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The Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists: Second Draft

by

Janel Gauthier, Ph.D.

Laval University, Québec, Canada

Chair of the Ad Hoc Joint Committee for the

Development of a Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists

International Union of Psychological Science

International Association of Applied Psychology

International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology

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Since 2002, I have had the honor and the privilege to lead an international initiative involving the development of a universal declaration of ethical principles for psychologists. This project is under the auspices of the International Union of Psychological Science (IUPsyS), the International Association of Applied Psychology (IAAP) and the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP). The Ad Hoc Joint Committee created to draft the declaration includes representatives from all five continents. The members are (in alphabetical order): Rubén Ardila (Colombia), Lutz Eckensberger (Germany), Janel Gauthier, Chair (Canada), Nasrin Jazani (Iran), Hassan Kassim Khan (Yemen), Catherine Love (New Zealand), Elizabeth Nair (Singapore), Kwadzi Nyanungo (Zimbabwe), Paul B. Pederson (United States), Tuomo Tikkanen (Finland), Ann Watts (South Africa), and Kan Zhang (China).

I am pleased to present here on behalf of the Ad Hoc Joint Committee a revised version of the draft *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* released for international consultation in 2005. This new draft, which is actually the second draft of the *Universal Declaration* to be released for review and discussion, is the result of a multiyear process involving careful research and broad international consultation (Gauthier, 2004, 2005, 2006):

- Comparisons were made among existing codes of ethics for psychologists from around the world to identify commonalties in ethical principles and values;
- Ethical principles and values espoused by other international disciplines and communities were examined and compared to those most commonly found in codes of ethics for psychologists;
- Internationally accepted documents, such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and the *Universal Declaration of Global Ethic*, were reviewed to delineate the underlying moral principles and to compare them to the principles most frequently used to develop codes of ethics in psychology;
- Historical documents from China, Egypt, Greece, India, Japan, and Persia, were explored to identify the roots of the ethical principles most commonly found in modern codes of ethics in psychology;

- Focus groups of psychologists were held at international meetings in Asia, Europe, India, the Middle East, North America, and South America;
- International symposia were organized in Singapore, Vienna, Beijing, Granada, Athens, Prague.

In its current form, the document has a preamble followed by four sections, each relating to a different ethical principle. Each section includes a statement defining the principle and outlining the fundamental ethical values contained in the principle. The structure of the document mirrors the framework developed through research and consultation (Gauthier, 2005).

Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists

Second Draft – June 14, 2007

PREAMBLE

Ethics is at the core of every discipline. The *Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists* speaks to the common moral framework that guides and inspires psychologists worldwide toward the highest ethical ideals in their professional and scientific work. Psychologists recognize that they carry out their activities within a larger social context. They recognize that the lives and identities of human beings both individually and collectively are connected across generations, and that there is a reciprocal relationship between human beings and their natural and social environments. Psychologists are committed to placing the welfare of society and its members above the welfare of the discipline and its members. They recognize that adherence to ethical principles in the context of their work contributes to a stable society that enhances the quality of life for all human beings.

The objectives of the *Universal Declaration* are to provide: (a) a generic set of moral principles to be used as a template by psychology organizations worldwide to develop and revise their country-specific or region-specific ethical codes and standards; (b) a universal standard against which the psychology community worldwide can assess progress in the ethical and moral relevancy of its codes of ethics; (c) a shared moral framework for representatives of the psychology community to speak with a collective voice on matters of ethical concern; and (d) a common basis for psychology as a discipline to evaluate alleged unethical behavior by its members.

The *Universal Declaration* describes those ethical principles that are based on shared human values. It reaffirms the commitment of the psychology community to help build a better world where peace, freedom, responsibility, justice, humanity, and morality prevail. Subsumed under each principle are a number of values that stem from it. These values should not be understood to exhaust the implications of the associated principles.

The *Universal Declaration* articulates principles and associated values that are general and aspirational rather than specific and prescriptive. Application of the principles and values to the development of specific standards of conduct will vary across cultures, and must occur locally or regionally in order to ensure their relevance to local or regional culture, customs, beliefs, and laws.

The significance of the contribution of the *Universal Declaration* depends on its recognition and promotion by psychology organizations at national, regional, and international levels. Every psychology organization is asked to keep this *Declaration* constantly in mind and, through teaching and education, promote respect for these principles, and, through national and international measures, secure their universal recognition and observance.

Principle I

Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples

Respect for the dignity of persons is the most fundamental and universal ethical principle across geographical and cultural boundaries, and across professional disciplines. It provides the philosophical foundation for many of the other ethical principles put forward by professions. Respect for dignity recognizes the inherent worth of all human beings, regardless of perceived or real differences in social status, ethnic origin, gender, capacities, or other such characteristics. This inherent worth means that all human beings are worthy of equal moral consideration.

All human beings, as well as being individuals, are interdependent social beings that are born into, live in, and contribute to the ongoing evolution of their peoples. The different culture, ethnicity, religion, social structures and other such characteristics of peoples are integral to the identity of their members and give meaning to their lives. The continuity of lives and cultures over time connects the peoples of today with the peoples of past generations and the need to nurture future generations. As such, respect for the dignity of persons includes moral consideration of and respect for the dignity of peoples.

Respect for the dignity and worth of human beings is expressed in different ways in different communities and cultures. It is important to acknowledge and respect such differences. On the other hand, it also is important that all communities and cultures adhere to moral values that respect and protect their members both individually and collectively.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Respect for the Dignity of Persons and Peoples. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

a) Respect for the unique worth and inherent dignity of all human beings;
b) Respect for the diversity among persons and peoples;
c) Respect for the customs and beliefs of cultures, limited only when a custom or a belief seriously contravenes the principle of respect for the dignity of persons or peoples or causes serious harm to their well-being;
d) Free and informed consent;
e) Privacy for individuals, families, groups, and communities;
f) Protection of confidentiality of personal information;
g) Fairness and justice in the treatment of others.

Principle II

Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Others

Competent caring for the well-being of others involves working for their benefit and, above all, trying to do no harm. It includes maximizing benefits, minimizing potential harm, and offsetting or correcting harm. Competent caring requires the application of knowledge and skills that are appropriate for the nature, and the social and cultural context, of a situation. It also requires the ability to establish interpersonal relationships that enhance potential benefits and reduce potential harms. Another requirement is adequate self-knowledge of how one's values, experiences, culture, and social context might influence one's actions and interpretations.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Competent Caring for the Well-Being of Others. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

a) Active concern for the well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities;
b) Taking care to do no harm to individuals, families, groups, and communities;
c) Maximizing benefits and minimizing potential harms to individuals, families, groups, and communities;

d) Correcting or offsetting harmful effects that have occurred as a result of their activities;
e) Developing and maintaining competence;
f) Self-knowledge regarding how their own values, attitudes, experiences, and social context influence their actions, interpretations, choices, and recommendations;
g) Respect for the ability of individuals, families, groups, and communities to make decisions for themselves and to care for themselves and each other.

Principle III

Integrity

Integrity is vital to the advancement of scientific knowledge and its application, and to the maintenance of public confidence in psychologists. Integrity is based on honest, open, and accurate communications. It includes recognizing, monitoring, and managing potential biases, multiple relationships, and other conflicts of interest that could result in harm to or exploitation of others.

Complete openness and disclosure of information must be balanced with other ethical considerations, including the need to protect the safety or confidentiality of others and to respect cultural expectations.

Cultural differences exist regarding appropriate professional boundaries, multiple relationships, and conflicts of interest. However, regardless of such differences, continual monitoring and management are needed to ensure that self-interest does not interfere with acting in the best interests of others.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Integrity. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

a) Truthfulness and honest, accurate, and open communications,
b) Avoiding incomplete disclosure of information unless complete disclosure is culturally inappropriate, or violates the confidentiality of others, or carries the potential to do serious harm to individuals, families, groups, or communities;
c) Maximizing impartiality and minimizing biases;
d) Not exploiting others for personal, professional, or financial gain;
e) Avoiding conflicts of interest and declare them when such situations cannot be avoided or are inappropriate to avoid.

Principle IV

Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society

Psychology functions as a discipline within the context of human society. As a science and a profession, it has responsibilities to society. These responsibilities include contributing to the knowledge about human behavior and to people's understanding of themselves and others, and using such knowledge to improve the condition of individuals, families, groups, communities, and society. They also include conducting its affairs within society in accordance with the highest ethical standards, and encouraging the development of social structures and policies that benefit all persons and peoples.

Differences exist in the way these responsibilities are interpreted by psychologists in different cultures. However, they need to be considered in a way that is culturally appropriate and consistent with the ethical principles of this *Declaration*.

THEREFORE, psychologists accept as fundamental the Principle of Professional and Scientific Responsibilities to Society. In so doing, they accept the following related values:

a) The discipline's responsibility to increase scientific and professional knowledge in ways that promote the well-being of society and all its members
b) The discipline's responsibility to ensure that psychological knowledge is used for beneficial purposes and to protect such knowledge from being misused, used incompetently, or made useless by others;
c) The discipline's responsibility to conduct its affairs in ways that promote the well-being of society and all its members;
d) The discipline's responsibility to promote the highest ethical standards in the scientific, professional and educational activities of its members;
e) The discipline's responsibility to adequately train its members in their ethical responsibilities and required competencies;
f) The discipline's responsibility to develop its ethical awareness and sensitivity and to be as self-correcting as possible.

What's new?

Since its release for consultation in 2005, the first draft of the *Universal Declaration* has yielded thoughtful comments and helpful suggestions from individual psychologists and psychology organizations. Every effort has been made to integrate those in this new draft. As a result, the first draft of the *Universal Declaration* has been modified in a number of ways. The main changes can be summarized as follows:

a) The structure of the document has been modified so as to do away with the concept of articles because it was a source of confusion for some people who had a tendency to see the document as a universal code of ethics rather than a universal declaration of ethical principles. This was done without deleting or diluting any of the content of the original draft. The revised structure includes a preamble, a description of each ethical principle and, under each principle, a list of values that are related to the principle. Each value has been assigned a different letter in order to facilitate reference to any specific value under the principle.

b) The wording of several statements has been revised to remove what might be interpreted as prescriptive, and to introduce words that better translate the aspirational intent of the document. For example, the expression "psychologists uphold" is no longer used in the document. It has been replaced by expressions such as "psychologists accept", "psychologists recognize", or "psychologists value", etc.

c) The term "human beings" in the naming of Principle I has been replaced by "persons and peoples" to better reflect the importance of both collective and individual contexts with regard to respect for dignity. Furthermore, an attempt has been made to incorporate the reference to the concept of "persons and peoples" under Principle I in a way that is historically and philosophically correct. The use of the concept of "peoples" in the context of ethics is relatively rare. However, it is not new. For example, it can be found in the *Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (2002) where the Maori culture co-exists with a European culture. The concept of "peoples" can also be found in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights,* which refers to "individuals, peoples, and nations." In addition, the United Nations has developed a declaration to affirm that indigenous peoples are equal in dignity and rights to all other peoples. It is called the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and it was adopted by the United Nations Human Rights Council in June 2006.

A work in progress

The second draft of the *Universal Declaration* is a work in progress. It will be revised in 2008, in response to new consultations to determine the cultural appropriateness of the definitions, concepts, and language used in the document. A new draft to be titled "third draft" will be submitted for discussion/approval to the three sponsoring organizations at their respective meetings in Germany in July 2008. You are kindly invited to review the second draft of the *Universal Declaration* and to send to me any comment or suggestion you may have, which would help us to arrive at a document that can obtain widespread support and be of worldwide value. The development of a universal declaration that is relevant to local communities and indigenous values and sensitive to natural and cultural differences is an ambitious goal. It also is a challenging process. It is very important to have as many people as possible involved in the process. The members of my working group and I look forward to hearing from you. My e-mail address is: janel.gauthier@psy.ulaval.ca

For more information regarding the development of the *Universal Declaration*, you are encouraged to visit the IUPsyS web site (http://www.iupsys.org) where you will find background papers, progress reports and discussions of important issues.

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