

Professional Ethics and Deontology



Professional ethics is commonly referred to with terms such as the worthy task, the noble contribution, the eminent science fundamental to the profession, and so on. However, it is somewhat ironic to see how such sound, and indeed transcendental judgements appear as so much hot air in the contrast between words and deeds. This is what occurs in the case of *professional ethics* in psychology: we see excellent intentions, but at the same time scarce activity to match those worthy intentions. In practice, the *deontology* of the psychology profession, at least in Spain, does not yet occupy the place it deserves in the training curriculum of psychology students; nor have psychology professionals fully appreciated the need for a set of mechanisms that will guarantee the continual updating of deontological aspects.

It is easy to deduce, on reading the articles making up this issue of *Papeles del Psicólogo*, that *ethics* and *deontology* should be far better represented within psychological knowledge than they are at present. Even more so when we consider the clear consensus on the desirability of such representation, and when the current ignorance continues to spread like a malevolent virus affecting the entire psychological community and the profession itself, as we can observe, for example, in media accounts of *maleficent* practice (in clear allusion to the ethical principle of *beneficence*, or *primum non nocere*) by psychology professionals. Obviously, such revelations damage the image of the discipline and generate mistrust even of those who do their job properly and well.

Spanish Psychology has well deserved international prestige. However, our achievements in the field under scrutiny do not meet the same high standards. In such a context, it is gratifying to have been provided with this platform by *Papeles del Psicólogo* in the form of a special issue dedicated to *professional ethics*. As far as we know, this is the third occasion on which a psychology journal in our country has devoted a special issue to this topic (it having been dealt with previously by *Informació Psicològica* in its issue 77 from 2001 and by *Revista de Psicología. Universitas Tarraconensis* in its issue 24 from 2002; indeed, this would be the fourth occasion if we include the special issue *Secreto Profesional*, published in 1994 by the Eastern Andalusian Psychological Association). This issue, thanks to the invitation by *Papeles del Psicólogo* and its Editor, Serafín Lemos, aims to offer an overview of *the ethics and deontology* of psychology that goes beyond our borders and situates us firmly within the European context. After all, even though the different member countries of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) have their own codes of ethics, the Meta-code framework embraces us all. As Pierre Nederlandt so rightly expresses it in his article included here: "*Whatever our approach, our nationality or our field of activity, we are united by deontology*".

It was enormously satisfying for us that some of the most prestigious European specialists agreed to participate, some of whom, at our request (and with due permission from the publishers), have based their contributions on respective chapters of *Ethics for European Psychologists* (Lindsay, Koene, Ovreeide and Lang, 2008), a fundamental text for all European psychologists that includes discussion and analysis of the EFPA Meta-code (2005), with abundant practical examples. It is undoubtedly a work of great value for the training of psychologists, and a useful tool for us all in our everyday work. Moreover, it constitutes a yardstick for psychological associations in the development of codes and/or guidelines, the control of nationwide practice and the processing of complaints or reports of malpractice. It is also of great utility for the users of psychological services, who will be able to familiarize themselves with the ethical standards they can expect to be met in the relationship with the psychology professional.





This special issue opens with an article by Geoff Lindsay, Chairman of the EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics when the possibility of this special issue was mooted, entitled “*Professional Ethics and Psychology*”, in which he explores the basis for promoting ethics within psychology, through an analysis of the EFPA Meta-code. This is followed by a work from Vicent Bermejo, Chairman of the Deontological Committee of the General Council of Spanish Psychological Associations, on “*Reasons for the review and modification of the deontological code of the psychology profession*”. In this article he discusses the aspects that made a review and updating of the Deontological Code of the Psychologist (1987) essential, and outlines the main content of the *Proposal for the Code for the Psychology Profession*, which is awaiting approval by the Governing Board of the General Council of Spanish Psychological Associations. Pierre Nederlandt, current Chairman of the EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics, and Carmen del Río, Vice-Chair of the Deontological Committee of the General Council of Spanish Psychological Associations, in articles entitled “*The deontology of psychology students in Europe*” and “*The teaching of professional ethics in Spain*”, offer their points of view on the teaching of ethics and deontology in Europe and the situation in Spain, respectively. Nederlandt, moreover, examines the deontological problems students generally encounter during their training. Contributions from three more members of the EFPA Standing Committee, Fredi Lang, Vítor Cláudio and Casper Koene, complete this special issue, the first with a discussion of psychologists’ responsibility in both individual professional practice and in relation to the professional community, entitled “*The principle of responsibility*”. This is followed by Vítor Cláudio’s article “*Between paths A and B, I choose the uncertain C. Good and Bad and ethical dilemmas*”, in which he looks at the resolution of ethical dilemmas by

means of three possible responses based on the definitions of good and bad contributed by philosophy. Finally, Casper Koene, in his work entitled “*When things go wrong: on mediation, arbitration, corrective action and disciplinary sanction*”, focuses on the analysis of disciplinary procedures and of possible actions (endorsed by EFPA) for improving the ethical quality of professional behaviour.

Finally, as coordinators of this special issue, we should like to express our thanks to the authors of the articles, who generously, and despite the time constraints, agreed to participate, and have made its publication possible. Our hope is that its content proves both interesting and useful for all psychologists, and that, in turn, it contributes to improved recognition of ethics and deontology, so that they might occupy the place they merit in both professional activity and the teaching of psychology.

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