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## WHO IS THE PSYCHOLOGIST AMONG PEOPLE? NOTES ON THE MARGIN OF KATARZYNA SIKORA'S ARTICLE

Katarzyna Sikora's question about the nature of ethical good that underlies the codes of psychologists' professional ethics is justified. It leads to reflection on the nature of good, which, however, does not preoccupy the authors or users of ethics codes very much. What they focus on is mainly practical regulations concerning various kinds of professional conduct, which experience proves to be indispensable for keeping practitioners of the profession within the bounds of its ethos as well as within the standards of its knowledge and skills. The good that the recipient of psychological services should enjoy and the psychologist should strive to provide remains vague. This is visible in comparison with other professions rich in axiological content, such as medical or legal professions. Good in the form of health or enjoying one's rights in society, which determines the axiological content in those professions, is elusive in the case of the psychologist. This axiological content in turn determines and constitutes the basis for the ethics of medical and legal professions, respectively. Psychologists have no such basis, or, at any rate, such a basis has not been clearly and distinctly identified for them. Personal integrity is proposed as the kind of good that psychologists should seek to provide the recipients of their services with when practicing their profession.

**Keywords:** code of professional ethics, axiological content of profession, ethical particularism, personal integrity.

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The author was President of the Peer Arbitration Panel of Polish Psychological Association in 1998-2001 and a member of its second instance in 2004-2006, as well as a member of the Ethical Committee of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) in 2007-2010 and a member of the Ethical Committee of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS) in 2009-2012.

I sympathize with Katarzyna Sikora's appeal for in-depth reflection on the nature of ethical good, which it is impossible to avoid when creating codes and using them in practice. And this reflection is the core of ethics – that is, of inquiries into the truth about good. It is not clear to me, however, what the specific aim of such efforts should be, or, in other words, what benefit they would bring to psychologists' codes of professional ethics.

We must agree that the ethics that is found in codes tends to be nebulous, imperfect, fragmentary, mixed with categories of several different kinds, but still useful (as British utilitarians gladly emphasize), fairly effective in pragmatic terms (as in turn the adherents of American pragmatism gladly say), and, above all, open to the experience of the use of codes, in which their current provisions are put to the test.

At the turn of the 21st century, the American Psychological Association (APA) revised its code. The first APA Committee dealing with ethical standards for psychologists was established in 1947 and, chaired by E. Tolman, set itself the task of creating a code that would be more than merely "a document with an imposing title" (Hobbs, 1948). This was a clear change of attitude in the spirit of pragmatism, as is most clearly visible in the fact that descriptions of more than a thousand incidents from professional experience were then collected from psychologists, these incidents being situations in which they faced moral dilemmas and decisions. Based on the analysis of that empirical material, the first APA code was created, published in 1952; its subsequent revisions were developed in a similar manner until the ninth version, published in 2003 (Fisher, 2003).

In Poland, Jerzy Brzeziński and Małgorzata Toeplitz-Winiewska (Brzeziński, Chyrowicz, Poznaniak, & Toeplitz-Winiewska, 2008) have made particularly significant contributions to the development and promotion of the ethics of the profession of psychologist, introduced as obligatory into the curricula of studies, and in the Polish Psychological Association (PTP) a peer arbitration panel investigates complaints and adjudicates in cases of violating PTP's Code of Professional Ethics for the Psychologist. The experience thus collected over several decades is worth using.

It is precisely thanks to this experience that we are able to keep up with the changing social reality around us and, at the same time, with the reality of our profession changing in us – individuals and the professional community. What changes is not only knowledge and skills, but also the ethos, being our place among the people together with the mission that we are supposed to fulfill as a unique social group. Just like the physician or lawyer, the psychologist in our country qualifies as a profession of public trust, as K. Sikora rightly observes in

the context of the psychologist's professional ethics. In accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, psychologists may acquire professional self-governance (Niemczyński, 2002a).

However, the difficulties we experience in our efforts to establish professional self-government stem, among other things, from the indefiniteness of our social identity. Who is the psychologist among people and what is he or she supposed to give them when living beside them: what should be expected of him/her? In other words: what is our ethos, the ethos of psychologists? The physician is supposed to take care of our health in accordance with the current medical knowledge and is the only one to have such a unique mission in society. The lawyer is supposed ensure that we enjoy our rights, and such is the lawyer's unique mission in society. And what mission does the psychologist have?

Health and its protection are the source for the axiology of medicine, just like the enjoyment of human rights by all and everyone in society underlies the mission of legal professions. Education is a good, too – one of the basic ones for the human being and his or her life worth living. It is from this good that teachers and others responsible for its enjoyment and for making it accessible in society derive or should derive the sense of meaning of their professional activity. It may therefore be concluded that various kinds of good are fundamental or pivotal to the constitution of different professions of public trust. In other words, it should be said that various kinds of good are fundamental to the social identity of the corresponding professions.

What kind of good that people should enjoy in their lives is fundamental to the profession of psychologist? What is psychologists' knowledge, skills, or professional ethos supposed to serve?

If it is to serve health, then psychology is a medical profession. If it is to serve education, it is an educational one. If it is to serve human rights in society, it belongs to the family of legal professions; if it is to serve either the defense or security of citizens, it is a military or police profession, etc. The identity of the psychologist thus disintegrates and we face the prospect of there being many psychological professions; however, unlike in the case of legal or medical professions, multiplicity in our case would amount to professional dependence and dissolution into other professions rather than to a diversification of care for the same good – as for health in medical professions or for the protection of everyone's rights in society in legal professions. Such diffuse identity leaves us exposed to confusion in the sphere of our professional values and to the mixing-up of professionals roles (Erikson, 1971).

Is the psychotherapist a variant in which the profession of psychologist occurs, or is it rather a medical profession? Or perhaps sometimes it belongs with educational professions or with social welfare professions, or with rehabilitation professions in the penitentiary system? If the mental health of prisoners, the homeless, the poorly or excessively educated, the mentally and/or somatically ill, soldiers, police officers, and every adult in any of the various occupations and in family life is the objective of the work of psychologist-psychotherapist for the benefit of his/her patients, then every psychologist-psychotherapist, whatever field he/she works in, goes over to medical professions, since health is the good he/she pursues. Is there anything else for him/her to pursue that would not be encompassed by the concept of health? Is the psychologist in the educational system supposed to take care of students' education, like a teacher, or of their mental health, like a physician or psychotherapist, or is neither of these the object of the psychologist's work for the student? What would it be for a student? The same questions could be asked in all the other cases. What would it be for a prisoner, for a homeless person, a soldier, a policeman, every professional, a parent, a child, a husband, or a wife?

Difficulties with the axiological anchoring of the profession of psychologist, amounting to difficulties in pointing to the good that would be constitutive for this profession, should not discourage us from efforts to specify this good and from persistent attempts at pinpointing its nature (Niemczyński, 2002b). This being my attitude, I am inclined to point to personal integrity and, naturally, submit this proposal for discussion. I believe that it is worth proceeding with such discussion without getting discouraged by the controversies that are bound to arise from the very beginning.

It is worth noting that focusing on personal integrity – which psychologists more often refer to as coherence or consistency of the self or *ego*, sometimes as inner integrity of personality or the identity of the human being as an individual – appeared on a larger scale in the history of thought and general culture in connection with what is sometimes called modernity in the contemporary West, one of its characteristic features being inwardness, that is, focus on the inner self as a deep down layer of personhood (Taylor, 1989; Harre, 1998; Weinreich & Saunderson, 2003).

It can be said that psychology as a science and the professional practice based on it was born out of this modernity of the West and may find its own place more aware of its role by trying to produce knowledge of this inner self that conditions a person's life in the external world as well as to provide it with professional care and support. Personal integrity as a good is not reducible to

health, education, the enjoyment of human rights, etc. This is evident, for example, in that it can be enjoyed in illness, in a situation of no access to education, or in a situation of being deprived of one's rights. And conversely: it is possible not to care for it and jeopardize it while enjoying good health and education as well as full human rights in society.

There is no space in this comment on Katarzyna Sikorska's article for a less nebulous outline of the direction I propose in looking for the psychologist's professional identity. It may, however, be sufficient to show that it is not necessary to enter into dispute on the universals in ethics or to look for a universal system of values or the universal good in order to try to ethically reinforce the professional position of psychologists among people. Such a suggestion of the necessity of ethical universalism for the reinforcement of psychologists' professional ethics is clearly present in that thought-provoking article. I have tried to show that the proposal is not without an alternative.

Ethical universalism remains in dispute with ethical particularism. The above argumentation in favor of personal integrity as the good for which the professionalism of psychologists is supposed to work and for which codes of professional ethics are to be built breaks out of this dispute. It is a stance that has a universal quality, since in all circumstances involving the necessity to take care of personal integrity it is the particular kind of professionalism that the psychologist represents that is supposed to provide the necessary diagnoses, the necessary sensitivity, as well as the necessary efficient and effective action. Blum (1994), drawing on the stance of Murdoch (1970) as well as that of Flanagan (1991), has offered a resolution to the above-mentioned dispute between universalism and particularism in the field of theory of morality. Blum's proposal seems to be particularly inspiring to those interested in the ethics of public trust professions, to which various kinds of good are constitutive.

The other important proposal that comes to mind when we concern ourselves with the professional ethics of psychologists is not only control over the professional behavior to which the code applies, but primarily the ethical development of psychologists as part of their professional development, and, during studies, as part of their personal formation both before the threshold – that is, before entering the profession – and later, at the beginning, during internship after graduation and in the course of further professional development. Psychological knowledge on human social and moral development also has several useful contributions to offer to that end (Niemczyński, 2011). This is because we are talking about the formation of a complex ability of psychologists to use, in their professional activity, the resources of their own interpersonal and social sensitivity, empathy

and all other emotions, social and moral thinking, as well as prosocial behavior, devoid of manipulative qualities, towards the recipients of our professional services. However, the issues of what is the full ethical dimension of the profession of psychologist and why it does not come down to creating, applying, and perfecting codes are a broad subject, and one to be left for other occasions.

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