

# PERSPECTIVES

## On the Professions

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### "Professions and Character"

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George W. Bush, a candidate for President I do not admire, recently did something I did admire--repeatedly refused to answer questions about whether, as a young man, he had used cocaine. Though Bush has not been young for several decades, the reporters justified their questions by claiming that the answers would give insight into Bush's "character"--and so, into his fitness for office. The use of cocaine, even in a well-spent youth, would have been a felony. Our chief magistrate should not be a felon.

Bush's refusal seemed consciously to raise a deep question about the relation between past conduct, character, and our assessment of fitness for office. Bush did not refuse to answer all 11 character questions". For example, he willingly admitted that, at age forty, having gotten drunk once too often, he gave up alcohol. He drew the line for character questions a decade or so back, as if there were a moral statute of limitations on them.

#### Practical Importance of Character

Why is this "character" so interesting to reporters? That's not just a philosopher's question.

Professions too must decide what character is--and not as philosophers do, in the abstract and with plenty of time to get every detail right; professions must decide in particular cases, sometimes in a hurry. For example, in the United States, part of admitting lawyers to practice is subjecting them to an evaluation of their "character and fitness". A "character and fitness committee" not only interviews each would-be lawyer, asking at least a few questions relevant to assessing character; it actively seeks evidence of bad character, asking the dean of the would-be lawyer's law school, members of the faculty, and other references whether they know anything reflecting adversely on the candidate's character or fitness to practice law. "Character" seems to allow investigation of matters beyond mere fitness to practice law. These investigations are not pro forma. About the time Bush was refusing to say whether he had used cocaine, a character and fitness committee in Illinois was denying admission to the leader of a white supremacist organization. Is white supremacism a flaw in character? Should it bar one from the practice of law? The committee had to decide.

#### Some Senses of "Character"

The terms "character", "virtue", and even "integrity" are often treated as synonyms. There are,

however, important differences between "character" and these near synonyms. This may be one place the differences matter. The root idea of "character" seems to be something engraved or written. In this sense, we might speak of "Chinese characters" (meaning the symbols in which Chinese is written). In a closely related sense, we frequently speak of the characters of a novel or play, those real or fictional persons described ("characterized") there. A "real character" is someone who seems to have stepped out of a lively novel or play; a "bad character", someone who would make a good villain in such a work.

In the nineteenth century, a servant who made a bad impression on an employer might worry that she would "lose her character" or "get a bad character", meaning that she would get a bad reference from an employer. A servant who had lost her character would have trouble getting another serving job. Here "character" is close to record".

Today, when we think of character, we think of it in none of these writing-related senses. Most of us do not even think of it as an "internal" record, the revealing marks the friction of life cuts into the soul. Indeed, we are likely to think of character as relatively static, a diamond that can have "flaws" or "faults" but remains the

same more or less, once we reach adulthood .

The Army can claim to "build character" only because the army makes no such claim for senior officers. Their conduct may reveal character but cannot change it. Even a single act, many years ago, may reveal a great deal about character then--and so now.

If George W. Bush was a felon at thirty, he is one still--and, if he were a general, that old felony would be grounds for discharge.

Character is, however, not altogether destiny. We excuse some acts because they are "out of character"; they cannot be attributed to the agent because they are "uncharacteristic"; they are mere accidents revealing nothing about him. How are we to distinguish characteristic from uncharacteristic acts? In practice, we seem to treat as uncharacteristic whatever we cannot fit into the smooth outline of a single life, whatever demands more inventiveness than we possess. The more static we think character, the more we must explain as "out of character".

### **Virtue and Integrity**

The language of virtue seems rather different from that of character. Unvirtuous conduct may or may not be uncharacteristic of the person in question. "Acting out of virtue" is, more or less, the opposite of "acting out of character". If the concern of reporters questioning Bush had been virtue rather than character, they would have viewed Bush's early use of cocaine, if there was any, as a baseline from which to measure his growth in virtue. What would be important would not be the baseline itself but the growth

since. His conduct twenty or even ten years ago would not seem important. Because we do not think of virtue in the static way we think of character, we are quite willing to admit that people can grow in virtue over a life time.

Integrity seems to resemble virtue in developing over time; we are unlikely to go back even ten years to decide whether someone, even someone in his forties or fifties, has integrity. Other than that, it is hard to say what integrity is. It certainly is not mere congruence between thought, word, and deed. We would, for example, not attribute integrity to the villain of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* even though, knowing his life was of a piece, he mounted the gallows saying, "If one good deed in all my life I did, I do repent it from my very soul".

Since this introduction began with questions some reporters asked George Bush, it is fitting that the first professionals whose character we should consider are journalists. They have, as Sandra Borden points out, much to worry about. When we think of journalists today, we are likely to think of drooling bloodhounds sniffing about a laundry basket with no better motive than a byline on the evening news. Borden reminds us that journalists should be better than that. They should ask themselves whether their "sniffing" will yield information relevant to decisions the public should make.

The question of relevance leads her to distinguish between public and private character. Even if all facts about a person are relevant to assessing private character, they might not all be relevant to assessing professional character. What, for example, does a married

reporter's long affair tell us about his professional character?

### **Drawing the Line**

Seumas Miller, while accepting the distinction between professional and private character, does much to limit its importance--at least where the profession in question is law enforcement.

For example, an officer's political views, even if never expressed on the job or in public, may be relevant to his fitness for police work.

The public is not in a position to evaluate police decisions. In general, the public gives the police the benefit of the doubt. But if the public in a racially mixed city comes to believe that some of the police are white supremacists, will they go on giving police the benefit of the doubt? Won't police work become harder? Insofar as the line between professional and private character depends on what the public might think, all traits of character are, at least potentially, part of professional character. There is no line between public and private.

To this, Albert Flores responds, in effect, that the line between professional and private character should not depend entirely on what the public might think. Considerations of privacy are also relevant. We need to preserve for each person, even for such public servants as George Bush or our local sheriff, a domain where the public does not enquire. Privacy is itself necessary for developing the professional judgment essential to professional character.

Mike Martin concludes with a series of examples that both

reenforce Flores' claims for privacy and also suggest how hard it is to decide how much weight to give them. Martin also calls our attention to a part of character about which our other contributors say nothing, a professional's commitment to standards beyond what the profession requires.

In all these pieces, there is an inclination to think about character as a collection of virtues. Is that the best way to think about character?

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### **"Public Character in Journalism"**

Sandra L. Borden, Western Michigan University

Many people have concluded that there is something deeply wrong with the character of most journalists. Their evidence comes from the journalists themselves: inaccurate reporting, television images of reporters mobbing a tearful newsmaker, salacious headlines, and those awful promotional "1. spots". That conclusion about journalists makes people angry. Why?

#### **Jimmy**

One reason, no doubt, is that what journalists do affects people. Take the infamous Janet Cooke, an African- reporter at the Washington Post. In 1981, she won a Pulitzer Prize for her front-page story about "Jimmy", an 8-year-old heroin addict. Her story set off a search to find the boy. Only after she received the Prize

did it become clear that she had made him up. A shadow then fell over the credibility of the Post, over the investigative work of other journalists, and even over affirmative action.

But there is more to the public's concern about the character of journalists than the way journalists affect the public. The public also gets mad at bad journalists because journalists have been given privileges, especially the protection of the First Amendment, so that they may serve a larger social good. In the United States, at least, journalists are supposed to keep civil society abreast of ideas and events that significantly affect the well- of citizens and their prerogatives in a democracy. With those privileges comes the expectation that journalists will be worthy of the trust put in them. When they do things that make us wonder whether they have the character to deserve our trust, we get angry.

If the character of journalists is so important, why don't journalists scrutinize each other in the same way that they have scrutinized politicians like President Clinton? Unlike law, journalism has no fitness requirement-, indeed, journalism has no system of licensing whatever. Journalists seem reluctant to judge each other. They certainly aren't keen to discuss their own actions in terms of good and bad character. Why not?

Hypocrisy and convenience have something to do with it, of course. But the explanation is more complicated, as I will soon explain. First, however, we need to get clear about the distinction between private and public character -- and the connection

between them.

### **Two Perspectives on Public Character**

Aristotle thought that desirable character traits (or virtues) are inherently social even though they are also necessary for personal excellence. The virtues help us to live well together. Aristotle didn't distinguish between public and private character.

Today, one common way of talking about public character is as a "mask" one wears in public. Public character is that identity that "I" project for others-, private character is the "me" I know even if no one else does.

For a person to be authentic, the character on one side of the mask must be congruent with the character on the other. If they do not seem congruent, we talk about the person being "twofaced," a "hypocrite." We assume that the character behind the mask is the real one and that the character produced for public consumption is merely the product of manipulating what others see.

We can apply this way of thinking about character to Janet Cooke. She manufactured her resume as well as the story of Jimmy. Few, if any, knew who she really was.

But, usually, things are more complicated. Take, for instance, the CBS correspondent Charles Kuralt. He was a roving reporter famous--and loved-- his affectionate chronicles of back-America. He was often honored by his colleagues and compared to journalism's greats. That was his public side. His private side was less honorable. Six years after he married, he began an extramarital affair. While settled with his wife

in New York, he spent long periods with his mistress in Montana. His wife didn't find out about the other woman until after his death. Clearly, this long affair tells us something bad about Kuralt's character. But what does it tell us about his character as a journalist?

Kuralt's duplicity suggests another way of conceiving public character. Rather than having one core identity, "the real me", we might have several (overlapping) identities that coincide with the different roles we occupy in life: journalist, spouse, lover, friend, and so on. Although radical discontinuity between one's public and one's private character is as suspect on this conception of character as on the first, mere differences are not. One character trait may be more relevant in one context than another. The trait of decisiveness, for example, may be essential to the businesswoman, but much less important in a friend. The same businesswoman might be very decisive about approving an acquisition but reluctant to give personal advice. This discontinuity is not hypocrisy. The businesswoman is neither "really" decisive nor "really" reluctant.

Although I am attracted to the idea of a "real me", I lean toward the second way of conceiving character. We all belong to several communities where the substance of what is virtuous varies at least in degree. And there are just too many examples of people who behave uprightly in the private sphere and despicably in the public - vice versa - for us to conclude that hypocrisy (or schizophrenia) is the only explanation.

Further, strict adherence to the

first way of conceiving character threatens to weaken substantially respect for individual privacy. On the first conception, we are encouraged to poke around in a person's private affairs to evaluate her character, that is, to determine whether there is enough correspondence between the private and the public to clear her of the charge of hypocrisy.

So, it seems to me, the only reasonable way to evaluate people's public character - that of politicians as well as of journalists - is by what they say and do in public that is substantially relevant to their public role.

### **Do Journalists' Actions Speak Loudly Enough?**

If what we know about what journalists say and do as journalists can be considered evidence of their public character, all we need to do is to examine those words and actions. It's not hard to come up with a short list of virtues we would like the evidence to show: honesty, fairness, diligence, and so on. Such virtues are appropriate objects of our attention because they tend to promote the good that journalism aims at-, that is, reliably supplying citizens with ideas and information relevant to making good choices - except that, as I suggested earlier, it's not that simple.

Mainstream journalists pride themselves on mastering the techniques associated with objectivity: faithfully reproducing word-for-word statements, carefully giving "each side" of the story, writing in the third person, only reporting what can be verified through corroboration or direct observation, and so on. As media scholars Ted Glasser and Jim Ettema have noted, this

mastery has the effect of morally distancing journalists from the outcomes of their work. We rarely catch journalists in action.

Journalists work so hard at not being "in" their stories that they seem to be nowhere at all. Although journalism may seem to get more opinionated all the time, especially on television, the typical news story still lacks a discernible point of view.

Further, we rarely catch journalists in action. We do not see what they said or did to get a story; we see only what's published or broadcast. One exception is when we are ourselves the subject of a story. Then we can observe journalists first hand. Another exception is when journalists allow us behind the scenes, for example, in the long column by the Post's ombudsman that followed his investigation of the Cooke scandal. Finally, we may sometimes see the journalist interviewing someone during live coverage of breaking news. But seeing should not always be believing. Even the most spontaneous-looking television can be highly contrived.

A final difficulty in assessing the public character of journalists is that what the public observes must be evaluated in context. That context is often missing, in part because journalists obscure the production process, but in part too because much of the public does not understand journalism's distinctive mission.

Where does all this leave us? I wish that journalists would adopt a more argumentative model of news, while continuing to observe exacting standards of accuracy and completeness. I also wish that

journalists would do more to open to the public the process of making news. Elsewhere, I have argued for more scrutiny of journalists by journalists. These changes would make journalists more accountable to us and to each other - and would give us a lot more to go on when we attempt to evaluate their public character.

In the meantime, we must make do with the available evidence, limited as it is.

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### **"Private and Professional Character in Policing"**

Seumas Miller, Charles Sturt University, Australia

Professional ethics is about what an individual member of a profession ought to do and about what rules and procedures the organizations that increasingly house members of the professions ought to have. But professional ethics is also about what the character of members of a profession ought to be.

Many of the moral principles governing the actions of individual persons seem to be universal; they apply to individuals at all times, both in private and in public. For example, the moral principle prohibiting murder is universal. However, some moral principles governing action seem to apply to some professions but not others. For example, while to deceive others is in general morally wrong, it is necessary for some professionals, such as undercover police operatives. They must engage in deception and do so as a

matter of routine.

The same point seems to hold for virtues and vices, and therefore for moral character. A highly developed disposition to be suspicious concerning the motives and actions of others might be a virtue for a police officer, but it is surely a vice for a husband or wife.

#### **Professional Character v. Private Character**

Arguably, professions are defined in terms of the basic purposes that they ought to serve, as well as by their constitutive activities. The different purposes and activities of different professions generate differences in required moral character. It is because the police must track down and arrest criminals that police officers need to have a disposition to be suspicious, a high degree of physical courage, and so on.

In undertaking a particular profession, individuals accept professional obligations. Some of these obligations are also moral obligations. The moral obligations are different from and additional to the moral obligations the professionals had before entering the profession. For example, if a police officer fails to intervene in an attempted burglary, she has not only failed to do what her profession requires, she has also failed to do what morality now requires of her. So, it seems, in undertaking a particular profession, an individual is obliged to possess or develop a specific moral character in order to be able to discharge the profession's distinctive moral obligations.

At least two things seem to follow from this account of the moral character of a member of a

profession, or at least of the moral character of police officers. First, the fact that a police officer is deficient in some trait of character that is highly morally desirable in members of some other profession, or in some specific private role, would not necessarily count against the officer qua police officer. Compare, for example, a police officer who is sexually promiscuous (on his own time) with a sexually promiscuous husband or catholic priest (neither of whom ever is "off").

Second, that a police officer was deficient in some trait of character might well count against that officer, even though the trait in question is not necessary for, or highly desirable in, members of most other professions, or in most private roles. Consider physical courage. This is necessary for police officers, but not for academics, accountants, or most of the rest of us. Indeed, some trait of character might even be a virtue in a police officer, but a vice in members of most other professions-- and even in most private roles. Suspiciousness might be such a trait. The same constant looking about for wrongdoing that makes a good detective might make him a very bad husband.

#### **The Importance of Character**

There is a further point about moral character that might follow from the nature and purposes of policing.

This concerns moral character conceived in general terms, as opposed to specific character traits. Perhaps the minimum standards of integrity, honesty, courage, and so on demanded of police officers, ought to be higher than for many, even most, other professions. After all, police have

extraordinary powers not given to others, including the power (briefly) to take away the liberty of their fellow citizens. Yet police are subject to moral temptations to an extent not typically found in other professions. Consider detectives working in drug-law enforcement: they are exposed to drug dealers prepared to offer large bribes just to have an officer do nothing. The conjunction of extraordinary powers and moral vulnerability justifies higher minimum standards of moral character for police than for members of many other professions.

### **The importance of Public Perception**

We have so far been speaking in terms of deficiencies of character that might in a general sense count against a police officer. But now we need to be more precise about the implications of a deficiency in character. On one view, deficiencies in character per se--as distinct from actual misbehavior (failing to do what is right)--ought to have no implications. Character is relevant only insofar as it translates into identifiable misbehavior.

This view has some plausibility in relation to traits of character that are not central to the police role. Suppose an officer is mean spirited or jealous of the achievements of others. This might make her difficult to work with, but in a world consisting of persons less than perfect, the officer in question would have to be tolerated. But now consider a police officer who is a coward, fearful of danger to the point where he could well put the lives of fellow officers and citizens at risk. On the view in question, so long as the officer did not break the law or violate police

regulations, there would be no grounds for dismissal or other serious disciplinary action. Perhaps so. But at the very least, once identified, such an officer should be given a 'desk job' or counselled to leave policing for another sort of work.

Now consider a police officer who is an avowed racist. Should she be dismissed? Obviously, if such an officer's attitudes are translating into blatant disrespect for the rights of members of a particular race, or into violation of law or regulation, then the officer should be dismissed. But assume that the officer is careful to respect rights, and does not in fact violate any law or regulation, not even those detailing how to apply the law impartially.

Nevertheless, I think there is a problem. Given the nature of policing in a racially mixed community, I believe that being an avowed racist must have some implications for how the police department ought to treat the officer. For example, the quality of service provided to (say) the members of the black community by an avowed white supremacist would presumably--other things being equal--be less than that provided by non-racist police. A racist police officer might, for example, be less assiduous in her pursuit of complaints made by members of a black community.

Moreover, the presumption that an officer applied the law in an objective and impartial manner would be put under severe strain if it were learned that the officer was a member of a white supremacist organization. The black community's belief, albeit false, that an officer known to be a white supremacist was violating, or just misusing, laws or

regulations might create considerable distrust between the community and the police. Racist attitudes--as distinct from racially motivated conduct--must have some implications for police policy. At the very least, the presence of racist attitudes ought to be a criterion for assessing the suitability of applicants to join the police in a racially mixed community.

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### **"Professional Character and Private Lives"**

Albert Flores, California State University, Fullerton

Consider the following events: A President of the United States is impeached and almost removed from office in part because he lied to keep secret a sexual dalliance. The Dean of Harvard's School of Divinity, a prominent theologian and respected academic administrator, is removed from office after the discovery that he had logged hundreds of hours on the Internet looking at pornography. The New York Times reports that "hundreds of thousands" of patients are being recruited by their personal physicians into a booming venture: the business of testing experimental drugs on people." The patients, uninformed about their physician's financial interest, "were being pushed to participate in the studies because of the financial interests of their doctors." (May 16, 1999)

What ties these events together is that an activity or interest that some, especially the accused, might consider dubious but purely private seems to others to conflict

directly with the accused's professional responsibilities. These events suggest many questions relevant to professional ethics. We might, for example, wonder whether the conduct in question was wrong simply because it sets a bad example or because it tends to undermine the public's trust in professionals generally.

But the question I want to consider here is whether such personal failings inevitably interfere with the proper performance of professional responsibilities. The prevailing assumption seems to be that one cannot compartmentalize one's life into distinct domains of public and private activities without loss of professional integrity, that private vices eventually corrupt professional character, and that therefore the conduct of professionals in private life should be above reproach. Indeed, licensing laws for most professions make that assumption explicit by requiring that licensees be of "good moral character" as well as technically competent.

### **Dangers of Integrity?**

This principle Of consistency suggests that we should expect absolute coherence between personal and professional standards of ethics. How can we trust the President, or anyone else in authority, who in their personal lives violate standards of trust, fidelity, and honesty? Not only does lack of consistency between public and private character seem to undermine pretensions to integrity-, it also seems likely to lead to an unhealthy fragmentation of one's identity.

Yet there is considerable disagreement about this matter;

many people are unsure how much consistency we should demand between public and private character. It too is unsure. Is it fair or reasonable to question the integrity of those who in their private lives engage in activities morally in conflict with their professional roles? Is a surgeon who cheats on a spouse, has heart trouble because he walks too little, eats too much, and can't give up smoking, and otherwise exhibits a morally flawed character necessarily unable to be compassionate to and honest with patients? Is he necessarily unable to give wise counsel? Is he even likely to fall below ordinary standards of good practice?

In short, is it reasonable to demand that professionals lead exemplary private lives when they are no less subject to the character faults, assorted vices, and weakness of will to which other people are subject? The answer is not so obvious.

By acknowledging a distinction between "public" and "private", we implicitly recognize a domain that should be beyond public scrutiny. What justifies this domain of privacy? Privacy is what enables us to work out a way of being that is uniquely fitted to our own talents, skills, and ambitions. Often the process of working things out leads us to experiment in ways that would be impossible--and harmful to personal growth--if we knew we would have to make public the entire spectrum of our undertakings, including mistakes resulting from bad judgment. Assuredly, privacy has limits and should not shield us from sanction if our private behavior is criminal or morally egregious. But short of this, mistakes and other minor

infidelities in private may in fact be the prelude to avoiding such errors in one's professional life; they may also be the impetus that deepens a commitment to uphold ethical standards more rigorously.

Privacy insulates us from public condemnation and enhances self-by cloak-ing personal failings and errors behind a veil of secrecy so that we can learn from our mistakes and develop skills essential to living a better life. To think that the only morally good professionals are those who are equally good in their personal lives is to pre-empt the possibility of moral development, both personal and professional.

Moreover, to suppose that there must be absolute consistency between private and public actions does violence to the very point of drawing the distinction in the first place. Privacy is an essential ingredient underlying human dignity. People who take on professional roles are as entitled to protect their privacy as is anyone else. Protecting their privacy means that they may not, in their private lives, always live up to the standards they profess as a professional. That is as it should be. That is what privacy is for.

### **Perplexities of the Good Life**

To believe that there must be consistency between public and private behavior is to assume not only that how we should act morally is always straightforward and clear, without any serious ambiguity or uncertainty, but also that there is no inherent conflict between personal and professional roles. Both assumptions seem naive. Few serious moral situations are completely transparent or unambiguous, in the sense that we know, at least

most of the time, what is good or ethically best. More frequently, there are complexities and uncertainties that leave us bewildered about what to do. We often end up choosing to do the least harm rather than do what is the morally best. What is good, and what a good life is morally, are notoriously contentious topics. The diversity of opinion among philosophers on those topics, both today and over the whole history of moral philosophy, testifies to how much there is to contend with.

If we are often in doubt about what is good in life, especially in our personal life, then it seems presumptuous to believe that there will be a ready moral coherence between our personal and professional roles. Each professional will have to work diligently to find the right balance, one that avoids the inherent conflicts and tensions that make it nearly impossible to do both roles well. For some, it is a drama that leads them to abandon career in order to save their personal life from ruin. Achieving integrity seems straightforward enough, but only if we oversimplify our understanding of what in reality is a much more complex and perplexing undertaking.

### **The Ideal Self**

Behind all this, there stands the belief that underlying the roles we play there exists an objective, rational, and deliberative self that controls all that we do; to harmonize our roles we need only employ logic--rationally, self-principles--to all our choices, in our various roles. By this method, we will automatically achieve integrity. Unfortunately, that belief involves a radically

idealized conception of self, stripped from its social and historical context and the hard reality of unequal resources, skills, and capabilities: the ideal self feeds on an illusion that self-avoids the ambivalent, existential, and tragic dimensions of life.

Then add to these doubts about the ideal self doubts about how much of our character we are responsible for.

To what degree do the vagaries of moral luck change the dynamic, making any assessment of moral integrity problematic at best and intractable at worst? Although the President is surely responsible for his actions, can we assert with the same degree of confidence that he is also responsible for the flaws in his character that may have led him astray? Can we say with conviction that every married man should be able to resist the advances of a sexually alluring woman? The President might have avoided the scandal were it not for his bad luck in being pursued by an implacable prosecutor bent on bringing him down. Is Harvard's Dean of Divinity responsible for his addiction to pornography? And to what degree can we resist the blandishments of our cultural obsession with wealth and the accumulation of material goods? Isn't the promise of increased wealth just the sort of inducement that can get almost anyone--including, it seems, many physicians--to do almost anything for more money? Are our desires, proclivities, and vices really something we choose? Or do we discover their power as they drive us in directions that we may find hard to resist, regardless of our idealized understanding of ourselves and who we wish

ourselves to be?

We should, I think, pause in our rush to judge. Ideally, professional ethics and personal character should cohere as the necessary ground for integrity, but in practice the relation between the two is, apparently, much more complicated; and the costs of too much simplifying could be quite high.

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### **"Moral Fitness for Professions"**

Mike W. Martin, Chapman University

The idea of moral fitness for a profession may sound slightly quaint and stuffy, but it deserves more attention than it has received. In a variety of contexts, we do make character assessments in determining who is qualified to enter or continue to serve in a profession, as well as in a specific job or office. Those contexts include: registration and licensing boards deciding whether to grant entrance to a profession; citizens assessing politicians, judges, and other officials for public offices-, and professors writing letters of recommendation for students seeking entrance to professional programs.

### **A Teacher's Problem**

Once, a student I knew to be an alcoholic, asked me for a letter of recommendation for a graduate program in criminal justice. On another occasion, I learned that a student who had stolen books from my office was asking a colleague to write a letter of recommendation for her to enter



divinity school. What were my responsibilities? What should I have done? Could I seriously predict, based on what I knew, how responsible the students were likely to be in their respective professions? Does the teacher-student relationship require me to give the benefit of the doubt to the student? If so, should mentors and professional colleagues always be similarly generous, at the possible expense of clients? These illustrations also bear on wider questions about how overall character relates to professional roles--and how much we can know about that relation in specific instances. Were these isolated incidents, or signs of temporary immaturity, or indications of basic unfitness for entering their professions?

How general character bears on moral fitness for a profession deserves at least as much attention as the inverse subject of how professional roles shape character, a topic frequently discussed since the 1970s. Indeed, the issues are connected: In assessing the relevance of character to a future member of a profession, we need to take into account how professions may reshape the character we see--in negative as well as positive ways.

Judgments of moral fitness look to the future based on the past, but they extrapolate from one limited set of data about some areas of life, often personal life, to new contexts in which we have not yet seen the person perform. That extrapolation makes such judgments risky, but does it also make them fallacious? Does the extrapolation depend on the mistaken idea that good character is all or nothing and that good conduct in one context is tightly

linked to good conduct in a quite different context?

### Unity of Virtues?

Character is not a seamless web. Aristotle defended a strong "unity of virtue" thesis, although his thesis focused on the unity of the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice). Today most ethicists would agree with John Dewey in sharply rejecting the unity of virtue. "All character is speckled," wrote Dewey in *Human Nature and Conduct*. More recently, Owen Flanagan in the *Varieties of Moral Personality* drew on cognitive psychology to explain why character is invariably riddled with "moral gaps": character traits are situation-sensitive, moral virtues are enormously varied (and sometimes in conflict), and both situations and personalities vary enormously.

Moral gaps arise not only from having some virtues (for example generosity) and lacking others (truthfulness), but in manifesting the same virtues in some contexts, roles, or dimensions of roles, but not others.

Clearly, fundamental traits of a person's character are relevant to their acting responsibly in a professional role. The most important of these are humaneness, selfcontrol, general responsibility, and honesty (both trustworthiness and truthfulness). Professionals generally are placed in positions of trust, serving an important need of client or society. The specific importance of trust is broad-based and in varying degrees open-ended - we cannot now foresee exactly how and when trust will matter. Of necessity, we must look to the past and present in projecting an

uncertain and dangerous future, estimating from some (private) contexts where irresponsibility is manifest, the likelihood of similar irresponsibility in other quite different (public) contexts. So, for example, most Americans, whatever their judgment of Clinton's private character, saw enough competence and creativity in Clinton's public record to make removal from office seem unwarranted.

### My Homophobic Physician

Sometimes the links are clear enough. We do not want a heroin user working as a pharmacist, a pedophile supervising a child-care center, a rapist working as an anesthesiologist, a rabid bigot serving as a judge. In these instances, general character bears directly on the work. More often the link is not so clear. Do we, for example, want to bar from practice a homophobic physician who is admirably skilled and caring except when the patient is gay?

For me, this is not an abstract question. On June 21, 1999, I picked up the *Los Angeles Times* to read--to my horror--that the American Civil Liberties Union was suing my own physician (and HMO) for sex discrimination. While conducting a routine physical, which included a pelvic examination, the physician asked the patient about birth control. She replied that she used none because she was a lesbian in a monogamous relationship. Following the exam the doctor asked the patient to make her next medical visit with another physician in the office because he did not approve of her "lifestyle."

Homophobia and many other bigotries are all too common in

the professions, as are drug abuse, kleptomania, an assortment of sexual perversions, and so on. A hard line on character would not merely create a shortage of qualified professionals; it might leave us with none at all!

Nevertheless, there is a problem here. On the one hand, knowing the physician in question, I would not have wanted him blocked from entering medicine because of his homophobia. On the other hand, his homophobia might well surface many times during a career in medicine. Bigotry is at least one important character trait I would want taken seriously in preparing individuals for medical careers--and to be addressed in programs of continuing education.

#### **Character and Conscience**

So far I have focused on preparing for a profession, including what education can do about character flaws likely to surface in practice. Let me conclude by distinguishing several additional issues regarding the interplay of character in private and professional roles.

One issue concerns disciplining people for specific failings once they have become professionals. My physician should (and undoubtedly will) be disciplined, by the courts and by his HMO, for how he dealt with his patient. (He should at least have found a less insulting way to transfer his patient to another physician.) But the penalty will be for the act, not for his flawed character. This is true even if, as seems unlikely, he were to be required to undergo counselling for homophobia. In general, we should respond only when abuses occur. We should leave room for the exercise of both personal freedom and professional conscience.

Issues about private conscience in professional life are notoriously complex. How far should we allow private conscience to guide professional conduct when it departs from the moral consensus expressed in the relevant code of ethics. When does conduct guided by personal conscience become unprofessional? These issues are the primary topic of most debates about professional ethics in the courts, classrooms, and professional societies. We all agree, for example, that college professors should have great freedom to express their views. Academic freedom is central to what college professors are supposed to be. But what about an atheist philosopher who grades down a student for defending religion in an essay? The professor is wrong, of course. The question is what should we, his colleagues, do about it? Here, I think, a code of ethics is essential in setting and enforcing standards--even though codes are always vague and incomplete.

Issues of conscience are also connected with the meaning and requirements of professional distance. Just what does appropriate distance amount to? What does it require by way of setting aside personal values in order to meet professional responsibilities, to avoid greed, sexual dominance, paternalism, or conflicts of interest, and otherwise to meet minimum standards for practice of the profession?

#### **Room for Aspirations?**

I turn now to the more positive side of character, the aspiration to do more than meet the profession's minimum standard. We want practitioners who have been drawn into their profession by a deeply-felt commitment to its

ideals. This commitment must cohere with codified duties, but it transcends the minimal competence required of members of the profession. Professional ethics is more than shared duties and episodic dilemmas. It includes the personal commitments that motivate, guide, and give meaning to the lives of professionals. These commitments, though personal, deserve greater emphasis in thinking about professional ethics--as I argue in my latest book, *Meaningful Work: Rethinking Professional Ethics* (forthcoming, Oxford University Press).

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#### **"Announcements"**

The Medical Alumni Association of the University of California, Davis, is sponsoring a conference, HealthCare Systems: *Ethical and Economic Considerations*, in Sacramento, January 14-15, 2000. Contact: Dr. Erick H. Loewy, Chair of Bioethics, University of California, Davis, UCDMC - PSSB 2400, 4250 V Street, Sacramento, CA 95817. Tel. 916-734-2177. Fax. 916-734-1531. Email: ehloewy@ucdavis.edu.

The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics will hold its ninth Annual Meeting in Washington, DC, February 24-27, 2000. Robert Putnam, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, will begin the conference with a talk entitled, "Salem without Witches: The Ethical Dimension of Social Capital". In addition to the sixth Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, the meeting will host (among other events) a mini-conference on "Religion and Ethics in the

Professions", a session on "Codes of Ethics for Academics", and the usual "Breakfast with the Authors". Contact: <http://php.ucs.indiana.edu/~appe/home.html>.

The International Society of Business, Economics, and Ethics will hold its second World Congress, "The Ethical Challenges of Globalization," in Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 19-23, 2000. Deadline for submitting papers is December 1, 1999. The Web site address is <http://www.nd.edu/~isbee>.

Contact: Cecilia Arrucla, CENEEAESP/FGV, av. 9 de Julho, 2029-Sala 1059, 01313-902 Sao Paulo, Brazil. Tel/fax: 55-11-281-7749. Email: [carruda@eaesp.fgvsp.br](mailto:carruda@eaesp.fgvsp.br).

Teaching Business Ethics is soliciting articles for a new section on "Innovative Teaching Techniques". The section contains essay-style short articles that describe novel or nontraditional teaching approaches that enhance teaching effectiveness, anything from use of film to use of non-concepts to explain business ethics. This section of Teaching Business Ethics will not publish cases. The journal may be found at

<http://www.wkap.nl/kaphtml.htm/IFA1382-6891>. Contact: Robert A. Giacalone, Ph.D., Belk College of Business Administration, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC 28223-0001. Ph. 704- 547-2737 or 704-547-3123 Email: [ragiacal@uncc.edu](mailto:ragiacal@uncc.edu)

The thirteenth Annual Conference of the European Ethics Network, Ethics: Leadership and Accountability, will be held in Churchill College, Cambridge, England, September 12-14, 2000.

Deadline for submission is February 15 for full papers and April 15 for working papers or poster presentations. Contact: EBEN 2000 Conference Secretariat, Judge Institute of Management Studies, Cambridge University, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1AG, United Kingdom. Email: [c.j.cowston@hud.ac.uk](mailto:c.j.cowston@hud.ac.uk).

PUBLICATIONS: Michael Davis (Ethics and the University, Routledge, 1999), brings together two closely related topics, the practice of ethics in the university ("academic ethics") and the teaching of practical or applied ethics in the university. The book is divided into four parts: 1) a survey of practical ethics, offering an explanation of its recent emergence as a university subject; 2) an examination of research ethics, including the problem of responding to plagiarism; 3) a discussion of the teaching of practical ethics, including integrating it into the curriculum, using cases to teach it, and ethical problems for teachers that arise from teaching it; and 4) an exploration of sexual ethics within the university.

The Philosophy of Science Association invites its members to submit proposals for symposia to be presented at the PSA 2000 meeting in Vancouver, B.C. November 4-7, 2000. Proposals must include sufficient supporting material to permit the program committee to evaluate the quality and interest of the symposium. The proposal should include the title of the proposed symposium, a description of the topic and a justification of its current importance to the discipline (1-2

e-mail address (including the institutional affiliation), and short bio or vitae. For further information, contact Jeff Barrett, Chair, PSA 2000 Program Committee, University of California, Irvine, California 92697 - 4130 or e-mail: [sa2k@uci.edu](mailto:sa2k@uci.edu)

CALL FOR PAPERS: *The Journal of Information Ethics* will devote its Fall 2000 issue to cybercrime. Brief or detailed scholarly essays on any aspect of this diverse topic are welcome: encroachments on privacy, telecommunications fraud, stock market scams, espionage, cyberterrorism, plagiarism and so on. Deadline: April 1, 2000. Contact: Robert Hauptman, Editor, Journal of Information Ethics, R&TS, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN 56301. Tel: 320-2554822. Email: [hauptman@stcloudstate.edu](mailto:hauptman@stcloudstate.edu).

Anthony N. Lalli, a volunteer and advocate for informed consent, has invited readers of *Perspectives* to look over three papers he has electronically published at his human research subject protection web site: <http://pw2.netcom.com/~alalli/pageone.html>.

The Humane Society of the United States has announced a new award for academic excellence in the design and instruction of *Animal and Society* courses-courses addressing animal ethics, rights, or welfare. The award is to foster the availability of good curricula and instruction in relevant academic fields such as biology, law, philosophy, psychology, animal science, and environmental studies. Contact: HSUS Animals & Society Award, Animal Research Issues Section,

HUSU, 2100 L Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037. Tel: 301-Fax: 301-258-7760. Email: jbalcombe@hsus.org.

The Society on Social Implications of Technology (SSIT) of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) seeks applications or nominations for the position of Editor of IEEE *Technology and Society Magazine* for a two-year term (2001-2002). The position is non-salaried. To the extent possible, institutional support for the Editor's expenses should come from the Editor's employer or academic institution. A modest expense budget is available, if necessary, to supplement such support. Contact: Joseph R. Herkert, SSIT Publications Chair, Division of Multidisciplinary Studies, Box 7107, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, NC 27695-Tel: 919-515-7997. Fax: 919-5151828. Email: j.herkert@ieee.org.

Cornell University is looking for a Director for its *Program on Ethics and Public Life*. The successful candidate, who will also be the Hutchinson Professor of Ethics and Public Life, should have a distinguished record of research and publications in ethics, be an effective teacher, and have proven administrative ability. The Program on Ethics and Public Life serves Cornell's ten colleges, both teaching its own courses in practical ethics to students (both graduate and undergraduate) and collaborating with faculty outside the program who are not specialists in ethics but want to enhance their treatment of ethical issues in their own fields. Applications from persons in any field of practical ethics are

welcome, particularly those in government, history, law, and philosophy. Applications will be considered on a rolling basis, although preference will be given to files completed before December 1, 1999.

Applications for 2000-2001 residential Faculty Fellowships in Ethics are invited from teachers and scholars who hold a doctorate or professional degree. Successful applicants normally will have completed their final degree within the past five years. For an information packet, please contact Judy M. Kendall, The Center for Ethics and the Professions, Harvard University, 79 Kennedy Street, Cambridge, MA 02138; telephone: (617) 495-1336; Fax: (617) 496-6104; website: <http://www.ethics.harvard.edu>; email: [ethics@harvard.edu](mailto:ethics@harvard.edu)

The third Conference on Ethics and Contemporary Human Resource Management "Towards Human Centered Organization" will be held January 7, 2000 at Imperial College Management School. Developments in human resource management have shifted the emphasis away from the human component. In this conference, we want to bring the human being back to center stage in human resource management. This conference focuses on the individual, and their experience, needs and aspirations in the workplace. Although we welcome papers which critique the shift of emphasis, or alternatively examine and provide evidence on the link between effectiveness and humanistic work forms, we specifically want papers which help rebuild the notion of the humanistic organization. For further information, contact Dr. Diana Winstanley, Imperial

College Management School, 53, Prince's Gate, Exhibition Road, London, SW7 2PG; telephone: 0171-5949114; Fax: 0171-823-7685; email: [d.winstanley@ic.ac.uk](mailto:d.winstanley@ic.ac.uk)

CALL FOR PAPERS: Ethics For The Professions. Editors seek submissions for a new textbook, *Ethics for the Professions*, to be published by Harcourt Brace. Appropriate for undergraduate courses in professional ethics, the textbook will include articles on issues that cut across various professions (in Part 1) and on issues within specific professions (in Part 11). Chapters in Part 1: Aspects of Professions (e.g., the proper function of a professional, the nature of expertise); the Role of Professional Organizations (profit, non- (disclosure, autonomy, confidentiality); The Nature of Ethics Codes (company-level, industry-level, effectiveness).

Chapters in Part 11: Business (e.g. sciences, advertising, environmental issues); Engineering (product safety, trade secrets); Medicine (patient competence, research, life and death issues); Counseling (the use of medications, insurance issues, child counseling); Law (advocacy, honesty); Journalism (privacy, political vs. nonpolitical news); Education (teaching, administration, the student as customer). Submission deadline is January 28, 2000. Submissions and inquiries should be sent to John Rowan (219)989-2654; ([jrowan@calumet.purdue.edu](mailto:jrowan@calumet.purdue.edu)) or Samuel Zinaich (219) 989-2132; ([zinaich@calumet.purdue.edu](mailto:zinaich@calumet.purdue.edu)). Both are at Purdue University, Department of Philosophy, 2200 1 69th Street, Hammond, IN 46323-2094. Earlier submissions will receive priority in the review

process.

Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, will host a Philosophy Graduate Student Conference February 11-12, 2000. The conference topic is Business Ethics: Corporate Responsibility. Contact Andy Gustafson for further information at 414-288-5957; andy.gustafo@philosophers.net or Timothy Yoder @ (414) 2881501; timushka@msn.com.

The Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions (CSEP) was established in 1976 for the purpose of promoting education and scholarship relating to ethical and policy issues of the professions. *Perspectives on the Professions* is one of the means the Center has of achieving that purpose.

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