

CALL FOR PAPERS

A Workshop on

Professionalism and Vulnerability

A Collaboration Between the Vulnerability and the Human Condition Initiatives
at Emory and Leeds Universities

October 27-28, 2017

University of Leeds, United Kingdom

This workshop will use the lens of individual and institutional vulnerability to examine historic, comparative, and contemporaneous depictions of professionalism. This new approach is proposed at a point at which core features of professionalism have been undermined by the pressures of neo-liberal market imperatives, alongside a post-modern cultural skepticism about professions' claims to expert knowledge. The workshop will explore the ways in which contingent and complex conceptions of professionalism may be understood and enacted by professional actors within a range of organizations. Thus, is it possible to conceive of a vision of professionalism which can serve as a form of "protection" or source of resilience for professionals as managing the diverse, often conflicting, demands of those who employ them, institutional norms, codes of conduct, and the law - at the very moment when notions of 'professionalism' are challenged and undermined?

We have seen a radical transformation in the organization of work. From medieval guild labor, followed by the rise and dominance of unionization, to the stripping of workplace protections and the rise of a culture of individual gain and individual responsibility, the organization of work continues to change. However, our relationship to labor and the workplace continues to structure human lives, even as the relationship between those who employ and those who are employed has fundamentally shifted. Increasingly, those jobs classified as "professional" have an altered, narrow conception of "ethics" applied to them. Thus, the marketized and de-regulated sectors in which many professions operate has given rise to the displacement of an equitable 'civic culture' with a 'business culture', which further undermines the credibility of the professions' classical claims of altruism and public service. Notwithstanding the sustained critique of the claims of ethicality in the traditional professions, the increasing framing of responsibilities as transactional, and mediated by market forces, rather than as underpinned by more fundamental ethical principles further raises questions about the value that is derived from 'professionalism' by either the professional, the client, or, indeed, wider society. Alongside these transformations, the exclusivity of the boundaries of professional expertise faces disruption from new competitors and technologies. Moreover, the notion of 'professionalism' is used in occupational settings, far removed from traditional professions, as a disciplining discourse of workers exhorted to work 'professionally', but without the traditional claims to autonomy, ethicality and expertise.

A vulnerability analysis seeks to challenge the individual and contractually grounded focus on transactional values and limited responsibility and (re)places professional relationship within social contexts - as part of a larger social contract. This workshop will mark the start of a larger project to rethink the foundational questions of professionalism, as well as the

role for and responsibility of the professions within society. At a point at which academic and regulatory critiques challenge core conceptions of traditional professionalism, and indeed the analytical value of the notion of a 'profession', this approach will represent a novel starting point for future analyses of professionalism. It recognizes that law, along with other organizations, plays an important structural role in codifying or containing norms and values and also in defining the roles and relationships of the professional and professional institutions within society.

For this initial workshop we are particularly interested in three bedrock professions - law, medicine, and business. We want to explore the evolution and the specific content of principles of professional responsibility that shape these institutions. How are they the same and how are they different? During a period of accelerated fragmentation within these traditional professions is it still possible to speak of a unifying conception of 'professionalism', even within a particular occupation, and might a vulnerability analysis provide a new lens through which to articulate a greater sense of shared values? Do current conceptions of "professional ethics" mean anything in the professions beyond the facilitation of transactions that can maximize personal wealth? Can a focus on vulnerability - the vulnerability of the professional, the professions, the client, and the larger society - help us to more readily understand the complex social ramifications of professional behavior? From this perspective, what would social and structural responsibility look like across the professions, how could it be implemented and what might be the implications for the education of future generations of professionals?

Questions to Consider:

- What is a profession? Why do we need professionalism?
- What are the implications of the creep of transactional values into professional relationships?
- How do and should we understand professional responsibility on an institutional as well as an individual level?
- How should we think about individual professional responsibility in relationship to social and structural responsibility?
- What is the role of authority within professional structures?
- What is the role of professional education and training in developing shared professional values?
- To what extent can education and training strengthen the resilience of professionals in navigating the challenges of organizational and professional cultures?
- What are transactional values and what part do they play in protecting professionals?
- What is the impact of a transactional professional culture upon society and social norms?
- What reliable measurements can we use to gauge whether behavior is 'professional' and whether the balance between the parties to a transaction is the right one? Should this balance change in different contexts?
- What role do professional institutions (including regulators) play in articulating, supporting or challenging professional values? What is the nature of institutional vulnerability within the professional landscape?
- How has the changing nature of the state affected our understanding of professionalism and wider professional responsibilities?"
- Where are the limits of ethics as a concept? How have ethical questions been addressed and defined within professional contexts?
- To what extent are potential social obligations to third parties and the environment consistent with traditional conceptions of the professional role?

Workshop Contacts:

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Submission Procedure:

Email a proposal as a Word or PDF document by **July 31, 2017**
to Rachel Ezrol (rezrol@emory.edu).

Decisions will be made by **August 7, 2017** and working paper drafts will be due
September 22, 2017 so they can be duplicated and distributed prior to the Workshop.

Workshop Details:

This Workshop begins Friday at 4 PM at the University of Leeds School of Law. Dinner will follow Friday's session. Panels continue on Saturday from 9 AM to 5 PM; breakfast and lunch will be provided.

VHC workshops are structured to allow for extended and meaningful participation by non-presenters and are open the public. To attend as a registered guest click [**HERE**](#).