


Newsletter: The Center for Professional Ethics, Fall 1996

Case Western Reserve University

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the
Center
for
Professional **NEWSLETTER**
Ethics at Case Western Reserve University

FALL 1996

DIRECTOR'S CORNER by Robert P. Lawry

I look forward to reading the Sunday papers. I especially like to read the usually more thoughtful articles that appear in the magazine sections. The New York Times Magazine for August 11, 1996, carried an article by Garry Wills on the legacy of Ronald Reagan that I could not help sharing with friends because it was so insightful and thought-provoking. Occasionally, however, an article ruins my weekend. Alison Bass' piece in the September 1, 1996, Sunday Magazine section of the Plain Dealer ruined an entire week. I am writing this at week's end to purge from my being the experience of reading the article.

The article was called Lies and Damn Lies. It reported on several recent studies which purportedly challenged the point of view on lying set forth by Sissela Bok in her path-breaking 1978 book, Lying: Moral Choices in Private and Public Life. I say "purportedly" because it was not easy to tell the precise nature of the challenge. In the first place, Bok's book was a work of philosophy, one of the first major works in the then comparatively new field of practical ethics. Using philosophically grounded arguments but not relying on a specific moral theory, Bok sets out arguments for and against "lying" in a wide variety of circumstances and situations. The authors Bass cites as challenging Bok's position are, mostly, though not exclusively, psychologists.

It is hard to tell from the article how wide-ranging the psychological and psycho-social studies were, and even harder to assess precisely how the findings of those studies challenged Sissela Bok's work. It is not that psychology is irrelevant to moral argument, but the way in which the data is used is crucial. My dismay was, firstly, that I couldn't tell from the article how the data was being used. Compounding the dismay, of course, was the failure to recognize the virtues and limitations of any distinct intellectual discipline. The article read to me as if there were no distinctions to be made between philosophy and psychology. Thus, some of the quotations used to assert that Bok was somehow wrong in her judgment that very few lies can be morally justified were ... well, nutty.

For example, it was asserted that Clarence Thomas had to lie about any "social interest" he had in Anita Hill. Why? The argument seemed to be that the situation gave Thomas no way out except to lie. Presumably this means if you want a position and the only way to get it is to lie, then lying is OK. After all it was society's fault somehow that you were put in such a position. Is this a moral argument? I hope no one thinks so; but I fear it is just the kind of thing that passes muster in the popular press.

Another so-called argument cited is as follows. Those who "engage in the art of

deception ... most skillfully ... are often very successful in relationships, on the job, and in public office." This is offered not as a descriptive statement, but as moral advice.

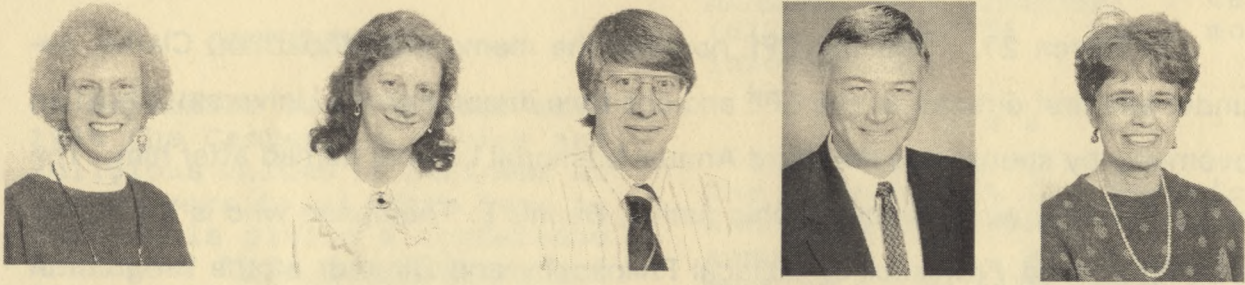
Another gem is this, from one of the researchers: "Lying is a social skill - we do it to coat social interactions and maintain good relations with others. What I've come to realize is that everyone has their own truth." Again, this is offered as a piece of moral wisdom.

No one denies that some people lie to get ahead in this competitive world. No one denies that the skillful deceivers may just wind up with more money or power than others who are more honest. But that is exactly the point of the moral enterprise. If we would not ever be embarrassed by telling the truth or if we were assured of every advantage by not lying, who would not be a paradigm of virtue? You'd be a fool to lie. But life is more complicated than that, and the moral enterprise is part of the complication. Why can't the Sunday papers say that?

1525 - CPE Summer Ethics Fellowship Program Off to a Great Start

June, 1996 marked the beginning of a remarkable turn of events for the Center for Professional Ethics. That was when 16 professors at CWRU (see pictures next page) from extremely diverse backgrounds attended the first of two Summer Ethics Fellowship Programs. The intent of the program, which is funded by a \$200,000 grant by the 1525 Foundation, is to intensify the knowledge of ethics among the university faculty, enabling them to incorporate ethics into courses in their own disciplines, thereby increasing the ethical awareness of our faculty and students as well. This month long institute dedicated the first two weeks to providing an overview of moral vocabulary, argument and traditions. The third week offered a feminist critique of the western philosophical tradition in ethics and an examination of paradigm shifts in moral thought. In addition, specific issues in Genetics and End of Life Decisions were investigated. The program came to a close with a week on Pedagogy and Curriculum, dealing with how to bridge the gap between philosophical ethics and classroom teaching. The program concluded with a broad-based discussion of "The Good Life." With the assistance of seven distinguished teaching faculty (Barbara Daly, School of Nursing, CWRU; William Deal, Religion Department, CWRU; Barbara Krasner, Philosophy Department, CWRU; Ed Lawry, Philosophy Department, Oklahoma State University; Robert Lawry, Director, Center for Professional Ethics, CWRU; Thomas Murray, Director, Center for Biomedical Ethics, CWRU; and Stephen Post, Center for Biomedical Ethics, CWRU) the sessions were characterized by dialogue, stimulating conversation and debate. It was a very collegial enterprise. The CPE is looking forward to the second Summer Ethics Fellowship Program scheduled for June, 1997. With the support and input of the 1996 Ethics Fellows, the Center hopes to make next year's program just as successful.

The 1996 1525 - CPE Summer Ethics Fellows



(Left to right) Sarah Andrews, Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences; Margaret Cicirella, Nutrition; Christopher Cullis, Biology; Mikhail Gratchev, Management of Policy Studies; Gladys Haddad, American Studies.



(Left to right) Aaron Jennings, Civil Engineering; Eric Kodish, Pediatrics and Biomedical Ethics; David Matthiesen, Materials Sciences & Engineering; Peter McCall, Geology; Beth McGee, Theater Arts; Jenifer Neils, Art History & Art.



(Left to right) Joseph Routman, Communication Sciences; Charles Rozek, Biology; Marilyn Samuels, English; Sree Sreenath, Systems Control & Industrial Engineering; Katherine Wisner, Psychiatry & Reproductive Medicine.

The CPE would like to take this opportunity to thank those of you who helped to make this year so successful:

The 1525 Foundation; John Bassett, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, CWRU; Susan Jaros, Associate VP, Development and Alumni Affairs, CWRU; The 1525 - CPE Summer Ethics Fellowship Program Teaching Faculty; The 1996 Summer Ethics Fellows; and, as usual, our members, guest lecturers, program attendees and Newsletter readers.

Thanks again for all your support!

DENNIS F. THOMPSON VISITS CAMPUS

On March 27, 1996 the CPE honored the memory of Robert W. Clarke, co-founder and first director of the CPE and one time director of the University Christian Movement, by sponsoring the Third Annual Memorial Lecture named after him. The keynote speaker was Hamilton, Ohio native, Dennis F. Thompson who is the Alfred North Whitehead Professor of Political Philosophy and Director of the Program in Ethics and The Professions at Harvard University. In addition to having held several prestigious appointments, Professor Thompson has published numerous books, monographs and articles. His lecture titled "**The Place of Ethics in the University**" took place in the beautiful George S. Dively Executive Building. By incorporating his vast knowledge and experiences into his speech, he kept a crowd of over 100 people captivated. Following a brief question and answer period, there was a reception to thank Professor Thompson for a job well done and to recognize the 16 university professors accepted into the first Summer Ethics Fellowship Program. The event was deemed a great success by all involved.

Earlier in the day, Professor Thompson met with President Pytte, Trustees from the 1525 Foundation and several members of the CWRU administration to discuss the benefits of having a chaired professorship in ethics. For some time The 1525 Foundation had been considering offering financial assistance for such a position. By the conclusion of Professor Thompson's visit, The 1525 Foundation was convinced that this was yet another worthy cause and committed a gift of \$2,000,000. This chaired professor will be a teacher, scholar, and an administrative leader in the Department of Philosophy at CWRU and will work with other professors to help faculty develop a curriculum which will extend the teaching of ethics into all disciplines, mostly at the undergraduate level.

Most of our readership will recall that The 1525 Foundation also funded the Summer Ethics Fellowship Program that began in June of this year. More details of the Program are set forth in another part of this newsletter. Once again, The 1525 Foundation has helped to make another one of the Center's long-range goals become a reality and for that we are extremely grateful.

NEWS & NOTES

CONFERENCES:

On **September 30 - October 2nd, 1996** the Center for Ethics and Religious Values in Business at The University of Notre Dame in Indiana is giving a conference entitled "How Literature and Films Can Stimulate Ethical Reflection in the Business World." This event will explore the alliance between these art forms and ethics. For more information contact John Houck at (219) 631-6685, Oliver Williams at (219) 631-5761 or Madeline Day at (219) 631-6072.

* * *

The University Center on Aging and Health, CWRU and the Eliza Bryant Center in Cleveland, OH will co-sponsor the 14th national symposium on "Serving Minority Elders in the 21st Century" to be held on **October 21-22, 1996** at the Cleveland Marriott Society Center. Major topics to be covered are physical health, continuum of care, mental health, social policy, economic security, and research planning and development. CE credits will be available. For information call (216) 368-2692.

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The Center for Biomedical Ethics at the University of Minnesota has two upcoming conferences at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Minneapolis. The first dated **October 31, 1996** is titled "ICU Care at the End of Life: Ethics and Practice." The other will be

on **November 1 & 2, 1996** titled "End of Life Health Care in Managed Care Systems." Call (612) 626-9756 for more information.

* * *

The Association for Practical and Professional Ethics announces its sixth annual meeting to be held **March 6 -8, 1997** in Washington, D.C. The keynote address will be delivered by David B. Wilkins, Director of the Program on the Legal Profession and Professor of Law, Harvard University. Other features will be: mini-conferences on Innovative Projects of Ethics Centers, Teaching Ethics in Engineering and Computing, the Third Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, Networking the Ethics Committee Networks, Breakfast with an Author and a call for papers. For more information contact the APPE by phone (812) 855-6450 or fax (812) 855-3315.

COURSES:

An executive development course titled, "Managing Ethics in Organizations." will be offered on **November 10-15, 1996** by the Center for Business Ethics at Bentley College in Waltham, MA. This course is a first step in a planned program by the Ethics Officer Association to certify practitioners of professional ethics. Some features of this course include current ethics office issues, problems, and practices; theoretical knowledge and frameworks; and problem-solving and skill-building workshops. Contact Kelly LeBlanc at (617) 891-2981 for more information.

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