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PROFESSIONAL ETHICS--DISCUSSION PAPER

Part I : **Orientation**

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The need that medical practitioners have for a thorough grounding in **medical ethics** is now widely recognized, and often supplied.

There is far less recognition of a similar need in other **professions.** But why? And what is a profession anyhow?

Professional ethics is a systematic study of responsibility in decision-making by a person who has achieved power by accepting the discipline required for gaining understanding and overcoming illusions in some unified body of knowledge (e.g. medicine, law, engineering, accountancy, education) and who supplies that knowledge to others who lack that particular power.

Ethics requires familiarity with **responsibility**, as experienced in conscience, along with some understanding of (a) the value of intelligent decisions, and of (b) the difference between responsibility and irresponsibility.

Education in Ethics

Education in ethics, as in other subjects, requires (a) the **presentation** by a teacher of experiential data (whether sense data or some data of consciousness) suitably arranged for the student to **discover** some relevant intelligible relationship, and (b) further presentation of data that may allow the student to find alternative relationships and to **verify** whether one of these may apply to a whole range of applications.

The data must be that of decision-making itself. The problem is that this is hard to come by in merely experimental or pedagogical situations, as all decisions are part of real life, and bad decisions may do great harm.

Spiritual Direction is a profession that has found a way out of this difficulty. Attention is directed to the small decisions that are made in order to facilitate the implementation of some more major decision-- such as the decision to spend some definite time in prayer. These minor decisions provide a rich field of experience in responsibility and in irresponsibility. And this experience may trigger some **discoveries** about one's own power of introducing changes into the world.

Another opening for education in ethics is suggested by the word "**conscience**", which clearly has the greatest importance in this area, as it does, too, in the area of morality (which is the whole field of every-day common sense decisions, prior to critical analysis of them).

In French and Italian the word that translates our "conscience" translates also our word "**consciousness**". So an investigation of consciousness can be of considerable help.

A Theory of Human Learning

Data of consciousness can be provided copiously by exercising oneself (or one's students) in **inquiry** (the power behind every question that we ask), in **understanding** (the power to find order in disorder, to make sense out of what seems--in its first presentation--to be a hopelessly insolubly puzzle), and in **judging** (the power to distinguish between truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, reality and illusion).

Knowledge is the content of intelligent and verified assent, so this process leads to knowledge. It is a process of **learning**, so an understanding of the relationships between inquiry, understanding, and judging, (as well as sensation) can be thought of as a theory of human learning. And, if we incorporate into this scheme decision-making and its implementation in action, we have a theory of the structure of human consciousness.

Important preparation for Ethics

My experience has been that a thorough grounding in the theory of **human learning** is an excellent preparation for a short course in ethics. Indeed, without such grounding the ethics can easily become detached from "the real world" of everyday human activity. But once one has learned to attend confidently to human consciousness and to recognize all that this means about one's powers as a human being, then one is thoroughly alive to the importance and accessibility of that area of consciousness that we call "**conscience**".

This experience has been drawn from extensive courses to children aged eleven, to students of theology in Melbourne and in Papua New Guinea, and from many shorter one- or two-day courses on management to senior executives.

Working with Mr John Little, an engineer and management consultant, I was surprised to find that after an introduction to Human Learning and Reality the executives moved on spontaneously to ask questions in ethics with considerable bite. So now we bring ethics directly into the latter parts of the two-day course. I would urge any other teacher of ethics to ensure that such a preparation has been given.

Part II : **Can there be any real Professional Ethics?**

A.M. Krohn

Part III : **Place within a Philosophy Course**
which be abridged in various ways
to suit
A VARIETY OF PROFESSIONS

(Sections 1, 2, 7, &8 of the following 14-section course would be basic, with the optional inclusion of parts of sections 4,5,or 6)

1. Human Learning

2. Reality

3. Blinkers on reality
   Rediscovering philosophies through cognitional models

4. Reaching into the universe
   - Description
   - Explanation
   - Clockwork
   - Probability
   - Life: organisation
     - Levels of organisation
       - Potentiality
       - Intelligibility
       - Fact
       - Initiative (freedom)
       - Love

5. Basic humanity
   - Life
   - Body
   - Soul - Animal
     - Human
   - Spirit
   - Soul and Body
   - Freewill
   - Love
   - Goals
   - Culture

6. Human inventions
   - Culture
   - Technology
   - Language
   - Literature
   - Law

7. Human opportunities (General Ethics)
   - Constraints
   - Norms
   - Flourishing

8. Making decisions (Special Ethics)

9. Allowing for human inperfections (Dialectic)

10. Our furthest reach (General Transcendent Knowledge)
    Explanations
    Ultimate explanation
    The notion of God
    Loss of God

11. Beyond expectations (Special Transcendent Knowledge)
    The problem of evil
    Basic solution to the problem of evil
    Heuristic structure of the solution
    Faith

12 "Healing and Creating in History"

13 Dialogue with the past
    The eight functional specialties

14. Confronting thinkers
    Samples of history of philosophy
        (using Functional Specialties)
    Samples of history of culture,
                of ideas,
                of theology.

Part IV : **A Very Brief Introduction to Ethics**

See "What is Ethics?"

Persons and Morals Eth 4214.ETH

(pages 1-4)

WHAT IS ETHICS?

Ethics is the science of responsibility, enabling us to distinguish between **right** and **wrong**, that is, between good **choices** and evil choices, and to explain our choices and our obligations. In ethics types of right and wrong are classified and compared.

Ethics is part of philosophy, and so is more **reflective** than morality, but ethics and morality are closely connected.

Morality is simply the rightness or wrongness of human actions and the goodness or badness of the people who choose to do them.

Because each of us is **responsible** for every decision we make, everyone is **involved** in morality in every free choice, but only those who **ask why** any particular choice is right or wrong are doing ethics.

The Basis of Conscience

A right or wrong choice is **accompanied**, respectively, by a feeling of inner peace in acting responsibly or of uneasiness in acting irresponsibly and such **conscious feelings of responsibility and irresponsibility** are the basis of conscience . These conscious feelings are present independently of whether or not we attend to them, whether or not we can name them, and whether or not we can explain why the decision makes us feel good or bad.

A judgment of conscience is a judgment that a present or prospective decision is responsible or irresponsible as compared intelligently with all such previous experiences of responsibility or irresponsibility. Ethics investigates **the meaning of** such responsibility or irresponsibility and the **source** of such inner peace or uneasiness.

How Ethics can help Conscience

Persons who frequently act irresponsibly gradually **repress** their feeling of uneasiness and so start making **unsound** judgments of conscience. They come to live under an **illusion** and start deceiving themselves by rationalizations. A rationalization is a poor excuse, one that could not really be justified.

In **unfamiliar circumstances** when unaccustomed options come before us we find it harder to relate the issue intelligently to our past experiences. At such times moral judgments based on mere commonsense are **harder** to make accurately.

The reflection undertaken in ethics can **help to clarify** such unfamiliar issues and support intelligent commonsense by helping us to understand the meaning of responsibility and of right or wrong and good or bad.

The Difference between Good and Evil in General

Good basically means what is desirable, but to be able to make a truly human decision we must progress through three levels of desire.

On the first level, of **mere feeling**, pleasure is desirable and pain is undesirable. (I am attracted by sweets, but shy away from the pain of intensive sports training.)

But in some instances pleasure is possibly undesirable and pain can be **intelligently grasped as** desirable. This gives a second level of consideration, that of understanding. (I may find that sweets are making me too fat, so that I become unhealthy. A pain may help the doctor to discover some serious health risk.)

On a third level we can make reliable judgments that a particular state of affairs is **really desirable, all things considered**, or, on the other hand, undesirable when viewed in the light of all the facts. This third level gives us what is **really** good. Sometimes this is called a value. It saves us from illusions. (The need to ask a range of questions is illustrated by the action of making a gift, which in the abstract is good, but which becomes bad if my motivation was bribery or if the object given did not belong to me.)

Good, **in general**, helps build up the object concerned. (A good car can travel safely and economically. It has all that a car ought to have.)

Thus **a good action or event** is an enhancement of the the object, in a way that leaves that object open to further enhancement of the same sort. (The addition of the right amount of oil is good for the car.)

An evil event is a deprivation in the object concerned that closes it off from enhancement. (Losing a wheel is bad for the car.)

Human Good

Human good is what is good for a human being, that is, an enhancement of a human being which enables it to flourish and leaves it open to further enhancement.

It can be **physical**, like eating food,

or **spiritual**, like learning or helping another person or contributing to the common good,

or **supernatural**, like receiving a sacrament.

Human evil is a deprivation of a human being that closes it off from its proper development.

Moral Good

Moral good is a choice of a human good while allowing for **integral human fulfillment.** This must include:

(a) a choice of some basic human good, such as health or truth.
(b) a choice to choose well, for example, fairly and courageously.
(c) no choice of human evil.

Moral evil is a choice incompatible with integral human fulfillment. (Thus, lying is incompatible with truth and communication, stealing is incompatible with friendship.)

Notice that, to be judged good, an action has to be considered under every aspect. But the act is wrong if it rejects even one of those requirements for goodness.

The Central Question of Ethics

Am I choosing (either as a main aim or as a means) to act **against** life, truth, beauty, ~~performance,~~ achievement (in work or play), integrity, responsibility, friendship, or religion?

or **without**
fairness, patience, team-spirit,
commitment, courage, self-control, objectivity,
or openness to each of the basic human goods?

If so, I am doing wrong.

OR, ON THE OTHER HAND,

Is any violation (that I foresee) of one of these values

not something that I choose in itself,

not part of my total plan of action,

nor without fairness, patience, team-spirit, etc.?

In this case I am not doing wrong.

A useful test

Can I honestly say that my project would be as well fulfilled if the foreseen violation of such a value were not to occur?

Explanation: I am responsible only for my own choices, but I must realize that choosing something, even reluctantly, as a means to an end definitely involves my own personal responsibility. On the other hand, any action at all has some unwanted side-effects, but life would be impossible if there were an obligation to refrain from every action just because of side effects. (Example: Full-time study of law has the side effect of preventing me from qualifying in medicine.)

Some useful (but by no means necessary) references

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