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*Artículos Científicos*

## Ética profesional desde la perspectiva sociológica y filosófica

*Professional Ethics from a Sociological and Philosophical Perspective*

*Ética professional sob uma perspectiva sociológica e filosófica*

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### Resumen

Este texto constituye un análisis crítico de la visión de la ética profesional elaborada por la perspectiva funcionalista de la sociología de las profesiones. La metodología de este análisis comprendió los siguientes aspectos: *a)* identificar y desarrollar las tesis y los argumentos principales sobre la ética profesional elaborados por la visión funcionalista de la sociología de las profesiones; *b)* examinar estas tesis y sus argumentos con base en los planteamientos de la postura filosófica de la ética profesional, así como desde el enfoque crítico de la sociología de las profesiones, y *c)* presentar y desarrollar la contribución que hace la perspectiva funcionalista al establecer a la ética profesional como un componente propio de las profesiones modernas. Asimismo, mostrar que esta visión resulta corta y estrecha para comprender que la ética profesional es más que un rasgo o característica de las profesiones, dado que en la actualidad se concibe que aquella es la que dota de sentido a estas. Dentro de los resultados, el análisis crítico da cuenta de que la visión de la ética profesional elaborada por el enfoque funcionalista está determinada por la concepción de las profesiones propia de esta corriente de la sociología. Pero, aunque esta visión tiene limitaciones, establece que la ética profesional es inherente a las profesiones modernas. Mientras que la postura crítica de



La sociología de las profesiones devela que, tanto la concepción de una como de la otra, son conceptos sociohistóricos que evolucionan y se modifican, delimitados en gran medida por el contexto económico, social, político y cultural del momento histórico. Por su parte, la perspectiva filosófica de la ética profesional muestra aspectos y dimensiones que no han tomado en cuenta las diferentes corrientes teóricas de la sociología y ofrece un horizonte teórico para comprender y analizar a las profesiones modernas en el marco filosófico.

**Palabras clave:** códigos éticos, ética profesional, profesionalización, profesiones, sociología de las profesiones.

### Abstract

This text constitutes a critical analysis of the vision of professional ethics elaborated by the functionalist perspective of the sociology of professions. The methodology of this analysis included the following aspects: *a)* to identify and develop the thesis and main arguments on professional ethics elaborated by the functionalist vision of the sociology of professions; *b)* to examine these theses and their arguments based on the approaches of the philosophical position of professional ethics, as well as the critical approach of the sociology of the professions; and *c)* to present and develop the contribution made by the functionalist perspective of the professions by establishing professional ethics as a component of modern professions. Likewise, to show that this vision is short and narrow to understand that professional ethics is more than a trait or characteristic of professions, given that it is currently conceived that such ethics is what gives meaning to modern professions. The critical analysis shows that the vision of professional ethics elaborated by the functionalist approach is determined by the conception of the professions of this current of the sociology of the professions. But, although this vision has limitations, it establishes that professional ethics is inherent in modern professions. While the critical position of the sociology of the professions reveals that, both the conception of the professions and that of professional ethics, are socio-historical concepts that evolve and are modified, largely defined by the economic, social, political and cultural historical moment. For its part, the philosophical perspective of professional ethics shows its aspects and dimensions that have not considered into account the different theoretical currents of the sociology of the professions and offers a theoretical horizon to understand and analyze modern professions in the philosophical framework.



**Keywords:** ethical codes, professional ethics, professionalization, professions, sociology of professions.

## Resumo

Este texto constitui uma análise crítica da visão da ética profissional elaborada pela perspectiva funcionalista da sociologia das profissões. A metodologia desta análise incluiu os seguintes aspectos: *a)* identificar e desenvolver a tese e principais argumentos sobre ética profissional elaborados pela visão funcionalista da sociologia das profissões; *b)* examinar essas teses e seus argumentos com base nas abordagens da posição filosófica da ética profissional, bem como na abordagem crítica da sociologia das profissões; *c)* apresentar e desenvolver a contribuição da perspectiva funcionalista das profissões por estabelecer a ética profissional como um componente das profissões modernas. Da mesma forma, mostrar que essa visão é curta e estreita para entender que a ética profissional é mais do que uma característica ou característica das profissões, uma vez que atualmente é concebido que essa ética é o que dá sentido às profissões modernas. A análise crítica mostra que a visão da ética profissional elaborada pela abordagem funcionalista é determinada pela concepção das profissões dessa corrente da sociologia das profissões. Mas, embora essa visão tenha limitações, ela estabelece que a ética profissional é inerente às profissões modernas. Enquanto a posição crítica da sociologia das profissões revela que, tanto a concepção das profissões quanto a ética profissional, são conceitos sócio-históricos que evoluem e são modificados, em grande parte definidos pelos aspectos econômico, social, político e cultural. Por sua vez, a perspectiva filosófica da ética profissional mostra seus aspectos e dimensões que não levaram em conta as diferentes correntes teóricas da sociologia das profissões e oferece um horizonte teórico para entender e analisar as profissões modernas no quadro filosófico.

**Palavras-chave:** códigos éticos, ética profissional, profissionalização, profissões, sociologia das profissões.

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## Introduction

The subject of professional ethics and its link with modern professions has been addressed both by the sociology of professions and by the philosophical perspective of professional ethics. In the field of sociology, the axis of reflection has revolved around modern professions as subjects and groups that are part of the structure of the labor market, as well as their insertion in the social system and participation in the field of power. of contemporary society. In this reflection, professional ethics has not been the center of analysis and has been raised as a component or attribute of professions.

From the philosophical perspective, the nucleus of analysis has been professional ethics with a view to understanding and questioning the practice of modern professions today. In the sociology approach, professional ethics is one more attribute of modern professions. For the philosophical position, they exist and develop thanks to professional ethics:

*Professional ethics is not an addition to the profession, but something intrinsic to it, which defines it, gives it meaning and justifies its existence and value.*

Without professional ethics there would be no profession and not vice versa (Feito, 2009, p. 129).

Thus, the sociology of professions is at the pole that understands and explains the emergence and realization of professions due to the characteristics and attributes that distinguish them. While the philosophical perspective of professional ethics is located in the pole that puts professional ethics as the essence of modern professions. For this reason, it considers that this ethic is the base and the sustenance that allowed its appearance and progress in contemporary society, because it endows the professions with meaning or reason for being. The critical analysis that is exposed in this text recovers the theoretical formulations elaborated by the sociology of the professions on professional ethics, understood as an attribute of the professions, since it makes it possible to understand the evolution and the advances that this had in the 20th century. And the philosophical point of view is used to identify the restrictions and narrowness of the functionalist vision and thus show the value and importance of ethics for the development of professions in contemporary society. Likewise, this philosophical vision is offered as a line and possibility that allows promoting and improving professional ethics in current modern professions.

In this framework, works and investigations prepared by both fields of knowledge are recovered as antecedents of this critical analysis. In the focus of the sociology of the professions, Finkel's research (2015) is distinguished, which constitutes his doctoral thesis, where he exposes and develops professional ethics in a particular way. In a specific section, dedicated to the study of Durkheim's thought, he analyzes the proposal of this sociologist, who believes that the professions can be moral agents capable of helping to end anomie and individualism to contribute to achieving the social and moral cohesion of the society of his time. Likewise, Finkel (2015) recovers professional ethics by analyzing the ethics of professionalism. Along these same lines, Aguayo (2003, 2006, 2007, 2008) has carried out various investigations on modern professions in which he deals broadly with the subject of professional ethics. Although this author has focused her studies on Max Weber's approaches, she also analyzes the functionalist vision of the professions and the critical position of the sociology of the professions.

In the field of the philosophical perspective of professional ethics, the theoretical works of Hortal (1993, 2002) stand out, who analyzes the functionalist conception of modern professions and makes a radical criticism of the vision of professional ethics that this aspect of sociology. The criticism made by this author focuses especially on the conception of professional ethics as ethical codes.

In the present critical study, the vision of professional ethics presented by Carr Saunders and Wilson (1933), Wilensky (cited in Dettmer, 2009) and Moore (cited in Machado, 1991), who are classic and representative authors of the functionalist current of the sociology of professions. As previously stated, the methodology of this study was critical analysis, and the theoretical references on which it was based are the philosophical perspective of professional ethics (Cortina, 2000, 2006, 2009; Hortal, 1993, 2000; López de la Osa, 1994) and the critical approach to the sociology of professions (Freidson, 2003; Larson, 1989). The theoretical formulations of these authors made it possible to achieve the objectives of this study: a) expose the contributions (scope) made by the functionalist perspective of the professions to understand professional ethics as an attribute of modern professions, and b) explain the limitations it has this functionalist conception of professional ethics to understand and account for the relevance it has in today's society.

Professional ethics is a significant topic not only in theoretical terms, but also for society. Because it contributes greatly to modern professions fulfilling their social function,



that is, providing the good and service that society requires for their survival and development. In this sense, for every society it is imperative to have professions capable of satisfying their vital needs (Cortina, 2000, 2006). However, in the last two decades, professional ethics has become especially important. In the first place, because the services provided by professionals have been seriously questioned by their users, because in some modern professions, unethical values, habits and practices prevail that affect the care they provide. For example, putting your economic interests above the user's needs or doing your professional practice governed by the rules of the bureaucracy. In some extreme cases, negligence in the provision of the service has been proven with serious consequences for both users and society as a whole. This has pushed users of professional services to raise their voices and demand quality more often and to really respond to their needs and problems (Martínez, 2006). Secondly, the services provided by a good number of professions constitute the way or the means to realize human rights in a society, such as health, education, housing and work. The above as long as these professions develop an ethical professional practice (Ibarra, 2015). All this places professional ethics as the horizon where the professions can recover their reason for being in contemporary society, as well as strengthen the recognition and legitimacy that a society has given them.

The critical analysis presented in this text comprises two sections. In the first, the conception of professional ethics as an ethic of social service elaborated by Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) was addressed. In the second, the vision of professional ethics as ethical codes developed by Wilensky (1964) was developed, whose examination was carried out within the framework of the professionalization model proposed by this author. In turn, this section includes the following subsections: the full-time profession, professions and university, professions and professional associations, professions and the State, professions and ethical codes.

### **Professional ethics as ethics of professional service**

The study of modern professions by the sociology of professions begins at the dawn of the 20th century with the work of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933). This century was marked by the social and economic conditions that society was experiencing derived from the accelerated process of industrialization focused on promoting and consolidating



capitalism as an economic model. This process brought about changes in the division of labor by presenting a growing specialization: the labor market required highly qualified and specialized personnel, which encouraged the development of modern professions. It was also accompanied by progressive urbanization, which forged new social segments—including another type of middle class—in such a way that capitalist society as a whole presented novel and different needs, as well as diverse problems, as a result of these radical changes that they needed to be resolved. In this context, the nation state was positioned as the key form of political organization and, in the long run, enabled this process of economic and social transformation of this society described as modern.

The changes in the moral sphere that this modern society presented are significant for the understanding of the vision of professional ethics that prevailed in the ideal model of professions, elaborated by the functionalist conception of the sociology of professions. Industrial society banished from the moral realm the religious or supernatural ideas with which pre-capitalist societies were governed and put a new type of totally earthly and concrete ethics, called the ethics of capitalism, which was distinguished for being “an ethic that associated effort economic to moral virtue and success to rewarded virtue” (Hartwell, 1986, p. 9).

The core of this ethic is the affirmation of individualism, because from the perspective of capitalism only the free and autonomous individual is capable of achieving economic achievement by putting his efforts, will and determination into play. Hence, the effort shown in carrying out an economic activity is conceived as a moral virtue. The values that accompany individualism are freedom, equality and autonomy.

In this historical context, Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) carried out a historical investigation of a set of professions in England and, based on this, they elaborated a basic definition of modern professions, which includes a set of own attributes that distinguish them. For these English authors “perhaps a profession can be defined as a task based on specialized intellectual study and training, the purpose of which is to provide experienced service or advice to others by virtue of a defined fee or salary” (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1939, cited in Tenti, 1989, p. 22).

Based on this definition, the characteristics of modern professions are: a) they are understood as tasks or functions performed in society; b) these tasks are carried out based on scientific knowledge and skills obtained through specialized educational training; c) have the



purpose or purpose of providing a service to those who lack these knowledge and skills, and d) obtain financial remuneration for the service provided. This set of attributes has remained as inherent to the modern professions and are in force today.

For the sociology of professions, this conception focuses on establishing the differences between trades and professions, focusing this distinction on the specialized scientific knowledge that dominates the professional and on the scientific and technical training acquired, since the trades, since they lack these elements, they carry out less complex activities. It is important to point out that this vision recovers the provision of a service as the substantive attribute of the professions, but in the subsequent development of the functionalist perspective, more weight will be given to expert knowledge backed by a long university education; in fact, it will be one of the banners of professional groups to seek a monopoly on the labor market.

The theoretical approach to professional ethics allows us to understand that, in the vision of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933), the tasks performed by professionals are conceived as the social function that they must fulfill, since they establish the purpose or purpose of providing a service to society. The philosophical perspective of professional ethics conceives this end as the necessary and essential good for the social life that each profession must provide. The basis of this approach is the vision of practice developed by MacIntyre (2009), author who understands this good as the internal or intrinsic good of the profession due to which it makes sense. That is, the professions, by providing professional service, provide society with the benefit that concerns them and therefore are accepted and socially recognized.

MacIntyre (...) understands by practice a cooperative social activity that is characterized by tending to achieve goods that are internal to itself and that no other can provide. These goods are what give it meaning, constitute its own rationality and, at the same time, lend it social legitimacy. (...) Transferring this characterization to professional activities, we could say that the internal good of health is the good of the patient; that of the company, the satisfaction of human needs with quality, that of teaching, the transmission of culture and the training of critical people (Cortina, 2006, p. 61).





It is noteworthy that Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933), in establishing that professions develop with an inherent social purpose or function, show the social and moral nature of modern professions. The philosophical position of professional ethics, on the other hand, when proclaiming that this end constitutes the good or contribution that professions make to society, reveals that this ethic is intrinsic to these, since the service they provide involves responsibility and the moral commitment to satisfy the vital needs of society (Feito, 2009, p. 129).

For an author like Fernández (2001), Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) recognize this substance of professional ethics and recover it in their vision of the ethics of professional service.

By the 1930s, Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) pointed out that an occupation reached the status of a profession when a type of activity was practiced only through the acquisition of controlled training, submission to rules and regulations of conduct between members and non-members, and adherence to a social service ethic (Fernández, 2001, p. 25).

Here it is possible to ask: what does this ethic of social service mean?

In principle, it is one is an autonomous ethic, since it is proper and exclusive to the professions, whose reference is the service they provide and not the religious principles or values that prevailed in the pre-capitalist era. The philosophical approach to professional ethics accounts for the process that it was undergoing to separate from the religious sphere until it was conceived as an ethic of professional service.

It is in Modernity when the professions begin to emancipate themselves from the religious sphere and to be based on an autonomous ethics. As Max Weber well shows, the German word (Beruf) and English (calling), which we translate by profession, have both the sense of vocation and mission, and receive the meaning that we now give it, especially after the reform. Protestant. Indeed, it is the reformers who, without intending to do so, lay the foundations so that it can be understood that moral conduct itself consists of feeling as a duty the fulfillment of the professional task in the world (Cortina, 2006, p. 57).



Thus, the ethics of social service shows that in the field of professions the religious concept by which the fulfillment of professional activities was understood as a religious duty has been canceled, and is replaced by a moral duty or obligation through which they respond to the social interest. This interest is of great value and scope because, by providing a service to a person who lacks the knowledge and skills that a professional has, they are not only contributing to solving their particular needs, but are contributing to a social cause of great importance : survival and development of society.

In this way, although in modernity it breaks with the religious concept of the profession, the conviction prevails in the countryside that there is a particular task or mission in society and it is assumed as a moral obligation. This duty involves carrying out professional activities with responsibility and developing them based on social interest and not on personal gain. That is to say, for example, the doctor understands that it is committed to preserving or restoring the patient's health, the teacher assumes that it is inherent to his profession to achieve the education of the students, and thus with each of the modern professions.

To understand the meaning of this ethic of social service, it is important to take into account both the functionalist angle from which the professions are conceived and the historical context marked by the accelerated process of industrialization. This functionalist vision allows us to understand that the ethics of social service arises in relation to the contribution that professions can make to achieve the balance and stability of social and economic life, which is relevant to promote and consolidate capitalism as an economic model. . Professions can fulfill this function because "they inherit, maintain and transmit a tradition, they generate ways of life, ways of thinking that make them centers of resistance against the forces that threaten a peaceful evolution" (Carr-Saunders y Wilson, 1933, citados en Rodríguez, 2008, p. 29).

In this framework, although Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) establish that the task carried out by the professions is intended to provide a service, its significance is understood as the contribution to the balance and advancement of society in an orderly and structured way. . The functionalist position conceives of society as a whole articulated by interdependent parts, which fulfill a social role or function to achieve the stability they consider necessary for group functioning. From this perspective, the social role or function of the professions is to contribute to the progress and development of capitalist society.



Functionalism aims to build a theory of the functioning and genesis of professional groups. Its rationality does not consist in describing its main characteristics as such, but in identifying what are the functions they fulfill in society (...). Professions constitute mediations between the individual needs and the functional needs of society and contribute to the regulation and control that allows the proper functioning of society (Tenti, 1989, p. 27).

### **Professional ethics as ethical codes**

After World War II, the functionalist approach continues to predominate in the sociology of professions, but there is a shift in its scope of analysis, since research is no longer focused on defining the attributes or characteristics that distinguish professions, but in the professionalization process understood as the stages or moments that every occupation has to fulfill to reach the status of profession.

In this text, the vision of professionalization elaborated by Wilensky (cited in Dettmer, 2009) and Moore (cited in Machado, 1991) is recovered, which has been considered a classic and obligatory reference to approach the study of the debated topic in question. The axis of analysis of this section is the Wilensky (1964) model and aspects of Moore's proposal (cited in Machado, 1991) are recovered to present this functionalist approach that predominated in the field of sociology of professions until the beginning of the 70s, when other approaches such as the neo-Marxist Larson (1989) and the neo-Weberian (Freidson, 2003) are present.

The model of the professionalization process is the result of the following study:

Wilensky in his already famous 1964 article observed when analyzing the dates when formal events took place - creation of first formation and training schools, first universities, first local associations, first national associations, laws establishing degrees and other credentials and establishment of some ethical codes — that the North American professions followed a common evolutionary sequence. From this observation, he built a narrative to explain this process. (González, 1999, p. 32).



It is understood, then, that this model was developed based on the actions carried out by different North American occupations and at different historical moments to achieve the status of professions, from which a series of stages specific to the professionalization process is established.

Rodríguez and Guillén (1992) have placed Wilensky (1964) in the evolutionary school of the sociology of professions, whose approach is recovered here because this model expresses a functionalist vision of social reality, understood as a process of evolution natural by which society is achieving better levels of development, and in this dynamic the process of professionalization is inserted. For this reason, it is conceived as a linear sequence by stages, where there are no conflicts or external forces that impede the “natural” transition from an occupation to a profession. Likewise, this process leads to an ideal type of profession, since not all professions have followed the order or sequence presented by this model to achieve this status.

For the critical approach to the sociology of professions (Freidson, 2003; Larson, 1989), this model of professionalization shows how it is possible that, through the fulfillment of each of these stages, professional groups can consolidate into economic and with prestige and access to power. The stages of this process form the basis for professions organized in a corporate group to seek a monopoly on knowledge and the labor market, as well as autonomy and moral self-regulation.

Following Evetts (2003) and Hernández (2017), Larson in his work *The Rise of Professionalism* made a radical critique of this functionalist vision of the professions by establishing that the process of professionalization constitutes a professional project - “professional project” - in words de Hernández (2017, p. 82) -. For the latter author, said process was outlined to carry out actions to achieve a monopoly on the market for professional services and, at the same time, promote and achieve upward mobility so that the professions achieve a greater and better social status both individually and collective.

According to Evetts (2003, p. 36), for Freidson (2003) the professionalization process did not imply obtaining a monopoly on the professional services market, but the achievement of protected market niches.

In relation to professional ethics, both Wilensky (cited in Dettmer, 2009) and Moore (cited in Machado, 1991) recognize as a component of professionalization the elaboration of ethical codes where the functionalist vision of professional ethics is embodied. That is why



it is pertinent and necessary to analyze these codes in an articulated way with the set of components that structure this model. The following table (1) summarizes and presents the elements that make up the professionalization model proposed by Wilensky (citado por Dettmer, 2009) and Moore (citado por Machado, 1991).

**Tabla 1.** Modelo de profesionalización

<b>Wilensky (1964)</b>	<b>Moore (1970)</b>
1) Que el trabajo se convierta en una ocupación de tiempo completo.	1) Ocupación de tiempo integral. El profesional obtiene sus ingresos para vivir de la realización de la actividad profesional.
2) Establecimiento de una escuela o universidad.	2) Se caracterizan por tener “vocación”.
3) Formación de una asociación profesional.	3) Poseen una organización y adoptan un código de ética.
4) “La búsqueda de reconocimiento y el apoyo legal para controlar el acceso y las formas de ejercicio de la profesión”.	4) Tienen un cuerpo de conocimientos formal que se transmite en las universidades.
5) Formulación de un código de ética formal.	5) Poseen orientación para el servicio, y desarrollan una práctica social.
	6) Poseen autonomía y está presente el corporativismo.

Fuente: Elaboración propia con base en Dettmer (2009) y Machado (1991)

### **The full-time profession**

Professions, to achieve this status, demand full-time days. In this regard, More (cited in Machado, 1991) establishes as a sign that distinguishes professionals the fact that professional practice constitutes their main source of income and therefore their livelihood. In this approach, it is possible to recognize the conception of professions elaborated by Max Weber (1969): “It is the specialized and permanent activity of a man, which, normally, constitutes for him a source of income and, therefore, an economic foundation certain of its existence”(Cortina, 2000, p. 13).

Thus, at this stage, the profession is conceived as a way of life and this attribute is established to distinguish it from other social groups, such as businessmen who possess wealth and material goods, as well as aristocrats who inherit money and property that



constitute their financial support. In other words, professionals earn their income through professional practice, which is considered a well-earned remuneration and the result of their scientific skills acquired through a long process of university training.

Cortina (2000) offers a philosophical vision of the professions that stands out because it establishes that, in social and moral terms, they are not limited to being a way of life: they fulfill a social function that allows them to be accepted and recognized by society.

For this reason, the profession is socially and morally much more than an individual means of obtaining sustenance. We could characterize it as a cooperative social activity, whose internal goal is to provide society with a specific and indispensable good for its survival as a human society, for which the participation of the community of professionals who as such identify themselves with society is required. (Cortina, 2000, p. 15).

The disposition to practice for full-time days is currently preserved as a trait that distinguishes modern professions. For example, those professionals who are part of the human resources of an institution or organization of a private or public nature that generally have full-time positions guaranteed in the function they perform or the service they provide. Likewise, professional practice is the main way of life for both liberal professionals and those who earn their income exercising in institutions and organizations.

### **Professions and university**

The second stage of the professionalization process places universities as the institutions specialized in training future members of this group, since they provide them with the knowledge and skills required to carry out professional practice. Thus, it is established that the universities are the recognized and accepted institutions, both by the professions and by society and the legitimate entities, to certify by means of a degree the acquired skills that, in turn, support the performance of the professional practice.

González (1999, p. 63) specifies that in Larson's vision the professions established a structural relationship with the universities with the interest that their scientific and technical knowledge be institutionalized so that they would train future professionals in a type or model of profession in order to generate and consolidate a market for professional services. In line with this argument, Dettmer (2009) points out the following:



In analyzing the classic processes of professionalization — emerged during the competitive capitalism phase — Larson confirms that in achieving these objectives the university played a key role in shaping the traditional professions (medicine, law and architecture) by uniting two trajectories until then independent: the first, derived from the existence of specific bodies of technical-theoretical knowledge; and the second, marked by the constitution of potential or effective markets, for services or jobs that required mastery of certain skills. However, in order to unify the two trajectories in practice, it was necessary for the existing professional groups to transfer to the university the monopoly on the training of producers or providers of professional services. (Dettmer, 2009, p. 20).

Thus, for this approach, universities were not only necessary to generate and position professions in a professional services market, but they were also a mechanism that promoted their upward mobility strategy to achieve better social status, based on a prestige supported by university degrees and certificates.

Currently these higher education institutions have been recognized and legally and socially endorsed as the entities where future professionals required by society are trained. This is the social function they fulfill, which does not respond to the interests of any professional group. However, this model of professionalization helped to consolidate as a characteristic of modern professions having training backed by a degree issued by a higher educational institution that certifies and legally supports that the professional is trained to practice.

### **Professions and professional associations**

Stage three of the professionalization process includes:

The creation of professional associations that consolidate the spirit of the profession, the selection criteria and quality standards of the new members, and define the essential professional tasks in order to differentiate themselves from similar, unprofessional occupations. (Dettmer, 2009, p.16).

Thus, professional associations are conceived as a form of organization of professional groups outlined to unite and defend their economic and social interests. They are not only intended to group and give identity to the professions, but above all to contribute



to conquer that protected work niche alluded to by Freidson (2003). Therefore, it is established as a priority for these organizations to jointly delimit the tasks or functions that they fulfill in society as a professional group, which allows them to differentiate themselves from other occupations and professions that have a similar function or task, while facing competition with other professional groups that also intend to carry out that task that they consider their own.

Likewise, the members of these associations establish their own selection criteria and quality measures to enter this type of professional body, thereby seeking to close the market for professional services to other professionals who are not part of this group.

This is argued by Evetts (2003) when referring to Larson's critical analysis of the professionalization process:

All this came to be understood as the analysis of the historical and contemporary processes through which an occupational group was able to close the market (to the untrained, unskilled or without credentials) thus achieving a salary and a position of privileged status for their Professions (Evetts, 2003, p. 35).

Cortina (2000) It does not disqualify or rule out these forms of organization of the modern professions because it considers that they can contribute to the moralization of society as long as they eliminate corporatism. This author's argument is as follows:

We said in the first section that any society that wants to avoid being guided only by two referents, by the State and by the market, needs to promote intermediate associations (...). This is obviously one of the reasons why certain progressive groups are now seeking to strengthen civil society, especially those civil society associations and the framework of public opinion that can be a source of social moralization. Among the voluntary associations are professional associations (Cortina, 2000, p. 23).

Although this model of professionalization was marked by corporatism, it cannot be denied that professional associations are the organizations that precede and promote current professional associations. To this extent, it is a characteristic characteristic of modern professions that prevails as a sign of professional status or as a regulatory mechanism, since in several countries professionals are required to be part of an association or a college as a requirement to practice.





## Professions and the State

The professional associations were a solid base for the professional groups to carry out actions before the State in order to seek legal protection, to delimit and control the labor market where they carried out their professional practice. Likewise, these associations contributed to ensuring that society valued the importance of the professional service provided by its members. The role played by these associations for the professional groups to request the legal guarantee is as follows:

The formation of a professional association is part of an ongoing process to establish and define the occupational function both to establish models and norms within the occupation and to direct its relations with other competitive groups. These provide the basis for the fourth stage, in which the occupation seeks to achieve public recognition and legal support for its control of access to it and the ways in which it must be exercised. Legal support generally takes the form of restrictions on the use of the professional name, although in some cases the direct and indirect restriction has been placed on the performance of the professional function. (Elliott, 1875, p. 120).

According to Hernández (2017, p 82), for Larson the strategy of the professional project (professionalization) is to achieve, first of all, the monopoly of knowledge, namely, the legal and social recognition that only the professions have the knowledge scientists, as well as the technical skills and competences to provide the professional services that society needs. Achieving this privilege is important both to gain control of professional services markets and to achieve professional autonomy.

For González (1999), the critical approach of the sociology of the professions accounts for the role of the State in this process of professionalization:

Starting from different interests, Sarfatti Larson arrives at results that coincide in many respects with Freidson. For both, the State ensures the conditions of professionalization and is in turn the one that facilitates, conditions and ensures professional autonomy (p. 71).

This stage of the professionalization model shows that the professional groups of the 60s and 70s had corporatism as a distinguishing feature, which was also manifested in the political actions they carried out before the State to realize their economic and social interests.



This is explained by the economic and social context of those decades marked by the development of competitive capitalism.

### **Professions and ethical codes**

Ethical codes constitute stage five of the professionalization process and have the following functions: “Eliminate the unskilled and the unscrupulous, in such a way as to reduce internal competition, protect clients and emphasize the ideal of services” (Wilensky, 1964, quoted in Finkel, 1999, p. 201).

This vision of ethical codes shows the change and evolution that professional ethics has within the framework of the conception of professions typical of functionalism. As noted above, Carr-Saunders and Wilson's (1933) conception of professions breaks with the religious ideas that permeated the morals of the professions and puts a service ethic outlined to meet the needs of society. Likewise, this ethic is conceived and presented as an autonomous ethic, that is, one of its own and exclusive to the professions. With this conception of professional ethics as an autonomous one, the bases are affirmed to advance to the next step: moral self-regulation by the same professions. In this perspective, the approach of an ethical code is understood as a stage of the professionalization process.

In accordance with the provisions of Wilensky (cited in Finkel, 1999), it is possible to point out that ethical codes are subject to the logic of the “closure of the market for professional services” to which Evetts (2003) alludes. This is because moral standards are one of the mechanisms to regulate internal competition, excluding professionals from the group who consider that they are not qualified to perform professional service, as well as those who are unscrupulous from their valuation. Likewise, it can be argued that, as part of the upward social mobility strategy, service provision prevails in these ethical codes as an ideal or aspiration to achieve. This is important for the professions because it allows them to preserve the altruistic nature of their services by showing the State and society that they do not seek to satisfy their economic and social interests but those of society.

Thus, while in the vision of the professions of Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) the ethics of service focuses on satisfying the needs of society, in the Wilensky model (1964) ethical codes are part of the professional project for achieve recognition and social legitimacy by the State and society by dressing the professional service of an altruistic aura. This argument is supported by the approach of Hortal (1993), who points out the following: "The



deontological code of a professional group is one more instrument to consolidate the aspirations of said group to social esteem and full professional status" (p . 211).

The presence of the codes has another aspect referring to the moral self-regulation that professional groups propose in exchange for the recognition and legitimacy that society grants them. Ethical codes are presented as the mechanism that guarantees society that the professional group itself is capable of monitoring and sanctioning its members, in the event that they misuse professional capacities or have unethical or unethical professional practice with clients or users of professional services.

In the framework of the philosophical perspective of professional ethics, Hortal (2000) critically analyzes the approaches elaborated by this functionalist aspect. For this author, the set of stages comprising professionalism, including ethical codes, account for "dentrism", understood as the process by which modern professions define themselves by establishing their attributes and functions according to their own criteria without take into account society in general or users of professional services in particular. The term dentrismo recovers it from J. Martín Moreno and A. de Miguel and manifests itself as follows:

If only the voices of professionals were attended to, what they say about themselves, the essence of their profession consists in selfless service to humanity in the corresponding aspect of its specific functionality. (...) The privileges he enjoys are but necessary elements to better exercise his profession for the benefit of clients and users, etc. (...) But in the inescapable institutionalization to which all relevant and recurring social activity is subject, not everything responds exclusively or primarily to the needs of good professional practice, also and much more to the interests of those who provide this service. If they are the only ones who understand that, they also have to be the only ones who can prosecute those activities. This creates the special jurisdiction of the professional group under a monopoly (...). They only offer ethical guarantees and professional self-control to clients and public authorities. That is why it is said that professional codes of ethics are nothing more than smoke screens to mask economic interests and social power. (Hortal, 2000, pp. 47-48).

Thus, in this vision of the professionalization process, ethical codes are part of the strategy of pursuing and defending the monopoly of the professional services market to the extent that they endorse and support in moral terms that the professions not only guarantee an effective service, but also a service for the benefit of society. Based on this, it is possible to argue that, in this model, ethical codes, rather than professional ethics, express the morality of a corporate group. This morality is understood as the moral norms or duties defined by the same group to self-regulate and self-control themselves in moral terms, without interference from third parties (State, society, clients or users). From the perspective of professional ethics, this moral constitutes the expression of the separatist thesis:

The idea in the separatist thesis is that each profession is defined according to its purposes and procedures and, therefore, they have their own criteria of value and, with them, their inherent moral justification. More than the negation of all kinds of morals, what is intended with this interpretation of the principle is to affirm a different morality, which is based on the concept of duty and service to a set of predetermined values, and to which it is necessary to guide all our acts (López de la Osa, 1994, p. 113).

This separatist thesis contributes greatly to endorsing the professional project because its argument allows modern professions to be placed in moral and social terms above and outside society. Here it is worth recalling the term social closure (social isolation) elaborated by Larson (cited in Hernández, 2017, p. 82) to account for the fact that the professionalization project strategy leads to the social isolation of professional groups protected by professional autonomy and moral.

The strategy of social isolation obeys to the creation of a closed professional market, a legal economic monopoly and a socio-cultural isolation of a class that holds legitimate knowledge about those who lack this knowledge and who need it. This legitimate knowledge is institutionalized in modern universities and through regulatory action is linked to the creation and maintenance of the professional market preserved. This double isolation makes it impossible for the profession to be controlled from outside, becoming experts in their own actions. (Hernández, 2017, p. 82).

Thus, the professions close the possibility for society to intervene in the valuation of their service under the argument that they possess scientific knowledge and competences



and, therefore, are vested with the authority to evaluate and qualify their professional practice. In this they sustain their professional and moral autonomy, since, with their own moral self-regulation, they also do not allow society to judge and qualify the provision of professional service in moral terms.

For González (2006), current contemporary society has undergone a change in values that allows him to question the classic model of professions, which had as references the achievement of privileges, social status and authority, largely because users of Professional services require greater participation in the provision of the service, on the grounds that their results directly impact them. Cortina agrees on this (2000):

In effect, professional activities are carried out within societies whose moral conscience is evolving in the sense that people demand greater respect for their autonomy, demand that their rights be respected, ask that they be allowed to participate in decisions. that affect them (p. 62).

In tune with this change in the moral conscience of society, the current theoretical perspectives of professional ethics have contributed to fracturing the functionalist vision, which placed the professions as privileged autonomous and independent groups in society, because for this philosophical approach the task Current of these does not reside so much in the elaboration of moral standards (ethical codes) that regulate the professions, but in the following:

Responsibly design which are the good practices of the profession and which are the bad, taking into account that it is a social activity that takes on its meaning of pursuing a goal, that of providing society with a specific good (Cortina, 2000, p. 24).

In carrying out this task, Martínez (2006) considers that both users of professional services and society in general should participate because, being those directly affected by the professional service, they are able to provide criteria, principles and values that contribute to improving the quality of service.

## Discussion

The caveat of the critical analysis developed in this text is that it limits itself to studying only the functionalist vision of professional ethics elaborated by this aspect of the sociology of professions, which constitutes a field of knowledge where other currents and approaches are present. However, this dimension is solved because the functionalist perspective accounts for the actions, practices, ideals, principles and values that the professions assumed to position and consolidate themselves in the market for professional services and in society. The functionalist position reveals this key moment in the development of the professions in general and of professional ethics in particular.

For this reason, some of the approaches elaborated by this functionalist current are recognized and rescued here, since it makes important contributions by defining in conceptual terms what a modern profession is and by establishing a set of attributes and characteristics that currently prevail as criteria and parameters to consider an occupation with the status of profession, such as: professionals perform a social function by providing a service to society, professional practice is their main economic support, they have professional training acquired at a university or higher education institution, they carry out their professional practice backed by a university degree that certifies and endorses their professional knowledge and skills, they organize themselves in associations or colleges, many of which have a deontological or ethical code.

This contribution is important to define and characterize the professions. However, the philosophical stance of professional ethics allows us to understand that modern professions are not understood in a comprehensive way if they are only conceived as groups of individuals who have scientific knowledge, and with the abilities and skills to carry out professional practice, because the essence One of these is professional ethics, which more than being its own attribute constitutes its core that enables its existence and development. The critical study presented here, although acknowledging this narrowness of the functionalist vision of professional ethics, recovers the achievements and progress that this ethic had as a result of the development of said functionalist conceptualization. The first is his emancipation from the religious sphere; the second is to consolidate as an autonomous ethic proper and particular to the professions; the third is to assume itself as an ethic of service, and the fourth is to conceive a code or set of moral norms and duties that are currently



understood as the moral minimums that modern professions are obliged to fulfill in contemporary society.

## Conclusions

This critical study of the functionalist vision of the professions is significant because it focuses the analysis on the historical period in which the modern professions gain momentum and are consolidated based on the characteristics and attributes that define them, which allowed them to open a market. professional services and achieve recognition of society.

The axis of this critical study was the functionalist vision of professional ethics that allowed us to develop how and why the attributes of the professions are established, most of which are currently preserved, including professional ethics. The central contribution of this analysis is that it exposes the limitations that this functionalist conception has to understand the meaning that professional ethics has for modern professions, but also reveals the contribution that it made to know the structuring and development of a particular ethics of professions in modernity.

The functionalist conception of professional ethics was analyzed based on the approaches of the philosophical perspective of professional ethics and the critical approach of the sociology of professions. In this analysis, both theoretical currents were complemented to account for the different aspects and dimensions that influenced the consolidation and progress of modern professions and professional ethics.

The contribution of the critical approach to the sociology of professions was the radical criticism that he made both of the functionalist conception of professions and to the model of professionalization based on the economic, social and political aspects that marked the dynamics of professions and professional ethics at that historical moment. Thus, this position shows that modern professions cannot be understood and studied in the complexity that they contain only from a functionalist perspective, because their conceptualizations were the product of a specific historical context.

The philosophical stance of professional ethics allowed us to identify the limitations that this vision has in social and moral terms. This perspective was not only a support for a critique of this functionalist conception, but also provided the foundations for understanding that the meaning or *raison d'être* of modern professions is professional ethics. With this, the



conception of this offered by this philosophical approach accounts for the social and moral character of the modern professions as their own or inherent in them. Likewise, it allowed us to understand that the ethos of the professions that is expressed in the functionalist vision has no place in today's society, where there are other economic, social, political and cultural conditions.

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