

## *Professional Values*

**The quality of workmanship of professional persons  
in any practical situation is determined by the  
quality of thinking used in meeting that situation**

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ONE OF THE commonly accepted characteristics of a professional group is the altruistic motivation of its members. This is reflected in the group's commitment to codes or standards which govern members' professional activities. Being altruistic, their codes and standards are not the codes and standards of the market place. If Extension workers are or are to become professional, then they must have altruistic motivations and, as a group, must be committed to certain altruistic codes or standards governing their professional activities. This is another way of saying that Extension workers must have a system of professional values to which they are committed.

Our purposes are to explore the meaning of a professional system of values and some values associated with being a profession.

A value is a conception of the desirable held by an individual or group. As a conception of the desirable, value is a standard which influences the selection of (1) ends or goals of action, (2) means used in attempting to reach those ends or goals, and (3) modes or styles of action.<sup>1</sup> Certain aspects of our value system are bound up in the nature of the thing we call a "profession."

The term "profession," used as a scientific term by the social

<sup>1</sup>For an analysis of the relationship between value and action see Clyde Kluckhohn, "Values and Value-Orientations," in Talcott Parsons and Edward A. Shils (eds.), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 328-433.

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scientist, is a verbal tool to identify certain phenomena in a particular kind of occupational organization. This becomes an arbitrary definition. Another way to define profession is to see what the term symbolizes to people—to members of professions as well as lay persons. In other words, what do people have in mind when they say a particular occupation is a profession, when some other is not, or when some occupation is becoming more professional? Such a definition is used to provide a framework for values to be examined, for it is values that we are concerned with here.

In addition to associating the possession of altruistic motives and codes governing occupational activities with the term profession, certain other characteristics found to be attached to the symbol of profession are useful for our purposes:<sup>2</sup>

1. A profession has a body of knowledge which its members must master in order to be competent, and, therefore, in order to enter the profession. This body of knowledge is not of technical skills arrived at through practical experience; rather it is a systematic body of abstract principles derived from empirical research and logical analysis.
2. To master such complex knowledge requires a prolonged period of training at the college and university level.
3. The profession has a monopoly on the body of knowledge which it calls its own. Because of the complex and difficult nature of the knowledge required, only members of the profession are in a position to pass intelligent judgment on when a person is qualified to practice in the profession.
4. The body of knowledge which the profession possesses is necessary for the good of society.
5. The occupational group and its members have an esteemed position in the society. Members are considered to have earned the right to a voice in public affairs, particularly those related to the areas of professional concerns and competence.

#### VALUES ASSOCIATED WITH A PROFESSION

What values are implicit in these characteristics of a profession? We are concerned with a professional value-orientations? There are two groups of values implied: one group which would be common

<sup>2</sup> See Howard S. Becker, "The Nature of a Profession," in the Sixty-first Yearbook of The National Society for the Study of Education, Part II, *Education in the Professions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), chapter ii; and William J. Goode, "Encroachment, Charlatanism, and the Emerging Profession: Psychology, Sociology, and Medicine," *American Sociological Review*, XXX (December, 1960), 902-14.

to all professions and a second group logically and empirically related to the central purpose of the profession.

First, in giving attention to values we would share with the other professions, we will find that they are really *values shared with the academic community*. Professions share the values of the academic community not because education for the professions goes on there (although, of course, it does); instead, education for the professions is done at colleges and universities because of the positive values in being part of the academic community. These values are related to building a complex body of knowledge by empirical research and logical analysis and to educating preprofessional and professional persons. There are, therefore, cognitive values concerned with ways of thinking and the standards for accepting the products of thought. They comprise a system of values (as opposed to isolated or discrete values) because they are interrelated. These values are observable among mature and esteemed members of the community in their professional acts and in the products of their work.

### *Rational Thought*

This system of values places positive value on the use of rational thought—on reason as a style of thought which is most productive of the most good. Negative value, on the other hand, is placed on the use of irrational thought—on uncontrolled emotionality which blocks the individual's way to full use of his mental abilities and which blocks a group's way to collective and fruitful use of the mental powers of the members. Commitment to the use of rational thought does not deny the existence or the importance of emotions; it merely recognizes that some areas of life demand the ability to hold the irrational in abeyance.

This means that in staff and committee meetings, in regional and national groups, in classes, in formal and informal conversations among ourselves and with persons in other fields we behave like rational people. It means that we do certain things ourselves and we make clear that in professional activities we expect others to do these things too (for a value, as a concept of the desirable, is something we expect of others as well as of ourselves). It means that we reason, that we give valid grounds for our conclusions, that we discriminate between the relevant and irrelevant. It means that we do not, in our professional activities, use such ego-defense mechanisms as ridiculing, dominating, withdrawing, having emotional tirades, weeping, lying, favoring the people who feed our undernourished

ego (if we have one) and disfavoring those who do not, and so on for the many kinds of irrational behaviors. It means that we respect and defend that behavior of persons which promotes rational thought; and we consider those persons who show such behavior assets to the profession and persons who consistently fail to do so as liabilities. It means that the emotional excitement generated is from the thrill of discovering and verifying ideas rather than from prejudice, fear, greed, or malice. It means that ideas are examined and judged by appropriate criteria according to the nature of the ideas rather than by one's feelings (positive or negative) for the person who expressed the ideas.

### *Rigorous Thought*

A second positive value within the system to which the academic community subscribes is rigorous thought as opposed to sloppy thinking and oversimplification. Groups of persons who would build complex bodies of knowledge and have members of the profession master such knowledge must be capable of and produce complex thought. They are expected to be exacting in correctness of thinking, logically accurate in identifying and relating the elements of thought, and in seeing organizational principles.

This means that in professional programs we do not substitute entertainment for serious thinking when we should be serious—that we are not obsessed by the clever title and the cute way of presenting ideas when what is entitled and what is presented is itself empty of any really meaty ideas. It means that we are concerned with what lies under the surface rather than the obvious and the superficial. We would master the tools of logic and scientific study and apply our skill in using these to engage in complex thought; we would not shy away from “involved” thinking on one pretext or another.

### *Examination of Thought*

A scholar welcomes and cherishes the examination of his expression of thought by other scholars. He recognizes that if his thinking is to be sound, both the process and the product must withstand the examination of mature minds. He is, therefore, eager to test the soundness of his thinking. Because he is committed to rational and rigorous thinking, his concern is for the quality of his thought rather than for protection of his ego. (As a matter of fact, the ego of such a person is satisfied and enhanced by open examination of his own

thinking and that of others.) Thus he is able to receive and to give rational criticism of thought in an impersonal way. But openness to examination of thought is associated also with using the standards of rigorous thought. Examination of thought must not only be impersonal, it must be sound. Refusal to be open to examination of thought and to openly examining the thought of others is disapproved or negatively valued in a community of scholars.

This means—in addition to the obvious practices in soliciting, giving, and receiving criticism of thought—some less obvious practices. It means that provision is deliberately made in professional meetings and periodicals to examine rationally and rigorously different points of view on issues. It means that those who sincerely question an idea are not uncomfortably labeled “impolite”; we do not confuse criticism of the idea with criticism of the person. It means that something once examined is not forever a closed issue. It means, upon any occasion, that adequate time must be provided for thought to be examined openly and rigorously. Persons who consistently have a compulsion to check off long lists of jobs done and who tend to substitute “action no matter what quality” for “action based upon sound thought” will have to have their behavior negatively valued by the profession or there will be little opportunity for open examination of thought.

### *Freedom of Thought*

Closely related to openness in examination of thought, freedom of thought means, in part, the right of all members of the academic community and the profession to think for themselves. Negative value, therefore, is placed upon allowing expression of thought only from persons in official or status positions or the “elders of the tribe.” To assume that intellectual leaders in a profession are limited to persons with some official status is not only a rejection of freedom of thought, it is a rejection of the truth. Empirical evidence shows that highly creative people avoid positions of power and that persons whose motivations cause them to look with awe upon positions of institutionally derived power have a different personality organization from that of the healthy or fully functioning person.<sup>3</sup>

The right to dissent is a basic aspect of freedom of thought; it is

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, T. W. Adorno and others, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950); J. W. Thibout and H. W. Riecken, “Some Determinants and Consequences of the Perception of Social Causality,” *Journal of Personality*, XXIV (December, 1955), 113-33; N. I. Stein and Shirley L. Stein, *Creativity and the Individual* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1964).

treasured and fought for in the academic community. Researchers in intellectual history have discovered two principles relevant to the value of freedom of thought: (1) The great creative and vigorous societies have been those which safeguarded the expression of new and unexpected (and sometimes unpleasant) thoughts and (2) "the great creative ages have been those in which reasoned dissent was welcome."<sup>4</sup> The right to dissent here means the right to *reasoned* dissent. One is not free to think when irrationality is in control of the situation. Nor is one free to think when one lacks the necessary intellectual tools for exactness and accuracy in thought.

This means that important decisions in the profession reflect the mature thinking of the majority of the profession instead of a small minority. It means that professional meetings and periodicals reflect more than the "official" point of view, that they encourage reasoned dissent and debate of issues. It means that reasoned dissenters are welcome and considered an asset, that they are listened to objectively and openly rather than viewed with embarrassment and quietly, if not publicly, excommunicated.

### *Intellectual Honesty*

A fifth positive value of the academic community is intellectual honesty, as opposed to sham or pretense. Although this is close kin to intellectual values explored thus far, I would like to apply it to that characteristic of a profession which indicates that "profession" is a symbol of esteem. In the academic community, esteem is earned; it is not sought and it cannot be bought. Esteem for a field of study is earned according to the quality of thought reflected in the work of members of the field. Esteem for a profession is earned according to how well it compares with the standards or characteristics associated with "profession."

To seek esteem makes others suspicious of those doing the seeking. Since esteem is given only when earned, those who seek it put themselves in the position of seeking something they do not deserve or which they could not get through the normal means. Those who would buy esteem by paying image builders to spread words of esteem about the field or profession make a mockery of the standards held by which a field or a profession comes to be respected. To make such a mockery of these standards not only fails to earn the necessary esteem, it boomerangs and makes the profession or field that uses it appear intellectually naive, its members intellectually

<sup>4</sup>J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish, *The Western Intellectual Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1960), p. 501.

dishonest and lazy and emotionally tied to the values of the market place.

There are no short-cuts to intellectual respectability among fields of study in general and among the professions. We should concentrate our time, our energy, our abilities, and our professional funds on attaining and using the intellectual skills necessary to achieve the values symbolized in being a profession. But it means that we do these things not for recognition but because the cognitive values are important ends in themselves.

#### RELATED TO CENTRAL PURPOSE

Two of the characteristics associated with a profession listed earlier were (1) monopoly of a body of knowledge and, therefore, of approval to enter the profession and (2) the necessity of this body of knowledge for the good of society. What values are implicit in these characteristics?

The values related to the central purpose of the profession are those which give direction to the work of the profession. They identify the particular problems or questions to which researchers direct their attention. They help to give focus in the logical construction of the body of knowledge "monopolized" by the profession. These values also help to provide direction in the education of persons to become members of the profession. If a profession has a "monopoly" on a body of knowledge, it follows that it must be able to identify the knowledge that belongs to it. Otherwise how can a monopoly of such knowledge exist? Furthermore, what is monopolized is not a random assortment of knowledge.

Professions do not exist merely to give employment to their members; each exists because it attempts to answer certain related questions which are significant problems in the society—problems concerned with achieving the good life. Thus a profession is concerned with knowledge which is for the good of society. For example, law, as a profession, is concerned with the basic value of justice and the protection of human rights in society. Social workers are committed to the prevention and alleviation of the socially and psychologically damaging effects of crisis situations among members of society. The good of society toward which the medical profession is devoted is the prevention and alleviation of human pain and disease. We could go on similarly for other established professions. In each case the services of the profession are oriented to the achievement of a value in society—a value that is the unique contribution of the particular profession.

Having a common commitment to a basic cause, the members of the particular profession give attention to pressing problems of society in the area of their concern. Solutions to these problems require knowledge arrived at through empirical research and reasoning from the findings. Because the problems to which the profession is devoted are complex and interrelated, mere fact-finding is not sufficient; the use of logic to construct a reasoned analysis is necessary to build a systematic body of knowledge.

#### CONCLUSION

Every field of study is based on certain logical considerations. At the simplest level they begin with a definition of what the field is about. In a profession, this takes the form of stating the basic altruistic value which the profession will contribute to society. At the most sophisticated level, the field has a systematically organized body of knowledge. Such logical considerations do not just happen; they must be consciously and deliberately worked at by members of the professional field.

If Extension is to grow up as a field, Extension workers must give attention to the logical foundations of its field. This would include such matters as central value-orientation, sub-values relevant to the central one, major questions to be answered, methods of inquiry appropriate, and, the most difficult of all, a logical structure to knowledge in the field. This would be called by some a philosophical study of the field.

Unless Extension workers uphold in word and in deed the system of cognitive values to which the academic community is committed, we become a group not respected for the quality of intellectual workmanship. The quality of our workmanship as professional persons in any practical situation is determined by the quality of thinking which is used in meeting that practical situation. The quality of thinking used is dependent upon the quality of the body of knowledge from which the practitioner draws and the standards of thought required of him for admission to the profession.

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A GOOD AGENT can never satisfy himself or his people completely. But he can retain his self respect and gain the respect of his friends—and his enemies—if he demonstrates a high standard of proficiency, a deep feeling for people, and unquestioned integrity and loyalty to his trust. —GEORGE GANYARD.