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Professional Ethics, Media and Good Governance

Desh Raj Sirswal

Abstract:

Philosophy is a vast subject and it is growing day by day in many branches although it has many traditional branches like epistemology, metaphysics, ethics and logic etc. Professional ethics is a discipline of philosophy and a part of subject called as ETHICS. In professional ethics we study the morals and code of conduct to be used while one practices in his/her profession. Media is also a profession and there is also a code of conduct to this profession better. If media professional be ready to work according to its professional ethics, he/she can have a good approach and it will direct him/her to play an important role in shaping good governance. In this paper it is an attempt made to draw a relation between all these conceptions and presents a theoretical interpretation of the above.

Introduction

"We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants." - Omar Bradley (Major General of the Army, USAFR)

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

Ethics in different Professions

All persons whether in business, government, educational institutes, or any other professions are concerned with ethics. Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines ethics as "the organization or criticism of conduct in terms of notions like, good, right or welfare... Ethics is the secular and critical manner of taking account of the rationalizing process in human conduct. Its temper is non-mystical, and its orientation is social rather than theological."¹

In the same sense personal ethics has been referred to as, "the rules by which an individual lives his or her personal life."² In the Business profession, managers are facing many situations that require ethical judgment, but they are not easy to answer. These have a responsibility to create an organizational environment that fosters ethical decision making by institutionalizing ethics. It means that applying and integrating ethical concepts into daily action. Theodore Parcel and James Weber suggest that this can be accomplished in three ways:

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

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

Difference between Professional Ethics and Morality

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

Ethical values transcend cultural, religious, or ethnic differences. Ethical values embrace a more universal worldview. The Josephson Institute of Ethics recommends six core ethical values to abide by: Trustworthiness, Respect, Responsibility, Fairness, Caring and Citizenship. Whether the circumstance is business or life, ethical values should be ground-rules for behaviour. When we live by these values we are demonstrating that we are worthy of trust.⁴ In this regard, we can define ethics basically in normative framework.

Code of Professional Ethics

A Code is a statement of policies, principles or rules that guide behaviour. Certainly, codes of ethics do not apply only to business enterprises, but they should guide the behaviour of persons in all organizations and in every life, so that we named it "Professional Ethics". The major international codes include the Nuremberg Code (1946); the World Health Organization's Definition of Health (1946); the Declaration of Tokyo Co torture, detention and imprisonment (1975); and the World Health Organization's Proposed International Guidelines for Biomedical Research involving human Subjects.⁵ In the present time, every profession has its own codes, to practise by their professionals. For example, The Psychological Society of Ireland consists of four overall ethical principles, in their code, which subsumes a large number of specific ethical standards. I have quoted it whole and these are given below:

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

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

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

Principle 2: Competence

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

Principle 3: Responsibility

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

with animals, they shall take care to treat the animals humanely.

Principle 4. Integrity

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

Where possible, they shall avoid the use of deception with research participants. They shall not use the professional relationship to exploit clients, sexually or otherwise, and they shall deal actively with conflicts of interest. They shall take action against harmful or unethical behaviour in colleagues or members of other professions."⁶

In the view of the Society thinks that psychologists develop and apply knowledge about human cognition and behaviour. They accept that codes of ethics are necessary to protect the interests of clients and prevent misuse of psychological knowledge. In joining the Society, members agree to comply with the Code's provision.⁷ In the same manner ethical code is a need of the present time for every profession, so that we can create a just and healthy society for our fellow beings. Computer Societies around the world such as the IEEE and national bodies in Australia, Singapore, the UK and other countries have on their websites professional codes of ethics to consider and adopt in the way professionals conduct themselves in and out of the work place. Ethical codes provide for the most part only ethical conclusions, principles, or injunctions, not the careful and difficult ethical reasoning and multidisciplinary collaboration which will be required in applying those principles to specific ethical dilemmas in a variety of circumstances.

A person takes decision and acts mostly on the basis of his intuitive moral sense. This intuitive moral judgment in turn, is derived from the world-view he entertains. Finally it is the life-view a person adopts that determines the course of action he judges to be moral. Patnaik says, "So all those debates that now cluster around the issues like environmental ethics, biomedical ethics, business ethics, the problem of equality, the question of cruelty to animals, etc. finally depend on the life-view provided by such systems of thought as Utilitarianism, Paternalism, Egotism, etc."⁸ Personal ethics, morality, and integrity will strongly influence a person's professional ethical conduct. Integrity means wholeness or completeness-continuity of life in all its actions. We must not delude ourselves or the people we lead by thinking that we can practice conduct.

Media and Good Governance

In the late 20th Century, mass media could be classified into eight mass media industries: books, newspapers, magazines, recordings, radio, movies, television and the internet. With the explosion of digital communication technology in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the question of what forms of media should be classified as "mass media" has become more prominent. For example, it is controversial whether to include cell phones, video games and computer games (such as MMORPGs) in the definition. In the 2000s, a classification called the "seven mass media" became popular. In order of introduction, they are: Print (books, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, etc.) from the late 15th century, Recordings (gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CDs, DVDs) from the late 19th century, Cinema from about 1900, Radio from about 1910, Television from about 1950, Internet from about 1990, Mobile phones from about 2000.⁹

Five characteristics of the Media:

Five characteristics of mass communication have been identified by Cambridge University's

John Thompson.

" [C]omprises both technical and institutional methods of production and distribution" This is evident throughout the history of the media, from print to the Internet, each suitable for commercial utility.

" Involves the "commodification of symbolic forms", as the production of materials relies on its ability to manufacture and sell large quantities of the work. Just as radio stations rely on its time sold to advertisements, newspapers rely for the same reasons on its space.

- v "[S]eparate contexts between the production and reception of information."
- v Its "reach to those 'far removed' in time and space, in comparison to the producers".
- v "[I]nformation distribution" - a "one to many" form of communication, whereby products are mass produced and disseminated to a great quantity of audiences.¹⁰

No theory of good governance could be intelligible unless it is seen in the context of its time where media and media persons have so many works to do. India's democratic experience of the past six decades has clearly established that good governance must aim at expansion of social opportunities and removal of poverty. Good governance means securing justice, empowerment, employment and efficient delivery of services. Media identifies criminalization of politics and corruption as two major challenges which are very harmful factors for good governance. There are several areas of concern that need to be addressed energetically and calls for synergy of efforts between government, the market and the civil society and the media can play an important role on this. Innovations are generally taking place. Some areas are that need special attention by media persons namely, economic empowerment of women, to highlight Dalit problems, human right issues, education, and corruption etc.

The government is viewed as an agency or machinery through which the will of the State is formulated, expressed and realised. For the establishment of good governance it is said that "For our purposes, however, we are confining governance only to public domain. We are concerned here with that form of governance which serves the citizens by safeguarding territorial integrity of the State and securing individual security, rule of law and the delivery of services ranging from education, health to livelihood and food security. The need is to formulate a national strategy that accords primacy to the Gandhian principle of 'antodaya' without sacrificing growth and by making instruments of State accountable for good governance."¹¹

Conclusion

If the media persons follow a code of conduct, formulated by their respective profession, it makes them more honest, responsible and reliable to do justice with their profession and for the society. This paper may conclude with some ancient sayings which reflect the previous discussion of professional ethics, media and good governance in the present time: "When one sees all beings in his own self and his own Self in all beings, one loses all fear." "When one sees this great Unity and the self has become all beings, no sorrow can afflict him."¹²

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