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## ***The Professions: Public Interest and Common Good***

***by Bruce Jennings, Daniel Callahan, and Susan M. Wolf***

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**T**his is the age of the professional. As knowledge becomes more specialized and technology more complex, well-established professions, like medicine and law, acquire new power. The same is true of fields such as corporate management, journalism, social work, and public administration—all of which have entered the ranks of the professions in the twentieth century.

The growth of professional power should carry with it a stronger sense of ethical responsibility. Professional ethics should express the moral bond linking the professions, the individuals they serve, and the society as a whole. The professions affect the interests and well-being of individuals, and they also play a vital role in the pursuit of the public interest and the common good. This means that discussions of professional ethics should have a dual focus. They should focus on the private duties of the professions—ethical obligations to clients and to particular organizations or interest groups. And they should focus as well on the public duties of the professions—the obligations and responsibilities owed in service to the public as a whole.

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In professional ethics today most of the emphasis falls on private duties. Private duties seem concrete and relatively easy to define. They are rooted in the tangible interests and rights of specific individuals. Public duties, by contrast, seem abstract. The harm done to society or to the “public” is much harder to identify than the harm done to specific individuals by unethical professional conduct. Notions such as the “public interest” and the “common good” are difficult to define, and the professions often appeal to them in self-serving ways. We need to revitalize these notions in order to give the public duties of the professions the attention they deserve.

### **The Professions and Public Life**

It is not difficult to understand why professional ethics tends to be skewed toward a concentration on private duties. The professions now play a pivotal role in nearly everyone’s life at one time or another. We depend upon the services of the professional to increase the control we have over our own lives—to maintain our health, to handle our legal and financial affairs, to protect our interests in the political arena, to manage businesses that provide employment and consumer goods, to assist us in times of trouble.

A certain vulnerability comes with such dependency. Professionals are entrepreneurs, and yet the principle of *caveat emptor* is not sufficient to govern their transactions with clients or employers. Other means must be sought to protect the vulnerable from fraud, exploitation, malpractice, and injury. Some of these means are legal and regulatory—state licensing mechanisms, peer-review systems, and civil suits to deter and compensate for professional malpractice.

But these alone are not enough. We must also rely on the ethical integrity of professional practitioners—on their dedication to scrupulous standards of conduct and to basic ethical principles and virtues, such as respect for the rights of others, justice, and beneficence. These ethical standards are the linchpins of public trust in a profession. They give professionalism its moral dimension; they transform the career of selling services into the calling of providing service.

As individuals have grown dependent upon professionals, society as a whole has also grown dependent upon the professions. Hence it is essential to hold them accountable to public as well as private duties. The professions today wield significant power and influence in the decision-making processes of our major social institutions, both governmental and corporate. They control

information and knowledge essential to the formation of laws and public policies. They also play a strategic role in the successful implementation of many of those policies. Overall, the professions contribute to the growth of technology and large-scale organizational cooperation upon which so much of modern social life depends.

Consider, for example, how different our society would be without vaccines and modern surgical techniques, without diversified industrial corporations, without nonpartisan daily newspapers and broadcast news organizations, without the entitlement programs and the social service networks of the welfare state—all of which are, at least in part, the by-products of the rise of the professions concerned with each of these areas. Above all, our society has grown culturally dependent upon the professions as custodians of many of our most basic values—knowledge, health, procedural justice and the rule of law, civil liberties, freedom of information, economic prosperity, and equity in the distribution of social benefits and burdens. The professions nurture and interpret these values, and they assist in the collective task of translating these values into concrete institutional forms and modes of social practice.

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Traditionally, the ideal of public service has been a common, albeit rhetorical, theme in many codes of professional ethics. Successive versions of the American Bar Association's Code of Professional Responsibility, for example, have acknowledged the legal profession's role in preserving the rule of law as a central value in our society, and have addressed such topics as the donation of *pro bono* legal assistance and the bar's duty to sustain a system of adequate legal representation for all. For its part, the American Medical Association in its Principles of Medical Ethics affirms that "a physician must recognize responsibility not only to patients, but also to society" and "participate in activities contributing to an improved community." The code of the National Association of Social Workers contains an explicit obligation to "promote the general welfare of society."

Parallel language could easily be cited in codes from many other fields. Yet specific attempts to strengthen such provisions and to give them teeth have generated intense controversy. Behind the

hortatory language of the codes, the reality is that public duty remains low on the list of ethical priorities in most professions. And even in those professions with an explicit public service orientation, such as journalism and public administration, the notion of public duty remains uncertain and ill-defined.

This state of affairs is troubling. It fuels public cynicism about the professions. It reinforces the tendency to view professional ethics as an ideological smoke screen masking economic self-interest and social power. The failure to take the public duties of the professions seriously also hinders our capacity to understand what is at stake in conflicts between commitment to individual client service and broader societal obligations.

Recent examples of such conflicts include: the problem of what a criminal defense lawyer should do when the client wants to testify and perjure himself; the question of whether social work as a profession has an ethical commitment to promote progressive social welfare reform as distinguished from individual client benefits; the issue of how corporate management should balance its conflicting obligations to the stockholders and the "stakeholders" of the company; and the question of whether physicians have a social obligation to keep health care costs under control even if they must compromise the welfare of some individual patients to do so.

It is by no means clear how a proper balance between private and public duties should be struck. But it surely is important to give public duties their due weight. In the absence of a clear understanding of why they are important and what they entail, private obligations tend to gain primacy by default.

The changing institutional settings within which professionals practice are, at any rate, making the dominant focus on individual client service less and less serviceable as an exclusive touchstone for discussions of professional ethics. The function of professionals was once limited to private practice or to technical staff support. Today members of traditional professions—such as medicine and law—are moving beyond their established roles and functions. They are playing an increasingly direct and significant part in the formation of government and corporate policies. Moreover, managerial, executive, and policy-making positions in both the private and public sectors are themselves becoming professionalized as never before, as fields such as corporate management and public administration take on a professional or quasi-professional status.

These trends amount to what one might call the "professionalization of leadership." Its rationale is that only highly trained experts possess the specialized, technical knowledge needed to solve

complex social and organizational problems. But professionalism should be more than technical expertise, and leadership ultimately requires more than a technical or instrumental perspective. Many of our society's most pressing problems are fundamentally moral problems. They raise questions about the ends and values our institutions should serve, and about the justifiable means to achieve those ends. Hence leadership requires clarity of moral vision as well as specialized expertise. In a society marked by the widespread professionalization of leadership, the professions must be attentive to their emerging public roles and responsibilities.

### **The Meaning of Professionalism**

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Together with their special social role, the professions have a distinctive cultural status in contemporary society. Some professions, such as medicine and law, have a long history and a rich and varied intellectual tradition. In general, however, the rise of the professions in Western society is a relatively recent historical development, which began in the nineteenth century and did not fully coalesce, at least in the United States, until the early decades of the twentieth century.

There are significant differences between the pattern of professionalization characteristic of the Western European nations and that of England and the United States. In Europe the professions arose in tandem with the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus of the state. In England and America—with their more decentralized and parliamentary constitutional regimes—the professions did not become appendices of a centralized state, but emerged instead out of a competitive struggle for special legal privileges and favorable market positions.

The characteristic self-understanding of the American professions is therefore complex and ambivalent. It is riddled with the conflict between entrepreneurship and professionalism, career and calling. To set themselves apart from the unvarnished entrepreneurial orientation of other occupational groups, the professions place a great deal of emphasis on their special moral commitments. They have embraced the language of ethical responsibility, and have made that language an integral part of their own cultural identity. Originally perhaps this had more to do with economic self-interest and the desire for social status than with ethical dedication. But whatever their motivations, in building their social persona on the language of ethics and not just the logic of commerce the professions generated expectations and demands in the public mind that they be held to a "higher

standard." In ethical terms, to be a professional is to be dedicated to a distinctive set of ideals and standards of conduct. It is to lead a certain kind of life defined by special virtues and norms of character. And it is to enter into a subcommunity with a characteristic moral ethos and outlook.

The moral meaning of professionalism is now being threatened and is eroding, even as the professions take on new roles of social power and leadership. It is imperative that we ask how the professions might avoid degenerating into mere special interest groups engaged in a socially harmful struggle for privilege, power, and position. But this alone is not enough. We must also insist that the professions play a more positive social and cultural role than they have in the past. They must help sustain and revitalize the shared values and goals that inform our sense of common purpose and our open, democratic way of life. The rudiments of this notion of public service may be found in the ethical traditions of many of the professions themselves. Those traditions should be strengthened and built upon. The new kinds of social and political roles the professions are being called upon to play must be accompanied by new kinds of moral vision if the professions are to play these roles legitimately and well.

It is easy enough to fault the professions for their failure to live up to their own announced ideals of public responsibility. Denunciations of the arrogance of professional power are a popular national pastime. Critiques of the self-interested behavior of the professions do have considerable validity, to be sure. But they do not tell the whole story. We are not persuaded by those who would deprofessionalize society, or by those who see in the professions only greed, self-interest, and power. Higher standards of moral responsibility can and should continue to be applied to the professions. Discourse on professional ethics both within and outside the professions has a critical role to play in fashioning a more just and publicly beneficial *modus vivendi* between the professions and the broader society.

### **Modes of Public Service**

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What then does it mean to say that the professions have public as well as private duties? What aspirations should the professions have in this regard, and what is reasonable for the general public to expect of them?

The professions can—and do—serve the public on many different levels and in many different ways. Within nearly every profession today there is an ongoing discussion of ways to improve the profes-

sion's service to the community, and to restore public confidence. What is lacking, however, is some systematic framework that could put these discussions in a broader perspective; a framework that could sort out various types of public service and call attention to some neglected dimensions of public duty.

To begin with, it is helpful to classify various modes of public service by the professions into two main groups: those that seek to promote the *public interest* and those that seek to promote the *common good*. Public service that promotes the public interest includes the professions' contribution of technical expertise to public policy analysis, and indirect service to society that is a byproduct of service to individual members of society.

Service that promotes the common good includes the distinctive and critical perspective the various professions have to offer on basic human values, and on facets of the human good and the good life. It also includes the professions' contribution to what may be called civic discourse or public philosophy—that ongoing, pluralistic conversation in a democratic society about our shared goals, our common purposes, and the nature of the good life in a just social order.

### **The Common Good and the Public Interest: Differing Ideals of Public Duty**

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The common good and the public interest are usually taken to be synonyms and are used more or less interchangeably. It is important, however, to distinguish between them. They connote quite different understandings of what a society is, and of the bonds that hold it together. Whereas the focus of the language of the common good is communal, the public interest is individualistic in orientation.

The concept of the common good has its roots in ancient Greek political thought, and it was revitalized during the Renaissance and after to play a central role in the political theory of civic republicanism. Briefly stated, the notion of the common good is associated with a vision of society as a community whose members are joined in a shared pursuit of values and goals that they hold in common, a community comprised of individuals whose own good is inextricably bound up with the good of the whole. The common good, therefore, refers to that which constitutes the well-being of the community—its safety, the integrity of its basic institutions and practices, the preservation of its core values. It also refers to the *telos* or end toward which the members of the community cooperatively strive—the “good life,” human flourishing, and moral development.

The concept of the public interest, by contrast, initially came into vogue in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was first used as a term denoting the goals of national security and prosperity that enlightened monarchs should pursue in their foreign and economic policies, and later as a more general conception of the collective end that any legitimate government was established to promote. In this latter usage the concept of the public interest was subsequently annexed to the newly emerging social philosophies of liberalism, utilitarianism, and democratic pluralism. It grows out of a vision of society as a rational alliance of primarily self-interested individuals whose own “good” is made up of a complex of private interests. The public interest then refers to the aggregation of the private interests of individuals who join together in an association dedicated to the pursuit of mutual advantage. To promote the public interest is to maximize the collective realization of individual interests, and to protect the integrity and functioning of those social arrangements, institutions, and values that make peaceful, orderly social life possible and mutually advantageous.

The theoretical resonance and traditional meaning of the common good and the public interest are thus quite different. It is of course possible to hold that a particular social objective or public policy goal—controlling the spread of AIDS, reducing the level of unemployment, or reducing air pollution, for example—is both in the public interest and for the common good. But the point is that, while they may coincide in particular cases, these two concepts involve substantially different considerations. They direct our attention to different ways of thinking about the ends of public policy and even about the nature of the society and the individual.

Both perspectives, however, have something to contribute to an understanding of the public duties of professions. At the level of general political theory, the notions of the common good and the public interest are at odds with one another; but in an analysis of professional ethics they can offer complementary rather than competing perspectives.

Insofar as the professions attend to the public dimension of their ethical responsibilities at all, at present most tend to see their public duties as obligations to promote the public interest. This is not enough. Important as they are, activities such as contributing to the analysis of public policies and providing services to individuals in the aggregate do not exhaust the duties that the professions ought to discharge. The public duties of the professions extend beyond the realm of service to the public interest into the realm of service to the common good.

## Public Policy Analysis

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One direct way in which the professions serve the public interest is by providing policy makers and public officials with intellectual and technical expertise on matters of public policy. Legislators and high-ranking public officials must rely on expert advice from many quarters. It is important for them to have the benefit of information and opinions coming from the private sector to supplement the advice they receive from inside the government bureaucracy and from their political constituencies. The professions can speak through their organized associations and through the testimony and writing of leading practitioners in the field. In these and other ways they are in an excellent position to provide the objective, well-informed perspective that policy makers need.

If public policy analysis is to constitute service to the public interest it is important for the professions to acknowledge these broad objectives and take steps to facilitate their ability to provide disinterested policy advice. This effort must be distinguished from their ability to lobby for policy positions that are perceived to be in the more narrow corporate interests of the profession itself. Special interest lobbying is, of course, a legitimate activity in its own right, and the professions have shown themselves to be quite adept at it. But lobbying to protect a profession's special interests is no substitute for using the expertise and experience of a profession as a resource for policy analysis and policy making in the public interest. Professional groups can bring this resource to bear by supporting independent policy studies and nonpartisan research organizations, by sponsoring conferences and other public education activities, and in other ways. The work of organizations such as the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science, the special committees of various bar associations, the Business Roundtable, and the National Academy of Public Administration offer examples of the ways in which policy analyses growing out of distinctive professional perspectives can inform and enrich policy debates.

## Serving the Public Interest by Serving Individual Interests

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The professions also render a public service simply by making their knowledge and services available to the general public. In this way they serve the public interest by serving the personal needs, interests, and goods of individual patients or clients. Many argue that this is the only acceptable notion of public duty for the professions. For them, this relatively narrow, but clearly defined notion of duty

to society keeps the professions' claims to authority and expertise within proper boundaries. It prevents the professions from encroaching on areas that should be the exclusive province of elected officials and the democratic political process. Individual professionals or professional groups may choose to get involved in public policy issues or other so-called "public interest" activities—for example, the role some physicians have played in debates about nuclear disarmament. But when they do so it should be understood that they are acting in their capacity as private citizens, and not as "professionals" who have some special claim on our attention.

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## The public duties of the professions extend beyond the realm of service to the public interest into the realm of service to the common good.

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This conception is powerful and attractive in many ways. It builds on what is perhaps the greatest strength of discussions of professional ethics during the past two decades, namely, their focus on the rights, dignity, and autonomy of individual patients or clients. This focus has helped to move discussions of professional ethics away from their earlier preoccupation with matters of professional etiquette and decorum, and to shift the balance of these discussions from the protection of the interests and privileges of the professional to the protection of the rights and well-being of the client. Also, this conception is important because it keeps the needs and interests of individual human beings clearly in view. This guards against the reification of "society" into some abstract, supra-individual entity that purportedly might have a greater moral claim on the professional than does the individual. It is always dangerous to divorce the notion of the public interest from the interests of individuals. Whatever else it may mean, the public interest clearly requires obedience to the moral and legal principles of justice and right that are designed to protect individuals from harm by others.

Attractive as it is, however, this conception of public duty is too limited. It does not offer a sufficiently rich understanding of the social setting in which all professional activities, including service to individual clients, take place. It does not provide adequate guidance to professionals, for example, when they must choose between the conflicting interests or needs of two or more clients; or when they must ration scarce technological or organizational resources; or when they must balance their professional duties to clients against their ordinary moral duties to third parties.

Also, this client-centered focus arguably does not provide an ethical framework that is sufficiently broad to encompass the full spectrum of clinical, managerial, and policy-making roles professionals are called upon to play. This conception maintains that when professionals are not in a direct relationship with individual clients, or when they play managerial or policy roles, they cease to act *qua* professionals and fall back into their more general status as ordinary citizens. It is hard to see how this view applies to professions, such as journalism and public administration, that do not serve clients in the traditional sense. It also sheds little light on important ethical questions in social work and business management where serving the community and serving the client (or stockholders) often seem to conflict. And even for traditionally client-oriented professions like medicine and law, this view suggests a rather too tidy compartmentalization of personal, civic, and professional life. It belies the fact that membership in a profession is something that may quite deeply inform—and should inform—a person's self-identity. For those who consider their profession to be a calling, the line between professional identity and citizenship is not so easily or clearly drawn.

### **In Search of the Common Good**

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The ethical burden of serving the public interest is formidable enough. And yet we ask still more of the professions. The professions are powerful shaping forces in our culture, as well as being influential social, political, and economic entities. They affect not only how individuals live and how institutions work, but also the way we think about how we should live and about the ends our social institutions should serve. They nurture particular values that are integral to our cultural heritage and to our way of life. In this sense the professions participate in our quest for a community of common purpose just as centrally as they do in our design of a society of mutual advantage. They have a responsibility to the common good as well as to the public interest.

In its concern for individual liberties, the legal profession, for example, expresses an important part of the Western tradition of human rights and the role these rights play in our conception of the good life. At the same time, by its stress on the importance of the rule of law and due process, it helps to establish a framework of limited government and popular sovereignty that makes our open, democratic way of life possible. The law also presents a vision of human justice: a conception of how human beings ought to deal fairly with one another, make and

keep agreements, and engage in commercial transactions. The legal profession ought to project its views, speak on behalf of these values, and call attention to where the law needs reform, where justice could be better implemented, and what the larger visions standing behind the law have to say about the contemporary state of society.

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It is of the very essence of the field of medicine to consider the nature of human health. In their ordinary daily practice, of course, doctors are not often forced to think in any broad and general fashion about the nature of health. But when new research possibilities beckon, when serious threats to public health arise, and when new technologies offer life extension for some at great public expense, physicians and other health care providers are often forced to stand back and ask just what it is about human health that is important, what it consists of, and its relative value in the hierarchy of human goods. Moreover, because of significant strides in the cure and control of illness, new methods of delivering health care, and striking ways to improve and lengthen life, fundamental questions are raised about just what it means for a human being to have good health, and how health relates to human welfare, more broadly defined. In our society's quest for the common good, it is the special role of the medical profession to put that question before us.

Journalism is a striking example of the way a profession can shape our society's values and self-understanding. The information and analysis journalists provide enable the rest of us to participate more effectively as citizens in a democracy. But what kind of information is important, and how much analysis is required? Who should be heard? And how should we understand what we hear? The journalism profession cannot ignore these questions. Journalists are never simply neutral conduits of information. Inevitably they select, interpret, and place the news in a particular context. As they perform these professional tasks, journalists are—and should be—guided by a conception of the public interest and the common good. At its best journalism

stands for the values of objectivity, fairness, balance, and truth. These values not only further the pursuit of the public interest and the common good, they are also integral to the democratic process through which the public interest and the common good are defined in the first place.

The field of public administration possesses a special knowledge of the internal workings of government. Public administrators are charged with making government operate in a fair and efficient manner. It is their duty to make the workings of governmental organizations conform to constitutional and ethical ideals. More than that, the public administration profession should play an active role in fashioning those ideals. Although professional civil servants must remain accountable and responsive to elected officials, they should be more than mere technicians in the process of democratic governance. As a whole, the profession of public administration contains vital insights and experience that should be brought to bear in our ongoing debates about the ends of government, as well as its means. In this respect the public duties of public administrators are akin to those of journalists. Public administrators inevitably shape democratic values in the course of pursuing and implementing those values. And they have a special responsibility to the integrity of the process through which the public interest and the common good are collectively defined.

The responsibility of professional social work is to provide counsel and assistance to those in need of governmental or private social services. Social workers must deal with both private troubles and public problems. They have unique insight into the reasons that families break down, why individuals have difficulty functioning, and how people are harmed or injured by social structures and institutions. In an affluent country it is by no means easy for those who are well off to understand the special problems of the poor, who are often hidden from public view. The public duty of social work as a profession is to make the invisible visible, to show the underside of a system that otherwise seems to be functioning adequately. Whether social work should concentrate on changing individual behavior or press for more systemic social reform has been a matter of debate within the profession. But there is no doubt that the profession of social work embodies a tradition of altruism, mutual aid, and social justice. These values are in continuing need of reassertion and renewal in a highly individualistic and competitive society. Social work can help make our community life richer by serving as the voice of these values in our social conscience.

Those in the field of corporate management also

constitute a distinct profession in contemporary society. And no less than other professionals they have special public duties and an important contribution to make to the pursuit of both the public interest and the common good. Their special province is the efficient and socially responsible functioning of our major economic institutions. They have a valuable perspective to contribute to our understanding of the internal and external forces that shape business and economic prosperity. Those who run our major business corporations know how to organize productive operations on a large scale. They have come to be the principal spokesmen in our society for the values of initiative, orderly competition, and the work ethic. The nation cannot remain strong if its economic life is weak or if such values erode. The definition and pursuit of the common good should not be left entirely up to government and the more traditionally established professions. The corporate sector, and indeed the entire business community, should and inevitably will be a partner in that pursuit. As corporate management increasingly evolves into a profession in its own right it should not ignore its role in this process. Just as the public duties of doctors or lawyers go beyond the discharge of their private duties to patients or clients, the public duties of corporate management are broader than its duty to serve the economic interests of investors and to maximize profits.

This sketch of the special contributions of the six professions examined in our study only scratches the surface. The important point is that each of these professions possesses a distinctive kind of knowledge and experience about important areas of human life and social concern. The history of the professions, their own changing values, and their special vantage points, provide a unique source of insight. Each profession nurtures particular values, and their social priorities may often conflict. But the common good is a mosaic of many different goods and values. Our general sense of the common good comes out of a chorus of many voices. The insights and perspectives of the various professions can contribute to a cultural whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is a final dimension of the public duty of the professions to which we now turn.

### **Enhancing Civic Discourse**

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The professions can serve the common good by enhancing the quality of civic discourse about our society's ultimate goals. Here the issue involves not so much the specific knowledge or value orientations that the professions might add to the analysis of



particular public policy options, but rather their contribution to the process of democratic civil deliberation and moral debate.

It is useful to think in terms of the professions' role in sustaining what might be called "public philosophies" in various areas of social life. Samuel H. Beer, a noted political scientist at Harvard University, has defined a public philosophy as "an outlook on public affairs which is accepted within a nation by a wide coalition and which serves to give definition to problems and direction to government policies dealing with them." A public philosophy also provides the terms upon which reasonable moral and political compromises can be worked out. Beer goes on to contrast public debate within the framework of a shared public philosophy with instances of conflict, all too prevalent in contemporary societies, "in which warring groups, emptied of any vision of the social whole and guided only by the residuum of their private concerns, quarrel over spoils."

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**Ethical commitments may counter economic pressures, and mitigate narrow professional self-interest. Today's moral aspirations may become tomorrow's expectations, and society's demands.**

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We would argue that this latter type of private-regarding, fragmenting social conflict poses a significant threat to a democratic society. The common good of our society requires processes and institutions that facilitate the formation of public philosophies. Their purpose is not to eliminate all conflict and ethical disagreement in the public realm. A public philosophy is not the same thing as a political or moral consensus; but it does provide the common frame of reference that is a necessary precondition for the emergence of compromise and consensus. The professions should play a pivotal role in the creation of these public frameworks for addressing and resolving public problems. In so doing they will contribute tangibly, meaningfully to the common good. But they will forfeit their opportunity to make this contribution if they cannot make themselves more than simply special interest groups, morally emptied of their own overriding vision of their public duties.

We are not suggesting that the professions alone can or should determine the content of the values and goals constituting these public philosophies. There is perhaps a fine line to be drawn between a profession's contribution to a public philosophy and its ideological advocacy of a specific value position, whether that advocacy is based upon

corporate self-interest, sincere ethical conviction, or some combination of both. This line is important to draw nonetheless. In the final analysis, perhaps, this distinction depends upon the spirit with which the professions engage in the broader process of civic deliberation. The ultimate aim should be not the triumph of any single value perspective, but the collective and cooperative search for a reasonable and workable deliberative process that respects the diverse ethical perspectives and traditions of our pluralistic society.

### **Taking the Next Steps**

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Our principal objective in this essay has been to throw a neglected dimension of professional ethics into clearer relief and to map out some terrain that future work in this area might profitably explore. Much of what we have said requires a good deal more elaboration and argument; we have tried to stimulate further discussion, not to have the last word. Our own concluding recommendation is that the conversation on the public duties of the professions be a continuing one—within the professions, among them, and between the professions and the broader society. This can broaden the ethical horizons of those professions that tend to view their responsibilities in exclusively client-centered terms, and it can enrich ethical reflection within those professions that traditionally have espoused a "public interest" orientation.

Organized educational activities and public discussions sponsored by professional associations have a key role to play here. Through these efforts professional associations can promote decision making with a proper regard to public duty and societal obligation, and thereby find yet another way to serve the public interest and the common good. To some the notion of public duty we have been exploring here may seem like wishful thinking in the face of powerful motives of self-interest and economic forces at work in the professions today. It would be a mistake to discount these forces. But it would also be a mistake to underestimate the intellectual ferment now present in the professions and the opportunity it presents. Influential segments in each of the professions are searching for a new vision of their profession's mission and of its place in the broader society. Creating multiple forums in which professionals can discuss and debate their public duties with one another and with laymen can be a first step toward a richer vision for the future. Ethical commitments may counter economic pressures, and mitigate narrow professional self-interest. Today's moral aspirations may become tomorrow's expectations, and society's demands.