

Closing Words

CUNY Conference on Academic Integrity

Baruch College
March 9, 2007

After an introduction by Dr. Dennis Slavin, Associate Provost for Academic Development, Baruch College:

Preamble

Thank you, Dennis, for that kind introduction. I spend a fair amount of time at Baruch because of the stimulating people, the stimulating conversation, and the way my mind gets opened to all sorts of different ideas.

I'm grateful for that, and for the opportunity to become involved in events such as this.

I'm going to start with something called the Alibi Network. I'm going to end with Father Bernard Lonergan. In between I'm going to tell you about what I think I've learned, what I will do differently, and what I think are some remaining questions. I'm very much emboldened by Professor Ryan. So I shall, towards the end of my remarks, be provocative.

It's through healthy provocation that we really develop a deeper understanding for what it is we are trying to do in ethics. This is not easy. Inasmuch as it's not easy, and it's important, it is worthy of our time and our energy.

The Alibi Network

"Alibi Network is a cutting edge full service agency providing alibis and excused absences as well as assistance with a variety of sensitive issues. We view ourselves as professional advisors who understand our clients' unique situations. We explore various approaches with our clients and implement the best solution based on each individual case. We understand your need for privacy and we are completely discreet and confidential."

The price varies from \$35 to \$175 with negotiated prices on Custom Alibis For Affairs. Seems like unethical behavior for profit. This is the issue that we face out there. What do we do to combat it? We have things like 'Turn it in'. Not enough, I say.

Encouraging ethical behavior is going to be an eternal struggle for us.

What I have Learned

Rules and processes may not always be preferred over judgment. We tend to want to create rules and processes to give order to what it is we do. But my experience in business and academia, which is going back further than I would like to say, suggests to me that we're really not smart enough to develop a rule and a process to cover every situation. Therefore, we need to have judgment. Judgment usually arrives because we lack experience.

We have to go through the growing pains of acquiring experience. I sometimes liken it to a teenager growing up. You know you're going to go through acne. The trick is to get through it as quickly as you possibly can. And so we need to continue to develop this judgment, this ability to discern what is really going on. That's not easy.

¹ <http://www.alibinetwork.com/index.jsp> [February 27, 2007]

This particular conference has really been helpful to me. My own personal philosophy is that without integrity, nothing else you have is useful. If you don't have that fundamental ethical base, if people can't rely on you and your word, then I don't think it makes much difference what else you may know.

Judgment doesn't mean that we always have to agree with one another. In my classroom, I encourage vigorous debate about issues. We can be respectful and we can disagree with one another.

It's very tempting for us to rationalize behavior. We need to resist this. Rationalization is always, in my view, the easy way out. I don't know that we really develop a deeper insight nor are we, as faculty, really good role models if we engage in rationalization. We should not say, nor be allowed to say; "Do it because I say so. Do it because it's in the book." We need to be a little bit deeper than that.

I have some very, very strong feelings about culture. Culture, I think, defines integrity. One of the things that we have to do, particularly at an institution like Maritime where any time I walk into a classroom, 30 to 40 percent of my students are from somewhere else in the world, is to understand the cultural underpinnings shaping ethical behavior. In many instances, Maritime may be my students' first experience with America and American education.

So there is a responsibility I take on to manage that heterogeneity in the classroom. It's an important and significant undertaking in my view. But if I don't do it, I don't think I'm doing what the students are asking me to do, nor what I really want to, nor, for that matter, what really needs to be done.

Example is everything as we heard from Larry Simon. I agree. If we want our students to behave in an ethical manner, we need to behave in an ethical manner. What that calls to attention in my mind is this discussion that we've been having about the student academic code.

I'm not sure I agree with the general opinion on this issue. If we're going to have a code, it ought to be for the institution as a whole. I think we need to have a bit more discussion of what is really required here.

The other thing that occurs to me is that we don't want to create situations (i.e., temptations) that provoke ethical dilemma. We saw this situation in the table discussions of Professor Smith. There is no real need to do that. We need to think through the implications of what we do before we do it. Not thinking things through tends to invoke the Law of Unintended Consequences.

So part of the ethical issue is that we, as teachers, ought not present those opportunities for students to sin.

And the final thing that I've learned is that at the end of the day, ethics is the behavior that you have when no one else is around.

What I Will Do Differently

One of the things that I think I need to do better is to engage others more broadly in the resolution of issues of ethical behavior. I tend to want to solve these problems myself. When I do that, I might improve the knowledge that I have about how to deal with ethical issues. I might get the student to come to grips with the issue and what it means in the real world.

But I don't add anything to the institutional knowledge. I am letting my institution down when I don't do this. I'm derelict here

Remaining Questions

Let me come to some remaining questions. I don't know why we speak of academic integrity. Is it any different from business integrity, or religious integrity? Why do we use that modifier? Isn't integrity, integrity?

I'm prompted on this particular matter by this beautiful little book that I picked up by John Maxwell. "Ethics 101," a 110-page, \$9.95 book, is absolutely brilliant in discussing ethics.

Isn't consistency a key principle of ethics? I don't know why I would behave any differently at this conference than I would in a classroom or I would in front of my children or I would if I was around on the other side of the world by myself.

When we encounter an ethical lapse, is it a teaching moment? Or is it time to demand penance? Or is it both? This is where the judgment comes in. I was telling the story earlier in the day that I had a student in my grad class who submitted a paper that was suspect. In fact, I found out that the student took the entire article from the 1989 issue of Scientific American and presented it as his own.

The problem was that he left off the last word which I provided to him. And then I failed him. There are times, I think, when we have to be very direct about resolving issues. But there are also times, I think, when we have to look at things a little bit differently. We need judgment.

This is a teaching moment. Is it better to punish or is it better to lift the student up a little bit, to get them to see something that they didn't see before? But sometimes you've got to spank them. We shouldn't resist that, but it should be the very last resort.

Here is a provocative question. Do American ethical values help or hinder in developing the world? We talk very much about how international students come to America. There is an implication in our discussions that we think they will stay here. A lot of my students don't. They go somewhere else for their careers. So we teach them a certain set of ethical values that may not really apply to their particular situation. We ought to be somewhat sensitive to this particular issue.

I don't believe ethics is operative in the absence of critical thinking and communication. I think all of these things want to come together. I've always had it in the back of my mind to develop and teach a course that combines ethics, communications, and critical thinking.

To me, these three things form a very, very tight bond. If you can't critically think, I don't know how you can make a judgment about ethics. So, Dennis, I'm flattered that you remembered that little thing I said about ethics being too important to be left to the ethicists.

I'm glad to hear that Baruch recognizes this and that every course is, or will be, inspected along these lines. We ought to ask teachers, "What are you doing about ethics? What are you doing about critical thinking? What are you doing about communications?" Otherwise, we run the danger of putting our students into the real world and they have no way to apply their subject matter skills.

As you might have read, I am the Director of Distance Learning and I teach distance learning classes. I never see some of my students. They are all over the planet. How do I know they are who they say they are? The Internet and the way that we do things are fundamentally changing the manner in which we establish and maintain relationships and their ethical underpinnings.

I don't know what to do about this. I don't believe I've been fooled yet, but I don't know. Is it a serious issue or not?

Jim Kelly, the former Chairman of UPS, now retired, made this wonderful statement at a meeting in California a few years ago.

"I believe that we're about to witness what may turn out to be the last competitive frontier business will see. It's going to be a war over the one priceless resource. Time. And when it comes, trust may turn out to be the best investment anyone's made."²

Trust is based on integrity. And trust and integrity take time to develop. If one waits to develop ethical behavior and trust until one needs it, it will be too late.

There is an issue, I think as I mentioned a little earlier, about the honor code. I think that if you ask students to sign an honor code I believe you should ask faculty and administration to sign the very same code. Maxwell talks about the Golden Rule. That works for me. Everybody shares a common commitment.

² Jim Kelly, CEO of UPS, Remarks to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco & Oakland Chamber of Commerce, February 23, 2000.

I was impressed earlier this morning by the recitation from the West Point student.

*'The Cadet Honor Code states that "a cadet will not lie, cheat or steal nor tolerate those who do."'*³

Do our honor codes need to be any more extensive than that? The West Point Honor Code has, after all, passed the test of time.

I think that integrity is very much a function of maturity. I don't think we can expect a 16 or 17-year-old kid to have the same maturity as someone who is twice or three times that age. So we need to be careful about where we set the bar. We want to set the bar high enough to demand something of people so that they grow. But we don't want to set the bar so high that it discourages them and they give up. Again, I think that requires a lot of judgment on our part.

One of the things that was mentioned earlier is that we don't talk about the upside of integrity. We talk about the downside. How you are going to be punished. We need to trot out models of people who have demonstrated they have integrity and have been successful in what they've been doing.

It would be helpful if the mainstream media would get a little bit on the bandwagon on this matter as opposed to all of the bad news. But the bad news is what sells papers and it's advertising that keeps the papers in business. So maybe that's going to be another of our burdens. But we need examples of the positive side of ethical behavior. They're out there.

The last thing that I would say to you is that I think the hard thing is changing behavior. I continually try to change my behavior to be a little bit better today than I was yesterday. Niccolo Machiavelli wrote about this a number of years ago.

*"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. Because the innovator has for enemies all those who have done well under the old conditions, and lukewarm defenders in those who may do well under the new."*⁴

We know what the risks are that we run and the hurdles that we have to go over if we want to establish ethical behavior.

This change is not going to come about simply because we have a conference or because we publish things or because we read books. It's because we live our lives differently and we demonstrate that to people.

Let me wrap this up by talking about Father Bernard Lonergan.⁵ Some of you may know of him. I was introduced to him in John Della Costa's book, 'The Ethical Imperative,'. It's a fantastic book. If you haven't read it, please do so.

I was reviewing Costa during my preparation for this conference. I came across a marvelous chart that synthesized all of Lonergan's theological thinking into a very simple prescription for success.

The first thing Lonergan says is that we need to be attentive. By that, we need to observe, to recognize what it is we see, and we need to reflect on that. What is the meaning of what we see?

The second thing we need to do is be intelligent. We need to question. We don't want to accept what we see at face value. We need to probe. We need to develop a deeper level of understanding about what it is that we seem to be observing.

³ Center for Teaching Excellence at West Point, <http://www.dean.usma.edu/cte/WestLearner.cfm> [March 16, 2007]

⁴ Machiavelli, Niccolo. *The Prince*. Trans. David Wootton. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1995.

⁵ Fr. Bernard Lonergan, S.J. (17 December 1904 – 26 November 1984) was a Canadian Jesuit Priest. He was a philosopher-theologian in the Thomist tradition and an economist from Buckingham, Quebec. He taught at Loyola College (Montreal), the University of Toronto (Regis College), the Pontifical Gregorian University and Boston College. He is the author of *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (1957) and *Method in Theology* (1973), which established what he called the Generalized Empirical Method (GEM). http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Lonergan [March 4, 2007]

Then comes the third step which doesn't get mentioned enough. That is, we need to be reasonable. We need to connect some way with the situation and what people are going through. We need to evaluate on the basis of what we have observed and then make our judgment.

There are things that I do and actions that I take regarding students that I am sure people would say are unethical. But I try to look at a broader perspective of what is the potential impact of my decision on the student. And therefore, should I follow the rule? Or should I make some judgment here about the decision I need to take?

Sometimes it's hard making these decisions. I have disenrolled students, which is never a pleasant thing to do. This is a life lesson. I have put up for graduation students that didn't meet the graduation criteria because I thought there was a bigger purpose here I was trying to deal with.

I am willing, as is the fourth step of Lonergan, to be held responsible for my decisions. So this notion of committing to a particular action and then being held responsible or accountable I think is what we have to demonstrate to people in terms of our own ethical behavior.

So, that's kind of the end of some things that I think came out of this conference, some things that I brought in, some change I need to change, and some questions that are unanswered. Ethics is difficult. I can't imagine anything more important to everything it is we want to achieve than to help establish a level of ethical behavior and integrity in all of the situations that we encounter. In particular, with respect to the responsibility we have to help prepare students for what's going on out there where the cold wind blows.

Thank you very much.

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Production Note

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