**CHAPTER 4: BECOMING AN ETHICAL PROFESSIONAL**

**Lecture Notes**

This chapter looks at the ways in which one’s morals develop. We can now start applying the abstract concepts of the first three chapters within the Criminal Justice field. It’s interesting to examine the reality that people’s beliefs don’t always guide their actions.In this section we look at some of the possible causes of bad behavior. Some resist the study of “causes,” as it seems to them that doing so may excuse bad behavior.

Certain biological factors have been shown to affect behavior. As anyone who watches television knows, there is a thriving economy based on medications meant to boost serotonin levels, reduce anxiety, promote sleep, etc. Injury or chemical deficiency in the brain can result in changes in behavior and even in moral decision-making. Further, studies show behavioral differences between the sexes: women are more inclined to show empathy and sensitivity, while men are more inclined to exhibit antisocial behavior. Shermer suggests that human morality evolved as a trait necessary for survival.

Opposing biological theory is learning theory. Learning theory suggests that we are born as a blank slate and shaped by our environment (including, prominently, our parents). We mimic and learn not only behaviors but also morals and ethics. Behavioral learning takes two forms: modeling (we copy those we admire) and reinforcement (behavior is modified through the use of rewards and punishments). When our behavior does not match our beliefs, we feel a discomfort known as “cognitive dissonance,” which can only be resolved by changing either the behavior or the beliefs. Suppressing one’s ethics can take several forms, as Bandura suggests. For instance, it is easier to plan a crime when the victim remains unknown or otherwise dehumanized. There are seven methods in of suppressing self-regulation described in the chapter (see outline for list).

Another theory suggests that as people mature physically, cognitively, and emotionally, they also develop their ethical and moral beliefs. Kohlberg suggests that this development takes place in specific, ordered steps. As children, we are motivated purely by personal interests, then mature to a point where we understand our place in society and the attendant responsibilities. A rare few develop even further, to a so-called “post-conventional” level, where their morals reflect what is best for all societies.

The goals of the country’s first colleges included ethical and philosophical instruction. Today, most professional schools (law school, medical school, etc) still require some study in the ethics of the profession. Sherman laid out the components of a course of study of ethics in the Criminal Justice system. One of the challenges in the area of professional ethics in Criminal Justice is the fact that regardless of what is taught formally, new employees (especially front-line officers like patrol officers and correctional officers) are often encouraged to forget what was taught in the classroom in favor of on-the-job training.

Trautman describes how an organization can descend into unethical behavior, via a path termed the “corruption continuum.” Administrative apathy toward employee integrity and a policy of ignoring obvious ethical problems creates a culture of perceived hypocrisy and fear. Individual employees react to such a culture by adopting a “survival of the fittest” mentality which leads directly to unethical behavior. Thus, ethical organizations must have ethical administrators who take affirmative steps to encourage ethical behavior from the employees.

The chapter concludes with the beginning of the application of these ethical concepts to the police specifically. In any police department, there is a strong emphasis on chain of command and following orders. Front-line employees may not feel that they can resist an immoral instruction; yet following an illegal order is not a legitimate defense for one’s unethical behavior. Acquiring knowledge and skills in the classroom does not necessarily equip one with moral sense, which is compounded when one’s on-the-job training might not correspond to what was taught previously. Cynicism and burnout are two effects of the job that can lead to unethical behavior, and which can be avoided through such strategies as surrounding one’s self with ethical colleagues and seeking self-fulfillment outside the job.

**Key Terms**

bounded ethicality Kohlberg’s moral stages reinforcement

developmental theories modeling self-efficacy

ethical fading recognition tests