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Professional Ethics and Morality

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Chapter-46**Professional Ethics and Morality****—DESH RAJ SIRSWAL**

“We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants.”

—Omar Bradley (Major General of the Army, USAFR)

Dr. S.R Tater, former Vice- chancellor, is well known educationist, philosopher and social worker. I met him in International Conference some time back and became his admirer. His life is based on ethics and morality of high order. The cardinal values of honesty and pristine purity are part and parcel of Dr. Tater’s life. What he is today due to his hard work, honesty, punctuality and dedication. He is a man of word and action. His creativity always got admiration.

Modern educational thoughts have made a powerful impact on civilized persons. The learner is a partner in the process of learning in our age. He is a disciple and is going to be a consumer as well as customer. There is a shift from education as a means of welfare and awareness to commercialization of education. In this background, Professional Ethics is partly comprised of what a professional should or should not do in the work -place. It also encompasses a much greater part of the professional’s life. If a professional is to have ethics then that person needs to adopt that conduct in all of his dealings. Another aspect of this is the enhancement of the profession and the industry within which the professional works. It concerns a professional’s conduct and behaviour while carrying out their professional work that is work for the good of the community and mankind. In this paper it is an attempt to draw out a relation between Professional Ethics and Morality.

The Definition of Morality

The term “morality” can be used either (1) descriptively to refer to a code of conduct put forward by a society or, (a) some other group, such as a religion, or (b) accepted by an individual for his/her own behavior, (2) normatively to refer to a code of conduct that, given specified conditions, would be put forward by all rational persons. In other words, “morality” is used to refer to a code of conduct put forward by any actual group, including a society, whether or not it is distinguished from etiquette, law and religion, then it is being used in a descriptive sense and it refers to important attitudes of individuals. “In universal normative sense, it need not have either of the two features that are essential to moralities referred to by the original descriptive sense: that it be a code of conduct that is put forward by a society and that it be accepted as a guide to behaviour by the members of that society. Indeed, it is possible that “morality” in the normative sense has never been put forward by any particular society, by a group at all, or even by any individual who regards it as over-riding.”¹

The following definition of morality incorporates all of the essential features of morality as a guide to behaviour that all rational persons would put forward for governing the behaviour of all moral agents. “Morality is an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal.”² This definition allows meaningful the commonly asked question, “Why should I be moral?” It is also compatible with the commonly held view that it is not always irrational to be immoral, however it guarantees that it is never irrational to be moral. This definition also explains why we want others to act morally and why others want us to act morally. It thus does what definitions of referring terms are supposed to do: it clarifies this term’s relationship to other terms with which it is related, and helps to explain why we use the word in the way that we do.

When we come to our education system we can see that our education loses its moral punch. Permeating our educational system is the belief that we must not teach moral values which delineate right and wrong. Chuck Miller writes that “A 1986 poll of educators listed rape, robbery, assault, burglary, arson, bombings, murder, suicide, absenteeism, vandalism, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, gang warfare, pregnancy, abortion and venereal disease.”³ There are three types of moral theories in normative ethics. First, the utilitarian theory suggests that plans and actions should be evaluated by their consequences. The underlying idea is that plans or actions should produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Second, the theory based on rights. Examples are the rights to freedom of conscience, free-speech and due process. A number of those rights can be found in the various constitutions of different countries of the world. Third,

the theory of justice demands that decision makers be guided by fairness and equality, as well as impartiality.⁴

Ethics in Different Professions

All persons, whether in business, government, educational institutes, or any other professions are concerned with ethics. *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* defines ethics as “the organization or criticism of conduct in terms of notions like, good, right or welfare... Ethics is the secular and critical manner of taking account of the rationalizing process in human conduct. Its temper is non-mystical, and its orientation is social rather than theological.”⁵

In the same sense personal ethics has been referred to as, “the rules by which an individual lives his or her personal life.”⁶ In the Business profession, managers are facing many situations that require ethical judgment, but they are not easy to answer. These have a responsibility to create an organizational environment that fosters ethical decision making by institutionalizing ethics. It means that applying and integrating ethical concepts into daily action. Theodore Parcel and James Weber suggest that this can be accomplished in three ways:

- 1) by establishing appropriate company policy or a code of ethics.
- 2) by using a formally appointed ethics committee.
- 3) by teaching ethics in management development programmes.⁷

The most common way to institutionalize ethics is to establish a code of ethics; much less common is the use of ethics board committees.

Difference between Professional Ethics and Morality

Morals or moral values are generally associated with personal view of values, which reflect beliefs relating to sex, drinking, gambling, etc. They can reflect the influence of religion, culture, family and friends. Ethics is concerned with how a moral person *should* behave. Ethical values are beliefs concerning what is morally right and proper as opposed to what is simply correct or effective. i.e. an individual may personally believe that drinking is immoral. However, drinking is not, in and of itself, unethical. Further, it is unethical to impose your personal moral values on another.

Ethical values transcend cultural, religious, or ethnic differences. Ethical values embrace a more universal worldview. The Josephson Institute of Ethics recommends six core ethical values to abide by: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. Whether the circumstance is business or life, ethical values

should be ground-rules for behaviour. When we live by these values we are demonstrating that we are worthy of trust.⁸ In this regard, we can define ethics basically in normative framework.

Code of Professional Ethics

A Code is a statement of policies, principles or rules that guide behaviour. Certainly, codes of ethics do not apply only to business enterprises, but they should guide the behaviour of persons in all organizations and in every life, so that we named it "Professional Ethics". The major international codes include the Nuremberg Code (1946); the World Health Organization's Definition of Health (1946); the Declaration of Tokyo Co torture, detention and imprisonment (1975); and the World Health Organization's Proposed International Guidelines for Biomedical Research involving human Subjects.⁹ In the present time, every profession has its own codes, to practise by their professionals. For example, *The Psychological Society of Ireland* consists of four overall ethical principles, in their code, which subsumes a large number of specific ethical standards. I have quoted it whole and these are given below:

Principle 1: Respect for the rights and dignity of the person

"This principle requires of psychologists that they treat their clients as persons of intrinsic worth with a right to determine their own priorities, that they respect clients' dignity and give due regard to their moral and cultural values. Psychologists shall take care not to intrude inappropriately on clients' privacy.

They shall treat as confidential all information (including oral, verbal, written and electronic) obtained in the course of their work, except where the law requires disclosure. As far as possible, they shall ensure that clients understand and consent to whatever professional action they propose.

Principle 2: Competence

Psychologists must constantly maintain and update their professional skills and ethical awareness. They shall recognize that psychological knowledge and their own expertise and capacity for work are limited, and take care not to exceed the limits.

Principle 3: Responsibility

In their professional and scientific activities, psychologists are required to act in a trustworthy, reputable and accountable manner towards clients and the community. They shall avoid doing harm to clients and research participants, and act to prevent harm caused by others. They shall co-operate with colleagues and other professionals to ensure the best service to clients, and act positively to resolve ethical dilemmas. They

shall ensure that those whom they supervise act ethically. In research with animals, they shall take care to treat the animals humanely.

Principle 4: Integrity

Psychologists are obliged to be honest and accurate about their qualifications, the effectiveness of the services which they offer, and their research findings. They shall take steps to manage personal stress and maintain their own mental health. They shall treat others in a fair, open and straightforward manner, honour professional commitments, and act to clarify any confusion about their role or responsibilities.

Where possible, they shall avoid the use of deception with research participants. They shall not use the professional relationship to exploit clients, sexually or otherwise, and they shall deal actively with conflicts of interest. They shall take action against harmful or unethical behaviour in colleagues or members of other professions.”¹⁰

In the view of the Society thinks that psychologists develop and apply knowledge about human cognition and behaviour. They accept that codes of ethics are necessary to protect the interests of clients and prevent misuse of psychological knowledge. In joining the Society, members agree to comply with the Code’s provision.¹¹ In the same manner ethical code is a need of the present time for every profession, so that we can create a just and healthy society for our fellow beings. Computer Societies around the world such as the IEEE and national bodies in Australia, Singapore, the UK and other countries have on their websites professional codes of ethics to consider and adopt in the way professionals conduct themselves in and out of the work place. Ethical codes provide for the most part only ethical conclusions, principles, or injunctions, not the careful and difficult ethical reasoning and multidisciplinary collaboration which will be required in applying those principles to specific ethical dilemmas in a variety of circumstances.

A person takes decision and acts mostly on the basis of his intuitive moral sense. This intuitive moral judgment in turn, is derived from the world-view he entertains. Finally it is the life-view a person adopts that determines the course of action he judges to be moral. Patnaik says, “So all those debates that now cluster around the issues like environmental ethics, biomedical ethics, business ethics, the problem of equality, the question of cruelty to animals, etc. finally depend on the life -view provided by such systems of thought as Utilitarianism, Paternalism, Egotism, etc.”¹² Personal ethics, morality, and integrity will strongly influence a person’s professional ethical conduct. Integrity means wholeness or completeness—continuity of life in all its actions. We must not delude ourselves or the people we lead by thinking that we can practice conduct.

This paper may conclude with some ancient sayings which reflect the previous discussion of Professional Ethics and Morality in the present time: “When one sees all beings in his own self and his own Self in all beings, one loses all fear.” “When one sees this great Unity and the self has become all beings, no sorrow can afflict him.”¹³

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