

Philosophy of Academic Ethics and the Common Good

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In the introduction, the author deals with the current state of the academic profession and the existing forms of academic ethics, based on which he defines a broad and narrow sense of academic ethics. Subsequently, he focuses on the narrow sense, i.e., the professional ethics of academics. He formulates a philosophy of academic ethics embodied in the ethics of academic work and the ethics of academic work relationships, which he considers interconnected spheres and the key for the successful functioning of the academic profession. The ethics of academic work should be based on good academic work in research, publishing, and teaching.

Keywords: academic ethics – ethics of academic work – ethics of academic work relationships

Being aware of the risks present in current developments, Neil W. Hamilton points out that the social compact between society and the academic profession on the role of the academic profession in the pursuit of the common good and its position in society must be renewed in every generation through educating both sides, i.e., members of the profession and the public regarding traditions and professional ethics. Education must emphasize the timeless purpose of the service provided by the academic profession as well as the ways a profession fulfils its duties in serving the common good in its area of responsibility (Hamilton 2002).

Academic ethics, especially, is the area that should fulfil this task, i.e., first and foremost define ethical values of the academic profession expressing its positive dimension in the given sector of society and its functioning. However, the ethical values of a profession correspond with the goals for which the academic profession strives, based on the way the public or

common good is defined. It is, however, questionable to what extent academic ethics can fulfil this function and what the roles of present-day academic ethics are, or what its current form is. My article aims to define the philosophy of academic ethics¹ following the conception of professional ethics based on ethics of social consequences.

I. The Definition of Academic Ethics

We can start with defining what one should understand by academic ethics, as it is frequently defined in broad terms, which can lead to some misunderstandings. As an example, one could use Michael Davis' claim:

[W]hile the ethics of the professoriate is a species of professional ethics, academic ethics must be a species of something else, what we might call "institutional ethics." In this respect, academic ethics stands in much the same relation to professional ethics as business ethics does. We must, then, explain the connection between the ethics of the professoriate, a kind of professional ethics, and academic ethics, a kind of institutional ethics (Davis 1992, 121).

Unlike Davis, I do not think that academic ethics can be identified with institutional ethics; moreover, I do not agree with his view on the ethics of the professoriate, although it could be assumed what he means is all academics.

Regarding potential conflicts between academic ethics and institutional ethics of a university or a college, I do not consider it appropriate to identify academic ethics with institutional ethics, as, in the context of contemporary trends in the management of universities and colleges, the goals and intentions as well as values of academic ethics and institutional ethics at a university, or a college, might grow more and more dissimilar. For example, Sara R. Jordan characterized academic ethics as follows:

Academic Ethics: standards of moral behaviour, expressed with reference to ethical theory (e.g., deontology), intended to guide all individuals employed as professionals in or working as staff or students in institutions of education, research, or scholarship (Jordan 2013, 252).

Michael Davis also defines academic ethics very broadly: "Academic ethics is, then, best understood and concerned with how academics – professors, students, and others – should conduct their common institutional life" (Davis

¹ Following J. Angel Corlett, I use the term an "academic" throughout the article to mean a teacher at a university or in higher education who carries out research, publishes, teaches, and provides academic services (Corlett 2014).

1992, 136). Similarly, Neil W. Hamilton presented a wide range of moral problems in academic ethics, including examples of unethical and immoral behaviour of teachers and students and problems related to the behaviour and conduct of academic administration (Hamilton 2002). Such an approach to the definition of academic ethics is confusing, as it places different types of rights and freedoms on an equal footing, but also the duties and responsibilities of a wide range of members of the academic community.

I suggest a broad and narrow sense of academic ethics should be differentiated. In a broad sense, academic ethics studies ethical and moral aspects of the life of an academic community, i.e., teachers, students, academic administration working at a university or a college, as well as other stakeholders participating in the functioning of an academic institution. In a narrow sense, academic ethics could be viewed as ethical and moral aspects of academic work. It could also be claimed that it is the professional ethics of academics. In such a case, academic ethics as professional ethics of academics entails ethical values of the profession, rights, and duties towards society and the employer, i.e., university and/or college, and the ethical and moral level of the relationships towards superiors and subordinates, colleagues, students, and other external and internal stakeholders, including the academic administrators.

The broad scope of academic ethics includes professional ethics of academics, i.e., academic ethics in the narrower understanding only concerning academics, then academic ethics of students, professional ethics of academic administrators, ethics of external academic stakeholders, and, equally, institutional academic ethics, which, however, cannot mean professional ethics. Academic ethics in a broader sense cannot be regarded as professional ethics either, as it integrates several (at least partially) differing professions and, apart from that, has such members who are not professionals, such as students or external stakeholders.

I focus my attention exclusively on the field of work of the academics, i.e., on the philosophical issues of the ethics of the professional conducting the research, publishing the results of his/her research, and presenting the results of this research to the students.

To specify the narrow understanding of academic ethics more closely, i.e., the professional ethics of academics, I would add that it regards persons who work in science and research, teach, and provide a service, which also means that this framework does not include scientific researchers. To be included in the narrow understanding of academic ethics, one must carry out

all three functions, or activities, related to the work of an academic, i.e., research and publishing, teaching, and service. Professional ethics of an academic is then a subcategory, or part, of a broadly understood academic ethics, such as the ethics of a researcher working at an academic institution who, however, does not teach, or an academic administrator who does not teach. In both cases, a type of professional ethics is concerned, which is different in some ways from professional ethics of academics but is, at the same time, part of broadly understood academic ethics.²

J. Angelo Corlett came to a similar definition of academic ethics. He claims:

[A]cademic ethics is that field of study which provides qualitative and quantitative analyses of a wide array of ethical problems, both descriptively and normatively, related to the academic enterprise. It is both empirical and conceptual in that it must gain from history and the sciences data about which to provide normative arguments regarding how the academy ought to be best conducted. This definition is intended to be wide enough to include every academic domain of inquiry, from philosophy to physics, from history to psychology. ...[S]o ought academic ethics to be broad enough to address the wide range of issues of, and approaches to, academic life (Corlett 2014, 1 – 2).

The above definition of academic ethics could be considered quite apt, although, on the other hand, I consider it to be rather broad, or corresponding with what I would call a broad definition of academic ethics. I do not think it is necessary to especially emphasize that academic ethics relates to all subject fields. However, the aim of my research is not to analyse the differences in academic work in all areas of academic knowledge but to consider the philosophical foundations and values of academic work, which are common, and which may be of interest within the ethics of the academic profession. We will get to the empirical level of researching professions if we examine each profession separately and emphasize their specifics, which they certainly have. The role of philosophy and its advantage over the empirical sciences is that it seeks to generalize knowledge, in this case, the study of common features within the profession of academics.

² Further on in the present contribution, I mainly focus on academic ethics in its narrow understanding, i.e., academic professional ethics, or professional ethics of academics. In the same sense, I also use the term “academic ethics” henceforth. In those cases where I discuss academic ethics in its broad sense, I point it out directly in the text.

I consider the prevailing deontological approach, manifested in academic ethics, predominantly perceived as a set of academics' duties towards society, their superiors, subordinates, colleagues, and students as a serious problem in the understanding of academic ethics (Sethy 2018). In the process, it is often overlooked that academic ethics, just like any other serious professional ethics, should not only protect society and students from unethical behaviour on the part of the academics while reminding them of their duties and responsibilities, but also provide protection to academics regarding their rights, and rightful interests, including the opportunity for professional, as well as ethical, growth, development and cultivation within society, community, and profession, while utilizing academic freedoms, traditions and values associated with the academic profession.

The following view by Satya Sundar Sethy demonstrates the deontological approach. He reduces academic ethics to

HE [higher education] teachers own the teaching and research profession, as it requires certain level of skills, intelligence, and expertise to practice the profession which ordinary citizens of a state don't possess. Similar to other professions (i.e., accounting, lawyer, medicine, etc.), teaching in HE settings is regarded as a profession. It suggests that there can be a code of ethics for HE teachers to follow while rendering their services to students, colleagues, institution authorities, research works, and society at large. The code of ethics must give autonomy to the HE teachers and at the same time fix responsibilities on them for their professional activities. Thus, the teacher's code of ethics shall not only guide HE teachers to render their services in a professional manner but also protect them from indulging in unethical practices and resolving conflict of interests and commitments that arise while performing the tasks. The teacher's code of ethics must also give strength to the HE teachers to disregard political pressure and influential authorities' unwanted requests to indulge in unethical actions in the HE settings (Sethy 2018, 297).

The ethical code should, first of all, function as a general manual for the behaviour and actions of the members of a certain profession and should include essential ethical and moral values of the profession. It, however, must not be the final tool in the decision-making and assessing the ethical or unethical nature of the behaviour and actions of a moral agent. This especially applies to academics who, generally, possess high intellectual, cognitive, and mental abilities, based on which they can manage demanding procedures of

analysis, assessment, judgment, and decision-making regarding various types of behaviour and actions present in academic life and can raise doubts of their rightness or wrongness, or moral or immoral nature.

In my opinion, academic ethics very often lacks a strong enough philosophical dimension, I need to mention J. Angelo Corlett, one of the few authors who also deals with academic ethics. In his view,

[a]cademic ethics is fundamentally philosophical. For *philosophy can assist academic ethics in finding its conceptual foundations and keep us on track with sound reasoning so that our academic efforts can be maximized both qualitatively and quantitatively* (Corlett 2014, 2).

He characterizes his approach as philosophical, i.e., conceptual, qualitative, and normative. One of philosophy's tasks within academic ethics is, as he sees it, to clarify the nature, function, and value of normative ethics in general (Corlett 2014). Unlike the above author, I do not perceive the primary role of philosophy as relating to normative ethics, but rather analysis of the nature of academic ethics and in defining its value framework including what one should understand by the public, or common, good which universities and colleges are to provide for society, country, or, possibly, mankind as a whole. That is what academic ethics (in its broad sense) should be based on to go beyond the boundaries of the descriptive and normative form in which ethics and morality of life are perceived within an academic community. Also, to truly develop the conceptual aspect and the value framework of the given area of the subject field as a starting point for analysis of specific forms of ethical and unethical behaviour and actions within the life of an academic community or institution.

I agree with Corlett that it should be an ambition of philosophy to define conceptual and, in my view, also value-related bases of (generally perceived) academic ethics, as that is the domain of philosophy, or philosophical ethics. It is in this way that philosophy can most markedly contribute to sufficient theoretical, or philosophical, embedding of academic ethics. It is not merely empirical research, or a description of the existing status quo and an interpretation of the outcomes of empirical research studies, but also theoretical, or philosophical justification of ideals, values, principles, rules, and norms within academic ethics (in its broad sense). Corlett expresses what could be considered ethically justifiable, i.e., what might be considered ethical, or unethical, behaviour and actions on certain philosophical-ethical bases of academic ethics.

The importance of academic ethics (in its broad sense) lies in its focus on all its essential processes regarding academic life. There are a great number of problems that Corlett perceives as an expert insider working in higher education. The multidisciplinary form of academia also means the need for a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary character of academic ethics. He believes that the solution to these problems requires a philosophical approach based on the primary method of conceptual analysis and argumentation. Second, philosophy must outline and study the entire range of academic ethics in general terms, which, however, also creates space to study academic ethics in its narrower sense concerning various study fields. Academic ethics could be defined based on various approaches, be it ethical theories, or problems to be solved (Corlett 2014). One could agree with the opinion regarding the interdisciplinary, or even multidisciplinary, character of academic ethics; however, its philosophical-ethical basis should not be neglected, or undervalued, as it is the only way for academic ethics to function and be able to offer answers and solutions to moral problems related to life within an academic community or institution.

I do agree with Corlett about a few things regarding the philosophy of academic ethics (in its broad sense); however, I still think there is great space for defining the theory, or philosophy, of academic ethics especially when it comes to its value framework, i.e., the common good of an academic community in its broad as well as narrow sense. The author only deals with this specific area latently, without placing a clear emphasis on what should be understood by the common good of an academic community (in the broad sense of academic ethics) and the academic profession (in the narrow sense of academic ethics). Unlike the author, I would, within the academic profession, emphasize the value framework within academic ethics, especially in the context that the academic profession, in general, is typical of a high level of intellectual, cognitive, and mental abilities of those moral agents.

That is why I consider it paramount to create a value framework within academic ethics and leave the search for answers on how to advance in specific situations, or ethical and moral problems occurring within the profession in question to the intellectual and cognitive activities of its members following the definition of the common good. The code of ethics could be the primary basis, or a guide, for solutions to simple issues within academic ethics. Normative ethics is rather binding and pinioning, which might not be beneficial for solutions to frequently complex ethical and moral problems within the academic profession. It is much more important to

consider to what extent solving ethical and moral problems of an academic community or institution corresponds with the framework of values and, therefore, the common good of the profession or the public good of society and country than whether it is following specific norms, which are never able to sufficiently cover the complexity of the profession, as well as the life-related and professional situation in which members of the profession in question, i.e., academics, can find themselves.

Undoubtedly, such an approach places more demands on time, as well as the use of intellectual, cognitive, and mental abilities of the members of this profession in comparison to the normative approach based on, for instance, deontological ethics. Moreover, it is closer to the nature of the academic profession than the mere normative approach embodied in a code of ethics.

II. The Ethics of Academic Work and the Ethics of Academic Relationships

The definition of the common or public good is an imperative part of academic ethics and its primary starting point. In the case of academic professional ethics, as well as institutional academic ethics, i.e., academics, universities, and colleges, it primarily means the formation and distribution of knowledge, development and cultivation of society, country, its citizens, including students, mankind as a whole, as well as oneself. The pursuit of the above goal within the present-day academic profession faces danger in the form of academic capitalism. The public, or common, good is no longer a priority, while a particular type of good relating to group political and economic interests of external stakeholders comes to the forefront.³

To form and distribute knowledge should be the nature of the efforts and activities of the academic profession in all areas of life of society, country, and mankind. That is the right and, at the same time, a duty to which every member should adhere and contribute (Hamilton 2002). An academic community and its members usually possess high intellectual, cognitive, and mental abilities, which is why they are obliged to contribute to its social and economic development. Such development also includes science and technology. First of all, they are to serve in the developed countries (and not only there) for the social, cultural, intellectual, and spiritual development of

³ Barnett (2005); Bergland (2018); Burnes – Wend – Todnem By (2014); Collini (2012); Collyer (2015); Ezell (2007; 2008); Ginsberg (2011); Gonzales – Martinez – Ordu (2014); Hendrickson – Francis (2018); Jessop (2018); Nussbaum (2010); Slaughter – Leslie (1999); Slaughter – Rhoades (2004).

society and its citizens, to develop the values of democracy and civic society, which will lead to a better-quality life for all its members.

According to Corlett, a university teacher should be greatly engaged in the formation and distribution of human knowledge, which can be best achieved and documented by publishing in peer-reviewed publications, as this is how one's analyses and reasoning can be best accounted for and presented. Research and publishing are, in his view, parts of a university teacher's self-development, which should, or could, influence the students. He finds the opinion that excellent teaching can be achieved independently of one's excellent research wrong. The author claims that the contents of one's research are the contents of his teaching, which is why it is also necessary to be an active researcher. One must be critical about great personalities and towards each other, when looking for the truth and to avoid mistakes. Corlett is not aware of a better way to achieve this than to participate in teaching, conferences, and peer-review publishing. Continued research activities are key for the development of university teachers. He considers original and quality research to be fundamental (Corlett 2005).

Good academic work⁴ must represent the content core of the academic profession as a basis for the definition of the value framework of academic ethics. It is this that I consider a task for academic ethics to return to the key aspect of academic activity, i.e., help in the search for and understanding of the purpose of academic work and its intrinsic value. It could become the core of ethics of academic work and serve as a basis in the efforts for good academic work and the work performance of an academic.

The role of academic ethics is to define the meaning of academic work as an activity developing his/her creative abilities, and proving one's professional, and ethical, qualities. Furthermore, work should also be defined as a challenge for the development of students, increasing their level within a specific field, as well as ethical qualities, while applying ethical values in the process of their education.

Many authors claim that meaningful work increases personal satisfaction; one wants to work to be happy, but it is also necessary to know the purpose of the work and the efforts one puts into his/her work activities (Brooks 2008; Collins 2001; Collins and Hansen 2011; Collins and Porras 1994; Freidson 2004b; Haidt 2006; Larson 2013). In such a case, it is not money that

⁴ Steven M. Cahn and, similarly, J. Angelo Corlett characterised good academic work as excellence, especially in research, publishing, and teaching (Cahn 2011; Corlett 2005; 2014).

is the incentive but a deeper, hidden, meaning of what one does and why (Collins 2001; Collins and Porras 1994), which might be named, in Freidson's words as the spirit of a profession or the spirit of a discipline, the spirit of a professional's work (Freidson 2004a). I strongly think that it is academic ethics that can significantly help an academic's work. "[I]t is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work" (Collins 2001, 210). The role of academic ethics is not only to search for the meaning of the work and performance of academics but also to find the connection with the purpose of life, where academic work and work achievements form an essential part of one's existence. The meaningful and successful work of an academic makes his/her (not only academic) life meaningful and successful.

Academic ethics should contribute to defining positive motivation to work as a creative activity of an academic, expressing his/her abilities, while, in a sense, reflecting one's individuality, his/her ontological dimension. Said expressively, to be meant to work, to live also means to work, while to live well means to work well, all of that while being aware that an academic cannot merely be identified with an individual's work.

If the goal of academic ethics is to help, or support, one's self-realization, self-growth, self-cultivation, and the development of creative forces and abilities of an academic, especially as a professional in his/her area of cognition, then all those organizational forms of work performance should be supported, which enable it and create space, or conditions, for the fulfilment of such an intention. The problem with present-day academic ethics is that it has been reduced to its normative aspect, or narrowed to codes of ethics, is. Its "portfolio" has entirely, or almost entirely, lost the ethics of academic work, ethical definition, or justification, of the need to build a relationship towards academic work, good work performance developing the creative abilities and skills of an academic including one's personal and ethical development.

It is in the ethics of academic work, that there is, for academic ethics, great space for theoretical justification for the interconnection between work and life for academics and other actors (including students) to realize earning money and bringing necessary resources to fulfil one's life intentions is not the purpose of academic work. Work is part of their meaningful life, as it fulfils them, and develops them as human beings, as well as academics. Without meaningful and successful work, it would be difficult for one to become a successful professional in their subject field, or achieve life

satisfaction (however, such a possibility is not excluded, although there is rather a small probability of achieving happiness and satisfaction in life without meaningful and, if possible, successful work).

On both the theoretical and practical level, the role of academic ethics is to form, in academics, a positive relationship to work with an emphasis on forming and distributing knowledge and, equally, creating good interpersonal, or academic, work relationships, as these significantly influence the academics' good of work performance and results. A great number of empirical research studies regarding job satisfaction in professionals confirm that satisfaction with a working atmosphere is a significant condition for the good of work performed, as well as academics' overall happiness (Erickson 2004; Laff 2006; Lockwood 2007; Richman 2006).

On the other hand, one needs to realize good work performance cannot be accepted by such academics who behave inappropriately, humiliate, or use other colleagues, their subordinates, or students. It means that ethics of academic work and ethics of academic work relationships are equally important from the viewpoint of assessing the academic profession, its members, and the roles of the profession, or its significance in the functioning of a society. That is why I understand academic ethics as a symbiosis of ethics of academic work and ethics of academic work relationships. I consider it important for academic ethics to focus on ethics of academic work and ethics of academic work relationships as the essential components of academic ethics that best describe the theoretical and practical framework of research into and functioning of academic ethics.

One can agree with the opinion that academic ethics is more than just rules and codes. At the same time, it is much more than expertise and reflection on one's experience. The above aspects only form part of academic ethics, as it is true, they concern ethics of academic work on the one hand and ethics of academic work relationships on the other. Both parts include a great number of topics that have a prominent place within academic ethics.

Undoubtedly, the good of public service is a significant area of academic ethics, as it reflects its core, i.e., relationship to work; thus, it concerns ethics of academic work, but it is rather a practical manual that lacks theoretical justification, the definition of values of the service provided to society and the public. On the other hand, its practical form resulting from ethics of academic work relationships does not necessarily need to be sufficiently defined, i.e., while relationships towards students, colleagues, superiors, and subordinates are concerned. The code of conduct, apart from other things, evokes that the

focus is only on the ethics of academic work relationships, which is a regulative manual for conduct within interpersonal relationships, primarily towards students. That means that also, in this case, a sufficient value framework, or value embedding, of ethics of academic work relationships might very likely be missing.

My most prominent conclusion resulting from existing studies on the above topic is the understanding of academic ethics as a symbiosis of ethics of academic work and ethics of academic work relationships. Ethics of academic work concerns a complex of values expressing the relationship towards academic work, the effort for good work performance, i.e., forming and distributing knowledge. Ethics of academic work relationships deals with values of humanity, human dignity, human's moral right to life, his/her growth, development, and cultivation, and, equally, the values of justice, responsibility, tolerance, and obligation (Gluchmanová 2009; 2013; 2021).

In this sense, academic ethics plays a significant role, in the context of ethics of academic work, in justifying the need for defining more challenging tasks, discipline, improvement, and self-improvement of the academic institution as well as academics, as that is the only way to the true development of all parties concerned and the achievement of the goal and purpose of academic work and the academic institution. On the other hand, the management of academic institutions also needs to be called upon to equally develop the ethics of academic work relationships. Only in a fair academic environment can the fulfilment of requirements of the good of academic work be expected, as well as the ability to meet challenging tasks, maintain discipline and self-discipline, self-improvement, and grow, whether at the level of an academic institution or an academic.

III. Conclusion

In summary, it could be stated that ethics of academic work and ethics of academic work relationships are interconnected spheres. They can contribute to the fulfilment of the demanding tasks of an academic institution only if they are developed in parallel, i.e., if they succeed in fulfilling goals and objectives both in the field of the good of academic work, as well as in the field of working and interpersonal relations within the academic institution. An academic institution cannot be successful if it only focuses on one of the developmental factors, i.e., academic work performance. Its efforts must be focused on equal development of the institution from the viewpoint of defining goals in ethics of academic work as well as ethics of academic work

relationships. That is, however, merely a presumption of success, which must meet with understanding and support on the part of academics.

It should be a philosophy that is helpful to academic ethics in defining challenging goals for the further development of an academic institution and the academic profession, which should, primarily, be set following the requirements and demands following ethics of academic work and ethics of work relationships within an academic institution and the academic profession. This results in a general challenging multifunctional task for academic ethics, as it must diagnose and assess the current state (descriptive function), define the basic ideology, the purpose of functioning, including the key values (axiological function) and norms expressing strategic goals and intentions (normative function). It must be equally capable of self-reflection, enriching its knowledge corresponding with new cognition in management and individual fields of its functioning (meta-theoretical function).

In this sense, academic ethics changes from an academic discipline to an active part of the functioning of an academic institution and the academic profession and contributes to the common, or public, good. The role of academic ethics is to study ethics of academic work and ethics of work relationships (analytical viewpoint) on the one hand and form the relationship to academic work, the work performance of academics as well as academic work relationships at all levels of an academic institution and the academic profession (functional viewpoint) on the other. In this context, it could be argued that mediocrity as a failure on the part of management is also the result of the extent to which academic ethics is implemented in the functioning of an academic institution and the academic profession.

Hence, I see the most significant contribution of philosophy to the academic profession in formulating its ethical value basis. First and foremost, it explains the philosophical foundations of academic work and its relationship to the public/common good of society to which the profession of academics is to contribute. It is also about formulating the meaning of academic work in the context of the meaning of life in academics, an integral part of which is the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Likewise, the importance of philosophy for the ethics of the academic profession lies in the formulation of adequate ethical values for labour relations in academic work. In conceiving my approach to the philosophy of academic ethics, I proceed from the values of the ethics of social consequences (humanity, human dignity, moral right, justice, responsibility, tolerance, duty).

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