

PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AS AN IMPETUS TOWARDS SOLVING GLOBAL CHALLENGES IN AFRICA

Magdalyn Aboh, (Ph.D)
Department of Philosophy,
Federal University,
Wukari, Nigeria.

Abstract

The objectives of calling for professional ethics are to understand the moral values that ought to guide any profession. To resolve the moral issues in the profession and justify the moral judgement concerning the profession thus, it is intended to develop a set of beliefs, attitudes, and habits that professionals should display concerning morality. In this vein, the essence of professional ethics is to increase one's ability to deal effectively with moral complexity, cognitive skills, that is skills of intellect in thinking clearly on issues concerning morals and to act in morally desirable ways, towards moral commitment and responsible conduct. Thus, the paper shall examine the concept of profession, the idea of professional roles, features of professions, principles of professional ethics, the concept of ethics, divine command of ethics, moral dilemma, solution to moral dilemma, moral autonomy. Then the paper will round-up with conclusion.

A profession is any job that requires advanced expertise that is skilled knowledge, self-regulation, and concerted service to the public good. It brings a high status, socially and economically, with its features as advanced expertise, self-regulation and public good. In this light, a professional is a 'person' as well as a 'status' as it relates to a person or any work that a professional does with professional, and display the required expertise or skills and knowledge, with self-regulation and results in public good, while professionalism is the status of a professional which implies certain attitudes or typical qualities that are expected of a professional. According to Macintyre as quoted in Naagarazan (2006:29) professionalism is the

services related to achieving the public good, with the practices of the knowledge of moral ideals.

While ethics is a theoretical discipline which attempts to discover why any action is right or wrong. Thus, ethics or moral philosophy differ from ordinary reasoning in everyday life to the extent of justifying reasons are pursued in the level of their generality (Aja. 1996:23).

Ethics in Aristotle's view, constitutes a body of objective knowledge. In this sense it is a science of correct conduct that guides us towards the goal of achieving human excellence. Aristotle and Plato share the same view as they believed that for an individual in a particular set of circumstances, there is a morally correct way of acting (Lawhead 2002:80). Thus, the paper shall examine the concept of professor, the ideal professional roles, features of professions, principles of professional ethics, the concept of ethics, divine command of ethic, moral autonomy, then the paper is rounded up with conclusion.

The Concept of Profession

According to Naagarazan (2006:29), profession is defined as any occupation that requires advanced expertise that is skills and knowledge, self-regulation, and concerted service to the public good. It brings a high status, socially and economically. Thus the features of a profession are as follows:

1. **Advance Expertise:** Here various professions need sophisticated skills that is, know how, and theoretical knowledge that is the know-how and why. At this point formal education, training, continuing education, updating are required.
2. **Self-Regulation:** Professional societies influence the essential role in setting standards for admission to profession by drafting codes of ethics, enforcing standards of conduct and representing the profession before the public and the government.
3. **Public Good:** The job or occupation supplies some important public good, by concerted efforts to maintain ethical standards such as, a physician promoting health, a lawyer protects the legal rights, an engineer provides a product or a project for use by the public towards health, welfare, and safety. Teaching is also claimed or designed as a profession as it helps shaping and training the minds of the students, young as well as the old.

There are certain arguments on how or what jobs are to be classified as professional jobs. Such jobs like carpenter, barbers, porters and drivers. Here, a driver who is engaged by a travel agency to drive various types of cars for tourist leads to courtesy of the customers, requires education, a valid driving license and

respect to the public. Here his job may be referred to as a profession. While a mercenary is not a professional as he acts against public good.

In this vein (Naagarazan 2006:29) the term professional means a ‘person’ as well as a status. It relates to person or work that a person does on profession, and that which demands expertise that is skills and knowledge, self-regulation and results in public good.

While professionalism according to Macintgre in Naagarazan (2006:29) is defined as the services related to achieving the public good, in addition to the practice of the knowledge of moral ideals. Thus, professionalism is the status of a professional that implies certain attitudes or typical qualities that are expected of a professional.

With this the categories for achieving and sustaining professional or professionalism are:

1. **Advanced Expertise:** These are sophisticated skills and theoretical knowledge in exercising judgement. Thus, a professional should analyse the problem in specific known area, in an objective manner.
2. **Self-Regulation:** Here one should analyse the problem independent of self-interest and direct the decision towards the best interest of the customers. With this the judgement should be unbiased and based on merits only. With this situation, the codes of conduct of professional societies are observed as guidance.
3. **Public Good:** An individual should not be a mere paid employee of an individual or teaching college or manufacturing organisation, to carry out whatever the employer wants an individual to do. The job should be acknowledged by the public. The concerted efforts in the job should be towards promotion of the welfare, safety, and health of the public.

Ideal Professional Roles

The promotion of public good is the major concern of professional ethic. As these models motivate their thinking, attitudes and actions.

Savior and Guardian Roles: The professional as a savior and guardian, saves the society from poverty; illiteracy, wastage, inefficiency, ill-health, human (labour) dignity and leads it to prosperity, through technological advancement and social planning. While as a guardian, he protects the interest of the poor and general public. Since he is conversant with technological advancement, is given the powers befitting his expertise to determine what is good for the society (Naagarazan, 2006:31).

As a Social Servant, Enabler and Catalyst: As a professional he exhibits social responsibility, and he translates the interest and aspirations of the society into a reality, remembering or knowing that his true master is the society as a whole. Thus, as he changes the society through technology, the professional has to assist the management and the society to acknowledge their needs or goals and make bring them to light decisions on the desirable technological advancement and minimize the bad effects of technology on the masses and their environment. In effect he shines as a social enabler and a catalyst for further advancement (Naagarazan, 2006:31).

A Royal Model: A professional is neither a servant nor a master. He is an assertive player, not a passive player who may carry out his master's voice. He plays a unique role successfully within the organization, enjoying the excitement of the professional and having the satisfaction of surging ahead in a competitive world (Naagarazan 2006:31).

Features of Professions

The features of a 'profession' are different from these of 'non-professional occupation' are as follows:

1. **An Extensive Training:** Belonging to a profession demands an extensive period of training of intellectual that is competence and moral, that is integrity character. It is clear, that the theoretical base is obtained through formal education, usually in an academic institution. This could be a Bachelor degree from either a College, University or an advanced degree conferred by professional schools (Naagarazan 2006:30).
2. **Knowledge and Skills:** Here the knowledge, skills and competence are essential for the well-being of the society. Like the knowledge of physicians protects us from disease and restores health. While the lawyer's knowledge is essential when we are sued for a crime, or if our school, business, etc. is to be merged or closed or when we buy a property while the knowledge, study, and research of the engineer are needed for the safety of the air plane, for technological advancement and for national defence.
3. **Monopoly Acquirement:** Monopoly control is ascertained in two various ways;
 - a) The professional has to convince the community that only those who have graduated from the professional schools should be allowed to hold the professional title. While the profession also gains control over professional schools by establishing accreditation standards (2006:30).
 - b) The profession has to be persuading the community to have a licensing system for those who want to enter the profession. That is emphasising that practicing without licence, they are liable to pay penalties (2006:30).

4. **Autonomy in Work Place:** Here the professional engaged in private practice have great freedom in selecting his clients. It is clear that even the professional working in a big organizations exercises a large degree of impartiality, creativity and care with decision making and communication in carrying out his responsibility. Apart from this, professionals are equipped with certain rights to establish their autonomy. While the physicians have to determine the most ideal medical treatments for their clients the lawyers have to decide on the most successful defence for their clients. Thus, the possession of specialized knowledge is a great or powerful weapon of defence of professional autonomy (2006:31).
5. **Ethical standards:** Ethically, professionals societies enact the code of conducts to regulate the professional against their abuse of any unethical decisions and actions like impartiality and responsibility affecting the individuals, groups or the society.

In the school environment, according to Burns et al (2008:46) in National Association of School Psychologists (2010:4) it is ethically permissible to provide school based consultation service regarding a child or adolescent to a student assistance team or teacher without informed parent consent as long as the resulting interventions are under the authority of the teacher and within the scope of typical classroom intervention. Thus, within this framework, it is expected that school psychologists will make careful, reasoned, and principled ethical choices that will be based on knowledge of this code, recognizing that responsibility for ethical conduct rests with the individual practitioners (2010:2).

Principles of Professional Ethics

According to National Association of Professional Ethics (2010:2), the principles for professional ethics, like all codes of ethics, provides only limited guidance in making ethical choices. But individual judgement is essential to apply the code to situations that arise in professional practice. Here, in Jacobs – Timm view (1999:205-217) ethical dilemmas may be caused by situation including competing ethical principles, conflicts between ethics and law, clashing interests of several parties, the dual roles of employee and clients advocate, or due to the fact that it is difficult to decide how statements in the code apply to a specific situation. In this vein, situations like this, are often complicated and may demand a nuanced application of these principles that may result to a resolution that leads to the greatest benefit to the client and the concerned others. In cases where difficult situations arise, experts are encouraged to use a systematic problem-solving process to identify the best course of action. Here this process should include specifying the ethical issues involved, by consulting these principles, consulting colleagues with greater expertise,

evaluating the rights and welfare of all affected parties, considering alternative solutions and their results or effects and accepting responsibility for decisions made.

In American Psychological Association (2002:1060) the principle for professional ethics may demand a standard of conduct than law, and in those situations or cases in which both apply, experts are required to keep to the principles. If there are conflicts between ethics, law experts are required to take steps to resolve the conflicts by problem solving with others and through positive, respected, and legal channels. In a situation where they cannot resolve the conflicts using this method, they may abide by the law, as long as the effects of the action do not violate basic human rights.

In line with these series of ethical principles, these four broad ethical themes provide the organisational framework for the 2010 principles for professional ethics, which are workable principles for this work. These four broad ethical themes subsume seventeen (17) ethical principles. All the principles are further articulated by various specific standards of conduct, the broad themes, corollary principles, and ethical standards are to be considered indecision making. In spite of this role, clientele, or setting, experts should reflect on the theme and intent of each ethical principle and standard to determine its application to his or her individual situation.

Thus, the decision made by experts affects the welfare of clients and can enhance their society or communities. In this vein, experts are encouraged to strive for excellence instead of simply mating the minimum obligations stated in the principles for professional ethics, and to engage in the life-long learning that is essential to achieve and maintain expertise in applied professional ethics.

Thus, these are the principles of professional ethics:

1. **Respecting the Dignity and Rights of all Persons:** Here experts engage only in professional practices that maintain the dignity of all that they work. According to experts' words and actions, they also demonstrate respect for the autonomy of people and their rights to self-determination, respect for privacy and a commitment to just and fair treatment of all people.

With this, the basic principles here are:

- a) **Autonomy and Self – Determination** that is consent and assent, experts respect the right of people to participate in decisions affecting the own welfare (2006:3).
- b) **Privacy and Confidentiality:** Experts respects the right of people by allowing them to decide on whether to disclose their private thoughts, feelings, beliefs and behaviour (2006:5).

- c) **Fairness and Justice:** Here experts promote fairness and justice. They use their expertise to cultivate professional climate that are safe and welcoming to all people no matter the actual or perceived features, involving race, ethnicity, colour, religion, ancestry, national origin immigration status, socio economic status, primary language, gender, sexual, orientation, gender identity, gender expression, disability, or any other distinguishing features (2006:5-6).
2. **Professional Competence and Responsibility:** According to Naagarazan 2006:5-6 beneficence, or responsible caring, means that experts acts to benefit others. To achieve this, they must practice within their environment of their competence, use scientific knowledge to aid clients and others make informed choices, and accept responsibility for their work.
- The accompanying basic principles here are;
- a) **Competence:** This is, to benefit clients, experts engage only in practice for which they are qualified and competent.
- b) **Accepting Responsibility for Actions:** With this principle, experts accept responsibility for their professional work, monitor the effectiveness of their services and work to correct ineffective recommendations.
- c) Responsible assessment and intervention practices, experts maintain the highest standard for responsible professional practices and direct and indirect interventions.
3. **Honesty and Integrity in Professional Relationships:** According to National Association of School Psychologists (2010:9), in order to foster and withhold trust, experts must be faithful to the truth and adhere to their professional promises. They are upright about their qualifications, competencies, and roles; work in full co-operation with other professional areas to meet the demands of clients, and avoid several relationships that diminish their professional effectiveness.
- a) **Accurate Presentation of Professional Qualifications:** Experts accurately identify their professional qualifications to others (2006:9).
- b) **Forthright Explanations of Professional Services, Roles and Priorities:** Experts are candid or give a clue about the nature and scope of their services.
- c) **Respecting other Professionals:** In order to meet the demands of clients with other professionals in relationship based on mutual respect (2006:10).

- d) **Several Relationships and Conflicts of Interest:** In National Association of School Psychologists 2010 view, experts avoid various relationship and conflict of interest that cause decline in their professional effectiveness (2010:10).
4. **Responsibility to Clients, the Profession and Society:** According to National Association of School Psychologists (2010:11) among other principles,
- a) **Respect for Law and the Relationship of Law and Ethics:** Here experts are knowledgeable of and respect law pertinent to the practice of profession. Like in selecting the right course of action, they consider the relationship between law and the principles of professional ethics (2010:12).
 - b) **Maintaining Public Trust by Self-Monitoring and Peer Monitoring:** Here experts accept responsibility to monitor their own conduct and the conduct of other experts or professions to ensure it conforms to ethical standards.
 - c) **Contributing to the Profession by Monitoring Teaching and Supervision:** As part of their duties to clients and their profession, experts mentor less experienced practitioners to assure high quality services, and they serve as role models for sound ethical and professional practices and decision making.
 - d) **Contributing to the School Psychology Knowledge Base:** Here psychologists are to make sure that the services rendered to children, families and schools are improved to promote the welfare of children, by contributing to the school psychology knowledge base by participating in, assisting in, or conducting and disseminating research (National Association of School Psychologists 2010:13).

The Concept of Ethics

The word ethics is from Greek ethos, meaning custom or character. Ethics deals with the value accompanying human conduct and human character. Thus, ethics should be distinguished from morals or morality. The morals or morality of a person or society are the sum total of all the moral judgements or moral beliefs, or moral beliefs implicit in certain acts or behavior of the person or society. Like, if you ask a person to list all his moral judgements or beliefs and he does so accurately, the list would constitute his moral or morality, while the same could be known of a society (Aja 1996:22).

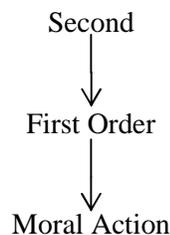
In this light, ethics is a branch of philosophy which ‘seeks’ to establish and rationally defend a universally valid theory of what is right and wrong, good and bad

in general, that can be used as a set of moral principles guiding human action. Here, this is reasonably an accurate definition of ethics; it does not give us a clear or comprehensive sense of what ethics is all about. Thus, we have to see how ethics or moral philosophy differs from other activities associated with morality with which we are familiar with in everyday life (Aja, 1996:23).

Ethics is not primarily in business of giving moral advice, or laying down specific moral injunctions, like, “be honest”, “pay your debts”, “work hard” etc. These tasks fall to parents, teachers, priests, ministers, and community leaders who seek to encourage the adoption of conformity to customary, socially approved morality, and to offer guidance in cases where ordinary morality is not clear. Thus, these activities form ethics as a branch of philosophy. It is clear that in all the above mentioned virtues, one might believe that going against any is morally wrong. But when one criticizes those who disagree with one who judges the virtue and tries to persuade them to alter their moral beliefs and practices, one may be challenged, because others may say there is nothing wrong with going against them. Thus, what makes your opinion any better than mine? Of course, the individual in support of the belief of the immoral act may refuse to offer any reason; but if he does try to justify his moral beliefs, then he is well on his way to engaging in moral philosophy or ethics.

Thus, a workable definition of ethic for this paper is known as, ethics is a theoretical discipline which attempts to discover why any action is right or wrong; that is, what makes an action right or wrong. Ethics is the act of giving reason in everyday life why our actions are right or wrong. But, ethics or moral philosophy differs from ordinary reasoning in everyday life in the extent to which such justifying reasons are pursued and in the level of their generality (Aja, 1996:23).

Here reason can be given to justify a particular action or to justify another reason. Philosophers refers to the former as a ‘first-order’ or ‘lower-order’ to distinguish first from the lower which they call a ‘second-order’ or ‘higher-order’ reason. A second-order reason is a reason for a reason for an action. The relationship falls in this order:



In this light, ethics is the attempt to find the highest-order and most general reason that justifies all human action and that which explains completely and finally what makes an action right or wrong, and, indeed, for this comes to the same thing, what right and wrong, good and bad really are. While ethical theories are, in general, the pursuit of the highest and most general reason justifying moral action (Aja, 1996:23).

When ethics discovers the highest order and most general principles which serve as general theories of morality, ethics is also interested in general theories for evaluating the goodness of objects, and those determining the moral rightness of human actions (Aja 1996:24). Values can be moral or non-moral values, non-moral values comprise of all those qualities we value in material and non-human objects, while values concern certain unique human traits, like loyalty, honesty and truthfulness for which we praise or blame people. Thus, ethics is concerned with those kinds of value judgement (Aja 1996:24).

Moral philosophers are also kin to know what is right and wrong, good and bad, and how we assess arguments and evidence for one ethical theory over another. When we say that something is good or bad we are expressing a value judgement, not a statement of fact. Then, how can anyone claim to know what is right or wrong? And how can you prove that your moral judgements are any better than mine or someone else? Sure you can offer arguments in support of your ethical stance (Aja 1996:24).

Features, Roles and Functions of Ethics

Ethics is the word that refers to morals, values, and beliefs of the individuals, family or the society. The word ethics has several meanings:

First, basically it is an activity and process of inquiry, secondly, it is different from non-moral problems, when dealing with issues and controversies. Thirdly, ethics refers to a particular set of beliefs, attitudes, and habits of individuals or family or groups concerned with morals. Fourth, it is used to mean 'morally correct'.

The study of ethics helps to know the people's beliefs, values, and moral, learn the good and bad of them, and practice them to maximize their wellbeing and happiness. Ethics involves the inquiry on the existing situations, from judgements and resolve the issues. Also ethics tells us how to live, to respond to issues, through the duties, right, responsibilities, and obligations. In this vein, in religion, similar principles are involved, while the reasoning on procedures is limited. Thus, the principles and practices of religions have varied from time to time in history, region in geography, climatic conditions, religion, society, language, caste and creed. While ethics has grown to a large extent beyond these barriers mentioned, thus, in ethics, the

focus is to study and apply the principles and practices, universally (Naagarazan 2006:5).

According to Popkin et-al (1993:2) the motivation for studying ethics lies in the attempts by philosophers to construct satisfactory answers to questions like those that have to deal with good life, like how can the good life be identical with a life of pleasure, since there are pleasures which are bad? Then if it is not pleasure which constitutes the good life, then what does?

At this point, the philosopher begins a consideration of ethics by reflecting about common situations, but then goes beyond these to discussions of a more general sort. Thus, it is this sort of abstract speculation which constitutes 'ethical theory'. Popkin et-al (1993:2).

In Aristotle's view, ethics constitutes a body of objective knowledge. In this sense it is a science of correct conduct that guides us toward the goal of achieving human excellence. He agreed with Plato on this point, as they believed that for an individual in a particular set of circumstances there is a morally correct way of acting (Lawhead 2002:80).

Divine Command Ethics

According to Naagarazan (2006:43), this principle of divine command ethics, the right action is defined by the command by God. It implies that to be moral, a person should believe in God and an action is right only if it is commanded by God. But there are difficulties in this approach, such as:

- a) Whether God exists or not is not clear.
- b) How to know what are the God's commands? and
- c) How to verify the genuineness of the command?

Thus, in line with religious beliefs, such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity accept the existence of God, while Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism adopt only faith in a right path and do not believe in God.

In the philosophical sphere Socrates was said to have argued that God, an entity which is responsible, morally good, and beyond fear or favor, would command murder, rape, torture, immoral activities, and even mass suicide. As several of such crimes were committed in the name of God then and continues even now in different parts of the world. If anyone claims to have obtained commands from God to kill people mercilessly, then we have to conclude that the person is not religious but insane.

Moral Dilemma

Dilemmas being situations in which moral reasons come into conflict, or in which the application of moral values are problems, and one is not clear of the immediate choice or solution of the problems. Moral reasons could be rights, duties, goods or obligations. These situations do not mean that things had gone wrong, but they only show the presence of moral complexity. This makes the decision making complex. Thus, one has to fix the priority.

- a. **The Problem of Vagueness:** This is a situation where one is unable to distinguish between good and bad or right or wrong principle. Good means an action that is obligatory. Like the code of ethics specifies that one should obey the laws and follow standards. Refuse bribe or accept the gift, and maintain confidentiality.
- b. **The Problem of Conflicting Reasons:** Here, one is unable to choose between two good moral solutions. Thus, an individual has to fix priority, through knowledge or value system.
- c. **The Problem of Disagreement:** There may be two or more solutions and none of them mandatory. These solutions may be better or worse in some respects but not in all aspects.

Thus, an individual has to interpret, apply different moral reasons, and analyze and rank the decisions. Select the best suitable, under the existing and the most probable conditions (Naagarazan 2006:25).

Solution to Moral Dilemma

The logical steps to solve or for confronting moral dilemma are as follows:

1. **Identification of the Moral Factors and Reasons:** The clarity to identify the relevant moral values from among duties, rights, goods and obligations is obtained or conceptual inquiry. The most useful resource in identifying dilemma in situation is the professional codes of ethics, as interpreted by the professional experience. Another resource is talking with colleagues who can focus or narrow down the choice of values.
2. Collection of all information, data, and facts relevant to the situation.
3. Rank the moral options, that is priority in application through value system, and also as obligatory, all right, acceptable, not acceptable, damaging, and most damaging etc.

4. Generate alternate course of action to resolve the dilemma. State the main options and sub-options as a matrix or decision tree ensure that all options are involved.
5. Discuss with other people and obtain their perspectives, priorities, and suggestions on different alternatives.
6. Then, decide upon a final course of action, based on priority fixed or assumed. But where there is no ideal solution, we arrive at a partially satisfactory or 'satisficing' solution (Naagarazan 2006:26)

Moral Autonomy

Moral autonomy according to Naagarazan (2006:26) is defined as, decisions and actions exercised on the basis of moral concern for other people and recognition of good moral reasons. Alternatively, moral autonomy means 'self-determinant or independent'. Thus, the autonomous people hold moral beliefs and attitude based on their critical reflection rather than on passive adoption of the convention of the society or profession. Moral autonomy can also be defined as a skill and habit of thinking rationally about the ethical issues, on the basis of moral concern.

While autonomy is the independence in making decisions and actions, is different from authority. Authority provides freedom for action, specified within limits, depending on the situation. Moral autonomy and respect for authority can coexist. They are not against one another.

Conclusion

From the fore-going, it is clear that we need professionals to execute certain attitudes or typical qualities that are expected of a professional so that there will be evidence of professionalism. That is professionals are to render services that are related to achieving the public good, with the practices of the knowledge of moral ideals. Thus, ethically, professionals will be aware that consensus and controversy have to work hand in hand in exercising moral autonomy, one is likely to obtain the same results as by others, which in most cases ends in controversy.

Professionals are aware that a good amount of autonomy and being reasonable and responsible are necessary. This does not mean forcing the professionals to reach unique moral solutions. And that many reasonable solutions are possible to a given ethical problem. Ethics makes the professional realize the importance of tolerance among them, in case of disagreement while applying moral autonomy (Naagarazan 2006:29).

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