PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND SOCIAL MORALITY—AN INTERFACE.

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ABSTRACT

The shared social concept of justice, virtue and sense of duty is the fountain-head of professional codes. There may be ethical considerations which transcend national boundaries, but universal and uniform rules of conduct are inconceivable in diversity of values and norms. Despite occasional coincidence of self-interest and ethics, individual or group interests are independent of ethical codes. Codes, therefore, appeal to an individual's sense of morality rather than self-interest. While professional codes assure society of professional sincerity and integrity of architects, they enhance standard and promote the profession -- both professed objectives of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Division of labour and differentiation of functions in society produce a vocabulary which describes men in terms of roles they fulfil. The doctor treats the sick, the lawyer defends the accused, the architect designs and the builder builds. Every profession fulfils a social need. Professionalism is a result of social needs without which there would be no professionals. Professionals, therefore, operate within a social framework and are subject to the norms and values of the society. Hence their prime duty is to serve the society justly and virtuously. It is in the social concept of justice and virtue that ethics find their roots.

SOCIAL MORALITY

Injustice, as elucidated by Aristotle, is "to have more than one ought and to suffer it is to have less than one ought."[1] Justice, in short, is getting what one deserves. Modern ethics asks, "What ought I to do if I am to do right?" and puts the question in a way which implies that doing right is quite independent of faring well. In this respect justice has no justification which Plato believes in. As Prichard contents, "..... to justify justice is to show that it is more profitable than injustice, that it is to our interest to be just."[2] But if we do what is just and right because it is in our interest, then we are not doing it because it is just and right at all. Morality cannot have any justification external to itself. If we do not do what is right for its own sake, whether it is in our interest or not, then we are not doing what is right. The notion of what is in our interest or what is profitable to us, is logically independent of the concept of what is just and right for us to do. If what is profitable is also just, this, so far as ethics is concerned is a mere happy coincidence.

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Virtues are not inborn, but a consequence of training. Virtuous action cannot be specified without reference to the judgement of one who knows how to take account of circumstances. Consequently knowledge of the means cannot be knowledge of formula, it must be the ability to apply rules to choices. What is of interest in ethical deliberations is not which actions are just or virtuous, but what is it that makes them right? What is it that enables us to mark off those cases which belong on one list from those that do not? What is the criterion? Wittgenstein suggests that the criterion is embodied in a rule and the rule is a socially established practice. Others, like Augustine, suggests devine sanctions.[3] In other words the answers to 'What is moral, right or wrong?' have their roots in value systems; be it individual, social or devine. Moral concepts change from one society to another and also within a society over time. In periods of stable social order all moral questions can be answered from within the context of the norms which a community shares; but in periods of instability the norms themselves are questioned and tested against the criteria of human desires and needs. Same ethical question have different answers in different context and may change with time and circumstances. Questions on freedom of speech are not answered in the same way in capitalist and socialist societies. Or the concept of democracy in medival Europe was different from the present concept. The existing Code of Profession Ethics of American Institute of Architects (AIA) is very different from the codes a few decades ago.[4] While the concept of right and wrong are common to all societies, they vary widely in content. The difference in answers to the same ethical question is related not only to the value system but also to the individuals making the choice. The utilitarians assign much importance to consequence of actions or decisions, as opposed to moral idealists who do not believe in external justification of right action. Stoics believe in ignoring that which is not within ones power to rectify. There are many schools of thought and diverse kinds of investigations have been called 'ethics'. It is perhaps impossible to systematize all the variety into one organising idea. But well known systems of ethics are related to deliberative questions. If we take a set of deliberative questions as our point of departure, we may proceed in one of the two possible directions. We may ask the question in action-situations, applying ethical standards to practical problems or we may study the theoritical complexities suggested by the ethical standards. The latter have held interest with philosophers. But the concern in formulation of code of ethics is with practical relevance of ethical concerns.

CODE OF ETHICS

Ethics is ordinarily conceived of as an effort to introduce some principles into practical life. It would be unrealistic to adopt completely empirical case methods. Ethical investigations look for desirable and undesirable results; for consistencies and inconsistencies; and also for those considerations which according to various philosopies constitute the basis of value judgements. Ethical investigations apply ideas to actual situations seeking facts that can be interpreted by general ideas, rather than guessing the situations that must correspond to ideas. Ideas, however, need not correspond to utilitarianism or moral idealism or any one system of deliberative questions in particular, but may be pragmatic which in essence, is a mixture of all or some of the systems. Ley's contention that, "Practical arts....have virtually abandoned 'principle approach' in favor of 'the case method'......."[5] provides a procedural frame-work to resolve ethical questions.

Ethics is concerned with human actions. They are aimed at serving a purpose which constitutes a part or the whole of the actor's intention in doing what he does. Where observance of rules has no or relatively little connection with achievement of ends, the observance of rules becomes an end in itself -- a private ideal for individuals and perhaps a requirement of social morality. If the achievement of ends on the other hand, is independent of the observance of rules, then ends become dissociated from the requirements of the public domain. It is natural in such circumstances to conceive of the pursuit of pleasure and the pursuit of the virtue as mutually exclusive alternatives. Moral advice then, most naturally, takes the form analogous to 'Gather ye rose buds while ye may' or ' Do what is right

regardless of the consequences.' But this is hardly the intention of code of ethics of professional societies. Professional societies have a purpose and the code of ethics has to uphold that purpose.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR ARCHITECTS

Society designates functions to professional architects and rightly expects a high standard of service. The Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) stands to, promote just and honourable conduct, enhance excellence and advance the profession.[6] Such expectation devolves on architects duties and obligations to clients, fellow architects, related professionals and the society at large. The wide range of issues and conflicts the codes have to contend with, are not always clear and specific. Consensus among architects is a pre-requisite for an effective code of ethics. This, however, is not without complexity. Consensus on issues are often achieved by defining them in terms that are abstract and general. Issues so defined have little operational value. Specific issues, on the contrary, are susceptible to dubious and contradictory interpretations making consensus rather difficult. Public interst, for example, is a general concept. Few, if any, will disagree that architects should uphold public interest. But public interest is difficult to identify in specific situations. Indivisual or group interest distorts judgement and shrouds 'public good' beyond easy recognition.

Codes, therefore, have to address issues that are both specific and general. Only in less controversial situations can codes maintain specificity; the codes otherwise have to be on a level of generality. The general codes, despite operational problems, do have a purpose - that of providing guidelines within which individuals may exercise their value judgement.

NEED FOR CODE OF ETHICS

Architects operate in a social framework subject to the values and norms of the community. There is also a legal system, which, as members of the community, one has to respect. Why then, the need for professional ethics?

Professional ethics and legal provisions may derive inspiration from one value system, but they are not conceptually the same. While some ethical issues may also have legal validity, this is more of an exception than a rule. What is unethical may not be illegal at all. Racial discrimination, for instance, may offend the moral sensibility of some South Africans but it is an expressed legal policy of apartheid. Manipulating an architect out of a design commission in hand does not infringe the law, but is a transgression of professional ethics.

Architects increasingly confront issues that are important in advancing and sustaining professional standards, but are unfortunately without legal sanctions. The concern of professional codes and the Institute are with these issues. Professional codes, therefore, are only applicable to those members of the profession who subscribe to them. An architect practising the codes is honouring the values shared in common by the members of a professional body. A professional body may censure, condemn, penalise or even expel members who violate its codes, but it cannot prevent them from practising the profession. Violation of codes born of social need is a breach of trust; a disregard for social and professional duty. Professional architects who do not practice the code of ethics care neither for the society nor for the profession.

CONCLUSION

Professional codes owe their origin to social morality. The commonly shared social concept of justice, virtue and sense of duty is the fountain-head of professional codes. There may be certain ethical considerations which transcend national boundaries, but universal and uniform rules of conduct are inconceivable in diversity of values and norms.

Despite occasional coincidence of self-interest and ethics; individual or group interests are independent of ethical codes. As codes serve the society and not the individual; they appeal to an individual's sense of morality rather than self-interest. It is the professional codes that assure society of sincerity and integrity of architects; it is the codes which enhance and promote the standard and practice of the profession. Professional code of ethics serves a noble end. Professional Institute formulates code of ethics and mandates that they be followed by its members. But reality is different. Command does not always assure compliance.

NOTES

The article is based on moral and ethical concepts elaborated in Alasdair MacIntyre's *A Short History of Ethics, Macmillan, New York, 1973.* The quotations of Aristole (1) , Prichard (2), Wittgenstein (3) and Ley (5) are as cited in the same work.

4. *AIA Code of Professional Ethics,* American Institute of Architects, Washington, 1961.

6. *IAB Directory,* Institute of Architects Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1985.