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Ethical Norms in Science

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National Science Foundation

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Western Michigan University

Center for the
Study of
Ethics in
Society



**ETHICAL NORMS IN
SCIENCE**

**Rachelle D. Hollander
National Science Foundation**

**Papers Presented to the Center
Vol. 1, No. 1
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**Center for the Study of Ethics in
Society
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008**

The purpose of WMU's Center for the Study of Ethics is to encourage and support research, teaching, and service to the university and community in areas of applied and professional ethics. These areas include, but are not restricted to: business, education, engineering, government, health and human services, law, media, medicine, science and technology.

Founded 1985

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The Center for the Study of Ethics in Society was established in the Fall of 1985. It evolved from the efforts of an interdisciplinary group of faculty to work together in examining ethical issues related to their teaching and research interests. Recognizing that the study of applied ethics is not the province of any single academic discipline, members of the group quickly recognized the value of sharing their concerns and reflections with each other. They also recognized that even more could be learned through a forum open to students and members of the general public.

A central activity of the Center during its first two years has been its series of public presentations. A wide range of areas of ethical concern have been addressed: medicine; engineering; business; journalism; media; agriculture; and education. More specific topics discussed have included: making critical medical decisions; product liability; environmental safety; affirmative action; appropriate and inappropriate scientific research; organizational ethics; whistle-blowing; moral development; and ethics in educational institutions.

Now in its third year of existence, the Center continues its series of public presentations. In order to share with a wider audience some of the outstanding presentations made during its first two years, the Center is initiating this series of publications. We hope you will find these publications helpful in thinking through some of the vital and complex ethical issues now facing society.

The Center has benefited from the participation, support, and encouragement of many faculty and administrators at Western Michigan University. We are grateful to them all.

We especially wish to express our appreciation to WMU President Diether Haenicke, without whose strong support the publication of this series would not have been possible.

Michael S. Pritchard
Director

From President Diether Haenicke, WMU

In recent years, we have witnessed across American campuses a resurgent interest in problems relating to applied ethics. Students, faculty, and professionals alike outside the academy are seeking answers to questions posed by political decision makers, by businessmen, lawyers, physicians, and academics. The multitude of existing questions reflects not only an increasingly complex technical, political and professional environment, it also indicates a widespread sense that ethical concerns have, in the past, not been sufficiently integrated into some of our societal decision-making processes and that our professional and personal decisions and practices need to be subjected to a careful philosophical examination of, simply put, what is good and bad.

The renewed interest in applied ethics on our campuses has spawned one of the most vigorous, provocative and fruitful debates academia has encountered in many years. The discussion has attracted genuine interest and involved argument from a wide variety of academic disciplines and has drawn many professional practitioners back into the campus life and its intellectual disputations. At Western Michigan University the Ethics Center plays the vital, coordinating role for this important academic endeavor. Founded by faculty members from rather dissimilar departments, the Ethics Center represents one of the few truly successful interdisciplinary programs of the University. In its willingness to examine through public lectures, discussions, and publications the ethical questions faced in politics, business, engineering, medicine, law, and other professions, it provides, beyond the realm of the campus, a valuable and constructive public service to the larger community.

Although still young, the Ethics Center has made its impact on our campus. The University looks forward to the Center's continued practical contributions to an essential and productive scholarly debate.

The notion that pursuit of truth was in and of itself enough to assure beneficial ends and allow scientists the autonomy to govern themselves was probably a myth, perhaps a benign one, while it was in effect. But its power as a myth--over scientists and others--seems to be rapidly coming to an end. Just now, both internal and external threats to open inquiry are a topic of growing concern. These threats seem to take many forms: scientific fraud, disputes over patents and access to data, restriction of communication for national security or commercial purposes, are some examples. This paper describes current attitudes and responses of scientists, journal editors, and universities to a few of these controversies.

Concerns about inquiry are not limited to scientists. They are topics of media attention and Congressional hearings. This is not surprising, because science is now big business, and it's a business operated from the public purse. Lakoff reminds us that science is a social enterprise. A great many individuals and institutions are involved. Each bears some degree of responsibility for what happens, and for what doesn't happen. Responsibility is diffuse, but nonetheless present. It encompasses all of us, and public opinion plays a part. The debates over creationism or using animals in research provide some illustrations.

Public interest is also not surprising, because most all of us are aware that scientific and engineering work has had and will continue to have profound

MEMBERSHIP

Membership in the Ethics Center is open to anyone interested. There is no membership fee.

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Please enroll me as a member of the WMU Center for the Study of Ethics in Society.

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During 1987-88, the Center plans to publish five papers previously presented to the Center. Distribution will be free to members. In the future, the Center plans to publish four presentations a year.

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