Cultural Complexes in Professional Ethics

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In creating a Jungian perspective on professional ethics, this paper suggests that professions create ethical statements and codes predicated on idealized selfimages and fail to engage with the shadow aspects of the occupational group. A brief survey of approaches to the study of professional ethics illustrates divergent attitudes to professions in general, with some scholars (Durkheim, for example) considering their function as stabilizing influences in society and others (broadly following Weber) who find professional claims to be self-serving and empty. An overview of literature suggests most professional ethics offer greater support for the latter than former view, though discussions on Asian, discourse, and virtue ethics have influenced thinking in this field in recent years. This discussion offers a space for a Jungian contribution to the field of professional ethics, one that has not been suggested before despite the obvious parallels between the idealized image and a Jungian persona, with the disowned aspects of practice relegated to the shadow dimensions. As most approaches to professional ethics, particularly as embodied in codes, are constructed around such persona images, I argue that they are too partial to be ethical in any deep sense. Indeed, they thrive on claims of moral superiority while rejecting deviant members of the group as Other, as "bad apples", despite Zimbardo's (2007) evocation of "bad barrels."

This paper argues four points:

- 1. Professional ethics lack reflexivity and are over-reliant on rules and codes;
- 2. The concept of cultural complexes allows groups, such as professions, to be considered as psychic entities;
- 3. Individuation forms the ground for an ethical approach; and
- 4. Some aspects of individuation, such as working with the shadow, might be undertaken by professions as the first step in building a new professional ethic.

It explores the tensions in professional ethics, conceptualizes professions as psychic entities with the potential to integrate shadow material, and suggests how such a Jungian approach might form the foundation of a new ethic. Finally, this paper considers the implications of such an approach for the particular profession

of public relations (PR), in which the author has taught and practiced for over 30 years, to illustrate the argument. A brief examination of PR literature reveals a schism between those who insist on PR's contribution to society (the dominant paradigm in PR education) and those who accuse it of undermining democracy. This schism can be characterized as a group complex. The research approach is conceptual and hermeneutic, interpreting professional and public relations ethics through the lens of Jungian writing.

Professions in Crisis

Professions are experiencing a crisis of trust in a variety of fields from banking and politics to clerics and athletics. Shifts in society, including scandals in leading professional groups (Sama & Shoaf, 2008), the rise of managerialism (Dent & Whitehead, 2002) and changes in national and global institutions (Sklair & Miller, 2010) mean that such groups can no longer rely on deference or social standing to secure their positions.

There is a renewed interest in ethics as a solution to the loss of trust, as is illustrated by the Leveson inquiry into journalism ethics following the phone hacking scandal in the UK media. Some argue that this interest is superficial, seeking to reassure the public rather than change behaviours (Sklair & Miller, 2010). This reflects an old tension between those who see professions as contributing to social stability (Durkheim, 1933) and those who see such claims as spurious aspects of jurisdictional struggles between occupational groups seeking social power (Weber, Henderson & Parsons, 1964); a division between functionalists and revisionists, according to Sciulli (2005). Professional ethics and codes tend to be generated by the former group and critiqued by the latter.

There is a new urgency to addressing professional ethics, given that business surveys find that the most pressing issue facing professions is the lack of public trust. Research by leading public relations practitioners, such as Arthur W. Page Society (2007, 2009) and the Edelman Trust barometer (2009), have identified the loss of public trust in institutions, from banks to churches, as a major priority. The 2009 Mori/Ipsos UK survey exploring trust in professions found that many groups from business leaders to police and civil servants also experienced loss of trust (Campbell, 2009). What Larson (1977) calls the "professional project" is under threat, and professional identity is in crisis (Broadbent, Dietrich & Roberts, 1997). It should not therefore be surprising that many professional bodies are hoping a renewed engagement with professional ethics will validate the larger project. For example, UK newspapers are developing a new approach to self-regulation in the hope of fending off government intervention. As Sama and Shoaf (2008) put it:

As scandal continues to rock the professional business sector, questions abound as to cause and effect, while clients' trust and business legitimacy wear down. Understanding the fundamental drivers of ethical lapses in the professions is a critical pursuit of academics and practitioners alike. (p. 39)

Current Approaches to Professional Ethics

A central element of the professional narrative is the responsibility of the professional to society at large, as well as to the particular client or patient. Professionals are perceived as "possessing some of the characteristics of community" (Larson, 1977, p. x); in order to justify the social credit they enjoy, professions appeal to general ideological rationales, as promoters of social values, rather than simple monetary reward, for example. But Cooper (2004) argues that professional ethics fail to respond adequately to societal changes, and that professions tend to claim either that there are no moral frameworks any more or create situation-specific codes lacking an underlying philosophy, leading to "moral drift and banal choices" (p. viii). Friedson (1994) distinguishes between the older professions which have legally protected licenses to practice and those less prestigious occupations which are protected by professional bodies, and much of the following discussion is primarily relevant to the latter group, though there may be implications for the former. I use profession in the looser sense of "community of practice" drawing on Brown and Duguid (1991), to encompass practitioners, commentators and academics.

The traditional approach to professional ethics was—and in many cases, still is—based on what Larson (1977) calls the ideal-typical practitioner, usually involving codes and other embodiments of best practice. She is concerned that these "do not tell us what a profession is, only what it pretends to be . . ." (Larson, 1977, p. xii). Abbott (1983) calls professional codes of ethics "the most concrete cultural form in which professions acknowledge their societal obligations" (p. 856). Kultgen (1988) suggests that this codified idealization may be because the functionalist ideal-typical approach forms a mythology which is convenient for professions, "the Urmythos from which all of the myths in the professional mythology spring is that professions are oriented to the service of humanity" (p. 120). He cites numerous examples of professional codes claiming to be of such service, but finds such views are not often shared by service users or others outside the profession. This idealized self-image, far from being a guarantee of ethical probity, may actually represent an obstacle. It should also be noted that most discussion of professional ethics concerns the behaviour of the individual member; the group or collective responsibility for ethics is rarely addressed (Abbott, 1983).

For the first half of the twentieth century, professional ethics focused on the specific conflicts facing particular professions, such as patient confidentiality or accounting procedures, following the trait approach (Cooper, 2004). Then wider reading of philosophy introduced the established schools of consequentialism (ethical outcomes) and deontology (ethical duties), as developed by Bentham and Kant respectively, which have since dominated the development of professional ethics (Lefkowitz, 2003), although Lucas (2005) points out the dehumanizing and de-professionalizing aspects inherent in both approaches. Discourse ethics, as developed by Habermas, has shifted this field by engaging with the power dynamics of ethical communication, though this has not led to revision of professional ethics, unlike virtue ethics, as described by MacIntyre (1984) and others. There are other approaches to professional ethics, drawing on Confucianism, social identity theory, post modern and feminist approaches, but the virtue approach, based in Aristotelian ethics, is particularly relevant in its lack of reliance on external rules or codes to prescribe acceptable ethical behaviour, focusing instead on character and reflection, making it an agent-based ethics (Oakley & Cocking, 2001). It is this shift away from ethics based on codes and rational evaluation of choices that creates the space for discussion of a Jungian professional ethic.

A Jungian Approach

The key Jungian concepts in this discussion are persona, shadow, and individuation. While there is some contradiction between different parts of Jung's writing, I am summarizing the psyche as consisting of: a) personal consciousness (with the ego at the center); b) the personal unconscious; and c) the collective unconscious (CW 8, par. 321). If personal consciousness (a) comprises everything of which the individual is aware, with the ego acting as the main organizer for managing external and internal stimuli, (b) includes forgotten and repressed material and peripheral, low interest contents, and (c) contains the possibilities of representations common to all people (archetypes), which may constellate differently according to the particular cultures and epoch, and which form the basic structure underpinning the individual psyche. These elements are seen as compensatory; that is, the more the personal conscious refuses to deal with unwelcome thoughts or insights, the more powerful the unconscious becomes. Jung described the public face of the individual as the "persona," drawing on Greek dramatic tradition, a kind of mask designed to "impress and conceal," and to meet societal demands (CW 7, par. 305).

As the ego gravitates to the public "approved" view, unconscious activity starts to compensate, giving rise to shadow material, representing all that is feared or despised in the individual. Of course, the shadow is not necessarily comprised of

negative or "bad" elements: it is the unlived, unintegrated qualities that cause the tension and these can be projected onto others, making them "carry" the unlived elements (Storr, 1999). The individual can be conceived of as a multiplicity of subpersonalities (Stein, 1998), subject to internal pressures, for example when the ego over-identifies with its outer or persona aspects, or shadow material starts "leaking" into the outer world.

The danger is that (people) become identical with their personas – the professor with his text book, the tenor with his voice . . . one could say . . . that the persona is that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others think one is (CW 9i, par. 221).

Individuation, or the path towards wholeness, can only be sketched here, with particular attention to the integration of persona and shadow (marginalizing the other aspects, such as animus and anima, whose integration is essential to individuation). The stages on this path are stages of integrating disowned or invisible (to the ego) elements of the psyche. As Stein (1998) puts it, "integration hinges on self-acceptance, on fully accepting those parts of oneself that do not belong in the persona image, which is itself usually an image of an ideal or at least of a cultural norm" (p. 122).

The extrapolation of Jungian concepts from individuals to groups and workplaces is not unprecedented; for example, Feldman (2004) and Hede (2007) explore shadow aspects of organizations. Singer and Kimbles' (2004) elucidation of cultural complexes (building on Henderson, 1990) offers particularly useful insight into the study of organizational-level shadow dynamics:

As personal complexes emerge out of the level of the personal unconscious in their interaction with deeper levels of the psyche and early parental/familial relationships, cultural complexes can be thought of arising out the cultural unconscious as it interacts with both the archetypal and personal realms of the psyche and the broader outer world arena of schools, communities, media, and all the other forms of cultural and group life. As such, cultural complexes can be thought of as forming the essential components of an inner sociology. (p. 4)

This paper suggests that professions can be envisaged as entities possessing both sociological and psychological qualities and capable of manifesting cultural complexes. Thus a professional association may embody the persona functions in its relationship to society through participation in what Wernick (1991) called the "promotional" culture. The responsibility of the professional association is to speak up for the "community of practice" and extol its members' virtues and contribution to society. Economically, it must be seen to be acting in the interests of members in

order to maintain existing membership and attract new members. These are consistent with persona roles in establishing the place of the individual in society. There may also be ego-functions at work, organizing the field, coordinating communication, distributing information and experience, for example. Like the individual, the danger to the profession occurs through over-identification with the persona aspects and denial of shadow material. A profession which believed its idealized ethical statements to be factual would be in this position. This paper (and the thesis from which it is drawn) conceptualizes the profession as a psychic entity, comprising equivalents to persona, ego, shadow, and other archetypal functions and therefore capable of integrating shadow aspects, which, it is suggested, offers a foundation for an ethic.

Individuation as an Ethical Process

Solomon (2000) and Robinson (2005) are both surprised at how little is written about Jung and ethics, apart from discussion of the analytical relationship. There are exceptions: Guggenbuhl-Craig (1972/1991) raises the shadow side of healing professions, particularly physicians, priests, and, of course, analysts; Beebe (1992) examines integrity as the core Jungian aspect of character; Neumann (1949/1990) applied the theory of individuation to global ethics; Becker (2004) looks at individuation and personal ethics, particularly in analysis; and Samuels (2006) has explored the professional ethics of depth psychology. However, the application of a Jungian approach to the wider field of professional ethics is original.

Jung thought that ethics and morality are innate, but that the individual has to free him/herself from normative collective ethics to experience their own ethical attitude (Samuels, 1985). Like Nietzsche, Jung rejects the "performance" of morals and refers back to classical ethics and Gnosticism in which morality was intrinsic rather than extrinsic (CW 11, par. 133). While Jung's definitions are not always consistent, it is clear that he locates ethics as an inward, esoteric journey, rather than the application of externally generated rules; the ethical is linked to the integral, in that the whole person is less conflicted or ego-driven and has greater access to his or her own moral consciousness: ".. for Jung the realm of ethical values was in a complex - in fact inseparable - relationship with the psychic sphere" (Robinson, 2005, p. 91). The process of developing an integrated self involves bringing opposing elements together in consciousness so that they become creative sources of energy, rather than generators of distress, denial, and neurosis. In comprehending the individual's own flaws, Jung argues, he or she comes to understand the frailty of human morality in him/herself and in the other, generating compassion, modesty, love of neighbor, and other ethical responses. As Solomon (2000) puts it, "a Jungian approach to understanding how the self may achieve an ethical attitude can be located within the context of the unfolding of the self over

the stages of an entire life" (p. 198). Samuels (1985) suggests that "there is a compelling moral aspect to integration of the shadow: to unblock personal and communal relationship and also to admit the inadmissible, yet human" (p. 65).

The next question is: can these ideas be applied to professional ethics? Singer and Kimbles (2004) are quite clear that groups can engage in individuation:

One way to understand the process of individuation in the individual is to think of it as the gradual working through and integration of one's core complexes over a lifetime. A potential way of understanding the process of individuation in the group is to think of it as the gradual working through and integration of the group's core cultural complexes over its lifetime – which may be generation upon generation. (p. 237)

In my thesis, I reconceptualize professions as psychic entities, with the professional body as the persona role, the shadow aspects projecting either into competing professions or internally perhaps in women, ethnic, or sexual minorities and other entrants unwelcomed by the dominant groups. More optimistically, I also suggest there is the potential for the professional body to play a mature ego role, negotiating between parts of the self within a transcendent whole. The issue of how to imagine a transcendent function for professions might be addressed by Davey's (2004) suggestion that the *polis*, society at its most elevated, might offer such a transcendent function, a framework within which elements might negotiate more meaningful relationships. Davey does not engage with Jungian ideas, but his hermeneutic approach to the transcendent has relevance here. This would also be consistent with professions' claims to be of service to society as well as challenging them to define such service. (There is the option of abandoning such claims, but this would invalidate the basis for professional status).

Thus, in order to rebuild a base for a new ethics, a profession would need to undertake a modified version of the stages of individuation (Amir, 2005) as follows:

- Recognizing that its dealings with its members and the wider world are not wholly driven by rational reflection, but by forces within its collective field, mostly outside the current consciousness of members or leaders of that profession;
- 2. Acknowledging the imperfections of the profession, its fallibilities and pretensions (without falling into despair);
- 3. Constructing a new sense of identity based on a deeper understanding of human failing and aspiration; and

4. Within a greater, transcendent framework, placing the needs and desires of the profession and its members in a more meaningful context.

The first step then would be the recognition that the professional body acts as a persona for its members, distilling the field's claim to be treated with respect by society, and that this "mask" reflects the ideal-typical paradigm discussed earlier. According to Jung's ideas of compensation, the more a group insists on its idealized self-image (and blames others for misrepresentation or, if pushed, "bad apples" in its own ranks), the more obscure—and potent—its own shadow becomes. The second step would involve working with these shadow aspects, which means accepting that as well as bad apples, there may be bad barrels (Zimbardo, 2007) and that the hidden abuses of power may be systemic rather than deviant. One place to look for such material would be in the concept of the other. Jurisdictional struggle defines professions, according to Abbott (1995) and this can be seen as the struggle to assert the professional persona by rejecting the Other, the not-us. As Singer (2004) puts it:

The group may develop a defensive system akin to the individual, but in this case, its goal is to protect the group or collective spirit rather than the individual spirit. Such a traumatized group presents only a "false self" to the world, and the world cannot "see" the group in its more authentic and vulnerable identity. (p. 19)

Methods for exploring the shadow aspects of professions might include analyses of text and symbols from logo to headquarters, scrutiny of major internal disputes, jurisdictional struggles, and other narratives evolved by and with leading members. As with an individual, engaging with shadow material will be difficult for any profession. It means shifting away from rationality and certainty and becoming prepared to live with internal conflict for a period. But like the individual experiencing a mid-life crisis as the trigger for seeking help, the public loss of trust in professions, outlined above, might constitute such a turning point in their development. Moreover, Jung is clear that engaging with conflict engages with ethics: "A conflict of duty forces us to examine our conscience and thereby to discover the shadow. This then forces us to come to terms with the unconscious" (cited in Robinson, 2005, p. 226). By raising elements of shadow to consciousness, the profession can gain the insight to construct new ethics that embrace complexity and encourage individual and collective reflexivity. This is the contribution a Jungian approach offers. The final section considers how this might apply to a particular field, that of public relations.

Case Study: Public Relations

Public relations (PR) is an emerging profession: various histories of the US and European development of the field place its origins in the late 19th century, with rapid expansion through the 20th century (Cutlip, 1994; L'Etang, 2004). It meets some but not all of the criteria of a profession outlined earlier; some scholars (Pieczka & L'Etang, 2001) call it an occupation rather than a profession. It is poorly defined and lacks central tenets according to many scholars (Cheney & Christianson, 2001; Hutton, 1999).

The most influential bodies of writing about public relations are in direct opposition, namely the Excellence project (Grunig et al., 1992) which quantifies best practice and stresses the positive contribution that public relations makes to society, while minimizing its historical roots in propaganda, and the critics (Miller & Dinan, 2008; Stauber & Rampton, 2004) who insist that PR is nothing more than propaganda. The struggle to define the professional domain has led to competing paradigms of public relations with competing sets of ethics (see Fawkes, 2007).

The greatest tension is between the Excellence approach, based in systems theory, which is recognized as the dominant paradigm, and an expanding group of critical, rhetorical, and postmodern scholars (Heath, 1992; Holtzhausen, 2012; L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006; Moloney, 2006). The Excellence school is characterized by critics as normative and prescriptive; they, in turn, are accused of failing to seek solutions to problems facing the field. The Excellence approach to ethics places considerable emphasis on Codes of Conduct, though Parkinson (2001) found they were designed more to improve the reputation of the profession than to control its standards of behavior. Discussions of PR ethics in leading texts and journals tend to emphasize the contribution of the field to democracy and society generally. For example, Bowen (2007) considering Excellence ethics from a Kantian perspective, finds that "public relations is serving a larger and more ethically responsible role by communicating for the good of society, both for the benefit of specific groups and for the maintenance of society itself' (p. 279).

A Jungian approach to public relations' ethics might characterize such statements as fulfilling the persona role in claiming social good and moral probity, as well as in its lack of self-criticism. The validity of this view is further evidenced by the gusto with which the critics pick up the rejected, shadow material and fling it back at PR. The latest of these, Miller and Dinan's (2008) A Century of Spin provides copious illustrations of PR deception and misrepresentation, though there is no discussion of how a corporation might legitimately defend its own interests. This is also characteristic of shadow dynamics – the emphasis on the Otherness of the other precludes connection, shared ownership, or recognition of the self in the

other, as Singer and Kimbles (2004, p. 186) point out. There is duality at the heart of Excellence with its emphasis on Good and Bad as irreconcilable opposites. Yet experience and observation suggests public relations practitioners, like other human beings, frequently combine both. As with others involved in professional communication, issues of trust, transparency, accountability, and responsibility are central to its practice. I have written elsewhere (Fawkes, 2007, 2010) about the hidden role of persuasion in public relations: the Excellence approach distances itself from persuasion and considers it inherently unethical, while practitioners recognize that they play a persuasive role and often see themselves as advocates, serving the client rather than society. The schism in public relations ethics reflects the fact that codes are based on the former approach, practice on the latter.

A Jungian approach would encourage PR to look for the similarities, the points of connection within the field. A re-constructed ethics might reflect more closely the fallible, approval-seeking, boastful, and dishonest aspects of PR's collective psyche, as well as its desire to communicate, solve problems, and build bridges between groups within society. And of course, as Jung points out, shadow material contains what we need to be whole, if only we can claim it: "This process of coming to terms with the Other in us is well worthwhile, because in this way we get to know aspects of our nature which we would not allow anybody else to show us and which we would never have admitted" (CW 14, par. 706).

Conclusion

This paper has proposed that professional ethics, as currently formulated, rests on an idealized image of the professional and a refusal to engage with darker aspects of practice, and argues that professional groups need to engage with ethical issues to regain lost trust from society generally, on which their authority rests. A Jungian approach allows the reconceptualizion of the profession as a psychic entity containing cultural complexes that operate within the group the way complexes do in individuals. Having established that individuation, and particularly working with the shadow, offers the foundation for an ethical approach, these insights were then applied to the field of public relations.

It can be seen that encouraging an internal dialogue, raising hidden aspects of the profession to consciousness, would create new relationships with other internal and external groups and could lead to a re-appraisal of the professional persona. As suggested earlier, the problem is not in the emphasis on presentation, which is to be expected from the promotional nature of most professional bodies. It is in the over-identification with that image, the failure to engage with critics or examine the gaps between claim and practice. In the case of public relations, it is suggested that persuasion needs to be re-integrated into a core understanding of the profession and new ethics constructed on this insight. Other professions will have their own

cultural complexes, their own shadows; this paper suggests a Jungian perspective offers a new approach to professional ethics.

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