

Robert RILEY

## Book review

**Ethics for European Psychologists**

by Geoff Lindsay, Casper Koene, Haldor Ovreide, Fredi Lang  
Göttingen (Germany): Hogrefe & Huber Publishers, 2008, pb, 212pp

This book was written by four eminent European Psychologists: *Geoff Lindsay* is an educational psychologist and past president of the British Psychological Society. He was an original member of EFPA Standing committee on Ethics and is the current convenor. *Casper Koene* was a clinical psychologist and is now a practicing psychotherapist who also teaches professional ethics in the Netherlands. He was an original member of EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics and its previous convenor. *Haldor Ovreide* is a clinical child psychologist who also teaches and consults colleagues in the Nordic countries on therapeutic communication with children and families, and on professional ethics. He is a longstanding member of EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics and author of several books. *Fredi Lang* practiced as a health and organisational psychologist and is now a director of professional affairs in the Association of German Professional Psychologists and is a member of EFPA Standing Committee on Ethics.

As the members of European Federation of Psychologists Association (EFPA) Standing Committee on Ethics the authors are well aware of the ethical dilemmas facing practicing psychologists across Europe, regardless of their area of work - whether forensic, research, industrial, educational or clinical. So, if you are glancing at this review, thinking to yourself that you do not need to read a book about ethics, because »as a mature, right thinking individual you know instinctively what is right« (p. 8), then think again. As the number of complaints demonstrates such a view is no longer maintainable. And in the event of a complaint, the assertion that you acted at all times with the best of intentions, will simply not be enough.

This book is intended as a means to support the development of ethical practice by psychologists. It is practice orientated with 79 examples of situations giving rise to ethical considerations. It presents in depth the EFPA Meta-code of Ethics. EFPA found that a common ethical code for all psychologists within Europe was too difficult to achieve. Hence, rather than a code for psychologists, the Meta-code was devised for national associations setting out what the code of each member association should address. All member associations are required to ensure that their ethical codes are compliant with and certainly not in conflict with the Meta-code.

Such a code gives a set of norms by which actual professional behaviour can be evaluated. It comprises self-enforced norms which are all formulated as guiding principles of high generality and not as specific rules for practice. The code is not a cookbook where you look up the appropriate recipe to find the answer. The code rather provides a framework, a stimulus to thinking. Furthermore, the authors make the point that thinking about ethics should not be a solitary act.

The book initially considers some general ethical dimensions, including:

- the ethics of consequence »I must see that I am not criticised«. Is this an adequate ethical guideline when considering the potential consequences of professional acts?
- the ethics of procedure - does the use of standardised practices create a comfort zone for the psychologist who loses touch with a more ethical procedure?
- dialogical ethics - does maintaining distance from your client result in using your client as an object for psychological study and intervention, thus losing sight of a more ethical approach?

At the heart of the book are chapters 4 to 7 where each of the four main ethical principles of respect, competence, responsibility and integrity is examined in detail, together with the speci-

cations and standards for each and the authors include many case examples to illustrate practical applications.

The book concludes with chapters on Ethical problem solving and When things go wrong. The most frequent cause of professional complaint involves breach of clients' confidentiality. But are you at all times aware of who your client is? The answer is not always obvious, for instance when a business engages you to work with a group of employees, or parents ask you to work with their adolescent child, or if you are making assessments in a child custody dispute. And who are the secondary parties to whom you owe a duty of respect? What happens when maintaining confidentiality would expose your client or significant third party to some risks of danger, but breaking confidentiality would lead to filing a professional misconduct complaint?

Conflicting issues are the essence of ethical dilemmas and will not go away by not addressing them. There is the well known dictum »do good« - but, as the examples in the book show, with ethical dilemmas it is not always possible to act in a solely positive way.

The authors crucially comment that »as ethical questions in psychologists' practical experience do not come along as clearly expressed tasks to be carried out ... it is essential for psychologists to pay attention in order to develop and maintain a high degree of awareness and inner readiness to perceive and to seize ethical questions as a self-aware component of their professional role« (p. 122), and further »from the text of the Meta-code, professional practice is based on the expectation that the individual psychologist is conscious of, adheres to, and weighs the values, both explicit and implicit in the text of the codes. The Meta-code is an explication of what society, clients and authorities can expect as best professional practice of psychology« (p. 39).

Can any of us afford not to read it? It is quite simply essential reading. □

*Reviewed by Robert Riley*

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