CHAPTER XII

PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: NEW HORIZONS OF PRAXIS

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INTRODUCTION

When Martin Luther King junior electrified a massive crowd from the steps of the Lincoln memorial on August 28th 1963, when he departed from his prepared script and began ‘I have a dream today’—this was not mere idle talk nor simply day dreaming. Rather, in a Wittgensteinian sense he was going ‘back to the rough ground’ (Dunne, 1993), to a messy and far from satisfactory reality, to play a particular ‘language game,’ that of re-configuring elements of previous speeches and preaching, to forge new horizons. His words gave verbal reality to the world he envisaged, thus paving the way for others to step their way towards an alternative future with some confidence, a sense of purpose and direction. The future he envisaged had to be brought into being by the actions of others, individually and collectively. In similar vein, though much less dramatically so, and without the benefit of a live audience, we too find ourselves faced with the challenge of addressing the future of professionals—how they understand their respective roles, and deliberate on their actions, while recognising that there are different audiences, different constituencies within the diverse professional field:

a) Those who are already established members of professional groups or associations,

b) Those who are being prepared for entry into a profession whatever that might be, and,

c) Those whose responsibility it is to prepare new entrants, or existing members, for the life of a professional.

And, less directly, it is evident from the foregoing chapters that the various publics and civil societies from whom professionals garner legitimacy in return for quality professional service are legitimate participants in the conceptualisation of professional responsibility, theoretically and practically. However, this is not a static world. Rather, there is the additional and onerous necessity to ensure that those already part of a plethora of professional communities that continues to expand and mutate, are kept up to date in knowledge and skills. Updating knowledge and expertise however is scarcely adequate either. It is necessary also to connect these knowledge bases with wider social concerns through creating and nurturing a sense of professional responsibility as it continues to be buffeted by the inevitable tensions created between governments, citizens and professional groups, and increasingly also by international change forces.

Neither is this enough however. We understand our task as something akin to a ‘fusion of horizons’ in the Gadamerian sense and, in the process, to create new horizons, new possibilities for professional responsibility, while recognising as
King suggested ‘business as usual’ is an inadequate response. Consequently, at this juncture it is necessary to revisit perspectives articulated in chapter one in light of the contributions in each subsequent chapter, to forge new horizons of praxis. It is necessary to summon the courage to get off the academic fence, to grasp the nettle of professional responsibility and to transform the various perspectives espoused in the foregoing chapters into a different weave, to thread the distinct voices into a fabric that, while of our making, remains sensitive to context, culture and particular circumstance. We take up the challenge of meaning making, to engage in inter-subjective sense making while being mindful and respectful of our differences—language, culture, gender, professional lives and work.

We have determined that a shift in writing genre is appropriate, to speak to professionals whatever their milieu, while seeking to avoid artificial boundaries between thought and action, theory and practice. Such considerations provide justification also for persisting with the word praxis in the title of this chapter since the term practice in English tends to focus more exclusively on the doing, the action to the exclusion of thought and intention. We have a strong preference therefore for the Greek conceptualisation of praxis and its close relative phronesis as something more than mere enactment of a professional role. Elaboration of praxis and praxis artistry by Higgs, Mcallister & Whiteford’s (2009) are particularly useful in this regard as they combine critical and ethical reflection with other essential ingredients such as expertise, humanity, morality and finesse, all of which are embodied in high-quality professional practice.

While committing to these points of departure, our intention is to construct a deliberative conversation. The genre is conversational in style, while academic connections are more often confined to endnotes, though they are sometimes included as they might be in a more typical conversation on this topic. As reader, we invite you to become an active if absent presence in this conversation, thus making your own contribution to the meaning making process. In this manner, your voice, along with ours and the others that populate the various chapters, becomes active in the deliberative conversation of constructing new horizons of and for professional responsibility. As an active participant you are already in the process of rehearsing (new) conversations, constructing new tapestries of professional responsibility in ways that cannot be anticipated here. Two additional considerations are intended to facilitate this process. First, it is inevitable in a conversation that there is some repetition due to the back and forth nature of meaning making, though we have sought to keep this to a minimum. However, such interwovenness is also indicative of the seamlessness of professional responsibility, thus indicating simultaneously its complexity as well as the necessity for holding its diverse elements in productive tension. Second, while not wishing to constrain unduly the spontaneity of the conversation, we provide some sub-headings as a means of enabling the reader to remain a connected participant.
as our deliberations progress. Echoing King, this concluding chapter is a beginning rather than an end.

As we began to grapple with the import of the individual chapters for this conversation, an immediate pressing concern raised its head.

**Professional Responsibility: Prescriptive or Authoritative?**

Tone: It strikes me Ciaran that the contributions in this book are – in many respects – quite normative? And while I am comfortable with this, I also feel a little uncomfortable about being so prescriptive – so why are academics in general so reluctant to be prescriptive?

Ciaran: You believe in beginning with ‘easy’ questions obviously! Apart from left leaning liberalism, in this instance there is a tendency to hide behind the increasing complexity argument, but this is most likely merely ducking the question. Consequently, I would like to distinguish between being prescriptive and being authoritative. Perhaps another way of thinking about and connecting with this issue is consideration of courage and vulnerability, both issues that have been raised in various chapters. So, I might venture—it is a considerable challenge to be courageous while recognising one’s vulnerability, and to be authoritative about values, standards, service to public and profession. What the various voices are insistent upon, without being prescriptive, is that the normative dimension of professional responsibility has been impoverished, hollowed out, due to the dominance of a technical rational discourse.

Tone: I would like to go one step further though, to argue that, such a stance may also entail being ‘prescriptive’—that there are elements of professional responsibility that are non-negotiable. Is it too idealistic, for example, to re-iterate a phrase that has been around for a long time—‘above and beyond the call of duty’ and that this is the requirement or standard that is expected by professionals of themselves? This is both prescriptive and authoritative?

Ciaran: OK, as long as prescriptive here means insisting on an ethical dimension as inescapable, and that complexity cannot be used as an excuse for not grasping the ethical element, thus deliberations may be authoritative without being prescriptive in the sense of the outcomes of deliberations being predictable or pre-determined. Consequently, I think we should simply acknowledge that complexity is inherent in professional responsibility in the same way that we assert the inescapable presence of moral obligations.

**Professional Responsibility: Expert and Normative?**

Tone: I agree, but I’m rather uncertain that responsibility ends with either accepting complexity or a normative dimension. Wouldn’t it be necessary also to challenge the prevailing culture and how it has been influenced by dominant
approaches to accountability—that create, as indicated by the nurse participants in chapter ten, ‘paper care’ rather than proper care?

Ciaran: Well, would you like to have a go at answering your own question?

Tone: Thank you! We should keep in mind here, chapters three and ten in particular. What they indicate and illustrate is that care may be marginalised when a premium is put on efficiency, leading to defensive practices whereby professional care is denied in the interests of safety - a ‘cult of efficiency’.

Chapter three advocates care as integral to professional responsibility while chapter ten signals clearly that external accountability puts a premium on ‘paper care,’ actually trumps quality care, and restricts the sphere on which professionals are willing to exercise judgement. It serves then as a good example of how accountability or a more technical-rational approach reduces professional responsibility in comparison with what one might wish for a loved one in a nursing home.

Ciaran: OK, so in such circumstances, are you suggesting that professional responsibility obliges them to have the courage to resist such pressures, to recognise their vulnerability, and accompany the patients to the garden?

Tone: Yes, I do! I think courage needs to be taken seriously...and brought into the discussion on professional responsibility. However, even though I see it as an important ‘virtue,’ it is necessary to move beyond an individualistic perspective on courage to one connected to a communitarian approach consistent with May’s perspectives (see chapter 1). Individual professionals need support from their respective professions in order to be responsible, and to be encouraged to act with integrity.

Ciaran: It sounds to me that you are supporting the call (in chapter 2) for an ecological professionalism, a recognition that everything is connected with everything else. When an ethical dimension is silenced or marginalised by the dominance of a language of efficiency, professionals begin to be reductionist in the exercise of their responsibilities —compliance trumps comprehensive service to the client.

Tone: Perhaps you have forgotten, but in chapter one we indicated that at different time periods across the 20th century, various aspects of professional responsibility—ideals, expertise, moral mandates etc have been foregrounded. That account has resonances with Gert Biesta’s (2010) elaboration on what he describes as the three periods in the history of professionalism: client-emancipation which enhanced responsibility; the new public management that shifted the main focus from client to targets and an erosion of responsibility; which more recently has shifted further to a preoccupation with evidence-based practice and a consequent erosion of discretion and client emancipation. In such circumstances, it is necessary and worthwhile to consider why professions came into being. For some, Durkheim’s ideas may be anachronistic, but a more
ecological consideration suggests that old ideas may breathe new life into contemporary discourses on professional responsibility.

**Professional Responsibility: More than Accountability**

Ciaran: But I think there is an added urgency to recapitulate understandings of professional responsibility since ‘accountability’ looms so large in the English language and in contemporary discourses on professionalism (Cunningham, 2008; Gewirtz, Mahony, Hextall, & Cribb, 2009; Green, 2009).

Tone: Fine, but chapter four is primarily devoted to arguing that responsibility is more than being merely accountable. In fact your own chapter (9) makes this point too when it says that politicians and clergy followed various rules but neither behaved responsibly. In many respects therefore current preoccupations with accountability are impoverishing professional responsibility by reducing it to the application of rules, check lists and codes of conduct. For example, if evidence-based practice is the sole means of determining or measuring the nature of service, conformity and compliance dominate to the detriment of professional judgement and the exercise of professional responsibility.

Ciaran: I couldn’t agree more, but is that all there is to professional responsibility then, to say that it is more than being accountable?

Tone: I would say that it is understandable and necessary in various workplace contexts to follow checklists and rules as a means of managing complexity. However, I would like to add the following—in a paradoxical manner such behaviour is recognition of complexity, a way of dealing with it, of reducing it to manageable proportions, yet not sufficient as a professional response to it.

Ciaran: May I stop you there until I make sure I am getting the gist of your argument. Is the argument then that just applying the rules, or just to answer to prescribed routines is never an adequate fulfilment of professional responsibility or that it is only in some circumstances that this might be the case?

Tone: Complexity is here to stay, and, at one level, professionals need to recognise that it goes with the territory. Part of being a professional means living with complexity, dealing with it through the deliberative process of exercising professional judgement, and living with the uncertainties and insecurities that attach to such situatedness—the ‘messiness’ as indicated in chapter one. And it is this messiness that cannot be captured by pre-determined performance indicators that have become pervasive as part of new accountability systems such as the logic inherent in new public management.
Ciaran: From a theoretical or conceptual perspective, I can go along with what you say, but I’m thinking also of the harried, hard pressed professional who is quite likely to say in response: ‘in a low trust high risk environment such as my workplace, you are asking me to walk a tightrope without a safety net’, is it reasonable in such ‘high stakes’ circumstances to put additional pressure on already over-stretched professionals to go that extra mile, to be professionally responsible rather than play by the rules?

Tone: I think that this is a critically important question, and one we have to grapple with if this conversation is to ‘cut it’, to have credibility in diverse professional fields, because in low trust high risk environments, (as chapter six illustrates), professionals are more likely to be cautious and conservative in their deliberations when such courses of action may not always be in the best interest of the client. Of course, it is not possible to address this concern without situating it within a number of other considerations—the general policy environment, membership of professional bodies, the professional preparation of professionals for a life of professional responsibility, as well as the relationship of professionals to the public—both as members of the public as well as providing a service to that public in a public or private capacity.

Ciaran: Wow! Just when I thought things were coming together—this is definitely complexity at work, but we will have to wade through these issues, not all at once as that would be impossible, but nevertheless, deal with them while also indicating how they form part of the tapestry of professional responsibility—a ‘web of responsibilities’, as you might say, inspired by Larry May (1996).

**Professional Responsibility: ‘capital commitments’**

Tone: Before we deal with these inter-related issues, I want to say something about the notion of a web of commitments …

Ciaran: Feel free …

Tone: Once we accept that professionals do not work in a vacuum, then they are hooked into a whole plethora of commitments, but it is possible to understand a web in a number of ways. You could understand a web, from the spider’s perspective—as an elaborate network that is intended to ensnare—to capture unsuspecting or naïve members of the insect community. Such ‘ties that bind’ have a particular kind of self-serving ‘capital’. However, it is also possible to understand a web as an intricate work of art, carefully and systematically created over time, that despite its apparent fragility, is extremely robust, flexible and fit for purpose. Though each strand may be thin and fragile, collectively, they reinforce one another thus it is the web as a collective, as a system that is important. This more composite view of web enables the spider to survive and
thrive, as part of a more elaborate, integrated ecology. These are robust but ‘loose ties’ that create a more ecological sense of capital. By extending the metaphor in this manner, I like to think that the web of commitments that connect professionals to their fields of responsibility and influence, as well to their professional communities, make them robust in the sense that the web provides a firm basis for excellence in service provision, but when its fragility is exposed, too much effort may be spent on defending the citadel rather than using it as a basis for serving the client and wider community. Understood in this manner it is these internal and external ties that provide professionals with the bridging capital to behave with integrity as members of professional communities, while simultaneously drawing on this web as a resource to (re-) build trust with client and public.

Ciaran: Again, if I am understanding this appropriately, professionals are bound together by webs of professional association, but these are the same agencies and associations that create and influence codes of conduct, and professional ethics. This suggests that there is a need to encourage professionals to adopt such codes. However it is not simply a matter of adopting, but deliberating on them in ways that do not result in behaviour that works on ‘automatic pilot’—that being a responsible professional carries the additional responsibility of being alert to the strengths and limitations of any set of rules or procedures as they are brought to bear in particular contexts as part of the deliberative process. And, I think there is a subtle but important distinction between a web of commitments and a web of responsibilities. The latter is more open to questioning and deliberation than the former. To extend the point you made just now—professionals must strive to occupy a space that is always bridging, connected to fellow professionals through the ties of association and shared commitments, while retaining the autonomy conferred by loose ties to be able to act independently of, and possibly in defiance of, that same web of commitments in the interest of client and community; no pun intended, but this bridging positioning might be said to be their ‘over-arching’ professional responsibility!

Tone: I concur since your comments imply the additional responsibility of continuously questioning the appropriateness of rules in the workplace, in the processes of arriving at professional judgements, uncomfortable and time consuming though that may be. However, it is one thing to have the courage to challenge dominant forms of accountability, but doing so responsibly requires suggesting possible alternatives, does it not?

Ciaran: While I can subscribe to this view in an ideal world—professionals’ sense of ‘belonging’, their professional identity straddles or bridges the professional-public interface, and in a somewhat different manner than expressed in chapter 8, there is a ‘perpetual vulnerability’ inherent in professional responsibility given this borderland positioning. But, contemporary policy environments are far from ideal, heavily laden with various technologies of
accountability, as chapter six indicates, aren’t professionals more likely to be risk averse, to play safe rather than pushing the boat out regarding standards?

Tone: It may be more appropriate to suggest that while standards are important, an integral element of maintaining high standards is recognising the necessity for ‘legitimate compromise’. Where there is low trust, (and here I subscribe to the view that trust in professionals has declined), there is an additional responsibility to (re-) assert the highest standards and to go that extra mile to try to ensure that these standards are maintained, upheld and promoted despite current demands and difficulties. But, and this is an important caveat, we need to deliberate on what we mean by ‘highest standards’ because you cannot live up to all ideals all the time. Instead, professional discretion relies on the ability to negotiate the most appropriate solution in a particular situation, having considered all possibilities and arrived at a legitimate compromise. This is demanding, I agree. However, I think the most important principle or standard that may guide you as a professional is the one that you can never escape the responsibility of putting the interest of the client and society before your own interest. ...

Ciaran: In that sense, drawing on comments a little earlier, the bridging undertaken by professionals is an ongoing negotiated compromise between competing interests, while you are arguing that in these deliberations the interest of clients and public must be accorded priority over self-interest. I have two observations in relation to this. First, and with respect, this may be a particularly Norwegian, Scandinavian or even northern European perspective, that may be much more superficially shared, if at all, in the Anglo-Saxon or US context. Second, and with respect to the logic of what ‘legitimate compromise’ entails, a legitimate rapprochement between self, client and public interest seems both necessary and desirable. However, in the current policy climate, where often trust is notable by its absence between professional and public, what counts as legitimate or illegitimate becomes more contested.

Tone: Quite right, unless professionals not only aspire to the highest standards, but also seek to vindicate these standards in their professional work, then low trust and perhaps even more draconian accountability measures will be imposed from without, rather than professionals and their representative bodies insisting on the most exacting professional standards. And, I hasten to add, if professional associations have been complicit in a decline of trust by being perceived as putting self-interest ahead of service, this too calls on those associations to re-engage in public discourses beyond sound bites and spin, to re-connect meaningfully with the publics they serve. In order to do this, and it will undoubtedly take time, there needs to be a subtle mixture of vigilance in promoting the highest standards, defending those who seek to vindicate them, while being prepared to both question and defend those standards publicly, and where necessary point a finger when such standards are seriously compromised. To avoid compromising standards, the art of legitimate negotiated and acceptable professional judgements requires continuous vigilance and attention.
Ciaran: Phew! At this point, I need a coffee and a pit stop, and maybe even the reader does too! Perhaps we should take a break, digest what we have discussed so far, and when we return, take up some of the issues raised above.

Tone: OK, let’s do that, but we did also indicate earlier in the conversation that it would not be possible in this conversation to exhaust all possibilities—rather, we are initiating a conversation while inviting readers to be partners, with the additional expectation that these conversations will be extended through their own professional ties, networks, communities of practice ….

Ciaran: Let’s drink our coffee while continuing the conversation?

Tone: Sure, of course.

Ciaran: One of the elephants in the room in an age of expert professionalism is a separation of ethics or moral responsibility by privileging expert knowledge. So from a complexity or ecological perspective, and within the postmodern condition, how do you address the issue of the normative element of professional responsibility?

**Personal & Professional Responsibility: What Values, Who Decides?**

Tone: Well, we have already agreed that moral dimensions of professional responsibility are inescapable—that much is clear. Expert knowledge *per se* does not commit you to a particular courses of action—rather it is how that is used in the deliberative process of professional judgement that counts, and in that process values matter. I think that chapter seven illustrates this rather well in the case of the professional preparation of nurses in the US, while chapter five indicates that virtues too play a critical role.

Ciaran: Yes, agreed, but in a cultural climate of relativism, there is a sort of retreat from the public sphere, whereby values belong in the personal or private domain rather than informing and shaping professional thinking, deliberation and practice?

Tone: I think there is truth in what you say, and another aspect of understanding professional responsibility is connecting the personal and the professional….

Ciaran: Ok, but what values are to be included or considered, and, importantly also, who gets to decide?

Tone: Let’s begin with what values, for me that question is easier than who has the power to decide. First, in choosing to become a member of a particular professional community, you are not signing up to a blank canvas. Rather, there already exists—rules of the game, codes of conduct that are intended to spell out
the standards of service demanded of you. But more fundamentally, you are signing up to provide a service—to individuals, families, communities, and the public and this is inherent in the social contract—between the state and the profession—a mandate. You are obliged therefore to provide the highest possible quality service—you are obliged to have expert knowledge, to commit to updating that knowledge continuously or regularly and in this way the value of service and all that entails is part of the relationship, implicitly and explicitly. And, even though we asserted this in chapter one, such deliberations often remain rather abstract. In order to come to grips with what it means, reflective conversations with colleagues and peers are a necessity—rather like the conversation we are having right now. It is necessary to ask: what are the values that should guide our professional work—and how do we understand them in practice—and how are they embedded both in our deliberations and our actions? We know that there is a lack of such discussion in both higher education and professional work (Fishman et al 2004, Gardner, Csikszentmihalyi & Damon, 2001; Solbrekke 2008). I think, if we want to take responsibility for vindicating those values embedded in the notion of social trustee articulated in chapter one, we need to become more self-conscious about what is guiding our own choices in everyday practices. It is as easy and as difficult as that ... particularly in a pluralistic and super-complex world.

Ciara: But don’t we need to go a step beyond saying this is difficult and challenging? And, I think here is where the work of Charles Taylor (1989) (Sources of the Self) is particularly useful, although his work is not directly linked to professions.7

*Tone: Please say more …*

Ciara: His thesis is that the frameworks in which we make sense of our lives, and how identities are constituted occurs through the taking of moral stances, and, in my view, the processes of becoming and being a professional are identical. Both Taylor and May (1996) are ‘on the same page’ when I say that a professional with integrity, is an individual who has successfully integrated the principles of his or her profession with the principles of personal life, including the society and family (May 1996). But I am less confident in my own mind regarding the seamlessness or indivisibility between the personal and professional.

*Tone: In so far as we are ever confident about anything, and perhaps professional humility is an under used virtue also, my understanding of Taylor is that without commitment to some moral order, the individual is lost.8 There is a mutual shaping between individuals and their respective communities such that both identity and morality develop through engagement and exchange with others in the communities in which they participate. Becoming a professional, and, taking on as well as shaping its responsibilities, is an ongoing conversation that*
encourages articulation of the moral content, values if you like, embedded in theories and actions (Solbrekke & Jensen 2006).

Ciaran: So, I assume also that it is for this reason that ongoing reflective conversation is vital if professional responsibility is to remain vibrant. I would like to add though that this is where important echoes of Durkheim’s work continues to have relevance—there needs to be a kind of realignment between the individual and the collective, between individuals and their professional communities, and, as May suggests, between the professional, the professions and their publics.

**Professional and Personal Responsibility?**

Tone: I couldn’t have put it better myself!
Ciaran: Oh thank you! So, active participation in a vibrant professional community carries the additional responsibility of challenging our colleagues—as the chapters in this book tend to do—by raising questions regarding: power in our professional—client relationship, trust, risk, vulnerability, dilemmas, professional judgement, and deliberations about what counts as responsible behaviour in ‘real’ situations so that we are better equipped to act in a professionally responsible manner and to continue to be both critically reflective on, and articulate about, our professional deliberations and actions. While I can live with these realities, I have two additional concerns—is the relationship between the personal and professional entirely seamless, and does such intimate alignment have implications for the notion of the ‘boundless’ professional?

Tone: What do you mean—boundless professional?

Ciaran: What I mean is—borrowing from the commercial or economic notion that ‘the market never sleeps’ and in a world where you can be online 24/7, trading futures somewhere in the world, is the professional similarly always on duty, is there no respite—is there a kind of panopticon professional responsibility, am I never off duty?

Tone: There are two issues here as I see it. The first is the personal and professional life. Here is how I understand the relationship. As an individual in my private life, I operate to a personalised moral code, I set my own standards, espouse a set of values that are shaped by family background, education, friendships and professional life also, so in that sense they are not exclusively my personal code—they are shaped by the influences just mentioned. However, in the professional sphere, I opt to become a member of a particular profession, a professional community, where there is already a history of standards, of values and expectations that I may influence, but I am expected also to internalise. Consequently, by becoming a member I take on responsibility for upholding, developing and promoting that inheritance or legacy and, in turn, seek to pass it on to subsequent new members of the profession. And, there is the additional
responsibility, to question critically those values, particularly in contexts where legitimate compromises need to be negotiated.

Ciara: So, is there a definite break, a clear distinction then, between how I lead my personal and my professional life? As a professional, I am not answerable to a personal code of conduct; rather I have an obligation to uphold the standards and integrity of the profession to which I belong. If for whatever reason I fail to do this, I not only let myself down, I also leave the profession down, both in the eyes of the professional community as well as in the eyes of the public.

Tone: Yes, I agree if you are saying that it is not possible to separate one's personal and professional lives. May (1996) makes this point that some continuity and transfer is to be expected between how an individual behaves in private and while acting in a professional role.

Professional Responsibility: Perpetual Duty?

Ciara: While I am inclined to agree, I'm mindful also of professionals who work in the private sector in particular, and the words of the song that come to mind are: ‘I owe my soul to the company store’, or we say the ‘company owns you body and soul’ meaning that you can be expected to work ridiculously long hours, because your ‘boss’ demands it of you? So, are you expected to be a professional 24/7, in which case you have no personal life, or the professional colonises (entirely) the personal sphere?

Tone: If I am a novice professional, then I am more susceptible to the overtures of a demanding employer to be in the office or workplace early and late, but in my view beyond a certain point, admittedly difficult to determine precisely, such demands are excessive, unreasonable and, I would suggest, unprofessional—I am entitled to a family life too. While such demands might very well meet accountability criteria, in the longer term they are likely to undermine or erode professional responsibility, resulting in compliance rather than the exercise of professional discretion and judgement—your behaviour becomes (entirely) predictable—anathema to professional responsibility.

Ciara: So, let’s assume that I am that novice professional and you are my overly demanding boss, and I say—‘sorry, I cannot remain at work, I have other responsibilities’, and I do that on a number of occasions, and on one of those your response is: ‘well in those circumstances, I think you would be better to seek alternative employment’. Now, it may be that in Norway such a response would not be permitted, and I am aware that in other jurisdictions there is legislation that protects against unfair dismissal, but I am aware also that in the private sector, such protections are frequently circumvented.

Tone: Let me respond directly while I want to bring in a related issue also. If this employer were putting pressure on me to deal with more clients in order to
maximise company profits or in the interest of greater ‘efficiency’ to the point where I felt very genuinely that I could no longer stand over the quality of the work I was doing, how would I deal with that? In my view, in both instances there are issues about professional standards at stake. In the first instance, it is unfair, and unacceptable to make excessive work demands on a professional employee; in the second, I feel my work is compromised, I can no longer uphold the standards of professional responsibility, due care and diligence that I signed up to as I am expected to work at a pace that does not allow due diligence.

Ciaran: Well, in both instances, on the assumption that my protests fall on deaf ears, and that my employer is not prepared to negotiate either on time at work (the length of my working day) or on the amount of work I am expected to complete, then it seems to me that my options are limited: I can complain to my professional association, I can do the best I can in the circumstances—and this might mean compromising on professional standards and values, or I could seek alternative employment.

Tone: For now, let us rule out the ‘nuclear’ option and assume you stay. In exercising the first option, I can initiate a grievance procedure, but I need to be very convinced of the ‘rightness’ of my perceptions, and recognise that in pursuing such a process, I may be jeopardising my career prospects longer term—a very serious decision. I become something of a whistleblower on my employer, and presumably the profession in general would not be enamoured by such a course of action since it is like ‘washing one’s dirty linen in public’, and my professional association might caution against such a course of action. If I remain, and chose to do the best I can, is this a ‘legitimate compromise’ as Larry May suggests?

Ciaran: My concern is that seeking to vindicate my sense of professional responsibility in such circumstances may require a super-human effort on my part, or when does ‘legitimate compromise’ become illegitimate?

Tone: But I would never argue for professionals to be super-humans. On the contrary, we have to argue for a middle ground, a via media—it is not by accident that Romans coined the phrase—virtus in medio stat (virtue stands in the middle). Take for example, the prevalence of ‘paper care’ in chapter ten, where access to the therapeutic garden is denied to elderly patients. I would be rather insistent in those circumstances that the nurses need to take a stand by drawing attention to the impact of policy on practice. In such circumstances, they are obliged, in my view, even at some risk to their own employment security, to raise the matter through whatever channels are available to them—management, professional bodies, and in the event of not having the matter resolved in a professionally responsible manner, as a last resort to air the matter in public.

Ciaran: For some reason or other, more perverse perhaps rather than linguistic and cultural, I am more comfortable with via media than ‘legitimate compromise’ and
accept that it is not possible in all circumstances to attain the ideal. But as suggested earlier, if professionals are to connect with the public and re-build trust, apart from a professional commitment to provide the best possible service, then perhaps recognising that such selflessness (if not self-sacrifice) may be necessary, but should not be required routinely. Such demands are what Appiah (2010: 193) refers to as ‘supererogatory’—‘acts that are morally desirable but which ask too much of us to be morally required’. However, even if such demands are expecting too much of some, they nevertheless draw attention to moral dimensions of professionals’ work that are inextricably entwined with respect, dignity and integrity, and if these were more to the fore then perhaps contemporary preoccupations with accountability and attendant technologies of surveillance and ‘paper care’ could be relegated to an appropriate subservient rather than super-ordinate role.

Tone: In response, I might invoke the question with which we began this conversation—a reluctance to be prescriptive, and suggest that, for professional responsibility to be treated with the utmost seriousness, with the care and attention it deserves, demands even, when any one individual falls short of these demanding responsibilities, all members of that professional group or association, in fact you might say all professionals, but perhaps less so, have their reputations tarnished. So, while I recognise the point made with reference to Appiah, there are times when it is necessary for individuals to insist publicly on those standards being upheld, even if such supererogatory stances are exceptional. However, it is not just the individual who is obliged to ‘stand up and be counted’ in the name of professional responsibility but the profession—collective solidarity that is more than self-interest.

Ciaran: So where does that leave the issue of always being on duty?

Tone: There isn’t a simple answer to the question other than to assert—professionals are entitled to a private life, to assert otherwise is potentially detrimental to professional responsibility.

Ciaran: OK, so even if it isn’t possible to indicate what is ‘reasonable’ in the abstract, let me try the following by way of ‘legitimate compromise’ while building on an earlier part of the conversation. This is where I think the idea of bridging capital is useful. It is to be expected and desirable that there will be some overspill between the personal and professional life, it is vitally important also, on occasion, at the end of the working day or week and so on, to be able to pull up the drawbridge and to retreat into one’s private, personal or family life, to leave the professional behind, temporarily. This may not be a satisfactory response for some, but it may have to suffice in current flexible and fluid circumstance. Maybe it’s time to turn some attention to educating for professional responsibility?

Tone: I agree …
Professional Responsibility: Initiation Into A Way Of Life

Ciaran: It seems sensible to separate this task into initiation into a professional community and to follow with some discussion of sustaining professionals’ sense of professional responsibility across the lifespan?

Tone: So, let’s begin with professional schools?

Ciaran: Alright, in a generic sense then, are there key ingredients of professional preparation.

Tone: I would say that, in the first instance, it is important to recognise that in many instances contemporary pre-occupation with expertise and expert knowledge has tended to marginalise other important element of professional formation. Dealing with professional responsibility in an integrated, coherent and complete manner within programmes has been largely neglected. I think that the three apprenticeships (expert knowledge, skills and competencies, and ethics) indicated in chapter seven have much to recommend then.

Ciaran: I agree with the attractiveness of the three apprenticeships approach, but does this approach run the risk of fragmentation in a number of senses and I have some difficulties with the term ‘apprenticeship’.

Tone: But don’t you think that the arguments in chapter seven promotes integration rather than fragmentation – even though they use the concept of apprenticeship? Are they not primarily used for analytical purposes?

Ciaran: While I agree that these are useful analytical tools, my experience of teacher education over many years is that with disciplinary boundaries, status hierarchies, planning and delivery of programmes, shared responsibility and collective ownership are intractable challenges.

Tone: But even if these challenges are intractable as you suggest, the dictates of professional responsibility suggest that it is necessary, as Tennyson put it: ‘to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield,’ so whether or not there is a division of labour approach or a more integrated holistic view of professional preparation, either view has potential to lead to superficial or inadequate treatment of professional responsibility. As an addition to or development of the three apprenticeships therefore, I want to argue that professional responsibility needs to be the anchoring for the other two.
Ciaran: But what about my concern regarding apprenticeship and its training connotations?

Tone: If you hadn’t interrupted me, I would have continued, chapter five makes reference to a ‘golden mean’ and here is where planning across the three apprenticeships is critical, while I take your training/apprenticeship connotations seriously—but here too there are cultural and linguistic considerations at play. My view is that preparation for professional responsibility needs to be undertaken within as well as between all three apprenticeships, and this necessitates all contributors having a comprehensive overview of the entire programme and how they are expected to contribute to it. This may also mean altering existing pedagogical approaches so that there is real engagement with learners, beyond the kind of compliance approach evident in the case of nurse preparation (in chapter seven), and teacher education (see chapter eleven).

Ciaran: Apart from pedagogical innovation—which I recognise as being a necessary part of more comprehensive provision, this also raises questions about time allocation, and how much may be achieved realistically in initial professional preparation programmes, but we will come to that in a minute. Meantime, I want to add: isn’t there also a golden mean to be developed in an open-ended, ongoing manner between claims to expertise, robust procedures and practices, while recognising an essential fragility, and indeterminacy at the heart of professional responsibility?

Tone: If I may, I would like to add to that—developing a professional identity, within any professional community necessitates getting to grips with its traditions, its expert knowledge and related skills, while the vulnerability and professional humility derives from saturating these elements of what it means to be a professional in its various moral commitments and values—you might even say, these values lend unity to professional preparation. Consequently, professional preparation is also about creating a professional identity, as well as creating a professional disposition, a way of being in the world that respects tradition, but also challenges it when it conflicts with professional judgements. Issues about time, duration of programmes etc, I don’t think we can deal with in any meaningful sense other than to indicate their importance.

**Professional Responsibility: (Re-)New(ed) Learning**

Ciaran: I agree, so what about ongoing professional learning or renewal?

Tone: I’m not sure that we can add much to what we have said just now other than to indicate in professional workplaces, where the pace of change and new challenges are a regular feature of daily practice, there is greater need than ever before for more imaginative ways of what I might call ‘doing professional
renewal’ with combinations of the three apprenticeships in mind, and chapter five captures the necessity for the inclusion of all elements rather well.

Ciaran: It will require considerable advocacy on the part of professional leaders and their respective associations to persuade employers, either in the public or private sector, that more time and space will be necessary if professionals are not to be ‘running on empty’ rather than being renewed and revitalised. It is unlikely to happen, I would suggest, unless, as professionals, we develop collective courage and capability to articulate, deliberate and dare to confront questions raised here, and to challenge our colleagues, to raise legitimate questions regarding professional judgements. This is difficult, I’ll admit, requiring a professional culture that is more open to scrutiny, particularly if a sceptical public is to be convinced, and to trust that professionals are taking their responsibilities seriously rather than being self-serving.

Tone: All I will say in response is that this too needs to be part of an ongoing conversation around professional responsibility and, in this regard, those in professional schools, professionals in workplace settings and their representatives need to take up these issues individually and collectively, and create the public spaces and opportunities whereby what is at stake is part of a wider deliberative conversation about professions, professionalism and what professional responsibility entails.

Ciaran: I sense that this conversation may be coming to an end?

Tone: I thought you were going to say—grinding to a halt! Though I agree, I think we should conclude by addressing the reader directly regarding new horizons of professional responsibility as colleague and fellow professional.

Ciaran: I am more than happy to assent to that!

**PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: NEW HORIZONS OF PRAXIS**

We have had our say. It behoves us to be brief. This conversation is inexhaustible, and that is why finding your own voice in this deliberative process is a necessary next step. We began this chapter with the stirring voice of King, and towards the end invoked the more sombre tones of Tennyson, while a multiplicity of voices populate the pages of this text. It is from this pro-fusion of perspectives that new fusions of praxis will be propounded, and you and your colleagues are henceforth the primary actors in this unfolding drama—building ‘bridges’ to the future. It is our fervent hope that the polyphony evident here provides important ingredients for your ongoing deliberations that will enable a multiplicity of horizons to be forged, and that the deliberative process in this concluding chapter, provides you with a head start in the challenging but vitally necessary process of breathing new life into professional responsibility. We hereby pass the baton and depend on you
to (re-) enkindle the flame of professional responsibility in all your deliberations, reflections and actions.

ENDNOTES

1 For further elaboration on the significance of praxis and prhonesis for understanding and shaping the life worlds of professionals, see particularly, Green 2009 and Dunne 1993.

2 We make a crucial distinction here between deliberative communication as envisaged by Habermas in contrast to a Socratic dialogue, the latter being understood more as a master–apprentice relationship—question and answer, but with a particular end in view. In the present context, the deliberative conversation is communication among equals, and though bringing different contributions to the discussion, we seek to create intersubjective, shared meanings. And, in many respects, we consider that such conversations are a necessity to the promotion and longer term health of professions by taking professional responsibility more seriously as integral to and an unavoidable element of professional judgement and not a luxury to be indulged in when time, space and convenience allow.

3 In this regard, see the work of Gross Stein (2001) in the field of medical care, and that of Hargreaves (2003) who identifies ‘performance training sects’ in education where preoccupation with improvement of test scores trumps every other educational consideration as a consequence of policy climate. Similarly, chapter five indicates and illustrates how a lack of a more holistic, coherent and comprehensive approach to academic life hollows out what it means to be an academic by separating teaching, service and research.

4 It is worth noting in this regard that the Greek word ‘areté’ means both courage and ‘virtue’.

5 The notion of ‘capital’ as it is used here has resonance with the work of Bourdieu (P. Bourdieu, 1977; P. Bourdieu, and & Wacquant, 1992) and that of Putnam (R. Putnam, 2000; R. Putnam, and Feldstein, L. M., with Cohen, D., 2004). However, the most significant point being made is that capital, whether economic, cultural or social, may be deployed primarily for self-interest or in the service of others and for the good of society.

6 In this regard, it is worth noting that other possible words for mandate include—permission, authorization, consent and go-ahead—all of which imply notions of trust, obligation and responsibility.

7 For further elaboration on the relevance of Taylor’s work in the context of professional responsibility, see Solbrekke and Jensen 2006.

8 In support of this claim, and in acknowledgement of Taylor’s influence on this element of the conversation, the following quotation is apposite: “To know who you are is to be orientated in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good and what is bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning and importance to you and what is trivial and secondary,” Taylor continues (Taylor 1989, p.28).

9 This line is borrowed from the song ‘Sixteen Tons’, first recorded in the US in the late 1940s, and became controversial during the cold war anti-communist, McCarthyism period. The line refers to the practice of coal companies selling basic foodstuffs to miners, often at extortionist prices, while retaining wages to pay the bills—a form of indentured labour.

10 For a more extensive account of supererogatory responsibilities, see Appiah, 2010: 175-204.

11 This line is from Tennyson’s poem Ulysses, first published in 1842.

12 In the Fourth Way (Hargreaves & Shirley 2009), the authors identify ‘catalysts of coherence’, and we consider that ‘professional responsibility’ has potential to serve this function (see pp. 71-111).

REFERENCES


