to her first job and her decision, two years later, to leave the industry: 'I found, like… at work, I had to become this aggressive person. I don't know if that was because of the role I was in, and the […] world [of this

Against this, a defender of the model of autonomous action might hold that an agent might well adapt his or her outer behaviour, but keep a pure 'inner self' that is unaffected by it. But it is not clear whether this is a feasible model, except for exceptional circumstances and, maybe, exceptional individuals.[17] There is a plethora on psychological research on the mechanisms that can set in and undermine our independence, for example linguistic euphemisms[18] or shifts in moral standards that are so gradual that we hardly perceive them. 'Moral dissonance'[19] can occur, or self-deception that makes the moral dimensions of our decisions 'fade'.[20] Thus, it is extremely likely that whether we realize it or not, we do to some degree 'morph' and are changed by our professional role.[21] Even if our 'should self' may remain independent, our 'want self' can be quite different[22] – and if this is the case, it is likely that we are unable to act in the ways in which we would like to act when it comes to difficult decisions or moral dilemmas.[23] In fact, it is likely that not only our 'professional selves', but also our private selves are affected by our professional role. As Roessler puts it (in a slightly different context): 'It seems naïve to think that we can switch easily between different roles and forget the work and the sort of work we have been doing for hours.'[24]

In addition to being overly optimistic about one's psychological abilities and thereby being misled into thinking that one is independent when one in fact is not, however, the problem with this picture is that it is not so clear whether it is *normatively* desirable that one should remain completely unaffected by one's professional role. In order to be moral *as* the occupier of a certain role, one needs to be open to new insights about the duties and obligations it carries. This is first of all an epistemic question. Without the social practices in which professional roles are embedded we do not have access to what it means to be moral *as* an occupier of that role – even if the moral standards may, in abstract, be the same as one had before, they need to be applied to this specific context. For this, an understanding of the context is necessary, which an individual

industry]. [...] Outside work, I'm a very different person than in work. I felt that this work attitude was affecting my personal life as well. I could see myself being the same person outside work, and I didn't like that. So that really pushed me, actually one of the reasons to get out of [this industry].' (June 2012, original in English).

[17] One example might be Michail Gorbatschov, the Russian President who first rose through the ranks of the Sowjet apparatus and then paved the way towards Perestroika and Glasnost.

[18] See e.g. Albert Badura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 3(3) (1999), 193-209.

[19] See for example. Jonathan Lowell, 'Managers and Moral Dissonance: Self Justification as a Big Threat to Ethical Management?', *Journal of Business Ethics* 105 (2012), 17-25. Lowell discusses in particular the phenomena of rationalization, self affirmation and self-justification.

[20] Ann E. Tenbrusel and David M. Messick, 'Ethical Fading: The Role of Self-Deception in Unethical Behavior', *Social Justice Research* 17(2) 2004, 223-236, who have introduced the term 'ethical fading', distinguish four 'enablers' of self-deception: 'language euphemisms', slippery slope phenomena, 'errors in perceptual causation' (e.g. focussing on persons instead of systems or overlooking moral failure that is caused by omission), and 'constraints induced by representations of the self', i.e. the effect of who we are on how we perceive the world. Different frames in which individuals encounter decisions (especially a 'business frame' versus an 'ethical frame') also make a difference in how they decide (ibid. 232f.).

[21] This is a term from an interview in Jori Luyendijk's 'Banking Blog' interview project, taken from an interview with an 'employee relations manager at a major bank', *guardian.co.uk*, 2 November 2011: 'I'd say most people in finance are moulded by the system. They morph. I morph. The other day my boyfriend overheard me talking on the phone to somebody at work. 'You sound like a different person', he said.'

[22] Max H. Bazerman, Ann E. Tenbrunsel, *Blind Spots. Why We Fail to Do What's Right and What to Do about It.* Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press 2011, 66: 'The should self dominates before and after we make a decision, but the want self often wins at the moment of decision.' This statement relates to self-control, but the analogy to moral decision making in situations in which there is a temptation to do otherwise should be obvious.

[23] As one interviewee noted: 'If I wasn't authentic [in the sense of being the same person privately and in the job], I'd be in danger, to some degree, of not acting consistently, and I would be insecure, in certain situations. And it's always dilemmas, situations in which you have to decide between different options, when you get tempted to do something wrong' (November 2012, translated from German).

[24] Beate Roessler, 'Meaningful Work: Arguments From Autonomy', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20(1) (2012) 71-93, 83f.

needs to acquire from those who surround him or her in the professional context, and for this he or she needs to be willing to accept at least some aspects of the role as given, rather than wanting to define them completely on his or her own.[25] If one wants to enter a role at all, one has to be open to what one learns from others about what this role implies and what imperatives it carries with it.

While this might still be compatible with an understanding of the individual as independent and as only incurring obligations that he or she enters voluntarily, many of the features of what it means to occupy a professional role imply that individuals cannot exclude the possibility of being affected in a deeper sense, and of incurring moral obligations that they did not reckon with beforehand and did not chose voluntarily. There are a number of mechanisms through which this can happen. One is the 'moral entanglement' that Richardson has recently analysed in the context of medical researchers' duties to the participants in their studies.[26] As he argues, moral duties can be incurred unintentionally, as the by-product of other actions. This can be the case if one enters into the sphere of privacy of individuals, thereby incurring responsibilities for helping to protect that which the private space is supposed to protect in the first place: their autonomy. In many professional roles, individuals will encounter such 'entanglements': they acquire knowledge that carries with it responsibilities, either because, as in Richardson's case, someone else's autonomy is at stake (be it patients, customers, or colleagues), or because of other mechanisms, for example because they become the one's who are best able to help at low costs.[27] While such involuntarily entered duties and obligations can also be encountered in all spheres of life, it is very likely also to happen in one's professional role. Moreover, one will often not encounter them alone, but with and through the agency of others. After all, most professional roles are part of structures of divided labour and their aim is precisely allowing cooperation and joint action.[28] But the exact content of what individuals will have to do can often not be specified beforehand (which is why economists describe most labour contracts as 'incomplete' contracts[29]). This means that the meaning and consequences of an individual's actions are often co-determined by what those around him or her do. The actions performed by an individual connect to the actions of others, and often it may not be possible to fully understand all their moral dimensions on one's own,

[25] In this sense, professional (or even all social) roles are independent of single individuals. As Hardimon puts it: 'Social roles are not things that we, as individuals, make up, but enduring, socially defined structures that we, as individuals, enter' ('Role Obligations', 355). Cf. also Stefan Sciaraffa, 'Identification, Meaning, and the Normativity of Social Roles', *European Journal of Philosophy* 19(1) (2009), 107-128, 124 (in a slightly different context): 'The third way in which social roles and institutions are important is that they provide the social coordination necessary for the pursuit of comprehensive goals whose underlying points are sufficiently complex and rich to be the focus of a meaningful life. For example, to enjoy the life of a parent, there must be a social practice of deference and support that makes it possible to be a parent.'

[26] Henry S. Richardson, *Moral Entanglements: The Ancillary-Care Obligations of Medical Researchers*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012, esp. ch. 3.

[27] Cf. e.g. Leif Wenar's notion of a 'least-cost threat avoider' (discussed in Richardson, *Moral Entanglements*, 102ff.). See Leif Wenar, 'Responsibility and Severe Poverty', in Thomas Pogge, ed., *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 255-274.

[28] There is, of course, a large debate about how to analyse shared agency. For an overview see e.g. Roth, Abraham Sesshu, 'Shared Agency', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2011 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/shared-agency/. For our purposes, Tuomela's list of conditions for acting in the 'we-mode' are helpful: 'A group member thinks or acts in the we-mode if and only if he is (i) 'we-committed' (participates in the collective commitment) to a thought (the mental state and its content) or, respectively, to an action that is (ii) collectively accepted in the group as the group's thought or action and that is (iii) for the group's 'use' and accordingly gives the group members a group reason for their thinking and acting.' (Raimo Tuomela, *The Philosophy of Sociality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 9).

[29] Such contracts need to rely on additional enforcement mechanisms, e.g. wages that are higher than in equilibrium, so that employers can threaten employees with job loss (see e.g. Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, „Power and Wealth in a Competitive Capitalist Economy", *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 21(4), 1992, 324-353).

especially as these processes develop over time and not all other participants of an organization may do what they are supposed to do.[30]

Individuals thus need to be aware of the possibility that their professional role will confront them with duties they have not voluntarily entered and with situations in which they do not have full control over the moral meaning of their actions, and that it will affect their character over time. These issues should be taken seriously, rather than downplaying them by relying, implicitly or explicitly, on a picture of perfectly autonomous moral agency that is likely to end in self-delusion – or despair. For the fact that one can encounter moral entanglements and that one's professional role is likely to affect one's personality can lead to a desire to avoid all these problems. This, however, would make one incapable of acting in professional roles at all – it would be an instance of the phenomenon that Hegel has described as the problem of the 'beautiful soul', in a brief but famous discussion in the *Phenomenology*. The 'unhappy consciousness' or 'beautiful soul' is an individual that feels unable to act because it wants to 'preserve the purity of its heart' and ends up fleeing into the inner citadel of inactivity and inner monologue rather than exposing herself to the insecurity of social life, in which the interpretation of her actions has to take place in a common language and in which the consequences of her actions are not fully under her control.[31] As Sax puts it: '… the Beautiful Soul insists [but does not want to accept] that an individual acts always with a certain blindness to his circumstances. Within the deed there is always an opacity which even the doer of the act is not aware of.'[32] But rather than praising the moral purity of the 'Beautiful Soul', Hegel quite harshly dismisses it: 'being conscious of this contradiction in its unreconciled immediacy, is disordered to the point of madness, wastes itself in yearning and pines away in consumption'.[33] The individual who wants to stick to an unrealistic ideal of autonomy in moral judgment and moral agency misunderstands the human condition, one might say, in which all agency retains a degree of uncertainty and of dependency on the social circumstances and the actions and interpretations of others. Of course, there is a sense in which we can never fully know what will happen, even when we act alone, as the future is by definition uncertain – Hegel's discussion concerns moral agency in general, not just agency in one's professional role. But in situations in which one acts in a professional role this problem is aggravated by the facts that one acts according to certain previously defined standards that one may not fully understand or that may be hard to apply to concrete cases, and that one cooperates with other human beings, often also acting within professional roles. The others' action might change the character of one's own – at least, and this is sufficient for my argument, one cannot exclude the possibility that this will be the case.

On the other hand, the kind of cooperation that is institutionalized in mutually supportive professional roles can also help individuals to attain moral goods that they could not attain on their own, or to avoid moral errors that they would make on their own. Imagine the case of a well-defined, morally endorsable professional role: by obeying the imperatives of the role, they can, take on board the collective experience of those who have worked in this role before and helped to improve and refine it. By allowing the role to shape one's character, individuals can achieve a habitual stabilization of desirable traits, for example by becoming more caring for others or by becoming used to obeying certain safety standards. While this may seem

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[30] See e.g. Hans Bernard Schmid, *Moralische Integrität: Kritik eines Konstrukts*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2011, 217ff. on how individual actions depend on others' actions in epistemological, teleological and practical and normative ways. Schmid's case in point, the analysis of one participant of the infamous Milgram experiments, is an extreme case, but one does not have to share his views on this particular example in order to agree with the broader point that there can be cases in which an individual's actions cannot be morally evaluated without taking into account the actions of others.

[31] G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A.V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 400ff.

[32] Benjamin C. Sax, 'Active Individuality and the Language of Confession: The Figure of the Beautiful Soul in the Lehrjahre and the Phänomenologie', *Journal of the History of* Philosophy 21(4) (1983), 437-466, 454.

[33] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 407.

unnecessary, and even disconcerting, for an idealized autonomous agent, for normal mortals it offers a possibility of becoming *more* moral through the psychological processes one undergoes when adapting to a certain professional role. There is thus no reason to reject *tout court* the possibility of being affected by one's professional role. But there are nonetheless moral risks, which I discuss in the next section.

III The moral risks of *déformation professionnelle*

While complete independence from one's professional role is neither psychologically realistic nor *per se* normatively desirable, there are also obvious dangers connected to the identification with it. The most obvious problem is that one can lose an independent perspective on the moral dimensions of one's jobs. The more one gets used to accepting the norms that are taken for granted in one's professional context, the more likely it is that one starts lacking critical distance. This can create epistemological problems: one's ability to 'see' what is going on, morally speaking, is impaired.[34] If one's perspective merges too much with that of one's role, one may, for example, become incapable of asking whether one's organization still fulfils a useful role in the wider society. The tendency of 'confirmation bias'[35] can lead one to systematically ignoring evidence that contradicts one's own perspective from within one's professional role. As mentioned earlier, many professional roles are characterized by strong specialization. While not *necessarily* morally problematic, this phenomenon can add to the inability to keep an objective moral perspective, because one only sees one aspect or part of a more complex process.

In additional, strong identification with one's professional role can lead to motivational problems when one encounters moral problems. If one identifies very strong with one's role, it can become harder to choose the right path, for example because one's self-esteem depends on being seen as a good occupier of that role. This can lead individuals into compliance with its standards even if they would not normally morally endorse them. If one invests a lot in one's professional identity, emotionally speaking, this can make it more challenging to raise one's voice against morally problematic practices one encounters in one's job. In extreme cases, one might become almost addicted to the social ties, or the feeling of being part of something larger, that come with one's professional role. An understanding of one's work as a form of self-realization and as an aspect of a flourishing life, while maybe plausible in other respects, can here be dangerous, for it can induce individuals to identify so much with their professional role that they find it overly hard to keep a more neutral moral perspective and to resist pressures that might lead them on slippery moral slopes.

In this way, professional roles – and in fact many kinds of social roles – can be a danger for individual judgement and individual liberty. As G.A. Cohen puts it, in a comment on Goffman's theory of role-playing:

> There are theories which would engulf personality in role-playing; there are people who present themselves as so engulfed; there are institutions which foster engulfment. The

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[34] Cf. e.g. Frederic Bruce Bird, *The Muted Conscience. Moral Silence and the Practice of Ethics in Business*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Quorum Books, 1996, on moral 'blindness' and 'deafness'. Or, to take a case from one of my interviews: a manager realized that he had lost touch with reality when a mistake about a large sum of money was reported to him, which he shrugged off as being small in comparison to what he usually deals with, until he realized that this money (and its timely and correct payment) makes a huge difference to numerous individuals (December 2012).

[35] Cf. e.g. Max H. Bazerman and Don A. Moore, *Judgment in Managerial Decision Making* (7th edition). Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2009 for an overview.

propensity to engulfment must be resisted in theory and in practice, because it poses a threat to the exercise of our freedom, and, ultimately, to freedom itself.[36]

Of course, these dangers are little surprising if stated in the abstract. Few people would like be described as completely 'engulfed' in their professional role. But this does not mean that individuals might not be self-deceived about these issues. The mechanisms that I have described earlier – from euphemistic language to ethical 'fading' – are here, again, relevant, for they may not only contribute to a subtle change of one's normative standards, but also to deceiving oneself about the degree to which one has already changed them. At the extreme end of such processes are cases in which individuals do not even realize any more that there might be other perspectives than those of their professional roles.[37] This makes it impossible to evaluate *the role itself* from a neutral perspective, which amounts to self-disempowerment as a moral agent who *occupies* this role.

These arguments show that the two extreme positions – complete independence and complete identification – are not plausible for a moral agent who occupies a professional role and wants to be able to encounter moral issues from within it (and to recognize them as such!). This means that some middle position needs to be found. As I will argue in the next section, such a middle position cannot be understood as a static search for one particular point; rather, it should be seen as a temporal process in which reasons from within the role and from outside play a role.

IV Reflection on one's professional role in a temporal perspective

It is a basic fact of human life that we develop our moral perspective over time. While certain basic moral principles are part of our childhood education, it takes time to learn to apply them to concrete cases and to see how best to realize them. Equally, understanding how certain institutions realize moral principles, or fail to do so, is a temporal process. An important aspect of this process is to learn how well different alternatives, both in individual behaviour and in institutional solutions, are at realizing certain values, which compromises might be needed, and what the best overall solution at a given point in time can be – and hence what needs to be accepted as unavoidable, and what needs to be criticized as falling short of the best possible realization of these values in the prevailing circumstances. The process of getting to know and understanding a professional role takes place as part of this broader process. Here, however, we are not only passive observer (as we may be in other cases), but often have to jump into the water before we are able to check all morally relevant facts, because of the mechanisms described above – and even if we were able to do this as a certain point in time, this would give us no guarantee for how our professional role develops over time and what new moral challenges we are going to meet in it.

How should a moral agent relate to these phenomena? Ideally, he or she enters a process of on-going self-examination and reflection about the requirement of his or her professional role, and the right balance between identification and independence. Depending on the institutional context in which this takes place, there may often be a presumption in favour of the moral standards one has learned in one's private life, because institutions can easily 'slide' into immoral practices.[38] But this is not always the case, and one can also imagine cases in which one's professional role presents one with higher moral standards than one had in one's private life, e.g.

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[36] G. A. Cohen, 'Beliefs and Roles', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, LXVII (1966-67): 17-341967, 34.

[37] Another possibility is that individuals fall into what Lifton has called 'doubling' in his description of Auschwitz doctors: the formation of a 'second, relatively autonomous self' that allowed them 'to participate in evil' (*The Nazi Doctors*, 6, and chaps. 19 and 20.

[38] Cf. e.g. Günther Ortmann, *Organisation und Moral. Die dunkle Seite*. Weilerswist: Velbrück Wissenschaft, 2010.

with regard to the adherence to rules that protect a public good, or with regard to non-discrimination along religious lines. There is thus no *a priori* reason to think that *either* the standards of one's professional role *or* the standards one adheres to in one's private life (insofar as they diverge) are always trumping. As Andre, who arrives at a similar conclusion, puts it: 'The Hippocratic oath will trump some other moral requirements, but not all; and which it trumps may well vary from situation to situation.'[39]

In fact, we can understand the philosophical debate about the status of social roles in the light of these ongoing processes of reflection, in which different authors emphasize different stages or aspects. Hardimon's focus is on the fact that social roles exist, as a matter of fact, before we enter them, and have prima facie claims on us, while he also emphasizes that they can only acquire normative force once we have gone through a process of retrospectively endorsing them, in a process of 'role identification'.[40] Doing this will usually mean that we connect the duties implied by our roles with what we normally take to be our general moral duties, together with empirical assumptions about how best to fulfil them and about how institutions contribute to it or are an obstacle to it. The coherence of the obligations of social roles with general moral principles is what Simmons emphasizes. What he describes is, in a sense, the ideal end-state of such a process: a complete clarification and justification of all one's duties and the principles by which they are justified.[41] But often, individuals will still be 'on the way', and when they then encounter moral problems, it is often hard for them to see whether the demands of their professional role or other moral demands have a greater weight. Again, it seems impossible to say anything *in general* about the priority of one side or the other. In fact, we can generalize this point to other social roles as well. While we may sometimes comes close to reflecting on our various roles as a sort of 'naked' self,[42] sitting still at night and talking to one's inner self, another, and maybe more common, form of moral reflection consists in relating our different social roles to one another, and asking how things would look like from their different perspectives, and which moral principles are at stake in them and why. Similarly, the tensions that we can find *within* certain roles[43] can give us occasions for moral reflection. In fact, these tensions within roles or between roles are often such that one cannot help but enter into a reflection process about the best way to deal with them. It would require an outright refusal not to address these moral questions – for, as MacIntyre puts it, even the reflection that is needed within social roles is likely to 'generate reasons for acting beyond those requirements and even sometimes against those requirements.'[44]

Virtue ethical accounts can equally be understood as describing aspects of this process. For example, Swanton distinguishes between 'prototype virtues' and 'role virtues'[45]. The fact that the

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[39] Andre, 'Role Morality', 74.

[40] Hardimon, 'Role Obligations', 358. Sciaraffa ('Identification'), who criticizes this account, argues that it is the way in which role identification can contribute to an individual's good life, by creating meaning and an opportunity for self-determination, which creates the link between roles and the moral duties they imply, making the latter binding on us. It is not clear to me, however, why the contribution to a flourishing life *as such* should make role obligations trumping; it can provide *pro tanto* reasons, but these might well be trumped by other considerations (especially if someone has a problematic understanding of a flourishing life, e.g. an understanding that includes humiliating others).

[41] Simons' analysis depends, to some degree on his suggestion to separate the level of motivation and the level of justification. While this seems a reasonable move in a theoretical account, in our practical experience these will often be narrowly intertwined. Motivational factors, and changes in one's identity, can change one's perceptions of the reasons that are salient in the justification of a moral requirement. There are certainly cases in which the separation can clearly be made, and in which the justification is straightforward anyway – but these are often not the ones for which we need a lot of moral reflection.

[42] Whether or not such a self „behind' all its roles is possible or not is debatable. For some reflections (in the context of the methodology of sociology) see Ralph Dahrendorf, *Homo Sociologicus*, 26.

[43] As Merton has pointed out early in the debate about social roles, social positions usually involve not just one single role, but an 'array of roles,' which creates the potential for conflicts between these different roles (Robert K. Merton, 'The Role-Set: Problems in Sociological Theory', *The British Journal of Sociology* 8(2) (1957), 106-120, especially 110ff.)

[44] Alasdair MacInytre, 'Social Structures and their Threats to Moral Agency', *Philosophy* 74 (1999), 311-329, 326.

former are 'vague' but not 'empty'[46] makes it possible to adapt them to the contexts of different professional fields, in which they are 'refined' or 'extended'.[47] Swanton emphasises that prototype are 'traits of character whose emotional and cognitive features are deeply rooted through early training'.[48] But while this is plausible in many scenarios, there is no reason to think that 'prototype virtues' that one has learned in one's early childhood can always be problematically endorse. For example, someone might have internalized a sense of 'female humbleness' that is in fact not a virtue at all, and realize this when she enters a professional role in which she has to show some self-confidence. The distinction between 'prototype virtues' and 'role virtues' does not offer a guarantee for the direction in which the process of moral reflection needs to go.

Cordell suggests bringing a third element into the discussion about moral reasons that are internal or external to professional roles: he refers to the 'characteristic activity' or 'ergon' of the institution within which it takes places.[49] As he argues, taking into account an institution's specific ergon, in the Aristotelian sense, allow us to assess roles as '*fit for purpose*,'[50] and it is more helpful for this than abstract ideals – a proposal that has been brought forward by Oakley and Cocking[51] – because it relates 'to the distinct good or set of goods it serves'.[52] The problem, however, is that many institutions have not only one ergon, but several, sometimes even conflicting ones, and that the ergon of one institution needs to be evaluated in the wider context of a society. The criticism that Cordell raises against Oakley and Cocking can thus come back at a different, even more concrete level, as the abstract ergon of an institution may be too idealized for guiding ethical actions in concrete cases. The reflection on an ergon can certainly be helpful, but there is no *guarantee* that it provides us with a secure, unchangeable anchor for how we evaluate an institution and our professional role within it.

While these accounts thus all raise important issues with regard to the way in which professional roles can or cannot justify moral obligations, they tend to neglect the way in which we relate to them *in a temporal process*. Both the moral principles we adhere to and the ways in which they are or are not realized in our professional roles are moving targets. While there are some moral principles that are basic enough to be treated as fixed, these are usually not the cases that need much reflection or theorizing. But for the cases for which we could use some theoretical guidance, it is not so clear whether we can provide a *general* formula about whether, for example, role requirements always have to give in to more general principles, or whether such principles might sometimes have to be updated in the light of experiences we make within professional roles. Aiming for clearer statements here would mean to look for more certainty than the phenomena possess. Whether one thinks that role obligations are independent or derived might, in the end, have to do more with one's view of the ontology of the moral realm – e.g. as structured in a hierarchical way in which there are (epistemologically accessible!) first principles from which other moral requirements are derived, or as having a complex structure in which we can be relatively certain of some things, but cannot see all their connections in a clear way – than with how one sees this process of moral reflection.

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[45] Swanton, Christine. "Virtue Ethics, Role Ethics, and Business Ethics." In *Working Virtue. Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, edited by Rebecca L. Walker and Philip J. Ivanhoe, 207–224. Oxford / New York: Clarendon Press, 2007.
[46] Ibid., 211.
[47] Ibid., 214-16.
[48] Ibid., 217.
[49] Cordell, 'Virtuous Persons and Social Roles', 266
[50] Ibid. 265, italics in original.
[51] Justin Oakley and Dean Cocking, *Virtue Ethics and Professional Roles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[52] Cordell, 'Virtuous Persons and Social Roles', 266.

In reflecting on the requirements of our professional role and how they can or cannot be related to other moral principles, it is important not to neglect the level of the psychological processes that we are living through when one adopts a certain professional role. By acknowledging the possibility of 'déformation professionelle' (or the 'déformation' specific to some specific organisation), rather than simply denying that it might affect us,[53] it becomes possible to consciously address it. It is especially in the early phases of entering a professional context that it is worth paying attention to the norms of the context that we might unconsciously take over.[54] But psychological mechanisms such as group thinking or self-serving biases[55] are also at work later in one's professional life, and what makes them so dangerous is that they often work gradually, in small steps that are hard to perceive. The same holds for the changes in organizational cultures and routines that can be crucial for preventing or allowing morally relevant forms of organizational failure, such that one's role can come to require outright immoral actions. These processes require individuals to engage in a process of self-observation, as well as observation of their professional context, in which they pay attention to the little changes that might turn into, or be signs of, more substantial changes.[56] But this also implies that *organizations* have to be set up in ways that make it possible for individuals to do this.

V *Déformation professionnelle* and organizational design

The understanding of one's professional role as a focus for moral reflection opens up a critical perspective on the organizations within which these roles have their place. Many organizations are set up in ways that make it difficult for moral agents to engage in this process. This may have to do with the fact that this process, and the challenges it poses for moral agents, have often not been taken seriously – or that organizations do not take it to be in their interest to allow individuals to do this. While the process of moral reflection and maturing within one's roles is seen as part of a normal life in other spheres, notably the family, and is supported by sympathetic observers and partners in dialogue, this is not always the case within organizations. Those professional roles that are called 'professions' in the Anglophone world have maybe been best at recognizing the need for reflection about one's role, and have, at least in some cases, built institutions that support individuals in it. The idea behind this understanding of a 'profession' is that they come with superior knowledge, and hence a certain responsibility vis-à-vis clients. This constellation, however, can also be found in many other jobs – as mentioned earlier, it is the rule rather than the exception that labour contracts are 'incomplete'. At the same time, many 'professionals' in the narrow sense have to work in organizations in which there is no space and time for these reflections. This is why this critique of organizations can apply across a wide range of organizations, from private companies to public hospitals or universities.

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[53] Cf. similarly Tenbrunse and Messick, 'Ethical Fading', 234, on the role of self-deception when it comes to unethical behaviour on the job: 'By confronting the tendency toward self-deception head on, we will be more likely to reduce its prevalence than if we ignore it and act as if it did not exist. To do otherwise only reinforces this potentially destructive force.'

[54] The opposite is the phenomenon of 'anticipatory socialisation', the tendency of new members (especially ambitious new members) to take over behaviours and opinions of their colleagues and supervisors (cf. e.g. Ortmann, *Organisation und Moral*, 97). As Ortmann comments, this phenomenon contributes to the 'widely lamented conservatism of organisations and the shifting of moral norms among their new members' (ibid.).

[55] See e.g. Mary C. Gentile, *Giving Voice to Values. How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2010, 195ff. for a list of psychological mechanisms that might inhibit moral judgment and moral action.

[56] Business ethicist Mary Gentile recommends, in a similar vein, 'practising', in anticipatory scenarios, the kinds of conflicts or morally salient situations one might encounter, in order to improve one's ability to react to them in morally appropriate ways, rather than being taken by surprise and then giving in to social pressures (*Giving Voice*, cf. especially 74f. on 'normalizing' morally difficult situations in order to be better prepared for them).

What are the requirements for organizations to allow their members to enter into a fruitful process of reflection about their professional role? A first type of problems are situations in which job relations are so precarious and fleeting that individuals do not have a chance to develop a relationship to their professional role at all. With low job security, it might be too risky for individuals to invest emotional or intellectual energy in their job at all.[57] For individuals, this means that they do not have the opportunity to develop a different perspective on the other roles of their life. Their working life can then hardly be a sphere of moral reflection and moral growth for them. While I cannot argue for this at length here, it seems plausible that, ceteris paribus, at least those individuals who wish this should be able to have working life with these characteristics (after all, we spend a considerable amount of our time in our professional roles). Employing individuals who cannot develop a deeper relationship to their professional role may also be problematic for organizations and their ability to fulfil their purpose, for example when they mainly rely on temporary workers who do not care about the organization, its moral character, and its relation to the wider society.[58] If no one in the organization cares about its fate, dysfunctionalities are more likely to occur, and practices can slide into immoral forms of social pressure. This may even be harmful for the organization in a narrowly economic sense, as unattached workers may engage in forms of unethical behaviour such as stealing that directly harm the organization.[59]

At least as great a danger, however, is the opposite case: the problem of a loss of perspective if a complete 'engulfment' in one's professional role is expected or implied by the setup of organizations. Certain forms of organizations, and in particular of organizational cultures, can obstruct the individuals' reflective process vis-à-vis their professional role. This concerns both situations *within* the job and the possibility of *outside* experiences. Within jobs, individuals must have a possibility to raise moral questions, because many issues will come up directly on the job. This is mainly a question of organizational culture: individuals need to be given the opportunity to reflect on, and speak about, moral concerns, without such attempts being ridiculed or informally sanctioned. This means that the organization needs to understand itself in more than purely functional terms.[60] They also need to be seen as a space in which individuals as moral agents live and work and reflect upon the relation of their own values and principles and the values and principles they encounter in their professional role. Rather than trying to 'shape' the personality of their members,[61] organizations should encourage 'voice'[62] and 'moral conversation',[63] as Bird puts it. Also, as Bazerman and Tenbrusel note, in complex organizations, 'the typical ethical dilemma tends to be viewed as an engineering, marketing, or financial problem, even when the ethical relevance is obvious to other groups'[64] – so one obvious step to

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[57] This is a theme in Richard Sennett's (anecdotal-based) account of the end of long-term professional ties in *The Corrosion of Character, The Personal Consequences Of Work In the New Capitalism*, Norton, 1998. To what degree such phenomena prevail in today's labour market is an empirical question beyond the scope of this paper.

[58] Of course, one can also imagine cases in which the organization's purpose is *itself* morally problematic, and hence sabotage from within is, overall, morally desirable. I here assume that

[59] Studies in social psychology indicate that 'moral disengagement' is correlated with different forms of unethical behaviour at work (cf. e.g. Cecilia Moore et al., 'Why Employees Do Bad Things: Moral Disengament And Unethical Organizational Behavior', *Personnel Psychology* 65 (2012), 1-48).

[60] This could also lead to 'moral disengagement' – the study quoted in fn. 59 (despite all qualms one might have about the empirical methodology) supports this important point: if morality is systematically excluded (for example, by using 'euphemistic labelling') from the individual's mind set, the resulting behaviour is less ethical.

[61] One interviewee told me that certain companies deliberately search for young 'insecure overperformers' when recruiting new members, the rationale being that these can be shaped to adopt the company's values more easily. For obvious reasons, I have not been able to verify this information, but there is nothing in the publicly available information about this recruiting process that would contradict it.

[62] Cf. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

[63] Cf. Bird, *The Muted Conscience*, chap. 7.

[64] Bazerman and Tenbrusel, *Blind Spots*, 16.

help individuals to develop their moral perspective is to give them an opportunity to talk to other groups within the organization, or to stakeholders such as clients or neighbours.

While organizational cultures can thus be more or less supportive to the individuals' process of reflection, it is important not to forget that individuals also need time outside of their jobs in order to develop their moral perspective. This makes it problematic if professional roles come with such intense 'embeddedness' that it becomes hard to take on other perspectives. The problem is obvious when employers require their employees to adopt a certain world-view or ideology – but in most cases, things work in more subtle ways. For example, long working hours,[65] combined with informal expectations and social pressures to spend one's free time with one's colleagues, can be a toxic mixture. They can make it difficult to stay 'oneself', or even to even remember what one's *own* principles and values are.

If one considers sociological evidence on the degree of social inclusion, e.g. among higher managers in some industries, and the sheer lack of time, for many individuals, for nurturing other interests and other social ties, it becomes clear that this is not a merely theoretical problem.[66] Sociologists use the term 'hyperinclusion' to describe situations in which individuals voluntarily integrate themselves into the social context of their jobs not only during working hours, but also by taking part in free-time activities and in social networks. This can lead to situations in which all social contacts and all recognition from others take place within the same group, and in which any form of deviating behaviour becomes extremely difficult, because group pressures on the individual, whether at the conscious or at the unconscious level, become enormous, and criticism is seen as a breach of loyalty.[67] The professional context becomes the individuals' 'living space'[68], and in extreme cases it becomes hard to imagine for individuals that they might have an identity outside of their professional context.[69] Such situations might in fact even be dangerous for organizations, because they become so homogeneous that internal correction mechanisms do not work any longer.[70] But what is even more problematic is that such situations constitute a serious threat to the autonomy of the individuals as moral agents.[71]

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[65] Working hours, as well as holiday regulations, are not only an individual but also a societal, and hence political, problem, as they can be regulated by law. As MacIntyre ('Social Structures') rightly emphasizes, there need to be spaces in which individuals are more than the sum of their roles, and can understand themselves as 'someone with an identity other than the identities of role and office that I assume in each of the roles that I occupy.' (315) Individuals need the possibility of private and public encounters in which they can experience and practice their practical rationality. This means that certain economic structures are problematic, but I cannot here discuss the broader issue of the legitimacy of, say, capitalism from the perspective of the individuals' reflection process and their relation to their professional roles.

[66] See e.g. Philine Erfurt, 'Organisation matters (1): Führung als Hyperinklusion', in: R. Ortlieb/ B. Sieben (Hrsg.): *Geschenkt wird einer nichts – oder doch? Festschrift für Gertraude Krell*, Mering: Reiner Hampp Verlag, 2012, 91-96, and the literature quoted there. This research was undertaken with the aim of finding out why minorities (non-males, non-whites…) have such a hard time climbing the ladders of certain organizations. One organization was scrutinized as a case study. The informal networks and the 'hyperinclusion' of those aspiring to become part of the 'inner circle' were found to be among the causes of this phenomenon.

[67] In private conversation, a sociologist involved in this research mentioned the example of a partner at an accounting firm who would rather take two months of unpaid 'holidays' than using his right to parental leave, which has recently been introduced for fathers in Germany.

[68] Erfurt, 'Organisation matters', 93.

[69] From an interview with a former strategy consultant who attended a business summit: 'I hadn't brought my business card, and when I started talking to a banker [and mentioned that, he says]: ,Oh! So you are here without an identity!' Word by word! I started laughing, I asked him whether I looked like I had no identity [...] He turned dark red when he realized what he had said. [...] The conversation was over quickly.'

[70] See e.g. Rost, Katja/Osterloh, Margit (2008): 'You pay a fee for strong beliefs: Homogeneity as a driver of corporate governance failure, Social Science Research Network, Working Paper Series', http://ssrn.com/abstract=1304719 .

[71] On this topic, in a wider context, see also Roessler, 'Meaningful Work'.

Can it be a duty for organizations to nurture, or at least not to hinder, the moral reflection process of their members in which they relate to their professional roles? This depends on a number of contextual factors. In some jobs, e.g. in those in which negligence of one's professional duties has an immediate and morally problematic effect on others, it is likely that the combined weight of the effect on individuals themselves and of the harm that can be done if they fail to see their role in moral terms outweigh other considerations, e.g. of costs or of the advantages of a less open and self-critical culture. Typical examples are medicine and the caring professions. Time pressures and a technocratic culture can create an environment hostile to individuals articulating moral doubts and asking moral questions. In other areas, the moral dimensions are less visible – but that does not mean that they are less urgent there, because the consequences of immoral (or a-moral) practices, while less visible, can be as harmful. This can apply, for example, to capitalist organizations that rely on long value chains that reach into different countries, some of which have weak regulatory structures. More generally, in the last decades many capitalist organizations seem to have developed a culture and a self-understanding that runs counter to the fact that they are also spaces in which human beings work and live, and in which there must be space for raising one's voice when moral issues are at stake.

If one asks which concrete changes might be required in order to address these issues, one can distinguish between two levels of reform. In some cases, what is required are changes of design and culture that do not affect the fundamental structures of an organization – for example, employees need to be given more time and more occasions to connect to others. Sometimes, a viable solution may be to allow *additional* organizations – e.g. professional associations in contrast to capitalist enterprises – to play a role in supporting individuals when they encounter moral questions. The embeddedness in professional groups can help individual to resist institutional pressures in their working environment.[72] This is not to say that professional groups are per se morally better than other organisations,[73] but they can nonetheless offer some independence from immediate social pressures, and thus support the development of an individual's moral perspective. Ideally, they support what is good about professional roles: the habitualization of certain values and the reflection about them in protected social spaces.[74]

Sometimes, however, the inability of individuals to reflect on their professional roles, and the loss of autonomy implied by this, would require more fundamental changes in the structure of institutions. The question then becomes what other goods are at stake, and whether they can justify the moral disempowerment of individuals who take up these specific professional roles. In some areas, it might be required that individuals be highly motivated, and reflection (which often includes self-doubts), while morally desirable, might reduce their ability to fulfil the duties of their role. The question then is whether the goods at stake can justify the loss of autonomy – for example, might the good of national security justify designing military jobs in ways that discourage moral reflection? While it cannot be excluded that *some* goods are weighty enough to justify such jobs, it is far from clear that this is true for all jobs whose structural features today are that individuals have a hard time finding the time, energy, and practical means that allow them to

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[72] Cf. e.g. Larry May, *The Socially Responsible Self. Social Theory and Professional Ethics.* Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996, chap. 6. For example at 118: 'Professional associations should be as willing to step in and protect their members against organizational retaliations as they are to issue codes and guidelines about the appropriate conduct of these professionals.'

[73] Cf. e.g. Ortmann, *Organisation und Moral*, 214 on how the positive image of the 'caring' professions can be abused by pharmaceutical companies in their advertisement.

[74] There is, of course, a great tradition behind the idea that professional groups play a crucial role in socializing individuals and transporting certain values (and to which May (see fn. 72 above) relates). Cf. for example the discussion by Emile Durkheim in his preface on professional associations, in: *Über soziale Arbeitsteilung. Studie über die Organisation höherer Gesellschaften.* Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992.

reflect on their professional role and the way in which it might change them.[75] One can also ask whether the effects on individuals' lives could be mitigated in other ways, e.g. by limiting the number of years they spend in such jobs.

A second question in this context, however, is whether it is desirable, or even permissible, to have *organizations* that do *not* have the kind of moral control that comes from (at least some of) their members thinking about their professional role in moral terms and reflecting about the moral challenges of their professional role, and how they relate to their own moral standards. The idea that individuals in organizations could function like 'cogs in wheels' assumes that all moral responsibility lies at the top of organizations. But while it may be true that 'the tone is set at the top', for 'the top' to even *know* what moral challenges the organization confronts, other members need to be willing to communicate them to it. An organization that does not rely on its own members for doing this would require much more control from the top and maybe from the outside.[76] But it is questionable whether this is feasible. There are too many ways in which organizations and their formal and informal rules can 'drift', i.e. slowly change their character, in processes that are often imperceptible at the beginning, but then become self-reinforcing.[77] Without individuals paying some attention, organizations can too easily drift into morally problematic waters.[78]

To conclude, however, let me come back to the question I started with: how should individuals relate to their professional roles? As we have seen, this is a question that has not only an individual, but also a social answer. In the end, the question is what kind of society we want to live in and what kind of professional roles we want it to have: professional roles that can only be described in purely functional terms and that do not allow the individuals to have a work life that is also a space for moral development and moral growth – or professional roles that are such that individuals can relate to them as moral agents, taking into account the temporal dynamics of what it means to work in a certain context and, to some degree, be shaped by it, but without losing a moral perspective.

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[75] Another question, which I cannot discuss fully here, is whether it might sometimes be justified to use soft paternalistic means for preventing individuals for voluntarily taking on jobs that lead to the kind of disempowerment that comes from complete 'engulfment' in one's professional role. This seems to be an area where social ties among friends, family members and colleagues, and a certain care for one another (at least in the sense of a duty of warning) play an important role, but sometimes state measures might also be justified.

[76] A theoretical alternative would be some sort of Hegelian figure *à la* 'reason in history' that brings about certain aims behind the back of the individuals involved in it. While some might think that 'market competition' is somehow akin to this, there are too many empirical counterexamples

[77] Cf. e.g. Ortmann, *Organisation und Moral*, 30ff., 158ff.

[78] Of course, the individuals' responsibility is correlated with their power within the organization – the role model set by top-management, for examples, plays an central role. But one can also imagine cases in which changes at lower levels of the hierarchy make a considerable difference (e.g. when a certain amount of lying to customers becomes 'habitual' among sales people).