

Should Ethicists Have Their Own Code of Ethics?

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Introduction

In recent years there has been an expansion in the appointment and use of ethical advisers in Australasia, in North America and to a lesser extent in Europe. Their advice is sought in areas of research such as those involving experiments on animals, in public policy decisions concerning human health or the environment, in the way large corporations run their businesses, and by professions concerned with actions by members that may be deemed unprofessional. Increasingly such advice is being given by people who have some sort of “professional” ethical expertise rather than by individuals, “from the shop floor” as it were, who happen to have developed an interest in the ethical problems of their workplace. These types of experts are now often referred to as “ethicists,” and the use of such a term can lead one to think of them as making up an identifiable group. Can such a group be thought of as forming a profession?

Part of the reason why groups with particular kinds of expertise are drawn to see themselves as forming a profession is in order to maintain professional integrity and standards of good practice. Some might naively hope that ethicists, given the nature of their expertise, would be the very last people to act unethically their professional activities and hence have no need to regulate themselves. Others, of a more cynical nature, may think

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