Chapter 1
Philosophical Grounding of Ethics Expertise

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ABSTRACT

The chapter proposes to philosophically ground the ethics expertise in social work, starting from a series of ethics theories: utilitarian ethics, deontological ethics and ethics of virtues. During the foundation of ethics expertise we made conceptual distinctions between the theoretical and practical nature of expertise, between the ethical and the moral one, in order to justify the need for a new model of ethics expertise. In our approach, we debate the influence of such theories in the field of social services, which we consider to be representative in the context of the construction of a new model of ethics expertise, which underlies the constitutive values of social practice. The normativity of the ethical theories is extended to the level of certain different behavioural models and moral reasoning, summing up in practice the frameworks of the moral conduct the individuals can apply, when making an ethical decision, in social or organisational context, namely to determine whether the decision is morally acceptable or not.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of ethics in the organisations is a current and increasingly developed topic, involving all social actors responsible for their good functioning, however, the theoretical and empirical evaluation of the ethical decision are less exploited.

The role of ethical theories was the subject of different researches, aiming to apply certain ethical procedures in the practices of human resources (Schumann,
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2001), of implementing the policies of corporatist social responsibility, or checking the ethical evaluations undertaken by managers within the organisation (Reidenbach & Donald, 1990; Södergren, 2014). The majority of the research conducted in the field of ethics have the main purpose of identifying those rules, principles, values, that the professionals adopt and translate into practice. Another important aspect in the field of ethics of the professions is drawing the frameworks of the ethical principles, on whose considerations and implications the process of ethical decision-making can be developed. The models of making ethical decisions are grounded on a series of central ethical theories, further presenting a few basic characteristics of certain ethical theories, such as those of welfare/good – the utilitarian ethics, and ethical theories of justice: deontological ethics, ethics of justice (Rawlsian theory of justice as equity), as well as the theory of ethics of virtue.

BACKGROUND: ETHICS EXPERTISE AND SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

Theoretical Foundations

As a theory of good, the utilitarian ethics is based on the idea according to which a good thing must serve as many people as possible, not just one, and the way in which it is useful should be clearly outlined. Utility, understood in broad terms, as what is useful, opposes to the aesthetics or the religious dogmas, just as Jeremy Bentham shows in his work, since the very introduction, being against the ethical principles which are not based on usefulness (Bentham, 1970).

In the analysis of the theory of usefulness, Robert E. Goodin (2006) highlights a series of features specific for utilitarianism, even the early one, the hedonist, whose principles where criticized and parodied by the followers of other ethical theories. Therefore, under the specific of hedonist utilitarianism, which targeted people’s natural tendency towards happiness and pleasure, Jeremy Bentham proposes utilitarianism as an ethics theory derived from psychological premises. Goodin (2006) argues that “utilitarianism can be defined as an exercise of deducting certain possible ethical conclusions (...), starting from potential psychological premises.

Substituting Bentham’s hedonist utilitarianism, through the idea of satisfying the preferences, fulfilling the first theory, or even including it, its followers had to turn to satisfying the options of major importance, and less the priorities of pleasure in relation to suffering (Goodin, 2006). When referring to the satisfaction of preferences, the followers of the modern theory of usefulness are influenced by a micro-economic optics. For the individual whose preferences oppose to certain hedonist pleasures, or even exceeds them, satisfying those preferences will be useful
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