

Special Invited Article

Professional ethics – An approach through value education

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ABSTRACT

Profession is not only the means to earn one's livelihood but also the means of one's evolution by appropriate participation in the larger order. Through professional education, one acquires the specific knowledge and skills to make contributions beneficial to the living as well as non-living beings. The contradictions and dilemmas in profession exist due to the prevailing world view, in which wealth maximization is perceived to be prime objective. This is what seems to be ailing the present-day medical profession. The development of professional ethics is a long-term process to be achieved through appropriate value education. A systematic approach in the field has been introduced where the effort to understand human reality *vis-à-vis* the rest of existence, with the prime focus to discover inherent coexistence and harmony at all levels of existence, has been propounded. In this article, the process of understanding, one's own "natural acceptance"!

Keywords: Professional ethics, Value education, Ethical competence, Principle of natural acceptance

INTRODUCTION

Profession is a significant domain of human activity targeted toward participating in the larger order which includes the society and the nature around. Through professional education, one acquires the specific knowledge and skills to make contributions in the larger order inclusive of human beings, plants, air, water, soil, animals, birds, etc. Ethical conduct of profession implies the right utilization of one's professional skills toward the fulfillment of comprehensive human goal and thus meaningfully participates in the larger order. Therefore, it is expected from a professional to carry out one's profession with right understanding, dexterity and commitment so that the effort is conducive to human welfare, i.e., conducive to happiness and prosperity of all and also to the enrichment of rest of nature.^[1] However, to be able to achieve this, it is essential to develop the value competence or the ethical competence by the professionals along with requisite skills. It may be appreciated that significant implication of the right understanding is to develop this ethical competence and thereby facilitate professional ethics, a concept now envisaged by the Medical Council of India, through Attitude, Ethics, and Communication module introduced to develop competencies among Indian Medical Graduates.^[2]

Profession is not only the means to earn one's livelihood but also the means of one's evolution by appropriate participation in the larger order. It is an important activity to authenticate one's understanding, whereby we interact with other human beings and with the rest of nature in a mutually fulfilling manner. Thus, profession is a service. However, the general perception in which

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the profession is presently looked at is in terms of being able to earn more and more money, getting more power, getting more perks, or comforts to mention a few. Such a view which is widely prevailing inherently comes in conflict with the expectations of professional ethics to ensure sustained welfare of all. Hence, the real way to ensure ethical conduct of profession is to have a correct understanding of profession, correct understanding of happiness and prosperity, and then enable the development of this understanding and competence which is essential to ensure professional ethics.

Ethical competence in profession

Having understood the profession in right perspective, let us demarcate what we mean by developing ethical competence as the value competence of an individual which is the only way to ensure professional ethics. The development of professional ethics is a long-term process to be achieved through appropriate value education. As profession is only a subset of the life activities, the competence in profession will only be the manifestation of one's right understanding. The salient features characterizing these competencies would then be:

- a) Clarity about the comprehensive human goal.
- b) Confidence in oneself as well as confidence in the harmony, coexistence, and self-regulation prevailing in entire existence based on the right understanding of the oneself and the rest of existence.
- c) Competence of mutually fulfilling behavior, clarity, and confidence in ethical human conduct and its correlation with sustainable personal as well as collective happiness and prosperity.
- d) Competence of mutually enriching interaction with nature, ability to assess the needs for physical facilities for the family, and their fulfillment through production/service systems ensuring harmony in nature.
- e) Competence of actualizing one's understanding of real life.

Role of value education^[1]

The overall purpose of education is to enable every human being to live a purposeful and fulfilling life in harmony with oneself, with family, society, and nature. It is, therefore, the responsibility of education to enable the resolution of these issues so that human society can achieve the cherished goal. In the light of this, it becomes essential to find out what the value is or what is really valuable to a human being? The subject that deals with "what is of value" or "what is valuable to human being" is dealt with in "value education." Values thus provide the basis for all our actions and there is an essential complementarity between values and skills which need to be ensured in any education system and especially so in professional education dealing with health care and medical education.

Of late, there is a growing realization to lay adequate emphasis on "human values education." It will not be out of place to discuss specific universal human values which are universal, rational, natural and verifiable, all-encompassing, as well as permeating into all dimensions of our living – our thoughts, behavior, work and understanding/realization and at all levels of individual, family, society and nature. A framework of universal human values needs to be drawn without which we will not be able to decide whether the chosen action in a situation is desirable or not desirable. Universal acceptance of the human values will then constitute the backbone of successful conduct of any profession. The prominent universal human values, which are basically the feelings toward one another amongst human beings, identified are trust (considered as the foundational value), respect, affection, care, guidance, reverence, glory, gratitude, and love as the complete value. The "value" domain so created constitutes the domain of "wisdom" which helps us to identify and set the right goals and to proceed in the right direction. The "skill" domain, on the other hand, will help us learn methods and practices to actualize the goal, to develop techniques to make things happen in real life.

A systematic approach in the field has been introduced where the effort to understand human reality *vis-à-vis* the rest of existence, with the prime focus to discover inherent coexistence and harmony at all levels of existence, has been propounded. This then provides a tangible basis to develop a holistic approach to value education. Extensive experimentation with all specters of people in the society as well as with teachers and students in the institutional framework has been conducted. This has shown impressive change in thinking of students, in their vision about happiness and prosperity, the clarity about life goals, improvement in human relationships, self-confidence, commitment to learning, feeling more responsible toward their profession, etc. The effects of this approach which start with self-exploration by each individual at different levels have been found to be very rewarding.

Developing the right understanding about oneself and the rest of reality through self-exploration and realization of the inherent coexistence, harmony and self-regulation at various levels in existence have been seen to be the real basis for imbibing universal human values and ethical human conduct. This is what is claimed to affect transformation toward a holistic world view (human coexistence) acknowledged to be the prime purpose of value education. This approach, therefore, is considered to ensure ethical human conduct in each profession as well.

Principle of natural acceptance^[1]

The whole subject starts with self-exploration of understanding "what we are" and "what we really want to

be” on the basis of the concept of “Natural Acceptance.” Operating on the basis of “Natural Acceptance” leads us to operate on the basis of “Realization” and “Understanding.” “Realization” means to be able to see the reality as it is and “Understanding” means to be able to understand the self-organization in all entities of nature/existence and their interconnected organization as it is. “Natural Acceptance” is considered to be a faculty that is present in each individual and it remains intact and invariant. However, one has to start with paying attention to it to know what is right for us under any circumstances. The process of self-exploration involves two things, i.e., both verifying on the basis of “Natural Acceptance” and validating experientially by living accordingly. Put across differently, “Natural Acceptance” is all about understanding “Natural Laws” in the human dimension that is just as real, just as unchanging as gravity is there in the physical realm. These natural laws are the principles that govern human effectiveness.

The reality of such principles or natural laws becomes obvious to anyone who thinks deeply and examines them through his faculty of “Natural Acceptance.” It is almost as if these principles or natural laws are part of the human condition, part of human conscience. They seem to exist in all human beings, regardless of social conditioning and loyalty to them, even though they might be submerged or numbed by conditions or disloyalty.

To count some important principles,

- Principle of fairness, out of which the whole concept of equity and justice is developed.
- Integrity and honesty create the foundation of trust which is essential to cooperation and long-term personal and interpersonal growth.
- Human dignity that all men are created equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- Service or the idea of making a contribution.
- Quality or excellence.
- Principle of potential, the idea that we are embryonic and can grow and develop and release more and more potential, develop more and more talents.
- Highly related to potential is the principle of growth – the process of releasing potential and developing talents, with the accompanying need for principles such as patience, nurturance, and encouragement.

These principles are deep, fundamental truths that have universal application. They apply at all levels of existence, i.e., self, family, society, and nature. When these truths are internalized into habits, they empower people to create a wide variety of practices to deal with different situations. Although people may argue about how these principles

are defined or manifested or achieved, there seems to be an innate consciousness and awareness that they exist and can be easily verified on the basis of one’s own “Natural Acceptance” faculties.^[3]

The needs of human beings can be seen to consist of the need for right understanding, relationships, and physical facilities. Hence, fulfillment of relationships based on right understanding leads to mutual happiness. We very well understand that fulfillment of need for physical facilities through nature and fulfilling production/service activities, both identified on the basis of right understanding leads to mutual prosperity.

While carrying out self-exploration, we have to understand that human beings can be seen as a coexistence of the self and body. Examining the human being in little more depth would make us realize that there are different needs and activities at the physical level and the level of self. This study would lead us to clearly understand one’s ultimate goals in life and how these can be achieved. The problems such as anger, frustration, and depression to name a few that are associated while pursuing one’s goals will need to be resolved to achieve happiness. Hence, the exercise of self-exploration would begin with by starting to “watch within,” i.e., observing ourselves. The “Body” is physicochemical, the “Self” is “conscious” in nature. The powers of “Desire,” “Thought,” and “Expectation” that are associated with “Self” have corresponding associated set of activities in “Imaging,” “Analysis,” and “Selection.” To have a correct perspective of the powers and associated activities among human beings, it has to be realized that these are the outcomes of pre-conditioning/beliefs/assumptions prevailing around or sensations from the body. If these faculties of desire, thought, and expectation in us are not verified on the anvil of one’s own “Natural Acceptance,” these would lead us to conflicts at different levels. Since our desires are set on the basis of preconditioning and stimuli from our sensations, i.e., outputs from outside, these are borrowed and not our own. As a result, our goals keep shifting as the outputs from outside also keep changing, leading to wavering aspirations. This results in lack of confidence, unhappiness/conflict, and lack of qualitative improvement in us, a state of resignation. Under these circumstances, when we seek solution to the problem that concerns us, be it social, political, economical, ecological, or as regard purpose of life, it is not going to be a healthy one. It is so because we do not understand ourselves properly and have contradictions within, we slowly start getting disillusioned. On the contrary, the solution would be to start verifying our desires, thoughts, and expectations on the basis of our “Natural Acceptance.” This exercise of applying “Natural Acceptance” results in two activities in self, i.e., “Realization” and “Understanding” and these would help us in overcoming conflicting situations. The faculty of “Natural Acceptance” in each one of us, which is the process of continuously observing ourselves and

keep asking ourselves whether the solutions are naturally acceptable to us would ultimately lead us to realization and understanding. On the contrary, if the faculties of realization and understanding remain dormant in us and we operate on the basis of desires, thoughts, and expectations derived from our preconditioning and sensations, we will not be able to live with definiteness. Rather, we end up doing things we do not want to do, an “Indefinite Conduct.” Hence, the potential of realization and understanding are the ingredients within us, on accessing which through the course of self-exploration, we can have the right understanding about any situation that we come across in our daily life.^[3]

The realization and understanding lead us to harmony in our actions and they get self-aligned. Hence, to ensure harmony in self, it turns out to be a four-step process – first, become aware that the human being is the coexistence of self and body where body is just an instrument of self and self is the seer, doer and enjoyer; second, become aware of the actions of desire, thoughts and expectations and pass them through the prism of natural acceptance; third, understand harmony at all levels of existence by verifying the proposals being placed at the level of our natural acceptance; and fourth, let the realization and understanding become the basis for our desires, thoughts, and expectations, thus leading to harmony in self in continuity. The outcome of the process is that the desires, thoughts, and expectations are definite. Thus, there is a clear flow of ideas and with no contradictions, we have clarity about ourselves on the basic aspirations and how to fulfill these aspirations. Further, we have understanding about all the levels of our living and we live accordingly, we live in state of freedom, we are self-organized in our imagination, behavior, and our work. This results in continuous happiness and prosperity at all levels.

CONCLUSION

The contradictions and dilemmas in profession exist due to the prevailing world view, in which wealth maximization is perceived to be prime objective. In this case, the other people have to be exploited to gain affluence and there is no possibility of mutual fulfillment in a sustainable way. In the same way, exploitation of nature becomes acceptable as it helps a person to accumulate wealth easily and there is no limit to this. The prevailing dichotomy in medical profession is highlighted by degradation in health of society which is taken as a welcome opportunity for those whose expected role in the society is to facilitate the health of people. The dilemma here persists whether to give importance to one's profit or to the welfare of people needing help. Driven by

profit mania, one can adopt methods of extreme exploitation of the patients who are already in severe trouble.

As we observe ourselves and start becoming aware of our desires, thoughts, and expectations, we may not find acceptable what we see outside and even within. It is important to understand that we do not fight with the contradictory desires, thoughts, and expectations, we need to pass them through our natural acceptance. As we do this and have the right understanding, these contradictory desires, thoughts, and expectations would start dropping off by themselves since one can see that these are no longer meaningful, purposeful, and no longer important.

We have to start paying attention to the various aspects of the reality around us including ourselves at all four levels of living – in ourselves, in the family, in society, and in nature/existence as put forth by the proposals. As we do so, we begin to equip ourselves with the ability to understand the reality, verify it on our own right on the anvil of human values, and live accordingly thereby achieving complete harmony and happiness in our life and in that of others as well.

The resolution of all the contradiction and dilemmas can only come through right understanding through value education. Sincere efforts toward building up the ethical competence of human beings in general and professionals in particular through proper value education are the only effective way to establish and safeguard professional ethics.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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