Who Cares?
Australian Planners and Ethics

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> Planning deals with choices and politics deals with choices, while ethics, on the other hand, deals with choices.
>
> (Hallett, 1967, cited in Wachs, 1985: xvi)

> I know that having my personal ethics are at least helped along, if not generated by, my passion for what I do…. I really do think that a lot of planners don't realise what they are actually there for. They have some perverted description in their own minds about what the role of planning is. So, unless you have a firm understanding of the role that you have, I really think that you can't have a set of ethics because your ethics are based on what you are supposed to be doing and if you don't know what you are supposed to be doing, how on earth can you have a set of ethics for it?
>
> Male planner, Local Government, Western Australia
> (as interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Introduction[1]

What's happening to planning practice? Why does the planning profession—in Australia and overseas—have such a poor reputation with communities and among professionals? Where are planning's leaders? Why are other professions capturing the ethical high ground? These questions dog analysts of planning and are prominent in analyses of the role of the planner and theoretical formulations about how planning came to be the way it is and where it is heading.[2]

This chapter addresses some of these questions, drawing on recent Australian research. It reveals that any Australian planners complete their courses and enter a profession confused about its aims and values. Many see planning as a profession in crisis. Australian critiques of planning, while not as vehement or common as those in North America and Britain, certainly identify room for improvement. It is apparent from the literature that the last ten years have seen "comparative chaos within planning practice" (Cuthbert, 1994: 49). The social theory that has informed planning is now seen to be "practice-irrelevant theory". A decade ago, Brian McLoughlin and Mike Berry argued that, "As elsewhere in the English-speaking world, there is in Australian planning and education a great deal of confusion surrounding the chronic crisis of identity" (1989: 9).[3]

Analysts of North American and British planning have had a field day examining the profession's identity crisis, lack of direction, and lack of influence. This characterisation is also remarkably consistent with descriptions in the American literature on the role of the planner and the crisis in the planning profession, described as being "under assault" (Beauregard, n.d.: 3; see also Livingston, 1980). As one American environmentalist, also a

postgraduate student in planning explained, "This profession is very pragmatic, unpolitical in every way. This makes the mindset hard to change" (Wheeler, *pers. comm.,* 1994).

These points of dissatisfaction and confusion regarding the planning profession are echoed by Australian planners and have serious implications for the ethics of planners. As the planner from Western Australia noted (with frustration) in the opening quotation, "…if you don't know what you are supposed to be doing, how on earth can you have a set of ethics for it?"

In this chapter we will examine the ethical dimensions of what Hendler (1995: 3-4) has described as the three areas of theoretical interest to planning:

- Theories *of* planning - the processes of planning and how planners work (the internal machinations), and;
- Theories *for* planning - the wider role planning plays in society and the conceptualisations it can hold of itself which help make sense of it as a profession, and;
- Theories *in* planning - the ideas developed outside of planning which planners may use in their theorising.

We hope to weave within and around these different threads of ethical theory. Further, we share a particular interest in the metaethical dilemmas raised by normative planning – theories *for* and *in* planning ethics – and ethical questions like "is Nature a stakeholder?", "who has the authority to make decisions on behalf of the public?" and "what happens when 'responsibility to Nature' and the 'public interest' diverge or conflict?".

We argue in this chapter that there are problems with the ethical literacy[4] and action of Australian planners and that those very same planners admit to those problems. Confusion abounds in the application of normative values to planning, particularly in environments that still treat planning as a technocratic exercise. As the words of the planners we have spoken to indicate, this is simply not what planning is.[5] All that the technocratic and utilitarian approaches to planning denies – that planning is a politicised profession, that there are personal values involved, that planners are in some manner accountable to communities – are ethical dilemmas arising for planners in the 1990s. The purpose, here, is to illustrate how planners are dealing with (or not dealing with) the confusions of the field in the very real world of planning practice. We focus, as mentioned, particularly on the new 'normative' world of planning that is recognising, critiquing, debating and *applying* metaethical values related to environment (or Nature[6]), heritage, democracy, participation, communication and social justice, to name just a few.

The Ethical Stories Planners Tell

Through narrative, or 'storytelling', we uncover some powerful information about ourselves as ethical beings. As storytelling is the way of expression for our memories, it is often the only method of inquiry to capture individual and collective (including organisational) histories. The 'ethics of remembering' (Ricoeur 1999) is vital to the conceptual longevity of 'planning ethics'. The notion of planning ethics is built upon individual and collective narratives and depends upon those narratives as a medium for, as Arendt (1992) explains, the forgiving and the promising that allows the continuation of ethical action between generations, whether they be generations of a geographic or cultural (including the cultural

community of planners) community.[7] It is in the form of narrative that we learn lessons. For, as Ricoeur (1999) suggests, the narrative is the only medium in which we can explore the 'exemplarity' of events, as opposed to simply their 'factuality'.

These storytelling imperatives, whether conscious or unconscious on the part of the participating planners, have found expression in both the Sarkissian and Cook studies. And, in spite of an Enlightenment tradition of denying the story as 'knowledge', the story remains (or is re-emerging as) a fascinating source of knowledge. Indeed, the conjecture that in ancient Greece, "knowledge and narrative were thought to be the same sort of learning" (Dienstag 1997:2) can be seen in contemporary form in a renewed interest in indigenous peoples' oral traditions[8]; in the 'dis-allegiance' from the 'rational' traditions of the Enlightenment period by feminists, post-modernists, environmental philosophers and subjectivists. All of these would all agree that modernism has outlived its usefulness[9] (at least as the only valid method of inquiry); all search for alternative epistemologies.

Turning to the stories of the planners to whom we spoke, some general themes emerged:

- confusion between values and ethics; and/or
- confusion due to competing sets of ethical demands (i.e., personal ethics vs. professional ethics or planning ethics vs. the corporate ethics of the organisations they work for, and so forth) and/or
- the pressures of working in political environments with many stakeholders applying pressure to an individual planner's ethics; and/or
- a lack of guidance from the profession regarding professional ethics (including a general impression that tools such as the Royal Australian Planning Institute's Code of Conduct are of little help); and/or
- a lack of training and discussion opportunities around the issue of 'planning ethics'; and/or
- a feeling of not having ownership or control over values and ethics.

While the above categories represent a number of types of stories, this chapter will focus on three types of stories: – 'love stories', 'bewilderment stories' and 'professional pleas'[10] – in this Chapter. We aim to create an "arena for dialogue and dialectic development" (Reason and Hawkins 1988: 84) within which to synthesise and describe the 'experience' of planning ethics in practice.[11]

Love/Hate Stories

The *Love/Hate Stories* are the passionate stories of planning ethics. From the descriptions of these planners, they are often concerned with *relationships with others* in the planning process. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the other actors in the *Love/Hate Stories* were predominantly elected officials, other staff in the organisation, the 'community' and/or developers. Perhaps more surprisingly, Nature was the final grouping evident in the *Love/Hate Stories.*

Planners expressed a range of passionate impulses regarding elected officials. More commonly, elected officials were recounted in stories as both unethical and powerful (and therefore not held to account), as illustrated by this story of a political environment that caused a resignation:

> The Mayor [at my last position] was in business, and he was going to teach me how it works, how it 'really works'. Like, "this is Mr So and So, and he wants to develop a whatever I'll leave him in your capable hands".
>
> Smiles, everybody's nicely smiling and when I come up and say "I don't think this is a good idea", well you know, I'd get "come into my office". And [from there] all sorts of things would happen [on the project, behind closed doors]...and the Mayor said "we can agree now that it didn't happen" I mean!! It was out of a movie!!
>
> Male local government planner, ACT
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Another planner tells a similar story about elected officials and the senior public servants at one of his former positions:

> I had a lot of pressure from the councillors to make recommendations which took into account their values and their ways of interpreting the provisions and I also had a lot of pressure from the CEO who I thought was very unethical because he would have meetings with friends of his who would then put in an application, and would then come into see him and then he would come in to see me and he would make it very clear to me that he wanted this approved even though it meant that right from the start that I wasn't able to come up with a view of my own without having that pressure already put on me. I found that very, very difficult to live with. The sort of rationalisation that was associated with it and the sort of values of pushing for economic growth continuously were things that I couldn't accept.
>
> The thought of the unhappy work life that I had, I believe, contributed to a breakdown of my family life.
>
> Male local government planner, South Australia
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

The power of an unhappy work life (in an ethical sense) led this planner to seek out what he describes as "a clean, wholesome, fresh working environment …" – he sought out an ethical 'cleansing' that was, for him and in his own words, cathartic and a shift in his view of the world. He retreated to academic life for this cathartic experience and has returned to planning practice with a rural Shire.

Both these stories of power (and of rationalisations) in the workplace are strongly reminiscent of Flyvbjerg's case story of Aalborg in *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*. The conflict, which Flyvbjerg places at the centre of his understanding of power, is expressed in the South Australian planner's inability to address the situation at work (for a perceived or real lack of power in relation to the councillors and CEO), only to have it all expressed in his disintegrating family life. The *Realrationalität* or real rationality[12] of the situation was of grave ethical concern for him.

The following, on the other hand, is a *Love Story* about community and about the local Shire President; a story woven around the unique qualities of smaller communities and concluding with a definition of the morality of community:

[A government facilitator] asked us to identify "who do you think your heroes are?", "who are your leaders?"... Nobody said anything, there was confusion. Then people started to think because they were made to think. "That guy down there is a hero in case of fire. He always leads the fire brigade and so on. He's organised - he's a good leader". And the bus driver, the fellow that picks up all the kids to go to school, he's extremely careful and conscious of the responsibility he's got - I consider him a hero. That was a great expression of community identification. The other character is the Shire President. She's just a great person and she happens to be in a leadership position.

They lead by not considering themselves leaders but by doing things which other people don't do. So there is an emergence of leadership quality, character quality from those people. They rise by virtue of other people's respect to a certain level. It's not as if they seek it. It just happens that way. So that's small town stuff…I think of it as **"a strong morality of the own"**.

Male local government planner, Western Australia
(interviewed by Cook, 1998)

This man was among several planners from smaller communities (all of whom had had urban planning experience) who told this love story about community and the story of a more ethical environment in smaller communities.[13] The story and the moral classification – the "strong morality of the own" – that is this planner's conclusion indicates what Charles Hoch calls "individualism based on social reciprocity and responsibility" (1994: 337).[14] Throughout his interview, this planner discusses the *quality of relationships* needed to generate inclinations of responsibility and reciprocity; qualities like a personal engagement with the community (ie not being 'detached') and a personal reliance on good planning outcomes (i.e., living in the area). What is really being discussed here is an ethic of caring, the feminist ethic so different from ethics based on established deontological and teleological formulations (see Sarkissian, 1996, chapter 2)

In most cases, stories about developers were not *Love Stories*. Indeed, developers rarely appeared as actors in stories unless they were behaving unethically, as this story about working at a Sydney council illustrates:

I got offered two bribes in Sydney. One was an industrial complex…and the bloke wanted approval to do what he wanted to do there, approval to use it without even supplying all the infrastructure and I was offered this envelope and I just let it fall on the ground. And the other one was I was offered $5,000 by the bloke - he had this bloke with him who wanted to open a French restaurant. And the little shop was one door from the corner of the side street and he couldn't provide enough parking, and we said he couldn't do it, and he said "will this help?" Five thousand dollars each. And we said "no that's no good, you need more parking." [Laughs] I said you'd need at least $1 million to get to approval.

Male local government planner, New South Wales
(interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Despite this story, bribery tales and other stories of illegal activity were rarely cited by respondents in this study *on a first-person basis*. However, several planners did tell stories of *others* who had been bribed (successfully or not), a storytelling technique which was common and was indicative of a general externalising of ethical issues.

Passionate *Love Stories* regarding Nature were also recounted and were often very personally invested. Not one planner told a story of an organisational environment that placed a high priority on Nature. In this story, a planning manager spoke about trying to save a group of threatened owls in the face of an unaccommodating organisational culture:

> [Ethics] comes up in relation to conservation issues as well. For example, we had a situation where there was a site with Powerful Owls on it and we went to great lengths to save these two Powerful Owls. It consumed a great deal of my own time in trying to sort out what to do about these Owls. . . . And you might think that the organisation also ascribes to those views but then you go out and find different…that they are more concerned that you could have done eight other things in the time you spent.
>
> Male local government planner, Victoria
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Of all the planning organisations represented in the interviews, this planner's Council was most explicitly pro-conservation and had implemented a range of policies to preserve local flora and fauna. Sadly, his struggles in habitat conservation, then, communicate rather dire lessons concerning the priorities of planning in an economically motivated and competitive world where most Councils are much less accommodating of Nature and environmental ethics.

The *Love/Hate Stories* illustrate the strong connections in planning and the areas where planners have to confront ethical issues. They reveal that planners cannot avoid the ethical dilemmas of having to work within democracies, within organisations, with private interests, with communities and within the environment.

The Bewilderment Stories

For many of the participating planners, ethical dilemma often translated into a conflict between competing sets of values, *internally*. Planners often documented a list of values which were important to them in their work and as good people. Planners were also generally aware of a set of professional values and expectations for conduct. Finally, they often felt duty-bound to support the values and expectations of their individual organisations. Conflict between and within these sets of moral codes (personal, professional and organisational) generated a number of bewildered stories – stories which planners seemed either wearily resigned to or desperate to conclude with a satisfying 'moral'. A passage by Bauman illustrates what might underpin the *Bewilderment Stories*:

> Few choices are unambiguously good. The majority of moral choices are made between contradictory impulses. Most importantly, however, virtually every moral impulse, if acted upon in full, leads to immoral consequences; yet no moral impulse can implement itself unless the moral actor earnestly strives to stretch the effort to the limit (Bauman 1993: 11)

Bauman also discusses the non-rational nature of moral phenomena and advises that the 'rule-guided' approach of traditional codes of ethics cannot provide sufficient guidance to moral dilemma (1993: 10-12). The *Bewilderment Stories*, it can be argued, are a product of a loss of personal autonomy in ethical decision making in favour of a reliance, in times of modernity, on the law-based, assisted moral decision making that marks professional life.

Generally, the bewilderment themes concerned: lack of control over decision-making (due to issues such as the atomisation of professions or increased globalisation) and conflicts between competing sets of ethical principles (for example, dilemmas caused by projects where environmental values were set against 'common good' principles).

In an example of bewilderment brought about by lack of control, one planner explains his ethical illiteracy:

> In my area, I do a lot of application process and I don't have a lot of opportunity to focus on things like the environment. You basically have to assess if it is appropriate development based on particular design elements rather than looking at it in that broad context.
>
> So I guess, in many ways, the values on the broader planning principles are prescribed to me, if you like. They are handed over to me. So how do we deal with questions of fairness and environment and all that sort of stuff if we have a much narrower field that we are touching?
>
> Male local government planner, Tasmania
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

A young female planner from South Australia described how she often felt overwhelmed by the enormity of planning issues:

> I look at it as 'have I done such extreme environmental damage, having done this, that my grandchildren are going to be disadvantaged because I've done it?'. . Or have I caused some major blunder that is going to live in South Australia for the rest of its history? ***Q: And you haven't done anything like that?…*** History will only tell.
>
> Female State government planner, South Australia
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

A number of planners expressed alarm at what they see as the increasing influence of the market in planning and the actual 'privatisation' of planning in some States.[15] One described the ethical dangers of the growing emphasis on 'chasing development' thus:

> Some would say we should focus on the competition between regions for investment and that sort of thing. But unless you have a plan that talks about long term sustainability and heritage and so on, where the hell are you going? You are just being opportunistic and chasing developers. The way that that is done is not particularly ethical…. That's the way that governments and major corporations behave. And that is the way planning now has to behave in order to deliver. But I see it as a way that is simply wrong. It's obviously done with 'commercial confidence', behind closed doors and without accountability or evaluation.
>
> Male local government planner, Victoria
> (as interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Most of the participants agreed that consultants choosing to take a stand on environmental or social matters (as a matter of principle) could risk offending a client and losing a job. One said simply, "You have to represent the client".

Revealed here is an emerging picture of professional inaction with respect to ethics; an inaction deeply influenced by feeling paralysed by the complexity and atomisation of professional issues. The resulting *prevailing* ethos communicated by members of the planning

profession and those who know them should ring alarm bells. Utilitarianism and pragmatism are at the core. Typically, planners are engaged in a rushed process where normative matters or ethics are concerned, as illustrated by this story from a planner interviewed in Victoria:

> As an example of that, and this is a very topical example, later this afternoon we are dealing with an illegally constructed dam. It's huge, monstrous, and is right on the road. I personally hold the view that it is monstrous - it should never have been built. But, when you look at it and go through all the evaluation of the variables and look at the site and constraints on the site and so forth, you know that, at the end of the day, you're not going to get the thing filled in and beautiful, pristine gum trees planted on the site. So you will try to compromise…and while I might personally feel that the dam should never have been put there, professionally I recognise that I won't get far if I barrel in. Sometimes you have to make trade-offs to get an outcome that is expedient.
>
> Male local government planner, Victoria
> (as interviewed by Cook, 1998)

A landscape architect interviewed by Sarkissian was more blunt:

> If we all thought like you, the planet wouldn't be in such a foul mess. Unfortunately, nobody earns money by saying 'no' and after all money is our god.
>
> Male landscape architect, New South Wales
> (surveyed by Sarkissian, 1995)

Exploring these issues further, respondents in both studies described planning solutions as 'imposed' and often not open to full and thorough investigation. An atomistic approach characterised planning practice, with segregation of expertise and lack of accountability. Several respondents spoke of the lack of a holistic vision, a comprehensive approach. There was a strong call for more "global solutions" and ways of working where all impacts were considered. By the way planners and other members of the land professions discussed their ideal situations, they described their current reality. These planners sounded as though they were talking about some utopian situation in which they themselves could not imagine participating during their lifetimes. A quality emerged from their comments: "if only". "If only we were more powerful; if only the developers did not have us in their pay; if only we could find simple 'technical ' solutions to these problems". Several planners in Sarkissian's study complained that the survey asked questions many respondents had been silently asking themselves for a long time but nevertheless found provocative. Some really grappled with the question of how an ethic of caring for Nature could be nurtured in professional practice. Some, like this Darwin architect, tried to find solutions within the 'business as usual' paradigm of the development world:

> Ethics are not brought about. They slowly develop as understanding and knowledge proliferates. This process has been going on for some time and while application of ethics by future planners may be of intellectual importance and future gain, those planners will only suffer mid life crises if the same knowledge and ideals do not permeate the general populace. The development of sticks and carrots for developers will ultimately save the current generation of our planet, while starry-eyed pimple faced students get blown away by concepts.
>
> Male architect, Northern Territory
> (surveyed by Sarkissian, 1995)

The *Bewilderment Stories* reveal that, currently, Australian planning practice is a rushed, atomistic, technical, unaccountable, powerless process, relying on the direction of others, involving compromises which border on 'selling out'. It is characterised by a lack of concern for global issues and direct and indirect consequences and impacts. Few planners are short of an opinion on the subject, but few have very good ideas about how to remedy the problems that they identify, intensifying the bewilderment. While, as one young female planning consultant in Darwin exclaimed, "We have to look at the big picture", others, such as a young female planner in Sydney, suggested that there "might be a need to employ specialists associated within this area". This raises the frightening concept of further atomisation or specialisation by means of 'subcontracting' ethical responsibilities.

Professional Pleas

The final set of stories that planners told in the interviews were what we have termed *Professional Pleas*. Intrinsically related to the *Bewilderment Stories*; these stories were impassioned tales of what planning needs to **be** in order to address professional confusion and frustration. Not surprisingly, such stories were often pleas to educators and professional bodies.

First was the call for education and training – many planners quite yearned for more skills in ethical decision making and for opportunities to reflect upon the values (theirs and the wider profession's) that influence their work. A young planner in Perth, asked if it was important to expose planners to ethics in their training, responded emphatically:

> I think this is *fundamentally* important. Flipping through some notes of earlier this year--thoughts and so on--I have reflected on the information revolution and I made a note to myself that basically you don't need any more information. At any given point you often don't need any more information than what you've got. I wrote down that if the values are right, everything else will follow.
>
> Male local government planner, Western Australia
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

This story stresses that what planners need now is a confidence and competence in 'ways of knowing' as opposed to having 'more information' at their disposal. This excerpt was part of a longer discussion about the need to replace some of the existing professional development courses (in computer skills or economic modeling, for example) with opportunities for reflection. Equally emphatic were the majority of other planners interviewed. Despite differing opinions on the appropriate structures and mechanisms (tertiary education, continuing professional development or professional debate and discussion), they sounded a clear demand for educational reform..

Who can teach ethics to planners? The *Pleas* made were quite often half-hearted, preemptive and reflected a cynicism about organisations (workplaces, universities and professional bodies, notably RAPI. A young female planner, for example, was interested in the notion of further ethics education for planners but felt that both RAPI and her workplace (State government) had other priorities:

> I'm a member of Royal Australian Planning Institute and sometimes I think it's just a boy's club for planning consultants. So, while I think there is a role for Royal Australian Planning Institute, I'm not sure how much credence I would give it…because I'm a treacherous left-wing cynic! It's not really something an employer, like this employer, would offer…that kind of professional development. They're into training here but they'd be unlikely to send anyone on a course like that. It would have to be heavily disguised!
>
> Female state government planer, Victoria
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

A young male local government planner from remote Western Australia held an equally cynical view of the 'realities' of education, condemning of potential opportunities for ethical education; in universities, professional bodies and the workplace:

> This will be highly contentious, but my concern is that, because the [Royal Australian Planning] Institute is dominated by the private sector planners, that has also flowed on to the educational institutions. They have to accredit the course and there is so much sensitivity to keeping the course bland[16], if you like, so as not to upset the private consultants who wield the power in planning, that these issues are overlooked. You can imagine that private consultants don't necessarily want planners who are going to challenge them too much…. It sounds awful, I know, but it is not in their interest to have planners who are very ethical….
>
> Male local government planner, Western Australia
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Despite the resigned tone to some of the professional pleas, some planners enthusiastically engaged in imagining an alternative ethical education to that which currently exists. These became *Pleas* for better education. In some cases, a particularly memorable education experience made the *Plea* autobiographical, as in this plea for core philosophy courses in the training of planners and other professions with 'technocratic' histories:

> I think it's probably so big and so important that it probably needs to be a core course on its own. I remember, when I was at the University of [--], they had a core course called "History of Civilisation" which was mind boggling in its title even! The thing that struck me was that it exposed you to so much - I mean, I came out of a civil engineering background where the core courses were applied maths and pure maths and structural engineering - and to then go to a university where a core course was something that didn't actually have anything to do with the discipline itself. But in a way it had everything to do with the discipline itself. It's so broad and eclectic and probably mind changing. That really influenced me and one of the things I now feel that cultural studies or social studies or philosophical studies should be a part of every planning practitioner's course work.
>
> Male local government planner, Queensland
> (interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Other planners focused on the need for planners to take control and ownership of the **necessary** debate, while making *Pleas* for guidance:

> I value the importance of discussion and debate in the profession. And I think that professional institutes and other aligned bodies should be doing that and I don't think there is enough discussion and debate. Even in this office there isn't enough discussion and debate about things that are happening in planning. I value that because I think, as I get older, I am becoming a bit more entrenched in my views.
>
> Female consultant planner, Victoria
> (as interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Finally, many planners' stories illustrated that perhaps 'teaching' planning ethics is a reflective and responsive and caring exercise that planners themselves need to undertake, either independently of study or professional development (where such support does not exist) or with the guidance of such study or professional development. This will require changes to existing curriculum and lobbying of professional bodies.

The Ethical Actions Planners Take

Stories of planning ethics in the practice of local government planning work are one issue but what of ethical action[17]? Is there the possibility that planners 'talk a good talk' about planning ethics while not acting on their ethical beliefs? The two studies indicate that, to at least some extent, that this is true. As part of Cook's study (1998), interview participants, planners not participating in interviews and a group of students, undertook a scenario exercise in which they were to assess whether the actions of the planner were ethical or not and whether or not they would behave in the same manner in such a scenario. Scenario 1[18] was specifically designed to assess the reaction to a conflict between the metaethical environmental ethics of planners and the utilitarian ethics of professional conduct (a source of *Bewilderment Stories*…). It specifically involves the issue of 'leaking' information.

> **Scenario 1**: An environmental planner is fairly certain that his director has purposely left out certain findings from a draft report regarding the regeneration of native grasslands because the director felt it presented a point of view that the State government does not support. The environmental planner feels that these findings should not be kept from the public and, without authorisation, gives the findings to an environmental group that is strongly in favour of native grassland regeneration.

A majority of planners in practice (63 per cent) assessed the actions of the planner in the scenario as clearly or probably *unethical*.[19] This is in juxtaposition with the student sample, the majority of whom (58 per cent) saw the action as clearly or probably *ethical*. When asked if they would do as the planner in the scenario had, a clear majority (77 per cent) of practitioners said they definitely would not or probably would not do it. The students, interestingly enough, were split with 47 per cent stating they definitely or probably would do as the planner had and 42 per cent stating they would not. Over ten per cent were unsure.

These responses indicate quite strongly that utilitarian values win out in ethical dilemmas, despite planners' strong self-identification with environmental values, as illustrated in response to an attitude statement, "Preserving clean air and water should be high priority issues even if this means that economic development in the community may be slowed"

While 73 per cent of the scenario exercise participants either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with a statement that the environment should have priority over other considerations in some cases (and only 6 per cent even 'slightly disagreed' or 'disagreed'), 53 per cent of those surveyed thought it 'unethical' or 'probably unethical' to leak information to an environmental group even when suspecting that the organisation has not given full professional advice on an environmental issue. Further, 63 per cent reported that they would not do what the planner in the scenario had done, indicating that some planners would not pursue a course of action that they have assessed as 'ethical' or 'probably ethical'.

An analysis of the Australian responses reported in the scenario exercises reveals that organisational values and the utilitarian 'rules' are learned on the job and are likely to be informed by professions and work environments rather than by personal values. Students in the scenarios, for example, prioritise metaethical environmental values above the organisational conduct values more often than do practitioners, despite similarities in attitudes about the environment. In fact, practitioners seem to hold stronger attitudes about the environment than do the students. This nexus between metaethical values and the 'rules of the job' proves to be a real source of dilemma that leads to inconsistent action or inaction with respect to planning ethics.

This glimpse into the divergence between personal/professional values and ethical action represents a disturbing finding as it shows that even where planners have strong values about normative issues, their values are easily supplanted by other principles in the workplace.

Four Lessons Raised by These Studies

> I'm probably a good example of why there needs to be a bit more [training] at the undergraduate level. I'd like to be articulate about the issue because for me this is an issue and I'd like to be able to express my thoughts on what ethics are and what my own personal position on issues is. It's all very well to have a principle or an ethic but then to be able to identify that you are compromising it and then be able to take action are other steps altogether. I would have liked more training in those regards.
>
> Male consultant planner, Victoria
> (as interviewed by Cook, 1998)

These two complementary studies, taken as a whole, offer four tentative lessons about ethics in planning practice and education in Australia.

Lesson 1: The crisis in the planning profession

In Australia and overseas, the planning profession is in great crisis about its identity--a crisis of several decades' duration. Planning specialisation, globalisation, the magnitude and complexity of 'normative planning' (for example, the issues of global ecological crisis), the political framework (without political accountability) of public sector professions and the decline of the technocratic planner further confused matters and raised anxieties in relation to *what planners ought to do*. The planning profession is confused about how to proceed. It lacks a sense of direction about ethical issues.

This is exacerbated by the virtual silence of practitioners in planning debates, an issue highlighted by a female planning consultant in Melbourne:

> There is a dearth of actual communication within the profession itself. Across various age groups, across interest areas. I would value that happening more. It's a shame it's not happening because there are different perspectives in looking at things. I pick up *Planning News*, which is my institute's journal, and look at that and get *no* inspiration out of it. It worries me.
>
> Female consultant planner, Victoria
> (as interviewed by Cook, 1998)

Against a silent backdrop, as many philosophers have noted, one moral voice can sound like screaming. (The confusion continues unchecked because, for many planners, it is an entirely internalised confusion.

Lesson 2: The nature of planning practitioners and educators

Consistent with findings from North American research, it appears that the kinds of people who self-select into planning in Australia do not necessarily seek change actively. Rather, they are, in general, the sorts of people who support the *status quo* and value compliance. They are not likely, without support and encouragement, to embrace radical causes or lobby strongly for change, preferring methodically and slowly to effect small cultural changes within their individual organisations.

This reluctance will also affect how planners are educated about the ethical content of their work, particularly in the stickier 'metaethical' realm of the normative nature of planning. It implies a need for educators to create learning situations to empower planners with respect to their professional stances and the importance of their personal values in their professional lives. The separation of personal and professional values in planning is a regarded by many as tragedy that needs to be remedied in ethics education in planning and then replicated/reproduced in practice.

Lesson 3: The importance of education in ethics for professional planners

Professional ethics do not take a prominent place in the average planner's agenda and, while recognition might exist, an *understanding* of ethics is unlikely to arise naturally in a professional planner's life without some form of assistance. Thus, the importance of enhancing the study of planning *practice* with a focus on planning *education*. For example, all but one interviewee in the Cook study indicated a need to explore ethics as a topic in planning education.

There is a lack of awareness and/or lack of application of the RAPI Code of Conduct; practitioners reported it as too vague, too geared to private practice, inappropriate in certain situations and not useful in addressing the range of day-to-day normative ethical questions. Education should embrace not only professional training but also continuing professional development. While RAPI has recently developed policies on continuing professional development, our studies indicate that bodies such as the Royal Australian Planning Institute (RAPI) could play a key role in ethics education for planners. RAPI needs to examine the issue of planning ethics with more creativity if it is to play a truly effective role in shaping them.

Many of those who teach planners in Australian educational institutions lack leadership abilities and expertise in and current knowledge about the normative dimensions of planning such as ecological processes and environmental philosophy. Discussion of professional ethics is all but absent in planning practice and education. Educators seem to 'hide behind' a facade of impartiality and objectivity. Yet this is a time when "an older ideal of the value-free planner or administrator has collapsed" and where "we increasingly recognize that all policy-making and administration is value laden, and that some of the values involved are moral values" (Howe: 1990, 1). In what could be seen as a cowardly response, Australian planning educators, who depend on practitioners for jobs for their graduates (and ultimately for their own jobs), tend to find in the conservatism and pragmatism of the profession excuses for not delivering up-to-date course content on planning ethics (including environmental ethics) to their students. Current professional pressures severely limit opportunities to seek, nurture, support or embrace forces of change within planning schools and among practitioners. There is a hardening of positions, a battening down, a tightening, limiting ethos of doing more with less. Planning schools have become, according to many practitioners and academics, *too* responsive to the practicalities of 'the real world'. There is a vital need to engender moral reasoning among planners by encouraging them to be "reflective practitioners".[20]

Lesson 4: The limits of tinkering without a holistic approach to planning principles and ethical issues

In both studies, planners expressed the confusion and *ad hoc* nature of the professional response to ethical questions such as caring for Nature. For example, some old approaches have been coloured 'green' (such as AMCORD and the now-defunct federal "Better Cities" program[21]) in an attempt to address ecological issues (or to convince themselves that they are addressing global ecological issues and the moral questions which underpin them). Some of these approaches have real value, but often these projects are conceived without the holistic ethical shift necessary to bring about the paradigm shift called for in this chapter.[22] In Australia, the few hopeful examples are still just that--and the principles they embody are not represented in the mainstream--certainly not in mainstream planning.

Conclusions

The two studies reported here attempt to open up a discursive space for the discussion of professional ethics in Australian planning. They reveal that the Australian planning profession lacks ethical leadership. Planning practitioners are confused and torn by many forces. There is a sparseness of ethical discourse. No ethical community supports the young planning student or the practitioner.

An interview several years ago with the then National President of the Royal Australian Planning Institute provides an example. When asked how he attended to his ecological literacy, he replied, "I hire people to do that for me". Perhaps the operative model in Australian planning is simply *subcontracting*: Find another professional to do your thinking while you carry on with the mechanics. If the thinking that needs to be done is *philosophical* thinking, then perhaps it's better not to bother about it at all![23]

NOTES

[1] This chapter presents points of interest -- or 'food for thought' -- from two studies into planning ethics in Australia: doctoral research conducted by Wendy Sarkissian (completed in 1996) and doctoral research by Andrea Cook in progress.

[2] See, for example, Friedmann (1989: 337) who cites the planning profession is "a rudderless ship"; McClendon (1989) who argues that planning at the crossroads and that nothing less than the future of the profession may be at stake or Thomas and Healey (1991) who discuss 'immobilised professionals', cynical and in a policy malaise, practicing a profession that increasingly does not measure up to the purposes that first attracted them to planning.

[3] See Colman, 1993 for a balanced and enlightened view from practice.

[4] In this chapter, *planning ethics* embodies both the personal realm involved in ethical decision-making to realise a good life as an individual and the professional realm of making ethical decisions based on the society's priorities. Both realms involve *action*. As this chapter focuses, to some degree, on *environmental ethics* as a measure of ethical literacy, a definition of environmental ethics is taken from Martin and Beatley: "the most fundamental aspects of the relationship between humanity, other life forms, and the Environment or Nature, as well as the moral obligations of humanity to the earth community" (Martin and Beatley, 1993b: 117).

[5] We have consciously presented the 'voices' of actual Australian planners interviewed in the course of both studies reported in this chapter. In many respects, this is a shared project with planners and non-planners from around the country. Their perspectives on ethics are key to the discussion. The contributions of these planners and non-planners is gratefully acknowledged and appreciated.

[6] We have chosen to refer to all non-human life on this Earth as *Nature* and not as 'the environment', 'the biosphere', 'the biota', or 'the ecosphere'. We acknowledge the writings of environmental philosophers, who argue that to call the non-human world 'the environment' is to accord it the status of a commodity or resource, which has utilitarian value primarily for human use and enjoyment (see Naess, 1989; Devall and Sessions, 1985; Mathews, 1991; Titmuss, 1995: 27; Evernden, 1989 in Armstrong and Botzler, eds., 1993: 209).

[7] Bent Flyvbjerg also discusses, in the introduction to his case study of planning and politics, this phenomenon stating, "Narratives not only give meaning to our past experiences, they also help us envision alternative futures" (1998:8).

[8] Cantrell (1996) analysis of Susan Griffin's work states that there is an increasing challenge from storytelling in oral cultures to the permanence of the written record. As she eloquently states, " Rather than possessing permanence and objectivity, the stories in an oral tradition are transformed continuously as they are incorporated in each retelling within individual speakers' experiences. Told and re-told, its stories weave together listeners' stories with the stories that precede them, and join present understanding with past history and knowledge". This 'way of knowing', described as "woven truth" in contrast to "objective truth", she argues, is more accommodating of difference and binds storytellers and listeners together. See also Griffin (1978) and Trinh (1989).

This is not merely a conceptual shift. For example, some legal systems (e.g., the Supreme Court of Canada) are now accepting oral histories as evidence of land tenure in Native Title cases.

[9] See, for example: Healey (1997) who examines the evolution of planning theory – from traditions of policy analysis, physical planning and economic planning – to a more interpretive and communicative practice

[10] These three types of stories are a partial discussion, meant to illustrate some common planning ethics dilemmas. Cook's dissertation will provide a more comprehensive narrative analysis of contemporary planning ethics and will discuss other types of stories (for example, "Warning Stories", "Reiterated Professional and Organisational Stories" and "Origins Stories").

[11] By ‘experience’ we do not mean just a physical occurrence or event but also our mental experience of concepts such as ethics. Some of the planner’s stories, presented shortly, will highlight that this narrative medium is also applied in expressing our conceptualisations and metaphysical experiences.

[12] Flyvbjerg uses this as a key concept in his explorations of how rationality actually is expressed in modern democracies, explaining that a distinction between *Realrationalität* is as necessary a one as the distinction made by Machiavelli and von Rochau between formal politics and *Realpolitik* in understanding modernity and modern administrative and political activity (1998: 6).

[13] It should be noted that this is a recent phenomenon according to many of the planners. Stories of parochial and corrupt smaller communities as recent as a decade ago peppered the interview transcripts. No ‘transformative’ stories were told which might specifically explain the shift, although recent inquiries into local government ethics in several States (for example, Western Australia and New South Wales) may account more generally for the shift.

[14] Hoch speaks of this concept in almost utopian terms, arguing that such a concept is often hidden in the debates that concentrate on possessive individualism in contrast to collective socialisation. The dichotomy in the debate, he stresses, is limiting and precludes exploration of other ways of understanding power and practice in democracies. The planning stories in his book, in his words, are “intended to offer some reassurance. Professional planners work in an institutional order of competitive and hierarchical relationships, which, despite their adversarial and instrumental qualities, require some cooperation” and that “planners regularly try, in imaginative, incremental, and occasionally grand ways, to shift attention from the adversarial to the deliberative” (1994: 337).

Hoch’s planning stories, like this planner’s, indicate an ‘ethic of community’ that is built upon relationships, trust and mutual communication rather than on ‘being the expert’ (1994: 336). These stories can be seen to show how an “ethic of care” expresses itself in planning practice.

[15] In Australia, the Victorian Government’s compulsory competitive tendering process in local government, for example, was cited by several interviewees as a move to the privatisation of planning (Cook, 1998).

[16] In Sarkissian’s 1996 study of environmental and professional ethics as taught in Australian universities, she found that while some planning academics claimed that they had to package up ethics in ways that were palpable to their students (‘practical’ case studies and advice on how to manage problems seemed the common ideas), some planning practitioners remembered their university days clearly and were highly critical of the quality of their education. A general theme was that lecturers expected students to have no minds of their own and therefore did not choose to challenge them, especially not in professional ethics.

[17] Elizabeth Howe provides an illuminating distinction to clarify planners’ values and ethics and the potential difference between the two: “If principles are necessary for ethics to be effective, so is action. Three steps seem to be necessary for effective ethical behaviour. First, planners have to be able to see situations as posing ethical issues…the planner next must be able to make a decision about what he or she should do about it…. Finally, the planner must have both the will and the freedom or leverage to act on his or her decisions” (Howe, 1994: 10-11). The principles (or values) of the planner inform the first step in Howe’s ‘recipe’ for ethical behaviour, while decision and **action** complete the recipe and translate values into ethics.

[18] The scenario exercise was adapted from a similar exercise with a large number of participants conducted in the United States by Howe and Kaufman (1985) and a later study of Swedish planners (using the same scenario question) by Khakee and Dahlgren (1990) and has comparative purposes beyond the scope of this chapter.

[19] As with the other studies used for comparative purposes (see the previous note), the scenario exercise employed a Likert scale with five response options. In this analysis, as with others, positive responses (“clearly ethical” and “probably ethical”) and the negative responses (“clearly unethical” and “probably unethical”) have been grouped.

[20] Donald Schön’s *Reflective Practitioner* (1983) is a compelling study of how professional practices might respond to normative values. For an applied investigation, see Richmond’s description of training undertaken with transportation planners at which Schön was a participant (1995).

[21] For a description of the Better Cities program, see Campbell, 1993. AMCORD, the Australian Model Code for Residential Development, is described in B. Howe, 1993.

[22] An example is the recently completed 'green' North Haven' housing development in suburban Adelaide. While pioneering energy-efficiency, drainage and water quality innovations, this residential development suffers from such serious micro-scale design flaws (in terms of dwelling livability) that it is unlikely to greatly influence housing planning and design. Nevertheless, it received a National RAPI Award for Planning Excellence.

With respect to planning *education*, David Orr makes the point that the imperative is not "to tinker with minutiae, but a call to deeper change" (1994: 5).

[23] This interview was strangely reminiscent of an interview conducted by Sarkissian in May 1994 with the then President of the Canadian Institute of Planners, John Livey. Confessing that the "eco-view" is largely ignored in Canadian planning, Livey also admitted, with respect to the national code of ethics for planners (Canadian Institute of Planners/Institut Canadien des Urbanistes, 1994a and 1994b), that, "There is nothing in there [in the Code] that gives primacy to the environment over social or equity issues". Furthermore, "people [i.e., planners] don't understand that their health, that their economy is going to be affected". Livey continued by saying that planners "don't have confidence to take the leap yet". Comparing the global ecological situation to a cholera outbreak in the nineteenth century, he explained that Canadian planners are still saying, "Prove it".

For Livey, the answer lies in more scientific and technical research. Basic research *to prove it* is needed. In order to sensitise planners to what it really going on, we would have to "show there's a 'ticking time bomb'". Even with respect to the "oil catastrophe" or energy shortage, he argued that "people can't believe that the crisis is real" (Livey, *pers. comm.*, 1994).

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