

Regulation of Lawyers: Problems of Law and Ethics

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A Preface to Students

Titles like "Professional Responsibility" and "Legal Ethics" do not adequately describe the subject matter of this book. It is a book about the legal profession and about the practice of law. But the book goes beyond the legal rules governing the practice of law and includes rules contained in ethical codes and, to a lesser extent, behavior that springs from custom and experience. These laws, ethical rules, and customs can be discussed from three perspectives.

Perhaps most immediate for those about to enter on a legal career are the rules that constrain working lawyers. In such areas as competence, fees, advertising and solicitation, client secrets, conflicts of interest, negotiation, and the attorney-client relationship: what may you do, how may you behave, with confidence that your conduct will not land you before a disciplinary committee or in a civil lawsuit and, sometimes more important, will not damage your reputation among your peers?

The second perspective of the course is the relationship between the profession and society. The rules lawyers impose on themselves or that are imposed on them, taken together, define the nature and operation of the profession as an entity, and therefore, to an extent, the behavior of our legal institutions and the quality of our social justice.

For example, a rule that allows lawyers to advertise certain kinds of information will influence the conduct of individual members of the bar. But it will also affect whether, and how, large categories of people use lawyers and the size of legal fees. Similarly, a rule that prohibits or requires a lawyer to reveal certain kinds of information about a client will control the lawyer's individual conduct, but it will also affect which client populations use lawyers and how. In short, nearly every rule, whatever its source, has social and political consequences, although there is often disagreement both over what these consequences will be and whether they should be avoided or encouraged.

About to go off into law practice, you may be more interested in such questions as: "How do I behave?" and "How can I stay out of trouble?" than in asking "What are the consequences to society and justice if one or another version of a particular ethical rule is applied to America's

two-thirds of a million lawyers?" Still, the last question is important and, if not as immediate, will from time to time arise in the course of your professional life.

Both kinds of questions, but more so the second, engender different, and sometimes vehement, responses. Why? In part because to answer them we must call upon political and moral values more fundamental than the "ethics" that inform various codes; and, of course, political and moral values of different people differ substantially, sometimes diametrically.

Furthermore, in addressing these questions, we are likely to make a threshold determination, conscious or not, of the extent to which we want the answers to further our self-interest. However we couch our responses, in truth whose best interest do we mean to protect? Those of society generally? The legal profession's? The interests of lawyers in practices like the one we have or expect to have? Those of the particular client population we serve? Our firm's? Our own? Law school and law practice, it is sometimes said, encourage more rather than less self-interest in addressing the kinds of questions that will be raised here.

At the outset we wrote that rules governing the practice of law can be discussed from three perspectives and we have so far listed two. The third is the effect of lawyers' work on the people who do the work, that is, the effect of role on self. For example, a rule that requires silence though it means that another will suffer injustice may cause discomfort to those who must obey it. As men and women, we consider it laudable to speak up to prevent injustice to others. As lawyers, we may be forbidden to do so. Can we reconcile these two positions, not intellectually or theoretically, but personally, within ourselves? A similar point can be made with regard to the rule that requires lawyers zealously to pursue the lawful goals of their clients, even if these goals (or the legal strategies to achieve them) offend the lawyer's values. Little has been written on the effect of role on self in the context of lawyers' work; we shall consider some of what there is in the first and final chapters and occasionally elsewhere in the book.

A Note on Sources

References in this text to the Code of Professional Responsibility (CPR) are to the 1970 Model Code as adopted by the American Bar Association. The code as it applies in the various states often differs from the model version. Furthermore, different states may opt for different changes from the model version. References to the Rules of Professional Conduct (RPC) are to the Model Rules as adopted by the American Bar Associ-

ation in August 1983. These Model Rules are the work of a commission, appointed by the then president of the ABA which was headed for most of its life by Robert J. Kutak of Omaha, Nebraska. As a result, the Model Rules are sometimes referred to as the "Kutak Rules" or the "Kutak Code." Mr. Kutak died before final adoption of the Model Rules by the ABA House of Delegates. For interest-analyses of the Model Code and Model Rules see, respectively, Morgan, *The Evolving Concept of Professional Responsibility*, 90 Harv. L. Rev. 702 (1977), and Gillers, *What We Talked About When We Talked About Ethics, A Critical View of the Model Rules*, 46 Ohio St. L.J. — (1985).

Mr. Kutak's commission proposed several drafts of the Model Rules between the time of its creation and the acceptance of the final draft by the House of Delegates in August 1983. Occasionally, we will cite to and excerpt sections from one of the publicly released drafts of the proposed Model Rules. These drafts are dated January 30, 1980, May 30, 1981, and June 30, 1982, respectively. We will especially refer to them when the substance of a proposed rule differs significantly from the corresponding rule finally adopted by the ABA in 1983, or where there is no corresponding rule adopted by the ABA.*

Different jurisdictions accord the code varying degrees of authority. The New York Court of Appeals, for example, has ruled that the code does not have "the status of decisional or statutory law." But the court has also said that "~~the courts should not denigrate [the code] by indifference.~~" *In re Estate of Weinstock*, 40 N.Y.2d 1, 351 N.E.2d 647, 386 N.Y.S.2d 1 (1976). See also *New York Criminal and Civil Courts Bar Assn. v. Jacoby*, 61 N.Y.2d 130, 136, 460 N.E.2d 1325, 1327, 412 N.Y.S.2d 890, 893 (1984). On the other hand, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has ruled that the code has "~~the force of statutory rules of conduct for lawyers.~~" *Slater v. Rimar*, 462 Pa. 138, 338 A.2d 584 (1975). Federal courts often rely on code provisions, although it is sometimes said that there is no obligation to do so. See, e.g., *Rosen v. NLRB*, 735 F.2d 564, 575 (D.C. Cir. 1984); *Freschi v. Grand Coal Venture*, 564 F. Supp. 414, 417 (S.D.N.Y. 1983): "~~There exists no statutory obligation upon the federal courts to apply the Code as enacted by the American Bar Association. Although the Code does set guidelines for the professional conduct of attorneys appearing before the federal bar the application of the Code is a part of the court's general supervisory authority to ensure fairness to all who bring their cause to the judiciary for resolution.~~" These references have treated the code, but presumably the Model Rules will enjoy a similar reception where adopted.

*For a discussion of the role and possible motives of the ABA in preparing and adopting ethics codes, see Abel, *Why Does the ABA Promulgate Ethical Rules?*, 59 Tex. L. Rev. 639 (1981); Rhode, *Why the ABA Bothers: A Functional Perspective on Professional Codes*, 59 Tex. L. Rev. 689 (1981); Frankel, *Why Does Professor Abel Work at a Useless Task?*, 59 Tex. L. Rev. 723 (1981).

Finally, students should be aware that in most jurisdictions, bar associations have ethics committees that will give an inquiring lawyer an opinion on the propriety of particular conduct the lawyer contemplates taking. In this way, a lawyer faced with an ethical dilemma can obtain the counsel of his or her colleagues with regard to the propriety of a proposed course of action. The American Bar Association's Committee on Ethics and Professional Responsibility, perhaps most prominently, also offers this service. We have used ABA opinions, and opinions of local and state bar associations, throughout this book.

There are many sources of information, both primary and secondary, on the legal and ethical regulation of lawyers and law practice. Some of the traditional ones are cases, law review articles, and treatises — but there are some other sources particular to this area. You will find a full bibliography at the end of the book.

Stephen Gillers
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Special Notice

Omissions and additions are indicated by ellipses and brackets. Omissions of citations to authorities are not indicated. All footnotes in edited material are from the original unless otherwise stated. Many footnotes have been omitted without indication.

Summary of Contents

A Preface to Students	xvii
A Note on Sources	xviii
Acknowledgments	xxi
Chapter I Are Lawyers Useful?	1
Chapter II The Availability and Cost of Legal Services	31
Chapter III Control of Quality	155
Chapter IV The Nature of the Relationship Between Attorney and Client	285
Chapter V Ethics in Advocacy	347
Chapter VI Conflicts of Interest	451
Chapter VII Special Masks Lawyers Wear: Selected Problems	523
Chapter VIII Free Speech Rights of Lawyers: Trial Publicity and Criticism of the Judiciary	617
Chapter IX Are Lawyers Used?	633
Vanessa H. Merton, Basic Bibliography for Research in Professional Ethics	651
Table of Cases	659
Index	665

Contents

A Preface to Students	xvii
A Note on Sources	xviii
Acknowledgments	xxi

Chapter I Are Lawyers Useful? 1

A. Critics: Friendly and Not So	3
Jerold S. Auerbach, Welcome to Litigation	3
Lawrence M. Friedman, A History of American Law	6
Jimmy Carter, Speech to the Los Angeles Bar Association	8
Derek Bok, 1981-1982 Report to the Harvard University Board of Overseers	12
Hyman Rickover, Lawyers Versus Society	16
Russell Baker, Lawyers for Cars	19
B. Defenders	20
Simon H. Rifkind, The Lawyer's Role and Responsibility in Modern Society	21
Irving R. Kaufman, Utopia Without Lawyers?	25
Charles Fried, The Artificial Reason of the Law or: What Lawyers Know	27
Questions 1.1 to 1.3	29

Chapter II The Availability and Cost of Legal Services 31

A. The Cost of Legal Services: Ethics and Money	31
1. Professional Advertising	31
<i>Bates v. State Bar of Arizona</i>	32

	<i>In re R. M. J.</i>	41
	Questions 2.1 to 2.4	46
	Generic Advertisements for Lawyers	47
	Tamar Lewin, Generic Ads on TV	
	Promoting Lawyers	47
	Questions 2.5 to 2.10	49
2.	Solicitation in General	52
a.	“Direct” Solicitation	52
	<i>Ohralik v. Ohio State Bar Assn.</i>	54
	<i>Matter of von Wiegen</i>	61
	Questions 2.11 to 2.14	65
b.	Solicitation Through Intermediaries	66
	<i>Matter of Alessi</i>	66
	Questions 2.15 and 2.16	74
	Notes on Further Developments in	
	Advertising and Solicitation	74
c.	The British View	
	<i>Castanho v. Brown and Root</i>	79
3.	Solicitation by Public Interest and Class Action	
	Lawyers	83
	<i>In re Primus</i>	83
	Questions 2.17 to 2.20	90
	Communication with Class Members	91
4.	Unauthorized Practice of Law	92
	<i>State Bar v. Cramer</i>	93
	<i>Hackin v. State</i>	100
	Notes	102
	Questions 2.21 and 2.22	107
5.	Group Legal Services	108
	Legislative History	109
	<i>NAACP v. Button</i>	111
	<i>Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen v. Virginia</i>	
	<i>State Bar</i>	114
	Note	117
	<i>United Mine Workers of America v. Illinois</i>	
	<i>State Bar Association</i>	117
	<i>United Transportation Union v. State Bar of</i>	
	<i>Michigan</i>	120
	Notes on Group Practice	124
	Questions 2.23 to 2.27	127
6.	Minimum Fee Schedules	128
	<i>Goldfarb v. Virginia State Bar</i>	128
	Note on Further Developments	
	Regarding Professional Regulation and	
	Antitrust Laws	132
	Questions 2.28 and 2.29	133

7. Specialization	134
<i>In re Johnson</i>	134
Note on Certification and Specialization Plans	136
B. The Price of a Legal Service	137
1. The Role of the Marketplace	137
<i>Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison v. Telex</i>	138
Questions 2.30 and 2.31	142
2. Controls on the Marketplace	143
<i>Bushman v. State Bar of California</i>	144
Questions 2.32 to 2.34	147
Notes on Legal Fees	148
Questions 2.35 and 2.36	149
3. Division of Fees	150
Question 2.37	151
 Chapter III Control of Quality	 155
A. Admission to the Bar	156
1. Geographical Restrictions	156
<i>Matter of Gordon</i>	157
2. Bar Examinations and Educational Requirements	160
Isaac Shapiro, Japan: Land of Law Graduates, If Not Lawyers	162
3. Character Tests	163
<i>Application of Ronwin</i>	164
<i>Application of William W. Gahan</i>	168
Questions 3.1 to 3.4	171
<i>Cord v. Gibb</i>	172
Question 3.5	174
<i>Law Students Civil Rights Research Council v. Wadmond</i>	174
Questions 3.6 to 3.8	181
4. Frequently Cited Grounds for Delaying or Denying Admission to the Bar	182
a. Criminal Acts or Convictions	182
b. Lack of Candor in the Application Process	185
c. Dishonesty or Lack of Integrity in Academic and Related Settings	186
d. Mental Health	188
e. Factors in an Applicant's Private Life	188
Questions 3.9 to 3.11	190
5. Attorney Discipline for Preadmission Conduct	191
6. Procedures Regarding Character Inquiry	192

7. Admission in a Federal System	192
<i>Matter of Roberts</i>	193
Question 3.12	196
Note	196
Admission by Reciprocity	196
B. The Transient Lawyer: Local Interests or a National Bar?	197
1. Admission <i>Pro Hac Vice</i>	198
<i>Leis v. Flynt</i>	198
Questions 3.13 to 3.15	206
<i>Ford v. Israel</i>	207
<i>Hahn v. Boeing Co.</i>	209
Notes on <i>Pro Hac Vice</i> Admission	212
2. Services Other Than Litigation	214
<i>Lozoff v. Shore Heights</i>	214
Question 3.16	216
Multistate Practices and Law Firm Stationery and Names	217
C. The Ethical Duty of Competence	219
Question 3.17	221
D. Malpractice	222
1. Liability to Clients	222
<i>Togstad v. Vesely, Otto, Miller & Keefe</i>	222
Notes on Issues in Legal Malpractice Cases	229
Questions 3.18 to 3.20	232
Violation of Ethical Rules as a Basis for Attorney Liability to Clients or Third Parties	234
Question 3.21	235
2. Liability to Third Persons	235
<i>Pelham v. Griesheimer</i>	235
Questions 3.22 and 3.23	239
Further on Attorney Malpractice Liability to Persons Other Than His or Her Client	239
Questions 3.24 and 3.25	242
E. Discipline	243
1. Types of Discipline	243
2. Acts Justifying Discipline and Defenses	244
<i>Matter of Lurie</i>	244
<i>Matter of Colin</i>	247
Notes	248
Questions 3.26 to 3.29	249
3. Procedures for Discipline	251
<i>In re Ruffalo</i>	251
Notes on Disciplinary Procedures	255

4. Readmission	257
5. Discipline of an Attorney Who Has Been Disciplined by Another Jurisdiction	258
a. Federal-State and State-State Discipline	258
b. Supreme Court Admissions as Affected by State Discipline	260
F. Continuing Legal Education	261
G. Constitutional Protection in Criminal Cases: Effective Assistance of Counsel	262
<i>Strickland v. Washington</i>	264
Notes	277
Questions 3.30 to 3.36	280

Chapter IV The Nature of the Relationship Between Attorney and Client 285

A. Confidentiality	287
<i>In re James M. Pool</i>	289
Note	291
Question 4.1	291
New York State Opinion 479	291
New York State Opinion 486	295
<i>Upjohn Co. v. United States</i>	297
Note on United States v. Arthur Young & Co.	303
Questions 4.2 and 4.3	305
B. The Lawyer as Agent	306
<i>Cine Forty-Second Street Theatre v. Allied Artists Pictures</i>	306
<i>McLhinney v. Lansdell Corp. of Maryland</i>	307
Notes	308
Questions 4.4 and 4.5	309
C. The Lawyer as Fiduciary	310
D. The Lawyer's Duties of Loyalty and Diligence	311
<i>Doyle v. State Bar</i>	313
Restrictions on Lay Ownership and Control of Law Firms	314
E. The Lawyer's Obligation to Inform	316
Mark Spiegel, Lawyering and Client Decisionmaking: Informed Consent and the Legal System	317
F. Is There an Emerging Right of Informed Consent?	319
<i>Olfe v. Gordon</i>	319