


Concept Paper

# Translating Values into Quality: How We Can Use Max Weber's Ethic of Responsibility to Rethink Professional Ethics

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**Abstract:** A risk-based reinterpretation of Weber's ethic of responsibility can resolve core problems of professional ethics (the role of values, the multilevel problem, etc.) and address current issues—such as the social responsibility of professions or the accountability of professionals. From this perspective, professions as organizations and professionals as their individual members share and distribute responsibility (and risk) in that the primary responsibility of a profession is to provide domain-specific quality standards, while that of individual professionals is to be able to justify service against those standards on a case-by-case basis. In this way, as argued in the paper, professionalism translates (sometimes conflicting) values into a case-specific quality.

**Keywords:** professional ethics; risk; Max Weber; social responsibility; accountability

## 1. Introduction

In 1919, Max Weber presented his concept of the ethic of responsibility in his lecture *Politics as a Vocation*. In principle, an ethic of responsibility is about taking responsibility for the unintended but foreseeable consequences of one's actions [1]. Weber saw this in sharp contrast to an "ethic of conviction": that one's values justify one's actions, regardless of the consequences. A century later, Weber's approach is still part of the political science debate [2]. The task I have set myself in this paper is to show that Weber's concept of a responsibility ethic is suitable for use as a modern ethics of professional action. As we shall see, there are a number of problems to be solved here, which I have summarized as the value problem, the generalizability problem, and the multilevel problem.

First, the value problem: Which values, especially social values, should be taken into account in professional action? In practical terms, such questions result in codes of ethics with the open issue of the extent to which these reflect the reality of professional work [3].

Second, the generalizability problem: The concept of professional ethics should not only apply to the professions of medicine and law but should also be generalizable to nonparadigmatic professions such as architecture, psychology, or accounting (including "new professionalism" [4]).

Third, even if the problem of values and generalizability appears to be solved, the multilevel problem remains: Are ethical demands directed only at individual professionals or, in a sense, also at the profession as a whole? Without addressing obligations at the corporate level, professions could be reduced to groups of experts, raising questions—about the power and influence of experts, and potential abuse—that have been widely discussed since the 1960s [5]. Even today, some authors question whether the pervasive influence of experts undermines democratic principles [6], and thus call for "democratic professionalism" [7].

As an alternative to codes of ethics, the concept of responsibility is often brought into play. In the legal profession, the notion of professional responsibility is long-established, and refers not least to principles such as confidentiality and loyalty [8]. A more recent example would be the volume by Mitchell and Ream [9], which aims to contribute to the discussion on education and health care reform. Mitchell and Ream emphasize the



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knowledge provided by professions and the many social relations with stakeholders that today's professionals must navigate, highlighting the social values served by professionals in health and education [9]. Unfortunately, in this way, the problem of values reappears and seems to have only been repackaged, especially when it comes to social responsibility. Commenting in the Mitchell and Ream volume, Brint describes the idea of professional responsibility as "social idealism" [10] (p. 99). As I aim to show, evaluating responsibility as an ethical principle depends on how it is understood.

My contribution seeks to demonstrate that, by reviving Weber's concept of responsibility ethic, a meaningful explication of professional responsibility is possible, and that it solves the problems concerning values, generalizability, and multiple reference levels. The argumentation in this paper is presented in Sections 2–6.

Section 2 briefly reviews the core value problem of professional ethics.

Section 3 introduces an understanding of professional responsibility as outlined by Max Weber and Eliot Freidson. I use Freidson's interpretation of professionalism as a filter to map Weber's ethic of responsibility onto a still-current understanding of professionalism.<sup>1</sup>

Section 4 links responsibility to the risk discourse, as reflected by Giddens [15] or Renn [16]. The link to risk is considered under two characteristics of responsibility: responsibility is relational (exists between several people) and responsibility can be shared. One conclusion is that professions (as corporations) and professionals (as individuals) share and distribute responsibility (and risk) in that the main responsibility of a profession is to set domain-specific quality standards, whereas that of individual professionals is to refer to these standards. This can have ambivalent consequences for the individual professional. With the qualified application of standards, the professional can take greater risks than he or she would normally be prepared to take (e.g., in surgical procedures). In organizational contexts, however, this type of professional risk premium can be used by the organization to take greater risks through individual professionals, while leaving ultimate responsibility with the professional ("responsibilization" [17]).

Section 5 summarizes the concept of professional responsibility. We can say, facing risks, and taking into account today's multi-relationality of professional responsibility, professional service consists of translating values into quality. We will see that social responsibility is the new form of the demand for professional altruism.

Section 6 presents the discussion. It focuses first on examining the responsibility-based approach in relation to the current requirements of professional ethics, and finally on a discussion of its novelty value—for an understanding of Weber's work as well as for democratic professionalism [7], demanding that professionals share responsibility more actively with citizens.

## 2. Values—A Core Problem of Professional Ethics

In this section, I will briefly revisit the value problem. The issue of values runs through the long discussion on professional ethics, which we could trace back even to Durkheim [18] or Tawney [19]. The discussion that continues today began with the question of the altruism of professions, moved on to a consideration of codes of ethics, and ended—according to the current state of affairs—with a return to the practiced value orientation as we find it among professionals. I outline this development in three steps:

- (1) The discussion of ethics and professions was shaped by Talcott Parsons. In his article for the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Parsons wrote that "a full-fledged profession must have some institutional means of making sure that such competence will be put to socially responsible uses" [20] (p. 535). Consequently, within academic textbooks, "altruism" has become a hallmark of professions [21]. However, already in the 1960s and 1970s there were different, influential, interpretations of professions, which saw them in the context of capitalist power structures [22], as an upward mobility project of bourgeois groups, or the "professional project" [23]. Viewed from such perspectives, altruism on the part of professions seems unlikely.

- (2) What we can observe is that professions are developing codes of ethics. This has shifted the discussion so that professional ethics revolve around *codes* of ethics. The development of a code of ethics may be taken as an expression of professionalization [24]. Many professions have developed codes of ethics, often oriented towards the Hippocratic Oath in medicine [25] and occasionally supported by ethical–philosophical considerations on the adequate criteria for such [3,26]. Abbott distilled characteristics of the use of professional codes of ethics, emphasizing that the code of ethics is a corporate phenomenon [27]. In a neo-Weberian approach, codes of ethics would represent a defensive tool to justify a form of market monopoly [11].
- (3) Years later, Abbott emphasized the role of values in professional practice [28], similar to Durkheim [18], but without the Durkheimian assumption that group norms and commitments emerge from professional work. From a philosophical point of view, professional practice could in principle be grounded in social values [29], seeing professions as “inherently ethical practices” [30] (p. 7). If we want to avoid referring to values, we could instead consider the professional sense of obligation in terms of virtue. I see in this context the sociological discussion about phronesis in professional practice [31–33]; Aristotle classically defined phronesis as practical wisdom or prudence, representing a kind of virtue. From a philosophical perspective, professionalism as such could even be seen as a special—i.e., professional—virtue [34].

The question of values becomes problematic in cases of misconduct. The problem arises from the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the high values such as health or justice with which some professions can be legitimized, and, on the other hand, repeated cases of abuse and numerous violations. The literature on individual misconduct by professions abounds, not only in the medical and legal professions [35–38], but also in professional fields where the individual and social stakes are not so high, such as social work [39] or higher education [40]. Some professions, such as accounting, can even face widespread suspicion of misleading the public in order to benefit their clients [41]. The practical solution, as mentioned, is codes of ethics, which seem to reassure the general public.

### 3. Weber, Freidson

In this section, I will introduce first Weber’s concept of an ethic of responsibility and then Freidson’s remarks on professional responsibility. For both Weber and Freidson, responsibility was not a systematic term. In this paper, I argue that their reflections, taken together, provide a solid basis for rethinking professional ethics.

#### 3.1. Weber: An Ethic of Responsibility—In Terms of Objective Rationality

Although Max Weber had already introduced the ethic of responsibility as part of his 1917 epistemological paper on *Wertfreiheit* (value neutrality) [12], it became popularized in the printed transcript of his lecture *Politics as a Vocation*, which was presented during a turbulent period in German history, following a lost war and at the beginning of the country’s first constitutional democracy. However, the weightiest criticism of this concept comes from Weber’s own work and relates to rational social action. Therefore, I supplement my introduction with a justification of the ethic of responsibility by an improved, Weberian explication of the concept of rationality.

##### 3.1.1. Weber’s Outline of the Ethic of Responsibility

Weber defined the ethic<sup>2</sup> of responsibility as “you must answer for the (foreseeable) consequences of your actions” and distinguished it from the ethic of conviction as two mutually exclusive normative or moral approaches.

We need to be clear that all ethically oriented action can be guided by either of two fundamentally different, irredeemably incompatible maxims: it can be guided by an ‘ethics of conviction’ or an ‘ethics of responsibility’. [...] there is a profound abyss between acting in accordance with the maxim governing an ethics of conviction and acting in tune with an ethics of responsibility. In the

former case this means, to put it in religious terms: ‘A Christian does what is right and leaves the outcome to God’, while in the latter you must answer for the (foreseeable) consequences of your actions. [1] (p. 83)

In the concluding passages of the lecture, Weber speaks about the personality required of a politician. In this context, Weber seems to blur the strict dichotomy between the ethic of responsibility and that of conviction.

[. . .] I find it immeasurably moving when a mature human being—whether young or old in actual years is immaterial—who feels the responsibility he bears for the consequences of his own actions with his entire soul and who acts in harmony with his ethics of responsibility reaches the point where he says, “Here I stand, I can do no other”. That is authentically human and cannot fail to move us. For this is a situation that *may* befall *any* of us at some point, if we are not inwardly dead. In this sense an ethics of responsibility and an ethics of conviction are not absolute antitheses, but are mutually complementary, and only when taken together do they constitute the authentic human being who *is capable* of having a “vocation for politics.” [1] (p. 92)<sup>3</sup>

The problem with this argumentation is that Weber himself presupposes that individual human behavior can in principle follow several types of social action. Weber introduced four such types of social action [44] (p. 115): instrumental-rational (zweckrational), value-rational (wertrational), affectual (affektuell), and traditional (traditional). For example, spontaneously assisting others out of a sense of solidarity could be an example of purely value-rational action; finding and making one’s way home by public transportation might be an example of purely instrumental-rational action. If we understand “conviction” as predominantly value-oriented and assume a substantial influence of values on our actions, which may not be visible at every moment, the strict distinction between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of conviction does not seem justified.

### 3.1.2. Starr’s Review of Weber’s Outline of the Ethic of Responsibility

In reviewing Weber’s concept of an ethic of responsibility, Starr argues that the two ethics represent different worldviews or types of morality [45]. Starr introduces Weber’s distinction between the ethic of responsibility and of conviction in parallel with Weber’s types of social action, and points out that these two distinctions are related but have still to be separated. According to Starr, the dichotomy between responsibility versus conviction must be seen on a higher-ordered, “theoretical” level of rationality than the rationality of types of social action (p. 413). Weber’s dichotomy of two ethics refers to values: for the ethic of conviction, values are “arranged in a rationally unified hierarchy” (p. 413); in contrast, the ethic of responsibility is based on the awareness of an “inevitable and irresolvable value conflict” (p. 409), but also on awareness of the fact that rational action has to be informed by values. In closing, Starr explains the contradiction, in which Weber’s lecture first introduced the ethic of responsibility and of conviction as driven “by two fundamentally different, irredeemably incompatible maxims”, yet concluded by calling them “mutually complementary.” Starr argues that Weber had switched the meaning of the dichotomy, addressing in the last section of the lecture not two worldviews—or types of morality—but two forms of social action (p. 427): value-rational action (instead of ethic of conviction) versus instrumental-rational action (instead of ethic of responsibility).

To support his argument, Starr refers to the analyses by Kalberg and Levine [46,47]. They argued that Weber’s work on rationalization is based on an implicit differentiation between subjective and objective forms of rationality. Types of social action such as value-rational action and instrumental-rational action represent subjective rationality and define individual behavior. Objective rationality refers to the institutional level and patterns of collective behavior. According to Kalberg and Levine, objective rationality takes on four forms: (1) instrumental or practical rationality (to survive by following practical rules); (2) conceptual or theoretical rationality (basing decisions on an elaborated, consistent

concept of the world); (3) substantive rationality (structuring actions with regard to basic value postulates); and (4) formal rationality (procedures, with disregard to persons) [46,47]. The process of rationalization can refer to any of these forms (also independently); for instance, formal rationalization has been advanced by industrialization, and conceptual rationality by the growth of science. The point to make is that *the ethic of conviction can apply and be based, even today, on substantive rationality*: “Only action oriented to substantive rationality has the potential to introduce methodical ways of life that subjugate the practical rational way of life based on interests, the formal rational orientation to rules, and reality’s stream of disjointed occurrences.” [46] (p. 1165). Based on substantive rationality, it is still possible today to orient one’s everyday life entirely according to various religious value systems, i.e., to an ethic of conviction. However, following Starr, there is no similar rational basis for an ethic of responsibility, particularly due to the lack of an “apparent overarching rationality”:

These struggles [between values and between rationalities, in and between different spheres of life] are not susceptible to rational resolution precisely because what counts as rational is designated differently within each of the warring factions, and there is no apparent overarching rationality that can mediate between the intersecting values and spheres. Here we have the context of Weber’s ethic of responsibility. What stance is available to the ethically serious person in such a world? [45] (p. 424)

To come to a first conclusion: Weber’s distinction between an ethic of responsibility and an ethic of conviction cannot be justified by reference to subjective rationalities of social action, but represents types of morality (maxims, worldviews) that particularly differ in objective rationality. Whereas the ethic of conviction can be linked to substantive rationality with defined value systems, the ethic of responsibility lacks any link to an overarching objective rationality and is based on an awareness of “inevitable and irresolvable value conflict” [45] (p. 409).

### 3.2. Freidson: Personal Professional Responsibility and the “Institutional Ethics” of Professions

Freidson treated professional responsibility not as an ethical principle but as a phenomenon of professional work, arising at three levels: first, the level of personal responsibility for clients; second, the collegial, work-organizing level; third, the corporate level of the profession. Freidson’s emphasis was on personal responsibility as a professional commitment.

#### 3.2.1. Personal Professional Responsibility

In his seminal work *Profession of Medicine*, Freidson emphasized how professional work is characterized by responsibility [48]. Referring to Carr-Saunders and Wilson [49], he called this a “sense of responsibility for the integrity of practice and its consequences for the patient” [48] (p. 161). “Medical responsibility”, Freidson wrote, “is responsibility for the patient’s well-being, and the exercise of medical responsibility is seen as the basis and key action of the practicing physician.” (p. 165). This responsibility is personal, direct, and consequential. Freidson characterizes professional responsibility not as a state of consciousness, but rather as a performance that is linked to the task and to the client. Freidson noted “the clinician not only assumes responsibility for his work, but even revels in it” (p. 182). In his late work *Professionalism: The Third Logic*, Freidson spoke not of responsibility but rather “commitment to work” [50] (pp. 107–109), in which “satisfaction is intrinsic to the performance of work that is interesting and challenging because it is complex and requires the exercise of discretion” (p. 108).

In *Profession of Medicine*, Freidson also described a “characteristic limitation” of the practitioner’s sense of responsibility [48] (p. 182): The emphasis is on *personal* responsibility rather than general or “communal” responsibility (p. 164). Communal responsibility would refer to “all tasks and clients of all members of one’s profession” (p. 182). Freidson concluded “It is the sense of personal responsibility that lays the heaviest qualification on the behavior of the individual practitioner in his everyday work” (p. 182). Abbott also

touches on this point of personal responsibility or commitments of professionals in his reflections on a processual sociology [28]. He uses “value” as a collective term for the personal sense of obligation that professionals feel in their work. If this personal value or commitment is not taken into account, we face a “contradiction between professionalism as explained and professionalism as experienced” (p. 258).

### 3.2.2. Collegial, Work-Organizing Level

According to Freidson, morality at the collegial level is—somewhat surprisingly—relegated to the background. Durkheim saw the starting point of professional ethics precisely in the specific “moral milieu” [18] (p. 29) represented by the professional group, which for Durkheim is the source of professional norms and obligations. According to Freidson, on the contrary, a lack of communal responsibility is precisely the reason for the emergence of codes of professional ethics [50]. Codes of ethics provide a generalized view of a profession’s service, by translating ethics to the “use of specialized skills in circumstances not familiar to lay people but involving similar sins” (p. 215), such as conflicts of interest.

However, for Freidson, responsibility also serves to organize professional work in contexts involving apprentices. In *Profession of Medicine*, Freidson referred in his presentation largely to the volume by Becker and colleagues [51]: “For a student to obtain responsibility was to obtain a privilege reflecting positive evaluation of his capacities by his superiors.” [48] (p. 167). The guiding principles in the clinical context studied, which also serves as a medical school, are the “values of medical responsibility and clinical experience” (p. 165). Here, responsibility defines status and privilege within a work context as well as a positive frame for commitment within an organization.

### 3.2.3. Corporate Level of the Profession, Institutional Level of Professionalism

Freidson never tired of emphasizing in his work that professions are *corporate* in nature [52]. This is most evident in professional associations. According to Freidson, they serve for “attempting to persuade society to grant and sustain its professional status” [48] (p. 200). Codes of ethics may be considered a mechanism of intra-professional control, however, “Even when clear an unequivocal incompetence or unethicity is revealed, there is considerable reluctance to exert controls” (pp. 180–181). Severe consequences such as a loss of license seem to result more often from adverse publicity than internal control. As Freidson noted, discipline within the profession can be carried out “on a more informal basis” (p. 162), for instance through loss of reputation and personal boycott (p. 183) of an incompetent or dishonest colleague.

With Freidson, if we look for the responsibility of the professions, we find it instead in the context of the “soul of professionalism” invoked in his book *Professionalism: The Third Logic* [50]. Particularly, Freidson distinguishes between, on the one hand, the professional codes of ethics that reflect “practice ethics” and on the other hand “institutional ethics”. *Institutional* ethics are concerned with framework conditions of professional work; for instance, “the way practice is financed, administered, and controlled in the concrete places where professionals work” (p. 216). The institutional ethics of professionalism should preserve the “freedom to judge and choose the ends of work” (p. 217). Brint sought to further define the characteristics of Freidson’s institutional ethics, including “services also for the needy” [53] (p. 109), “high-quality service”, and “commitment to a ‘transcendent’ value (health, justice, etc.)” (p. 110).

In summary, Freidson’s understanding of responsibility, unlike Weber’s, is based on professional practice. According to Freidson, codes of ethics serve more of a defensive, even relieving, function. The corporate responsibility of professions seems to rest on helping to shape a society’s “institutional ethics” in which professional practice is embedded.

## 4. Risk and Responsibility in Professional Work

In this section, I link the analysis of professional responsibility to the discourse of risk. I begin by briefly introducing the connection between the discourses of risk and

responsibility. I then show the implications for professional responsibility, first by looking at the standard professional–client model of professional work: a professional provides a personal, knowledge-based service to a client. Second, I consider responsibility and risk in professional work in the context of organizations and corporations.

#### 4.1. Linking the Discourses of Risk and Responsibility

The risk discourse seems to provide an appropriate framework for considering the consequences on which Weber’s definition of the responsibility ethic—“you must answer for the (foreseeable) consequences of your actions”—is based. However, the foundations for mathematical risk assessment were laid only after World War II with the work of von Neumann and Morgenstern [54]. At the latest after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986, the risk discourse gained importance through questions of the necessary technology assessment. The risk discourse was supported by sociological studies such as Beck’s *Risk Society* [55]. In the same context, the concept of responsibility was also discussed anew. Jonas’ conception of responsibility for the future should be mentioned in particular [56]. Jonas states “Put epigrammatically: the possibility of there being responsibility in the world, which is bound to the existence of men, is of all objects of responsibility the first” (p. 99). This responsibility refers in particular to the man-made possibilities and risks of technology, from medicine to nuclear power (pp. 17–20). For Jonas, this leads to the “duty to ensure a future” (p. 38). Strydom, referring to Jonas, addressed “responsibility” as a “new master frame” for addressing and integrating different societal risk debates, particularly in environmental policy and issues of global sustainable development [57]. Sena provides an account of how the discourses of risk and responsibility have come together [58].

As did Sena [58], I refer to Giddens’ contribution to *The Modern Law Review*, on the relationship between risk and responsibility [15]. His starting point was the distinction between risk and danger (similarly Luhmann [59]) and the observation that in modern societies external risks (dangers) become internal, workable, decidable risks (with strong reference to Beck [55]). Giddens speaks of “manufactured risks,” i.e., new (often poorly understood) risks resulting from human development, particularly science and technology [15] (p. 4). Technology, legislation, and also professional practice translate “foreign” nature into workable tasks with a calculable outcome, i.e., risks. For manufactured risks, questions of responsibility come into play because someone has decided on measures, taken risks, and thus made themselves responsible. Giddens discussed the consequences for the welfare state: how does welfare change when risks such as illness or job loss are understood as being manufactured?

In the convergence of risk and responsibility discourse over the past 20 years, not only has a standard for risk governance developed in Europe [16,60], covering all risks, whether man-made or not, but also some productive characteristics of responsibility have emerged more clearly in this context. These include the following.

First, responsibility can be *shared*. For example, the *Australian National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* [61] is based on this approach, the application of which “is a shared responsibility between governments, communities, businesses and individuals.” (p. iii).

Second, responsibility is *relational*. In her review paper, Sena defines responsibility as “a relational process” due to the fact that “the outcome of risk management will not be determined by one or more actors’ power to influence the decision-making process” [58] (p. 87).

These two characteristics are also discussed in philosophy: that responsibility can be shared [62] and is relational [63]. They are also reflected in the risk governance approach; for example, in distributed responsibility [60].

#### 4.2. Professional Responsibility within the Professional–Client Model: Sharing Responsibility with the Profession

The standard professional–client model of professional work has been described very clearly by Hughes [64], for example. According to Hughes, professionals “profess” (p. 2);

they make claims about expertise and competence, interacting with states and clients, seeking to obtain a “mandate” (p. 3). It is in the professional–client model that the personal responsibility of professionals, as Freidson portrayed it, comes into its own. In Freidson’s words, “the ideology of professionalism claims that its specialization is fitted to individual tasks rather than standardized production” [50] (p. 111). This is where risk comes in, because the treatment of “individual tasks” often rests on unspecified knowledge and risky consequences, or as Evetts wrote “Professionals are extensively engaged in dealing with risk, with risk assessment and, through the use of expert knowledge, enabling customers and clients to deal with uncertainty” [4] (p. 781). This would fit with Luhmann’s definition of responsibility as “taking over the risk of others,” where responsibility “absorbs uncertainty,” can substitute for missing information, and creates an “equivalent of certainty” [65].

The professional–client model is essentially concerned with “mandated” risks, i.e., those risks that are assumed via professional mandate. For example, in case of a medical emergency such as possible appendicitis, one would not consult a random friend, but rather a qualified doctor (preferably with access to the necessary healthcare infrastructure); similar arguments can be made for architecture and accounting services. In the case of a medical need, one is (or at least should be) aware of the risk, especially if consulting a practitioner who is willing to try unorthodox methods—such as spiritual laying on of hands. In some cases, such as architecture or accounting, the client may not perceive any risk in doing things themselves (e.g., drafting a blueprint for one’s home) and only realize the risk taken after the fact—when damage and expense occur.

The professional–client model implies a mandate by which a client allows a professional to handle risk on their behalf; that is, to exercise professional *discretion*. Discretion differentiates professional work from work in hierarchical planning structures or pure market conditions [50,66,67]: Society grants professions—and their individual members—discretion in their work, i.e., to consider a case from the perspective of a particular profession. As Molander and Grimen argued, discretion has a structural and an epistemic aspect [68]. The *structural* aspect can be described with discretionary power, and concerns the delegation of societal decision-making to professions [69,70]. Freidson justifies the discretionary power of professions through a specific, “third” logic of professionalism, aside from bureaucratic and market-driven logics of organizing work [50]. This power raises the question of whether discretion conflicts with democratic control of work [6,68].

The *epistemic* aspect of discretion puts the focus on reasoning and judgment: “Discretion, as a kind of reasoning, exhibits the characteristic features of practical arguments” [68] (p. 173), leading from a “description of a situation” to an “action” (p. 171).<sup>4</sup> Instead of discretion as reasoned judgment, we can speak, as does Abbott, of “inference” which “takes the information of diagnosis and indicates a range of treatments with their predicted outcomes,” [71] (p. 40). As Abbott argues, *inference* is a “purely professional act” (ibid.). Thus, if we look for a characteristic of discretion that is both epistemologically and ethically relevant, it would be professional inference, this inference being based on or referring to highly abstracted knowledge [52,71,72].

What does discretion mean for professional responsibility? For individual professionals, the responsibility relates to inferences and justification. First, professionals must make an objectively rational, scientifically based assessment of both the client’s situation and the options for action (i.e., making inferences) and act accordingly when appropriate. Second, professionals must, in principle, be able to justify their inferences. The easiest way to make inferences and justifications is to refer to the standards that are set by the profession [73]. As a first result (still to be further specified), we can say the following: It is the personal responsibility of the professional to manage risk for the client with possible reference to professional standards; in other words, to come to professionally justifiable inferences for a specific case. Consequently, the need to justify personal professional discretion implies a corporate responsibility of the profession to provide and develop the standards on which personal professional inference can be based.



In the context of risk, the professional–client model goes hand in hand with *shared responsibility*. Although in this model the primary responsibility lies with the individual professional, there remains a residual risk for other parties. On the client side, this includes not only the risk of choosing an appropriate professional (do I have the right doctor? A good tax advisor?), but also the cooperation in the professional–client relationship (e.g., taking prescribed medications correctly or carefully documenting personal income).

Responsibility is shared not only between client and professional, but also between professional and profession. The profession should not only develop standards, but also provide appropriate forms of continuing education or opportunities for knowledge sharing, such as conferences. Professionals, in turn, should keep abreast of evolving professional standards and opportunities for continuing education. The sharing of responsibilities fulfills a *relief function* both for clients in relation to professionals and for professionals in relation to the profession [74,75]. In terms of risk relief this means, as I put it more generally, “If a person acting in a position of high responsibility—such as a doctor or a politician—would at any moment realize the amount of uncertainty and risk involved, he or she would hold off or refrain from taking decisions. It is therefore vitally important for responsibilities to be regulated by roles, standards, laws—and social structures in general.” [76] (p. 267).

As a preliminary conclusion, we can say that even in the consideration of the professional–client relationship, when factoring in risk, the profession comes back into play. Professionals can be relieved by sharing responsibility with the profession.

#### 4.3. Professional Responsibility in Organizational Contexts: The Relational Nature of Responsibility

The current sociological discussion has moved away from the professional–client model [14]. As Brint noted in the discussion of professional responsibility, expertise today is largely organized, i.e., integrated into the division of labor in companies or administrations [10]. To some extent, the processes that take place here can be captured under the title “discourse of professionalism” meaning professionalism as a value and ideology that also serves for governing work [4], e.g., in appeals to work as or like “a professional” So, the organizational context includes the following:

1. New forms of organizational control: We find professionalism as a “disciplinary logic which describes ‘autonomous’ professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance” [77] (p. 280).
2. Increased accountability: We find increased reference to certified expertise, leading to a “responsibilization” of professionals in organizations [17], most probably due to greater emphasis on legal compliance [78].
3. A recombination of tasks: We see a “hybridization” of professional work, often in combination with managerial approaches, now focusing on how to control highly qualified work [79], as extensively researched for work in hospitals [80].
4. Globalization of work relations: Last but not least, we see the rise of global professional firms, for instance in law, accounting, engineering, or architecture, with transnational professional standards and work regimes [81].

The new organizational context both limits and reshapes professional discretion.

The organizational context also makes it necessary to define the concept of responsibility in more detail. Closer examination reveals the relational nature of responsibility. Terms of responsibility are “ascribable or attributed in the form of multi-place predicates” or “structural terms” [63] (p. 16), the analysis of which requires the following elements: *somebody* is responsible *for* something (actions, consequences. . .) *towards* (an addressee) *before* (an instance) *in relation to* (criterion, norm, value. . .) *within* the framework of an area of responsibility. . . (p. 16). We find discussion of the relational nature of responsibility in both the sociological literature and the self-reflection of the professions. From the point of view of professions, Montgomery argues similarly [82] (pp. 83–84), distinguishing four classes of stakeholders to which professional responsibility relates: (a) “discretionary stakeholders” such as educational institutions and professional societies; (b) “demanding stakeholders”

such as advocacy groups and the media; (c) “dominant stakeholders” such as government bodies and employing organizations, which dominate via the authority they exert; and (d) “dependent stakeholders” such as students, patients, or clients, which Montgomery termed “vulnerable,” noting

[. . .] the imbalance of power between the professional and these [dependent] stakeholders, who are located in the inner ring of the stakeholder map, places a higher moral expectation on professionals to honor their responsibility, both morally and legally, to these more vulnerable stakeholders. [82] (p. 84)

The concept of responsibility as introduced here shares many features with that of *accountability*, in particular its relational character [83,84]. However, responsibility and accountability differ in the locus of quality control. Accountability means to conform to *specific standards set by someone else*, the “accountability arrangements” [83], mostly referring to the operational context in companies or state bureaucracies. Similarly, Pellizzoni defines accountability as an “ex post” pull factor [85] (p. 548), i.e., someone is made accountable to specific norms and else might even face sanctions [86]. In the case of responsibility, the locus of controlling quality remains with the bearer of responsibility. With responsibility, according to Weber, potential conflicts of value should be considered. In the case of the professional–client model, there may be a conflict of values between the norms of the professions on the one hand and the particular concerns of the client on the other, with the professional required to reach a professionally appropriate decision or resolution. If corresponding “accountability arrangements” exist, these determine the decision.

The interplay of accountability and responsibility illustrates the problems of (certified) professionals in organizations. Put simply, in organizations, there is an accountability associated with the performance of a task that rests with the employee and is to be separated from the responsibility for the consequences of the performance of the task (wrong goods delivered; unexpected death of an inpatient in a hospital...), which must first be attributed to the organization and is only sometimes passed on to the employee (through dismissal, etc.). From the employee’s point of view, additional responsibility relationships arise. Let us take the example of psychologists working in a prison. They have a client relationship with the prisoners, a (loose) relationship with their profession, and an employment relationship with the prison as an organization, which may include conducting tests on individual prisoners that justify certain measures (solitary confinement). For the professional, the availability of standardized tests usually represents a relief function, a responsibility shared with the profession. This advantage—a kind of risk premium—can now be used by the organization to shift responsibility to the (certified) professional. This is the phenomenon of “responsibilization” reported by Le Bianic [17]).

## 5. The Concept of Professional Responsibility

In this section, I sketch the concept of professional responsibility that is based on Weber’s ethic of responsibility. I then present some implications for thinking about professional altruism. To conclude, I revisit the three core problems for an understanding of professional ethics, as introduced at the outset of this paper.

### 5.1. The Concept of Professional Responsibility—Providing Quality

What are the implications for a concept of professional responsibility? Let us begin with professional responsibility as a corporate phenomenon. The responsibility of a profession rests here: *Define the quality of a domain-specific type of service by highlighting best practices, setting norms and standards, etc. against a background of values and knowledge*—not as standardization but as a reference for discretion (or inference) in individual professional practice.

The social closure of a profession is less about expert knowledge than about *defining quality criteria* for services in a domain. Medical and scientific knowledge is largely public and anything but secret, but the quality criteria for good surgery or scientific practice are defined by the medical and scientific professions, respectively. The benefits and costs of medical interventions are the subject of social and political debate, but the criteria that

define a brain tumor or what constitutes a successful appendectomy remain a technical matter for the medical profession. This view represents a combination of a neo-Weberian view of the social closure of professions [11] and thinking along the lines of Baer about professional standards for skills, qualifications, diagnoses, treatments, etc. [73], which are essentially conveyed through education, training, or exchange within a profession.

There are other implications:

1. For the individual professional, the ability to refer to quality standards set by the profession means sharing responsibility for professional practice with the profession. The shared responsibility provided by the profession allows the individual professional to prudently assume greater risks in providing professional services (mandated risks) than they would likely be willing to assume in the absence of this professional framework of qualifications and standards.
2. From this perspective, it becomes understandable why codes of professional ethics are a corporate matter for the professions, as both Freidson [48] and Abbott [27] have pointed out, rather than for individual professional practice. Given the implicit risks of professional practice, such codes of ethics serve to reduce the burden on members of the profession as well as to discipline them.

The individual professional's responsibility mainly arises from their relationship to the profession and to their own clients. The individual professional is required to respond to both the profession and the client. *The responsibility of the professional is to exercise his/her service in a way that he/she is able to justify the service against the profession's quality standards (by applying, redefining, or rejecting them in a specific case).*

There are other implications:

1. In order to justify their professional practice, individuals may be required to improve their expertise and knowledge to meet the quality standards required by their professional bodies. This leads to a certain pressure for continuing education and orientation, which is exerted on the individual professional and which the profession helps to alleviate through conferences and continuing education programs (e.g., in architecture [87]).
2. For the individual professional, the relational nature of responsibility comes to the fore. When professionals work in organizations (e.g., as doctors in a hospital, in an industrial enterprise, or even in a prison), these relationships are multiplied. As already described, this can lead to a hybrid form of professionalism [79], for example when a job requires management functions and skills. The reference to professional quality can also be used by the organization (to legitimize practices) and thus increase the accountability of the employed professional ("responsibilization" [17]).

## 5.2. What Can Be Considered Professional Altruism? Social Responsibility; Translating Values into Quality

The congruence of the public interest and that of a profession cannot be presupposed [88], and neither can altruism, i.e., that professions put competence "to socially responsible uses" (Parsons [20]). Personal altruism seems neither sufficient nor necessary to exert professional service, whereas a specific education and accreditation are. Personal altruism may trigger the choice of one's occupation (as participation motivation), for instance in the health services, and support professional practice. However, if altruism is part of a profession's ideology, such as among firefighters, then it will be demonstrated in fulfilling the role, such as during selfless operations to rescue strangers from burning buildings. Then, altruism is an expectation of performing this profession. For most professions, simpler standards apply.

Therefore, what does "altruism" mean in the case of professions? It cannot mean an unmitigated, universal willingness to sacrifice oneself for others; that would not be a paid profession, but something along these lines resonates. From the perspective of responsibility as a "master frame" (Strydom [57]), altruism can be interpreted as social responsibility in the sense of Parsons, who spoke of "socially responsible uses" Transferring

altruism from the value canon, where values gain something absolute, to the responsibility frame has several advantages from the perspective of the professions. First, responsibility can be shared. Social responsibility can be viewed both individually and corporately, in the latter case affecting the profession as a whole. Because responsibility can be shared, social responsibility can be viewed as additive: the core professional activity can be complemented by individual activities that count as socially responsible, such as evening charity events or “pro bono” services by legal firms [89]. Second, responsibility is relational. The question arises of to whom social responsibility must be exercised: Toward all, or only specific customers? Toward the community? To the state? This relationality opens up a broad range of opportunities to demonstrate oneself as altruistic via exercising social responsibility toward a selected social group related to a profession or professional service. It is therefore not surprising that corporate social responsibility is attractive to so many professions, precisely because it also means cultivating relationships (e.g., in accounting [90]).

As can be seen from authors such as Bayles [29], there is a multiplicity of obligations for professionals precisely because their responsibility is relational and sharable. This multiplicity may relate not only to “transcendent” values such as health and justice, which are associated with the medical and legal professions and are not as readily apparent to other professions such as accounting, but also to more, or less, functional values around the professional services: availability and communicability, or scientificity, rationality, efficiency, but also empathy and humanity, and not to forget, sustainability [91]. These values can be very different depending on the individual and context, and can potentially conflict with each other. Such conflicts become evident when time pressure comes into play: professionals must sometimes act under time pressure, balancing between speed versus thoroughness of a service—taking into account the client’s situation and their own organizational context, etc. From Weber’s perspective, responsibility here means acting appropriately in the face of such a conflict of values or obligations. And perhaps what is *specific to professionalism* is to turn such conflicts into a professional quality of performance, e.g., a therapeutic treatment under time and cost pressures; or agreeing a plea-bargain to avoid a protracted and costly court case. We can put it this way: *professionalism translates values into a quality* (in a given context, maybe related to a conflict of values).

How professions translate values into quality can be understood in the case of architecture, a profession that is confronted with conflicting values on a daily basis. A well-researched example is the role of architecture in heritage conservation [92]. Conservation is committed to the authenticity of an object, for instance a building, but from a municipal perspective, economic uses would be desirable. Such value conflicts can hinder development [92]. With the help of an architectural solution, such as a spectacular extension as an entrance to the building, a quality can be created—with the addition of other values, in this case accessibility and aesthetics—that makes a compromise in use possible. Similar examples are found in other professions, for example in accounting, when a tax return has to be prepared that serves both legal formality and cost efficiency.

### 5.3. Three Problems of Professional Ethics Revisited

Can a responsibility-based approach solve the three problems mentioned?

I start with the multilevel problem: are ethical demands directed only at individual professionals or, in a certain sense, also at the profession as a whole? As argued, both levels have to be addressed. Key is the sharing of responsibility between professions and professionals. A professional can assume greater risk (without perhaps realizing it) by having the backing of the profession—e.g., by using standards and sharing knowledge—than if the profession did not exist and there were only individual experts. Sharing responsibility solves the multilevel problem. Both levels—the individual professionals as experts and the profession as an organization—are addressees of ethical demands.

Second, the problem of generalizability: The concept of professional ethics should not only apply to the professions of medicine and law, but should also be generalizable to modern nonparadigmatic professions such as architecture, psychology, or accounting.

The problem of generalizability is solved by the fact that, according to Weber, we do not have to start from central values in order to understand professional responsibility, but from the risk associated with professional action; for Weber, this is the consideration of the consequences of one's own professional action. There is no specific reference to a central value for every profession, but there is a reference to risk. What is specific to *professional* action is that risk is shared between individual experts and their wider profession.

Last but not least, the value problem: which values, especially social values, should be taken into account in professional action? As mentioned, Weber's concept of an ethic of responsibility is based on the acceptance of conflicts of values. The relationship between the values and the professions is thus loosened and can only be one of facilitation rather than one of obligation. Professions as organizations can—but do not have to—legitimize their work by referring to core values. For translation into individual professional practice, this reference is an enabling framework rather than a necessary condition. As a physician, one may (but is not obligated to) implement a personal, value-based motivation to help others become or remain healthy. The professional control of the individual practice takes place less through the codes of ethics (that too) than through quality requirements for the practical work of the expert.

In today's world, corporate responsibility is the other side of the coin of social closure of enterprises as well as professions [93]. Organizations that claim some sort of autonomy—as discretion, or due to a “third logic” (Freidson)—must expect to be held responsible.

## 6. Discussion

In this section I address two questions:

First, does the consideration of responsibility provide a sufficient and new view of professional ethics? On the one hand, I will argue that a Weberian extension still corresponds to—and complements—the sociological understanding of professional ethics (as described by Abbott [27]). On the other hand, I will defend a responsibility-based professional ethics against Brint's fundamental objections.

Second, does this imply a new understanding of Weber's contribution to work and organization, or just a new functionalism? I will argue that it is worthwhile to develop Weber's thought further, both in fundamental concepts such as rationality and in more practice-related concepts such as responsibility.

### 6.1. Does the Consideration of Responsibility Provide a Sufficient and New View of Professional Ethics?

To start with, I will discuss how the responsibility-based approach fits a standard sociological interpretation of professional ethics. With his seminal paper on professional ethics, Abbott identified five “basic properties” of professional ethics codes (in a slightly different order than here) [27]:

- (i) Universal distribution: “nearly all professions have some kind of formal ethical code” (p. 857);
- (ii) Enforcement dependent on visibility: “formal prosecution under professional ethics rules is a function largely of the public visibility of the offense” (p. 859);
- (iii) Individualism: “professional ethics codes deal with individuals and individual behavior” (p. 860);
- (iv) Emphasis on colleague obligations: “obligations toward fellow professionals predominate, especially those that restrain competition for clients, such as pricing policies, rules against client stealing, and the like” (p. 862);
- (v) Correlation with intraprofessional status: “both belief in and compliance with formal ethics codes seem to be related positively to intraprofessional status” (p. 858).

The first three characteristics are also relevant in a responsibility-based approach, precisely as a result of shared responsibility between the profession and individual professionals. In the case of characteristics (iv) and (v), a Weberian risk- and responsibility-based extension of professional ethics might provide even more clarification. Characteristic (iv) is

about collegiality. Sharing risk while promising quality is jeopardized for the profession and its members by free-riders in the profession who do not adhere to standards. Internal price wars as well as the mutual withholding of important professional information would undermine the common project of “profession,” especially when professions are in market competition with each other. In Weber’s view, professions are also “organizations that regulate economic activity” (“wirtschaftsregulierende Verbände”, [44] p. 172). Therefore, collegiality is required in the profession.

The observation of a correlation with intraprofessional status (*v*) can be linked to the phenomenon of ethical regression, which Abbott described as a divide between “high intraprofessional status, highly intraprofessionally ethical core and a lower status, less ethical periphery that provides much of the basic professional service” ([27] p. 871). In Abbott’s example, “Modern American lawyers are considered more professionally ethical the more they withdraw from certain areas and settings of practice” (p. 870). Similar tendencies are reported from other professions, e.g., psychology [94]. The phenomenon seems to be the flip side of the relational function of shared responsibility: most practitioners have to make many value compromises, especially driven by economic considerations, which can call into question the legitimacy of the profession as a whole: if architects yield entirely to developers’ goals of maximizing profit, the resulting buildings may be unattractive, poorly constructed, and ecologically unsustainable; correctional psychologists who treat and aim to rehabilitate criminal offenders (contrary to the popular focus on their victims); accountants who knowingly facilitate their clients’ tax evasion. This is why services that are close to the core value of a profession—or services for which the profession can claim a monopoly on the definition of quality (good architecture, good psychology, good accounting)—rise in ethical status.

Let us now turn to Brint’s objections against concepts of professional responsibility. In his contribution to Mitchell and Ream’s volume on professional responsibility, Brint formulated four general counter arguments [10]. I treat these individually.

- (1) The limited appeal of “progressive idealism” (p. 95). Brint shows that for many industries in which professionals work, we cannot expect them “to embrace ideas about reducing inequality and serving the underserved” (p. 98). However, the introduced Weberian interpretation of professional responsibility is based on risk sharing (taking into account potential conflicts of value) and not on “social idealism” in the way that Brint [10] (p. 99) understands the core of any responsibility. The professional is bound by the standards of the profession, and does not need to be socially motivated (although social motivation may be helpful to the work).
- (2) The significance of skill and expertise. Brint argues that skill, although dominant in professionalism, can have any combination with “social idealism” [10] (p. 99). Similarly, Koehn argues from a philosophical perspective that expertise is “inherently untrustworthy” as being unrelated to any “client’s good” [30] (pp. 21–22). From the perspective of responsibility-based professional ethics, however, the point is that because of the importance of their particular expertise, professionals have a relationship of responsibility to clients and society—and must be able to justify their work. The justification of expertise is all the more necessary, given repeated claims of a “crisis of expertise” [95]. We know from psychological research on expertise that the range of reliable expertise is generally much narrower than some experts claim or the public expects [96].
- (3) The decisive role of formal organizations. Brint argues that today organizations clearly play a more important role than individuals, and speaks of a “collective organizational worker” [10] (p. 100). Brint’s argument goes in the same direction as the multilevel solution described above: professionals and the profession share the risk. However, there are at least two reasons why, despite the advantages of organizations, there is still a need for individual professionals: First, there are not enough organizations—such as hospitals—to meet the demand for service. Second, from the perspective of responsibility, the use of individual experts—as a form of human capital [96]—has a

distinct advantage compared to an organization: In case they err, single experts can be dismissed more easily than an organization. It is easier to replace a single expert (as a bundle of skills and knowledge) than a whole organization or a profession.

- (4) The “contested and unsettled nature of professional responsibilities in practice” [10] (p. 94). Brint’s argument is less an objection than a description of the relational nature of responsibility: Professional responsibility means an obligation to respond to the various demands of clients, society, and all other stakeholders [82]. A vivid example is provided by Bayles’ book on professional ethics, which detailed the various obligations of professions and professionals in different scenarios (e.g., serving an immoral client). The second edition took into account even more constellations [29], such as the obligations of employed professionals or obligations of clients to professions. Especially when it comes to translating values into quality, it is important to know the many—sometimes conflicting—values. A new version of professional ethics should be able to capture the “contested and unsettled nature of professional responsibilities in practice”.

To conclude, the consideration of responsibility provides a sufficient and new view of professional ethics.

#### 6.2. *A New Understanding of Weber’s Contribution to Work and Organization, or Just a New Functionalism?*

Applying Weber’s ethics of responsibility to professional ethics teaches us not only about professionalism, but also about our understanding of Weber’s work, namely about the relation of rationality and the market economy. The common neo-Weberian approach to professionalism [11] focuses on the market monopoly of professions as “organizations regulating economic activity” [44]. In Weberian terms, this view should be supplemented by reference to the rationality component. As Parsons already noted, professionalism is essentially characterized by an “intellectual component” [20] (p. 536). In addition to what has been discussed above in the context of epistemic discretion, this professional rationality can—according to Weber—be described as technical [44] (pp. 160–161). The technique is based on the application of the scientific–professional apparatus of knowledge—“conceptual” rationality [46,47]—to specific cases. The application can be called “technical” because it contains “if–then” components, that make possible in the first place, processes of prediction and thus professional risk assessment.

Following Weber: It would be entirely wrong to interpret professional service in functionalist terms. Functionalism, as associated with the views of Goode [97] and Parsons [20], is a recurring discussion in the sociology of professions. From a functionalist view, a profession serves a central societal function of high value, such as health and justice, with some exclusivity. In his prominent translation of Weber’s *Economy and Society*, Parsons translated Weber’s definition of an occupation (Beruf) using the term “function” for Weber’s term “Leistung” [44] (p. 250). However, “Leistung” refers instead to performance [96] (p. 159). From a Weberian view, Parsons’ translation as “function” ignores the market character of professional service: a professional must offer something for which others are willing to pay a price—for instance, quality. In principle, the professional service must convince the client. Precisely because this is not easy, professions may be associated with (and clients come to expect) somewhat *performative* qualities, such as doctors in white coats and scientists with high-performance computers to the point of mystification. Nevertheless, if the core *functions* of the role are not delivered/performed satisfactorily, the professional service would not survive.

A refreshed Weberian view of professional work can overcome some obstacles faced by functionalism. The problems of a functionalist view have long been known and discussed [98,99], including a necessary but infeasible demarcation of professions from other occupations; ignoring competition among professions; and, ultimately, an ahistorical view of work. Even today, the functionalist view seems to be very popular among the professions, as it provides them with symbolic value and a strong justification for their services.

Mitchell and Ream's book, *Professional Responsibility* [9], also relies on value legitimation. From a Weberian perspective, however, issues of legitimation are historically dynamic; we see how rationality drives competition among the professions. As discussed above, the market foreclosure that the professions achieve as associations that regulate the economy is coupled with a monopoly on the definition of quality for a domain or a set of problems. Professions compete with each other by offering their own abstract (rational) explanations for problems and thus solutions from their range of services, for example in the question of whether alcohol abuse can be treated medically or rather psychologically, or whether it requires intervention by social work. According to Abbott [71] (pp. 8–9), it is precisely this competition for rational, abstract, definitional sovereignty that distinguishes inter-professional competition from competition in general, which is usually fought on the basis of price.

I would like to conclude with some reflections on codes of ethics and their relationship to quality and values. From the perspective of responsibility-based professional ethics, what are the implications for the codes of ethics of regulated professions that have an impact on people's health and lives? I argue the following:

First, as Abbott suggests [27], codes of ethics will continue to be a corporate matter for the professions (as a sign of self-regulation), but have long since been superseded by policy initiatives for quality control of professional services.

Second, codes of ethics should not only refer to general ethical behavior [3] or social responsibility, but also to the specific values associated with the core expertise (and risks) of a profession.

With regard to the first point, Adams has shown that even countries with similar legal traditions may adopt distinctly different systems for governing self-regulated professions, such that self-regulation is called into question in some places [100]. Trebilcock points out that political regulation is about *quality* control, and speaks of paradoxes because such regulation is usually misguided [101]. Regarding the second point: from a neo-Weberian perspective, if a self-regulated profession wants to survive, it must offer a service that makes a difference to people. Professional service is based on specific expertise, i.e., specialized knowledge and skills. In detail, there are two factors to this expertise [102]: the very specific "excellence" (in knowledge and skills, the "unique selling point", so to speak), coupled with "professionalism", i.e., the know-how to communicate and to find an integration of values on a case-specific basis. It is the responsibility of the profession (also in the sense of democratic professionalism according to Dzur [7]) to actively seek shared responsibility in quality control with stakeholders—for the purpose of integrating values—as a task at both the corporate and individual levels.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> An alternative would be to introduce the concept of responsibility as part of a neo-Weberian approach to the sociology of professions [11]. This would be possible because Weber's initial introduction of the ethics of responsibility occurred within the context of questions on the value of freedom of science—and thus of science as a profession [12], a context that can be connected to reflections on professions as science-based occupations [13]. In earlier versions of this paper, I pursued this path, but it proved



too complex to develop a theory of professions and to justify a non-standard application of Weber's ethic of responsibility at the same time. It seems to me that using Freidson's approach facilitates an easier connection with current strands of the sociology of professional groups [4,14].

2 "Ethic" or "ethics": In this paper, I will use the singular "ethic" for a form of morality that is distinct from other forms (ethic of responsibility vs. ethic of conviction, work ethic, Protestant ethic). The plural will be used for the expanded version of an "ethic" as a formulated theory (e.g., responsibility ethics). In directly quoted passages, the use of ethic/ethics matches the original source. Weber described the ethics of responsibility and conviction as two different "maxims". For German listeners and readers of his time, it must have been clear that he was referring to Kant, who used the term to describe a "subjective principle of volition" ("subjektives Prinzip des Wollens" [42]). The distinction between "morality" as a set of norms and "ethics" as a theory of morality only emerged in Germany after Scheler [43].

3 The phrase "Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me." is attributed to Martin Luther, who in 1521 was called before Emperor Charles V to defend his religious teachings and writing.

4 Because of the moral relevance of discretion, some authors advocate the use of the concept of "phronesis" [31,33]. Phronesis, or practical wisdom, is what we need in non-standard, unclear cases, particularly at the fringes of a profession's core work. However, phronesis does not seem to be particularly professional or, to use Kristjánsson's words: "Phronesis, as an Aristotelian concept, is relevant to professional ethics, not to professionalism in a more general (non-moral) sense." [32] (p. 307). Personal professional responsibility would then be no different from general moral behavior.

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