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Center for the Study of Ethics in Society: Celebrating 25 Years

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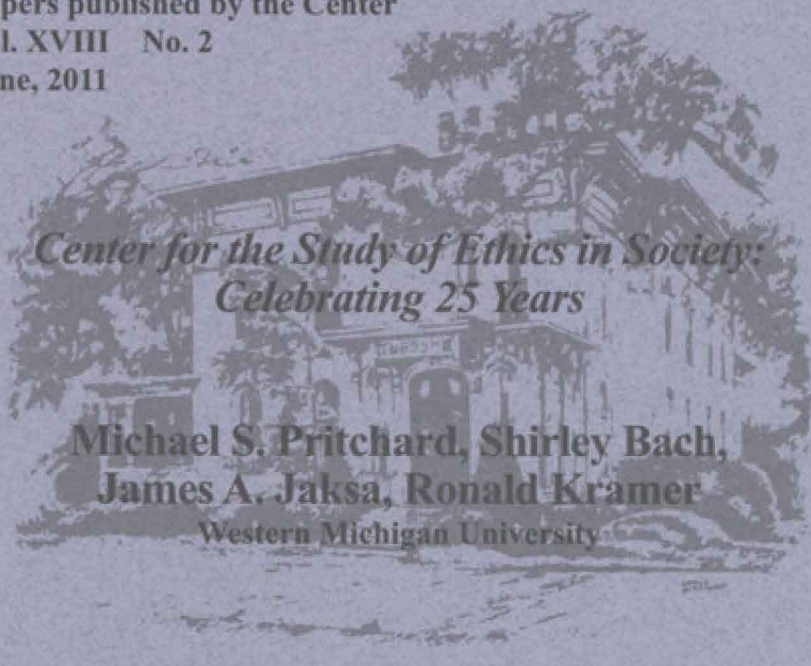
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Center for the Study of Ethics in Society

Center for the Study of Ethics in Society:
Celebrating 25 Years

Michael S. Pritchard, Shirley Bach,
James A. Jaksa, Ronald Kramer
Western Michigan University

Center for the Study of Ethics in Society
Founded 1985

Western Michigan University
3024 Moore Hall
1903 West Michigan Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49008-5328

The purpose of WMU's Center for the Study of Ethics is to encourage and suppor 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.

Tel: 269-387-4397

ethicscenter@wmich.edu

Fax: 269-387-4389

http://www.wmich.edu/ethics

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Center for the Study of Ethics in Society: Celebrating 25 Years

Presented November 15, 2010

Dr. Michael S. Pritchard, Dr. Shirley Bach, Dr. James A. Jaksa, Dr. Ronald Kramer

Papers presented for the
Center for the Study of Ethics in Society
Western Michigan University

Dedication

For the first 25 years of WMU's Center for the Study of Ethics in Society, Joseph Ellin (Philosophy) volunteered his time to serve on the center's Executive Board. It was his original idea that we create a publication series featuring outstanding papers presented in the Ethics Center's programs. He served as Publication Editor from the inception of this series in 1986 until his passing in February 2011.

Although seriously ill during the last few years of his life, Joe remained active in the classroom. He actually taught more courses as an emeritus in the first semester after he retired than any semester during his long and illustrious career at WMU! Joe was one of the first Ph.D.s in Philosophy to teach at WMU. He came to WMU directly after receiving his Ph.D. from Yale in 1962. At that time, Philosophy and Religion were joined as one department. Joe became the first chair of the Department of Philosophy when Philosophy and Religion became two, independent departments in the late 1960s.

Joe had hoped to contribute to this issue his own thoughts about the role of the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society at WMU. However, his illness prevented him from completing this task.

This is the first issue in our publication series not overseen by Joe. We miss our friend, dedicated colleague, and endearing Socratic "gadfly." We dedicate this issue to him.

The Center for the Study of Ethics in Society at Twenty-Five

Michael S. Pritchard, Co-Director

Our Beginnings

In August 1985, nineteen faculty from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business, Engineering and Applied Sciences, General Studies, and Health and Human Services met for three days in the Bernhard Student Center to exchange ideas on the place of ethics in their teaching and research. At the time, this was a rather unusual endeavor. Coming from different disciplines, various members of this group had occasionally talked with each other about their shared interests in ethics; but, for the most part, this was more a matter of chance than planning.

In my own case, there were a few pivotal moments that prompted me to want a more structured environment for exploring ethical issues with people from disciplines other than my own, Philosophy. In the 1970s, Jim Jaksa (Communication) and I had served on the Faculty Senate together and often met on the tennis courts. Based on several of our casual conversations in between shots, I thought he might be interested in Sissela Bok's new book, *Lying: Deception in Public and Private Life* (Vintage Books, 1978). After reading it, he said to me, "It sure would be good to teach a course on that subject sometime." I agreed. So, for the next decade or so, Jim and I taught a course together on lying and deception, drawing our students from Communication and Philosophy, respectively. Not entirely satisfied with what we

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were reading, he and I eventually wrote a book together, *Ethics in Communication: Methods of Analysis* (Wadsworth, 1st ed. 1988, 2nd ed. 1994).

In the early 1980s, Shirley Bach (General Studies, Science Area) convinced me that I should get involved in research ethics by serving on WMU's Institutional Review Board (IRB), whose creation she had recently spearheaded. Then she and I got involved in WMU's Science for Citizens Center, initiated by Robert Kaufman (Political Science) with the support of the National Science Foundation. This eventually led to an Honors College course on ethics and risk that Shirley Bach and I organized, aided by Frank Wolf (Industrial Engineering), Larry Oppliger (Physics), and Mike Stoline (Mathematics/Statistics).

Each of these ventures marked significant departures from "business as usual" for the faculty involved. *Practical* ethics (e.g., medical ethics, research ethics, ethics in communication, engineering, political science, statistics, and even in philosophy) was not at the core of any standard discipline at the time. This seems to be true even today. So, each of us had to volunteer time beyond our usual teaching schedules to find time to work together.

However, in addition to creating interdisciplinary teaching opportunities, some of us discovered, largely by chance, that we had common research interests in ethics. In a casual conversation with Ron Kramer (Sociology/Criminal Justice), Jim Jaksa mentioned that he and I were using the Ford Pinto case in our team-taught ethics class. Ron replied that he, too, was interested in this case, adding that he had a file cabinet full of documents and notes on it—and that he had even attended court hearings in Winnimac, Indiana, where the Ford Motor Company had to defend itself against the charge of negligent homicide, as a corporation.

However, what finally convinced me that we should explore the idea of establishing an ethics center at WMU was a phone call I received from Jim Peterson (Sociology). Jim told me that he had learned from Professor Vivian Weil at the Illinois

Institute of Technology in Chicago that I was interested in whistleblowing. Jim and Dan Farrell (Management) were writing a teaching module on whistleblowing as a part of an engineering ethics series of publications she was editing. What a way to learn about a colleague's common research interest, I thought. Colleagues whose offices are only a good drive and a chip shot away from each other (both offices were built on or near where the old WMU "goat hills" golf course used to be) learn about their mutual interests only through the efforts of someone they know who teaches 135 miles away, in another state! There must be a better, less fortuitous, way of learning about such things, I thought. Shirley and Jim agreed.

So, in the summer of 1985, we decided to organize a faculty workshop. We composed an invitation list of twenty faculty whom we thought might have a serious enough interest in ethics to take time out from their summer vacations to explore common interests in ethics. Nineteen of those faculty showed up.

As luck would have it, Diether Haenicke, WMU's new president, spotted a few of us taking a short break from one of our sessions in the Bernhard Center. Curious to find out more about why so many faculty would spend their free time in late summer to talk about ethics, he joined us for one of those sessions and eagerly participated in our discussion. Seeing our new president as seriously engaged as we were by ethical issues boosted our confidence that this was the right time for our new endeavor. Before our workshop concluded, we decided to form the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society. This, we imagined, would be a place where faculty, students, and the larger community could regularly meet together to talk about significant ethical issues of the day.

We faced two immediate problems. First, although we had lots of enthusiasm, we had no money. Mike Moskovis, Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs, asked us if $3,000 would help. Delighted, we said, "Yes!" However, he added a caution, "Nothing interdisciplinary ever seems to last

around here." We took this as a challenge (perhaps even a rallying point) rather than as discouragement.

Fortunately, we had lots of friends at other colleges and universities. We invited several of them to visit us, offering to cover their travel costs. When we learned about ethics speakers visiting the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, or other nearby campuses, we invited them to take a side-trip to Kalamazoo. Pleading poverty, we offered to cover the additional travel costs for their side-trips and a small honorarium. We also encouraged "local talent" from WMU, Kalamazoo College, Nazareth College, and Kalamazoo's business and professional community to make public presentations—pro bono. Bolstered by our $3,000 start-up fund and lots of good will from our friends, our first year featured a robust series of public presentations, as well as some very enthusiastic study groups.

Our second problem was to find a home—a place within WMU that would be perceived as welcoming the participation of everyone, not just those in a particular department or college. Our first thought was that the Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, with its reach across the entire academic community, would be the ideal home. Provost Phil Denenfeld officially endorsed the establishment of the Ethics Center. However, he worried that providing us a home within his office would launch an avalanche of similar requests from across the university. So, he encouraged us to look elsewhere.

Fortunately, Laurel Grotzinger, Dean of the Graduate College, had recently written an article in her college's newsletter that stressed the importance of ethics in higher education. Although the graduate programs at that time did not span the entire university, their reach was broad; and Dean Grotzinger's message seemed as relevant to undergraduate as graduate education at WMU. So, Shirley Bach, Jim Jaksa, and I knocked on her door and outlined our ambitions, including our wanting to find a home in the Graduate College. Dean Grotzinger graciously welcomed us and became our most ardent advocate. Through her efforts, we were able to secure a modest, but stable budget to

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continue beyond our first year. For this we will always be grateful. Without her continued support, Mike Moskovis's initial reflections on the typical fate of interdisciplinary ventures at WMU might well have applied to us, as well.

In our second year, we paid President Haenicke a visit, reminding him of his impromptu participation in our summer workshop. We shared with him our wish to extend our reach by creating an "in-house" publication series of leading Ethics Center talks. The president offered us $5,000 in "one-time money" to establish the series. Apparently, he was pleased with the results, as this level of funding became a permanent feature of our annual budget. Joe Ellin (Philosophy) agreed to serve as the series editor, a position he held until he recently passed away.

In the early 1990s, shortly after Laurel Grotzinger resumed her career as a reference librarian in Waldo Library, we accepted Dean Douglas Ferraro's offer to sponsor us within the College of Arts and Sciences. This is where we happily reside today.

The Hastings Center Aims and Goals in Teaching Ethics at Thirty

So, what did we talk about during that workshop in the summer of 1985? Among other things, we spent quite a bit of time discussing what we thought the aims and goals of teaching ethics in higher education should be. Fortunately, this was a question that had been explored intensively several years earlier by the Hastings Center, a prominent New York ethics "thinktank".

In 1977, the Hastings Center assembled a large, diverse team of well-known ethics educators from around the country to pursue this question. At that time I was on leave from WMU, participating in a year-long National Endowment for the Humanities seminar on ethics, psychology and religion, held at Yale University. Yale's Gene Outka, director of our seminar, was

one of those educators invited to participate in the Hastings Center project. From time to time he asked members of our seminar what we thought the aims and goals of teaching ethics should be. My recollection is that, although various opinions were proffered, nothing close to a consensus emerged.

However, three years later the results of the Hastings Center group surfaced in a series of publications. 1980 marked the publication of *Ethics Teaching in Higher Education* (Plenum Press, 1980), edited by Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok, along with a set of monographs discussing teaching ethics in a variety of areas—business, engineering, journalism, law, medicine, philosophy , the social sciences, and so on. Despite the vast differences among the academic disciplines represented, consensus was reached on five basic aims and goals. These aims and goals were emphasized in each of the individual monographs on teaching ethics that emerged from the Hastings Center deliberations. The consensus was that efforts should be made to:

- Stimulate students' moral imagination
- Help students recognize moral issues
- Help students analyze key moral concepts and principles
- Stimulate students' sense of responsibility
- Help students deal effectively with moral ambiguity and disagreement

An especially noteworthy feature of these aims and goals is that students are not treated as if they are just beginning to engage with moral issues. They are regarded as already having some ability to engage their moral imagination. The aim is to stimulate it further. They, like the rest of us, sometimes need help recognizing moral issues, as the situations calling for moral reflection and decision-making cannot be expected to come to us with a warning light that says, "Here I am, a moral issue."

Too often, we recognize moral issues only after we have made choices that create additional moral problems (by lying, for

example, rather than meeting the problem head-on before complicating matters through deliberate deception). Urging that students receive some help in analyzing key moral concepts and principles does not presume that they have no prior acquaintance with these concepts and principles, only that their further analysis and clarification is needed. Stimulating students' sense of responsibility is different from trying to implant it. Again, what is called for is further stimulation of something that is presumed already to be there in students, but which will be engaged in contexts about which they have much to learn. Finally, it is assumed that students have already had some experience dealing with moral ambiguity and disagreement. Handling this effectively and well is another matter, however. In short, it is not moral indoctrination that the Hastings Center group called for. Rather, it advocated serious moral engagement, with consequent moral enlargement.

Another Hastings Center participant, philosopher Bernard Rosen (then at Ohio State University) once told me that he suggested another item for the list—the dispensability of the teacher. When students leave their courses, he commented, they cannot take their teachers with them. They will be on their own, deciding for themselves, if not by themselves. One of the aims in teaching ethics, said Rosen, should be to help students prepare themselves for the challenges of going on without their teachers. Although this did not end up on the Hastings Center list, Rosen observed that none of the participants objected to his suggestion.

Those of us who organized the summer workshop in 1985 benefited from being able to present these aims and goals to the participants for their consideration. I do not know to what extent they found these aims and goals appropriate or helpful enough to use them in their own teaching, but I have regularly borne them in mind in all my ethics courses since they were first published in 1980.

However, I need to qualify my last statement. Although I still present these aims and goals to my students, I have found over the years that my interpretation of what they mean has

undergone some changes. In what follows, I would like to discuss some of these modifications and refinements.

I begin with the fourth goal, stimulating students' sense of responsibility. My initial take on this goal was that it borders on the "preachy". How could I stimulate students' sense of responsibility? By a kind of moral "cheerleading"?—"Be good," "Do the right thing," "Don't be unethical or immoral," "Be responsible". Such admonitions hardly provide any insight into what taking them seriously might entail. Besides, preaching is hardly teaching—and interpreting the fourth goal in this way seems quite out of step with the other four, each of which seems central to critical thinking rather than moral cheerleading.

Initial discomfort with this fourth goal resulted my attempting to sneak around it. It occurred to me that if I simply focused on the other four that a student's sense of responsibility would, in fact, be aroused—without my having to mention it. I think I was right about this. However, as I later realized, there is a way in which I can engage students' sense of responsibility without being a moral cheerleader or moral preacher.

Here I enlist Calvin and Hobbes as aides. I am referring to the still popular, but now-retired, comic strip characters, not the 16th century theologian John Calvin, and the 17th century philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Six-year-old Calvin is what we might call a 'minimalist' when it comes to responsibility. After making his bed one day, Calvin is praised enthusiastically by his mother. Hobbes expresses surprise that Calvin's mom is so impressed by what he has done. Calvin replies, "I like to impress her by fulfilling the *least* of my obligations." Given his minimalist attitude, we might wonder how well Calvin has made his bed. It looks good on the outside, but how about the sheets underneath (assuming he has any)?

We can think of one's sense of responsibility as being somewhere along a spectrum. At the lower end of the spectrum is Calvin's minimalism. At the higher end is conscientiousness, or even going "above and beyond the call of duty". I ask students to speculate on what kind of professional (doctor, lawyer, engineer,

and so on) they think Calvin will become, assuming that he retains his minimalist attitude as an adult. Students can be invited to reflect for themselves on where on this spectrum of responsibility they would like to be in their careers, and what this is likely to require of them.

The other four Hastings Center goals similarly encourage students to think for themselves, with the teacher helping to facilitate this. Presenting case studies for students' consideration can be an effective way of stimulating their moral imagination. In my early years of teaching ethics in engineering, I had an ample supply of what I call "big news/bad news" stories to share with my engineering students. Many of them could be easily recognized by name—Pinto, Hyatt Regency Walkway, Chernobyl, Challenger,…. One need only watch the TV news or peruse any daily newspaper.

So, I thought, here's how to stimulate students' moral imagination. Mention one of these stories by name. Ask the students if these names are familiar to them. Watch nearly everyone raise a hand. Then invite them to reflect on the ethical issues these stories—typically issues about alleged wrongdoing. Or, I could start by asking students to think of ethics and the media. Soon I would hear all the familiar names I just mentioned—and more. Having linked ethics with familiar stories that had received media attention, the discussion could begin.

One problem with providing students with a steady diet of such cases is that very few, if any, of them will ever be involved in such "big news/bad news" stories. A second problem is that, by focusing so much on the negative, students might be led to conclude that ethics is largely a matter of wrongdoing and its avoidance (This seemed to be the primary association made by engineers Jim Jaksa and I interviewed when we asked them to talk about ethical matters in engineering practice.). Although ethics must focus much of its attention on the negative in this way, it is also important to attend to the positive—acting responsibly, rightly, and for the sake of making things better.

Unfortunately, this more positive dimension of ethics receives much less attention in the media. In part, this may be because stories of ethically commendable work may be seen as less exciting than stories of wrongdoing. Or it could be, in part, because we tend to take for granted much of the commendable work that is done for us (We expect our cars and cell phones to work well, our bridges to hold up well, our elevators to work safely and efficiently, and so on.).

Suppose, however, we shift our attention to engineers doing their work well—constructing safe buildings and bridges, designing safety improvements for the vehicles we drive, or developing recyclable packaging materials. Here the stories are likely to be less dramatic, but they may show engineers at work in ways that require much engineering imagination in order to accomplish their desired ends.

Notice that I said *engineering* imagination. Insofar as such imagination is necessary in supporting ethically desirable ends in engineering (such as safety, combined with efficiency and usefulness), I now see this as an essential part of the *moral* imagination of engineers. Although it may be focused directly on the technical dimensions of the problem, this is done against the background of the ethical responsibility of engineers to protect the health, safety, and welfare of those who will be affected by this work.

Whereas initially I conceived of the exercise of moral imagination as focusing explicitly and primarily on moral concepts and principles relevant to the work of engineers, I no longer think that this is so. The employment of the technical imagination of engineers in this way is as much a part of their moral imagination as is their employment of moral concepts and principles in framing their work. Acknowledging this in teaching engineering ethics is important in helping students see that ethics should be seen as an integral part of their major area of study (such as engineering) rather than simply an "add-on" from another area of study. The same point can be made about other professional areas, such as law, medicine, and social work—each

of which should be seen, ideally, as integrating ethics into its special professional domain.

Regarding the second Hastings Center goal, helping students recognize moral issues, I've already indicated that we cannot count on these issues announcing themselves as moral issues. Recognizing them in such terms is not always easy. Here is an illustration. Speaking with an audience of engineers and ethics teachers, an engineer presented a fictional case. Imagine, he said, that your job is to recommend the size of drainage pipe that should be used for a housing development nested in a rustic area just outside a modest sized city. The 50 or so homes are surrounded by a few forested hillsides. "What diameter do you think the drainage pipes for rain and snow overflow should have?" he asked us. Engineers and ethics teachers alike began to guess. "16 inches?" "24 inches?" "32 inches?" "40 inches?" Finally, one member of the audience asked, "What's this have to do with ethics?" "Yes," chorused much of the audience.

The engineer responded with some questions of his own. "What will this community need if, in a few years, many of the trees on the surrounding hills are cut down in order to make room for a shopping mall or another set of homes? This may result in much more water running down the hills than now, when there are trees, grass, and other foliage to absorb the rain and melted snow. Did you take that into account in your calculations?"

Some said they had. Others said they had not. Still others asked, "Why *should* we?" The point is that underlying the calculations are assumptions about the responsibilities of engineers (and developers) to "look down the road." What are they, and who should determine what they are? Once asked, these questions may be difficult to answer. Those who were concerned with what this little community might have to deal with, say, five years down the road might well have been exercising their moral imagination as they considered different possibilities. Whether or not anyone was explicitly thinking about the responsibilities of engineers in considering these possibilities, the speaker was now urging that this could, and should, be done.

Here is another fictional example to consider, one that can be used in pursuing the first three Hastings Center goals—and, with a slight modification, the fifth one as well. A young civil engineer works for the traffic and roads department of a county with a mix of urban and rural settings. The young engineer's supervisor tells him that as the fiscal year is coming to a close, there is a modest amount of money left in the budget for making some road improvements. The supervisor wants the engineer to recommend the best use of these remaining funds. The engineer is told to assume that this money will be swept up from the department at the end of the fiscal year if it is unspent, but he should not assume that the next fiscal year will provide additional funding for completing the recommended project. So, recommendations should be restricted to projects for which the current funds are adequate.

As the engineer looks around the county, he settles on two affordable projects that he thinks would be good. However, there is not enough money to do both. One project would be to make safety improvements at an urban intersection, the other at a rural intersection. Both intersections have had fatal accidents for the past several years—an average of two a year at the urban intersection, one at the rural intersection. Both also have had accidents resulting in injuries and property damage. Here is a rough breakdown of the comparative data:

	Urban Intersection	Rural Intersection
Daily traffic flow: major road	20,000 vehicles	4,000 vehicles
Daily traffic flow: minor road	5,000 vehicles	1,000 vehicles
Average no. fatalities per year	2	1
Average no. injuries per year	20	5

Data on the results of similar improvements made in other parts of the state, as well as adjoining states, indicate that making the improvement at the urban intersection will cut the in half the average number of fatalities per year. A 50% reduction in injuries can reasonably be expected, too. Similar percentage reductions at

the rural intersection can be expected if the improvement is made there instead.

The initial question for students is: Which of these two sites should the engineer recommend for safety improvements. Students in classes with whom I have discussed this question initially respond overwhelmingly in favor of the urban intersection. They say that this is not a difficult moral question—this, they say, is on the side of "the greater good," a distinctly utilitarian refrain. So, one might say, they have no difficulty recognizing this as a moral choice. But, given the obviousness they see in this choice, they do not see it as a moral *issue*.

However, at some point a few students will object that more should be said about the rural intersection. After all, isn't it the more dangerous intersection? Drivers who pass through it face a higher probability of being killed or injured than those who pass through the urban intersection. Once this observation is made, many see the moral landscape differently than before. Is it *fair*, they ask, for the county to prefer the safety of the many to the few, given that most of those who pass through either intersection are tax-paying members of the same community? How much worse, they ask, would the rural intersection have to be in order to take priority? If one relies only on the "numbers," overcoming the 4 to 1 advantage of the urban intersection would require a *much* higher incidence of fatalities and injuries at the rural intersection. "But," a student might now ask, "what is *fairness*, anyway—and why is that so important?" "Well," another might respond, "what is 'the greater good' without fairness?" This clearly takes us to the third Hastings Center goal, analyzing key moral concepts and principles. The way to this was the recognition of a moral issue (the second goal), and the exercise of moral imagination (the first goal).

A slight variation on this example can also take us to the fifth goal, dealing effectively with moral ambiguity and disagreement. Suppose that, as is often the case, it is a *group* of engineers who, together, need to recommend one of the improvements. Suppose, further, that there is initial disagreement

about which intersection to recommend. (Or we could also imagine initial disagreement about whether these are the two most promising possibilities.) How should these differences be resolved ("My way or no way" is not likely either to win the day or to provide the best solution, even if someone is able to force the issue in this way.)?

As I've said, I continue to use the Hastings Center aims and goals of teaching ethics in my classes. Beyond this, I would like to think that the Ethics Center programs and projects over its first 25 years have also contributed to furthering these ends, not just for students, but for everyone who has been involved in them. All of us are lifelong learners in ethics—together.

Reflections on the Role of the Ethics Center at WMU

Shirley Bach, Associate Director

When I think about what sparked my interest in the development of a university-wide Center that nurtured critical thinking about ethical issues in contemporary life, both in the classroom and in the community, I reflect on the 10 years preceding the birth of the Ethics Center 25 years ago. You will note that my role, and therefore my example, is heavily weighted on my prior interest in biology and medicine. First and foremost, I was energized by taking part in two interdisciplinary workshops sponsored by the Hastings Center, the first at Berkeley in 1973 on bioethics, and the second at Dartmouth on clinical medical ethics. This was a time when astounding discoveries were being made in medicine that had considerable potential for benefit as well as some problems:

-We could help infertile couples to have wanted children and we could help fertile individuals to avoid having unwanted children. Ethical issues were raised, for example, about the propriety of in vitro fertilization.

-We were investigating the role of genes in normal and abnormal development, hoping to prevent or ameliorate the effects of deleterious genes, both before and after birth. Questions arose about the special nature of genetic intervention.

-We were investigating different treatments for mental illness, both pharmaceutical and other novel interventions, directed at alternatives to long-term hospitalization. Questions were raised about the capacity

of children, as well as mentally ill adults, to consent to participate in such research. One dramatic case involved a proposed surgical intervention in the brain in order to treat sexual pathology.

-We could substitute a technological replacement (dialysis) for a failing human kidney, but issues arose about how to pay for the procedure as well as how to prioritize access when the need outgrew the supply. When kidney transplantation became another alternative to dialysis, to generate a supply of organs, ethical issues arose which tied together the need to develop a new definition of death with the supply of organs.

Investigative journalists and a few research scholars were bringing some unbelievable abuses to public attention as well as congressional attention (e.g. the Tuskegee syphilis experiments, where the effects of untreated syphilis were studied without the patients' knowledge that they were in a research study). Another less well known example was carried out at the Brooklyn Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital, where live cancer cells were injected into elderly ill patients in order to study the rate of rejection of foreign tissue.

While some reasonable investigations into these abuses were being launched, there were also some uncivil and unreasonable protests being launched. Just one example, among many, involved a scientist, with his leg in a cast and on crutches, being drenched with ice water as he attempted to present a talk on sociobiology. There were reports of researchers, studying the genetic basis of certain behaviors, being threatened in order to thwart the direction of the research. Some of the recent political rhetoric directed at biomedical technology reminds me of those earlier protests.

It seemed time then to have a forum for discussion of these compelling and important issues, issues where good people may disagree, but where the science and the ethics could be

explored in an atmosphere of civility and reason. That forum is the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society.

This surely is the season to express gratitude, so I wanted to say that I am grateful to have had the opportunity both to develop courses in medical and health care ethics and also to work toward the formation of the Western Michigan University Ethics Center. The two often overlap since students in my courses were encouraged, perhaps even bribed, to attend programs of the Ethics Center.

Many of the programs we sponsored in biomedical ethics were done in collaboration with Bronson and Borgess Hospitals and I hope that we will continue this cooperation, especially as we work toward establishment of our medical school.

Topics for public presentations, in the fields of my interest ranged across the health care spectrum:

- Should Nazi doctors' data be used for potential good? (Arthur Elstein)
- Placebo Surgery: Moral Muddle or Praiseworthy Practice? (Jonathan Hopkins)
- Must We Ration Health Care? (Arthur Caplan)
- Single Payer Health Insurance (James Mitchiner)
- Dogs that Aren't Barking: Under-explored Issues in Health Care Ethics (Howard Brody)
- Americans Who Cared: The Rescue Work of Varian Fry (Pierre Sauvage)
- Professional Medical Ethics (Edmund Pellegrino)
- Medical Mistakes and Professional Responsibility

Other invited speakers include John Stone, Adrienne Asch, Joanne Lynn, Mark Siegler, Tom Beauchamp, and more. Other faculty involved in the Ethics Center can surely add many more topics and many other speakers to our list of public programs, but I started this discussion by saying that I would limit my reflection to programs in the areas of my special

interests, so I must apologize for not including highlights in programming in journalism, engineering, business,

One of my favorite sayings by Mark Twain which continues to guide me is: "Always do right. This will gratify some of the people and astonish the rest."

My hope is to continue to explore what is right, the basis for determining what is right, and to be able to explore this in an atmosphere of civility, scholarship, and reason. Hopefully the Ethics Center will play an important role in the development of Medical School programs, since ethics is at the heart and soul of good medicine.

Reflections on the Role of the Ethics Center at WMU

James A. Jaksa, Retired Associate Director

In the late 70s, Mike Pritchard and I developed an interest in communication ethics, and we convinced our departments to allow us to team teach a course. After team teaching the course for a few years, Mike and I developed our own text book, *Communication Ethics: Methods of Analysis*. In 1984, we joined with others in establishing a Communication Ethics Commission within the national Speech Communication Association (SCA). Simultaneously, we discovered that there was a growing interest in ethics among faculty in a wide range of disciplines. So, in the summer of 1985, a group of nearly 20 WMU faculty from across the university met for several days to discuss their teaching and research interests in ethics. This gathering resulted in establishing The Center for the Study of Ethics in Society, bringing together faculty from many disciplines who were interested in sharing ideas about teaching ethics and in working together on a variety of ethics projects that crossed traditional disciplinary lines.

As I reflect on the role of the Ethics Center at WMU, it brings back many pleasant memories. The Ethics Center Board, itself, was an interdisciplinary group from sociology, social work, business, engineering, philosophy, communication, educational leadership, women's studies, and English. Our discussions were lively as we planned programs and publications of Ethics Center presentations, considered development of grant proposals, organized workshops, and so on. So, of course, the Center has sponsored many events, and its range of activities has been vast. Thus, I have chosen to reflect, more specifically, on my own

activities and how they affected my department, the university, and my profession.

Ethics in communication has always been an important part of the discipline, so its concern was pretty much ingrained in what I was teaching and researching. But it was the stimulation of "Watergate" that created a turn of events which affected my career in meaningful ways. It was at our weekly tennis gatherings that Mike Pritchard and I would bemoan what was happening in the Nixon administration. "Could you believe what Nixon said— or Haldeman, or Ehrlichman, or Dean?" Then one week, Mike came to tennis and handed me a little book and said, "Read this. I think we might be able to team-teach a course together." The book was Sissala Bok's *Lying:Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*.

We were able to team teach an upper division, interdisciplinary course in communication ethics, open to students in the Department of Communication and the Department of Philosophy, and to others across the curriculum. We used Bok's book and a set of readings. The course was lively, exciting, and certainly fulfilling for Mike and me. As noted above, we decided to write our own book, *Communication Ethics:Methods of Analysis*, featuring the Hastings Center list of goals in teaching ethics, ethical and communication principles, and a heavy dose of case studies, such as Watergate, the Challenger space-shuttle explosion, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster, and a number of interpersonal communication cases. We continued to team-teach the course for several years. I also taught two different ethics related courses on the undergraduate and graduate levels in the Department of Communication.

Mike and I began offering communication ethics workshops and seminars, presented papers at various communication conferences, including the Speech Communication Association annual meetings. In 1984, my petition to form a Communication Ethics Commission in SCA, supported by 131 members, was approved by the Legislative

Council, thus formalizing SCA's commitment to the study of ethical communication. Although our original intention was to have "a handful of colleagues to get together for a couple of days," we modified our plans and organized the first National Communication Ethics Conference to be held at Michigan State University's Gull Lake Conference Center.

Beginning in 1990, eight biannual summer conferences were held at the Gull Lake center beginning in 1990. They were co-sponsored by WMU's Department of Communication, the Ethics Center, the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Communication Ethics Commission of SCA. Over the years about 60-75 attendees participated from throughout the nation. The purpose of the conference was to promote research and teaching related to ethical issues and standards in all aspects of human communication, as well as to facilitate exchange among teachers and scholars of communication ethics.

Conference formats included a variety of plenary sessions, including competitive papers, case studies, roundtable presentations, and discussion groups within various areas of communication—interpersonal, small groups, organizational, rhetoric and public address, argumentation and persuasion, and mass media, freedom of speech, the history of communication ethics, and communication ethics teaching methodologies.

The Conference Proceedings were published by our ethics center. Mike and I also edited a book, *Responsible Communication: Ethical Issues in Business, Industry, and the Professions*, a book which evolved from conference seminars.

Each summer conference featured a Scholar in Residence. Scholars included StephenToulmin (Northwestern), W. Charles Redding (Purdue), Franklyn Haiman (Northwestern), Julia Wood (North Carolina), Josina Makau (Ohio State), J. Vernon Jensen (Minnesota), Richard Johannessen (Northern Illinois), and Clifford Christians (Illinois).

I retired in 1996. My successor in the Department of Communication was Sandra Borden. She continues to teach a communication ethics course in the department, is now Co-

Director of the Ethics Center, coaches the WMU Ethics Bowl team, and was co-director of the National Communication Ethics Conference (until it moved to Duquesne University due to space limitations at WMU). Recently, Sandy won a prestigious national award—the 2008 Clifford G. Christians Ethics Research Award for her book *Journalism as Practice: MacIntyre, Virtue Ethics, and the Press.*

Reflections on the 25th Anniversary of the WMU Center for the Study of Ethics in Society

Ronald Kramer, Executive Board

I have been a member of the Executive Board of the WMU Center for the Study of Ethics from its inception. As a sociological criminologist who specializes in the study of organizational (corporate and government) crimes, it seemed a natural fit for me. Over the years, I have benefited greatly from the interdisciplinary collaboration that the Center fosters so well. One such collaboration had a significant impact on my work as a criminologist.

In the early 1980s I was working on an integrated theoretical model to explain organizational crimes such as the Ford Pinto case. I presented the model at an Ethics Center presentation in early 1986. After the presentation, fellow board member Jim Jaksa approached me and told me that he thought my model would apply well to the recent explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*. I didn't think any more about it at the time, but Jim persisted with his suggestion. Then, when I read the report of the Presidential Commission on the *Challenger* explosion, I realized that Jim was really on to something. Thanks to Jim, I started doing research on the *Challenger* case and eventually he and I collaborated on a paper titled "The Space Shuttle Disaster: Ethical Issues in Organizational Decision-Making." We first presented the paper in October 1986 at the Fall Conference of the Michigan Association of Speech Communication in Ann Arbor. The paper was selected as a showcase program presentation for the April 1987 joint meeting of the Central States Speech Association and the Southern Speech Communication Association in St. Louis, Missouri. A revised

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version of that paper, with Mike Pritchard now on board as a co-author, was eventually published as "Ethics in Organizations: The *Challenger* Explosion" in Jaksa and Pritchard's *Communication Ethics: Methods of Analysis* (Wadsworth, 1994) and reprinted in their *Responsible Communication: Ethical Issues in Business, Industry, and the Professions* (Hampton Press, 1996).

I continued to research the *Challenger* case and again, the Center provided an important assist. Roger Boisjoly, the whistle-blowing engineer from Morton Thiokol came to WMU to give an Ethics Center lecture on the Challenger and engineering ethics. While he was on campus, I was able to sit down with him and conduct a lengthy interview. The *Challenger* case study eventually led me to develop the concept of *state-corporate crime* (corporations and states acting together to produce a harm) since this incident involved an interaction between a business corporation (Morton Thiokol) and a government agency (NASA). I presented a paper on the *Challenger* as state-corporate crime in 1990 at a large conference at Indiana University celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of criminologist Edwin Sutherland's creation of the concept of white-collar crime. I was fortunate to have this paper selected for publication in a book that grew out of the conference (*White Collar Crime Reconsidered*, edited by Schlegel and Weisburd in 1992). This publication also drew a lot of attention and my work on the *Challenger* explosion has been discussed in a number of introductory criminology and white-collar crime textbooks.

Along with criminologist Ray Michalowski and a number of my graduate students, I continued to develop the concept of state-corporate crime. Dave Kauzlarich and I analyzed the radiation poisoning that occurred near U.S. nuclear weapons production facilities as a form of state-corporate crime (published in the *Journal of Human Justice* in 1993). The concept of state-corporate crime caught on within the field of organizational crime, generated a lot of discussion, and spurred the production of a substantial body of criminological research. Many of these case studies explicitly used the integrated theoretical model that I

had developed earlier and refined with Ray Michalowski. Eventually, Ray and I gathered much of this research together in the book *State-Corporate Crime: Wrongdoing at the Intersection of Business and Government* (published by Rutgers University Press in 2006). The topic of state-corporate crime is now widely recognized within criminology. It is presented in many introductory criminology textbooks and discussed in most books on white-collar crime. It has also been featured in a number of handbooks and encyclopedias in the field of criminology. The development of the concept and theory of state-corporate crime has been my most important contribution to the field of criminology to date, and it all started with my presentation to the Ethics Center, Jim Jaksa's persistence in suggesting that I apply my model to the *Challenger* case, and the collaborative work Jim and Mike and I engaged in under the auspices of the Center.

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