

SELF-DECEPTION AND MORAL BLINDNESS  
IN THE MODERN CORPORATION

BY

JOHN CHARLES KNAPP

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WALES

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF WALES, LAMPETER

JANUARY 1999

## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the hypothesis that self-deception can help to facilitate moral blindness in the context of the modern corporation. It contends that individuals are capable of suppressing knowledge or beliefs regarding truths that they prefer not to face, and that this self-deceptive process is aided by systemic and cultural factors that are characteristic of many large corporations

An interdisciplinary conceptual analysis examines understandings of self-deception in philosophy, psychology and Christian theology, and shows that perspectives vary greatly by method of inquiry, field of study and other contexts of meaning. Self-deception is a well-established category in the fields of philosophy and psychology, where much research has been conducted to elucidate the admittedly difficult, and apparently paradoxical, concept. In theology, by contrast, the matter has been subjected to somewhat less explicit analysis; however, our study demonstrates that the ontological and anthropological assumptions of theology can render a distinctive and realistic understanding of what self-deception is and how it happens.

It is proposed that four types of self-deception are found in the context of the modern corporation: The self-deception of tribalism, the self-deception of legalism, the self-deception of moral relativism and the self-deception of scientism. Each of these species is first identified and described theologically and then further developed using relevant literature in management, organizational theory and business ethics. To ground these conclusions, they are applied to an exhaustive case study of a multinational company which encountered accusations of wrongdoing in connection with product safety.

This inquiry demonstrates that self-deception can and does happen, and that the corporate milieu provides conditions where it may flourish, particularly when individuals or groups are motivated to avoid or deny the moral consequences of their activities. This is a crucial finding that has not heretofore been fully comprehended by theorists in business ethics.

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## PREFACE

My interest in the problem of self-deception arose largely from practical experience as a consultant to management in corporate America. For some 15 years, I worked with companies in managing a wide range of sensitive matters, among which were product safety, workplace violence, antitrust litigation, financial impropriety, child labor, worker safety, environmental impact, and work-force reductions. In this capacity I came to know many senior-level executives quite well, often counseling with them about their greatest challenges and, at times, their deepest disappointments.

Through these experiences I began to observe that when corporations face accusations of wrongdoing, managers' responses follow fairly predictable patterns, often involving a refusal, or perhaps an inability, to acknowledge the moral implications or consequences of their actions. This moral blindness is especially perplexing when managers condone, defend or even promote business practices that seem to be inconsistent with moral commitments that they continue to avow as individuals. Consider, for example, the executive who encourages her sales representatives to make misleading statements in presentations to prospective customers, but who demands honesty of her children at home. She finds no inconsistency in her beliefs with regard to truthfulness, for when she is at work she sees herself in the role of a game player whose purpose is to "play to win." Or take the manager who volunteers his spare time to work with disadvantaged youths, but who will not permit himself to contemplate his company's moral responsibility for the use of pre-adolescent workers in a distant country where there are no laws prohibiting the employment of children. He avoids the issue by telling himself that his company has fulfilled all of its responsibilities by carefully adhering to the local laws wherever it does business.

How is it possible for “good people” like these to maintain an easy conscience about business activities that, by all accounts, would appear to violate their individual moral commitments? And why does it seem that managers in large corporations are so often able to convince themselves of the beliefs they *prefer* to hold, even when they must surely know them to be false? These and similar questions prompted this inquiry to determine whether self-deception, properly understood, might help explain why and how individuals in the modern corporation can become blind to the moral dimension of their work lives.

As we shall see, the concept of deceiving oneself is problematic and only becomes more so when one surveys the methodologically diverse literature on the subject. Much has been said in recent years about self-deception, particularly by philosophers and psychologists. Some have declared that it simply “cannot happen,” while others have argued that it is so prevalent as to be “the major fact of our day.” In philosophy the debate has recently turned to the epistemological paradox seemingly entailed by the locution itself: Is it really possible to lie to oneself, to convince oneself of something one knows is false? In psychology, meanwhile, much attention has been devoted to self-deception as a problem of self-relatedness, with experts disagreeing on such matters as whether self-deception can obtain in individuals who are otherwise psychologically healthy.

Theologians, by contrast, have paid far less attention to the subject, at least as a formal category of study -- despite the fact that self-deception has long been an important concept in religious thought. As I shall attempt to demonstrate in these pages, a theological analysis is essential to understanding self-deception, for it not only shows that the phenomenon is epistemologically possible, it also suggests that it is a feature of the common life that may obtain to some extent in all of us. This



understanding of self-deception differs radically from the explanations offered by other disciplines, principally because of the ontological and anthropological perspectives of Christian theology regarding the nature of the *self* which, in self-deception, is both the deceiver and the deceived. A theological view of human being renders the notion of self-deception both coherent and plausible.

I will thus propose that a theological conception of self-deception can illuminate an important problem in business ethics, namely the difficulty of addressing moral issues when persons in positions of responsibility do not recognize or acknowledge them as such. The young but growing discipline of business ethics has emerged in recent years as an interdisciplinary field of study involving law, management theory, moral philosophy, sociology and other participants. Theology, however, has contributed relatively little to this enterprise. It is my belief that a theologically derived theory of self-deception has the potential to make two significant contributions to the study of business ethics. First, it can show that self-deception is a powerful, but seldom recognized barrier to ethical reflection and action in the corporate context. Second, it can provide a firmer footing for a much-needed theological critique of ethics in business life.

I am grateful to several people who have made it possible for me to undertake and complete this study. I wish to thank the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Wales, Lampeter, for their support and encouragement, and for the financial assistance made available to me for several years as an Honorary Visiting Lecturer for post-graduate business students at the university. In particular, I am indebted to Professor Peter Baelz and Professor D. P. Davies for their counsel and criticism, from which this study benefited immeasurably. I also wish to express my gratitude to my colleague Catharine Brockman Kuchar of The Southern Institute for

Business and Professional Ethics for her careful critique of these pages, and to Steven Olson of the Center for Ethics in Public Policy and the Professions at Emory University, who first suggested self-deception as a potential explanation for the moral blindness I had observed in the corporate world. My thanks is extended to Columbia Theological Seminary for the award of a Columbia Fellowship for the pursuit of this study and to Dr. Marcia Y. Riggs of the Columbia faculty for urging me to think more critically about the relationship of theology to business ethics.

This work would not have been possible without the support of my wife, Kelly Knapp, whose patience and help I cannot adequately acknowledge or repay. And to Amanda, Tracy, Charlie and Mary Margaret, who tolerated my seemingly endless days and nights of research and writing, I owe an inestimable debt.

To

The memory of Charles Julian Knapp,  
who taught me to be honest with myself and others,

and to

Kelly Teske Knapp,  
who knows just how little I learned

My sin was all the more incurable because I thought I was not a sinner.

St. Augustine, *The Confessions*

If we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

I John 1:8

Nothing is easier than self-deceit. For what each man wishes,  
that he also believes to be true.

Demosthenes, *Third Olynthiac*, Sec. 19

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the hypothesis that self-deception is a factor which helps to facilitate moral blindness in the context of the modern corporation in the United States of America. It is posited that individuals are capable of suppressing knowledge or beliefs regarding truths that they prefer not to face, and that this self-deceptive process is aided substantially by systemic and cultural influences endemic to many large corporations. The result can be a failure at both the micro (individual) and meso (organizational) levels to recognize and effectively address the moral implications of business activities.

Self-deception is a familiar locution that finds wide usage in many areas of life. We remark that a friend is “deceiving herself” by seeming to ignore a truth that is all too obvious. Or we hear that someone is “self-deceived,” or perhaps “in denial,” about a shortcoming or failure that he will not admit. There is no doubt that these linguistic expressions have meaning for both speaker and hearer, yet a moment’s reflection suggests that the phenomenon of self-deception may be anything but easily understood. How is it possible to deceive oneself? Can a person know what he or she does *not* know? Would a rational person actually believe a self-directed lie? Why would anyone *choose* to be deceived, especially about one’s own situation or moral character?

Thinkers in several fields of study have been intrigued by such questions and have brought a variety of methods to bear in seeking to elucidate what self-deception is, how it operates, and whether it is even possible. In undertaking the present research, much of this literature was consulted in pursuit of a conceptual and empirical understanding of self-deception that might be applied both logically and coherently. As

this study yielded an expanding range of perspectives (and more than a little frustration for the researcher), it was increasingly apparent that theories of self-deception are shaped in large measure by a diversity of understandings of the *self*, which is, of course, the reflexive component of the locution. It was thus concluded that if self-deception is to be accepted as a feature of the common life, there must be something in the nature of the self that makes it possible.

If we should establish that self-deception is indeed a factor that impedes moral recognition and action in business life, a potentially important contribution will have been made to the study of business ethics, where self-deception has heretofore been given little or no serious consideration by theorists. The practical implications for corporations are also notable if it can be shown that misconduct may be facilitated by self-deceptive characterizations of unethical behavior as morally neutral or acceptable, thereby allowing people to perceive no inconsistency between their commitments to act morally and their complicity in actions that violate such commitments. Moreover, it is hoped that this inquiry will contribute to a richer theological understanding of self-deception and its relationship to morality, and that this understanding might present a distinctive opportunity for a theological voice in the growing enterprise of business ethics.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It has been noted that, relative to other disciplines, theology has contributed little to the field of business ethics. See Gedeon Josua Rossouw, "Business Ethics: Where Have All the Christians Gone?", *Journal of Business Ethics* 13 (1994): 557-70; James M. Gustafson and Elmer W. Johnson, *The Judeo-Christian Vision and the Modern Corporation* (Southbend, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982); Louke van Wensveen Siker, "Christ and Business: A Typology for Christian Business Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 8 (1989): 883-88; Steward W. Herman, "The Modern Business Corporation and the Ethics of Trust," *Journal of Religious Studies* 20 (1992): 111-48; and Gerard Magill, "Theology in Business Ethics: Appealing to the Religious

## Methodology and Outline of the Study

Our inquiry will proceed using the approach often referred to as *interdisciplinary*. This method is both appropriate and necessary for two reasons. First of all, self-deception is an established category of theory in more than one discipline, each of which contributes perspectives derived from its own methodologies, assumptions and interests. Indeed, self-deception is recognized as a problem by philosophers, psychologists and theologians (although the latter have devoted somewhat less attention to it as an explicit category); therefore, to gain a full sense of its meaning, one must consult thinkers in multiple disciplines. A second reason for this approach is that we intend to explore self-deception as an ethical<sup>2</sup> concern in the context of the modern corporation. Thus, a portion of our research will draw upon the interdisciplinary literature of business ethics.

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Imagination,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 11 (1992): 129-35.

<sup>2</sup>A word about usage of the terms “ethics” and “morality”: For purposes of this study, these words and related locutions (e.g., “ethical” and “moral”) will be used somewhat interchangeably, as there is little distinction made between them by many of the thinkers consulted herein. In everyday parlance, as well, these words are frequently interchanged in referring to good people, right actions and principles that denote right and wrong. Likewise, in the theological lexicon, “moral theology” has essentially the same meaning for Roman Catholics and Anglicans that “Christian ethics” has for many contemporary protestants. (*Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 1983 ed., s.v., “moral theology.”) Among those who attempt to make a fine distinction is the philosopher Robert Solomon, who defines ethics as “a matter of *ethos*, participation in a community, a practice, a way of life”; morality, however, “means only *doing right*.” (Robert C. Solomon, *The New World of Business: Ethics and Free Enterprise in the Global 1990s* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1994], 119.) And Webster’s dictionary defines “morals” simply as “ethics,” but defines “ethics” as “1: the discipline dealing with what is good and bad and with moral duty and obligation; 2 a: a set of moral principles or values; b: a theory or system of moral values.” (*Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1979 ed., s.v. “moral” and “ethic.”)

Business ethics has an interdisciplinary character. Questions of economic policy and business practice intertwine with issues in politics, sociology and organizational theory. Although business ethics remains anchored in philosophy, even here abstract questions in normative ethics and political philosophy mingle with analysis of practical problems and concrete moral dilemmas.<sup>3</sup>

Our methodology will also involve the development and analysis of a case study which will serve to concretize the theoretical discussion by applying relevant concepts to the actual experience of a corporation that was confronted by moral questions related to the manufacture and marketing of one of its products. The case method was chosen for its strength in producing “grounded theory” which is “especially useful in establishing theoretical constructs”<sup>4</sup> and “results in enhanced conceptual understanding of the interaction between ethical beliefs of individuals and corporate and market pressures on business decision-taking.”<sup>5</sup> It is acknowledged that case studies are quite

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<sup>3</sup>William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992): v. Edward S. Petry, Jr., argues, “There is a need for more interdisciplinary research. Business ethics is clearly an interdisciplinary subject and field. Its topics bridge disciplines and its thinkers come from entrenched academic pockets with their own unique, specialised methodologies and terminologies. . . . However, much more ‘bridging’ work needs to be done, especially in the area of quality research, or we face the danger of different disciplines being able to adequately communicate and splintering off into separate factions.” (Edward S. Petry, Jr., “Business Ethics: A North American Perspective,” in *Business Prosperity and Business Ethics: Partners for the Nineties – Proceedings of a One-Day Conference Held at the University of Wales, Lampeter, 11 March 1993* [Lampeter, Wales: University of Wales, Lampeter, 1993], 17.) See also, Norman E. Bowie, “Business Ethics as a Discipline: The Search for Legitimacy,” in R. Edward Freeman ed., *Business Ethics: The State of The Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 17-41.

<sup>4</sup>Stephen Brigley, “Business Ethics in Context: Researching with Case Studies,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 14 (1995): 222. See also, Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 219. By comparison, it has been argued that alternative methods of business ethics research often extract and analyze information “out of context”; that is, they fail



different from positivist methods of measuring behavior in that they yield neither data nor inductively generalizable conclusions that can be consistently replicated from one social context to another. They do, however, generate solid empirical evidence which can be described and analyzed hermeneutically. Conclusions derived from the case method can, in fact, be applied to the larger business context by carefully considering “what it is a case of: what does a particular case represent, what wider reference does it make, *vis-à-vis* the deeper generic or formal concepts which cut across various sites and types of case study?”<sup>6</sup> This question will guide our analysis and application of the case study in the pages that follow.

In Chapter One, we will develop the case of Dow Corning Corporation, a major company in the United States that was forced into bankruptcy as a result of civil litigation related to health problems alleged to be caused by silicone gel-filled mammary prostheses, a product that the company manufactured and marketed in many countries. Dow Corning was noted for its well-publicized commitment to ethical business practice, and its formal ethics program was considered a model for corporate America. Yet as questions about the safety of its breast implant products were raised with increasing frequency over the span of two decades, the company never categorized or discussed these questions as ethical concerns. Our case study will examine the company’s internal and external responses to accusations of wrongdoing. It will not be our purpose to prove or disprove the claims made against Dow

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to consider the complex and non-linear relationship between ethical intention and outcome, which, in the large corporation, can be shaped by historic, emotive, economic, cultural and systemic influences of many kinds.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. 223.

Corning, but rather to demonstrate that moral issues were present which were not recognized or addressed as such by the company's management. This case will serve as a referent to contextualize subsequent chapters' understandings of self-deception.

Chapter Two will provide a conceptual analysis and review of the literature in philosophy and psychology, the fields where theories of self-deception have been most thoroughly developed and analyzed. Particular attention will be given to ethical applications and traditions. Because the boundaries between philosophy of the mind and psychology are not always discernible, and because scholars of both disciplines are struggling to answer many of the same questions, this analysis will be organized thematically, rather than by discipline. We shall see that perspectives on self-deception are strongly influenced by underlying ideas of what it means to be a self; and for this reason the chapter will begin by inquiring briefly into the prior question, "What is the *self* that is purported to be both perpetrator and victim in *self-deception*?" This will be followed by an exploration of the wide-ranging and often-conflicting theoretical literature on self-deception, together with examples of how the phenomenon might occur in the common life. The chapter will conclude by suggesting a tentative definition of the locution based upon the foregoing review and analysis.

Chapter Three will focus on theological interpretations of self-deception. As in the previous chapter, we will begin with a limited anthropological and ontological analysis of the human self. Our attention will then turn to understandings of self-deception, which in theology is frequently viewed as the handmaiden of *pride*. While the fields of philosophy and psychology see pride as synonymous with self-esteem and

self-sufficiency (which are deemed to be worthy goals), theology rejects it as an idolatrous self-love which denies the truth of one's sinfulness, creatureliness and need for repentance and new life in relationship with God. This fundamental difference will lead us to a distinctive theological conception of self-deception. Four types of self-deception will then be proposed, each of which involves attempts to justify oneself against moral criteria other than the "highest good" of the God criterion. The chapter will conclude with a descriptive definition of self-deception drawn from the findings of chapters two and three.

In Chapter Four, the conclusions of the second and third chapters will be brought into dialogue with the Dow Corning case study. Our investigation will also integrate relevant theory from business-related disciplines to help elucidate the nature, influence and organizational dynamics of the modern corporation. These disciplines will include business ethics, management science and organizational theory, among others. Following this analysis, we will consider the four types of self-deception proposed in Chapter Three, applying each to the experience of Dow Corning. Finally, we will undertake a critique of the most common approaches used by corporations to institutionalize ethical conduct, and will suggest an alternative direction based upon an understanding of self-deception and its role in preventing moral recognition and action in the corporate context.

## CHAPTER I:

### CASE STUDY: DOW CORNING CORPORATION AND SILICONE BREAST IMPLANTS

#### Introduction

This thesis examines the hypothesis that self-deception may be a factor contributing to the phenomenon of moral blindness in the context of the modern corporation in the United States of America. To concretize this inquiry, we will analyze the case of Dow Corning Corporation, a major American company that encountered ethical, legal, scientific and business problems related to the manufacture and marketing of silicone gel-filled mammary prostheses. This case will provide a referent for subsequent chapters, especially Chapter Four.

The case of Dow Corning was selected for two principal reasons. First, the company was the recognized leader among United States corporations in implementing measures to encourage ethical commitments and practices among its employees. Dow Corning's ethics program was studied for more than a decade by thousands of business students nationwide and was touted by Harvard Business School as a model for corporate America. Second, and more important, the safety and quality of the company's silicone breast implants were increasingly questioned over a 20-year period, both within the company and by external stakeholders. Yet, despite its elaborate ethics program, Dow Corning never categorized these questions as ethical concerns.

This study will suggest that a number of legitimate ethical issues were present which might have been addressed had the company recognized them as such. In reality, all implant-related questions were categorized and discussed as legal, scientific

or marketing matters. As the company began to face legal challenges by implant recipients, it adopted a highly defensive posture, denying even the possibility that it should have done more to ensure product safety or to inform women of potential complications. Ultimately Dow Corning was overwhelmed by the expense of litigation, withdrew from the medical devices business and in 1995 voluntarily filed for federal bankruptcy protection.

### Corporate History, Ownership and Financial Profile of Dow Corning Corporation

Dow Corning Corporation was founded in 1943 as a joint venture of Dow Chemical Company and Corning Glass Works (now Corning Incorporated). The two parent companies were the only shareholders, each owning 50 percent. Dow Corning's initial purpose was to supply the United States armed forces with silicone products, mostly lubricants, during World War II. After the war, an array of products for the civilian market was developed by combining Corning's silicone technology with Dow Chemical's manufacturing and chemical processing expertise.<sup>7</sup>

### Corning Incorporated

Corning was founded in Massachusetts in 1851 as Houghton Glass Co. It later relocated to Corning, New York, and changed its name to Corning Glass Works. The company specialized in technical and pharmaceutical glass, and an early customer was inventor Thomas Edison who used Corning glass for his first light bulb. By 1912, the

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<sup>7</sup>Gary Hoover, et al., *Hoover's Handbook of American Business* (Online: Nexis, 30 Dec. 1994), s.v. "Dow Corning Corp."

company had developed borosilicate glass, which withstood extreme heat and sudden changes in temperature. It became the basis for widely marketed products including cookware, laboratory equipment and light bulbs. Corning was the world's largest producer of tableware and cookware in 1995, and it had diversified its business lines to include 60,000 products.<sup>8</sup>

A strategy of pursuing joint ventures with other companies was a key to Corning's business success. In addition to Dow Corning, these included Pittsburgh Corning (glass construction materials), Owens-Corning (fiberglass), Corning Asahi Video Products, International Hua-Mei Glass Engineering (electronic glass), and several other domestic and international partnerships.

Corning's sales in 1995 totalled \$5.3 billion, an 11 percent increase from the previous year. Much of the growth was attributed to the performance of newer product lines: optical fiber and cable, information display products, pharmaceutical services and environmental products.<sup>9</sup> The company had 46 manufacturing plants and 49 laboratory facilities worldwide, with international sales accounting for just over 10 percent of gross income.<sup>10</sup> Despite sales success, the company reported a net loss of \$50.8 million in 1995, due in large measure to losses at Dow Corning, which four years earlier had contributed 25 percent of Corning's profits.

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid, s.v. "Corning Inc."

<sup>9</sup>Corning Inc., news release, "Corning Inc. Reports Fourth Quarter and Year-End Results." (Midland, MI: Corning Inc., 22 Jan. 1996). For purposes of this study, financial information regarding Corning Inc., Dow Chemical Corp., and Dow Corning Corp. is provided for the year 1995, during which Dow Corning filed for federal bankruptcy protection.

<sup>10</sup>Hoover, s.v. "Corning Inc."

## Dow Chemical Company

Dow Chemical was founded in 1897 in Midland, Michigan, as a mining and manufacturing business. Its first product, chlorine bleach, was sold on world markets and quickly overtook British and German monopolies on bleach, bromides and related chemicals. In the 1930s, the company was a pioneer in plastics and became the leader of that industry by the 1950s. Over the next 40 years, its production diversified to include not only chlorines and plastics, but also resins, cleaning agents, insecticides, herbicides, petrochemicals and other products. This period of diversification also brought highly publicized legal controversies related to the manufacture of napalm, Agent Orange and dioxin-producing bleaches.

In 1995, Dow Chemical had 53,000 employees and 130 manufacturing plants in 29 countries. Its gross sales were a record \$20.2 billion, 50 percent of which were derived from markets outside the U.S.<sup>11</sup> Annual operating income was \$3.9 billion, also a record.

## Dow Corning Corporation

Dow Corning, the progeny of Corning and Dow Chemical, employed 7,453 at year-end 1995. It had operations in 22 countries in North America, South America, Europe, Australia and Asia, and was among the 250 largest U.S. corporations.<sup>12</sup> It

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<sup>11</sup>Hoover, s.v. "Dow Chemical Co."; Dow Chemical Co., news release, "Dow Chemical Company Announces Earnings" (Midland, MI: Dow Chemical Co., 25 Jan. 1996).

<sup>12</sup>*Dun's Financial Records Plus* (Online: Dun & Bradstreet, 26 Oct. 1995), s.v.

had sales in 1995 of \$2.4 billion, approximately 60 percent of which came from markets outside the U.S. International sales increased in each of the preceding three years, with most such growth occurring in Asian markets. The company's financial statements for the year showed a loss of \$30.6 million, the result of massive litigation and settlement costs associated with its breast implant products.<sup>13</sup> To shield its ongoing business from implant-related financial claims, Dow Corning in May 1995 voluntarily filed for protection under Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code.<sup>14</sup>

Like its largest parent, Dow Corning is headquartered in Midland, a central Michigan town of 38,800 people, 80 percent of whom are employed directly or indirectly by the two companies.

#### Silicone: Versatile, Synthetic Material

The foundation of Dow Corning's business was silicone, a unique, synthetic polymer made by combining the mineral element silicon, found in quartz and sand, with organic compounds. From the beginning, the company's chemists were aggressive in pursuing new commercial uses for the substance. Silicone's advantages included electrical insulating characteristics, temperature resistance, lubricating properties, water repellency, long-lasting flexibility, strength greater than plastic, and chemical inertness. It was also believed to be biologically inert.

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"Dow Corning Corp."

<sup>13</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Announces Financial Results" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 31 Dec. 1995).

<sup>14</sup>Idem, news release, "Dow Corning Corporation: Background/Position Statement" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 4 May 1995).



Fifty years after signing its first contract with the U.S. Army, the company's silicone products numbered more than 5,000, with uses in industries as diverse as aerospace, construction, pharmaceuticals and textiles.<sup>15</sup> The company held approximately 4,900 worldwide patents and invested \$150 million annually in the research and development of fluids, resins, rubber, sealants and other silicone forms, as well as molybdenum silicon and polycrystalline silicon used in the manufacture of semiconductor devices and solar cells.<sup>16</sup> By 1992 Dow Corning's share of the world market for silicones was approximately 35 percent.<sup>17</sup>

In the late 1950s, researchers began to discover uses for silicone in the medical field. Encouraged by these developments, Dow Corning in 1959 established a Center for Aid to Medical Research, initially to support third parties studying potential new uses for Dow Corning materials. As examples, University of Michigan researchers made replacement bile ducts from silicone, and "a doctor reported placing an artificial urethra made of silicone rubber in a patient."<sup>18</sup> Over the next 20 years, silicone devices became commonplace in orthopaedic, cosmetic and other types of surgery. Among these were heart valves, artificial joints, eye lenses, nose cartilage, testicular implants and gel-filled prostheses for breast augmentation and reconstruction.

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<sup>15</sup>Idem, *Dow Corning Corp.: A Half-Century of Progress* (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1993).

<sup>16</sup>Idem, *Dow Corning Corp.: 1992-93 Profile* (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1993).

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth S. Kiesche, "Dow Corning's Tough Year Brings About a Sharper Focus," *Chemical Week* (20 Jan. 1993): 33.

<sup>18</sup>John A. Byrne, *Informed Consent* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 40.

## Breast Augmentation: History, Sales and Marketing

Dow Corning's introduction to silicone breast implants came in 1962 when a Texas surgeon, Dr. Thomas D. Cronin, contacted the Center for Aid to Medical Research to explore the possibility of creating a fluid-filled silicone bag for implantation in a woman's breast. This novel idea captured the interest of the company's researchers who agreed to fabricate a prototype in their laboratory. Just a year later, Dow Corning introduced a line of breast implants in eight sizes and marketed them under the trade name Silastic.<sup>19</sup> The size, shape and form of the devices evolved over the next three decades, but the basic concept -- a sealed, silicone envelope filled with silicone gel -- remained the same. An alternative formulation, used less frequently, substituted a saline solution for gel in the silicone envelope.

### Earlier Methods of Augmentation

Dow Corning sold its first implant in 1963; but silicone had been used as early as the 1940s to enlarge women's breasts. In post-war Japan, cosmetologists injected prostitutes' breasts with liquid silicone transformer coolant to make them more attractive to United States servicemen.<sup>20</sup> The practice soon made its way to America where it became popular with show girls in California and Nevada. One doctor in Las Vegas reported administering 16,000 injections directly into the breasts of 200 women.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>20</sup>Phillip J. Hilts, "Strange History of Silicone Held Many Warning Signs," *New York Times*, 17 Jan. 1992, 8(A).

<sup>21</sup>"Escalation," *Newsweek* (25 Oct. 1963): 110.

Silicone was not the only foreign substance used to enlarge women's breasts. Injections of liquid paraffin, processed petroleum products, waxes and various unknown liquids were reported in medical literature in Southeast Asia, Central America and Europe.<sup>22</sup> Surgical mammoplasty was performed for the first time in the late 19th century<sup>23</sup>; during the next 100 years, women were implanted with a variety of foreign materials, including glass balls, sponges and animal fat.<sup>24</sup>

The year Dow Corning introduced the first gel-filled implants, it began to require doctors requesting liquid silicone to sign an affidavit promising not to inject it directly into the bodies of humans. Despite this policy, Dow Corning was indicted in 1967 on federal charges of shipping an "unapproved drug" to doctors who used the product for injections. The company pleaded no contest and paid a fine.<sup>25</sup> With documentation of numerous, often severe, medical complications, silicone injections were outlawed by many states and banned by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) by the mid-1970s.

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<sup>22</sup>U.K. Department of Health, Medical Devices Directorate, *Evidence for an Association Between The Implantation of Silicones and Connective Tissue Disease; Report Submitted to Department of Health, Special Advisory Group on Silicone Gel Breast Implants and Connective Tissue Diseases* (London: Department of Health, 15 April 1992).

<sup>23</sup>Ralph R. Cook, et al., "The Breast Implant Controversy," *Arthritis & Rheumatism* 17(2) (Feb. 1994): 153-157.

<sup>24</sup>Patti Scher and Marion Koch, *The Untold Truth about Breast Implants, Vol. 1.* (Charlotte, NC: By the authors, P.O. Box 26923, 1993), 69.

<sup>25</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 43.

## The Marketing of Silicone Gel-Filled Implants

The commercial success of Dow Corning's breast implants paralleled the growing popularity of cosmetic surgery in the United States. From 1965 to 1989, the number of plastic surgeons grew at twice the rate of physicians as a whole. The projected increase in the number of plastic surgeons from 1960 to 2000 is 1,100 percent.<sup>26</sup> Breast augmentation ranked second only to liposuction among more than 640,000 cosmetic surgical procedures performed in 1990.<sup>27</sup> According to the FDA, more than 2 million American women -- and many more worldwide -- had silicone breast implants by 1991.<sup>28</sup> Four out of five recipients elected to have the surgery solely for cosmetic purposes, while 20 percent received implants for reconstructive purposes related to breast cancer, injury, cystic mastitis, birth defects or other medical problems.<sup>29</sup>

As sales flourished, Dow Corning attracted a growing field of competitors in the manufacture and marketing of silicone gel-filled implants. To strengthen its position, the company in 1977 acquired Wright Manufacturing Company, a maker of metal orthopaedic implants with \$4 million in annual sales. The new subsidiary, Dow

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<sup>26</sup>Jane Sprague Zones, "The Political and Social Context of Silicone Breast Implant Use in the United States," *Journal of Long-Term Effects of Medical Implants* 1(3) (1992): 226.

<sup>27</sup>L. Williams, "Women's Image in a Mirror: Who Defines What She Sees?", *New York Times*, 6 Feb. 1992, 1(A).

<sup>28</sup>This figure is commonly used by FDA and in various news reports; but other sources have suggested lower numbers, ranging from 800,000 to 1.5 million. (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Food and Drug Administration, *Background Information on The Possible Health Risks of Silicone Breast Implants* ([Rockville, MD.]: FDA, Feb. 1991), 1.

<sup>29</sup>U.K. Medical Devices Directorate. "Evidence for An Association," 4.

Corning Wright, began to manufacture many of the company's medical products, including most of its silicone breast implants.<sup>30</sup> Over time, Dow Corning's competitors in the breast implant market included Baxter Healthcare Corporation, Bristol-Meyers Squibb Company, Inamed Corporation, Markham Medical International Incorporated, McGhan Medical Corporation, Medical Engineering Corporation, Minnesota Mining & Manufacturing Company (3M Company), Union Carbide Corporation and others. These companies supplied implants to plastic surgeons who charged patients \$2,000 to \$6,000 for the mammoplasty procedure.

### Socio-Psychological Factors

Plastic surgeons aggressively marketed breast augmentation, using magazine, radio, television and newspaper advertisements to extol the benefits of a more attractive body. They were helped by the news media, especially women's magazines, which published numerous articles glamorizing cosmetic surgery. A 1988 story in *Los Angeles* magazine featured "an alluring woman leaning against a red sports car, captioned, 'Automobile by Ferrari, Body by Forsham [a plastic surgeon]'.<sup>31</sup> Even a magazine for adolescent girls promised that breast implants would improve self-image.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>In June 1992, Dow Corning announced plans to sell its global medical devices business, excluding the assets and liabilities associated with breast implants. Revenues from the remaining business, principally orthopaedic devices, were \$100 million in 1992. Dow Corning Corp. news release, "Dow Corning to Sell Medical Devices Business" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp, June 1992).

<sup>31</sup>Scher and Koch, 13.

<sup>32</sup>E. Karlsberg, "Plastic Surgery: New facts, New You," *Teen*, July 1988, 24.

The popularity of breast augmentation for cosmetic purposes cannot be credited solely to the merchandising acumen of plastic surgeons or manufacturers. Their efforts benefited greatly from preexisting social and psychological factors deeply embedded in Western, and particularly American, culture.

One school of thought on the psychological ramifications of breast augmentation has focused on intrapsychic states and the psychosexual development of the recipients, associating desire for the surgery to resolution of emotional difficulties in early life and in adult relationships. Another theoretical perspective of researchers in cosmetic surgery generally has been to concentrate on societal pressures to alter personal appearance.<sup>33</sup>

Researchers conducted a review of literature, covering approximately 100 articles on the psychological characteristics of women who undergo cosmetic breast augmentation, and reported:

Women requesting augmentation were often described as feeling physically inadequate, with doubts about femininity and desirability. Concerns related to self esteem or self concept were sometimes expressed as feelings of depression, lack of self confidence, and some degree of sexual inhibition.<sup>34</sup>

Profiting from and reinforcing women's anxieties about personal appearance is one of the oldest and most consistent characteristics of fashion and beauty advertising. Low self-esteem, advertisements often suggest, can be raised by products and services that help women conform to culturally conditioned ideas of the "ideal" image.<sup>35</sup> Becoming sexually attractive is subtly equated with achieving fulfillment and well-being. "In a culture that sends conflicting, frequently deprecating, messages to

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<sup>33</sup>Zones, 228.

<sup>34</sup>Ruth B. Merkatz, et al., "A Qualitative Analysis of Self-Reported Experiences Among Women Encountering Difficulties with Silicone Breast Implants," *Journal of Women's Health* 2(2) (1993): 106.

<sup>35</sup>Mark Crispin Miller, *Boxed In* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 46-47.

females, women get one message about how they're supposed to be -- and that's sexy." <sup>36</sup>

Studies as early as the turn of the century indicated that American women were particularly dissatisfied with their physical proportions, including the size and shape of their breasts. These researchers identified the marketing potential of selling a "dream of wholeness" or "dream of identity" that promised to alleviate this anxiety. <sup>37</sup>

Christopher Lasch notes that commercial advertising has encouraged "this preoccupation with appearances" since the 1920s:

. . . the women in ads were constantly observing themselves, ever self-critical . . . Ads of the 1920s were quite explicit about this narcissistic imperative. They unabashedly used pictures of veiled nudes and women in autoerotic stances to encourage self-comparison and to remind women of the primacy of their sexuality. A booklet advertising beauty aids depicted on its cover a nude with the caption: "Your Masterpiece -- Yourself." <sup>38</sup>

The relationship between marketing and self-image was illustrated more recently when a cosmetics trade association reported that 97 percent of skin-care professionals in 1985 found women "markedly more worried and upset about the threat of wrinkles than a few years earlier." Perhaps not coincidentally, sales of skin creams had doubled to \$1.9 billion during the five previous years. <sup>39</sup>

Plastic surgeons understood the powerful influence of socio-psychological

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<sup>36</sup>"Women Feeling Pressured to Sculpt a Perfect Body," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, 29 March 1992, 1(A).

<sup>37</sup>Stuart Ewan, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1988), 79.

<sup>38</sup>Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Norton, 1978), 92.

<sup>39</sup>Susan Faludi, *Backlash* (New York: Crown Publishers Inc., 1991), 210.

factors in patients' decisions to undergo cosmetic breast augmentation. When the FDA considered imposing more stringent regulations on breast implants in 1982, the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, the nation's primary organization of board-certified plastic surgeons, opposed the proposal and issued an official statement labeling small breasts as "deformities" and "a disease," which they labeled "micromastia":

There is a common misconception that the enlargement of the female breast is not necessary for the maintenance of health or treatment of disease. There is a substantial and enlarging body of medical information and opinion, however, to the effect that these deformities are really a disease which in most patients result in feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, distortion of body image and a total lack of well-being due to a lack of perceived femininity. The enlargement of the underdeveloped breast is, therefore, often very necessary to insure an improved quality of life for the patient.<sup>40</sup>

One might wonder whether the disease was invented to justify the cure. *Wall Street Journal* writer Susan Faludi calls the cosmetic surgery industry "the most superficial of institutions":

But its impact on women was, in many respects, the most intimately destructive -- to both female minds and bodies . . . . [Plastic surgeons] helped to deepen the psychic isolation that so many women felt . . . by reinforcing the representation of women's problems as purely personal ills, unrelated to social pressures and curable only to the degree that the individual woman succeeded in fitting the universal standard -- by physically changing herself.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>H.W. Porterfield, *Comments on the Proposed Classification of Inflatable Breast Prosthesis and Silicone Gel-Filled Breast Prostheses*, (Chicago: American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, 1982), 1.

<sup>41</sup>Faludi, 203. Cf., Iris Marion Young, *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington, IA: Indiana University Press, 1990), 210. "Plastic surgeons cut into the breast more than into any other body part. . . . Popular culture touts the possibilities of the plastic body. You can have the body you choose, ads and magazine articles suggest; you don't have to be stuck with your given body. But these messages do not give us a choice of the variety of real possible bodies. No, the idea that we can have the body we choose is that we can choose to take the body we have -- with its particular lumps, folds, bone structure, and round



In the decades following World War II, advances in medical science gave Americans confidence that almost anything could be cured or improved quickly by technology. Cosmetic surgeons' own slogan, "'psychiatrist with a knife,' summarizes the perspective that emotional and social benefits may accrue quickly without the amorphous process, long-term investment, and questionable outcomes associated with counseling or social change."<sup>42</sup>

### Product Testing and Regulatory Requirements

Dow Corning also had great confidence in its technology. When the first breast implants were introduced, no clinical tests had been conducted to ascertain their safety for implantation in the human body. The company believed silicone was biologically inert, a conclusion based largely upon experience with a variety of other silicone products, especially the hydrocephalus shunt, which by 1962 had been

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spots -- and make it over into the one and only good body, the slender but voluptuous glamour body that haunts the look, the scene, the pictures viewed. So cosmetic surgery, once the hidden instrument of assimilation or youthfulness, now is openly discussed by doctors, patients and celebrities. There is little choice of what body to value; the normalized body is reinforced by the transformative possibilities of medical technology. Why wouldn't a woman "choose" perfect breasts when the opportunity is there?" For contrasting feminist perspective, see Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Women and The Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and The Colonization of Women's Bodies" in *Nagging Questions: Feminist Ethics in Everyday Life*, ed. Dana E. Bushnell (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 323. "Choosing an artificial and technologically designed creation of youthful beauty may not only be necessary to an individual woman's material, economic and social survival. It may be the way that she is able to choose, to elect a kind of subjective transcendence against a backdrop of constraint, limitation and immanence (in Beauvoir's sense of this term)."

<sup>42</sup>Zones, 236.

implanted in 4,000 children to drain water from their brains.<sup>43</sup> Thomas Cronin, the surgeon who invented the silicone gel breast implant, conducted the only pre-market study, a rudimentary and inconclusive animal test that placed miniature implants in several dogs, two of which were studied for 18 months. "When concerns regarding the safety of these devices surfaced, investigators were chagrined to find that no controlled, long-term studies of women with breast implants were published."<sup>44</sup>

Silas A. Braley, a Dow Corning chemist who helped organize the Center for Aid to Medical Research, explained the company's philosophy about clinical testing:

At that time there were no tests for implant materials . . . . You put it under the skin and look and see what happens. And that is what we had done in many, many cases -- all of which reinforced the knowledge that these materials were satisfactory for use as far as we knew at that time and were infinitely superior to anything that was available as a substitute.<sup>45</sup>

In an April 1993 court deposition -- 30 years after implants were introduced -- Braley recalled, "There were no standards, . . . no protocols, . . . nothing."<sup>46</sup> During the three decades that Dow Corning manufactured breast implants, a growing body of medical research became available to the company; however, relatively little of it was conducted or sponsored by the company itself. Dr. Noel R. Rose, professor and chairman of the Department of Immunology at Johns Hopkins School of Hygiene and Public Health, had testified in court on behalf of Dow Corning. In an interview with

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<sup>43</sup>Charles Sellers, "Dow Corning Corporation: The Breast Implant Controversy" (Study Document, University of St. Thomas, 1996), 6.

<sup>44</sup>Neil A. Fenske, et al., "Silicone-Associated Connective-Tissue Disease," *Archives of Dermatology* 129 (January 1993): 97.

<sup>45</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 47.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid, 49.

a *New York Times* reporter, he said, "'Should the company have done more earlier? . . . Should the FDA have pushed them harder to get data? I just don't have a good feel for why we are left 20 years on, still saying we are sorry, we wish these things would have been looked at 20 years ago.'"<sup>47</sup>

### The FDA and Regulatory Policy

Dow Corning's failure to conduct tests before selling its first implants may be attributed in large part to the fact that no such testing was required by law. It was another 30 years before regulatory authorities in the United States and Canada<sup>48</sup> began to require manufacturers to demonstrate the safety of medical devices.<sup>49</sup>

The United States Congress passed the Medical Devices Amendments in 1976, giving the FDA authority to regulate all medical devices. The impetus for congressional action came not from breast implants but from the Dalkon Shield, an intra-uterine device that was found to cause injuries. The new law "grandfathered" products already on the market, including breast implants, so that manufacturers of existing devices were exempt from the Pre-Market Approval Application (PMAA) process that governed all new medical devices. According to FDA documents,

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<sup>47</sup>Hilts, 8(A).

<sup>48</sup>"Summary of the Report on Silicone-Gel-Filled Breast Implants," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 147(8) (15 Oct. 1992): 1141.

<sup>49</sup>In the United Kingdom, where implants never were as popular as in the United States and Canada, the devices were not subject to licensing under the Safety of Medicines Act of 1978; therefore, the Medical Devices Directorate voluntarily evaluated them for the Health Service. In 1992, the year the United States prohibited most uses of silicone breast implants, manufacturers still were not required by the United Kingdom to provide scientific evidence of long-term biocompatibility. U.K. Medical Devices Directorate, *Evidence for An Association*, 5.

. . . manufacturers of those products were not required to provide FDA with scientific evidence of safety and effectiveness . . . . That stipulation in the law is based on the premise that, generally speaking, more is known about the safety of a device that has been in use for some time than about one that is newly developed. But if questions arise over time that cast any doubt about a "grandfathered" device's safety, the law also gives FDA the authority to go back and require that its manufacturer provide us with evidence to demonstrate that it is safe and effective.<sup>50</sup>

After the 1976 law was enacted, the FDA grouped existing medical devices in three classifications. Mammary prostheses initially were categorized as Class II (temporary) implants, meaning no safety data would be required. In 1982, however, the FDA proposed to reclassify breast implants as Class III (permanent) devices. Manufacturers and plastic surgeons opposed the change and lobbied vigorously but unsuccessfully to prevent it. The following year, after a series of hearings, the FDA's General and Plastic Surgical Devices Advisory Panel voted to recommend the change of category. The FDA commissioner finally endorsed this recommendation in 1988, indicating that the safety of implants was yet unproven. The agency then notified manufacturers that it was commencing a complex process to decide what clinical data would be required from the companies in filing PMAs.<sup>51</sup> Three years later, in April 1991, the FDA informed manufacturers of silicone gel-filled implants<sup>52</sup> that they had 90 days in which to submit PMAs. Rejection of a PMA would force a manufacturer to withdraw an existing product from the market. At about the same time, a subcommittee of the United States Congress had begun an investigation of its

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<sup>50</sup>FDA, *Background Information*, 1.

<sup>51</sup>Zones, 226.

<sup>52</sup>In January 1993 the FDA made a similar request for data on the safety and effectiveness of saline-filled implants.

own on the safety of breast implants.

The FDA was criticized by many for being slow to exercise its authority to demand safety evidence from implant manufacturers. Dr. Sidney M. Wolfe, director of the Public Citizen Health Research Group, wrote a letter in 1988 asking the FDA commissioner about the agency's delay in taking action:

You must explain why six and one-half years elapsed before finalizing the FDA's January 19, 1982, proposal to require Dow [Corning] and other companies making silicone gel breast implants to submit safety data. Your agency negligently did not finalize this regulation until June of this year.<sup>53</sup>

This concern was echoed in a memorandum opinion by United States District Court Judge Stanley Sporkin in a 1990 case involving Dow Corning:

. . . Congress specifically empowered the FDA to require the submission of safety test results. Logically, this means that the agency would certainly be permitted to require research materials . . . [but] the agency has done little, if anything, to implement this extremely important and necessary authority for over 13 years.<sup>54</sup>

In the wake of such criticism, the FDA intended to publish a ruling on product safety within 180 days of the July deadline for receipt of PMAAs. Instead, unexpected problems arose when only four manufacturers, including Dow Corning, met the deadline, and the clinical data they submitted were deemed insufficient.<sup>55</sup> In September the FDA demanded complete reports from manufacturers on all animal and human research related to the effects of implants and silicone. In October it instructed

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<sup>53</sup>Frank B. Vasey and John Feldstein, *The Silicone Breast Implant Controversy* (Freedom, CA: Crossing Press, 1993), 77.

<sup>54</sup>Teich v. FDA and Dow Corning, U.S. District Court for The District of Columbia, Civil Action No. 89-0391, 26 Nov. 1991: 1.

<sup>55</sup>U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Food & Drug Administration, Docket No. 91N-0372, 20 Sept. 1991.

the companies to provide plastic surgeons with details on all known risks associated with the products. The doctors, in turn, were ordered to make manufacturers' information on risks available to all implant patients. A National Implant Registry also was established to track patients after surgery. In November the FDA held hearings to consider additional medical data and testimony from manufacturers, medical associations, consumer groups and others.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the PMAA process, manufacturers had a vocal ally in the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons, which mounted a \$3.1 million lobbying campaign to keep implants on the market. Each member of the Society was subject to a mandatory assessment of \$350 per year for three years to support the effort. At a Washington, D.C., "fly-in," more than 600 plastic surgeons and many of their patients converged on Congress and the FDA.

In January 1992, FDA Commissioner David A. Kessler declared a temporary moratorium on the use of silicone gel-filled implants until more research could be completed. Then, in April 1992, the FDA prohibited further use of the devices except in clinical studies and for purposes of reconstruction in patients with breast cancer and other physical diseases, disorders and injuries.<sup>57</sup> Kessler said,

Some people have argued that [silicone implants] have to be proven unsafe before the FDA can act to protect patients against their use. This is not so. The burden of proof is an affirmative one, and it rests with the manufacturer. We know more about the life span of automobile tires than we do about the longevity of breast implants. And we do not know whether there is any link between implants and immune-related disorders or other systematic diseases.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "A Chronology of Key Events" (Midland, MI: 6 March 1992), 1-3.

<sup>57</sup>Zones, 226.

<sup>58</sup>Vasey and Feldstein, 17.

A month earlier, Dow Corning had withdrawn its PMA application and announced it would exit the breast-implant market permanently. Chief Executive Officer Keith McKennon stated,

Let me make very clear that Dow Corning remains satisfied that Dow Corning implants produced over the years have filled an important medical need for thousands of women, and did not and do not represent an unreasonable risk . . . . Our reasons for not resuming production and sales, therefore, are not related to issues of science or safety but to the existing condition of the marketplace . . . . the products represent less than 1 percent of our revenues and have not been profitable over their history.<sup>59</sup>

### Medical Risks Associated with Silicone Breast Implants

By the time the FDA banned most uses of silicone gel-filled breast implants, a sizeable body of medical literature had raised questions about their safety. Studies indicated possible risks in "two basic categories: those related directly to the breast, and those that may involve distant parts of the body."<sup>60</sup> The following discussion identifies the range of medical complications and risks most often associated with silicone gel-filled implants. This discussion does not address complications peculiar to polyurethane foam-covered devices, as these were not manufactured by Dow Corning.

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<sup>59</sup>It should be noted that the breast implant business had been profitable for Dow Corning until litigation and settlement costs mushroomed in the last few years. Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Announces \$10 Million Research Fund to Continue Study of Silicone Breast Implant Safety; Affirms Financial Support for Implant Removal Under Certain Conditions; and Announces Withdrawal from the Silicone Breast Implant Market," (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 19 March 1992), 2.

## Capsular Contracture

The most commonly reported complication related to breast implants is capsular contracture,<sup>61</sup> a contraction of the fibrous pocket that forms around most subcutaneously placed foreign objects.

[After surgery] . . . the normal wound healing process focuses on isolating the intruder via a series of tissue reactions. During the first few days, a mild transitory inflammatory response calls in granulocytes and other leukocytes, as well as a few plasma cells and macrophages. Over the next few days, the number of leukocytes significantly decreases, and fibroblasts surround the implant. During the second and third weeks, a fibrous capsule, made of layers of connective tissue, forms around the foreign material.

Over time, this membrane or capsule contracts; in some individuals, the capsule becomes more constricted than in others.<sup>62</sup>

The degree of contracture has been associated with several factors, including the texture of the envelope surface, individual foreign-body tolerance, and "a correlation between the amount of silicone in the surrounding capsular tissue and the amount of capsular tissue present."<sup>63</sup> The theory that silicone gel bleeding into the capsule contributes to fibrosis is disputed by some plastic surgeons.<sup>64</sup>

Estimates of the incidence of excessive capsular contracture have ranged from

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<sup>61</sup>Zones, 229.

<sup>62</sup>Jane A. Nemecek and V. Leroy Young, "How Safe are Silicone Breast Implants?", *Southern Medical Journal* 86(8) (Aug. 1993): 933.

<sup>63</sup>Alan J. Bridges and Frank B. Vasey, "Silicone Breast Implants: History, Safety and Potential Complications," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 153 (13 Dec. 1993): 2641.

<sup>64</sup>American Medical Association, Council on Scientific Affairs, "Council Report: Silicone Gel Breast Implants," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270 (21) (1 Dec. 1993): 2604.



25 percent<sup>65</sup> to 70 percent or more.<sup>66</sup> Quantitative data are elusive in part because researchers lack agreement on the measure used to assess the degree of contracture. A review of clinical literature in 1984 placed the rate of incidence at 50 percent.<sup>67</sup>

During the period January 1992 through June 1992, the FDA's newly established Product Reporting System for Silicone Gel-Filled Breast Implants registered 1,136 complaints of physical health problems attributed to breast implants. Of these, approximately one-third involved hardness or excessive firmness of the breast, and 25 percent specifically named the fibrous capsule.<sup>68</sup>

Contracture of the fibrous capsule is not generally considered a serious health risk, though there is no consensus in etiology. What is certain, however, is that contracture can cause mastodynia (pain), hardening of the breast, mastitis (inflammation), and irregularity of breast shape. The typical methods of treatment are open capsulotomy (surgically removing and replacing the implant while cutting away the scar tissue) and closed capsulotomy (manually squeezing the breast with intense pressure to break the capsule and soften the breast). "Both methods have high contracture recurrence rates,"<sup>69</sup> and closed capsulotomy is discouraged by

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Zones, 229.

<sup>67</sup>Burkhardt, B. R., "Capsular Contracture: Hard Breasts, Soft Data," *Clinical Plastic Surgery* 15(4) (1988): 521-532.

<sup>68</sup>Ruth B. Merkatz, et al., "A Qualitative Analysis of Self-Reported Experiences Among Women Encountering Difficulties with Silicone Breast Implants," *Journal of Women's Health* 2(2) (1993): 112.

<sup>69</sup>Zones, 230.

manufacturers who warn that it "can result in [injury] and can rupture the implant."<sup>70</sup>

Another complication related to fibrous encapsulation of the implant is the development of "bone-like" deposits of calcium salts, which can cause sharp pain and sometimes are "difficult to discern [by x-ray] from abnormalities related to cancer."<sup>71</sup>

### Silicone Gel Bleed and Envelope Rupture

Silicone gel is released continuously from the breast implant by permeating the wall of the silicone envelope. This "bleed" phenomenon occurs in measurable amounts regardless of the age or condition of the envelope.<sup>72</sup> "Annual bleed rates of 60 to 100 milligrams for old implants and five to ten milligrams for new implants were reported for Dow Corning products."<sup>73</sup> Research by the company "concluded that gel bleed could not be significantly reduced by formulation changes without adversely affecting mechanical properties . . . ."<sup>74</sup> Because the envelope is semipermeable, substances can pass through it in either direction.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup>Dow Corning Wright, Implant Information Center, "Benefits and Complications," *Supplemental Information to Most Frequent Questions*, (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Wright, 1991).

<sup>71</sup>"Breast Implants: A Position Paper by the Canadian Society of Plastic Surgeons," *CSPS News* (Winter-Spring 1994): 1.

<sup>72</sup>D.E. Barker, et al., "Bleeding of Silicone from Bag Gel Breast Implants and its Clinical Relation to Fibrous Capsule Reaction," *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* 61 (1978): 836-41.

<sup>73</sup>"Summary of the Report on Silicone-Gel-Filled Breast Implants," 1143.

<sup>74</sup>U.K. Medical Devices Directorate, *Evidence for an Association*, 10.

<sup>75</sup>Nachman Brautbar, et al., "Silicone Breast Implants and Autoimmunity: Causation or Myth?," *Archives of Environmental Health* 49(3) (1994): 151.

Regardless of how much gel bleeds through the wall of an intact envelope, there is evidence to indicate that many, if not most, implants will degrade or rupture over time, spilling their contents into the fibrous capsule. A panel of the American Medical Association (AMA) reported that it was unable to obtain an accurate incidence rate for implant rupture, primarily because of "undetected asymptomatic rupture."<sup>76</sup> A Canadian study of 269 explantations found rupture rates of 31.9 percent.<sup>77</sup> Of complaints registered by the FDA Product Reporting Program, 26 percent reported rupture and 18 percent reported leaking.<sup>78</sup> The year before it ceased manufacturing the devices, Dow Corning stated that its breast implants could be expected to last no longer than 10 years, after which time replacement might be required.<sup>79</sup> The company previously had assured patients they would last a lifetime.

In most cases the leaking silicone is contained by the fibrous capsule; however, studies have shown that small amounts of silicone can migrate to more distant parts of the body, raising the possibility of complications similar to those that led to the prohibition of liquid silicone injections. "Micro-droplets of silicone fluid or microscopic particles of silicone elastomer [from the envelope] have been shown to be phagocytized by selected white blood cells and transported to regional lymph nodes."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup>American Medical Association, Council on Scientific Affairs, "Council Report: Silicone Gel Breast Implants," *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270(21) (1 Dec. 1993): 2604.

<sup>77</sup>"Summary of The Report," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 1143.

<sup>78</sup>Merkatz, 114.

<sup>79</sup>Dow Corning Wright, Implant Information Center, "Life Expectancy," *Patient Information Booklet*, 1991.

<sup>80</sup>AMA, "Council Report," 2604.

A review of research and clinical literature by the United Kingdom Department of Health concluded that silicone materials from implants were "widely distributed throughout the body via the reticulo-endothelial system . . . ." <sup>81</sup> Silicones also have been shown to spread locally to soft tissues and systemically through the vascular system. <sup>82</sup> In animal studies, subcutaneously injected silicone particles migrated to the liver, heart, spleen, kidney, lung, brain and ovary. <sup>83</sup> Dow Corning explains, "Silicones, because they are insoluble in water, are not absorbed by the body's tissue . . . [but] are transported by specialized cells." <sup>84</sup>

#### Autoimmune and Connective Tissue Disease

The most serious medical and legal concerns arise from studies that suggest a connection between silicone gel-filled implants and autoimmunity and rheumatic disease; however, there is substantial disagreement among medical researchers as to whether such a link exists. The connective-tissue diseases in question include rheumatoid arthritis, scleroderma, polymyositis, dermatomyositis, Sjogren's syndrome and lupus erythematosus. These disorders can lead to long-term health problems involving "pain and swelling of joints; tightness, redness or swelling of skin; swollen glands or lymph nodes; unusual and unexplained fatigue; swelling of the hands and

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<sup>81</sup>U.K. Medical Devices Directorate, *Evidence for an Association*, 12.

<sup>82</sup>Nir Kossovsky and Nora Papasian, "Clinical Reviews: Mammary Implants," *Journal of Applied Biomaterials*, 3 (1992): 2.

<sup>83</sup>Haideh Hirmand, et al., "Autoimmune Disease and Silicone Breast Implants," *Oncology* (July 1993): 19.

<sup>84</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Glossary of Terms" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 6 March 1992): 6.

feet; and unusual hair loss."<sup>85</sup> These symptoms are consistent with autoimmunity, in which antibodies created by the body's immune system attack not only their intended target but also the body's own tissues.

At issue in the scientific community is whether silicone is an immunogen (a stimulator of an immune response). The literature was divided at the time of this writing; some studies suggest a causal relationship between silicone and autoimmunity,<sup>86</sup> while others argue vigorously against it.<sup>87</sup>

The largest and best-regarded study to date was conducted by Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, an affiliate of Harvard Medical School. It involved nearly 400,000 female health professionals and found that women with breast implants were 24 percent more likely to have connective tissue disease than women without implants. Even so, the rate of reported incidence of the rare disease was quite low: 1.41 per 1,000 per year for women with implants, compared to 1.14 for those without

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<sup>85</sup>"Breast Implants: A Position Paper," *CSPS News* (Winter-Spring 1994), 4.

<sup>86</sup>Examples of such studies: Brautbar, et al.; Bridges, et al.; U.K. Medical Devices Directorate, "Evidence for an Association"; Richard M. Silver, et al., "Demonstration of Silicon in Sites of Connective-Tissue Disease in Patients with Silicone-Gel Breast Implants," *Archives of Dermatology* 129 (Jan. 1993); K. M. Fock, et al., "Autoimmune Disease Developing After Augmentation Mammoplasty: Report of Three Cases," *Journal of Rheumatology* 27(1) (1984): 98; H. Spiera, "Scleroderma After Silicone Augmentation Mammoplasty," *Journal of The American Medical Association* 260(2) (1988): 236.

<sup>87</sup>Examples of such studies: Sherine E. Gabriel, et al., "Risk of Connective-Tissue Diseases and Other Disorders After Breast Implantation," *New England Journal of Medicine* 330(24) (16 June, 1994): 1697; D. M. Gott and J. J. B. Tinkler, *Evaluation of Evidence for an Association Between The Implantation of Silicones and Connective Tissue Disease: Data Published from The End of 1991 to July 1994* (London: U.K. Department of Health, Medical Devices Agency, December 1994); S. E. Gabriel, et al., *Breast Implants/Connective Tissues Disease Disorders*, (Rochester, MN: Mayo Clinic, 1994); David Schottenfeld, et al., *Scleroderma and Its Causes* (Ann Arbor, MI: School of Public Health, University of Michigan, 1994).

them.<sup>88</sup> Dow Corning provided \$1.3 million of the \$18.3 million cost of the study, most of which was funded through the United States National Institutes of Health. A statement was released by the company in early 1998 citing three additional studies (two of which received funding from the company) which "add to the weight of evidence" in support of its position that there is no association between breast implants and connective tissue disease.<sup>89</sup>

Later that year, a report was issued by the British government's Independent Review Group on Silicone Gel Breast Implants, which concluded that there was "no evidence of an association with an abnormal immune response or typical or atypical connective tissue diseases," but which also stressed that "the information provided to women undergoing breast implantation is often inadequate" in helping patients make informed decisions about whether to proceed with surgery.<sup>90</sup>

### Interference with Mammography

As the popularity of silicone breast implants peaked in the late 1980s, the use of mammography to detect breast cancer was increasing as well. Radiologists discovered that implants were "radiopaque" and could interfere with x-ray and other imaging techniques by "hiding suspicious lesions in the breast."<sup>91</sup> The devices "also

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<sup>88</sup>The Associated Press, "Breast Implants Implicated," (Online: AP News, 28 Feb. 1996).

<sup>89</sup>Dow Corning Corp, news release, "Three Studies Add to Weight of Evidence About Breast Implants" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 17 February 1998): 1.

<sup>90</sup>United Kingdom Department of Health, *Report of The Independent Review Group on Silicone Gel Breast Implants* (Yorkshire, U.K.: 1998), 1.

<sup>91</sup>"Breast Implants: A Position Paper," *CSPA News*, 1.

compress the breast tissue so that normal breast architecture is distorted. From 22 percent to 83 percent of glandular tissue can be obscured.<sup>92</sup> Capsular contraction can further impede cancer-detection mammography:

This is partially due to the fact that capsules make it hard to displace the breast tissue away from an implant when trying to obtain modified compression views. At the same time, the capsule that forms around an implant may become calcified . . . [which] can either obscure or confuse the detection of tissue microcalcifications associated with breast cancer.<sup>93</sup>

Imaging is complicated further by the wide variety of styles, sizes and shapes of implants (approximately 1,500) that were produced by the various manufacturers.<sup>94</sup>

Techniques also have been developed for using mammography and ultrasonography to detect implant leaks and ruptures.

#### Other Potential Complications

Other reported problems associated with silicone gel-filled breast implants include heightened, decreased or loss of sensation of the nipple-areola complex<sup>95</sup>; interference with breast feeding; and infection, which occurs in about 1 percent of recipients and typically necessitates removal of the implant.<sup>96</sup> Some animal studies

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<sup>92</sup>"Summary of The Report on Silicone-Gel-Filled Breast Implants," 1144.

<sup>93</sup>Nemecek and Young, 938.

<sup>94</sup>Stephen J. Pomeranz, "Breast Implants: An Overview," *Implants & Health Risks Update* (Cincinnati, OH: Positron Emission Tomography Department, Metabolic Imaging Center, The Christ Hospital, June 1994), 1.

<sup>95</sup>Dow Corning Wright, Implant Information Center, "Silicone Breast Implants: Benefits and Complications," *Supplemental Information to Most Frequent Questions* (Midland MI: Dow Corning Wright, 1991).

<sup>96</sup>Risk of infection is comparable to other implanted devices. Nemecek and Young, 935.

have indicated that silicone is teratogenic, causing abnormalities in embryos carried by implant recipients, and carcinogenic, inducing fibrosarcoma at the implant site.

Neither of these conditions has been shown to develop in humans.<sup>97</sup> Animal research also has demonstrated a causal link between granulomatous lesions and tumors, which are present in some human cases and may result from cellular reaction to implanted silicone.<sup>98</sup>

### Product Liability Litigation

Between 1990 and 1994, allegations of medical complications related to silicone breast implants precipitated an avalanche of more than 20,000 lawsuits charging that Dow Corning knowingly sold unsafe products and failed to inform patients of risks. In an attempt to resolve these cases, the company joined with approximately 60 other manufacturers of implants and component materials in April 1994 to create a \$4.2 billion fund to compensate women who claimed to have silicone-induced rheumatic illnesses. Dow Corning was the largest contributor to the class-action settlement, agreeing to pay \$2 billion.<sup>99</sup>

Over the next 12 months, 260,000 claimants registered with the United States District Court, Northern District of Alabama. This number was much higher than anticipated and caused individual Disease Compensation benefits to be reduced

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid, 935.

<sup>98</sup>John P. Heggers, et al., *Biocompatibility of Silicone Implants*, Section on Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, University of Chicago Hospitals (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), 38-44.

<sup>99</sup>Thomas Burton, "Breast Implant Claims Fund May Need \$3 Billion More, Preliminary Study says," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 May 1995, 4(A).



severely, from a maximum of \$1.4 million to a maximum of \$253,000. In addition, 15,000 women elected to "opt out" of the global settlement in order to pursue their cases individually, potentially undermining the arrangement that was intended to circumscribe the defendants' financial exposure.<sup>100</sup> Dow Corning, fearful of being overwhelmed by legal claims outside the class-action settlement, filed for protection in May 1995 under Chapter 11 of the United States Bankruptcy Code.<sup>101</sup> Three years later, the company agreed to a \$3.2 billion settlement plan to compensate more than 170,000 claimants and ultimately conclude its period of bankruptcy protection. The new plan, which also included provisions for payments to women who might file implant-related claims during the next 16 years, allowed patients to receive \$5,000 to have their implants removed without waiving their rights to additional compensation or settlement funds.<sup>102</sup>

### The Stern Case

A decade before the bankruptcy filing, Dow Corning could not have foreseen the fury of the legal storm that was just beginning to gather. In 1985 the company lost

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<sup>100</sup>United States District Court, Northern District of Alabama, Southern Division, "Breast Implant Litigation Notice," 1; Approximately half of those who opted out were non-U.S. residents, for whom the global settlement offered fewer benefits: "Nearly 15,000 Women Opt Out of Breast Implant Settlement," *Chemical and Engineering News* (1 Aug. 1994): 17; Dow Corning was forced to continue to negotiate individual settlements: "18 Breast Implant Cases Settled," *Business Insurance* (8 Aug. 1994): 2.

<sup>101</sup>Milo Geyelin, "Dow Corning Seeks Chapter 11 Shield, Clouding Status of Breast-Implant Pact," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1995, 3(A).

<sup>102</sup>Dow Corning Corp., "Dow Corning Confirms Consensual Plan to Resolve Breast Implant Claims" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 8 July 1998).

the first in a series of cases alleging a causal relationship between silicone implants and autoimmune diseases. The \$1.7 million judgement in the case of Maria Stern was an unprecedented courtroom loss, as prior lawsuits "typically involved infections or implants that had ruptured" and were settled quietly for modest sums of \$15,000 to \$20,000.<sup>103</sup> The plaintiff also was atypical: she received breast implants after a double mastectomy, later developed severe arthritis and fatigue, and said that her symptoms had improved markedly when the implants were removed.

Convincing testimony was presented on Stern's behalf by a variety of experts, including an immunologist, a toxicologist and an ethicist specializing in health policy. But the evidence most harmful to Dow Corning was neither from outside experts nor from patient records, but from within the company itself. In the pre-trial discovery process, Stern's lawyers reviewed thousands of files at Dow Corning's corporate headquarters, uncovering potentially vital information that had been withheld from patients and the public.<sup>104</sup>

Among these documents were numerous letters from plastic surgeons complaining that Dow Corning implants ruptured before, during and after implantation. One surgeon, Dr. Charles A. Vinnick, wrote a series of letters expressing doubt about the company's claims that silicone was biologically inert. In 1981, he reported that a ruptured implant removed from a patient had caused "considerable silicone reaction to the extruded material, . . . [proving] that 'pure

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<sup>103</sup>Alison Frankel, "From Pioneers to Profits: The Splendid Past and Muddled Present of Breast Implant Litigation," *American Lawyer* (June 1992): 84.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

silicone' can cause severe foreign body reactions in susceptible individuals."<sup>105</sup> Four years later, the same doctor informed the company that the gel leaking from another ruptured implant appeared to change consistency when it came in contact with human tissue. He demanded that more information be disclosed to patients and the public:

I feel that your company has both a moral and legal obligation to make this information available through your representatives and in your literature. I am loathe to publish my series of cases as I feel it may open Pandora's Box. I do feel, however, that rapid dissemination of this information is very necessary to protect your company and my colleagues.<sup>106</sup>

A 1982 memorandum from a doctor at the University of Chicago medical school proposed that Dow Corning fund a clinical study to explore whether a physical reaction to silicone contributes to capsular contracture: "Our data . . . suggest strongly that the fibrosis and [contracture] seen clinically may be an immunologically mediated phenomenon."<sup>107</sup> The company declined to sponsor the project.

More damaging than these documents were internal research reports and memoranda indicating that Dow Corning had first-hand knowledge of implant risks and product flaws years before the public knew about them. Employees' concerns about these matters appeared to have gone unheeded by the company. Because of this evidence, the judgements in *Stern* and several subsequent cases were based primarily on fraud.

A pivotal issue in *Stern* was a two-year, Dow Corning-sponsored study in

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<sup>105</sup>Charles A. Vinnick to Robert Rylee, chairman of Dow Corning Wright, 23 September 1981. Released by Dow Corning Corp., Feb. 1992.

<sup>106</sup>Charles Vinnick to Bruce Reuter of Dow Corning Wright, 11 Sept. 1985. Released by Dow Corning Corp., Feb. 1992.

<sup>107</sup>Frankel, 84.

which researchers implanted miniature silicone implants in four dogs. They found after two years that one had died (of unrelated causes) and two of the remaining three had "chronic inflammation, thyroiditis, autoimmune response, and spots on the spleen."<sup>108</sup> These findings were never published in full; instead, after completing the study, Dow Corning employees wrote a journal article reporting only the unremarkable results of the first six months and stating that "the beagles remained in normal health after two years."<sup>109</sup> When United States District Court Judge Marilyn Hall Patel examined the research report from Dow Corning's files, she discovered that the numbers identifying the dogs appeared to have been altered to obfuscate the findings. Calling the company's behavior "highly reprehensible," the judge said the internal documents "cast considerable doubt on the safety of the product."<sup>110</sup> In a post-trial order, she wrote,

There was substantial evidence before the jury of defendant's knowledge of rupture and gel bleed. There was also substantial evidence of the probable injurious consequences and a conscious, willful failure to inform the consumer.<sup>111</sup>

The company appealed the judgement and lost, then appealed again. During the appeals process, the parties reached an out-of-court settlement that had implications for all subsequent cases over the next eight years. As part of the agreement, Dow Corning succeeded in gaining a court order sealing all internal

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<sup>108</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 103.

<sup>109</sup>Silas Braley and Gordon Robertson, *Medical Instrumentation*, (1973).

<sup>110</sup>Tim Smart, "Breast Implants: What Did The Industry Know, and When?" *Business Week* (10 June 1991): 94.

<sup>111</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 105.

documents discovered in the case. The company's lawyers prevented most of the documents from being made public until 1992.<sup>112</sup>

### The Hopkins Case

Three years after *Stern*, another portentous case added momentum to the legal onslaught against implant manufacturers. Mariann Hopkins of San Francisco sued Dow Corning in 1988 alleging that silicone implants caused an illness her doctors called "mixed connective tissue disease." Like Maria Stern, she underwent mammoplasty after a double mastectomy. Hopkins' symptoms, some of which began even before she received the implants, included "muscle spasms, joint inflammation, pleurisy, anemia and an ulcer" that required the surgical removal of one-third of her stomach.<sup>113</sup> In 1991, the year her case went to trial, doctors removed two collapsed implants in an 11-hour operation where silicone was scraped from inside her chest, shoulder and arm. The devices were the fourth set to be removed since her reconstructive surgery in 1976.<sup>114</sup>

During the Hopkins trial, much attention focused on the discovery of a 1975 experiment on mice conducted by Dow Corning researchers to test their own hypothesis that silicone stimulates the immune system. Their intent was to explore the market potential of silicone as an adjuvant to boost the effectiveness of antibiotics.

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<sup>112</sup>Thomas M. Burton and Scott McMurray, "Dow Corning Still Keeps Implant Data from Public, Despite Vow of Openness," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 Feb. 1992, 5(B).

<sup>113</sup>Frankel, 87.

<sup>114</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 167.

Injected with liquid silicone similar to the kind used in breast implants, the animals exhibited measurable immune-system reactions.<sup>115</sup> At about the same time, a researcher at the University of Texas medical school wrote to Dow Corning to report studies showing human immune-system response to silicone. Dr. John Paul Heggers later said, "They just weren't interested."<sup>116</sup>

A federal District Court jury awarded Hopkins \$840,000 in compensatory damages and an additional \$6.5 million in punitive damages, based on fraud. It was the largest single judgement for a plaintiff in a breast-implant case and it attracted national media attention. Within three months, 200 new lawsuits were filed against Dow Corning and the company began weighing the option of filing for Chapter 11 protection.<sup>117</sup>

#### Informed Consent, Product Information and Internal Concerns

The decisive issue in *Stern* and *Hopkins* concerned the medical doctrine of informed consent, which holds that prior to treatment, a physician must provide a patient with all available "information about the condition, goals and limitations of treatment, treatment alternatives available (including non-treatment), and risks and

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<sup>115</sup>Dow Corning Corp., Bioscience Research Department, *Action of Polydimethylsiloxanes on The Reticuloendothelial System of Mice: Basic Cellular Interactions and Structure-Activity Relationships*. (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., Bioscience Research Department, 10 Dec. 1975).

<sup>116</sup>Hilts, 8(A).

<sup>117</sup>Michelle Galen, "Debacle at Dow Corning: How Bad Will It Get: Lawsuits by Implant Recipients and Shareholders Could Cost It a Fortune," *Business Week* (2 March 1992): 36.

complications associated with the various treatment options.<sup>118</sup> Plaintiffs' lawyers argued that women would not have undergone mammoplasty had they been informed fully of the risks.

### Limited Disclosure to Patients

Many women had based their decisions in part on a pamphlet published by Dow Corning, "Facts You Should Know About Your New Look." It made no mention of the possibilities of leakage, rupture, silicone migration, rheumatic disease or interference with mammography, and it minimized the common complications associated with capsular contracture. The document posed a series of commonly asked questions and gave brief answers to each:

How long will the mammary prosthesis last?

Based upon laboratory findings, together with human experience to date, one would expect that the mammary prosthesis would last for a natural lifetime. However, since no mammary prosthesis has been implanted for a full life span, it is impossible to give an unequivocal answer.

Can I expect any problems with my breasts following mammary augmentation?

While thousands of women have mammary augmentation operations done annually without any adverse reactions, no surgical procedure is a success every time, and each person's reactions to surgery and implantations can be different. Occasional complaints of excessive breast firmness and/or discomfort caused by fibrous capsule formation and shrinkage have necessitated surgical correction and have been noted in the medical literature.<sup>119</sup>

Mark Lappe, an associate professor at the University of California-Berkeley School of Public Health and an expert on informed consent, testified at the Stern trial

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<sup>118</sup>Zones, 235.

that the pamphlet was "incomplete" and "deceptive,"<sup>120</sup> based on the evidence that Dow Corning deliberately withheld vital information from doctors and patients. The employee responsible for the pamphlet later denied any wrongdoing, saying he and his colleagues in marketing were "too dumb to conspire. Our engineers and scientists told us silicone was completely inert, and women would look good with [implants] for the rest of their lives."<sup>121</sup>

Serious concerns about implant safety were being raised by plastic surgeons, medical researchers and others well before 1970. Yet it was the courtroom loss in 1985 that finally motivated the company's legal department to require the inclusion of a list of 18 possible complications in the package insert accompanying each implant.<sup>122</sup>

The previous version of the insert mentioned only one potential "adverse reaction": "Occasional complaints of . . . discomfort caused by fibrous capsule formation and shrinkage . . . ."<sup>123</sup> The new insert, published in 1985, also estimated the chance of rupture to be just one percent.

Package inserts were written in technical language intended for doctors, rather than patients. In Dow Corning's view, it was the responsibility of the surgeon to read the insert and convey its information to the patient as part of securing informed

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<sup>119</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 101-102.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid, 102.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid.

<sup>122</sup>Dow Corning Corp., Medical Products, *Silastic Brand Mammary Prosthesis*, printed insert for product package (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., Medical Products, 1985).

<sup>123</sup>Idem, *Silastic Brand Mammary Prosthesis*, printed insert for product package (Midland MI: Dow Corning Corp.).



consent for the mammoplasty procedure. When *Business Week* magazine in 1991 asked why the company did not disclose more information about risks, Robert T. Rylee, chairman of health care businesses at Dow Corning, said, "We don't want to be overeducating plaintiffs' lawyers."<sup>124</sup> In 1998, the Independent Review Group on Silicone Gel Breast Implants, a special commission of the United Kingdom Department of Health, concluded that the information available to patients was still inadequate.<sup>125</sup>

### Internal Concerns

In February 1992, Dow Corning publicly released 800 pages of closely guarded internal documents, including those that had influenced the *Stern* jury. *Time* magazine noted, "the company made a virtue of necessity [since] the FDA had threatened to make the documents public anyway."<sup>126</sup> In these files was the 1975 mice study, which had not been reported to the FDA prior to its discovery in *Hopkins*. The FDA commissioner expressed "significant concerns" about the delay in reporting a study that "seems to suggest that one of the compounds that is present in breast implants and that we were concerned about does have adverse impacts."<sup>127</sup>

The *New York Times* reported,

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<sup>124</sup>Smart, "What Did The Industry Know and When," 95.

<sup>125</sup>U.K. Department of Health, *Report of Independent Review Group*, 1.

<sup>126</sup>"Silicone Blues: Dow Corning Tries to Shore Up Its Sagging Image," *Time* (24 February 1992): 65.

<sup>127</sup>Henry Weinstein, "FDA Objects to 19-Year Delay in Release of Implant Study," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 1994, 22(A).

Scientists within Dow Corning Corp. urged company officials for years to conduct critical safety studies of its silicone breast implants, but the tests were put off for more than a decade, a review of hundreds of documents shows.

The documents . . . also suggest that the studies that were done were inadequate. They describe insertion of implants into women before they had been tested in animals . . . .<sup>128</sup>

Internal memoranda indicate that some Dow Corning employees voiced serious concerns about customer complaints, product flaws, lack of safety research and the ambitious pace at which products were brought to market.<sup>129</sup> A frequent subject was a new implant, introduced in 1975, with a thinner envelope and diluted gel intended to achieve a more supple feeling. Art E. Rathjen was appointed to chair a task force with just two weeks to design and begin initial production of the new product.<sup>130</sup> As the company was about to begin filling the envelopes with the modified formula, Rathjen wrote to the task force:

A question not yet answered is whether or not there is an excessive bleed of the gel through the envelope. We must address ourselves to this question immediately, determine what the facts are, and decide whether the plant is to proceed with the filling of the current inventory. Question: Does the proposed new mammary bleed any more than our standard product? If the product does bleed more, is it substantial enough that it will affect product

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<sup>128</sup>"Research Questioned Breast Implants," *New York Times News Service* (Online: Nexis, 9 May 1994).

<sup>129</sup>It cannot be determined from these documents how, or whether, the company responded to each of these concerns. CEO Rylee argued that the internal memos were simply a normal part of the give-and-take of the "product development process." He rightly cautioned that "a single memo taken out of context can distort reality." Rylee, Robert T., chairman of healthcare businesses, Dow Corning Wright, "Remarks to The National Press Club," Washington, D.C., 13 January 1991.

<sup>130</sup>Dow Corning was fast losing market share to competitors whose products were more supple. The pace of the new project -- four months from product conception to market -- was considered reckless by some who later contended that the untested, thinner formulation was more prone to leak.

acceptance? A "go or no-go" decision will have to come from the Business Board. The stakes are too high if a wrong decision is made.<sup>131</sup>

Sixteen months after the product was first implanted in patients, Rathjen again expressed his frustration at the lack of definitive research. He had recently met with a plastic surgeon, Dr. James Penoff, whose questions he could not answer with confidence:

We are engulfed in unqualified speculation. Nothing to date is truly quantitative or qualitative; therefore, Dr. Penoff's suggestions for a course of action merit some consideration . . . . Is there something in the implant that migrates out or off the mammary prosthesis? Yes or no! Does it continue for the life of the implant or is it limited or controlled for a period of time? . . . . What is it?<sup>132</sup>

Within months of the product's release, Tom Salisbury, marketing manager and a member of the mammary task force, began to hear from sales representatives that the new gel seemed to migrate through the envelope wall more easily than in previous models. He responded,

It has been observed that the new mammaries with responsive gel have a tendency to appear oily after being manipulated. This could be a problem with your daily detailing activity where mammary manipulation is a must. Keep in mind that this is not a product problem; our technical people assure us that the doctor in [the operating room] will not see any appreciable oiling on product removed from the package. The oily phenomenon seems to appear the day following manipulation.

You should make plans to change demonstration samples often. Also, be sure samples are clean and dry before customer detailing. Two easy ways to clean demonstration samples while traveling are 1) wash with soap and water in the nearest washroom, dry with hand towels, 2) carry a small bottle of IPA and rag. I have used both methods and the first is my choice . . . .<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>A.E. Rathjen to Mammary Task Force, 28 January 1975. Released by Dow Corning Corp. Feb. 1992.

<sup>132</sup>Vasey and Feldstein, 45.

<sup>133</sup>Tom Salisbury to Sales Staff, 16 May 1975. Released by Dow Corning Corp.,

A chemical engineer, Thomas D. Talcott, was assigned to study the problem of bleed with the new design. During the early stages of development, he and a colleague wrote the task force:

We are concerned about a possible bleed situation as we are about the safety test results, about the suitability of the new gel in the contour-shaped prosthesis and simultaneously introducing a complete new line of sterile products.<sup>134</sup>

Despite these concerns, production proceeded on schedule. Almost immediately, the company began to receive reports of high rupture rates and flawed devices. Sales representatives complained loudly of embarrassing situations that jeopardized their relationships with customers. One such embarrassment came during a symposium for plastic surgeons when two implants ruptured during a videotaped augmentation.<sup>135</sup>

Talcott wrote Rathjen,

During our task force assignment to get the new products to market, a large number of people spent a lot of time discussing envelope quality. We ended up saying the envelopes were 'good enough' while looking at gross thin spots and flaws in the form of significant bubbles . . . . The allowable flaws are written into our current specifications.

When will we learn at Dow Corning that making a product "just good enough" almost always leads to products that are "not quite good enough?"<sup>136</sup>

Talcott, a 24-year employee, resigned in protest the following year because he said the company failed to heed his advice. Sixteen years later, as a \$400-per-hour consultant

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Feb. 1992.

<sup>134</sup>Thomas D. Talcott and William D. Larson to Mammary Task Force, 4 Feb. 1975. Released by Dow Corning Corp., Feb. 1992.

<sup>135</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 76.

<sup>136</sup>Talcott to Rathjen, 15 Jan. 1976. Released by Dow Corning Feb. 1992.

to plaintiffs' lawyers, he contended the company had been "conducting experimental surgery on humans."<sup>137</sup>

Internal memoranda indicate that questions continued for years. In 1980, Sales representative Robert Schnabel wrote to his supervisor after being confronted by an angry doctor about "greasy" implants:

The thing that is really galling is that I feel like I have been beaten by my own company instead of the competition . . . . It has been brought to my attention that this particular lot was put on the market with prior knowledge of the bleed problem. To put a questionable lot of mammaries on the market is inexcusable. I don't know who is responsible for this decision, but it has to rank right up there with the Pinto gas tank.<sup>138</sup>

Another representative complained of losing business at a large Michigan hospital:

I find it difficult to comprehend that I am the only one experiencing a rupture problem of this proportion . . . . I have lost more business recently due to ruptures than I lost last year due to competitors' sales efforts. My question is: Are we making the envelope different and is it weaker?<sup>139</sup>

Of all the approximately 90 documents released in early 1992, the one that received the most attention from news media was an internal memorandum from Charles Leach, a marketing manager who had been questioned by plastic surgeons about the effect of silicone on capsular contracture:

I assured them, with crossed fingers, that Dow Corning . . . had an active 'contracture/gel migration' study under way. This apparently satisfied them for the moment, but one of these days they will be asking us for the results of our studies . . . . The black clouds are ominous and should be given more

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<sup>137</sup>Tim Smart, "This Man Sounded The Silicone Alarm -- In 1976," *Business Week* (27 Jan. 1992): 34.

<sup>138</sup>Reference is to Ford Motor Company's Pinto automobile that was recalled because of a gas tank that tended to explode in rear-end collisions. Robert Schnabel to Milt Hinsch, 29 April 1980. Released by Dow Corning Corp., Feb. 1992.

<sup>139</sup>Frank Lewis to Milt Hinsch, 2 March 1978. Released by Dow Corning Corp., Feb. 1992.

attention.<sup>140</sup>

### Dow Corning's Public Response

Until 1991, the darkening clouds were apparent neither to the general public nor to most implant recipients. External researchers, plastic surgeons, company sales representatives and others had raised concerns about safety and quality for at least 18 years; yet few people outside the industry knew of the allegations of risks and complications associated with the product. Even as regulatory and legal cases began to raise public awareness of these issues, Dow Corning staunchly defended the safety and quality of its devices, adopting an often combative stance in the debate.

In January 1992, less than a month before the company released the internal files, an article in the *New York Times* reported, "officials at Dow Corning maintain that the implants are safe, that most women who have them are delighted with them . . . ."<sup>141</sup> Four weeks later, after the memos were released, a columnist at the same newspaper observed,

The company had 20 years to prepare for this. The memos were crisis prodromes -- warning signs -- that the company intentionally buried for two decades. It did so rather than fix the problem.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Charles Leach to Robert LeVier, 31 March 1977. Released by Dow Corning Corp., Feb. 1992. It should be noted that Leach and Robert Rylee later denied that the reference to "crossed fingers" meant he intended to mislead the doctors. Rylee said Leach "was hopeful that additional studies would resolve the issue of gel bleed and its relationship to contracture." Robert T. Rylee, Washington, D.C. speech, 13 January 1991.

<sup>141</sup>Phillip Hilts, "Maker of Implants Balked at Testing, Its Records Show," *New York Times*, 13 Jan. 1992, 1(A).

<sup>142</sup>Steven Fink, "Dow Corning's Moral Evasions," *New York Times*, 16 Feb. 1992, 13(F).

## Public Denial

Legal considerations forced Dow Corning to disclose potential risks and complications in its 1985 package insert, but the company's public communications continued to deny any safety concerns and its executives argued vehemently with those who suggested that there were problems with the product. A statement by Rylee in 1990 was typical of the corporate position:

Dow Corning has great confidence that our breast implants made of silicone material are safe and effective. This confidence is based on more than thirty years of solid science including hundreds of bio-safety studies.<sup>143</sup>

A similar remark, two years later, was made by Dan M. Hayes, president of Dow Corning Wright:

We are confident in the strength and accuracy of our science, particularly when it is interpreted by knowledgeable scientists. We know more about silicones than almost anyone in the world.<sup>144</sup>

Even as he sought to explain the most damaging internal documents, Rylee denied that the company ever should have been concerned about the safety of silicone implants:

By 1975, did we believe more research was needed? Of course. Any responsible scientist is always seeking more data and more evidence. The only debate was which studies we would undertake next.

Did we know that silicone bled through the implants? Of course we did. That was generally understood. But neither us nor our colleagues believed this phenomenon was a safety issue nor do any of our subsequent studies show this to be a safety issue.

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<sup>143</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Reaffirms Safety of Breast Implants at Congressional Hearing" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 18 Dec. 1990).

<sup>144</sup>Idem, news release, "Dow Corning Calls Upon Kessler to Identify 'New Information,' Echoes ASPRS Recommendation of New Expert Panel," (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 15 Jan. 1992).

Did we want to reduce the amount of gel bleed? Of course we did. Because gel bleed was not a phenomenon that contributed to the implant's performance. It was unnecessary and therefore we sought to reduce or eliminate it in our next generation of products.<sup>145</sup>

Beginning in 1991, the company attempted to focus the public debate on two issues in addition to product safety: the reconstructive needs of women with mastectomies, and the right of women to choose whether to undergo breast augmentation. When Dow Corning filed its PMAA, Rylee stressed that implants were created as a service to physicians and their patients:

Dow Corning began research and development work on silicone breast prostheses about 30 years ago at the request of physicians . . . . Since then, the company has continued to work with physicians to meet the needs of their patients, and to work in the laboratory to demonstrate the safety of silicone materials used to make breast implants . . . . The results of scientific studies on breast implants together with two-and-a-half decades of clinical use have not revealed any unreasonable health risks from silicone breast implants.<sup>146</sup>

Dow Corning, like the ASPRS, opposed the FDA's plans to impose stricter regulatory requirements to ensure implant safety. But when the FDA began weighing the question of whether to ban implants altogether, the company did not publicly defend its business interests; rather, it assumed the role of a champion of women's rights and issued a news release headlined, "90 Percent of Women Polled Want Government Not to Deny Their Right to Choose Breast Implants." According to the announcement, the survey, commissioned by the company, found that . . . women overwhelmingly

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<sup>145</sup>Idem, news release, "Dow Corning Reaffirms Safety of Silicone Breast Implants; Amasses Largest Safety Data Base of Any Medical Device," (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 13 Jan. 1992).

<sup>146</sup>Idem, news release, "Process for Filing Pre-Market Approval Application on Silicone Breast Implants is Welcomed by Manufacturer" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 19 March 1991).



believe that breast implants can help the self-image of women, whether the implants are used for cosmetic surgery or for reconstructive surgery after breast cancer. The women polled also agreed overwhelmingly that national policy makers must be sensitive to how an implant can restore a cancer patient's sense of wholeness.

. . . The issue of a woman's right to make her own medical decisions is a particularly timely one.<sup>147</sup>

Six weeks later, the company attacked those seeking a ban on implants and warned,

Their victims will be the two million American women who have implants and the thousands more who want them each year. These women who have faced the ravages of breast cancer or dealt with congenital asymmetries understand the very real public health need of silicone breast implants.<sup>148</sup>

A similar response was issued after the *Hopkins* judgement:

This jury verdict symbolizes the politicization of the entire breast implant issue. Thirty years of scientific data is being ignored because of the sensational media environment that has been established by plaintiff's attorneys who stand to make a lot of money from these awards. . . . It is clear that the deck is stacked against women across this country who value and want access to this product.<sup>149</sup>

The statement added that the verdict was "an affront to the more than 8,000 Dow Corning employees worldwide who conduct their business lives in accordance with the highest ethical standards."

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<sup>147</sup>Dow Corning Wright, news release, "90 Percent of Women Polled Want Government Not to Deny Their Right to Choose Breast Implants," (Arlington, TN: Dow Corning Wright, 11 Nov. 1991).

<sup>148</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Will Continue to Provide Implant Information Package; Temporarily Suspends Hot Line Discussions" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 2 Jan. 1992).

<sup>149</sup>Idem, news release, "Dow Corning and Its Employees Call San Francisco Jury Award Regarding Breast Implants 'Outrageous'; Characterize Breast Implant Debate as Sensationalistic and Politicized" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 13 Dec. 1991).

As Dow Corning sought to play the role of women's advocate, it announced the creation of an implant information center, including a toll-free telephone information service; however, Hayes emphasized, "we continue to believe that communication between doctors and patients is the most important source of information."<sup>150</sup> Within six months, the FDA objected to the telephone information line, charging that Dow Corning employees were communicating false information to callers. The company discontinued the service, which may have been intended less as a source of objective data than as a means of "reassuring women who had or are considering breast implant surgery that breast implants are safe."<sup>151</sup>

#### Company's Investigators Discover Falsified Records

In the same month that Dow Corning released the internal documents, it announced that it had retained former United States Attorney General Griffin Bell and his law firm, King & Spalding, to conduct an investigation of the company's "stewardship of its silicone gel-filled mammary implant business."<sup>152</sup> The company pledged to make public the report of the investigators. After eight months, Bell and Dow Corning Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Keith R. McKennon announced

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<sup>150</sup>Idem, news release, "Dow Corning Opens Implant Information Center to Support Informed Decisions on Silicone Breast Implants" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 24 July 1991).

<sup>151</sup>Ibid.

<sup>152</sup>Idem, news release, "Dow Corning Releases Independent Investigation Recommendations Concerning Silicone Breast Implants" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 2, Nov. 1992).

the law firm's nine recommendations.<sup>153</sup>

Eight of these recommendations were somewhat innocuous ("continue to work with the FDA," "continue to review complaints," etc.); but the fifth recommendation proved to be significant:

. . . Dow Corning should advise the FDA (1) that, in violation of company policy and procedures, an unknown number of breast implant lot history records were altered to include replacement oven charts instead of the actual oven charts; (2) that the replacement of charts was discovered in November 1987 and was terminated; and (3) that Dow Corning could not determine which lot histories contain replacement charts . . . .<sup>154</sup>

The report included the lawyers' opinion that the falsification of records "did not create a health risk," though it was the heating process in question that determined the thickness of the silicone gel. Pierre Blais, former senior scientific adviser to the Canadian national health agency, "suggested insufficiently vulcanized gel can react more inside women's bodies than properly treated silicone"<sup>155</sup>:

This is exactly what we suspected for years, but we always gave the companies the benefit of the doubt . . . . We never before could fathom why implants of one manufacturing series were violently reactive in some patients and not in others.<sup>156</sup>

McKennon issued a statement claiming that the records were altered "infrequently" and that the employees responsible had been "disciplined."<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Only the recommendations were released. The company was criticized for failing to make public the entire report, including details of findings that led to the recommendations. Thomas M. Burton, "Dow Corning Employees Falsified Data on Breast Implants, Counsel Concludes," *Wall Street Journal*, 3 November 1992.

<sup>154</sup>Dow Corning Corp., "Dow Corning Releases Independent Investigation," 6.

<sup>155</sup>Burton, "Dow Corning Employees Falsified."

<sup>156</sup>Ibid.

<sup>157</sup>Dow Corning Corp., "Dow Corning Releases Independent Investigation," 7.

## Chief Executive Officer Is Replaced

On 11 February 1992, the day Dow Corning released the internal files to the public, Keith McKennon was named the company's new chairman and chief executive officer. The move signalled that the board of directors had begun to take extraordinary steps to solve the legal and financial problems created by the implant controversy. In the first six months of 1992, Dow Corning withdrew from the mammary implant market; retained Bell to conduct an investigation; created a \$10 million research fund to study implant safety; offered to reimburse women for up to \$1,200 of the cost of medically indicated explantation surgery; and announced plans to sell its medical devices business. At company headquarters, discussions had begun in earnest on the possibility of a global settlement.

McKennon, formerly president of Dow USA and executive vice president of Dow Chemical Company, was selected for the job because of his "tremendous amount of expertise in managing high-profile public health and regulatory issues."<sup>158</sup> He had been responsible for maneuvering Dow through several high-profile crises. "I was kind of Dow's focal point for Agent orange and dioxin," he said, "[therefore] I have some background and experience unlike anyone at Dow Corning has."<sup>159</sup> He also set a more conciliatory tone for the company's public communication:

For me and Dow Corning, the overriding responsibility is to women who have mammary implants. If it hasn't been clear until now, we are going to cooperate absolutely with the Food and Drug Administration, and that means

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<sup>158</sup>Idem, news release, "Keith R. McKennon Elected Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Dow Corning Corporation" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 10 Feb. 1992).

<sup>159</sup>"Dow Corning Exec is a Crisis Manager: Agent Orange Taught McKennon The Rules," *Detroit Free Press*, 11 February 1992, 8(A).

we're going to stop complaining . . . .<sup>160</sup>

Dow Chemical Chairman Frank Popoff, explaining the need to replace Reed<sup>161</sup> with a more astute chief executive, said, "When the safety of implants became an issue, the company should have been in the first phase of damage control rather than in the first phase of denial."<sup>162</sup> McKennon served only one year before resigning voluntarily to be replaced by Richard A. Hazleton, a chemical engineer who had headed the company's European operations. John A. Byrne, a *Business Week* writer who conducted in-depth research of the company and its leadership, calls McKennon "open and more visible . . . [he] at least kept the company afloat during the crisis."<sup>163</sup> But the crisis was to worsen considerably in the two years to come.

### Bankruptcy

As we have seen, the creation of a global settlement fund failed to limit Dow Corning's legal exposure, as a large number of women chose to opt out of the settlement to pursue their cases individually. The company elected to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in May 1995, joining "the select group of firms that have used America's bankruptcy courts to stave off product-liability litigation."<sup>164</sup> The

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<sup>160</sup>Ibid.

<sup>161</sup>Reed remained with Dow Corning as president and chief operating officer reporting to McKennon.

<sup>162</sup>Elizabeth S. Kiesche, "Popoff on Implants and The Industry," *Chemical Week* (15 April 1992): 8.

<sup>163</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 211.

<sup>164</sup>"Production Liability: Silicone Valediction," *The Economist* (20 May 1995): 60.

strategic use of bankruptcy law allowed the company to shield its assets from legal claims, even though it was financially secure and profitable at the time. In the first quarter of 1995, net profit (\$49.5 million) was up 33 percent and sales (\$612 million) increased 20 percent compared with quarterly figures of a year earlier.<sup>165</sup> The *Economist* observed,

Although implant litigation has forced Dow Corning to write off a net \$567 million during the past two years, the bankruptcy is unlikely to damage its core business in silicon-based products . . . .

But there are snags too. Perhaps optimistically, Dow Corning thinks it will take two years to get out of Chapter 11. Meanwhile, many seriously ill women are struggling to pay for treatment. Worse, around \$1 billion of any settlement will go straight into lawyers' pockets . . . .<sup>166</sup>

Under bankruptcy law, "Dow Corning can channel all pending claims into a single mass-claims resolution plan funded by a trust, under which a no-opt-out option is available."<sup>167</sup> Agreement upon such a plan was reached in July 1998, allowing the company to begin the process of concluding a three-year period of bankruptcy protection.

Important legal and financial questions remained unresolved at the time of this writing. The bankruptcy filing prompted Dow Chemical and Corning Incorporated to write off substantial sums representing the book value of their investments in Dow

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<sup>165</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Announces First-Quarter Financial Results" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 4 May 1995).

<sup>166</sup>"Silicone Valediction," 60.

<sup>167</sup>Milo Geyelin and Timothy D. Schellhardt, "Dow Corning Seeks Chapter 11 Shield, Clouding Status of Breast-Implant Pact," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1995, 3(A).

Corning.<sup>168</sup> It also shifted the focus of litigation to the parent companies, which did not enjoy Chapter 11 protection. Dow Chemical was the more vulnerable of the two, losing in the courtroom because it "knew tests of the safety of materials in the implants were not adequate,"<sup>169</sup> and because it used its corporate resources to help market the products.

### Organizational Factors

A brief examination of the Dow Corning organization and culture is required to understand fully the company's actions in the silicone breast implant case.

Following are several factors that potentially influenced corporate and individual behavior:

Insular environment. Although Dow Corning was a global corporation, it was headquartered in a small, midwestern community dominated almost completely by the company and its parent, Dow Chemical. Eighty percent of the town's 38,000 residents were employed directly or indirectly by the two companies. Byrne describes the community as an unusually insular place to work:

The town and the two corporations are so thoroughly intertwined that each has shaped the others, reinforcing the others' strengths -- and magnifying the others' flaws. If its corporate headquarters had been in New York or Chicago, Dow Corning would have been a dramatically different company. As it is it mirrors Midland: this workplace of Ph.D. chemists is highly conservative and unemotional. At the same time, the fact that Dow Corning and Dow Chemical are both in the chemical business means that the town is much more

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<sup>168</sup>Dow Chemical wrote off \$374 million; Corning Inc. wrote off \$364 million.

<sup>169</sup>Terri Langford, "Jury Finds Dow Chemical Liable," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 Feb. 1995, 3(A).

homogenous than virtually any other city.<sup>170</sup>

The result was that decision-makers at Dow Corning were much less influenced by external events and pressures. They associated almost exclusively with like-minded co-workers, many of whom also could be found in their neighborhoods, churches and clubs. "The surroundings reflect the corporate culture, which has a low tolerance for mavericks and a high acceptance for bright people, blandly dressed and linear in their thinking."<sup>171</sup>

Absence of women in leadership. Dow Corning was first and foremost an industrial company. Its customers were nearly all male, as were most of its executives; indeed, a review of annual reports reveals that the company had not one woman officer nor director during the years it produced breast implants. As the controversy grew, the important issues ultimately were matters of women's health; but all the executives with authority were men, as were the vast majority of plastic surgeons. One month before Dow Corning withdrew permanently from the implant business, McKennon announced plans to form a Women's Council to advise the company.<sup>172</sup> The concept was never developed further.

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<sup>170</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 23.

<sup>171</sup>Ibid, 25.

<sup>172</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Chairman Cites Cooperation With FDA; Commits to New Safety Studies; States Intent to Establish 'Women's Council' to Advise Company on Implant Issues" (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 19 Feb. 1992).



Lack of accountability to financial markets. Dow Corning had only two shareholders: Dow Chemical and Corning Inc. Thus, it was a step removed from the rigorous public scrutiny endured by most publicly held corporations. This gave Dow Corning the freedom to plan and act for long-term purposes, unlike companies that must satisfy the short-term interests of the stock market with each quarterly financial disclosure. It also meant the company was under less pressure to act quickly and decisively when problems developed. Dow Corning answered only to its corporate owners, which began to intervene in 1992 only after problems with the joint venture began to affect investment value for their own shareholders.

One former executive concluded that the financial structure of the company made it "accountable only to itself, . . . and this feature led to a lack of accountability to any external stakeholders, including women with implants."<sup>173</sup>

Overconfidence in science and technology. Many of the company's public statements suggest an inordinate degree of confidence in its own scientists, though as an industrial enterprise it had little in-house expertise in biology or medicine. Dow Corning was an organization managed primarily by chemists and engineers whose training in management occurred mostly on the job. Two years after being named chief executive officer, Hazleton admitted that managing a business crisis was "nothing I ever learned about in chemical engineering school."<sup>174</sup> Byrne observed,

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<sup>173</sup>John E. Swanson, interview by author, 6 Feb. 1996. Transcript of tape recording; telephone conference. Atlanta, GA.

<sup>174</sup>Kathleen Kerwin, "On the Firing Line at Dow Corning," *Business Week* (29 May 1995): 33.

Within both Dow and Dow Corning, the chemists are clearly the Brahmins. They are the miracle workers and inventors whose wizardry allows both companies to commercialize their products. Executives on the frontier of science routinely climb the corporate ladder faster than managers with any other background, to such a degree that many non-chemists believe they merely provide support.<sup>175</sup>

A former manager of internal communications said,

This is a scientifically arrogant company -- very arrogant . . . . The Dow Corning scientists made decisions based on early tests. But they were industrial chemists who didn't have any idea how these materials would react in the body. The attitude was, "We know what's best, we don't need someone from the outside telling us what to do."<sup>176</sup>

Law department controls implant issue. After *Stern*, the implant issue was categorized as a legal matter, with all important decisions about the product being made or approved by the corporate law department. One executive recalled that when he recommended that the company "acknowledge the [implant] problem publicly, the lawyers said that would be an admission of liability."<sup>177</sup> Byrne notes that the "entrenched legal machine" was Dow Corning's fastest-growing department.

[General Counsel James R.] Jenkins also kept many of the most damaging memos and documents from the senior team managing the crisis -- ostensibly to protect the company from having its key executives dragged into litigation . . . .

Thanks largely to the company's aggressively combative strategy, Dow Corning was acquiring the image of a careless and heartless corporation.<sup>178</sup>

An article in the *New York Times* concluded,

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<sup>175</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 25.

<sup>176</sup>Swanson, interview by author.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid.

<sup>178</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 174.

From the beginning, Dow Corning relied too much on heavy-handed lawyering. Lawyers in product-liability cases often take the view that everything revolves around the law and its loopholes. What becomes obscured is the ultimate crisis management objective: to have a company left to manage after -- or if -- the crisis passes.<sup>179</sup>

Decentralized management philosophy. Dow Corning was a pioneer in the implementation of decentralized management. "In 1967, it reorganized from a conventional divisionalized type of organization into a matrix form of organization."<sup>180</sup>

The structure, which evolved into what the company called a "multidimensional organization," became a model for many other United States corporations after it was described in a *Harvard Business Review* article by then-Chief Executive Officer William C. Goggin:

. . . we were confident that in the long run the matrix would stimulate innovation and lead to increased emphasis on opportunities for profit rather than preoccupation with problems. And we were determined to make it work.<sup>181</sup>

A principal objective of the new design was to increase local control and autonomy in each of numerous profit centers (defined by product lines), cost centers (functional operations including marketing, legal, manufacturing and administration), and geographic areas. Goggin saw this philosophy as a "key to effectiveness":

In a multidimensional organization like the one we developed, decision making tends to be flattened out or spread across the organization. No longer is the chief executive or the president required to pass judgement on every important issue . . . . the intent is to push decision making as far down into

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<sup>179</sup>Fink, 13(F).

<sup>180</sup>William C. Goggin, "How The Multidimensional Structure Works at Dow Corning," *Harvard Business Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1974): 54.

<sup>181</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

the organization as possible . . .<sup>182</sup>

Ironically, this decentralized structure may have contributed to the company's failure to take decisive, early action when questions were raised about breast implants. The prolonged internal debate never reached the chief executive's office until a legal crisis had begun.

Most of all, the multidimensional approach emphasized individual responsibility for profits, creating a "stress-strain situation":

Prior to 1968 the functional specialist at Dow Corning had concerned himself exclusively with maintaining and improving the professionalism of his function. Now, in addition, he was asked to lead in developing profits for his business.<sup>183</sup>

To underscore this message, Goggin published the organization's "clear and unequivocal" charter for all functions:

*Marketing* - generation of sales volume, with a sharp eye on profitability.

*Technical service and development* - new product commercialization and old product maintenance.

*Manufacturing* - volume and efficiency in production, engineering and technology.

*Research* - assurance of a steady flow of new products that can be commercialized.

*Economic evaluation, control and planning* - development of a common corporate economic language and a uniform analytical system for evaluating capital expenditures and all strategic programs having an economic impact.<sup>184</sup>

There is no reference to product quality, safety or responsibilities to customers

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid, 58-59.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid, 59.

<sup>184</sup>Ibid, 61.

and employees; indeed, the sole focus is on developing, manufacturing and selling as much product as possible. It is true that corporate America did not embrace the concept of Total Quality Management until the 1980s; however, the charter's exclusive emphasis of bottom-line economic concerns cannot be overlooked as a factor contributing to organizational behavior in the breast implant matter. It also should be noted that this charter was established in 1974, the time when breast implants first gained widespread popularity and began to draw serious competition from other manufacturers.

Goggin also hoped the multidimensional structure would help the company overcome its introversion:

In the face of stiffening competition, the corporation remained too internalized in its thinking and organizational structure. It was insufficiently oriented to the outside world.<sup>185</sup>

There is reason to believe this organizational weakness persisted two decades later.

### Corporate Ethics Program

In 1975, the year Goggin's management article was published, John S. Ludington succeeded him as chief executive officer of Dow Corning. He continued the process of decentralization while an increasing number of operations and business relationships were established outside the United States. At about the same time, a high-profile case involving Lockheed Corporation's bribes of Japanese officials drew public attention to the problem of corruption in American companies' foreign business dealings. The United States Congress began to hold hearings which led in 1977 to the

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<sup>185</sup>Ibid, 54.

adoption of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act prohibiting payments to influence foreign officials. The United States Internal Revenue Service also took action, requiring corporations to answer eleven questions about "bribes, gifts, slush funds, and 'grease payments.'"<sup>186</sup>

Ludington and the board of directors at Dow Corning responded to the impending legislative and regulatory action by developing policies of their own to prevent employees from violating the law. In May 1976, a four-member Business Conduct Committee was appointed and charged with the following tasks:

1. learning more about how the company really operated outside the United States;
2. developing guidelines that would be the basis for communicating legal and ethical standards of business conduct around the world;
3. developing a workable process for monitoring and reporting the company's business practices; and
4. recommending ways to correct questionable practices as they became known.<sup>187</sup>

#### Creation and Evolution of Code of Conduct

The committee drafted a corporate code of conduct and, in keeping with the decentralized philosophy, sent it to managers of geographic regions with instructions to develop their own codes addressing concerns peculiar to their areas. "A recurring dilemma was producing a code general enough to be relevant to a variety of cultures

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<sup>186</sup>David Whiteside, "Dow Corning Corporation: Business Conduct and Global Values," case study (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School, Harvard College, 1984), 1.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid, 2.

and business practices and, at the same time, specific enough to be a useful guide for action."<sup>188</sup> The first corporate code of ethics, entitled "A Matter of Integrity," was distributed to all employees in 1977 -- accompanied by one of the five geographically specific codes and a letter from Ludington. The preamble to the code read:

Dow Corning believes in private enterprise. We will seek to establish an atmosphere of trust and respect between business and members of society, an atmosphere where business and the public understand, accept and recognize the values and needs of each other.

To establish and promote this atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, Dow Corning accepts as our responsibility a recognition, evaluation and sensitivity to social needs. We will meet this responsibility by utilizing our technological and management skills to develop products and services that will further the development of society.

The watchword of Dow Corning worldwide is integrity. We recognize that due to local differences in custom and law, business practice differs throughout the world. We believe that business is best conducted and society best served within each country when business practice is based on the universal principles of honesty and integrity.

We recognize that our social responsibilities must be maintained at the high standards which lead to respect and trust by society. A clear definition of our social responsibilities should be an integral part of our corporate objectives and be clearly communicated to every employee.<sup>189</sup>

The code of conduct itself comprised three brief sections: a general statement of intent to comply with the law; a list of the company's responsibilities to employees, including fair hiring practices, a safe work environment and opportunities for "individual self-fulfillment"; and a list of responsibilities to host countries, such as pollution control, legal compliance, responsible monetary practices, and payment of taxes.

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<sup>188</sup>Ibid, 3.

<sup>189</sup>Dow Corning Corp., *A Matter of Integrity* (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1977).

In 1984, the corporate code was revised and slightly expanded,<sup>190</sup> and the geographically specific codes were eliminated. The new version added a statement about responsibilities to customers, which read,

Dow Corning will provide on time products and services that meet the requirements of our customers. We will provide information and support necessary to maximize the use and effectiveness of our products.<sup>191</sup>

A new section on environmental and product stewardship declared, in part,

We will continually strive to assure that our products and services are safe, efficacious and accurately represented in our literature, advertising and package identification.

Product characteristics, including toxicity and potential hazards, will be made known to those who produce, package, transport, use and dispose of Dow Corning products.<sup>192</sup>

Another edition of the code was published in 1990, and the commitment to assuring that products are "accurately represented in our product literature, advertising and package identification," was changed to read, ". . . accurately represented in our selling and promotional activities."<sup>193</sup> This change was made at a time when the company's legal problems centered on the content of product literature and package inserts. In the 1993 edition, produced after Dow Corning withdrew from the breast implant market, the statement was even less specific: ". . . accurately represented for their intended uses."<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>190</sup>The code was reviewed and revised as necessary approximately every two years. (Idem, *A Matter of Integrity* [Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1984]).

<sup>191</sup>Ibid.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid.

<sup>193</sup>Idem, *A Matter of Integrity* (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1990).

<sup>194</sup>Idem, *A Matter of Integrity* (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1993).



When the principal author of the code was interviewed in 1984 for the first of a series of studies by Harvard Business School, he explained that frequent revision of the code was intentional:

We stress to our people that the code of conduct is a "living" statement, one that can change as accepted business practices change. A few statements in the code probably will not change: (a) All relations with employees will be guided by our belief that the dignity of the individual is primary and, (b) Dow Corning will be responsible for the impact of its technology upon the environment. Other positions are subject to continuing review.<sup>195</sup>

#### Communication, Compliance Audits and Reporting Procedures

To ensure that employees understood the code and to monitor compliance, the Business Conduct Committee scheduled a series of annual audits at operating locations throughout the world. From 1979 through the late 1980s, approximately 25 ethics audits were held each year; in the 1990s, the number increased to 40. The meetings, moderated by a member of the Business Conduct Committee, involved groups of five to 15 employees and lasted five to eight hours. A typical audit began with a review of the code of conduct; "the remainder of the meeting was then spent discussing such topics as competitor, government and customer relations; distributor practices; pricing; entertainment; questionable payments; conflicts of interest; importing procedures; employee concerns; purchasing practices; and product and environmental stewardship."<sup>196</sup> To ensure that each of these topics was covered, special worksheets included a series of questions about international issues, employment matters and legal compliance. There was no mention of product quality or safety. The final questions

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<sup>195</sup>Whiteside, 5.

<sup>196</sup>Ibid, 4.

in the audit meeting were:

What type of questionable business conduct do we miss in our present business conduct audit program? What additional specific questions should be asked?<sup>197</sup>

Area managers also were required to maintain compliance files and report violations to the Business Conduct Committee. In 1980 reporting procedures were standardized with a form that provided examples of "reportable incidents . . . : conflicts of interest; requests for questionable payments or kickbacks; misleading or deceptive product classifications intended to affect import duties." These reports and records of audits were reviewed at an annual meeting of the Business Conduct Committee which, in turn, prepared and presented a report to management each August. The committee also was to be a "corporate ombudsman . . . a neutral and safe party for surfacing and facilitating to resolution [*sic*] complex issues."<sup>198</sup>

More recently, a training component was added, with the goal of each employee participating in one ethics training session every three years. In 1993, program measurement was expanded to include surveys of external constituencies, including customers. Surveys of employees had included questions about the ethics program since 1976, and findings increasingly indicated that employees believed Dow Corning was an ethical organization. Even in 1995, after declaring bankruptcy and weathering more than five years of highly publicized controversy about breast implants, internal surveys found that 92 percent of employees agreed with the

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<sup>197</sup>Dow Corning Corp., *Worksheets For Business Conduct Audits* (Midland, MI: Dow Corning Corp., 1980); photocopy in Whiteside, 14.

<sup>198</sup>Idem, *Business Conduct Reporting Procedures* (Midland MI: Dow Corning Corp.); photocopy in Whiteside, 18.

statement, "Dow Corning is an ethical company." Only 2 percent disagreed.<sup>199</sup> The visibility of the ethics program apparently contributed significantly to this perception.

### Failure to Detect or Address Implant Issue

The program was one of the most elaborate in corporate America; thus, it is surprising to discover that it never dealt with the issues of implant quality and safety. Four ethics audits were conducted after 1983 at the Dow Corning Wright facility in Arlington, Tennessee -- the site of most breast implant manufacturing. Yet even in 1990, when implant safety had become a serious legal concern, the subject never surfaced during a three-hour audit, according to Jere D. Marciniak, then chairman of the Business Conduct Committee.<sup>200</sup>

The only case of an implant-related matter being brought to the attention of the committee was in 1990 when Dr. Charles Dillon, corporate medical director, sent a memorandum to John E. Swanson, creator of the ethics program and sole permanent member of the committee. Dillon complained that a senior corporate attorney had ordered a member of the medical staff to destroy all copies of a document containing findings of the National Center for Health Statistics that indicated a much higher rate of rupture than was being publicly acknowledged by Dow Corning. He wrote,

. . . [the attorney] stated to us that he was acting at the specific request of Robert T. Rylee, Vice President and General Manager of the Health Care Business, who was very angry with the memos, and that he had spoken to Mr.

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<sup>199</sup>Robert Woods, Manager of Human Resources, Dow Corning Corp., interview by the author, 8 Sept. 1995. Transcript of tape recording; telephone conference. Atlanta, GA.

<sup>200</sup>John A. Byrne, "The Best-Laid Ethics Programs . . . Couldn't Stop A Nightmare at Dow Corning. What Happened?", *Business Week* (9 March 1992): 67.

Rylee on this subject earlier by telephone. He also stated that from his personal viewpoint, the information contained in the memos would compromise projects that he was then working on in the Dow Corning product liability litigation and be adverse to the company if publicly revealed. I directed [my employee] not to comply with the request and stated . . . that to do so would in my opinion be unethical conduct.

I feel that this is a serious example of misconduct requiring formal review. I am concerned that these documents may be sought out and destroyed. Also, I am concerned that the incident, if not amended, may lead to others that would threaten the integrity of my department, its employees, their ability to provide valid scientific evaluations to management, as well as their careers in the company. I therefore ask the committee's review of this matter.<sup>201</sup>

The committee met and heard testimony from each of those involved in the incident.

The result was an agreement that a misunderstanding had occurred, and a recommendation that policies be developed to avoid similar incidents in the future.

The issue was one of internal authority and control; the group did not discuss implant quality or safety *per se*. Dillon left the company a year later.<sup>202</sup>

The internal concerns about implants were well-documented. Why were none of these brought to the ethics committee? Human Resources Manager Robert Woods dismisses the question as irrelevant:

I wouldn't see where the committee would take up those issues. The Code of Conduct Committee had no role because the general agreement is that the threat is external. Like any other company that's dealt in medical products, you just kind of expect to have lawsuits. [The controversy] has actually improved teamwork. That wouldn't have happened if people believed we were doing anything illegal or unethical.<sup>203</sup>

John Swanson, who retired in 1993 after 28 years with the company, has

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<sup>201</sup>Chuck Dillon to John Swanson; photocopy in Sellers, appendix.

<sup>202</sup>Sellers, 15.

<sup>203</sup>Woods, interview by author.

another perspective:

I don't think to this day the company sees it as an ethical issue. There's never been an official acknowledgement that it is an ethical issue. When the *Stern* documents were sealed, we had the first ethical problem. What came out in that trial was very damning to Dow Corning, but could have been very useful to surgeons and women. . . . That began a long practice of suppressing information . . . . When you have a situation where outside critics are coming at you with some of your own material, this is not a good time to go into denial.

In March 1992 we finally changed the product literature to say women will probably have to have them replaced every 10 years. How many women over the years would have opted not to have implants if they knew this?<sup>204</sup>

Swanson adds that another reason the matter never came before the ethics committee was that the minutes of such meetings were discoverable by plaintiffs' attorneys and could be used as evidence in court.

When Hazleton was appointed chief executive officer in 1993, Swanson wrote him a memorandum expressing concerns about how the ethics program had performed during the era of implant litigation:

. . . how Dow Corning is being perceived by the media, government, the regulatory agencies, courts and special interest groups should tell us that the standards we've used in the past are out of touch with the world we live in. . . . I also believe that if we look deeply into our past ethics processes, we would have to reluctantly conclude that they would not have been closely enough connected to anything that's really important to the corporation. (And it hurts to say that.)<sup>205</sup>

Hazleton did not agree that the implant issue was an ethical matter. "For him it was a business problem."<sup>206</sup> But he responded positively, asking Swanson to spend his last eight months with the company writing a report on the ethics program. Swanson

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<sup>204</sup>Swanson, interview by author.

<sup>205</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 212.

<sup>206</sup>*Ibid*, 213.

recalls his conclusions:

Up until the implant controversy, the program worked pretty well. But it was a good-times ethics program. It was basically an educational program augmented by compliance reviews. The committee was a centralized committee that acted as more of an enforcement, or compliance, body. We were successful for 18 years -- until a crisis struck.

Legal compliance was the minimum; but the primary objective of the business conduct program was to encourage employees to make ethically correct decisions based on the code of conduct. One of the company's root problems was that the ethics program was not designed for all areas of the company's business. Breast implants were viewed as a subsidiary. The code did not apply explicitly to the medical products business.

If there was one thing missing it was that the program was not tied to the concept of managing for stakeholders [including implant recipients]. Also, the managers at Dow Corning were chemical engineers. They don't make good intuitive judgements; they use the scientific approach. You need the good sense to say, "If this might cause a health problem, let's take it off the market until we know."<sup>207</sup>

#### Swanson's Dilemma

As a member of Dow Corning's public relations staff, Swanson for many years was among the staunchest defenders of implants, even writing a reassuring letter published in *Ms.* magazine in 1978.<sup>208</sup> It was a tragic personal experience that opened his eyes to the ethical dimension of the issue and which, finally, placed him in an untenable position within the ranks of Dow Corning management. His wife, Colleen, was diagnosed in 1990 as suffering from autoimmune disease, possibly related to her Dow Corning implants. For years she had experienced upper-body rashes, hair loss, severe pain in her shoulder and arm, hardened breasts and a burning in her chest. She

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<sup>207</sup>Swanson, interview with author.

<sup>208</sup>M.E. Nelson, letter to the editor, *Ms.* (January 1978): 7. Ghost-written by

had little energy and was losing weight at an alarming rate.<sup>209</sup> A slow, partial recovery began after her doctors removed her implants.

Swanson faced a difficult predicament, torn between his loyalties to his employer and his wife. He saw no way to resolve the conflict comfortably, but believed that for the remainder of his tenure (until he attained retirement age) he must recuse himself from all business related to breast implants. He informed his superiors of the situation and his decision to avoid further involvement in the issue.

Colleen Swanson filed suit against the company in August 1992, a year and a half after the company's legal department refused to meet with her attorney to discuss the situation. Dow Corning settled her lawsuit for an undisclosed sum.

### Ethical Issues

As we have seen, the issues related to silicone breast implants were not categorized as ethical by Dow Corning or most of its employees. They were, however, recognized as legal, business and scientific matters. What questions might have been addressed by Dow Corning's Business Conduct Committee had the implant controversy been seen as an ethical concern? Following are some possibilities:

What were the company's responsibilities to implant recipients? Swanson suggests a stakeholder approach to broaden the company's vision of its responsibilities. This approach, when taken seriously, challenges the neoclassical

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Swanson.

<sup>209</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 200.

economic theory that informs policy-making decisions in most corporations in the United States. This school of thought asserts, in the words of Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, that "the social responsibility of business is to increase its profits."<sup>210</sup> Kenneth E. Goodpaster and John B. Matthews identify four arguments against a stakeholder approach to corporate responsibility<sup>211</sup>: the "invisible hand of the marketplace"<sup>212</sup> argument, the "hand of government" argument, the "inept custodian" argument and the "materialization of society" argument. Each of these limits corporate responsibility by claiming, respectively: that business's pursuit of self-interest in a market economy inevitably yields the greatest good for society as a whole; that government, not business, is responsible for safeguarding the common good, and does so through law and regulation; that business executives are expert in economic decision-making, but should not presume to be competent negotiators of ethical or social matters; and, that broadening corporate social responsibility has a negative effect by extending business's materialistic values to other areas of life.

Was the marketing of implants by manufacturers and plastic surgeons

exploitive of women? This question could be considered only if the company first

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<sup>210</sup>Milton Friedman, "The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase Its Profits," *New York Times Magazine*, 13 Sept. 1970: 33. This theory is seen in Goggin's limited, economic-based charter for managers in the multidimensional organization.

<sup>211</sup>Kenneth Goodpaster and John B. Matthews, "Can a Corporation Have a Conscience?", *Harvard Business Review* 60 (Jan.-Feb. 1982): 132-141.

<sup>212</sup>It can be argued that this term is misappropriated, as Adam Smith's "invisible hand" had a very different meaning in a context of agrarian and cottage industry. Adam Smith. *The Wealth of Nations*, 1776, (London: Methusen and Co. Ltd, 1930).



acknowledged responsibilities to implant recipients. While Dow Corning executives frequently argued that implants were psychologically beneficial to cancer patients and others who required reconstructive surgery, the fact remains that eight of ten recipients underwent augmentation mammoplasty solely to improve their appearance and/or self-image. An ethical analysis might have considered whether the invention of this product, coupled with the manner in which it was often promoted, contributed to sexually exploitive attitudes toward women in American society, and to low self-image among women themselves. In addition, if silicone implants caused harm to the physical health of women, one might ask whether the enterprise of manufacturing and creating demand for them was analogous to the production and promotion of cigarettes.

Did the company provide adequate information to patients? Dow Corning was an industrial company selling most of its products to customers for use in their own manufacturing processes. The obligation to disclose health and safety information was minimal, especially in comparison to the medical field where there is a positive obligation to inform patients of any potential risks or complications that might influence their decision to be treated. The doctrine of informed consent is relatively new, replacing paternalistic practices and gaining general acceptance by medical and legal practitioners over the last 50 years.

The deontological argument for informed consent -- grounded in the Kantian view that persons are not to be used as means, even for their own good ends -- "promotes individual autonomy, protects an individual's moral status as a human

being, and avoids fraud and duress -- all considerations grounded in a fundamental respect for persons as beings capable of, and entitled to, self-direction in matters affecting themselves."<sup>213</sup>

Informed consent involves both an information component and a volitional component, which requires that the patient understand the information and be competent to make a rational decision. In the Dow Corning case, significant concerns arise from the ambiguity of who bore the greatest responsibility for informing the patient -- the manufacturer or the surgeon. The manufacturer provided information to the surgeon, primarily through package inserts; therefore, it was Dow Corning's belief that the surgeon had most of the responsibility for securing informed consent. The "Facts About Your New Look" pamphlet was the only item published by Dow Corning for patients for many years. The value of a package insert to the patient was limited, as it was written in technical language and probably was not opened until after the patient had been sedated.

The clearer ethical question was not who was responsible for communicating with the patient, but whether Dow Corning's materials conveyed sufficient information. Plastic surgeons argued in court that the company withheld vital information about product quality and risks. Juries found the company guilty of fraud for failing to disclose all of the relevant information it possessed.

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<sup>213</sup>Joan C. Calahan, *Ethical Issues in Professional Life*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 173.

What responsibilities did the company have for clinical research to verify product safety? Corporate responsibility for consumers' health and safety derives, in large part, from the fact that purchasers of products in a highly technological society are almost completely dependent upon business to provide the goods and services they use and need. In a modern society where citizens are not self-sufficient, economic efficiency rests on an implied trust that must exist between purchaser and seller.

These factors have

. . . heightened business's responsibilities to consumers -- particularly in the area of product safety. From toys to tools, consumers use products believing that they won't be harmed or injured by them. Since consumers are not in a position of technical expertise to judge the sophisticated products that are necessary for contemporary life, they must rely on the conscientious efforts of business to ensure consumer safety.<sup>214</sup>

Government also plays an important role in protecting the public, but the existence of regulations can lead to a kind of legalism, where businesses aim for the minimum safety standard required by law. United States case law in the area of products liability has established that companies are responsible for anticipating and minimizing the harm that can be caused by their products, even though they may be in compliance with the laws of the land. Dow Corning's lack of testing might well have been due to an absence of regulation by the FDA at the time breast implants were designed and first marketed; but the courts still found it liable for negligence and fraud. In hindsight, the company might have chosen to invest more time and money in research; but would such a decision have been based on legal or ethical considerations?

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<sup>214</sup>Shaw and Barry, 478.

Should Dow Corning have withdrawn from the breast implant market sooner?

The company never conceded that silicone breast implants were unsafe or caused disease; however, it did acknowledge that the devices sometimes led to complications such as capsular contracture and breast pain. Despite its public position, however, the company knew that research on silicone and autoimmunity was inconclusive; a possibility existed that the product was a cause of such disease. Swanson believes this possibility was enough reason to suspend production and sales, yet the idea never was seriously considered until legal and financial pressures made it unavoidable. Byrne notes that the subject was raised briefly after *Stern*:

Shortly after the verdict, the case came up . . . at Dow Corning's board of directors meeting in Midland.

"Why the hell are we in this business anyway?" asked Paul Orrefice, then chief executive of Dow Chemical.

Rylee told him the company was making implants mainly to help women who lost their breasts to cancer and to help other women restore their self-esteem by looking more normal. "We should stay in the business from an ethical standpoint," Rylee said. "We have a moral obligation to support the doctors who are treating breast cancer patients."<sup>215</sup>

Dow Corning's experience may be compared to that of Procter & Gamble Corporation when its Rely tampons were linked to toxic shock syndrome in a study by the United States Centers for Disease Control:

Because Procter & Gamble remained convinced that Rely was a safe product, it's fair to surmise that it would not have withdrawn the product without [FDA] pressure. After all, there was no laboratory evidence implicating highly absorbent tampons in the incidence of toxic shock until over a year later. Had the FDA not acted as it did and had Procter & Gamble continued to sell the product, many women undoubtedly would have suffered and even died between September 1980 and December 1981, when incontrovertible clinical evidence became available.

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<sup>215</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 107.

. . . Nonetheless, the prevailing view today among businesspeople favors self-regulation. Such a view certainly is in keeping with the tenets of classical capitalism and is arguably an attractive ideal. However, self-regulation can easily become an instrument for subordinating consumer interests to profit making when the two goals clash.<sup>216</sup>

Did the bankruptcy filing allow the company to shirk ethical obligations?

When Dow Corning used the United States bankruptcy courts to shield itself from litigants, it joined a growing number of American companies that have taken similar action in product liability cases, including Manville Corp., which faced 20,000 lawsuits regarding its asbestos pipe-insulation materials,<sup>217</sup> and A.H. Robins, which was inundated by 200,000 lawsuits associated with the Dalkon Shield birth-control device.<sup>218</sup> These actions have been controversial for a variety of reasons, fueling a debate about whether these actions are legitimate uses of the 1978 Federal Bankruptcy Act.<sup>219</sup> In the case of Manville, critics have claimed the company

. . . is acting in an illegal and immoral manner. They are held to be immoral insofar as their critics feel they are using the "bankruptcy boom" as a means of avoiding just compensation for those who have truly been injured. . . .<sup>220</sup>

The same has been said of Dow Corning. Mariann Hopkins, who won a major lawsuit against Dow Corning, called the bankruptcy filing "unconscionable." She

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<sup>216</sup>Shaw and Barry, 483.

<sup>217</sup>A.R. Gini, "Manville: The Ethics of Economic Efficiency?", *Journal of Business Ethics* 3 (1984): 63-69.

<sup>218</sup>"Silicone Valediction," *The Economist*: 60.

<sup>219</sup>For a more thorough discussion of this issue, see Mahmoud Salem and Opal-Dawn Martin, "The Ethics of Using Chapter XI as a Management Strategy," *Journal of Business Ethics* 13 (1994): 95-104.

<sup>220</sup>Gini, 64.

said, "I know of a lot of women who are still suffering from silicone implants, and a lot of women who will be hurt by Dow Corning's bankruptcy."<sup>221</sup>

Chief Executive Officer Hazleton, however, called the action "the only reasonable choice," a necessary means of preserving the company.<sup>222</sup> "We decided to take this action while we are in a position of financial strength, with the cash to continue operating our business without disruption," he said. In the long run, the company must survive if it is to contribute to any settlement with claimants.

No doubt there are many more such questions; but it is not the purpose of this study to enumerate them all, nor is it to make ethical judgements by attempting to answer these questions. Rather, our purpose is to examine why a company with a demonstrated commitment to corporate ethics failed to ask these questions of itself. The next chapters will consider whether an explanation might lie in theories of self-deception.

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<sup>221</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 240.

<sup>222</sup>Hassan Fattah, "Dow Could Face Implant Suits as Dow Corning Files for Protection," *Chemical Week* (24 May 1995): 9.

## CHAPTER II:

### SELF-DECEPTION: CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE IN PHILOSOPHY AND PSYCHOLOGY

#### Introduction

We turn now to the concept of self-deception as a potential factor in some cases where people in business fail to recognize or acknowledge the ethical dimensions of their activities. In this chapter, a range of major perspectives in philosophy and psychology will be surveyed, with particular attention to ethical applications and traditions. This will be a conceptual inquiry and, as such, will not attempt to adumbrate all of the theories or trace their historical development.

A review of the literature on self-deception finds a diversity of methodologies and disciplines, and yields an expansive range of often-contradictory accounts. The researcher thus encounters more confusion than coherence, for there is no generally accepted definition of self-deception. Indeed, some theorists argue that the term itself is epistemologically paradoxical or illogical.

Despite this, self-deception is a well-established category in both philosophy and psychology, and recently has been a popular interest in the growing field of philosophical psychology. Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre treat it as an important topic for existential inquiry, and Sigmund Freud pioneered the clinical study of self-deception as a barrier to self-appraisal and mental health. Therefore, the literature considered in this chapter is drawn primarily from these two fields, where concepts of self-deception have been most thoroughly and explicitly developed. Because the boundaries separating philosophy of the mind and psychology are not always discernible, our inquiry will be organized thematically.

rather than by discipline. In the study of self-deception, scholars of both disciplines are striving to answer many of the same questions, although psychology employs therapeutic and experimental methods, while philosophy tends to rely on theoretical constructs to gain insight into the mind.

In Chapter Three, we will direct our attention to theology, where self-deception, though a vital concept, is not as well developed, *per se*, as a category of study. Another potential field of research is popular literature (novels, plays and poetry), where a sizeable body of work relates to self-deception; however, space limitations will preclude us from examining these works and the instructive examples they might offer.<sup>223</sup>

In moral philosophy and religion, self-understanding has long been considered a necessary component of ethical consciousness and action. Likewise, on a personal level we often place value on being honest with ourselves; yet we learn that this can be hard to accomplish and even more difficult to maintain.

We are accustomed to trust our commitment to truth and to truthfulness. Our errors are easily dismissed as inevitable, given the complexity of the world and the limits of our intelligence. Self-deception disturbs us because it calls into question the purity of this commitment. It reveals how at any moment we act on passions and interests capable of filtering, deflecting and garnishing an impartial concern for truth. It confronts us with the possibility that we may be our own greatest obstacles in a search for self-understanding and insight into the world. And it leaves us perplexed at the irony of a creature whose rationality is rivaled by a capacity for distorted

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<sup>223</sup>Examples of popular works that feature self-deception as an important theme include: Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (New York: Penguin, 1957); Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: New American Library, 1957); Eugene O'Neill, *The Iceman Cometh* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957); Leo Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, trans. David Magarshack (New York: New American Library, 1961); Albert Camus, *The Fall*, trans. Justin O'Brien (New York, Vintage Books, 1956).



reasoning, deliberate ignorance and self-directed lies.<sup>224</sup>

### The Nature of The Self

A conceptual inquiry into self-deception must begin with the question, What is the *self* that is being deceived? We do not have time to survey the acres of scholarly literature on the self; therefore, our purpose will be to identify such features of the self as may illuminate our understanding of self-deception.<sup>225</sup> Definitions of "self" are as numerous as they are diverse, as illustrated by an entry in *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*:

1 a: the entire person of an individual . . . 2 a: an individual's typical character or behavior . . . 3: the union of the elements (as body, emotions, thoughts and sensations) that constitute the individuality and identity of a person.<sup>226</sup>

The *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology* defines self as "a person's framework of self-referential meaning -- cognitive and affective perceptions of self-as-object, arising from innate dispositions and social interactions across a lifetime, characterized by

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<sup>224</sup>Mike W. Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 1.

<sup>225</sup>Philosophical discussion can easily become mired in difficult questions about which properties (psychological, spiritual, physiological, etc.) can be said to constitute the self. William Alston points to the linguistic function of "self" as an identity-indicating noun: "In our ordinary thought we make no distinction between the self, the person, the man/woman, the human being, etc. . . . The term "self" (usually in compounds) is used for a person when that person is being spoken of as the object of a self-directed cognition, action, or attitude. The "self" of whom we speak in everyday discourse is in no way to be distinguished from the individual man, and is no more problematical. . . . By maintaining our hold on the everyday conceptual scheme, we will avoid conceptual quagmires and get on to real problems -- what functions are involved in, e.g., self-control, what determines, or influences their exercise. . . ." (William Alston, "Self-Intervention and the Structure of Motivation," in Theodore Mischel, ed., *The Self: Psychological and Philosophical Issues* [Ottawa: Rowan and Littlefield, 1977], 67-68.)

<sup>226</sup>*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1979 ed., s.v. "Self."

thought, feeling and action relative to a social structure of roles, rules, norms and values."<sup>227</sup> The *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* equates self with "'person,' though usually with more emphasis on the 'inner,' or psychological, dimension of personality than on outward bodily form."<sup>228</sup> Thus a self is conceived to be a subject of consciousness, a being capable of thought and experience and able to engage in deliberative action."<sup>229</sup>

Embedded in these various definitions are elements of two polarities in the ontology of selfhood. The first, which we will call the *Rational*, seeks to establish self-understanding and individual identity through instrumental reason and inwardly turned, solitary reflection. The Rationally conceived self is distinguished by individuality and autonomy and is defined with reference to the individual alone. Paul Ricoeur cites John Locke and David Hume as two philosophers whose Rational theories of personal identity continue to be influential. It is Locke who introduces the idea that "identity results from a comparison. . . of a thing with itself (of 'sameness with itself')." <sup>230</sup> Hume writes, "We have a distinct idea of an object that remains

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<sup>227</sup>*The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology*, 1983 ed., s.v. "Self: psychological usage."

<sup>228</sup>Bishop Joseph Butler argues that the nature of the self has little to do with physical being: ". . . our gross organized bodies, with which we perceive the objects of sense and with which we act, are no part of ourselves; and therefore show us that we have no reason to believe their destruction to be ours. . . . For we see by experience that men may lose their limbs, their organs of sense, and even the greatest part of these bodies, and yet remain the same living agents. (Joseph Butler, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to The Constitution and Course of Nature* [London: Routledge and Sons, 1887], 17.)

<sup>229</sup>*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), s.v. "self," 816.

<sup>230</sup>Paul Ricoeur, *One Self as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

invariable and uninterrupted through a supposed variation of time; and this idea we call that of *identity* or *sameness*."<sup>231</sup> Hume's chief problem comes when he learns that he cannot find this "sameness" within himself, and so concludes that the self is unknowable:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I can never catch myself at any time without a perception, and can never observe anything but the perception.<sup>232</sup>

The Rational form -- of persons as static, self-originating and separately existing entities -- has greatly influenced Western social and political thought, and, in Charles Taylor's view, has contributed to a social atomism and "radical

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1992), 125.

<sup>231</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Books, 1969), 301; quoted in Ricoeur, 127.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid, 300. Hume's inability to find sameness in himself was predicted by Bishop Joseph Butler in his critique of Locke's conception of identity: "The thing here considered. . . is proposed by Mr. Locke in these words, 'whether it' -- i.e., the same self or person -- 'be the same identical substance?' And he has suggested what is a much better answer to the question. . . For he defines person, 'a thinking intelligent being,' &c., and personal identity, 'the sameness of a rational being.' . . . Mr. Locke's observations. . ., when traced and examined to the bottom, amount, I think, to this: 'that personality is not a permanent but a transient thing; that it lives and dies, begins and ends continually; that no one can any more remain one and the same person two moments together, than two successive moments can be one and the same moment; that our substance is indeed continually changing, but whether this be so or not, is, it seems, nothing to the purpose, since it is not the substance, but consciousness alone, which constitutes personality; which consciousness, being successive, cannot be the same in any two moments, nor consequently the personality constituted by it.' And from hence it must follow that it is a fallacy upon ourselves to charge our present selves with anything we did, or to imagine our present selves interested in anything which befell us yesterday; or that our present self will be interested in what will befall us to-morrow; since our present self is not in reality the same with the self of yesterday, but another like self or person coming in its room and mistaken for it, to which another self will succeed to-morrow." (Butler, *The Analogy of Religion*, 287-89.)

anthropocentrism" that sees "fulfillment as just of the self, neglecting or delegitimizing the demands that come from beyond our own desires or aspirations, be they from history, tradition, society, nature, or God."<sup>233</sup> Vernon White observes that much social contract theory and subsequent utilitarian theory sees the self as an "independent centre of consciousness, the sole generator of his or her own desires, preferences and choices (social organization is therefore an external contrivance constructed by individuals to serve their needs and wants)."

Such an understanding of individuality has been nothing if not pervasive and influential. And it simply will not do. There are no such things as individuals conceived apart from their historical and social setting. We are formed as individual persons, at least in part, by our conscious and unconscious relationship with the past and with other persons and social realities in the present.<sup>234</sup>

The second polarity, which we will call the *Relational*, argues that self-knowledge is attained through an inter-subjective, dialogical process. The Relationally conceived self is defined as one who is "involved in history" and is continually growing and becoming through interaction with other human beings, institutions, the physical environment and, in some accounts, God.<sup>235</sup> Taylor adds that

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<sup>233</sup>Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 58. A radical, twentieth century expression of such thinking is seen in the so-called "objectivist" philosophy of Ayn Rand, whose central precept (the pursuit of enlightened self-interest) is that the self is a rational being with no obligation to, or need for, others.

<sup>234</sup>Vernon White, *Paying Attention to People: An Essay on Individualism and Christian Belief* (London: SPCK, 1996), 59.

<sup>235</sup>Maurice Natanson, *The Journeying Self: A Study in Philosophy and Social Role* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1970), 92. Other influential twentieth-century thinkers who have rejected Rational conceptions of the self include pragmatist philosopher William James and social psychologist George Herbert Mead. Their theories link epistemology and ontology by viewing the self as a product of history shaped by communication, interaction and shared interpretation within the

a self also exists in relation to "a space of moral issues, to do with identity and how one ought to be."<sup>236</sup> A sufficient answer to the question "Who am I?" requires more than just my name, genealogy or physical description.

What does answer this question for us is an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us. To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what to endorse or oppose. In other words it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.<sup>237</sup>

The strength of the Relational approach is its recognition of the essential relatedness of the self; its inherent weakness is its tendency in some accounts to minimize personal freedom by assigning a deterministic influence to social relations.

Alistair MacFadyen, who prefers the terms "individualist" and "collectivist," finds that neither the Rational nor the Relational approach offers a completely satisfactory explanation of what it means to be a self. He thus seeks to establish a middle ground that holds human freedom and autonomy in a dialectical tension with social role and institutional forces. For Ricoeur, the dichotomy is "sameness" versus "selfhood," with selfhood understood as narrative (past, present and future). We shall return to this discussion in Chapter Three; but for now it is sufficient to note that the theories of self-deception discussed below are shaped to one degree or another by

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community of other persons. See William James, *Pragmatism* (New York: Macmillan, 1913) and *A Pluralistic Universe* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1909); and Anselm Strauss, ed., *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956).

<sup>236</sup>Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 112.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid, 27.

these two conceptions of the self.

Taylor stresses that today's "subject is a self in a way he or she couldn't be for the ancients,"<sup>238</sup> as society's preoccupation with personal identity is a relatively recent development. Indeed, the modern sense of selfhood springs largely from Rene Descartes's treatment of the self as a subject for disengaged mastery and control<sup>239</sup> -- a Rational conception that led finally to an internalization of moral sources.<sup>240</sup> White agrees, but proposes that the modern self is also a product of the Reformation (especially Calvinist) emphasis on individuality.<sup>241</sup>

It is Michel Montaigne, according to Taylor, who shapes the modern conception by initiating the highly personal search for the self that has become a fundamental motif of contemporary, western culture with its emphasis on individuality

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<sup>238</sup>Ibid, 176. He does, however, trace the origins of the modern self as far back as Augustine.

<sup>239</sup>The concept of self-deception can be seen as foundational to the Cartesian *ego cogito*, with its ontology of doubt about the existence of anything but the "I" who "doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and which also imagines and senses." (Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress [Indianapolis, IA: Hackett, 1979], 19.) Though he contends that the reality of the self's existence in the midst of all-encompassing doubt is proven by the fact that someone is doing the doubting, Descartes muses about whether it is possible to "deceive myself and pretend for a considerable period that [my thoughts] are wholly false and imaginary." (Ibid, 16.)

<sup>240</sup>This internalization is seen clearly in the idea that true selfhood entails the freedom and autonomy to weigh a plurality of moral choices without relying upon external religious, social or philosophical sources of moral meaning. It was with this idea that "the modern individual was invented." (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* [Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981], 61.) White distinguishes between "those who see the individual as final 'creator' and arbiter of moral meaning (moral constructivism) and those who merely see the individual as free to choose or reject, to perceive or misperceive, those moral principles which already have meaning objectively (moral realism)." (White, *Paying Attention to People*, 24)

<sup>241</sup>White, *Paying Attention to People*, 24.

and autonomous agency.<sup>242</sup>

We seek self-knowledge, but this can no longer mean just impersonal lore about human nature, as it could for Plato. Each of us has to discover his or her own form. We are not looking for universal nature; we each look for our own being. Montaigne therefore inaugurates a new kind of reflection which is intensely individual, a self-explanation, the aim of which is to reach self-knowledge by coming to see through the screens of self-delusion which passion or spiritual pride have erected. It is entirely a first-person study, receiving little help from the deliveries of third-person observation, and none from 'science'.<sup>243</sup>

Anthony C. Thiselton concurs, but sees a radical, Relationalist shift as the concept of self<sup>244</sup> moves from the modern to the postmodern context:

Leaving behind the constraints of authority and medieval hierarchy, the self of modernity becomes, with Descartes, the starting-point for knowledge. With Kant it becomes the locus of autonomy and free decision. This mood of optimism in which the human self seems to be situated at the centre continues from the Enlightenment until perhaps around the end of the 1960s or the early 1970s.

By contrast, the self of postmodernity has become *de-centered*. It no longer regards itself as active agent carving out any possibility with the aid of natural and social sciences, but as an opaque product of variable roles and

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<sup>242</sup>"The Cartesian calls for a radical disengagement from ordinary experience; Montaigne requires a deeper engagement in our particularity. These two facets of modern individuality have been at odds up to this day." (Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 182) "Both disengagement and this understanding of the nature of things as within them helped to generate a new notion of individual independence. The disengaged subject is an independent being, in the sense that his or her paradigm purposes are to be found within, and not dictated by the larger order of which he or she is a part." (Ibid, 192.)

<sup>243</sup>Ibid, 181.

<sup>244</sup>The terms "self," "identity" and "person" are often used interchangeably, as they are in some portions of this study; however, the aptness of the term self is to be emphasized, especially as it is used in *self*-deception. Self is most appropriately used "with more emphasis on the 'inner,' or psychological, dimension of personality than on outward bodily form. Thus a self is conceived to be a subject of consciousness, a being capable of thought and experience and able to engage in deliberative action. More crucially, a self must have a capacity for self-consciousness. . . ." (*The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, s.v. "self," 816).

performances which have been imposed upon it by the constraints of society and by its own inner drives and conflicts.<sup>245</sup>

### Self-Deception and The Problematic Paradox

Much of the recent literature on self-deception struggles to arrive at a workable definition of the locution itself. Many scholars struggle with epistemological questions: Can one succeed in intentionally persuading oneself of something that one knows is untrue? Can a person consciously and simultaneously hold directly contradictory beliefs? Using such questions as a starting point suggests a literalistic interpretation of the term, equating the concept with interpersonal deception and defining self-deception, literally, as "lying to oneself." Ralph Demos, whose work sparked the current epistemological debate, contends,

[self-deception occurs] when a person lies to himself, persuades himself to believe what he knows is not so. In short, self-deception entails that [the subject] believes that p [(p = proposition)] and not-p at the same time.<sup>246</sup>

The difficulties arising from this definition are clear. How can one person believe what he or she, in fact, does not believe? Or, as Sartre asks, "How can we conceive of a knowledge that is ignorant of itself?"<sup>247</sup> Dion Scott-Kakures observes,

[This paradox creates] enormous pressure . . . to claim that the contrary evidence in favor of p is not *really* believed or to claim that the belief that p is somehow forgotten or pushed into inaccessibility . . . .

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<sup>245</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *Interpreting God and the Postmodern Self: On Meaning, Manipulation and Promise* (Grand Rapids, Mich., William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 121.

<sup>246</sup>Ralph Demos, "Lying to Oneself," *Journal of Philosophy*, 57 (1960): 588-95.

<sup>247</sup>Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1956), 53.



Most theorists draw the obvious conclusion: If self-deception really must be conceived along lines of lying to oneself, then we should be skeptics about self-deception.<sup>248</sup>

One such skeptic is Kenneth J. Gergen, who believes self-deception is a myth, a product of popular psychology. "In effect, the concept of self-deception is a constituent of the culture's ethnopscychology -- or system of folk beliefs about the nature of human functioning at the psychological level."<sup>249</sup> He warns that the concept can be used as a pernicious, "rhetorical means of acquiring social power." When a person (especially a psychoanalyst) has the authority to use the term to rule on the legitimacy of another's conduct, it is possible unfairly to characterize expressed commitments as "merely a subterfuge for underlying dispositions of an opposing character."<sup>250</sup>

Another skeptic is Sartre, who refers to self-deception as "bad faith," defined as "a lie to oneself."<sup>251</sup> He reasons that such a lie is problematic, as it requires one to be aware of one's own bad faith:

We must agree in fact that if I deliberately and cynically attempt to lie to myself, I fail completely in this undertaking; the lie falls back and collapses beneath my look; it is ruined *from behind* by the very consciousness of lying to myself which pitilessly constitutes itself well within my project as its very condition.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>248</sup>Dion Scott-Kakures, "Self-Deception and Internal Irrationality," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol LVI No. 1 (March 1996): 35.

<sup>249</sup>Kenneth J. Gergen, "The Ethnopscychology of Self-Deception," in *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding: New Essays in Philosophy and Psychology*, ed. Mike W. Martin (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1985), 236.

<sup>250</sup>*Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>251</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 49.

<sup>252</sup>*Ibid.* 49-51.

Despite his skepticism, Sartre reluctantly concedes the reality of the phenomenon.

"Even though the existence of bad faith is very precarious, and though it belongs to the kind of psychic structures we call 'metastable,' it presents nonetheless an autonomous and durable form." Indeed, it is "a normal aspect of life for a very great number of people."<sup>253</sup>

We find that many philosophers who see self-deception as a paradox tend to hold a Rational view of the self as an abstract, timeless, independent entity. By contrast, a Relational view of the self -- as a being existing in time and in relation to that which is other than itself -- opens the possibility of a self whose beliefs can change or vary in relation to social roles, moral contexts and history.

#### Internal Irrationality

Seeing no rational explanation for self-deception, some philosophers attribute the phenomenon to a kind of internal irrationality. Scott-Kakures believes "there is no self-deception without [internal irrationality],"<sup>254</sup> and Donald Davidson writes, "I think self-deception must be arrived at by a process, but then can be a continuing and clearly irrational state" involving an "incoherence or inconsistency in the thought of the self-deceiver."<sup>255</sup> Accordingly, self-deception is seen as a condition motivated and sustained by a need to avoid the anxiety that would otherwise arise from the rational

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<sup>253</sup>Ibid.

<sup>254</sup>Scott-Kakures, 41.

<sup>255</sup>Donald Davidson, "Deception and Division." in *Actions and Events: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, eds. Ernest LePore and Brian McLaughlin. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 147.

acknowledgement that opposing beliefs are being affirmed simultaneously.

Robert Audi disagrees: "[Self-deception] requires a certain minimum of rationality" and often provides reasons for entirely rational actions.<sup>256</sup> "Is it irrational to act in support of a self-deceptive avowal? It is often not."<sup>257</sup>

### Attempts to Resolve the Paradox

Is self-deception, then, a meaningful and coherent expression? Does it describe a phenomenon that commonly affects persons who are otherwise reasonable and sane? If not, how has it become a frequently employed expression in our everyday language? These questions suggest that a deception of one person by another must be a distinctly different phenomenon from an intra-psychic deception.

### Multiple Selves

Mary R. Haight is among those who seek to make sense of the apparent paradox by ascribing the problem to the psychological phenomenon of the divided self, or split personality. Reasoning that one self cannot simultaneously know and not know the same thing, she posits that self-deception (like interpersonal deception) requires two "selves," one of whom is the deceiver, the other the deceived. "When one self deceives another, then, this is still not literal self-deception: while 'deceive' can be literal, 'self' becomes a metaphor."<sup>258</sup> In the end, Haight concludes that there

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<sup>256</sup>Robert Audi, "Self-Deception, Rationalization, and Reasons for Acting," *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 113.

<sup>257</sup>Ibid, 115.

<sup>258</sup>Mary R. Haight, *A Study of Self-Deception* (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester

can be no literal self-deception. "It cannot happen."<sup>259</sup> Thus, to resolve the paradox, she denies the possibility of self-deception in persons who are of one mind, but continues to apply the term (while questioning its appropriateness) to cases involving multiple personalities. She is critical of others' attempts to resolve the paradox by "weakening the [literal] concept":

[Some accounts] play down the self-deceiver's command of evidence against his belief, or the way that he seems to choose not to know the truth, or his final success. Then to bring back all that self-deception in fact suggests, they hedge, and either bring back the paradox without noticing it or equivocate between paradox and something less than what the term means.<sup>260</sup>

Some of Haight's critique echoes Herbert Fingarette, who writes,

Philosophical attempts to elucidate the concept of self-deception have ended in paradox -- or in loss from sight of the elusive phenomenon itself. Yet whatever is obscure about self-deception infects our understanding of what it is to be a person, what it is to know oneself, and what it is to act responsibly.<sup>261</sup>

Who can doubt that we do deceive ourselves? Yet who can explain coherently and explicitly how we do so?<sup>262</sup>

Like Haight, Immanuel Kant divides the self into two. "A lie requires a second person whom one intends to deceive, and intentionally to deceive oneself seems to contain a contradiction."<sup>263</sup> He argues that even psychologically healthy

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Press, 1980), 36.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid, 73.

<sup>260</sup>Ibid, 4.

<sup>261</sup>Herbert Fingarette, *Self-Deception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), 1.

<sup>262</sup>Ibid, 4.

<sup>263</sup>Immanuel Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 94.

human beings have a "twofold" nature or "doubled self," one portion of which is an "inner judge whom we conceive as another person."<sup>264</sup> Fingarette reasons similarly, drawing on the Platonic conception of a person as a community of subselves, any of which might be in conflict or disagreement with another at a given time. He shifts the emphasis from self-deceptive "cognition-perception" to self-deceptive "volition-action," suggesting that a natural desire for internal unity leads us to actively cover up or suppress conflict between subselves.

Benzion Chanowitz and Ellen J. Langer also believe that self-deception obtains, if it does so at all,<sup>265</sup> because of a failure to unify a confederation of subselves within a single person. These are described as "social selves," each of which has a dim awareness of the other and expresses itself in the manner appropriate for its social role (professional, mother, neighbor) or context (work, home, community). Their Relationally conceived view is that human beings cultivate a social self for each role by committing themselves to the "skills and values necessary for operating in that context while remaining oblivious to the consistency of this commitment within their other commitments."<sup>266</sup> The issue of consistency is evident only when there is a possibility of conflict between the partitioned selves, giving rise to the question of

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<sup>264</sup>Ibid.

<sup>265</sup>They declare that they are "uncomfortable both with the assertion and with the denial of the reality of self-deception. Either approach involves implications that we find unacceptable . . . . Certainly, from a philosophical perspective, more questions are raised than are settled by our proposal. But in the long run, the route we propose seems to offer a better chance for solving the philosophical dimensions of the problem. From a psychological perspective, the problem becomes more manageable." (Benzion Chanowitz and Ellen J. Langer, "Self-Protection and Self-Inception," in *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 119.)

<sup>266</sup>Ibid, 127.

which orthogonally developed self is the more genuine or appropriate.

In a study conducted in a field setting, Chanowitz and Langer observed subjects' responses to an approaching conflict between social selves. They concluded that "self-protection" is a more accurate description of the behavior ordinarily called self-deception:

Self-protection can occur, whereby each of the two selves turns into itself as the two grow farther apart. Each is interested in its own preservation and therefore focuses its efforts on rigidly retaining the identity of all its parts.<sup>267</sup>

Stephen L. White denies that multiple selves are necessary for self-deception, but his psychological theory dividing the self into "interacting subsystems" bears a striking resemblance to the other divided-self theories we have reviewed.

Split the self into two or more interacting subsystems, each with its own beliefs, goals, plans, and strategies. Call any model that postulates more than one system per subject a *homuncular model*. On the basis of such a model we can describe the process of self-deception without conceptual strain. Subsystems S1 and S2 originally both believe that *p*. S1 causes S2 (either directly or indirectly) to lose the belief that *p* (and possibly to believe its negation), while itself continuing to believe that *p*. S1 subsequently monitors S2's environment for evidence that *p* and attempts to prevent S2 from acquiring that evidence. S1 also tries to prevent S2's coming by any evidence that would reveal S1's activity. The use of such homuncular models is by no means restricted to Freudian theory. Homuncular models are the common currency of most recent theorizing in the cognitive sciences.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>267</sup>An alternative response, called "self-inception," also can occur when inner selves conflict. The result can be the creation of a new, conflict-free self to replace the former selves. Among the additional complications noted by the authors is the potential for one self to lean toward self-protection while the other leans toward self-inception. (Ibid, 134.)

<sup>268</sup>Stephen L. White, "Self-Deception and Responsibility for the Self," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, ed. Brian P. McLaughlin and Amelie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 452.

## Unconscious Intention

Another strategy for overcoming the supposed paradox is to assign a role to the "unconscious" in self-deception. Audi and Lloyd Howard Steffen are representative of those who contend that self-deception cannot be understood or even described apart from the unconscious.<sup>269</sup> Steffen writes, "The notion plays an important, vital, even necessary role in making sense out of the concept of 'self-deception.'"<sup>270</sup>

A closely related concept is that of "intention," which most accounts based on the interpersonal model hold is a necessary feature of self-deception, since most uses of "deception" with reference to two persons involve cases where the deceiver intentionally -- and consciously -- brings about an epistemic deficit in the deceived. When I set out to deceive another person, I do so with the intention of causing that person to believe something that I know to be false, or to disbelieve something I know is true, or to be unaware of something I know. An interpersonal action that unintentionally produces a false belief or a misunderstanding is thought most often to be an "error," "oversight" or "honest mistake."

Applied to intrapersonal deception, it follows that a conscious intention to deceive myself must involve knowingly and deliberately persuading myself to believe something that I know is explicitly false. Hence, the paradox: one person is both

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<sup>269</sup>Robert Audi, "The Epistemic Authority of the First-Person," *Personalist* 56 (Winter 1975): 5. Audi's argument is challenged by John Exdell and James Hamilton, "The Incorrigeability of First Person Disavowals," *Personalist* 56 (Autumn 1975): 389. Audi responds with "Epistemic Disavowals and Self-Deception," *Personalist* 57 (Autumn 1976): 378.

<sup>270</sup>Lloyd Howard Steffen. "Self-Deception: A Conceptual Analysis in Three

deceiver and deceived, both perpetrator and victim.

Let us consider an example of intrapersonal, conscious intention. A man who is waiting to speak to a large audience feels the onset of stage fright. His hands become clammy, his stomach grows nauseous, he feels anxious. To lessen his fear, he sets out to convince himself of something that he knows is untrue, namely, that he is not afraid. Following one popular book's advice, he imagines that every member of the audience is naked, thus giving himself a feeling of confidence or superiority. Through mental repetition, he tells himself that he is fearless until, finally, he steps to the rostrum and finds that his fear has been replaced by a sense of self-assurance and calm.

Has he succeeded in deceiving himself? The criterion for intentional, conscious self-deception would seem to be satisfied: He was afraid but caused himself to believe that he was not afraid. Yet the problem with this example is obvious: at the point where the man's project succeeds, he is, in fact, no longer afraid. Therefore, there is little conflict between the present truth and his own beliefs. Of course, there is an untruth in his game of pretending the audience is naked; but it is unlikely he ever consciously doubts the reality of the clothes he sees with his own eyes. We might say he succeeds not so much in deceiving himself as in adjusting his mental attitude and, thereby, diminishing his actual fear.

There are other examples of self-deception that might be said to involve conscious intention, but all are problematic. Moreover, virtually all common employments of "self-deception" refer to cases where one is unaware, or unconscious,

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Relational Contexts" (Ph.D. Diss., Brown University, 1984), 65.



of one's own intention to deceive oneself. In most of the aforementioned accounts involving multiple selves or subsystems, self-deception is understood to be an unconscious, but nonetheless intentional, project. Chanowitz and Langer explain that the condition is "achieved, not by somehow sliding into it unwittingly, but by the active initiation of the self-deceived person."<sup>271</sup> But the person is not necessarily mindful of this activity:

When one self is in control, the person is acting under the sway of the social context that is currently shaping the environment. When the outsider notices a conflict between what the person truthfully says and what the person knows but is not saying, the outsider infers self-deception . . . . When a person is acting mindlessly, the person is conditioned for a self-deceptive response.<sup>272</sup>

Martin sees comparisons with interpersonal deception as inappropriately bringing "a social concept to the inner mind."<sup>273</sup> A better approach, he contends, is to "grant the possibility of unconscious beliefs"<sup>274</sup> that are psychologically partitioned from conscious ones.

One of the two contradictory beliefs can be held consciously in the sense that the self-deceiver is readily able and willing to attend to it. The other belief can remain unconscious in the sense that the person cannot readily attend to it except when under special influences such as drugs, psychotherapy or stress. The self-deception is purposeful when the unconscious belief is the basis for evading self-acknowledgement of what is believed unconsciously. It is at least partially intentional when the person has some degree of knowledge of the evasion.<sup>275</sup>

The intrapersonal deceiver might actually be unaware of the intention to deceive.

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<sup>271</sup>Chanowitz and Langer, "Self-Protection and Self-Inception," 119.

<sup>272</sup>Ibid, 133 - 134.

<sup>273</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 27.

<sup>274</sup>Cf. H. H. Price, *Belief* (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), 299 ff.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid, 22.

Martin, like Audi and Steffen, holds that self-deception is a logical concept only if one acknowledges the possibility of unconscious beliefs and intentions: "Could a self-deceiver or anyone else bring to consciousness two directly contradictory beliefs at the same time, formulate them in words, be clear about their meaning, believe that they are contradictory, be sane and not intoxicated, and still hold them?"<sup>276</sup> Steffen concurs:

A self-deceived person, then, is not a person who *consciously intends* to achieve a disavowal of p by simply willing p to be false. A self-deceived person, rather, is the person who, for certain reasons that he or she cannot discern, generates and supports an affirmation that not-p is true, fulfilling an "unconscious intention" by so doing. Moreover, the affirmation that p is false can be maintained in the face of evidence to the contrary so long as it is within the realm of rational possibilities to argue against the contrary evidence. A point could be reached, however, where evidence confirming the truth of a proposition is so overwhelming that further denial would simply be irrational.<sup>277</sup>

Thus, the concept of "unconscious intention" offers a logical means of extricating self-deception from the philosophical quagmire. A theory involving the unconscious in intra-psychoic relations is also congruous with Haight's conception of the divided self -- despite her insistence that the unconscious is not necessary for self-deception<sup>278</sup> -- because the two personalities she conceives are unaware (unconscious) of each other's intentions, thoughts and actions.

Most psychological accounts implicating the unconscious in self-deception are informed, in varying degrees, by Freud's psychoanalytic theory, a complex set of

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<sup>276</sup>Martin, "Self-Deception and Morality," 23.

<sup>277</sup>Steffen, "Self-Deception," 76.

<sup>278</sup>The selves must "by definition be separate consciousness . . . . one deceiving the other." (Haight, *A Study of Self-Deception*, 56.)

ideas that are held together by his general theory of the unconscious.<sup>279</sup> We will not attempt here to undertake a review of Freudian theory or the vigorous criticism it has faced over the last 30 years.<sup>280</sup> However, it must be acknowledged that Freud's interrelated concepts of defense and repression are of relevance to the present inquiry, especially as it concerns the possibility of unconscious intention.

Freud originally used the term 'defense' for the ego's struggle against unpleasant ideas or affects. Later the term 'repressed' was used instead, but in 1926 he returned to the use of 'defense' as the general term, while 'repression' was used to designate the specific measure that was originally called 'defense.'<sup>281</sup>

Freud emphasized that defense against disagreeable information is a normal psychological phenomenon that occurs at an unconscious level.<sup>282</sup> By conceiving the unconscious as a normative, structural feature of the mind, one can explain logically the possibility of an intrapersonal conflict of beliefs.<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Owen Flanagan. *The Science of The Mind* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1984), 75.

<sup>280</sup>One of the most important attacks on Freud was that of Karl Popper, who argued that psychoanalysis is not a scientific theory. (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol II. [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962.]) Hans Eysenck concurs, enumerating many empirical studies that he believes actually disprove Freud's theories. (Eysenck, *The Decline and Fall of the Freudian Empire* [New York: Penguin Books, 1985]).

<sup>281</sup>Joseph Sandler with Anna Freud, *The Analysis of Defense: The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense Revisited* (New York: International Universities, 1985), 107, quoted in Edward Isenor, "Self-Deception and Moral Education" (Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1991), 61.

<sup>282</sup>For an interesting field study of repression and self-deception, see Kenneth B. Cairns, "Repression, Self-Presentation and Action Identification: Audience Effects on Self-Deception" (Ph.D. diss, Case Western Reserve University, 1992).

<sup>283</sup>Kenneth Gergen cautions, however, that there is no reliable, experimental evidence that "unconscious defense" functions in the manner described by Freud. (Gergen, "The Ethnopsychology of Self-Deception.")

Philosophers have been more reluctant than psychologists to identify the unconscious as a participant in self-deception, regarding the move as philosophically weak. The notion of the unconscious is itself a controversial idea.<sup>284</sup> "In a word, how could the censor discern the impulses needing to be repressed without being conscious of discerning them?", asks Sartre, whose theory of bad faith argues that the self is not divided and that all consciousness is "translucent" and self-aware.<sup>285</sup> "Psychoanalysis has not gained anything for us since in order to overcome bad faith, it has established between the unconscious and consciousness an autonomous consciousness in bad faith."<sup>286</sup> Charles Taylor, however, believes it is the unconscious that lies behind the "inside-outside" opposition that is so much a part of our modern language of self-understanding.

We think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being 'within' us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are 'without.' Or else we think of our capacities or potentialities as 'inner,' awaiting the development which will manifest them or realize them in the public world. The unconscious is for us within, and we think of the depths of the unsaid, the unsayable, the powerful inchoate feelings and affinities and fears which dispute with us the control of our lives, as inner. We are creatures with inner depths;

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<sup>284</sup>Alfred Adler rejects the idea of the unconscious, redefining it to describe aspects of consciousness that are not well-understood. (Adler, *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler*, ed. Heinz L. Ansbacher and Rowena R. Ansbacher [New York: Harper and Row, 1964], 257-258.) Moreover, from a philosophical perspective, Freud's postulation of the unconscious undermines, in some measure, the Cartesian view that the mind is aware of itself and that first-person ascriptions of mental states are reliable.

<sup>285</sup>For a comparative analysis of Freud and Sartre on intention, see David Pears, "Freud, Sartre and Self-Deception," in *Freud*, ed. R. Wollheim (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1974), 97-122.

<sup>286</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 52-53. For a pointed response to Sartre, see Haight, 53-72.

with partly unexplored and dark interiors.<sup>287</sup>

### An Appeal to Ordinary Language

In recent literature, some theorists have begun to look to the linguistic usage of "self-deception" to describe it as a feature of the common life. Such familiar locutions as "self-deception," "self-deceived" and "deceiving oneself" are invoked frequently in ordinary language and, as such, are presumed to have coherence and meaning for both speaker and hearer. The methods of analytic philosophy (*a la* Ludwig Wittgenstein) have been employed to analyze the concept of self-deception based upon actual use; that is, "what it means" cannot be determined apart from "how it is used." "With 'meaning as use' functioning as a kind of heuristic principle, the idea of 'context dependence' generated by that theory of meaning will enable us to shift from one kind of employment to another . . ." <sup>288</sup> (i.e., behavioral, cognitive, emotional, volitional, logical, factual, ethical, theological, etc.). Audi believes that "self-deception is sometimes used loosely. . . . We should not expect, then, to frame an account that clearly matches every use of the term." <sup>289</sup> Acknowledging the variety of meanings, he joins the others who reject definitions based on the interpersonal model of deception. Martin concurs, responding to Haight's strict interpretation (lying to oneself) with an analogy that illustrates how the meaning of a locution in ordinary usage can differ significantly from its rigid, lexicological definition:

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<sup>287</sup>Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 111.

<sup>288</sup>Steffen, "Self-Deception," 20.

<sup>289</sup>Audi, "Self-Deception, Rationalization, and Reasons for Acting," *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 93.

Imagine someone arguing that self-taught or self-educated individuals are impossible in the literal sense of those words. Teaching requires knowing something and being readily able to become explicitly conscious of it, whereas learning something entails first being ignorant of it. In order to be self-taught, a person would have to know and not know the same information and be readily able and not readily able to call it to consciousness. Even if this occurred within a single person having a split personality, it would not, strictly speaking, be one self teaching itself. Hence, the idea of one person being teacher and student with respect to the same information is incoherent, and self-taught individuals could not exist.

This reasoning is not the result of paying strict adherence to the literal sense of the expression *self-taught*. Instead, it is the result of giving a mistaken interpretation to an intelligible expression by applying a potentially illuminating analogy in a too-rigid manner. In thinking about self-teaching, the model of teaching others is illuminating in limited respects because both activities involve purposeful endeavors directed toward acquisition of new knowledge and skills. But the interpersonal model does not by itself accurately give the literal or standard meaning of self-teaching. Similarly Haight's allegedly literal construal of *self-deception* is a fiction . . . .<sup>290</sup>

Steffen enumerates the ways "self-deception" is commonly used to describe, evaluate, interpret, judge and explain:

A philosophy teacher uses 'self-deception' to illustrate a logical paradox or contradiction. A person observes the behavior of another and describes that person as 'self-deceived.' Reflecting on past experience, a person adjudges his or her own inability to acknowledge what was the case at a certain time under certain circumstances to have been an instance of self-deception. Observers evaluate a certain action, characterizing it in terms of a loss of nerve, a moral failure, an instance of akrasia; and it is said that the individual did not do what he said he wanted to do or failed to do the thing he knew was right -- again, 'self-deceit' may appear as part of the description. A theologian interprets a certain kind of attitude with respect to the God-relationship (arrogance or pridefulness) as expressing a condition of despair. This despair is the loss of true fullness of being before God about which the subject in question is unaware, so that sinfulness is said to entail as a necessary condition, 'self-deception.'<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>290</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 20.

<sup>291</sup>Steffen, "Self-Deception," 16.

## Moral Ambiguity

Honesty with oneself is a foundational concept in the ethical theories of Socrates, Plato, Bishop Butler,<sup>292</sup> Hegel, Kierkegaard,<sup>293</sup> Nietzsche,<sup>294</sup> Sartre, and many others. Traditional philosophical views have held that self-deception serves to "camouflage wrongdoing and prevent improvement in character . . . . [It is] a derivative and compounding wrong -- a wrong that derives from its support for some primary wrong and that serves to double one's guilt."<sup>295</sup> It subverts self-understanding, which many philosophers believe is the very cornerstone of a morally significant life. Sartre judges self-deceivers as insincere and "cowardly" for failing to do their duty to themselves and others,<sup>296</sup> and David Kipp describes them as inauthentic and morally weak.<sup>297</sup> In the words of Bela Szabados, "That it is always immoral to deceive oneself seems to have been the received opinion of philosophers."<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>292</sup>Joseph Butler, "On Self-Deceit," *Fifteen Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel*, 4th ed. (London, 1749).

<sup>293</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or, Vol. II*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959). See also Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (New York: Anchor Books, 1954).

<sup>294</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Gay Science," in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking Press, 1954).

<sup>295</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 138.

<sup>296</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 47-70.

<sup>297</sup>David Kipp, "Self-Deception, Inauthenticity and Weakness of Will," *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 261.

<sup>298</sup>Bela Szabados, "The Morality of Self-Deception," *Dialogue* 13, 1 (March 1974): 25. Cf. Mike W. Martin, "Immorality and Self-Deception," *Dialogue* 16, 2 (June 1977): 274 - 280. (Martin replies to Szabados.)

Marcia Baron contends that self-deception can blind a person to things that deserve moral attention. "What is shielded may be something about his own behavior, where he is doing serious harm to another yet protecting himself from seeing this."<sup>299</sup>

What is objectionable is not so much the self-*deception* as the failure to strive to know oneself and what one is a part of, and to subject one's activities, and mode of living, to scrutiny. At the heart of the problem is the refusal to take seriously the fact that one is an agent and to take responsibility for oneself as an agent; and insofar as self-deception is wrong, usually through its rippling effects, it is this that makes it wrong. The wrongness of self-deception turns out to be closer to the wrongness of refusing to think than the wrongness of deceiving others.<sup>300</sup>

John King-Farlow and Richard Bosely do not so readily condemn the self-deceiver. They argue instead that self-deception lies along an Aristotelian (or Confucian) "Golden Mean," with the potential to serve either good or bad. They cite various examples of self-deceptive behaviors that produce positive outcomes, but note, "As self-deceiving and imagination can bring about so much power for human flourishing, it is hardly miraculous that they can achieve no less for establishing what is diabolical and morally intolerable."<sup>301</sup> Once again, self-deception is context-dependent; apart from specific circumstances, it is morally ambiguous. An example: A woman diagnosed with a terminal illness convinces herself that her condition is improving, despite mounting empirical evidence to the contrary. By so doing, she

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<sup>299</sup>Marcia Baron, "What is Wrong with Self-Deception?", *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 440.

<sup>300</sup>*Ibid*, 444.

<sup>301</sup>John King-Farlow and Richard Bosley, "Self-Formation and The Mean," *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 196. Commenting on this article, Martin recalls a line from the protagonist in playwright Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*: "To hell with the truth! . . . The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten mad lot of us, drunk or sober."



remains hopeful and manages to greet loved ones with a reassuring smile. Is her self-deception morally wrong, as some traditional philosophers might claim? Or is it analogous to a beneficial "white lie" in interpersonal communication?

Martin notes that "self-deception [can be] a valuable coping technique shielding us from unbearable realities and debilitating truths and contributing to personal growth, self-respect, love and community."<sup>302</sup> The philosophical tradition of the "vital lie" suggests that some self-deception is "morally permissible, especially when its motives are morally permissible, its foreseeable consequences are not harmful, and no moral obligations are violated."<sup>303</sup> Amelie Rorty agrees:

Those incapable of self-deception are probably also incapable of romantic love, certain sorts of loyalty, and dedication to causes that require acting slightly larger than life . . . . What we need is not the wholesale substitution of self-knowledge for self-deception, but the gifts of timing and tact to emphasize the right one in the appropriate place.<sup>304</sup>

Others go further, arguing that self-deception is a necessary and constant condition of human existence from early childhood. In his seminal work, *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker writes, "Man had to invent and create out of himself the limitations of perception and the equanimity to live on this planet."<sup>305</sup> He quotes psychoanalyst Gregory Zilboorg:

If this fear [of death] were constantly conscious, we should be unable to function normally. It must be properly repressed to keep us living with any modicum of comfort. We know very well that to repress means more than to

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<sup>302</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 5.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid, 123.

<sup>304</sup>Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, "Adaptivity and Self-Knowledge," *Inquiry* 11 (1975): 22, quoted in Martin, *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 7.

<sup>305</sup>Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death* (New York: The Free Press, 1973), 51.

put away and forget that which was put away and the place where we put it. It means also to maintain a constant psychological effort to keep the lid on and inwardly never relax our watchfulness.<sup>306</sup>

It has been proposed that self-deception obtains through unconscious intention, and that it is a "normal," even necessary, means of coping with unpleasant aspects of reality. It also has been noted that it has a capacity to serve both good and evil purposes. How, then, do we assess the moral responsibilities of self-deceivers? As we have seen, some philosophers condemn self-deception as a *prima facie* evil. There is a deontological position that holds that every person has an obligation to pursue and achieve the Socratic goal of self-awareness and self-understanding. Therefore, the self-deceiver is judged as violating a fundamental moral obligation to himself and others. Kant, for example, sees the "internal lie" as a breach of the "self-regarding duty" to know oneself as a necessary precondition for the moral life.<sup>307</sup>

Others take the opposite view, arguing that self-deception in ethical matters provides evidence of continuing moral commitments. Only a moral agent fearful of self-condemnation for an action he or she knows is wrong would engage in a self-deceptive project. Fingarette is "moved to a certain compassion in which there is awareness of the self-deceiver's authentic inner dignity as the motive of his self-betrayal," believing there is "a genuine subversion of personal agency and, for this

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<sup>306</sup>Gregory Zilboorg, "The Fear of Death," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 12 (1943): 465-467, quoted in Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 17. (Existentialists in philosophy and psychology emphasize that the condition of "being-in-the-world" involves the awareness and fear of "non-being," or "nothingness," the ultimate form of which is death. This awareness produces anxiety and a sense of dread, which are considered defining characteristics of the modern, existential self.)

<sup>307</sup>Kant, *The Doctrine of Virtue*, 77-104.

reason, a subversion of moral capacity."<sup>308</sup> Martin challenges him on this point, admitting that he may be correct regarding the neurotic, but maintaining that "other self-deceivers . . . are far more able, but simply unwilling, to confront what they refuse to acknowledge." He describes Fingarette's account as "a daring attempt to reconcile the morally judgmental perspectives of Sartre and Kierkegaard with a non-judgmental, therapeutic perspective."<sup>309</sup> Martin also contends that not all self-deception need be unconscious, and that some of the activity required to maintain self-deception is conducted consciously. To this extent, "not all self-deceivers are victims of uncontrollable forces."<sup>310</sup> He concludes,

Moral responsibility for self-deception reflects the complexity of moral responsibility in general. Assessing it can involve the consideration of many factors. It is hoped that we often manage to make these assessments with reasonable insight after being presented with the details about a situation. Sometimes, however, relevant factors cannot be identified or weighed with any precision. To that extent responsibility for self-deception is vague, uncertain or ambiguous by being open to alternative interpretations. Yet these difficulties pertain to specific individuals in particular situations, not to self-deceivers in general. In thinking about self-deception, we should balance our "craving for generality" (to borrow Wittgenstein's phrase) with a heightened sensitivity to differences.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>308</sup>Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, 140-141. A number of recent theories portray self-deceivers as victims of external or internal forces beyond their control, even when the phenomenon contributes to bad consequences. Freud and Fingarette are two who stress that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to hold a person morally responsible for the actions of the unconscious, which are, in a sense, consciously involuntary. Haight joins those who argue that psychological and social forces combine to actually determine the actions of the self-deceiver.

<sup>309</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 89-90.

<sup>310</sup>Ibid, 95.

<sup>311</sup>Ibid, 107-108.

## Self-Deception in The Social Context

The conclusion that self-deception can be understood only in relation to its context has led us to view it as a "family" of related concepts, *a la* Wittgenstein, that defy any single, neat definition.<sup>312</sup> For purposes of the present inquiry, we will examine more closely the Relational features of self-deception in the social context, which is the locus of most business activity.

It is ironic that social interaction can provide the means of defeating self-deception as well as fertile ground for it to flourish. It is not the purpose of this study to explore strategies for overcoming self-deception; however, it should be noted that the influence of the community of moral agents is widely believed to be a most powerful force in leading self-deceivers to the truth. Yet the social context also produces ideal conditions for self-deception to take root, especially in organizations that are composed of persons whose backgrounds, experiences, beliefs and purposes are similar.

### Self-Esteem and The Approval of Others

Daniel T. Gilbert and Joel Cooper describe strategies used by self-deceivers to formulate "overgenerous conceptions of themselves as competent, well-loved and virtuous." They assert that people are often "egocentric and self-serving in their self-assessments, attempting to highlight their positive features and deemphasize their flaws, and ultimately coming to believe these somewhat optimistic portraits of

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<sup>312</sup>For a discussion of how clusters of meanings can gather around a single word, see Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd ed., trans. G. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1953), 115.

themselves."<sup>313</sup> Citing Anthony Greenwald's theory that the self is a system with the ability to distort information in order to maintain a logical and stable view of the world,<sup>314</sup> they believe self-deception is essential for maintaining self-esteem. Therefore, it is not necessarily morally onerous; rather, it can be a "critical and adaptive part of both cognitive systems and social behavior."<sup>315</sup> We deceive ourselves unconsciously but intentionally, through strategies that elicit favorable responses from others -- encouraging them to perceive us as we would like to be perceived.

Self-schemas verify positive self-conceptions not only by drawing attention to selected aspects of feedback we receive, filling in gaps with self-enhancing information, or by assimilating ambiguous information to a positive self-conception, but also by undermining disconfirming information. [Research subjects] found more technical flaws in the methodology of studies that disconfirmed rather than confirmed their private beliefs -- regardless of how the study was actually conducted. If the self-concept is a theory that we hold about ourselves, then we might expect similar effects in the domain of self-assessment. Such effects have been found: people place less faith in the validity of information that disconfirms rather than confirms their self-conception . . . .

Thus, people may deceive themselves about themselves by assimilating what they perceive to the expectations they hold, paying greater attention to instances that confirm rather than disconfirm their expectations, and by being hypercritical of disconfirming information.<sup>316</sup>

As an information-processing function, this behavior requires skill not just in screening and evaluating input, but also in manipulating the social environment in order to help structure the information the environment produces. Among the

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<sup>313</sup>Daniel T. Gilbert and Joel Cooper, "Social Psychological Strategies of Self-Deception," *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 75.

<sup>314</sup>Anthony G. Greenwald, "The Totalitarian Ego: Fabrication and Revision of Personal History," *American Psychologist* 35 (1980): 603-618.

<sup>315</sup>Gilbert and Cooper, "Social Psychological Strategies," 76.

<sup>316</sup>Ibid, 75-80.

strategies suggested by Gilbert and Cooper for accomplishing this are "self-presentational feedback loops" that can alter others' conceptions of us in order that we may reciprocally convince ourselves of the validity of their impressions. "We may present ourselves in ways that underscore our best traits and obscure our worst."<sup>317</sup>

David Bersoff agrees that the protection of self-esteem is a principal objective of self-deceivers. He proposes that "unethical behavior is often rooted in an erroneous characterization of an unethical action as being morally neutral or acceptable. Such a characterization prevents an individual from associating a threat to his or her self-esteem with the performance of that action."<sup>318</sup> He conducted an experiment that demonstrated that the tendency to engage in unethical behavior is amenable to situational influences, apart from individual difference considerations. Subjects were deliberately overpaid for work and later subjected to various social conditions in an attempt to make it harder or easier to construct a self-deceptive, morally positive or neutral characterization of their failure to report the overpayment.

In social psychology, there is abundant research linking self-esteem needs to action decisions. These theories generally posit that the inner self activates processes to protect self-image whenever confronted by information that potentially threatens the experience of the self as being moral, good and worthy of the approval of others.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>317</sup>The authors cite Bem's work on self-perception to support this theory. (Daryl Bem, "Self-Perception Theory," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, vol. 6, ed. Leonard Berkowitz [New York: Academic Press, 1972]).

<sup>318</sup>David Mitchel Bersoff, "Why Good People Sometimes Do Bad Things: Prosocial Motivation, Self-Deception and Unethical Behavior" (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1992), 5.

<sup>319</sup>Examples of such studies include: C.N. Alexander and G.W. Knight, "Situated Identities and Social Psychological Experimentation," *Sociometry* 34 (1971): 65-82:

"Just as self-preservation pressures can be circumvented through a self-deceptive characterization of an action [as good], so too can the dictates of certain values or attitudes."<sup>320</sup>

Psychologist Abraham Maslow associates self-deception not only with protecting self-esteem but even with maintaining mental health:

. . . the great cause of much psychological illness is the fear of knowledge of oneself -- of one's emotions, impulses, memories, capacities, potentialities, of one's destiny. We have discovered that fear of knowledge of oneself is very often isomorphic with, and parallel with fear of the outside world.

In general this kind of fear is defensive, in the sense that it is a protection of our self-esteem, of our love and respect for ourselves. We tend to be afraid of any knowledge that could cause us to despise ourselves or to make us feel inferior, weak, worthless, evil, shameful. We protect ourselves and our image of ourselves by repression and similar defenses, which are essentially techniques by which we avoid becoming conscious of unpleasant or dangerous truths.<sup>321</sup>

William Ruddick recounts Petrarch's tale of an innkeeper who advertises better wine than he actually serves. His patrons praise the wine (either out of politeness or because their taste has been affected by false expectations), so that, over time, he

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A.G. Greenwald and S.J. Breckler, "To Whom Is the Self Presented?", in ed. B. Schlenker, *The Self and Social Life* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1985), 126-145; C.M. Steele, "The Psychology of Self-Affirmation: Sustaining the Integrity of The Self," in ed. L. Berkowitz, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol 21 (New York: Academic Press, 1988), 261-302; J.T. Tedeschi, *Impression Management and Social Psychological Research* (New York: Academic Press, 1981); and P.E. Tetlock and A.S.R. Manstead, "Impression Management versus Intrapsychic Explanations in Social Psychology: A Useful Dichotomy?", *Psychological Review* 92 (1985): 59-77.

<sup>320</sup>Bersoff, 43.

<sup>321</sup>Abraham Maslow, "The Need to Know and The Fear of Knowing," *Journal of General Psychology* 68 (1963): 118-119. For a similar view, see Otto Rank, *Will Therapy and Truth and Reality* (New York: Knopf, 1936), 251-252: "With the truth, one cannot live. To be able to live one needs illusions . . . [and] this constantly effective process of self-deceiving, pretending and blundering is no psychopathological mechanism . . ."

comes to believe his own lie. Evidently, he has "initiated a causal chain that has his own false belief as its last link."<sup>322</sup> Whether witting or unwitting, the innkeeper's customers played an integral role in his self-deception.

### Self-Deception and Social Groups

Of particular importance to our study in the business setting is the phenomenon of collective self-deception. Like individuals, social groups act to protect self-esteem by manipulating the information in their external and internal environments. Mutually dependent groups (businesses, families, racial minorities, ships' crews) often face common threats or risks, responding in a "tribal" manner. Ruddick maintains that self-deception is "simpler when others are similarly engaged . . . . No one acting in concert has an interest in speaking, or producing evidence, against the false belief or questionable desire that each person wants to maintain." As an example, he notes that clinical researchers "commonly discount the likely side effects of therapy as mere 'risks,' thereby suppressing their uncertainty, while listing probable improvements as 'benefits,' thereby seeming to guarantee them."<sup>323</sup>

Kipp sees the relationships between members of groups as mutually manipulative:

Immersed in a social game whose rules are the conventional truths and values of a certain group, one regards the others as primarily authoritative about what one 'ought' to be and about what one is 'worth,' and one identifies oneself primarily with whatever 'social image' one can create and sustain in the eyes

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<sup>322</sup>William Ruddick, "Social Self-Deceptions," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 381.

<sup>323</sup>*Ibid*, 383-384.



of the others. . . .<sup>324</sup>

He echoes Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger, all of whom relate their theories of existential inauthenticity to notions of self-deception and self-awareness, describing the self-deification of the crowd as an insidious, modern tribalism. "Unable to bear the task of responsibly constituting their 'own' lives. . . they seek to 'drown out' the call of their 'conscience' by fleeing into the everyday distractions of life in the crowd."<sup>325</sup>

Bruce Wilshire proposes that self-deception is also related to a voluntary, but not necessarily conscious, behavior he calls "mimetic engulfment," which is defined as "a situation in which humans imitate each other undeliberately."<sup>326</sup> While each self, physiologically speaking, is an individual body, he questions whether the "self" in its larger meaning can be so easily distinguished from the other "selves" in the group

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<sup>324</sup>Kipp, "Self-Deception, Inauthenticity and Weakness of Will," 278. As we saw above, Kipp believes accusations of self-deception often are used against others unfairly: "Usually those who inquire into self-deception tend to regard the self-deceiver as a muddled, morally incompetent 'misfit' surrounded by a group of clear-sighted, morally mature people who care and who could, if only the misfit would listen to them, administer all the corrective truths that the misfit needs. . . . Whereas [some research] suggests that the self-deceiver uses apparent self-deception as an instrument of manipulative defense (against the group), inquiry into the links between self-deception and inauthenticity suggests that the group uses self-deceptively shammed belief in literal self-deception as an instrument of manipulative aggression (against the individual). On both sides, notably, this self-deceptive shaming transcends mere interest-serving deceit by virtue of the predominantly 'socio-moralistic' nature of what is at stake, i.e., 'existentially' deep-rooted matters of face, self-esteem, or (self-perceived) justice."

<sup>325</sup>Ibid, 275.

<sup>326</sup>Bruce Wilshire, "Mimetic Engulfment and Self-Deception," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 390.

who stand together in "mimetic attunement or engulfment."<sup>327</sup>

We achieve what we call an identity as an individual self only because we incorporate mimetically and nondeliberately others' attitudes and perceptions (including others' attitudes and perceptions of ourselves.) Inevitably, then, 'what I am' (or its nonverbal equivalent) must include 'what we are' (or its non-verbal equivalent). At some moments, what distinguishes a self from others is in relative ascendancy, at other moments what is shared. When the latter occurs, self-deception can be rampant. . . .

The identity of the particular mimetic community typically conspires to blur one's sense of individuality and to facilitate one's self-deception. Successful role-playing is essential to the cohesion and survival of the group.<sup>328</sup>

Sociologists have documented that members of highly structured organizations develop norms and mores that mirror those of the group. In studying business organizations, Gordon Donaldson and Jay Lorsch conclude that "all of the beliefs in each company are a tightly interrelated system" that is a "fabric" of beliefs that "do not exist in isolation or discrete principles. Rather they are closely interwoven in managers' thought processes."<sup>329</sup> McFadyen warns that when social institutions "over-rigidify," personal autonomy is placed at risk and the institutional structure "makes [personal] endurance possible only as a social atom and not as a person."<sup>330</sup>

The endurance of the social form, on the other hand, is put at risk because it is so rigid that it will be unable to respond to changes in its internal or external communication contexts which push it beyond critical limits. Changes in historical circumstance which threaten the mode of social reproduction (e.g., technological innovation, actual or threatened invasion, . . . unforeseen effects of policy) can only be met with resistance or collapse if they require a different

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<sup>327</sup>Ibid, 393.

<sup>328</sup>Ibid, 398-399.

<sup>329</sup>Gordon Donaldson and Jay Lorsch, *Decision Making at the Top: The Shaping of Strategic Decision* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 81-82, quoted in Larry May, *The Morality of Groups* (Notre Dame, IN, 1987), 68.

<sup>330</sup>McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood*, 239.

quality in the encoding of relations or value structure. Because the structure is geared to its own reduplication into the future, it is unable to adapt itself to a different future, to endure through evolutionary innovation.<sup>331</sup>

These observations lead back to questions of individual moral responsibility: If my self-deception is an inevitable result of my membership in a larger, self-deceived group, can I be said to have freedom as an agent? It is not the purpose of the present inquiry to undertake a philosophical discussion of determinism; however, we must recognize that this is a critical issue for anyone who seeks to ascribe moral responsibility for self-deception or to develop strategies for defeating it.<sup>332</sup> In this regard, it is important to note that the debate about determinism extends well beyond self-deception. Haight, who adopts a mostly determinist stance, concludes that "almost everything that is morally interesting or important seems to lie between what uncertain paradigms we may accept for freedom and compulsion."<sup>333</sup> D. Don Welch doubts that freedom for personal agency is ever completely lost in social institutions:

To a large extent, we internalize the values and standards of the social institutions we inhabit. . . . Nevertheless, conflict between personal and corporate agendas is inevitable. One is rarely, if ever, completely socialized into a particular group's morality, and no single institutional arrangement will conform to all of the various components that make up an individual's agenda.

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<sup>331</sup>Ibid.

<sup>332</sup>"Kant has been crucial in the general formulation of . . . individual autonomy, which has largely survived in spite of greater awareness of the various kinds of constraints which limit it. In knowledge and cognitive skills, individuals are understood to possess at least some capacity in themselves, as well as in relation to others. That element of dependence on others certainly has to be acknowledged as a limiting factor. . . . Knowledge clearly is gained from relationship with others and cumulative community experience. But some sense of individual contribution nonetheless remains as one ingredient within that corporate learning process." (White, *Paying Attention to People*, 23.)

<sup>333</sup>Haight, 125.

Our participation in any organization will limit our freedom to respond to the world in ways we think appropriate. Institutional structures and cultures shape our interpretation of situations and our definitions of problems. Institutional responsibilities and obligations will demand certain choices that we would otherwise not make. On the other hand, we find ourselves within these corporate settings because those institutions promote values and ends that we endorse. Our ability to advance particular items on our own agendas is enhanced by the use of institutional power.<sup>334</sup>

It must be emphasized here that organizations actually create systems for the purpose of manipulating the opinions, attitudes and beliefs of members. In large corporations, for example, there are complex systems of communication that control and shape much of the information that employees receive. Jacques Ellul believes that it is primarily these "propaganda operations" that nourish a sort of tribalism. A person subjected to the continuous influence of a system of organizational communication will be affected not only in attitude and belief, but also in "mental and emotional structures."

This force springs, on the one hand, from the character of the media employed, which give the appearance of objectivity to subjective impulses, and, on the other, from everybody's adherence to the same standards and prejudices.

At the same time, these collective beliefs, which the individual assumes to be his own, these scales of values and stereotypes, which play only a small part in the psychological life of a person unaffected by propaganda, become big and important. . . .

To the extent that man needs justifications, propaganda provides them. . . . He can throw off all sense of guilt; he loses all feeling for the harm he might do, all sense of responsibility other than the responsibility propaganda instills in him. . . .

Through such a process of intense rationalization, propaganda builds monolithic individuals. It eliminates inner conflicts, tensions, self-criticism.

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<sup>334</sup>D. Don Welch, *Conflicting Agendas: Personal Morality in Institutional Settings* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 49.

self-doubt.<sup>335</sup>

Ellul sees propaganda as leading ultimately to self-alienation. "In a more profound sense, it means to be deprived of one's self. . . ." <sup>336</sup> "Aside from the effects that the propagandist seeks to obtain directly . . . his psychological manipulations evoke certain forces in the unconscious." <sup>337</sup>

### Self-Deception and Social Roles

The concept of roles, mentioned in preceding discussions, will now be considered in greater depth in relation to self-deception. The phenomenon of role-playing is analyzed by philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and other social scientists, as well as by legal and political theorists. Therefore, the literature on the subject is wide-ranging.

The Existentialist philosophers are among the most vocal in condemning role-playing as inauthenticity or, in Sartre's words, bad faith. Describing the ways people behave in occupational roles (waiter, grocer, tailor, auctioneer) Sartre accuses them of pretending to be "nothing more" than the role itself -- a "being-for-others," merely acting out a role in the way that is expected. "A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer. . . ." <sup>338</sup>

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<sup>335</sup>Jacques Ellul, *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 163-65.

<sup>336</sup>Ibid, 169.

<sup>337</sup>Ibid, 163.

<sup>338</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 221, 59.

The idea of "social selves," as conceived by Chanowitz and Langer takes Sartre's theory further by suggesting that humans comprise multiple selves, each adapted to the habits, skills, attitudes and values appropriate for a particular role. By presuming that there is no "necessary unity to the person," they maintain that each social setting stimulates the emergence of the appropriate self.<sup>339</sup> As an example, they point to

. . . the person who easily distinguishes between his personal life and his professional life and who comfortably acts in routine conformity with each setting despite the fact that the conventional standards of the two settings contradict each other. The untroubled action in either setting. . . might come under the rubric of self-deception, since we have here a person whose actions endorse one standard while 'covertly' endorsing another, contradictory standard.<sup>340</sup>

Haight calls role-playing "a familiar form of self-deception," although she rejects Sartre's analysis on the grounds that one who is said to "play a role" must, by definition, be distinct from it. She also differs with Chanowitz and Langer, contending that role-playing involving self-deception is not an everyday phenomenon for most people. Rather, it occurs when a role forces "certain views on the player and these override other views that we think he must have, and should acknowledge."<sup>341</sup> She recalls that weapons designer Wernher von Braun insisted that his work was purely scientific discovery and had no moral implications. He described himself as *nothing but* a scientist: "Once the rockets go up, who cares where they come down?"

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<sup>339</sup>Chanowitz and Langer, "Self Protection and Self-Inception," 125.

<sup>340</sup>Ibid, 124.

<sup>341</sup>Haight, 70. As noted above, Haight is convinced that literal self-deception (i.e., a successful lie to oneself) "cannot happen"; however, she uses the term to refer to cases where one suppresses or avoids awareness of facts that may dispute a preferred point of view. This is often accomplished by simply refusing to think things through.

That's not my department."<sup>342</sup>

Haight thinks he should know better:

We must assume -- if he deceives himself this way -- that he has certain humanitarian principles which should not let him limit himself to being nothing but a scientist vis-a-vis his work; and we assume that he knows they forbid it, and knows that he assents to these principles. He will literally (and paradoxically) deceive himself if he manages nevertheless to believe that he does not assent to them or that they allow what he is doing. If we take this possibility seriously, we may try to explain it by saying that his moral position would be clear to him if he thought it through -- but in order not to face it, he does not.<sup>343</sup>

Natanson observes that scientists are susceptible to the conflict between role and person, as they "cannot live by methodology alone." For this reason, it is not uncommon for a scientist to blind himself to "questions of the worth or moral validity" of his work so that the "doubts or indecisiveness he may feel as a person do not enter his formal activity."<sup>344</sup> "The eclipse of the individual makes possible the fulfillment of the role."<sup>345</sup>

Of course science is by no means the only occupational field where this phenomenon exists (recall Sartre's waiter and grocer whose identities are synonymous with their roles in the workplace). In a 1987 episode of the United States public television series *Ethics in America*, it was demonstrated that a news reporter's identification with his role can supersede even his sense of responsibility for the lives of his countrymen. In a panel discussion, a hypothetical question was posed to Peter

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<sup>342</sup>Ibid.

<sup>343</sup>Ibid, 70-71.

<sup>344</sup>Natanson, *The Journeying Self*, 71.

<sup>345</sup>Ibid, 135.

Jennings, lead news anchor for a major, commercial television network: If he and his camera crew were traveling with a company of enemy troops when they unexpectedly spotted a small group of American soldiers approaching at a distance, would he simply "roll tape" and watch the impending ambush of the Americans? James Fallows recounts Jennings's response and the discussion that ensues:

Jennings sat silent for about fifteen seconds. . . . 'Well I guess I wouldn't,' he finally said. 'I am going to tell you now what I am feeling, rather than the hypothesis I drew for myself. . . . I think that I personally would do what I could to warn the Americans.'

Even if that means losing the story? [moderator Charles] Ogletree asked.

Even though it would almost certainly mean losing my life, Jennings replied. . . .

'I am astonished, really,' at Jennings's answer, [competing network reporter Mike] Wallace said a moment later. He turned to Jennings and began to lecture him: 'You're a *reporter*. . . .'

Ogletree pushed Wallace. Didn't Jennings have some higher duty, either patriotic or human, to do something rather than just roll film as the soldiers from his own country were being shot?

'No,' Wallace said flatly and immediately. 'You don't have a higher duty. No. No. You're a reporter!'

Jennings backtracked fast. Wallace was right, he said. 'I chickened out.'<sup>346</sup>

So a reporter must be *nothing more* than a reporter, and it is fellow role-players who often act to keep one from straying too far from the role.

The primacy of roles in a large workplace or profession frequently promotes a sense of lessened personal accountability for the moral consequences of group actions. Welch identifies two additional, common devices for easing "the tension between



personal and institutional agendas [or roles] by blurring any sense of personal responsibility within institutions." The first is the concept of hierarchical responsibility, used as a defense by Nazi defendants at Nuremberg, that places moral responsibility only at the top level of the organization. The second concept is collective responsibility, based on the view that each person's role is so "small and indistinguishable from the contributions of others, that either everyone is responsible or only the collective body is responsible."<sup>347</sup> Either rationalization of personal inaction can be a self-deceptive device, as we will discuss later.

The phenomenon of role-playing is rendered compellingly by Alasdair MacIntyre, who uses the term "characters" to describe those roles which are endemic to particular cultures. These roles -- exemplified in business by the bureaucratic manager -- "furnish recognizable characters and the ability to recognize them is socially crucial because a knowledge of the character provides an interpretation of the actions of those individuals who have assumed the character." Everyone who assumes a role is not a *character*, for the term applies only to persons whose roles place them under "a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality."<sup>348</sup> MacIntyre sees a link between the dramatic roles and moral obligations of characters, an *is* premise that entails an *ought* conclusion. A person is a theology professor, therefore he ought to do whatever a theology professor ought to do.<sup>349</sup> Although there are similarities in

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<sup>346</sup>James Fallows, *Breaking the News* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 12-14.

<sup>347</sup>Welch, *Conflicting Agendas: Personal Morality in Institutional Settings*, 61.

<sup>348</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 26.

<sup>349</sup>Ibid, 54.

their accounts, MacIntyre is careful to contrast his concept of "character" with Sartre's "being for others." He challenges Sartre for making the self identical with ("nothing but") its role, and argues that social roles are more like "masks worn by moral philosophies."<sup>350</sup> Taking a harsh view of the manager in business, MacIntyre claims that the expected role of this character is to act solely for the purpose of maximizing efficiency, using people as ends.<sup>351</sup> The manager's claims to effectiveness are described as a "moral fiction," for the manager and those in relation to him or her are deceived by themselves. "To a disturbing extent our morality will be disclosed as a theater of illusions."<sup>352</sup>

#### Self-Acknowledgement and Avowal

Martin proposes a "working analysis" of self-deception that synthesizes many of the philosophical accounts we have reviewed. "All these approaches have yielded valuable insights, [but] they emphasize a few cases while neglecting others, or they single out only some elements of self-deception." He argues that the notion of "acknowledging (admitting, confessing) to oneself" leads to a coherent explanation of how self-deception is possible. "Deceiving oneself is the evasion of full self-acknowledgement of some truth or of what one would view as truth if one were to

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<sup>350</sup>Ibid, 28.

<sup>351</sup>Ibid, 34. For a response challenging MacIntyre's view of the manager, see Kathryn Balstad Brewer, "Management as a Practice; A Response to Alasdair MacIntyre," *Journal of Business Ethics* 16, no. 8 (June I 1997): 825-33.

<sup>352</sup>Ibid, 74.

confront an issue squarely."<sup>353</sup> He sees self-deceivers' actions following a variety of patterns:

[They] might (a) evade understanding by blurring their own grasp of what they know, (b) evade attention through systematic distraction, (c) evade belief via willful ignorance or rationalization, (d) evade cogent argument by disregarding evidence, (e) evade appropriate emotional responses and attitude adjustments by using emotional detachment, (f) evade appropriate action using self-pretense or any of the preceding strategies, and so on.<sup>354</sup>

He does not intend this list to be exhaustive, and he observes that self-deception often is accomplished with a combination of these methods. He stresses (*contra* Kant and Demos) that it need not involve an "inner lie" or a "lie to oneself." Conversely, to acknowledge something to oneself, one must:

(a) understand it, (b) be willing to attend to it in explicit consciousness, (c) believe it, (d) have a disposition to use it in reasoning (where relevant), (e) undergo emotional and attitudinal responses to what it expresses, as appropriate given one's personality, and (f) have at least some disposition to express it in actions made appropriate by one's desires, beliefs and basic commitments.<sup>355</sup>

Martin's account parallels "social selves" theories in several respects. "Self acknowledgement requires that the belief (or knowledge) become active by being brought into intimate relation with other aspects of the personality."<sup>356</sup> Like Chanowitz and Langer, he describes beliefs that have "characteristic habitats" in which they are expressed. He cites the "classic Sunday-only Christian [who] displays

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<sup>353</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 13. For a similar description of the evasion of self-confession, see R. G. Collingwood, *The Principles of Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 217 ff.

<sup>354</sup>Ibid, 15.

<sup>355</sup>Ibid.

<sup>356</sup>Ibid.

one set of beliefs (or half-beliefs) on Sunday, another on weekdays."<sup>357</sup>

Fingarette advances a similar explanation of how self-deception occurs:

[One is drawn into] some engagement in the world [that], in part or in whole, the person cannot avow as his engagement, for to avow it would apparently lead to such disruptive, distressing consequences as to be unmanageably destructive to . . . that currently achieved synthesis of engagements which is the person.<sup>358</sup>

To disavow is to refuse to identify oneself as the person acting (or believing) in a manner that is inconsistent with one's values.<sup>359</sup> In this process, the disavowal itself is disavowed; therefore, one does not assume moral responsibility for the disavowed engagement. By avoiding explicit consciousness of an engagement, one loses control over the actions associated with it. (Fingarette provides an example that challenges the conventional description of alcoholism as a mental disease, arguing instead that the label "disease" allows the alcoholic to make a socially sanctioned excuse for his loss of control over drinking.<sup>360</sup>) The motive for disavowal is to preserve inner unity and avoid the psychic turmoil that results from a loss of self-esteem. According to Martin, the principal difference between evading self-acknowledgement and disavowing one's identity is in the motives assigned by each account:

In my view, self-deception does not have any one generic motive or aim (although I allow that a concern for self-esteem is usually a motive for not admitting to ourselves that we are engaged in self-deception). Certainly there

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<sup>357</sup>Ibid, 22.

<sup>358</sup>Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, 87.

<sup>359</sup>Cf. Georges Rey, "Toward a Computational Account of Akrasia and Self-Deception," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 264. Rey sees self-deception as a failure to act in accordance with one's sincerely avowed beliefs.

<sup>360</sup>Fingarette, "Alcoholism and Self-Deception," in *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 54.

are motives for self-deception that have little to do with fear of dealing with inner turmoil. . . . In fact, self-deception can be prompted by any number of more specific reasons for avoiding an unpleasant or onerous task: a desire to find an easy way out of a difficulty, a need to relax, a wish to make oneself fail, a hope of indirectly hurting others on whom one's actions impinge, and so on. Nothing as momentous as protecting one's present self-identity need be involved. Self-deception can even be motivated by admirable and courageous desires. . . .<sup>361</sup>

Another significant difference between the two is that Fingarette declares self-deception to be morally ambiguous because of the self-deceiver's inability to become conscious of the engagement (thus subverting the capacity for moral agency).<sup>362</sup> Martin, by contrast, maintains that self-deceivers must be held responsible for the harm they cause, regardless of whether they disown their actions.

#### Rationalization, Denial and Excuse-Making

Some accounts connect the concepts of self-deception and rationalization, terms that Audi finds mutually illuminating. "Rationalization is one of the facets of behavior in which self-deception shows its true character."<sup>363</sup> Self-esteem protection is a principal motive for self-deceivers' rationalizations, he suggests, because "most people don't like to appear unreasonable." Rationalizations are attempts to "make otherwise unreasonable behavior seem appropriate."<sup>364</sup> He names several features of a

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<sup>361</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 86.

<sup>362</sup>Fingarette, *Self-Deception*, 136.

<sup>363</sup>Audi, "Self-Deception, Rationalization and Reasons for Acting," 93.

<sup>364</sup>Ibid, 97. See also Sanford's account connecting self-deception and rationalization, but attributing self-deception to misunderstanding of one's psychological attitudes and motivations. (David H. Sanford, "Self-Deception as Rationalization," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 157.)

rationalization:

1. It offers a reason -- or excuse -- for one's action (or belief, desire, motive, emotion), but does not actually explain why one did it.
2. It attempts to justify an action that others might criticize as unwise or immoral.
3. It is at least *prima facie* rational.
4. It often provides a conscious rationale in hindsight for decisions that were made intuitively.
5. It frequently serves self-defensive purposes.

Audi observes that self-deception is seldom a "static phenomenon"; rather, it requires a host of efforts to maintain the veil between conscious and unconscious knowledge. Rationalizations are among the most important of these efforts, and "they often reveal much about the agent; what he values, believes and wants; even what ego need is responsible for his self-deception."<sup>365</sup> This view is echoed by C. R. Snyder: "It is assumed that self-deception occurs principally in circumstances where the self-deceiver is very ego-involved."<sup>366</sup> He proposes that the two conflicting beliefs that invite rationalization are "(a) that one is responsible for a negative outcome, and (b) that one is a good person."<sup>367</sup> He identifies two excuse-making strategies for coping with this conflict:

1. *Reframing Performance* is a maneuver that seeks to lessen the negativity of an action. Rationalizations of this type range from "I couldn't help it" to "It

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<sup>365</sup>Ibid, 117.

<sup>366</sup>C. R. Snyder, "Collaborative Companions: The Relationship of Self-Deception and Excuse-Making," in *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 35.

<sup>367</sup>Ibid, 37.

really wasn't serious." Reframing also can take the form of derogating one's victim (as when the racist argues that his victim is less than human) or derogating the source of negative feedback.<sup>368</sup>

2. *Transformed Responsibility* is a strategy of blaming actions on circumstances beyond one's control, or responsibility. Typical responses are "Everyone behaves in a like (bad) manner," "Anyone would have failed," and "I didn't mean to do it."

Adrian M.S. Piper's account of self-deception links it not only to rationalization, but also to the closely related concepts of denial and dissociation. Though she makes fine distinctions between the terms, they are more alike than dissimilar. All self-deceivers are classified as "pseudorationalizing dogmatists" -- persons who conceptualize their experiences according to a "favored theory." Accordingly, the dogmatist is convinced that he or she is very fortunate to experience the world the way it actually *is*. By being so invested in a favored theory, this person experiences anxiety when confronted with information that threatens to contradict it, and uses strategies of rationalization, denial and dissociation to cope.<sup>369</sup>

[Self-deceivers] are pseudorationalizers with a personal investment in a certain *kind* of dogmatic theory, namely one with two mutually dependent parts. The first, explicit part is a dogmatic and parochial theory of their experience. . . . The second part, however, is often left implicit: it is a theory of who they are, how they behave, and how they relate socially to others. For the self-deceiver, this second part of the theory is the source of the vanity and self-

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<sup>368</sup>Sartre agrees, using the term "redescription," seeing things differently, rather than not seeing at all. See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 59 ff. Cf. Haight, 59-60, and King-Farlow, "Self-Deceivers and Sartrean Seducers," *Analysis* 23 (1963): 131 - 136.

<sup>369</sup>Adrian M. S. Piper, "Pseudorationality," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 307.

aggrandizement. . . .

A self-conception, the unstated part of the self-deceiver's theory, is mutually dependent with the first, in that the validity of the first is a necessary and sufficient condition, in the self-deceiver's eyes, of the validity of the second. This is because, typically, the first part, the dogmatic theory of her experience, includes in it honorific status for persons of the kind she conceives herself to be. According to this analysis, then, a self-deceiver is a pseudorationalizer who conceives of herself as a good and valuable person if and only if the dogmatic theory of her experience she espouses is the correct one.<sup>370</sup>

Martin identifies rationalization as one of five patterns of self-deception, calling it "an effort to silence an otherwise anguished conscience."<sup>371</sup> He views it as a conscious act for which one should be held morally accountable. Szabados is less certain of the rationalizer's blameworthiness:

A rationalizer, as opposed to a liar, thinks that the justifications he produces are good ones. He does not produce justifications under the description: 'I am producing false justifications to fool others and myself.' The enterprise is prereflective: it is prompted by motives that cannot be spelled out without destroying the enterprise itself. Its motives and structure can be made explicit but only in retrospect.<sup>372</sup>

#### Self-Serving Bias: Deliberate Ignorance, Avoidance and Partisanship

Social psychologists have documented a predictable tendency of humans to interpret information and events as favorable to themselves, even when the facts do not support such interpretations.<sup>373</sup> Paul C. Vitz observes that this self-serving bias

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<sup>370</sup>Ibid, 313.

<sup>371</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 9.

<sup>372</sup>Bela Szabados, "The Self, Its Passions and Self-Deception," in *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, 155.

<sup>373</sup>See D. T. Miller and M. Ross, "Self-Serving Biases in the Attribution Process," *Psychological Bulletin* 82 (1975): 213-225.



leads people to take credit for successes and blame others for failures, whether or not such credit or blame is warranted. "It is now clear that the great majority of us are so reliably biased in favor of our own capacities and prospects that it is hard to find people who are truly realistic about themselves . . . [and who do not tend to] trust their own judgements in many situations in which it can be shown that objectively they have little basis for confidence."<sup>374</sup>

Likewise, communication theorists have demonstrated that self-serving bias is frequently facilitated by sophisticated capacities for filtering information as it is received. Human beings continuously ignore large amounts of data that are deemed unimportant or unwanted, as Sissela Bok explains:

Consider all the possible knowledge that an individual might acquire: with all the openness and acuity in the world, he could acquire only a minute portion of this knowledge, even in principle. Every direction chosen forecloses innumerable others. . . . Thousands of sensory impressions reach the average individual per second, according to some estimates: the vast majority of these are dealt with -- adapted or rejected -- at the simplest organic levels.<sup>375</sup>

She adds that this alone does not constitute self-deception, but it does perhaps explain a natural process of censorship and avoidance that can produce deliberate ignorance. King-Farlow and Bosely write, "One can refuse to listen and so deceive oneself," citing the familiar accusations, "You've blinded yourself," and "You can't hear what is being said."<sup>376</sup> In Martin's account, willful ignorance is a principal self-deceptive strategy, more often resulting in the absence of truth than the presence of falsehood.

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<sup>374</sup>Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 21.

<sup>375</sup>Sissela Bok, *Secrets: On The Ethics of Concealment and Revelation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 67.

<sup>376</sup>King-Farlow and Bosley, "Self-Formation and the Mean," 201.

This is achieved by the "systematic ignoring of something known, believed or suspected, where ignoring may include both distraction of thoughts from a topic and disregarding evidence while reasoning. . . ."<sup>377</sup>

Socrates, like Plato, assumes that knowledge of the good leads naturally to virtuous action. To act immorally, then, one must be ignorant, for Socrates cannot conceive of a person who knows the good but does evil. There is no room in his theory for freedom to engage in voluntary wrongdoing; therefore, there is no evil apart from self-deceptive ignorance, because a prerequisite for wrongdoing is the belief that the act is not evil. A. E. Taylor infers from Socrates that "a man has temporarily sophisticated himself into regarding evil as good before he will choose it. . . . Evil-doing always rests upon a false estimate of good."<sup>378</sup> Thus, it might follow that ignorance of certain information can make it possible for a morally inclined person to engage in wrongdoing without recognizing it -- even if Socrates is in error about the impossibility of voluntary wrongdoing.

Bok refers to Albert Speer's account of his role as a minister of Adolph Hitler's government as an example of self-imposed ignorance. He refused to confront the atrocities in "other than an abstract way," later recalling, "I did not investigate -- for I did not want to know what was happening there [at Auschwitz]."<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>377</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 13.

<sup>378</sup>A. E. Taylor, *Socrates: The Man and His Thought* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1953), 86.

<sup>379</sup>Bok, *Secrets: On The Ethics of Concealment and Revelation*, 67. She quotes Albert Speer, *Inside The Third Reich* (New York: Avon Books, 1970), 376. See also the commentary of David Burrell and Stanley Hauerwas, "Self-Deception and Autobiography: Theological and Ethical Reflections on Speer's *Inside the Third Reich*," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 2 (1974): 99 - 117.

Adam Morton examines the issue in the context of the laboratory, maintaining that biased assimilation of information leads to differences in the outcomes of scientific inquiries conducted by different research teams. Partisanship, as he terms it, arises from guiding conceptions, hypotheses, traditions, loyalties and rules of thumb.

It ought to be possible for members of rival research teams to see each other as reasonable, but wrong, misguided. For after all, a member of a differing team is reaching different conclusions as a result of different assumptions, originally fairly arbitrary ones, about the most profitable strategy for unraveling the phenomena in question, and these are in the end different presumptions about the form that the truth behind the phenomena is likely to take. After all, it then looks like any other dispute between reasonable, understanding, self-conscious people. But to describe it like this is to miss the essential difficulty of the situation. If you are a member of one team, then members of another will: take seriously hypotheses that seem to you not worth consideration, consider them supported by what you consider misconstruals of the evidence, and integrate them into the common theoretical background in a way that seems to you to show a misunderstanding of the structure and direction of the theories involved.<sup>380</sup>

Scientific partisanship causes the researcher to ignore or disregard potentially valid information, for personal commitments and desires (often socially formed) can rationally influence the beliefs one forms.

Carl Rogers, a pioneer of psychological self-theory, believes it is possible for a person who is "fully actualized" to experience his or her environment freely and without distortion. Such a person, in theory, perceives in an accurate and unbiased manner the existential situation within and without, "always becoming more of a person, more unique and more self-expressive."<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>380</sup>Adam Morton, "Partisanship," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 173.

<sup>381</sup>Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1961), 37. See also Carl Rogers, *Freedom to Learn* (Columbus, OH: C. E. Merrill, 1969).

## Related Locutions

Finally, to further illuminate the concept of self-deception, we will compare and contrast it with two, closely related locutions. To fully comprehend what self-deception is, we must also recognize what it is not. Not surprisingly, there is as much disagreement about these terms as there is about self-deception itself.

### Hypocrisy

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines hypocrisy as "assuming a false appearance of virtue or goodness, with dissimulation of real character or inclinations."

Martin defines hypocrites as "(a) pretenders, (b) who intend to willingly allow themselves to appear better than they are . . . and (c) who are at fault for doing so."<sup>382</sup>

They are at fault, but he cautions that assigning blame must be done on a case-by-case basis, as some pretending is necessary for social survival. Generally speaking, hypocrisy may be seen as a form of coercion that violates our necessary trust of others not to deceive us, and it is a derivative wrong when it supports immorality.

If hypocrites pretend to be better than they are in blameworthy ways, it is clear that not all self-deceivers are hypocrites. For one thing, not all of them are culpable and blameworthy, as we have seen. Moreover, some self-deceivers appear to themselves and others to be much worse than they really are.

. . . [But] our definition of hypocrisy also clarifies why many self-deceivers are hypocrites, . . . for they engage in immorality while pretending not to be engaged in it.<sup>383</sup>

It might be added that many hypocrites are not self-deceivers because they are quite

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<sup>382</sup>Martin, *Self-Deception and Morality*, 45.

<sup>383</sup>Ibid, 45 - 46.

aware of the contradiction between their actions and their words.

### Wishful Thinking

Self-deception also is easily confused with wishful thinking, as both entail beliefs that are not epistemically warranted. But Brian McLaughlin demonstrates that there are distinct differences:

One can be self-deceived in believing that  $p$  without desiring that  $p$ . Paranoia, for instance, *can* involve self-deception (though, of course, it need not). A paranoid might be self-deceived in believing that he is constantly being gossiped about. To be so self-deceived, the paranoid need not want to be gossiped about. It is, in part, because he wants not to be gossiped about that he suffers deeply in believing that he is being gossiped about. His is not a wishful thinker, yet he is a self-deceiver.<sup>384</sup>

Szabados goes further with the distinction, arguing that the self-deceiver "perverts" the "procedures whereby we establish truth and falsehood."<sup>385</sup> The wishful thinker may be described as one who yields to the weight of evidence that  $p$  is untrue, while the self-deceiver resorts to stratagems of rationalization or other maneuvers to maintain his or her unwarranted belief. The term itself suggests that *wishful* thinking is more hypothetical than concrete; however, it also goes beyond the expression of a wish or a hope.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>384</sup>Brian P McLaughlin, "Exploring the Possibility of Self-Deception in Belief," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 44 - 45.

<sup>385</sup>Bela Szabados, "Wishful Thinking and Self-Deception," *Analysis* 33, 6 (June 1973): 205.

<sup>386</sup>For an account that treats self-deception as a species of wishful thinking, see Mark Johnston, "Self-Deception and the Nature of the Mind," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 67.

## Conclusion

Upon reading the literature, one must concede that self-deception is a problematic concept. Its definition varies by method of inquiry, field of study and other contexts of meaning. It is clear, however, from the preceding discussion -- and from our experience in the common life -- that it can and does happen. Stated simply, it is a self-directed, belief-misleading phenomenon that produces a cognitive, or epistemic, deficit which results in deliberate ignorance and/or simultaneously held, contradictory beliefs, one of which is not immediately accessible to consciousness. Self-deceptive projects are undertaken in a variety of ways but always for a reason, which frequently is the protection of one's self-esteem or identity conception.

Perspectives on *self-deception* are strongly influenced by underlying ideas about what it means to be a *self*. For purposes of this study, we have suggested that these conceptions of the self may be categorized in either of the two, broad categories of Rational and Relational. The Rational self is conceived as a solitary, transparent and unchanging entity. A philosophical paradox arises when one tries to imagine such a self succeeding in a self-directed lie. The Relational self, on the other hand, is a growing and changing being that exists in dialogical relation to persons, organizations, the environment, history and moral contexts. It is by understanding this essential relatedness that one sees the range of possibilities for self-deception.

In the next chapter, we will consider the self in relation to God, a relationship that is unique in its potential for bringing meaning and coherence to human selfhood. Because God is truth, there can be no interpersonal deception between God and oneself, only prideful acts to keep oneself from awareness of the truth. Opening

oneself to the God-relation leads to self-understanding, self-surrender and, ultimately, to wholeness.

## CHAPTER III:

### THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF SELF-DECEPTION

#### Introduction

The preceding chapter was engaged in a conceptual inquiry which consulted a wide variety of philosophical and psychological thinkers. Many of their understandings of self-deception were found to be modern ones, informed in large measure by post-Enlightenment conceptions of the self. We now turn to a question that leads down different and somewhat older paths: How is self-deception understood by Christian theology?

As before, we will begin by inquiring about the *self* as the reflexive component of *self-deception*. In viewing the self through the lens of theology, we shall expect to encounter some concepts similar to those considered previously, for the influence of Christian belief permeates Western philosophical and psychological thought. Indeed, the intellectual foundations of modernity itself rest on an amalgam of Greek and Judeo-Christian ideas.<sup>387</sup> Despite this, there remain crucial features of the self which

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<sup>387</sup>See Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 5. "All modern views of human nature are adaptations, transformations and varying compounds of two distinctive views of man: (a) the view of classical antiquity, that is of the Graeco-Roman world, and (b) the Biblical view. It is important to remember that while these two views are distinct and partly incompatible, they were actually merged in the thought of medieval Catholicism." Also see idem, *The Self and the Dramas of History*, 77. "But the Hellenic is defective in understanding the self and its dramas because it tries to understand both rationally and ontologically. The Hebraic, on the other hand, is defective in analyzing any permanent structure in the flow of temporal events. For the one history is made into another dimension of nature; and for the other nature is subsumed under history. Both nature and history are understood as standing under a divine sovereignty, rather than as subject to self-explanatory laws. Thus the one culture misunderstands human selves and their history, where freedom is more apparent than laws. The other misunderstands nature because it is primarily to be



are uniquely revealed and explained by Christian theology.

### The Nature of the Self

The brief discussion that follows does not propose to undertake a full exposition of the expansive and intricate field of theological anthropology. For as Karl Barth rightly observes, all of Christian theology might appropriately be seen as "The-anthropology," because "an abstract doctrine of God [or of man, for that matter] has no place in the Christian realm, only a 'doctrine of God and of man,' a doctrine of the commerce and communion between God and man."<sup>388</sup> Thus, the aim of the present study is to explore a limited scope of theological thought which might contribute to a better understanding of self-deception. Because our intention is to show how this concept may be understood and employed theologically, a broad and inclusive approach is to be preferred to an in-depth analysis of a particular figure, theory or school of thought.

### Rational Conceptions of the Self

The "abstract doctrine" of which Barth speaks is one of the progeny of theological Rationalism, a close relative of the Cartesian philosophical claim that human reason is the sole source of pure knowledge, and of the empiricist belief (e.g.,

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understood in terms of analyzable laws."

<sup>388</sup>Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Weiser (John Knox Press, 1960), 11. Cf., Idem, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. II, eds., G. W. Bromily, T. F. Torrance, trans., J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958). In his essay on the Doctrine of God, Barth demonstrates that God is known only in the "overflow" of His life and love to His

Locke and Hume) that knowledge derives exclusively from science and concrete human experience. Theological Rationalism is usually seen as a post-Enlightenment posture; however, it echoes the earlier thinking of Thomas Aquinas, whose natural theology first made a distinction between theological knowledge acquired through unaided reason, and knowledge gained through divine revelation. (In this he opposed the older, Augustinian doctrine that all knowledge of God is revealed by God.) During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Rationalism was expressed in various, sometimes radical, forms including deism, which espoused universalized beliefs about God and often rejected Christian faith as "unreasonable."

Charles Taylor's historical account traces the contributions of theology to the formation of a Rationalist, secularized ontology that is "perhaps the dominant outlook of modern Western technological society." This ontology arises from a fusion of Cartesian philosophy with ideas of freedom and individuality drawn from the Reformers (mostly through Francis Bacon): ". . . they shared common opponents in the defenders of the older, hierarchical views of order, and came together in endorsing the instrumental stance to the self and world."<sup>389</sup>

As this world view took hold, the centrality and primacy of reason transformed traditional conceptions of God and of self, a shift which Taylor credits primarily to Locke. We come to God because it is the *rational* thing to do; and we do so freely as a result of our self-responsible autonomy. Locke's fateful step moves theology from the Reform notion of living *worshipfully* for God toward an ideal of living *rationally*.

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creatures.

<sup>389</sup>Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 234.

Both God and the human self become objects of instrumental, disengaged knowledge, such that there is little room for the mystery of a God who is "wholly other" or a creature whose very being depends upon such a God.

As Reinhold Niebuhr demonstrates, this is the point where the distinction between Creator and creature begins to disappear, as "rationalism practically identifies rational man (who is essential man) with the divine; for reason is, as the creative principle, identical with God."<sup>390</sup> The "curious compound of classical, Christian and distinctively modern conceptions of human nature, involved in modern anthropology" has profoundly influenced theological thought, giving rise to the idealistic inclination to "protest against Christian humility" and to dismiss the idea of human sinfulness.<sup>391</sup>

Modern man has an essentially easy conscience; and nothing gives the diverse and discordant notes of modern culture so much harmony as the unanimous opposition to the sinfulness of man. The idea that man is sinful at the very centre of his personality, that is in his will, is universally rejected. It is this rejection which has seemed to make the Christian gospel simply irrelevant to modern man. . . . If modern culture conceives man primarily in terms of the uniqueness of his rational faculties, it finds the root of his evil in his involvement in natural impulses and natural necessities from which it hopes to free him by the increase of his rational faculties.<sup>392</sup>

Barth concurs, noting that the theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries frequently "ascribed a normative character to the ideas of its environment,"

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<sup>390</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 7. Niebuhr adds that reason's "most natural inclination is to make itself that ultimate principle, and thus in effect to declare itself God. Christian psychology and philosophy have never completely freed themselves from this fault, which explains why naturalists plausibly though erroneously regard Christian faith as the very fountain source of idealism" (13). "Idealism conceives the self primarily as reason and reason primarily as God" (76).

<sup>391</sup>Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>392</sup>Ibid, 23.

especially philosophical and psychological ones.<sup>393</sup> In accepting the Enlightenment notion that man is the measure of all things, including God, theology fell into the "the old error that one can speak of man without first, and very concretely, having spoken of the living God."<sup>394</sup>

. . . When the Christian gospel was changed into a statement, a religion, about Christian self-awareness, the God was lost sight of who in His sovereignty confronts man, calling him to account, and dealing with him as Lord. This loss also blurred the sight horizontally. The Christian was condemned to uncritical and irresponsible subservience to the patterns, forces, and movements of human history and civilization. Man's inner experience did not provide a firm enough ground for resistance to these phenomena.<sup>395</sup>

Nineteenth-century Rationalists, dazzled by rapid advances in industry and science, were confident that the human condition was improving steadily and that much tradition and past teaching about human sinfulness was outdated.<sup>396</sup> But this utopian positivism was blunted as it collided with the realities of the first World War, the Great Depression, communist revolutions and the rise of Adolph Hitler.

Barth and Niebuhr, while differing on many points of substance, exemplify the "search for realism"<sup>397</sup> and keen awareness of human limitations that characterize the

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<sup>393</sup>Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 19. "There was scarcely a theologian who did not also consider himself a professional philosopher" (21).

<sup>394</sup>Ibid, 57. In Helmut Thielicke's words, the "secularized" world has "attempted to organize and constitute itself exclusively on the basis of factors already inherent within itself" (Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. 1, ed. William H. Lazareth [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966], 4).

<sup>395</sup>Ibid, 27.

<sup>396</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), 3. Two "religious presuppositions" are responsible for most Rationalist errors in assessing humanity: "(a) the idea of the perfectibility of man and (B) the idea of progress."

<sup>397</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of The American People* (New Haven,

neo-orthodox theology which emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century in reaction to the liberal doctrines of modernity. This movement, kindled by Barth and other European theologians, was joined by Niebuhr who became the best-known American proponent of a renewed theological emphasis on the judgement of God, the depth of human sinfulness, and the pre-Enlightenment teachings of church fathers, from Paul to Augustine to Calvin and Luther.

It is important to stress that it would be a mistake to read these theologians' critiques of Rationalism as a rejection of rationality, or of human reason. Indeed, Niebuhr holds that it is the "force of reason" (but not reason alone, "as the educator and social scientist usually believes") which encourages individuals to restrain self-interest for the common good of society, and which enables society to "analyse the pretensions made by the powerful and privileged groups" in order to overcome its uncritical acceptance of injustice.<sup>398</sup> He even sees potential in rational suasion for helping "destroy the morale of dominant groups by making them more conscious of the hollowness of their pretensions, so that they will be unable to assert their interests and protect their special privileges with the same degree of self-deception."<sup>399</sup>

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CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 932.

<sup>398</sup>Even so, Rationalism's emphasis on *justice* often comes at the expense of *love*. "The religious ethic, (the Christian ethic more particularly, though not solely) insists that the needs of the neighbor shall be met, without a careful computation of relative needs. . . . On the one hand religion absolutises the sentiment of benevolence and makes it the norm and ideal of the moral life. On the other hand it gives transcendent and absolute worth to the life of the neighbor and thus encourages sympathy toward him. Love meets the needs of the neighbor, without carefully weighing and comparing his needs with those of the self. It is therefore ethically purer than the justice which is prompted by reason." (Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932], 57.)

<sup>399</sup>Ibid, 31.

Similarly, he suggests that rational resources can help overcome self-deception in individuals: "If the psychological scientist aids men in analysing their true motives, and in separating their inevitable pretensions from the actual desires, which they are intended to hide, he may increase the purity of social morality."<sup>400</sup>

In the end, however, Niebuhr cautions strongly against the "understandable *naivete* of rationalists" who attribute too much power to reason, for human beings "will not cease to be dishonest, merely because their dishonesties have been revealed or because they have discovered their own deceptions."<sup>401</sup> As we will discuss later, this propensity for dishonesty is seen in its most elemental form in the self-deceptive inclination to deny one's creatureliness and sinful nature.

H. Richard Niebuhr, brother of Reinhold Niebuhr, contrasts the polarities of theological Rationalists ("Christ-of-culture" believers) and their opponents ("Christ-against-culture" believers) in the debate about the ultimate source of knowledge: reason or revelation, culture or Christ. For Rationalists, Christ is the "great teacher of rational truth and goodness, or the emergent genius in the history of religious and moral reason." They view revelation as nothing more than the "fabulous clothing" in which reasonable truth is seen by persons of less intelligence. From the Rational standpoint the doctrines of sin and grace can appear to be "demeaning to man and discouraging to his will."<sup>402</sup> By contrast, he cites Tertullian ("the great exponent of the antirational defense of revelation"), many of the monastics, protestant sectarians,

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<sup>400</sup>Ibid, 32.

<sup>401</sup>Ibid, 34.

<sup>402</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 110-13.

and Tolstoy as examples of those who denigrate human reason as altogether "erroneous and deceptive."<sup>403</sup> He attempts to show the inadequacies of both extremes, offering another possibility: "Our ultimate question in this existential situation of dependent freedom is not whether we will choose in accordance with reason or by faith, but whether we will choose with reasoning faithlessness or reasoning faith."<sup>404</sup>

Although many twentieth-century theologians (and philosophers) have argued forcefully against Rationalism, its influence remains a strong cord in the fabric of Western thought. "The faith of the Enlightenment is still the creed of the educators of our day and is shared more or less by philosophers, psychologists and social scientists . . . [who] cling to their hope that an adequate pedagogical technique will finally produce the 'socialised man' and thus solve the problems of society."<sup>405</sup> Meanwhile, in the late twentieth century, radically Rationalist theologies continue to thrive, encouraged by post-modernist assumptions which dissipate the idea of Truth into an endless number of competing "truths."<sup>406</sup>

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<sup>403</sup>Ibid, 77.

<sup>404</sup>Ibid, 251. Cf., Emil Brunner, *The Divine Imperative* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1947), 483 ff. Brunner places great importance on reason ("the essential core of life") as a necessary faculty for the exercise of freedom and responsibility; but he emphasizes that reason must never be "divorced from faith": "It is the very essence of Reason that man's understanding of his nature -- if based on Reason rather than on God -- will always be that of the isolated solitary individual, wholly self-sufficient; but it is of the very essence of faith in the Word of God that man understands himself as existing in responsibility and in indissoluble relation to a 'thou.' . . . It is due to the Divine order in Creation that man is created not merely as an individual but as an individual-in-community, as a responsible self, related to the 'Thou'" (486-7).

<sup>405</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 24.

<sup>406</sup>In *Interpreting God and The Postmodern Self* (81), Anthony Thiselton gives the recent example of the "Sea of Faith Network," a British organization whose stated purpose is "to promote religious faith as a human creation" (their italics). He

## Relational Conceptions of the Self

Theologically, the Relational alternative to the Rationally conceived self is a self created in God's image for relationship with a transcendent deity whose being actually determines the being of His creatures. Kierkegaard defines the self as "a relation that relates itself to itself and in relating itself to itself relates itself to another" (the latter being God, "the power that established it").<sup>407</sup> Emil Brunner writes, "Man has been created by God in such a way that he is never complete in himself; he is only complete through his relation to God."<sup>408</sup> For a self so conceived, knowledge of God - and of self -- is attained by faith, in relationship with God through the Holy Spirit.<sup>409</sup> "I believe that man exists and moves and has his being in God," declares H. Richard Niebuhr, "that his fundamental relation is to God. . . . I cannot think about God's

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observes that the Network has many clergy among its members, despite its leaders' claims that the human self is the source of all meaning: "There is nothing beyond or outside human beings, neither God nor some other notion like 'Ultimate Reality' that gives life and meaning and purpose. We do that ourselves!" (David A. Hart, *Faith in Doubt: Non-Realism and Christian Belief* [London: Mowbray, 1993], 7, quoted in Thiselton, 82.) The organization's founder, Don Cupitt, follows Kant, Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx and Freud in claiming that conceptions of God are merely projections of human needs, desires and "values" -- that those who believe in the reality of the God of the bible are, therefore, self-deceived. (Don Cupitt, *Taking Leave of God* [New York: Crossroad, 1980], 34-50, quoted in Thiselton, 83.)

<sup>407</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13-14, 49.

<sup>408</sup>Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 486.

<sup>409</sup>Or as Calvin puts it, "Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit." (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book III, ch. II, sec. 7, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975], 551.)



relation to man in the abstract."<sup>410</sup>

The preeminence of the God-relation is foundational to a Christian ontology, as Vernon White illustrates:

We are brought into being and held in being not just as an accidental collocation of atoms with an evolutionary by-product of consciousness, nor just by our social, cultural and linguistic conventions and constructions, but also by an ultimate and transcendent personal reality. Taken together with Christological doctrines of redemption and resurrection, in which God's love underwrites (and remakes) human personhood into eternity, this therefore begins a sketch of a systematic ontological framework (as persons-in-relation, not only to others, but to God).<sup>411</sup>

Before proceeding, it must be emphasized that Christian theology does not suggest a *purely* Relational ontology. Individuality and particularity remain enduring characteristics of the self, such that "being and relation are to be firmly welded together -- so that they never fly apart or reduce one to another."<sup>412</sup> Alistair McFadyen tempers his Relational conception of the self with a warning about the danger of reducing the self to mere *relations*. "A relation which conforms to Christ and images of God is a dialogical structure of call and response . . . [which] requires the persons to be both genuinely present in but also partially discrete from the

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<sup>410</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 44. Niebuhr expounds on his theory of self-knowledge in *The Meaning of Revelation* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1941). James Gustafson observes that Niebuhr finds the substance of self-knowledge *in relation to* the knowledge of God, as opposed to Barth's attempt to derive self-knowledge *out of* the knowledge of God (from his introduction to *The Responsible Self*, 15).

<sup>411</sup>White, *Paying Attention to People*, 94-95. He quotes Stephen Clark, "If God is dead . . . so also is the self." (Stephen Clark, *Civil Peace and Sacred Order* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], 37.)

<sup>412</sup>Ibid, 104-5. "In other words, none of this should be taken to mean that relationality is in itself the prior ontological category" (102).

relation."<sup>413</sup> He sees individual identity as intertwined with the identities of the others with whom one has had relationships over time, with the "sedimentation" of information from these relationships contributing to one's identity and shaping one's response to others in new situations.<sup>414</sup> Yet he also believes identity can be transformed by its "incorporation into new relationships and patterns of co-intention, [so] past relations cannot be determinative of identity in a complete, absolute, mechanistic sense."<sup>415</sup> In McFadyen's account, it is the God-relation which has transformative power to redeem other relationships and to orient one toward the future.

The redemptive presence of God is the presence of something so radically new that it cannot be fully present. God and redemption can only be present in promissory or anticipatory form. The mode of redemption's presence is future. Because of the newness and futurity which it brings, God's presence transforms present structures and forms. In addition to the more mundane sedimentation processes through which past relations push persons into an evolutionary future, God's Word pulls persons into the divine future which so radically differs from the present that it seriously challenges our present identities, relations and social structures in the process.<sup>416</sup>

White proposes that a "firm, realist theological" ontology can secure self-identity "in the most radical way imaginable." He rejects as ontologically "hard to sustain" the narrative and social selves that are offered by philosophy and psychology as alternatives to Rationalism.<sup>417</sup>

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<sup>413</sup>McFadyen, 126.

<sup>414</sup>White concurs in a general sense, but challenges the notion (see McFadyen) that sedimented relations with others are the sole constitutive properties of personhood.

<sup>415</sup>Ibid, 115.

<sup>416</sup>Ibid, 115.

<sup>417</sup>Thiselton correctly points out that "narrative" is a concept that has application in

For if *God* is the inescapable ground of all being, then there is stability indeed. If God wills it, identity can endure through all kinds of flux, and can even be restored after death itself. Such, in brief, is the uncompromising traditional claim of Christian faith.<sup>418</sup>

This, then, is the penetrating difference between the Relational self of theology and Relational self of social psychology and philosophy of the mind.<sup>419</sup> In White, as in Barth, the very essence of human being derives from Christ's "revelation of relatedness . . . in which there is both union and differentiation between persons . . . [for] neither the persons of the Godhead [(the Trinity)], nor human persons, can properly be self-sufficient or self-centred."<sup>420</sup> Moreover, Barth stresses that the Relational self is not static, but is always in the process of becoming something more, of being made into a self with intimations of immortality.<sup>421</sup>

Leonardo Boff contends that the modern focus on self-awareness has actually deepened our understanding of the trinitarian doctrine.<sup>422</sup> "All three persons affirm

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theology as well, providing a way to express the self's continuity, action and change over time. "Ricoeur readily recognizes that a theological understanding of witness, promise and accountability strengthens his argument, but he does not wish his argument to be perceived as resting on special theological pleading [Cf., Ricoeur, 24-5]. What is fundamental in theology finds resonance in all human experience, namely the identity of the self through time as one who is loved and who loves. Theology could add 'in relation to God,' or 'in the sight of God,' but the principle otherwise still stands" (Thiselton, *Interpreting God and The Postmodern Self*, 74).

<sup>418</sup>White, *Paying Attention to People*, 94.

<sup>419</sup>Cf., Chapter 2, above.

<sup>420</sup>Ibid, 98-99.

<sup>421</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977), 111/4, 373.

<sup>422</sup>White echoes Boff: The early Christian concept of perichoresis is "opposite for our current climate. It offers just that basis for a secure but relational view of personhood which is being sought. In its relational concern it coheres well with insights from social anthropology and psychology about how human persons are

themselves as an 'I,' not in order to close in on themselves, but in order to be able to give themselves to the other two. What emerges is a real psychological perichoresis."

This . . . can also be expressed in another way, according to the model of a basic ontological analysis of the I-thou-we relationship. Personal existence displays two sorts of relationship, each with its own characteristic. The first consists of the I-thou relationship and produces *dialogue*. The second establishes the communion (common) relationship between the I and the thou and produces the *we*. The personal pronouns I-thou-we denote individuals. . . as open to others as their vis-a-vis or interlocutors (cf Ge. 2:18). . . . So, between the I and the thou, a dialogue of knowledge and love, of mutual proposal and response, is established.<sup>423</sup>

Daniel L. Migliore points us in the same direction: ". . . the trinitarian selves have their personal identity in relationship" and provide a model of the human self that contradicts "modern theories that equate personal existence with absolute autonomy and isolated self-consciousness." With God, human selves are "relational realities that are defined by intersubjectivity, shared consciousness, faithful relationships, and the mutual giving and receiving of love."<sup>424</sup> Through the selfhood, humanity and suffering of Christ, we learn of a God who accompanies creatures and shares their pain. "The God of free grace does not will to act alone and does not will that the creatures should suffer alone."<sup>425</sup>

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constituted and sustained: we are not 'abstract' entities existing in individual isolation, but essentially relational" (White, *Paying Attention to People*, 100).

<sup>423</sup>Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 116.

<sup>424</sup>Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1991), 68.

<sup>425</sup>*Ibid*, 117.

## The Dialectical Self: Problem and Possibility

Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic of the theologically conceived, Relational self is its dialectical nature -- at once finite and infinite, sinful yet bearing God's own image. This is the inescapable tension of a theological anthropology, for "without the presuppositions of the Christian faith the individual is either nothing or becomes everything."<sup>426</sup> The human creature has always been a problem to itself, caught between the misery to which it is doomed and the majesty to which it constantly aspires. The Psalmist declares, "I was born guilty" (Ps. 51:5), but elsewhere gives thanks that God made human beings "a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5). This human paradox can lead to a refusal to accept the extent of either the problem or the possibility of being.

John Calvin writes that "knowledge of ourselves lies first in considering what we were given at creation and how generously God continues his favor toward us," but also in facing the reality of our sinfulness which, "when all our boasting and self-assurance are laid low, should truly humble us and overwhelm us with shame."<sup>427</sup> Man's age-old propensity is to focus more on the former, which "tickles the pride that itches in his very marrow."<sup>428</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr describes the self as a "creature of infinite possibilities which cannot be fulfilled within terms of this temporal existence. . . . The self, even

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<sup>426</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 92.

<sup>427</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of The Christian Religion*, Book II, Chapt. 1, 242. He adds, ". . . that primal worthiness cannot come to mind without the sorry spectacle of our foulness and dishonor presenting itself by way of contrast. . . ."

<sup>428</sup>*Ibid*, 243.

in the highest reaches of its self-consciousness, is still the finite self, which must regard the pretensions of universality, to which idealistic philosophies for instance tempt it, as sin."<sup>429</sup> He observes that Christianity from the very beginning has tended to diminish the Biblical understanding of human limitations by incorporating idealistic, Hellenistic philosophy. Yet in recovering a sense of human finiteness, creatureliness and insufficiency, one must be mindful not to deprecate the self; for these are the characteristics of the created order which God proclaims is good.

The nature and destiny of human being cannot be fully grasped without first witnessing the reality of God in Jesus Christ, who is the "meaning and end" of creation. In becoming a creature, God takes upon himself the lowest and highest dimensions of human existence. "His humiliation and exaltation as the Son of God are the self-revelation of God the Creator."<sup>430</sup> Barth describes the twofold nature of the self, which is

on the one hand an exaltation and dignity of the creature in the sight of God (for otherwise how could it be His partner, or be accepted by Him?); and on the other hand the equally clear need and peril of the creature before Him (for otherwise how could it be so exclusively referred to His lordship and help in the covenant, and to reconciliation with God in the person of His Son?). God created man to lift him in His own Son into fellowship with Himself. This is

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<sup>429</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 170. A distinctive characteristic of Neo-orthodoxy is its use of the dialectical method. Niebuhr and other crisis theologians see irony all around them and use it as a tool for pointing out the paradoxes of the human condition. They see potential for good but lament the historical failure of humans to do good. The height of human promise and the depth of human limitations come to light in relationship with God through Christ; therefore, Neo-orthodox anthropology leads to Christology, especially in Barth's writings. Neo-orthodoxy is pervaded by a sense of discomfort and tension that promises no simple solutions to complex problems. (Cf, Ronald H. Stone, *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to The Twentieth Century* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992], 136.)

<sup>430</sup>Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, 377.

the positive meaning of human existence and all existence. But this elevation presupposes a wretchedness of human and all existence which His own Son will share and bear. This is the negative meaning of creation. Since everything is created for Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection, from the very outset everything must stand under this twofold and contradictory determination.<sup>431</sup>

As we will discuss below, self-deception is born of this dialectic and the accompanying dual, sinful tendencies -- the denial of human limitations (pride) and the denial of human potential (sloth).

### The *Imago Dei* and The Self

The unique value accorded to humanity in Jewish and Christian theology is based upon the Hebraic teaching that human beings are "made in God's image."<sup>432</sup> The concept is irreducibly mysterious yet at once essential to the biblical understanding of the self. Here again, there is an important distinction to be made between Rational and Relational understandings, for a Rationalist view tends to place the *imago Dei* in the human intellect or capacity for reason, in Aquinas's words, "in the very nature of the mind."<sup>433</sup> This interpretation sometimes is extended to include the rational faculties necessary for humanity's dominion over earthly creation. Rationalism also emphasizes human freedom as a locus of the *imago Dei*. Accordingly, human beings are like God in their self-creativity, self-determination and capacity for self-actualization, characteristics which allow them to live autonomously,

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<sup>431</sup>Ibid, 375-6.

<sup>432</sup>The Old Testament mentions the concept explicitly in three texts: Gen. 1:26-28, 5:1-3 and 9:6.

<sup>433</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Blackfriars (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 13:61.

free from one another and even from God.

The inadequacy of Rational interpretations is their claim that the image of God is *in man* as an intrinsic characteristic or property that gives a God-like value to the self, independent of relations with other humans or God. Many twentieth-century thinkers point out that reason and other human attributes might bear some resemblance to God, but that these characteristics should be seen not as the image of God, but as instruments that can be used by God to help human beings realize their potential in relationships. Helmut Thielicke's Relational interpretation of the *imago* is both horizontal (in humanity's relation to humanity and creation) and vertical (in humanity's relation to God), proposing that God's image has to do with activity, rather than intrinsic capacities or characteristics.

The divine likeness is thus a relational entity because it is manifested in man's ruling position vis-a-vis the rest of creation, or better, because it consists in this manifestation, in this exercise of dominion and lordship. The attempt to differentiate the essence of the image from its manifestation, and therefore to understand man's ruling position of lordship only as a result of the true properties of the image (reason, will, freedom, etc.), has no foundation in the Bible and betrays a Platonic mode of thinking. . . . We have to see the nature of God not in his attributes (*Eigenschaften*), but in his outward relations (*Aussenschaften*), in what he does with us, in his relation to us, in his being 'Emmanuel' (God with us). The image of God in man is to be similarly defined. It is not a constituent capacity inherent in man but a relational entity, namely, man's ruling function vis-a-vis other creatures.<sup>434</sup>

But Thielicke finds the primary expression of the *imago Dei* in the human relation to God which is "one of strict preeminence as compared with the rest of creation."<sup>435</sup>

The command of God the creator and the corresponding obedience of man his creature together describe the fellowship with God which we call the divine

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<sup>434</sup>Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 157.

<sup>435</sup>*Ibid*, 157.



likeness. We therefore understand by the command of God the creator that command in which God hands over to his creature the life of man in all its fullness, and lays upon him the task of living that life in fellowship with God. This command insures that according to the Christian view of creation the human creature was made to be a person, 'man.' Faith in creation sets me in a personal I-thou relationship to God, not primarily into an I-it relationship with the world. Christian thinking about creation is personalistic. Moreover, the doctrine of the *imago Dei* does not describe a given attribute or property (*habitus*) of man which may be demonstrated in detail. It has reference rather to the alien dignity which man possesses by way of his divine prototype (*Urbild*), that original which is present in Christ alone. The *imago Dei* therefore, is not simply a gift. . . it is also the task implicit in the gift. . . . Since man cannot fulfill his destiny in his own strength, the divine likeness is to be attained only in the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>436</sup>

Brunner concurs, stressing that the *imago Dei* consists in humanity's answerability to God's divine command, which is to love. This idea is central to his conception of Christian ethics, which is based principally on this command and which stresses that knowledge of the good comes not from human reason but from a relationship with a loving God. "The whole work of Jesus Christ in reconciliation and redemption may be summed up in this central conception of the renewal and consummation of the Divine Image in man."<sup>437</sup> As Migliore notes, the image of God is seen most clearly in Jesus who is "fully responsive to the will of God and the needs of others," the latter involving a tension between "personal identity and communal participation."<sup>438</sup>

Reinhold Niebuhr draws a strong connection between the nature of the self, including

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<sup>436</sup>Ibid, 151-2. Cf., Jacques Ellul, *The Humiliation of The Word* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1985), 63: "'God Speaks. We must answer him.' God creates human beings as speaking things. Perhaps this is one of the meanings of the image of God: one who responds and is responsible; a counterpart who will dialogue, who is both at a certain distance and has the ability to communicate. The human being is the only one, out of the entire creation, who is capable of language."

<sup>437</sup>Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, trans. Olive Wyon (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), 501.

<sup>438</sup>Migliore, 125.

the *imago Dei*, and the self-deception of those who are not in proper relation to God:

The self is not related to God by sharing its reason with God and finding a point of identity with the divine through the rational faculty. The self is related to God in repentance, faith and commitment. All these forms of relation imply a certain degree of existential discontinuity with God. The self is always a creature, conscious of its finiteness, and equally conscious of its pretension in not admitting its finiteness. Insofar as it becomes conscious of its pretensions it is capable of repentance and a new life. The encounter with God is in short a dramatic one.<sup>439</sup>

### Self-Deception

Based on the preceding analysis, we may conclude that a Relational context for self-deception involves not only the relationships with oneself and other persons (as in philosophical and psychological conceptions), but also, and primarily, the relationship with God. The development of a theological understanding of self-deception rests on the Christian presupposition that the God-relation is possible and available through God's own action and revelation. Our failure to see ourselves as we really are -- our denial of our true nature as creatures -- is a rejection of God's offer of relationship. Conversely, it is by accepting and participating in a relationship with God that our limitations and our potential, our sinfulness and our redemption, are revealed.

Calvin agrees that true self-knowledge is gained only through relationship with God. "Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face. . . . For, because all of us are inclined by nature to hypocrisy, a kind of empty image of righteousness in place of righteousness

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<sup>439</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Self and the Dramas of History* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons), 84.

itself abundantly satisfies us."<sup>440</sup> Ignorance of oneself is more "detestable" than ignorance of external affairs, because it is self-ignorance "by which, when making decisions in necessary matters, we miserably deceive and even blind ourselves!"<sup>441</sup>

Thiselton finds theological support for Freud's analysis of the human capacity for using deceptive, self-protective and manipulative devices to suppress or disguise one or more sets of opposing interests. He cites a range of biblical perspectives including those of Paul, in I Cor. 3:18, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews, 3:13, and John, in I John 1:8 ("If we say we are without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us").

Freud's emphasis on self-deception, then, entirely coheres with Christian theology. As Ricoeur comments, this necessitates a hermeneutics of the self as 'text' for the human subject, which, contrary to Descartes and to secular modernity, 'is never the subject one thinks it is.' Christian theology also coheres with Freud's analysis of the self as falling victim to forces which it does not fully understand and which certainly it cannot fully control. The postmodern self at this point stands closer to biblical realism than to the innocent confidence of modernity.<sup>442</sup>

Thielicke, discussing the self-deception involved in the denial of death, writes, "It would be wrong and overfacile to give a mere psychological explanation of this phenomenon. . . ." <sup>443</sup> He cautions against attributing too much influence to deterministic forces beyond one's control, arguing that it is actually human freedom which makes self-deception possible. "Personal freedom thus has the ability to set itself at a distance, and it is for this reason that man is able -- and also psychologically

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<sup>440</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book I, Ch. II, 37-38.

<sup>441</sup>Ibid, Book II, Ch. 1, 241.

<sup>442</sup>Thiselton, *Interpreting God and The Postmodern Self*, 129.

<sup>443</sup>Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. I, 563.

able!"<sup>444</sup> -- to succeed in self-deception.

The psychological fact that man can resort to this shelter of personal non-involvement would be inexplicable as a psychological fact if we were not to take into account the existential possibility of aloofness which is afforded by freedom.

We are thus confronted by an important and basic fact of human existence which we have now observed in many different connections. Man's special prerogative of being endowed with personal freedom is wholly ambivalent. It is oriented toward genuine responsibility before the divine Thou, toward man's relationship with God; but on the dark side it also possesses the other possibility of using a gift of grace to evade the claim of that which is sent and ordained by God.<sup>445</sup>

Evading this truth is self-deception. Thieliicke further shows that it is through the freedom to enter into the God-relation ("fellowship") that one receives forgiveness and, thus, loses interest in "denying sin or in trying to falsify its true nature."<sup>446</sup> Forgiveness alters the character of self-respect, allowing one to be "realistic" and "whole,"<sup>447</sup> rather than obsessed with "moral self-preservation which is supremely concerned that the balance of our actions should be positive, and which is thus forced to resort to every possible manipulation and reinterpretation."<sup>448</sup>

If human beings are created in God's image and endowed with a capacity for God-relatedness, and if freely choosing a relationship with God brings about forgiveness and wholeness, then the denial of the God-relation and of one's need for

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<sup>444</sup>Ibid, 565.

<sup>445</sup>Ibid.

<sup>446</sup>Ibid, 604.

<sup>447</sup>Ibid, 605.

<sup>448</sup>Ibid, 604.

God's forgiveness is sin.<sup>449</sup> "From this vantage point, sin is fundamentally *opposition to grace*, saying No to the invitation to be human in grateful service to God and in friendship with our fellow creatures."<sup>450</sup> Sin is not only to be seen as a violation of a moral standard or code; it is more importantly a breach of the God-relation. All sin, therefore, is primarily against God: "Against you, you alone, have I sinned" (Ps. 51:4). In relation to self-deception, this concept may be summarized as follows:

The theological perspective presupposes that the possibility for transcendent relationship with God exists, and that this possibility is made actual through divine activity -- revelation, intervention, assistance and grace. One cannot know of this possibility solely through the power of human reason; it is God who calls and the human self which responds in faith. When a person opts to entrust his or her own reason with the exclusive authority to discern truth, that person denies the grace of the divinely offered relationship, for God is not known by reason alone. The God-relation is itself the foundation for all knowledge, especially (as we have seen) knowledge of the self. Moreover, without this relationship, the human self is alienated from itself and God, and stands in desperate need of God's gift of redemption, a gift which makes one aware of the truth and the highest good for oneself. To refuse the relationship offered by God is to make oneself ignorant of this truth -- in effect, to deceive oneself.<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>449</sup>"Through the Word of God alone -- as the Word of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit -- can man believe; but by the fact of the freedom of reason he also can refuse to believe. This is sin." (Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 486.)

<sup>450</sup>Migliore, 130.

<sup>451</sup> See Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979), 22-23. "Finally, man protects himself against any ultimate disclosure, he keeps his

Hauerwas cautions, however, that the difficulty of overcoming the power and prevalence of self-deception -- even for Christians -- must not be underestimated, as it is "the rule rather than the exception in our lives."

Contrary to our dominant presumptions, we are seldom conscious of what we are doing or who we are. We choose to stay ignorant of certain engagements with the world, for to put them all together often asks too much of us, and sometimes threatens the more enjoyable engagements.<sup>452</sup>

He concludes, "To be is to be rooted in self-deception."<sup>453</sup>

### A Biblical Account of Self-Deception

The scriptures recognize the power and depth of self-deception, warning that "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately corrupt" (Jer. 17:9). Nowhere do we find a better biblical illustration of self-deception than the story of David and Uriah in the second book of Samuel.

King David lusts for a beautiful woman, Bathsheba, who is married to another man. When her husband, Uriah, is far away serving as a soldier in the king's army, David invites Bathsheba to his palace where he satisfies his desire. Soon after, she informs David that she is pregnant. He responds by summoning Uriah home from battle in hopes that he will sleep with his wife and assume that he is the father of the child.

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own secret even from himself when, for example, he refuses to become conscious of himself in everything that arises within him. . . . The dialectic of concealment and exposure is only a sign of shame. . . . Shame is overcome only in the enduring act of final shaming, namely the becoming manifest of knowledge before God."

<sup>452</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy* (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977), 82.

<sup>453</sup>*Ibid.*, 95.

But the plan fails. Instead of returning to his own bed, Uriah chooses to sleep at the door of the palace as a demonstration of his loyalty to the king. David, frustrated by Uriah's failure to cooperate, sends him back to the front lines with orders to his commanders to make sure he is killed in battle. After receiving word of Uriah's death, David marries Bathsheba and she gives birth to a son.

As much as a year passes, and by all accounts David has an easy conscience. It is now that the prophet Nathan enters the story. He is well aware of David's murderous scheme, a fact which suggests that others -- perhaps many others -- knew the truth about the circumstances of Uriah's demise. Wisely, Nathan does not confront David directly with accusations of murder and adultery. Instead he tells him a simple parable:

There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.<sup>454</sup>

Listening to the story, David burns with anger against the rich man and declares, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity" (2 Sam. 12:5-6). Nathan's famous answer is the penetrating statement that speaks to all self-deceivers, "*You are the man.*" David can no longer avoid the truth as Nathan proceeds to recite the details of his adulterous and murderous affair. "I have sinned

against the Lord," he confesses in verse 13. He avows his deeds as his own, admitting to himself that he is guilty.

It is Bishop Butler who sees most clearly that David was self-deceived, that he managed to "delude himself" about his guilt until Nathan forced him to confront the truth which he already knew in his heart.

Hence it is that many men seem perfect strangers to their own characters. They think, and reason, and judge quite differently upon any matter relating to themselves, from what they do in cases of others where they are not interested [i.e., the story of the ewe lamb]. Hence it is one hears people exposing follies, which they themselves are eminent for; and talking with great severity against particular vices, which, if all the world be not mistaken, they themselves are notoriously guilty of.<sup>455</sup>

Butler defines self-deception as deliberate self-ignorance and "self-partiality" motivated by inordinate self-love. Those who deceive themselves "will not allow themselves to think how guilty they are, [they] explain and argue away their guilt to themselves; and though they do really impose upon themselves in some measure, yet there are none of them but have . . . at least an implicit suspicion where the weakness lies, and what part of their behaviour they wish unknown or forgotten forever."<sup>456</sup>

How did David argue away his guilt? We do not know. Perhaps he told himself that as king he was above the law, or that his love for Bathsheba was so great that it outweighed other considerations, or that sending Uriah to the front lines was acceptable because Uriah was a soldier and such is the risk of warfare.

Butler emphasizes that the evil of self-deception goes well beyond its ability to

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<sup>454</sup>2 Sam. 12:1b-4.

<sup>455</sup>Joseph Butler, "Upon Self-Deceit," in *Fifteen Sermons* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers), 114.

<sup>456</sup>Ibid. 120-21.



obscure one's sinfulness:

[It is] vicious and immoral. It is unfairness; it is dishonesty; it is falseness of heart; and is therefore so far from extenuating guilt, that it is itself the greatest of all guilt in proportion to the degree it prevails; for it is a corruption of the whole moral character in its principle. . . . And whilst men are under the power of this temper, in proportion still to the degree they are so, they are fortified on every side against conviction: and when they hear the vice and folly of what is in truth their own course of life, exposed in the justest and strongest manner, they often will assent to it, and even carry the matter further; persuading themselves, one does not know how, but some way or other persuading themselves, that they are out of these, and that it hath no relation to them.<sup>457</sup>

The self-deceiver rejects the God-relation and the truth which it may reveal.

Self-deception can entail suppressing or evading knowledge of who one is "before God" in order to maintain false beliefs that support a desired self-image. David may have tried to deceive others and even God about his sin; however, the biblical account suggests that he succeeded only in deceiving himself. David's self-deceptive project was directed against God; but God cannot be deceived and is Himself the truth. Kierkegaard asks, "Can a man deceive God?" He answers, "No, in relation to God a man can only deceive himself. For the God-relationship is the highest good in such a way that he who would deceive God frightfully deceives himself."<sup>458</sup>

Despite Butler's assertions about the immorality of self-deception, the story of David and Uriah demonstrates the irony that self-deception can actually result from one's desire to think of oneself as a moral person. A person with continuing moral commitments may engage in self-deception in order to maintain a positive self-image in the face of personal deeds that are inconsistent with those commitments. A king

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<sup>457</sup>Ibid.

<sup>458</sup>Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. Howard and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 223-23.

with no respect for moral law or obligations to others would have no reason to deceive himself about adultery or murder. The irony, notes Hauerwas, is that "a cynic is less vulnerable to self-deception than a conscientious person."<sup>459</sup>

### The Sin of Pride as Self-Deception

What is the nature of the sin Bishop Butler describes? Theologians have held that the sin of pride is one of the chief barriers separating human beings from relationship with God. Pride causes one to make oneself, rather than God, the center of existence. It is a denial of God's rightful place in one's life -- the place of the highest good. Thomas Aquinas writes that "all sins may have their origin in pride," for "the proud man does not subject himself to the divine rule as he ought."<sup>460</sup> Pride occasions other sins and is, literally, the first sin:

Now the first thing [Adam] coveted inordinately was his own excellence; and consequently his disobedience was the result of his pride. This agrees with Augustine, who says that man puffed up with pride obeyed the serpent's prompting, and scorned God's commands.<sup>461</sup>

Augustine sees pride as constituent to all sin: ". . . only ask what every sin is,

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<sup>459</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 87. Hauerwas agrees with Fingarette, who writes: "The less integrity, the less is there motive to enter into self-deception. The greater the integrity of the person, and the more powerful the contrary inclination, the greater is the temptation to self-deception (the nearer to saintliness, the more a powerful personality suffers. . . . We are moved to a certain compassion in which there is awareness of the self-deceiver's authentic inner dignity as the motive of his self-betrayal" (Fingarette, 140).

<sup>460</sup>Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, pt. II-II, Q. 162, art. 5, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (New York: Benziger Bros., 1947), p. 1859.

<sup>461</sup>Ibid. Q. 163, art. 1, p. 1862. Brunner notes that pride obtains when one refuses to respond to God in faith and embraces an "absolute self-end and an absolute autonomy," desiring to be as God. "This is the real origin of evil." (Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 486.)

and see whether you can find any sin without the designation of pride."<sup>462</sup> Pride is nothing less than the attempt to be God-like, Augustine believes, recalling the serpent's promise, "You shall be as Gods" (Gen. 3:5). It suggests a disrelationship with God, "when the soul cuts itself off from the very Source to which it should keep close and somehow makes itself and becomes an end to itself. This takes place when the soul becomes inordinately pleased with itself, and such self-pleasing occurs when the soul falls away from the unchangeable Good which ought to please the soul far more than the soul can please itself."<sup>463</sup> Throughout his autobiographical *Confessions*, pride is a central theme that cannot be separated from his notion of self-deception. He writes, "My sin was all the more incurable because I thought I was not a sinner."<sup>464</sup>

Augustine's inability to see his sinfulness might be described by Calvin as a case of "deluded self-admiration."<sup>465</sup> The truth that we come to know in relationship

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<sup>462</sup>St. Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, in *St. Augustine: The Anti-Pelagian Writings*, Vol. V., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Phillip Schaff (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1971), p. 132. More recently, C. S. Lewis writes, "The essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through pride that the devil became the devil. . . . It is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity -- it *is* enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God." (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan, 1960], 110-11.)

<sup>463</sup>Idem, *The City of God*, in Max Stackhouse, et. al., eds., *On Moral Business* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 123.

<sup>464</sup>St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), 28. But ". . . you, O Lord, turned my back upon myself. You took me from behind my own back, where I had placed myself because I did not want to look upon myself. You stood me face to face with myself. . . ." (193-94).

<sup>465</sup>Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, Ch. 1, 242.

with God "requires the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all confidence in our own ability, deprive us of all occasion for boasting. . ."466 Calvin's idea of self-partiality is comparable to Butler's:

I am quite aware how much more pleasing is that principle which invites us to weigh our good traits rather than to look upon our miserable want and dishonor, which ought to overwhelm us with shame. There is, indeed, nothing that man's nature seeks more eagerly than to be flattered. Accordingly, when his nature becomes aware that its gifts are highly esteemed, it tends to be unduly credulous about them. It is thus no wonder that the majority of men have erred so perniciously in this respect. For since blind self-love is innate in all mortals, they are most freely persuaded that nothing inheres in themselves that deserves to be considered hateful.<sup>467</sup>

The sin of pride is dependent upon self-deception. No thinker of the twentieth century has offered a more insightful analysis of this than Reinhold Niebuhr,<sup>468</sup> who demonstrates that the self's own pretensions -- of power, knowledge or righteousness -- are justified through deceptions that allow one to believe inordinate claims about oneself. Ironically, it is one's knowledge of the truth about oneself or one's situation, and the need to deny such truth, that leads one to willfully convince oneself of a falsehood. Niebuhr identifies four types of pride, each of which is upheld by self-deception: the pride of power, intellectual pride, moral pride and spiritual pride.<sup>469</sup>

The pride of power. An egoistic assumption of "self-sufficiency and self-mastery"

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<sup>466</sup>Ibid.

<sup>467</sup>Ibid, 242-43.

<sup>468</sup>Niebuhr asserts that pride is the basic sin; he opposes the "rationalist-classical" view that sin is essentially sensuality or ignorance. (Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 186-188.)

<sup>469</sup>Ibid, 186 ff.

underlies the pride of power. It denies human dependency upon God and others, and "rises to greater heights among those individuals and classes who have a more than ordinary degree of social power."<sup>470</sup> Despite the appearance that the ego is "unconscious" of human finiteness and dependency, the "lust for power is prompted by a darkly conscious realization" of insecurity and doubt.<sup>471</sup> The pride of power is always a pretentious cover for insecurity, even among those who would seem to have accumulated ample power for themselves, for "there is no level of greatness and power in which the lash of fear is not at least one strand in the whip of ambition."<sup>472</sup> Elsewhere, he characterizes power as a self-deceptive "poison which blinds the eyes of moral insight and lames the will of moral purpose."<sup>473</sup> Obadiah's prophecy warns Edom of the consequences of the pride of power and its attendant self-deception: "The pride of your heart has deceived you. . . you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'" (Ob. 1:3).

Intellectual pride. A close relative of the pride of power is the pride of knowledge and intellect. No human knowledge is free from ideological influence, and truth "pretends to be more true than it is. It is finite knowledge, gained from a particular perspective; but it pretends to be final and ultimate knowledge."<sup>474</sup> Intellectual pride,

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<sup>470</sup>Ibid, 188.

<sup>471</sup>Ibid, 189.

<sup>472</sup>Ibid, 194.

<sup>473</sup>Idem, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 6.

<sup>474</sup>Idem, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 194.

then, is maintained by a self-deceptive "attempt to obscure the known conditioned character of human knowledge and the taint of self-interest in human truth."<sup>475</sup>

Niebuhr stresses that the self-deceiver seeks to "obscure" the real motivation of his or her ideological pretensions. Echoing Butler's account of self-deceit, he shows that a hallmark of intellectual pride is "the inability of the agent to recognize the same or similar limitations of perspective in himself which he has detected in others."<sup>476</sup> As an illustration he cites the Marxist critique of the intellectual pride and pretension of other cultures which serves only to expose Marxism's own guilt of the same sin. The self-deception involved in intellectual pride is summed up neatly: "The vehemence with which the foe is accused of errors of which the self regards itself free betrays the usual desperation with which the self seeks to hide the finiteness and determinateness of its own position *from itself* [emphasis added]."<sup>477</sup> In denying the limitations of one's knowledge, intellectual pride becomes apparent in one's attempts to denigrate opposing views, to evade information that conflicts with one's own perspective, and to obscure the ideological partiality of one's own position.

Moral pride. Intellectual pride often involves a conviction that one's own perspective is morally superior. Niebuhr sees moral pride in all self-righteous judgements "in which the other is condemned because he fails to conform to the highly arbitrary

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<sup>475</sup>Ibid, 194-95.

<sup>476</sup>Ibid, 196.

<sup>477</sup>Ibid, 197.

standards of the self."<sup>478</sup> The problem of moral pride was a central concern of the Reformation, where Luther and other reformers argued that the "final proof that man no longer knows God is that he does not know his own sin."<sup>479</sup> Without the God-relation, "Rationalism in morals may persuade men in one moment that their selfishness is a peril to society and in the next moment it may condone their egoism as a necessary and inevitable element in the total social harmony."<sup>480</sup> Hauerwas contends that self-deception and self-righteousness are inseparable:

We will do almost anything to avoid recognizing the limits on our claims to righteousness. In fact, we seem to be able to acknowledge those limits only when life has brought us to the point where we can do nothing else. To accept the Gospel is to receive training in accepting the limits on our claims to righteousness before we are forced to. It is a hard and painful discipline but it cannot be avoided, we suspect, if we wish to have a place to stand free of self-deception.<sup>481</sup>

Spiritual pride. Moral pride leads easily to spiritual pride, "the ultimate sin" in which one's insufficient standards and actions are believed to be comparable to the ultimate good and to have divine sanction. Niebuhr calls it the "last battleground between God and man's self-esteem."<sup>482</sup> The same agent who regards Christ as ultimate judge seeks to prove to himself that he is more Christ-like than his opponent. Yet it is God's revelation which ultimately overcomes this self-deceptive pretension. "A religion of

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<sup>478</sup>Ibid, 199.

<sup>479</sup>Ibid, 200.

<sup>480</sup>Idem, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 41.

<sup>481</sup>Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 98.

<sup>482</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 200.

revelation is grounded in the faith that God speaks to man from beyond the highest pinnacle of the human spirit; and that this voice of God will discover man's highest not only to be short of the highest but involved in the dishonesty of claiming that it is the highest."<sup>483</sup> One is reminded of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14), wherein the Pharisee prays, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men - - robbers, evildoers, adulterers -- or even like this tax collector." Jesus makes it clear that the Pharisee is blind to his own sin (yet we wonder how many people over the centuries have read this parable and then prayed, "Thank you that I am not like that prideful, hypocritical Pharisee").

Dan O. Via contrasts Niebuhr's and Sartre's analyses of self-deception and the ways in which it obtains:

According to Niebuhr, I conceal from myself my limitations because I cannot bear the pain of being caught in the visible, conscious dishonesty of claiming more knowledge, righteousness or power than I have. In Sartre's view I conceal from myself my flaws, apparently, simply because I cannot bear to acknowledge my fault but also because I cannot bear the uncertainty of being more than my flaws. For Niebuhr I cannot tolerate the tension between what I am and what I claim to be; therefore I conceal what I am from myself. For Sartre I cannot tolerate the uncertain, open freedom that justifies my claiming to be more than my acts or roles; therefore I conceal this open freedom by turning it into a closed thing that is the opposite of my acts. And thus I also conceal my unacceptable acts from myself. Or is it that in order to conceal my acts (facticity) from myself I turn my transcendent freedom into a facticity that is the opposite of my acts?<sup>484</sup>

Self-deception is seen by Niebuhr as a prideful attempt to make oneself or one's actions what they are not, to accept a false belief that supports one's desired self-image, while simultaneously suppressing the truth about oneself that does not conform

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<sup>483</sup>Ibid, 203.

<sup>484</sup>Dan. O. Via, *Self-Deception and Wholeness in Paul and Matthew* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1990), 9-10.



to the desired image. Self-deception, then, is both a consequence and a facilitator of pride. That is, pride is the cause of self-deception, and self-deception is necessary<sup>485</sup> for the maintenance of pride in the face of realities that contradict one's desired beliefs. The philosophical paradox of self-deception is not lost on Niebuhr who calls the phenomenon "too complicated to fit into the category of either pure ignorance or pure dishonesty."<sup>486</sup> He quotes Phillip Leon:

The self-deceiver does not believe . . . what he says or he would not be a deceiver. He does believe what he says or he would not be deceived. He both believes and does not believe . . . .<sup>487</sup>

Because the truth is never wholly obscured by the self-deceptive project, the self never quite accepts its own lies. Thus, Niebuhr recognizes the contributing role of interpersonal deception in achieving and maintaining self-deception. "The self must at any rate deceive itself first. Its deception of others is partly an effort to convince itself against itself."<sup>488</sup>

The desperate effort to deceive others must, therefore, be regarded as, on the whole, an attempt to aid the self in believing a pretension it cannot easily believe because it was itself the author of the deception. If others will only accept what the self cannot quite accept, the self as deceiver is given an ally against the self as deceived. All efforts to impress our fellowmen, our vanity, our display of power or of goodness must, therefore, be regarded as revelations of the fact that sin increases the insecurity of the self by veiling its weakness with veils which may be torn aside. The self is afraid of being discovered in its nakedness behind these veils and of being recognized as the

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<sup>485</sup>"Since his determinate existence does not deserve the devotion lavished upon it, it is obviously necessary to practice some deception in order to justify such excessive devotion." (Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 203.)

<sup>486</sup>Ibid, 204.

<sup>487</sup>Phillip Leon, *The Ethics of Power*, 258. quoted in Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 204, ft. 2.

<sup>488</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 203.

author of the veiling deceptions.<sup>489</sup>

### The Sin of Sloth as Self-Deception

Barth finds a pivotal role for self-deception in a second form of sin that is closely related to pride. If pride is a "heroic, Promethean form of sin. . . a counter-movement to the divine condescension practised and revealed in Jesus Christ," its antithesis is what Barth labels "the sloth of man."<sup>490</sup>

In other words, [sin] has the form, not only of evil action, but also of evil inaction; not only of the rash arrogance which is forbidden and reprehensible, but also of the tardiness and failure which are equally forbidden and reprehensible. It is also the counter-movement to the elevation which has come to man from God Himself in Jesus Christ. . . .

We are missing the real man . . . if we try to see and understand his sin consistently and one-sidedly as hybris, as this brilliant perversion of human pride. . . . The sinner is not merely a Prometheus or Lucifer. . . . He does not exist only in an exalted world of evil, he exists in a very mean and petty world of evil (and there is a remarkable unity and reciprocity between the two in spite of their apparent antithesis). In the one case, he stands bitterly in need of humiliation; in the other he stands no less bitterly in need of exaltation. And in both cases the need is in relation to the totality of his life and action.<sup>491</sup>

In his intricate development of the concept of sloth, Barth equates "self-contradiction" (the refusal of one's own reality) with self-deception in the form of deliberate ignorance and the denial of revealed truth. We "close our eyes" to "evade the

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<sup>489</sup>Ibid, 206-07.

<sup>490</sup>Cf. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 131. He refers to these two forms of sin as "active and self-centered idolatry" (pride) and "passive and other-centered idolatry" (sloth).

<sup>491</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, eds. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance, trans., J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 403-4.

knowledge of God," and we "harden ourselves in our unreason."<sup>492</sup> Self-deception, therefore, "consists in the fact that God is revealed to man but that man will not accept the fact in practice; that in the knowledge of God, in the clear light of His reality, presence and action, [the self] is radically known by God but refuses or fails to know God in return and to exist in this knowledge; that he lets himself fall as one who is already lifted up by God and to God."<sup>493</sup> Christians, too, are prone to the self-deception of sloth, especially the universal inclination to ignore one's sinful nature (depicted by Barth as the "vagabond within.") "We are not aware of it. We do not want to be aware of it."<sup>494</sup>

Suppressing this knowledge of the truth about oneself creates anxiety and threatens to make one a "prisoner of care. The self-contradiction in which he is involved is too striking and painful for him to admit that this is what he really intends and does."<sup>495</sup> To alleviate this anxiety, the person of western culture often chooses the "concealment" of preoccupation with work and personal achievement.

More recently, feminist and liberation theologians have echoed Barth in pointing out the one-sidedness of traditional theology's preoccupation with sin as pride. They stress that sin is the failure to be fully human in the sight of God, and

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<sup>492</sup>Ibid, 410.

<sup>493</sup>Ibid, 415. Barth defines sloth as letting oneself fall from that for which one was created: relationship with God and other persons. He describes four forms of sloth which are interwoven and correspond to four aspects of what God created human beings to be. They are (1) sloth in relation to God, (2) sloth in relation to fellow human beings, (3) sloth in relation to oneself and (4) sloth in relation to one's temporality.

<sup>494</sup>Ibid, 456.

<sup>495</sup>Ibid, 472.

that oppressive human structures (including, at times, the church) have contributed to this failure. Some feminist thinkers, seeing pride as the typically masculine form of sin, bring this interpretation to ethical analyses of male-dominated social structures, particularly businesses.

### Four Types of Self-Deception

In the sections below, we will propose four species of self-deception which take hold of individuals or groups, and especially commercial organizations such as large corporations. Fostered by institutional structures, social norms and modes of thinking which are common to collectives, these forms of self-deception are pertinent to the moral context and are categorized as tribalism, legalism, moral relativism and scientism. While these are important forms of self-deception for purposes of this study (focusing on business life), it is not supposed that they are the only categories that might be developed.

### The Self-Deception of Tribalism

As we discovered in Chapter Two, self-deception obtains more readily when others are similarly engaged, as when members of a social group act in concert to produce evidence supporting a false belief while collectively suppressing evidence that might contradict it. Again, it is Reinhold Niebuhr who provides the most incisive analysis of the phenomenon which we will call the *self-deception of tribalism*. As difficult as it is for individuals to be honest with themselves, it is more difficult, if not impossible, for social groups. "In every human group there is less reason to guide

and to check impulse, less capacity for self-transcendence, less ability to comprehend the needs of others and therefore more unrestrained egoism than the individuals, who compose the group, reveal in their personal relationships."<sup>496</sup> Rationalists, Niebuhr contends, cannot comprehend the power and influence of collectives upon the individual selves they comprise. Tribalism, "though having its source in individual attitudes, actually achieves a certain authority over the individual and results in unconditioned demands by the group upon the individual. . . . [The group] seems to the individual to have become an independent center of moral life."<sup>497</sup>

Tribalism, which may be understood as an egoistic expression of *group pride*, has particular relevance for our study of self-deception in the business context. Niebuhr sees modern political power becoming more responsible even as economic power, "the significant coercive force of modern society," becomes less so.<sup>498</sup> Any large, powerful social group (a nation, a profession, the church, a corporation) develops its own means of imposing its values and ways of thinking, and of enforcing its will upon individuals. By participating in the collective enterprise, individuals adopt the values and attitudes of the group without always recognizing the subtle coercion and pressures that cause them to do so. They fall victim to a "naive and unstudied self-deception" that sometimes prevents them from seeing the full extent of the conflict between their personal values and the group's values to which they

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<sup>496</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xi-xii.

<sup>497</sup>Idem, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 208.

<sup>498</sup>Idem, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 15.

simultaneously adhere.<sup>499</sup>

As Wilshire, Kipp and others demonstrate, strong identification with the group (mimetic engulfment) and one's role in it can have a defining influence on one's beliefs about oneself and one's actions as a member of the group. Despite this, individuals frequently have moral commitments that make the "actions of collective man an outrage to their conscience"; therefore, they engage in shared self-deceptive projects that "invent romantic and moral interpretations of the real facts, preferring to obscure rather than reveal the true character of their collective behavior." For example, individuals typically "believe they ought to love each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves whatever their power can command."<sup>500</sup> Thiselton summarizes Niebuhr's argument: ". . . human persons allow themselves to be seduced into operating manipulative power-interests by deceiving themselves into reinterpreting their own acts as altruistic concerns for the sake of the corporate structures to which they belong."<sup>501</sup>

Tribalism, with its attendant self-deception, has predictable characteristics in groups of greater size and power, such as large corporations, and in situations where such groups are in conflict with others, as when the "we group" which shares mutual responsibilities opposes a "they group." The very fact that a group is large gives its

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<sup>499</sup>Ibid, 97.

<sup>500</sup>Ibid. 8. Although racial and national groups are the focus of much of his writing on the concept of tribalism, Niebuhr's analysis applies equally well to large corporations, especially multinationals whose internal and external (global) interests reflect those of some nations.

<sup>501</sup>Thiselton, 137.

members "the illusion that they are moral," writes Niebuhr.<sup>502</sup> The distinguishing marks of tribal groups may include ethnicity, economic interests, class, language, geographic boundaries or other common interests.<sup>503</sup>

The larger the group the more certainly will it express itself selfishly in the total human community. It will be more powerful and therefore more able to defy any social restraints which might be devised. It also will be less subject to internal moral restraints. The larger the group the more difficult it is to achieve a common mind and purpose and the more inevitably will it be unified by momentary impulses and immediate and unreflective purposes. The increasing size of the group increases the difficulty of achieving a group self-consciousness, except as it comes in conflict with other groups. . . . Furthermore the greater the strength and the wider the dominion of a community, the more will it seem to represent universal values from the perspective of the individual.<sup>504</sup>

Thiselton stresses that "the gloves are off" when social groups clash, for one group's idea of truth is often disparaged by another group as a manipulative attempt to legitimate power-claims. "If different groups choose to adopt different *criteria of truth* to determine what *counts* as true, or even *what counts as a meaningful truth-claim*, rational argument and dialogue become undermined by recurring appeals to what one group counts as axioms, but seems far from axiomatic for another."

Rhetoric then must rely on "force, seduction or manipulation." He concludes,

. . . a Christian account of human nature accepts the capacity of the self for self-deception and its readiness to use strategies of manipulation.

The term 'heart' (*kardia*) closely approaches in the Pauline letters Freudian notions of the hidden depths which lie below the threshold of conscious awareness. The things of the heart, Bultmann rightly comments, 'need not penetrate into the field of consciousness at all, but may designate the

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<sup>502</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 49.

<sup>503</sup>Cf., idem, "Man's Tribalism as One Source of His Inhumanity," in *Man's Nature and His Communities* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1965), 64.

<sup>504</sup>Idem, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 48.

hidden tendency of the self.' . . . Thus, Gal. 6:12, Bultmann writes, may allude to a 'secret motive hidden even from themselves.' Motivations of the heart may remain 'darkened' (Rom. 1:21).<sup>505</sup>

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Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Eng. vol. I (London: SCM, 1952 and 1955), 225; cf. 220-27.

It is also typical of large organizations that they become increasingly rigid and bureaucratic, reproducing their mores and attitudes through structured interactions and socially routinized patterns. "This represents a distortion of the proper function and orientation of institutions," writes McFadyen, "as they become self-legitimizing and idolatrous."<sup>506</sup> Thiselton points out that Niebuhr's social analysis is substantiated by Rom. 1:18-31, wherein Paul describes "the uncontrolled situatedness of the corporate plight [which] breeds 'evil, covetedness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, gossip, slander, insolence, haughtiness, self-congratulation, new forms of evil, conflict with parents, folly, faithlessness to commitments, heartlessness,

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<sup>505</sup>Thiselton, 12-14.

<sup>506</sup>McFadyen, 232. It should be noted that McFadyen does not share Niebuhr's pessimistic view of the immorality of social groups; rather, he insists on the "necessity of institutions for personal existence by arguing that they are the stabilised reciprocity and public form of life upon which the autonomy of personhood depends." (235) "The incorporation of persons into social institutions which regulate meaning and value must be understood as a necessary condition for meaningful communication. It does not, then, run counter to personal freedom or subjectivity in communication." McFadyen's conception of the self is based upon a theory that communication at the micro, or personal, level is the primary source of one's identity; thus, at the meso level, "institutions are themselves the ossifications of persons' communication." (234) He seeks to steer "something of a mid-course between collectivism and individualism," (224) with the goal of allowing for personal freedom within large social groups, provided they are "genuinely democratic" institutions. His argument appears to lose its footing at this point, however; for his only example of such an "open" institution is the church, which operates within the "ultimate communication context" (with God) and anticipates the eschatological reality of the coming kingdom of God. (241 ff.)



ruthlessness.<sup>507</sup>

The moral inferiority of groups may be attributed in part to the insular nature of large organizations. Earlier in our study, we found that self-deception often entails the avoidance of information that might contradict one's preferred beliefs. The self-deception of tribalism is thus aided by institutionalized systems that amplify any information that confirms preferred beliefs and suppress or fence out information that might undermine these beliefs. In its most basic form, this filtering of information relies upon the lack of contact that usually exists between large groups, especially those in conflict with one another. Consequently, tribal organizations of all types have only indirect knowledge of the opinions, needs and problems of other groups. "Since both sympathy and justice depend to a large degree upon the perception of need, which makes sympathy flow, and upon the understanding of competing interests, which must be resolved, it is obvious that human communities have greater difficulty than individuals in achieving ethical relationships."<sup>508</sup> Conversely, the difficulty of turning a blind eye to the problems of another individual in a more intimate, person-to-person relationship is the reason that moral awareness is generally more acute at the personal level.

Niebuhr calls self-deception and hypocrisy the "most significant" moral characteristics of groups, and an "unvarying element in the moral life of all human beings.

[Self-deception] is the tribute which morality pays to immorality; or rather the device by which the lesser self gains the consent of the larger self to indulge in

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<sup>507</sup>Thiselton, 143-44.

<sup>508</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 85.

impulses and ventures which the rational self can approve only when they are disguised. One can never be quite certain whether the disguise is meant only for the eye of the external observer or whether, as may be usually the case, it deceives itself. Naturally this defect in individuals becomes more apparent in the less moral life of nations.<sup>509</sup>

A final dimension of the self-deception of tribalism is seen in groups with inordinate power and privilege<sup>510</sup>, which Niebuhr correctly points out are very likely, in a modern capitalist society, to be large corporations with "ownership of the means of production." He identifies three types of self-deception which are common to such groups:

1. The self-righteousness fostered by expressions of morality within the organization, despite the fact that the same moral principles are being violated by the organization in its relations with external groups or individuals.
2. The group's identification of its self-interests with universal interests or values, allowing it to defend itself by "proving" that the good of the whole society is best served by pursuing the self-interests of the group.
3. The group's justification, in its own eyes, of its special privileges on the assumption that they are just payments for its meritorious function in

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<sup>509</sup>Ibid, 95.

<sup>510</sup>Niebuhr writes, "The strictures of the prophets against the mighty, accusing them of pride and injustice, of both the religious and the social dimensions of sin, are consistently partial. . . . The simple religious insight which underlies these prophetic judgements is that the men who are tempted by their eminence and by the possession of undue power become more guilty of pride. . . ."

"This biblical analysis agrees with the known facts of history. Capitalists are not greater sinners than poor labourers by any natural depravity. But it is a fact that those who hold great economic and political power are more guilty of pride against God and injustice against the weak. . . ." (Idem, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 223-25).

society.<sup>511</sup>

### The Self-Deception of Legalism

Bishop Butler finds fertile ground for self-deception wherever questions of morality are determined solely by the standards of the law. These circumstances "lie more open to this self-deceit, and give it greater scope and opportunities."<sup>512</sup> The "very province of self-deceit and self-partiality" is the occasion when one's sin is not explicitly prohibited by the law, or when it consists merely in a neglect of duty, such as that of loving one's neighbor.

Here [self-deception] governs without check or control. 'For what commandment is there broken? Is there a transgression where there is no law? A vice which cannot be defined?'<sup>513</sup>

When the law is unclear or fails specifically to address a matter, the opportunity arises for an individual or a group to rationalize, "If it's not against the law, it must be permissible." Yet Butler stresses that such cases -- where morality cannot be reduced to fixed, determinate rules -- are not the rare exception but are "perhaps the greatest part of the intercourse amongst mankind." For this reason, there is great latitude and freedom for one to "determine for, and consequently to deceive, himself." The most egregious sins of this type, he believes, are sins of oppression.<sup>514</sup>

Space does not permit an examination of the theological debate over the

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<sup>511</sup>Idem, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 116-17. Cf., idem, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 211.

<sup>512</sup>Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 118.

<sup>513</sup>Ibid, 119.

<sup>514</sup>Ibid.

relationship of law and grace. However, this fundamental dichotomy is crucial to the *self-deception of legalism*. Our interest is not so much in the law *per se*, but in legalism, a distortion of law such that persons "come to exist for the demands of law" and consequently have their self-understanding directed toward either guilt or self-righteousness.<sup>515</sup> Legalism may be understood as a Rational view of the law as an abstraction, detached from the human relations it is meant to govern. McFadyen describes legalism as a "closure . . . of law's proper spirit which leads automatically to distorted codification of relations -- both with God and others."<sup>516</sup> This, in turn, provides a footing for self-deception:

The self-righteous . . . are conscious only of the ways in which they fulfill the law and not of their imperfections. They are resistant to becoming conscious of their need of grace, for their self-consciousness must first become that of sinners. Self-righteousness represents a belief in themselves and their own power (as well as in the absolute validity of the law, the demands of which they meet) -- a belief, that is, in themselves rather than God. But the idol which functions as a religious substitute for God is not so much their belief in themselves as the medium of this belief, the law, legalistically understood. Legalism is the belief in the absolute validity of a law or network of laws, from whence comes the belief that satisfaction of the letter of the law will lead to justification before God and others.<sup>517</sup>

Like Luther, Thieliicke believes that the law leads "only to despair, to defiance, or to false confidence." The vain attempt to serve God only by satisfying the law is "diametrically opposed to the true worship and service of God."<sup>518</sup> By contrast, the intention of the law is to remind us of who and what we should be, and Hauerwas

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<sup>515</sup>McFadyen, 250.

<sup>516</sup>Ibid.

<sup>517</sup>Ibid. 251.

<sup>518</sup>Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. I, 8.

proposes that the law can actually contribute to the development of character and virtue, for "it is through descriptions of our behavior tested against other accounts that we check ourselves against self-deception and self-righteousness."<sup>519</sup>

Among the biblical accounts of the self-deception of legalism are those found in Matt. 7:3-5 and 23:13-39. Jesus asks, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" (7:3). (In this saying, he points to the same tendency to self-partiality observed by Butler above.) In Chapter 23 Jesus confronts the scribes and Pharisees with their own hypocrisy, showing that their careful adherence to the law merely hides their inner lawlessness. These "hypocrites" evidently are blind to their own flaws, especially those *within* themselves. It is not specified that those addressed in Matt. 23 are unconscious of their sinfulness; however, Via suggests that, when taken together with 7:3-5, we can reasonably conclude that Jesus' hearers are unaware of the contradictions between their inner and outer selves, and that Jesus' intent is to call their attention to this inconsistency.<sup>520</sup> To the extent that they are blind to their own hypocrisy, the Pharisees may be self-deceived. "One fails to interpret the law correctly because one intends not to see how much is really required of one."<sup>521</sup> The righteousness that is really required by God goes well beyond external obedience to the letter of the law (e.g., do not divorce, tell the truth under oath) and calls for obedience to the command of Jesus to love from the heart.

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<sup>519</sup>Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 119.

<sup>520</sup>Via, 93.

<sup>521</sup>Ibid, 94.

The law may express the will of God. The written law does in [Matt.] 5:17, 21, 27; 19:17b-19. And the oral law does in 23:2-3, 23. But the law may also be opposed to the will of God. The written law is so opposed in 5:34, 38-39 and the oral law is opposed in 15:20. The law, then, written and oral, is for Matthew a possible clue to the will of God, a trace left on Israel's religious culture by the will of God. But the law is not a formal authority. It does not in and of itself say adequately and unequivocally what one must do to fulfill the will of God.<sup>522</sup>

Does Matthew's hypocrite set out consciously to deceive others? Perhaps not, for he does not allow himself to see the flaw within himself; "but he does lack integrity, correspondence between inner and outer, and is responsible for the deficiency because he has concealed the true nature of the inner person from himself."<sup>523</sup>

In the letters of Paul, legalism and self-deception are also developed as important, intertwined concepts. The claim to have wisdom, to know and to do what is righteous, is an indication of a self-deceived, or "darkened" mind. God has revealed himself "since the creation of the world," but some *choose* not to see.

So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools. . . . (Rom. 1:20-22)

This motif is prominent in many Pauline writings, though he speaks explicitly of self-deception in only two texts:

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. (1 Cor. 3:18)

For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. (Gal. 6:2-3)

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<sup>522</sup>Ibid, 88.

<sup>523</sup>Ibid.

Via undertakes a detailed analysis of Paul's view of the law (which some have said is an inconsistent view), and deduces that the righteousness of law is seen not as merely inferior to the righteousness of faith, but is actually its antithesis (Phil 3:8-9). "The fault with the law is not that it gives Israel a special status (which it does not) but that it offers the opportunity for a righteousness of one's own and leads away from God's righteousness."<sup>524</sup> In Romans 7, it is clear that the law itself prompts the self-deceptive project whereby one seeks to establish oneself on the basis of one's own righteousness. In an ironic twist, the law becomes an instrument of sin. The law helps me conceal from myself the truth about myself and my situation by allowing me to believe that I have within my grasp the means to make myself righteous and blameless through my own efforts. Paul's claims that we deceive ourselves and that the law deceives us are thus closely connected.

The Pauline account of the self-deception of legalism is rooted deeply in his conception of self-righteous pride. The pursuit of righteousness by human means often involves a legalistic approach to the law which helps one become convinced of one's success. With this in mind, Paul warns against boasting (Rom. 3:27-28; 1 Cor. 1:29; 3:18-21) and confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3-6), for

not far beneath the surface is the troubling need to keep pursuing achievements. This is engendered by the unconscious but operant knowledge that the person is not righteous. The most inaccessible truth, which becomes available only from outside by eschatological revelation, is the good news of God's free gift.<sup>525</sup>

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<sup>524</sup>Ibid, 24.

<sup>525</sup>Ibid, 32.

## The Self-Deception of Moral Relativism

A third species of self-deception is closely related to both tribalism and legalism. The *self-deception of moral relativism* is tied to the social roles of the self and involves the belief that one's moral commitments and responsibilities are determined by, and may vary according to, the roles and contexts in which one finds oneself. The basis of such thinking is an underlying assumption that "there are no universal moral standards to which all tribal moralities and tribal legal systems must be subject."<sup>526</sup> While it is undeniable that there are many local and cultural conceptions of morality (i.e., cultural relativism), self-deception is often necessary for one to maintain an image of oneself as a morally consistent person by convincing oneself that what counts as moral or immoral, as important or unimportant, *for oneself* is relative to the situation (culture, tribe, role) in which the distinction is made. In the role of mother, a woman may take great care to be honest with her child and to demand honesty in return, yet in her role as businesswoman she may persuade herself that misleading a customer is just "savvy salesmanship." Thus, it is possible for her simultaneously to hold contradictory beliefs about honesty (a moral principle she avows), exercising one belief as mother and quite another as businesswoman.

According to Hauerwas, roles provide "a ready vehicle for self-deception, since we can easily identify with them without any need to spell out what we are doing. The role is accepted into our identity."<sup>527</sup> He cites former Nazi leader Albert

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<sup>526</sup>Rom Harre and Michael Krausz. *Varieties of Relativism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 147.

<sup>527</sup>Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy*, 87. Cf., McFadyen, 104-05: "[Persons] are not to be overidentified with the general social role assumed by themselves or that



Speer as an example of one whose self-perception was tied almost completely to his role in professional life.<sup>528</sup> Such a person "pretends that the self can be constituted by the roles one has assumed or by the current story a person has been able to compose. Yet neither of these will suffice, as we have seen, for each of them is susceptible of confirming us in a state of self-deception."<sup>529</sup>

J. Irwin Miller, past chairman of Cummins Engine Company in the United States, observes that business executives with religious commitments often succeed in "compartmentizing" their lives, learning to live comfortably with conflicting, role-based moralities:

One can simply wall [religious commitments] off from the difficult demands of business life and the real world. Sir John Bowring, who was in 1854 Superintendent of British Trade in China, could precipitate and win the second opium war with China, and over fierce Chinese resistance, force the Chinese to introduce Indian opium into their country. During the same years this man of many talents could compose and leave for us the great hymns, "God is love; His mercy brightens / All the path in which we rove," as well as "Watchman, tell us of the night, / What its signs of promise are" and "In the cross of Christ I glory, / Towering o'er the wrecks of time."<sup>530</sup>

But this compartmentization is not easily accomplished or maintained. "Managers

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supposed, perceived or expected of them by others. Personal identity is a self-identity and deep 'self', where identity is lodged in a semi-stable structure, and is distanced from the practicalities and possibilities of direct public appearance and therefore from a complete identification with social role or status."

<sup>528</sup>Ibid, 94. See also, idem, "Relativism and Tragedy," *A Community of Character*, 101-08. "The source of each tragedy is a situation in which a character's multiple responsibilities and obligations conflict not only with self-interest, but with each other. Moral choice is potentially tragic when several moral obligations are juxtaposed with the necessity of a single decision having irreversible consequences."

<sup>529</sup>Ibid, 95.

<sup>530</sup>J. Irwin Miller, "How Religious Commitments Shape Corporate Decisions," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Feb.-March 1984): 5.

experience moral stress as a result of role conflict and role ambiguity in connection with moral expectations.<sup>531</sup> The tribal pressures of the group are intensified when the group develops what Niebuhr calls "organs of will," for it is then that the collective "seems to the individual to have become an independent centre of moral life."<sup>532</sup> This tension is especially apparent to statesmen who wish to live morally but find within themselves the disparity between their personal morality and the "accepted habits of collective and political behaviour." Niebuhr quotes Frederick the Great, a statesman who struggled with this tension: "I hope that posterity will distinguish the philosopher from the monarch in me and the decent man from the politician. I must admit that when drawn into the vortex of European politics it is difficult to preserve decency and integrity. . . ."<sup>533</sup>

The stress arising from one's inner desire for coherence and unity in identity (and self-perception) may be alleviated to the extent that a self-deceptive project succeeds in reducing awareness of the degree to which one's actions or beliefs in one role may contradict one's actions or beliefs in another. A strategy for achieving such self-deception is recommended by Albert Carr in a famous *Harvard Business Review*

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<sup>531</sup>Frederick B. Bird and James A. Waters, "The Moral Muteness of Managers," *California Management Review* 32, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 81.

<sup>532</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 208.

<sup>533</sup>Ibid, 209. See also, Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, 533-54, for an interesting and relevant discussion of Frederick the Great and the problems of compromise and falsehood in the realm of diplomacy. "For Frederick the Great there was still something scandalous about having to lie in politics. He explained it on the grounds that reason was not yet sufficiently developed in the epoch in which he lived. Within the schema of the doctrine of progress he was thus aware of the imperfection in the world, or better, of the fact that in its present state the world was not what it ought to be."

article which exhorts business people to learn to see themselves as "game players" whose actions in the workplace should not be expected to agree with the morality of their personal lives. "The ethics of business are game ethics," he argues, "different from the ethics of religion."<sup>534</sup>

That most businessmen are not indifferent to ethics in their private lives, everyone will agree. My point is that in their office lives they cease to be private citizens; they become game players who must be guided by a somewhat different set of ethical standards.<sup>535</sup>

Carr chooses the term "bluffing" to refer to "conscious misstatements, concealment of pertinent facts or exaggeration" -- all of which, he believes, are "opportunities" permitted under the rules of the business game. He acknowledges, however, that some business people cannot become effective game players until they convince themselves that their actions in the "game" do not violate their personal moral commitments or integrity.

But here and there a businessman is unable to reconcile himself to the bluff in which he plays a part. His conscience, perhaps spurred by religious idealism, troubles him. He feels guilty; he may develop an ulcer or a nervous tic. Before any executive can make profitable use of the strategy of the bluff, he needs to make sure that in bluffing he will not lose self-respect or become emotionally disturbed. If he is to reconcile personal integrity and high standards of honesty with the practical requirements of business, he must feel that his bluffs are ethically justified. The justification rests on the fact that business, as practiced by individuals as well as by corporations, has the impersonal character of a game -- a game that demands both special strategy and an understanding of its special ethics.<sup>536</sup>

He urges us to think of business as a poker game, for "no one expects poker to be

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<sup>534</sup>Albert Z. Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?", *Harvard Business Review* (Jan.-Feb. 1968): 144.

<sup>535</sup>Ibid, 145.

<sup>536</sup>Ibid, 144.

played on the ethical principles preached in churches." In poker, the object of the game is to go home with as much of the other players' money as possible, using whatever guile and deception is necessary to win. It is "up to the other fellow to protect himself."<sup>537</sup>

Poker's own brand of ethics is different from the ethical ideals of civilized human relationships. The game calls for distrust of the other fellow. It ignores the claim of friendship. Cunning deception and concealment of one's strength and intentions, not kindness and openheartedness, are vital in poker. No one thinks any worse of poker on that account. And no one should think any worse of business because its standards of right and wrong differ from the prevailing traditions of morality in our society.<sup>538</sup>

In his defense of moral relativism, Carr bases much of his argument on a legalistic view of morality, agreeing with the executive who tells him, "So long as a businessman complies with the laws of the land and avoids telling malicious lies, he's ethical."<sup>539</sup> He provides an array of justifications to business people who wish to deceive themselves.

While Carr believes the self should be compartmentized so that it can exist comfortably in the two, autonomous spheres of personal and business activity, Thieliicke strongly challenges this idea, condemning those who would limit God's influence to the private, inward life or withdraw the "lordship of God from the 'worldly' sphere, trying, as it were, to make this lordship private rather than public."<sup>540</sup> Yet this compartmentization, and the moral relativism which supports it,

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<sup>537</sup>Ibid, 145.

<sup>538</sup>Ibid.

<sup>539</sup>Ibid, 146.

<sup>540</sup>Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. I, 8.

has long had its proponents in theological circles as well. Thieliicke shows that a misreading of Luther's doctrine of the "two kingdoms" has led to the suggestion "that the Christian -- who must also participate in the temporal kingdom as a father or mother, a citizen or soldier -- [should surrender] the identifying marks of his Christianity the moment he enters the worldly sphere." The result is a Carr-like view of "two spheres of existence which have nothing to do with one another, spheres which are subject to very different laws and which divide the Christian person -- through whom the dividing frontier passes -- into two completely separate and isolated segments."<sup>541</sup>

Did not the Lutherans of Germany all too often teach this view during Hitler's Third Reich, tacitly giving free rein to the state in what was supposed to be its sphere of operation? The very fact that the question of the extent of this "secular" sphere, and of the limit of the state, was seldom raised shows how dominant was this line of thinking.<sup>542</sup>

Thieliicke is concerned that this misunderstanding of Luther leads easily to a moral dualism, where the "inner person" acts within the kingdom of God in pursuit of divine goodness, while the "outer person" adheres to the moral standards of the world, where power and self-seeking are ultimate. He contends that Luther actually builds in "safeguards" against "first, a 'double morality,' and, second, the establishment of a temporal sphere in which the radical commandments of the Sermon on the Mount do not seem to apply, a sphere which consequently cannot be called in question."<sup>543</sup> In Luther, the law of love is the overriding commandment governing all spheres, and

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<sup>541</sup>Ibid, 362-63.

<sup>542</sup>Ibid, 364.

<sup>543</sup>Ibid, 377-78.

every person "must realize that he is not engaged in his own business but in God's. When the maid swings her broom, the mother brings up her child, the politician runs the government, and the judge pronounces sentence, their work is a kind of service rendered to God."<sup>544</sup>

Reformed theology, by comparison, has an understanding of law and gospel that does not lead easily to a sharp distinction between two kingdoms. Calvin understands the law as a present Word with the potential to have normative significance for order not only in the faith community but in public life in general. "The relation between Christ and the world is fully as direct as the relation between Christ and the church. In both relations what is at stake is the one universal lordship."<sup>545</sup> It is for this reason, Thieliicke believes, that Reformed leaders were quicker than Lutherans to challenge the Third Reich.<sup>546</sup> He agrees with H. Richard Niebuhr, who emphasizes that church and society are "both subject to a common constitution, the will of God declared in Scripture and nature."<sup>547</sup> This "common constitution" provides the basis for a theological response to moral relativism.

Philosophical arguments against relativism often involve a Rational defense of *moral realism*; however, the theoretical debate ranges widely as philosophers fail to agree upon the supposed moral facts, or truths, that stand above individual opinions

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<sup>544</sup>Ibid, 376.

<sup>545</sup>Thieliicke, *Theological Ethics*, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 592.

<sup>546</sup>Ibid, 588.

<sup>547</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, 1937), 39.

and social customs.<sup>548</sup> Thielicke counters that "true realism" is possible only when the state and other institutions become aware of their limits by seeing their purpose within salvation history. "That is to say, they come into view only under the Word of God. Realism is thus in the last analysis a theological concept."<sup>549</sup>

But by what authority does a theologically conceived realism propose to judge the morality of individual and collective action within non-religious institutions? With the waning influence of religious institutions in the late twentieth century, Western society has undergone a gradual secularization whereby individuals -- even professing Christians -- have become uncertain of how great a role their religious beliefs should play in defining moral standards for the social institutions in which they play a part. As Peter Baelz observes, "religion has become more and more a private affair, and morality has become secular."

This process affects both the structure of society and the consciousness of individuals. Institutions become independent of each other and establish their own rules and regulations. Individuals interpret life in non-religious ways. Religious beliefs lose their plausibility and no longer serve to provide a single cohesive moral pattern. Instead individuals and groups fashion their own ideals and society is held together by a minimal morality which is sufficient to make life in society possible.<sup>550</sup>

This variety of morally relative ideals is theologically untenable, for all persons and groups must finally be assessed "in light of God's purposes for them," Baelz believes.

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<sup>548</sup>For a more complete analysis of moral realism as a response to relativism, see Harre and Krausz, *Varieties of Relativism*, 165 ff. See also Peter Baelz, *Ethics and Belief* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), for helpful discussions of moral relativism (6 ff.) and of the contrast between secular and religious foundations of morality (65 ff.)

<sup>549</sup>Thielicke, *Theological Ethics*, 375.

<sup>550</sup>Baelz, *Ethics and Belief*, 66.

Moral relativism "fails to do justice . . . to the inescapable relation in which man stands to God, whether man recognizes it or not. This relationship is not one which he can choose or not choose, according to his private ideals."<sup>551</sup>

Man is not alone in an indifferent universe which may at any moment bring his moral enterprise down to the ground in dust and ashes. He is in God's world. God reigns. . . . The moral claim is interpreted as the invitation and command of God; and if God is an accompanying and an enabling God, then morality itself may be seen as part of a divine-human enterprise.<sup>552</sup>

Thus, a theologically conceived moral realism is a Relational antidote to moral relativism. The revealed will of God is the moral standard for all human activity, regardless of an individual's momentary social role or context. To accept Carr's argument that morality informed by religious beliefs has no place in business life, one's self-deceptive project would have to blind one not only to one's moral inconsistencies, but also to the truth that is available through the God-relation.

The challenge for the Christian is to hold a consistent view of God's ultimate place in all areas of life, both public and private, while resisting the pressures to capitulate to moral relativism. Jacques Ellul stresses the ethical implication of this view, describing the purpose of the Christian life as being a "visible sign" of the gospel as "salt, light and sheep," not succumbing to the self-deceptive temptation to "dissociate the spiritual situation from the material one, despising the material situation, denying that it has any meaning, declaring that it is neutral and does not concern eternal life. . . . This is exactly what Jesus Christ calls hypocrisy."<sup>553</sup> But

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<sup>551</sup>Ibid, 86.

<sup>552</sup>Ibid, 84.

<sup>553</sup>Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of The Kingdom* (Colorado Springs, CO: Helmers & Howard, 1989), 7.



Ellul advises that authentic Christianity requires a life of "agony," not believing that one's moral and spiritual obligations may shift from one sphere to another, but, rather, placing oneself "at the point of contact between two currents: the will of the Lord, and the will of the world."<sup>554</sup>

### The Self-Deception of Scientism

A fourth proposed category is the *self-deception of scientism*, which is based upon the Rationalistic assumption that the methods of science and technology are sufficient for understanding and solving all of the problems related to the self and humanity. "Almost all of the misrepresentations of human selfhood and the drama of history in the modern day are derived from the effort to reduce human existence to the coherence of nature,"<sup>555</sup> according to Reinhold Niebuhr, who worries that we live in a time when "every bit of truth and wisdom must first be 'cleared by science' before it can be given credence."<sup>556</sup> In the late twentieth century, science has such prestige that the search for truth in almost every field, including theology, awaits its verdicts and accepts them almost without question. Yet the fact remains that the "so-called 'methods of science' which have gained mankind so many significant victories over the forces of nature and have laid the foundations for the whole accumulation of technical power, have been singularly deficient in generating *wisdom* in human

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<sup>554</sup>Ibid, 18.

<sup>555</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *Christian Realism and Political Problems* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 199.

<sup>556</sup>Idem, "The Tyranny of Science," *Theology Today* X, No. 4 (January 1954):464.

affairs."<sup>557</sup> In Niebuhr, scientism is seen as an idolatrous faith in the capacities of Rational tools and methods to produce an explanation of the human condition that is more credible than the alternative found in the truth revealed through the God-relation. He argues that the more rigorously the scientific method is applied, the more we deny the God-revealed truth about the meaning of human existence.

The relation between 'I and Thou' is not a scientific but an existential procedure. The turning of the self from itself as the center of life to God and the neighbor is also not scientific. The correlation of historic facts requires imagination, wisdom and humility which are not properly defined as 'scientific.' These attitudes require existential commitments, denials of self-interest, and recognition of the finiteness of all human knowledge in which the self rather than the mind is involved. If we fully analyze these characteristically human elements in history we will not only cease to worship so uncritically at the altar of science. We will be less apologetic for the essence of a religion of history and revelation.<sup>558</sup>

We thus confront the ironic fact that a culture, intent upon understanding nature and boasting of ever more impressive achievements in the 'conquest' of nature, has become involved in ever more serious misunderstandings of human nature, of the self and its uniqueness, and in its dramatic-historical environment.<sup>559</sup>

Brunner underscores this point, identifying science as an autonomous sphere of life which does not seek the Good but the True -- yet which, ironically, propagates a "horrible lie" by claiming that the human self is little more than an object and trusting science and technology to elevate the human race to the status of creator.<sup>560</sup> The self-

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<sup>557</sup>Ibid, 465.

<sup>558</sup>Ibid, 471.

<sup>559</sup>Idem, *The Self and The Dramas of History*, 144.

<sup>560</sup>Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 491, 493. "Here science dissolves the connexion between the 'I' and the 'Thou'. . . . When man forgets that even he, in spite of his freedom through knowledge, is himself a creature, a created being, and not a creator, then he misunderstands his connexion with his fellow-man" (493).

deception of scientism arises from the fact that "alongside the scientific knowledge and self-interpretation of man there is always another kind of knowledge," that of the self as creature defined by and dependent upon a divine Creator. Science "does not reveal human reality as it really is"; rather, it sometimes conceals it, distorts it and introduces confusion. This is increasingly true the nearer science moves to the personal sphere of life, for "the more the real human being needs to be known, the more [religious] faith gains not merely a regulative but a constitutive significance."<sup>561</sup>

Neil Postman recalls that pre-Enlightenment theologians had developed an elaborate description of "the relation of man to God, man to nature, man to man, and man to his tools. Their theology took as a first and last principle that all knowledge and goodness come from God"; consequently, "theology, not technology, provided people with the authorization of what to do or think."<sup>562</sup> Today, "technology creates its own imperatives and, at the same time creates a wide-ranging social system to

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<sup>561</sup>Ibid, 495-96. See also, Lesslie Newbigin, *Proper Confidence: Faith, Doubt and Certainty in Christian Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 46-47: "Everyone recognizes that science works; it delivers desirable things. But we are left in a world which the Chinese writer Carver Yu has summarized in the phrase "technological optimism and literary despair". . . . Science combines to deliver an ever-growing abundance of things to have and to do, beyond all the dreams of earlier ages. It offers no guidance, however, on the questions of worth: What things are worth doing? What things are worth having? . . . In the 28th chapter of Job, the glowing description of the marvels of human technology is followed by the haunting question: 'But where shall wisdom be found?' This question still haunts us today."

<sup>562</sup>Neil Postman, *Technopoly* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 25-26. See also, Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1957), 574-85. Merton points out that it was Rational theology which precipitated and empowered the modern scientific enterprise. "Faith in the possibility of science" was actually generated by the theological emphasis on the discovery of God in his creation, coupled with the Reformers' "intense concentration upon secular activity with an emphasis upon experience and reason as bases for action and belief. . . ."

reinforce its imperatives."<sup>563</sup> To illustrate his concept of scientism he shows how faith in science can serve as a quasi-theological belief system that gives meaning to life, as well as a sense of well-being, morality and even immortality.<sup>564</sup> Scientism replaces that which it destroys -- the "edifice of belief" in the sacred -- with "efficiency, interest and economic advance. It promises heaven on earth through the convenience of technological progress," and exalts the "life of skills, technical expertise, and the ecstasy of consumption."<sup>565</sup>

Scientism . . . is the desperate hope, and wish, and ultimately the illusory belief that some standardized set of procedures called 'science' can provide us with an unimpeachable source of moral authority, a suprahuman basis for answers to questions like 'What is life, and when, and why?' 'Why is death and suffering?' 'What is right and wrong to do?' 'What are good and evil ends?' . . . <sup>566</sup>

Ellul agrees, arguing that when "technique" judges moral problems, *only* technical criteria are considered. "Since it has put itself beyond good and evil, it need fear no limitation whatever," for it has become "the judge of what is moral, the creator of a new morality."<sup>567</sup>

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<sup>563</sup>Ibid, 106.

<sup>564</sup>Ibid, 147.

<sup>565</sup>Ibid, 179. "The elevation of one God requires the demotion of another. 'Thou shalt have no other Gods before me' applies as well to a technological divinity as any other" (165).

<sup>566</sup>Ibid, 162.

<sup>567</sup>Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society*, trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), 134. Ellul's critique should not be misinterpreted as anti-technological, for he emphasizes elsewhere that more technology, not less, is needed, and that it can actually be used as an instrument of God's will. "[Technique] is neither exclusively positive nor totally negative. . . . [and] I would certainly never wish to maintain that technology was to be deplored." His concern focuses more on the matter of means and ends. (Idem, "The Technological Revolution and Its Moral

In the wake of the scientific successes of the modern era, society willingly grants to scientific experts "an awesome measure of authority, . . . respect and prestige."<sup>568</sup> However, as a general rule, such experts have two limiting characteristics. First, they are often ignorant of things not directly related to their own, particularized expertise. Second, and perhaps more important, neither they nor society will admit this ignorance; consequently, they claim authority over not only technical matters but also social, religious, and moral affairs.<sup>569</sup> Niebuhr sees in this phenomenon "a certainty which betrays ignorance of its own prejudices and failure to recognize the limits of scientific knowledge." It is self-deception in the form of intellectual pride, which is more than mere ignorance of ignorance, for it "always involves, besides, a conscious or subconscious effort to obscure a known or partly known taint of interest."<sup>570</sup>

Adolph Hitler recognized the potential of scientific experts to lend moral legitimacy to the "euthanasia" killing operation which systematically exterminated the handicapped and mentally ill, and eventually led to the mass genocide of millions of Jews, Gypsies and others considered "unworthy of life." He personally ordered that only physicians were permitted to oversee the gas chambers. "Physicians and

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and Political Consequences," in *The Evolving World and Theology*, ed. Johannes Metz [New York: Paulist Press, 1967], 100.)

<sup>568</sup>Postman, *Technopoly*, 159.

<sup>569</sup>Ibid, 87.

<sup>570</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 195. Cf., discussion of "scientific partisanship" and self-deception, chapter two, above.

scientists thus served the state as theorists and experts" to legitimize Nazi ideology.<sup>571</sup>

In considering the inordinate influence of scientific experts, we find a close connection between scientism and moral relativism. The expert whose self-deception involves an exalted view of science may also believe that his or her personal moral commitments need not apply in the performance of technical or scientific duties. (We are reminded of Wernher von Braun's disavowal of any personal responsibility for deaths that might result from missiles which he designs [see Chapter Two, above].)<sup>572</sup>

The scientist or technician relies heavily on the Rationalist myth of the human being as an abstraction -- not as you or I. In highly complex organizations (e.g., government agencies or multinational corporations), individual experts seldom play more than a limited role in the total enterprise, making it possible for them to "compartmentize" their lives and, thereby, to avoid recognition of any personal responsibility for the human effects of the collective actions in which they participate.

According to Ellul, "A plurality of [scientific actions] converge toward the human being, and each individual technician can assert in good faith that his technique leaves intact the integrity of its object."<sup>573</sup> He stresses that most human beings, not scientists alone, are profoundly affected by the technological environment which prevails in much of Western society. "Technique has penetrated the deepest recesses of the

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<sup>571</sup>Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 216. It is noteworthy that even before the killing began, scientists in Germany "enjoyed far greater status" than their counterparts in the United States or elsewhere in Europe (9).

<sup>572</sup>*Cf.*, Postman, *Technopoly*, 87. Similarly, Postman chooses Nazi leader Adolph Eichmann as the "basic model and metaphor" for the scientific bureaucrat who believes, "I have no responsibility for the human consequences of my decisions."

<sup>573</sup>Ellul, *The Technological Society*, 391.

human being," he writes. "He was created with a certain essential unity, and he is fragmented by all the forces of the modern world."<sup>574</sup>

### Self-Deception Defined Theologically

The theological thinkers surveyed above would agree with much of the philosophical and psychological literature regarding the nature of self-deception in the moral context. The following conclusions find broad support across all three disciplines:

- (1) Self-deception *does* occur and is a pervasive feature of the common life.
- (2) Self-deception obtains when one chooses willfully, but not necessarily consciously, to hold a belief about oneself or one's situation in reality, while simultaneously knowing that the belief is not true. The self-deceiver may have a veiled awareness that he is holding a false belief, yet he ensures that his knowledge of the truth is less accessible than the false belief.
- (3) In self-deception, the deceiver and the deceived, the victim and perpetrator, are one.
- (4) Self-deception may entail a willful ignorance and self-partiality which extends to circumstances, activities and people closely related to the self. The self-deceiver may refuse to turn an eye toward information that would dispute her preferred conception of herself or her situation. This often includes a disregard of reproof and instruction.
- (5) Self-deceivers often maintain continuing moral or theological commitments that

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<sup>574</sup>Ibid, 325.

conflict with their actions or beliefs. As illustrated by the example of the biblical David, the self-deceptive project may actually be occasioned by a desire to maintain one's perception of oneself as a moral person.

- (6) Self-deception often involves interpersonal deception, as the self-deceiver seeks to create allies who, having been deceived, can help to reinforce the deceiver's false beliefs.
- (7) The principal motivation for self-deception is human pride. In the fields of philosophy and psychology pride is synonymous with self-esteem and self-sufficiency, which are deemed to be worthy goals. In theology, however, this approval is withdrawn, for pride is defined as an idolatrous self-love which denies the truth of one's sinfulness, creatureliness and need for repentance and new life in relationship with God.

Despite these commonly held understandings of self-deception, we have seen that there are distinct and defining differences in the perspectives of the three disciplines. In philosophy, theorists have tended to become mired in the epistemological complexities and contradictions seemingly entailed by the concept. Much of the recent literature struggles to come to a rational resolution of the supposed paradox of simultaneously believing that *p* and *not-p* are both true. Many of these thinkers see self-deception as a Rational-logical problem rather than a Relational-existential problem. Of those philosophers who do help to elucidate the concept, most approach the self as a being-in-relation with others.

Psychological accounts grapple with self-deception from the perspectives of self-relatedness and relatedness to other human beings (in the social-psychological



context). Yet most fail even to acknowledge the essential dimension of self-relatedness that is defined and informed by the God-relation. It is this human-divine economy which makes distinctive a theological understanding of the self and the phenomenon of self-deceit.

Theologically speaking, self-deception is of deeper significance than the mere acts of holding conflicting beliefs, avoiding unwanted information or protecting self-esteem. To attempt to be what one is not, to willfully believe a falsehood about oneself or one's situation, is to attempt a deception "before God" who is the truth. Self-deception, therefore, is the handmaiden of pride (and sloth), through which human beings refuse to accept the truth about themselves. The false "cover story" of self-sufficiency enables one to deny or disavow one's true insufficiency and need for God. "For if those who are nothing think they are something they deceive themselves" (Gal. 6:3). The self-deceiver prefers a false self-image to the truthful self-examination and humility required by faith. The God-relation demands self-surrender, the very antithesis of pride.

Pride motivates attempts at self-justification, such as the evaluation of oneself against the moral criteria of social groups, the law or even scientific experts. When I accept these criteria as morally authoritative *pro me*, I blind myself to the "highest good" of the God-criterion. I choose voluntary ignorance of the truth. Brunner contends that this is the case not only for the person of faith who avows knowledge of God, but also for the non-believer who is ". . . without excuse because he could, and might, know God, but he continually denies this knowledge."<sup>575</sup> The self-deceiver

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<sup>575</sup>Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and*

turns away from the original revelation of God and declines the offer of relationship with God (which is possible because each person is endowed with the *imago Dei*, or capacity for the God-relation). "Revelation is not something that is added to man's being; it is there even when it is denied, rejected and ignored."<sup>576</sup> The highest reaches of human selfhood are illumined by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Self-understanding does not lie *within* myself; rather, I can hope to understand myself as I am understood from *beyond* myself by God. The theological analysis of the self (as finite-in-relation-to-infinite) leads not so much to an additional or separate theory of self-deception as to a transcendent perspective which has the potential to illuminate and enrich all thinking about self-deception.

While philosophers ponder the epistemological paradox, theologians seek clues to the mystery of self-deception in the anthropological paradox. The theologically conceived self exists in a dialectical tension, torn between an acute awareness of its finite creatureliness and an overreaching desire for its infinite potential. In an ironic sense, self-deception is made possible by our dual capacities for self-awareness and God-relatedness. Indeed, by recognizing this contradictory and dynamic self-relatedness we are able to describe self-deception in a coherent and meaningful way. Even so, the phenomenon remains deeply perplexing.

Self-deception is accepted by theology as a valid concept not through theoretical formulations but by considering the very nature of the created self. The Relationally conceived self is remarkable in both its complexity and its ability to

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*Knowledge*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), 213.

<sup>576</sup>Ibid, 54.

comprise a multiplicity of conflicting motivations and desires that can vary according to situations, contexts and relationships. By contrast, the Rational presumption that sharpening man's cognitive faculties can somehow overcome or prevent self-deception merely leads back to the problematic -- for the pride of self-sufficiency is itself self-deceptive. "This is the sin of Adam," Barth reminds us.

We are all, incorrigibly, those who know better -- and, therefore, because grace is the truth revealed and known to us, we are all incorrigible liars. The consequences follow. Falsehood is self-destruction. Because man and the world live under the dominion of sin, lying to God and deceiving themselves, they live in self-destruction.<sup>577</sup>

In the next chapter we will revisit the case of Dow Corning Corporation to investigate the application of theories of self-deception to this study and, potentially, to the larger business context. We will give particular attention in this analysis to the applicability of the four proposed categories of self-deception: tribalism, legalism, moral relativism and scientism.

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<sup>577</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, 143-44.

CHAPTER IV:  
SELF-DECEPTION AND THE MODERN CORPORATION

Introduction

We now return to the case of Dow Corning Corporation for the purpose of applying the preceding understandings of self-deception in the context of a large, multinational corporation headquartered in the United States. Its distinctive product lines and joint-venture ownership notwithstanding, it is believed that Dow Corning exemplifies many of the bureaucratic and cultural characteristics that are common to major corporations.<sup>578</sup> This chapter will commence with a view of the modern corporation as a powerful social and economic institution, followed by a discussion of the individual self in the corporate context. The balance of this study will examine ways in which self-deception may obtain in this milieu. We will seek to bring the case study of Chapter One into the theoretical framework developed in Chapters Two and Three, while simultaneously consulting an interdisciplinary selection of literature in business ethics, organizational theory and other relevant fields.

The Power of the Modern Corporation

The day is long past when the United States was a nation of shopkeepers and family farms. Small businesses still thrive, to be sure, and provide most of the

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<sup>578</sup>It is admitted that one must be very cautious about generalizations which purport to apply to all large businesses. Product lines, in particular have a profound influence on corporate culture. Dow Corning, for example, has a science-based culture, while The Coca-Cola Company is strongly oriented toward consumer marketing. For purposes of the discussion in this chapter, the word "corporation" should be understood to refer primarily to the largest publicly held companies in the United States (i.e., the top 1,000 ranked by revenues annually in *Fortune* magazine).

nation's private-sector employment; but in the late twentieth century large corporations rank among the institutions with the greatest potential to influence daily life, for good and for ill. Corporate power is pervasive, yet we do not always comprehend the extent of its influence in society, as one economist explains:

The institution that most changes our lives we least understand or, more correctly, seek most elaborately to misunderstand. That is the modern corporation. Week by week, month by month, year by year, it exercises a greater influence on our livelihood and the way we live than unions, universities, politicians, the government.<sup>579</sup>

"Ours is a world of international conglomerates," writes Robert C. Solomon.<sup>580</sup>

Indeed, of the world's 100 largest economic entities, as measured by Gross National Product or total sales, 49 are nations and 51 are corporations.<sup>581</sup> Phillip Selznick observes that these institutions "dominate the social landscape. . . . Largely self-

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<sup>579</sup>John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 257. A similar observation is made by Harry Braverman: "The fact that . . . government activities are highly visible, in comparison with those of the corporation, has led to the notion that the prime exercise of social control is done by government. On the contrary, so long as investment decisions are made by corporations, the locus of social control and coordination must be sought among them; government fills the interstices left by these prime decisions." (Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in The Twentieth Century* [New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974], 268-69.)

<sup>580</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 47.

<sup>581</sup>"Big Business," *Current Thoughts and Trends*, Vol. 13, No. 8 (April 1997): 30. See also, Ralph Estes, *The Tyranny of The Bottom Line: Why Corporations Make Good People Do Bad Things* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996), 106-09. To illustrate the size and influence of large corporations, Estes uses the example of General Motors Corporation, which has approximately 700,000 employees worldwide, noting that the company's population is greater than the eleven smallest countries combined, though it is "run by a government that the voting public did not elect and cannot recall, impeach or even petition effectively." He adds that the company's 1994 revenues of \$155 billion make its budget "about the size of the governments of Sweden or The Netherlands -- or of Norway, New Zealand, Finland, Greece and Ireland combined."

governing, they often command huge resources, have multiple constituencies and decisively affect the fate of persons and the quality of community."<sup>582</sup> Solomon describes the potential repercussions of corporate actions:

A small decision by a giant corporation can affect thousands, perhaps millions of people. If General Motors HQ in Detroit decides to close a small, rundown plant outside Atlanta, it can destroy an entire community. If Exxon makes a small change in its oil-drilling policies, the entire life of the nation can be altered. . . . An unethical baker can cause a few stomach cramps. But ITT or Exxon can bring about a revolution, a national crisis, a change in the way the world works. With increased size and power there is exponentially increased impact.<sup>583</sup>

Corporate influence extends well beyond the proximate economic effects of purchasing supplies, producing goods, providing employment and paying taxes; it is also a powerful *social* force in the larger culture. "Not only do corporations produce most of the goods and services we buy, but they and their ethos permeate everything from politics and communications to athletics and religion."<sup>584</sup> In one business professor's appraisal, corporate messages (especially advertising) wield "a social influence comparable to that of religion and education" in propagating a view of

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<sup>582</sup>Philip Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 231.

<sup>583</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 47.

<sup>584</sup>William H. Shaw and Vincent Barry, *Moral Issues in Business, Fifth Edition* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1992), 202. Ahmet Aykac and Michael Gordy write that it is "fairly obvious from the point of view of society as a whole that the resources at the command of corporations of any size are very large and concentrated relative to their environment, and that the disposition of these resources is in the hands of a relatively small number of executives. This is to say nothing more than that the objective social weight of corporate activity is becoming widely apparent." (Ahmet Aykac and Michael Gordy, "The Emerging Corporatism: Business Executives as Corporate Managers," in *The Legitimate Corporation: Essential Readings in Business Ethics and Corporate Governance*, ed. Brenda Sutton [Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993], 214-15.

humanity and the good life.<sup>585</sup> As early as the 1930s, corporate executives were seen by Niebuhr as "gradually usurping the position of eminence and privilege once held by the soldier and the priest."<sup>586</sup>

Certainly corporate puissance is felt more acutely in the hometown of Dow Corning and Dow Chemical Company than in many other communities. The two companies' sheer size relative to any other institution in Midland, Michigan, has allowed them to shape "the culture of the community, creating social norms and attitudes vastly different from those of other cities and towns. In Midland, social acceptance has as much to do with what you are as with who you are."<sup>587</sup> And the most accepted and influential citizens are those who hold power within the corporate offices, primarily scientists and engineers in management positions.

The social consequences of a corporation's actions often reach far beyond its hometown or principal operating locations, though at times these effects may be neither consciously intended nor immediately evident. For example, psychologists have suggested that Dow Corning's creation and worldwide promotion of mammary prostheses contributed to low self-esteem among women who were encouraged to perceive breast size as an important measure of wholeness and self-worth.<sup>588</sup>

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<sup>585</sup>Ralph Estes, *The Tyranny of The Bottom Line*, 95.

<sup>586</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 7.

<sup>587</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 26.

<sup>588</sup>Estes, like Christopher Lasch, observes that corporate marketing to consumers often "impels women and men -- and children -- to pursue an appearance and persona that nature never intended. . . ." (Estes, 95.)

## The Corporate Drive for Autonomy

The magnitude and extent of the modern corporation's power have prompted some to ask whether any countervailing forces exist which are strong enough to prevent its misuse. The largest multinational companies are decreasingly dependent upon any one host country as a sole source of customers, workers, natural resources or sites for production or other operations. (Dow Corning, we recall, had operations in 22 countries on five continents and marketed its products in many more.) In achieving multinational status, these companies have become less accountable to governments, thus giving rise to a growing debate about the sources of legitimacy of the modern corporation.<sup>589</sup> "As long as corporations were perceived to be functioning for the good of the society in which they were based, their legitimacy was not fundamentally in question," writes Michael Gordy. In the United States, "corporate organization, albeit undemocratic, was nevertheless perceived to be under the control of a democratically elected government." The multinational company, by contrast, has effectively escaped the control of any single government.<sup>590</sup> Even four decades ago, Edward S. Mason asked,

Who selected these men, if not to rule over us, at least to exercise vast authority, and to whom are they responsible? The answer to the first question is quite clearly: they selected themselves. The answer to the second is, at best,

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<sup>589</sup>"It's eery to contemplate -- the idea of a multinational corporation roaming the globe, 'headquartering' itself in a new nation. . . . But that's what the \$5.3 billion Unocal is doing, as U.S. pressure heats up over its Burma pipeline and its complicity with the oppressive Burmese regime. . . . Unocal 'no longer considers itself a U.S. company,' corporate literature says, but a 'global energy company.'" ("Unocal Becomes a Company Without a Nation," *Business Ethics* [Jan.-Feb. 1998]: 6.)

<sup>590</sup>Michael Gordy, "Thinking About Corporate Legitimacy," in *The Legitimate Corporation*, 96.



nebulous. This, in a nutshell, constitutes the problem of legitimacy.<sup>591</sup>

More recently, these questions have been raised and analyzed theologically by liberation theorists, whose thinking concerning corporations is informed by a tradition of political inquiry focused on institutional power. Jose Miguez Bonino discerns a strong link between the "omnipresence of politics" and the "occupation of economic space in our modern world by the transnationals," many of which exercise power that stems from their control of a "scientific-technological complex that penetrates every area of life." Bonino contends that science *is* power and that such power rests as never before with commercial "groups or organizations which themselves need to be brought to some form of accountability to the human community."<sup>592</sup>

Researchers have shown that corporations actively seek to minimize external

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<sup>591</sup>Edward S. Mason, *The Corporation in Modern Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), 5. An answer to Mason's second question is suggested by Jackall: "Public opinion, of course, constitutes one of the only effective checks on the bureaucratic impulse to translate all moral issues into practical concerns." (Jackall, *Moral Mazes*, 162.)

<sup>592</sup>Jose Miguel Bonino, *Toward a Christian Political Ethics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 12-13. Bonino's use of the term "transnational" is thought to be roughly synonymous with "multinational." Though some writers make a distinction between these terms, they are used interchangeably for purposes of the present inquiry. David C. Korten defines the terms according to varying degrees of autonomy: "A multinational corporation takes on many national identities, maintaining relatively autonomous production and sales facilities in individual countries, establishing local roots and presenting itself in each locality as a good local citizen. Its global operations are linked to one another but are deeply integrated into the individual local economies in which they operate, and they do function to some extent as local citizens. The trend, however, is toward transnationalism, which involves the integration of a firm's local operations around vertically integrated supplier networks. . . . Although a transnational corporation may choose to claim local citizenship when that posture suits its purpose, local commitments are temporary, and it actively attempts to eliminate considerations of nationality in its effort to maximize the economies that centralized global procurement makes possible." (David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule The World* [San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1995], 125.)

accountability by waging "a constant struggle for autonomy and discretion,"<sup>593</sup> the ultimate goal of which is, in David C. Korten's estimation, "to act solely on the basis of profitability without regard to national or local consequences."<sup>594</sup> This tendency to resist external constraint and control includes a disregard of criticism, even that which is potentially constructive. "The need for criticism or opposition is an admission which is built into our liberal democracies, but which is remarkably absent from management thought," writes Francis Sejersted.<sup>595</sup>

What is the alternative to this extensive use of hidden power?

The most important way to meet this manipulative tendency is [for corporations] to accept it as the moral dilemma it is, and not to pretend that no moral problem exists. This admission, in itself, gives a form of humility which will colour practice.<sup>596</sup>

Sejersted offers no prescription for achieving such moral awareness; however, given the self-deceptive nature of disregarding criticism and "pretending that no moral problem exists," he proposes no simple task. For as Niebuhr rightly observes in his

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<sup>593</sup>J. Pfeffer and G. R. Salancik, *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Model* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 257. See also J. Hage, *Theories of Organizations: Form, Process and Transformation* (New York: Wiley, 1980); and H. Mintzberg, *Power in and Around Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983).

<sup>594</sup>Korten, 131. He cites a United States Congressional report which concludes that "many MNEs (multinational enterprises) are less concerned with advancing national goals than with pursuing objectives internal to the firm -- principally growth, profits, proprietary technology, strategic alliances, return on investment, and market power. . . ." (Office of Technology Assessment, U.S. Congress, *Multinationals and The National Interest: Playing by Different Rules* [Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1993], 1-4, in Korten, 126.)

<sup>595</sup>Francis Sejersted, "Managers and consultants as Manipulators: Reflections on the Suspension of Ethics," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 6,1 (1996): 81.

<sup>596</sup>*Ibid.*, 82.

response to Sir Arthur Salter, "His entire hope for recovery rests upon the possibility of developing a degree of economic disinterestedness among men of power which the entire history of mankind proves them incapable of acquiring."<sup>597</sup>

### The Corporation and The Individual Self

It is in the context of such powerful institutions that corporate employees spend sizable percentages of their waking hours and productive years. Like people in other types of employment, these individuals have capacities for moral agency and autonomy, and are likely to claim and espouse personal moral commitments derived from religious, family or other social influences outside the workplace. Yet the moral convictions of individuals are not necessarily reflected in the collective behaviors of the corporate groups to which they belong. Niebuhr emphasizes that while most individuals are capable of "preferring the advantages of others to their own," social institutions rarely have this capacity.<sup>598</sup> As Solomon puts it, "A large corporation. . . may be populated entirely with morally upstanding personnel and yet have an ethics problem."<sup>599</sup>

This is not to imply that corporations are incapable of acting ethically, nor should it suggest that the moral agency of individuals cannot affect corporate culture

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<sup>597</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xix. Elsewhere, he asserts that "even the most learned men would not be rational enough to penetrate and transform the unconscious and sub-rational sources of parochial loyalties, which determine the limits of communities and which prompt inhuman brutalities to other human beings. . . ." (Idem, "Man's Tribalism as One Source of His Inhumanity," 70.)

<sup>598</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xi.

<sup>599</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 144.

or decisions; however, there is little doubt that the corporation has far greater influence upon the individual than *vice versa*.<sup>600</sup> Theorists including Haight and Welch have shown that this dynamic tension between the will of the individual and the power of the group -- between freedom and determinism -- is essential to an understanding of self-deception in the social context.<sup>601</sup> Gradually but almost inevitably corporate employees become functionaries of a system which Robert Jackall believes expects them always to protect the *status quo* and, in so doing, to subordinate their moral convictions to the corporate urge for self-protection and self-preservation. This is the "enduring genius of the organizational form," wherein individuals may retain a diversity of private beliefs and motives as long as they conform to corporate standards in their work lives.<sup>602</sup> "As a result, bureaucratic work causes people to bracket, while at work, the moralities that they might hold outside the workplace or that they might adhere to privately and to follow instead the prevailing morality of the

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<sup>600</sup>Primary research among corporate managers finds that individuals perceive incongruity between their personal ethical commitments and the expectations of their employers. "In particular, many managers appear pressured to compromise their values to achieve organizational goals and to advance their careers. . . . [T]he conflict between personal values and ethics and those demanded for success may have dysfunctional consequences for both individuals and organizations." (Peter E. Mudrack and E. Sharon Mason, "Individual Ethical Beliefs and Perceived Organizational Interests," *Journal of Business Ethics* 15 [1996]: 851.) Other researchers have reached similar conclusions; see A. B. Carroll, "Linking Business Ethics to Behavior in Organizations," *SAM Advanced Management Journal* 43 (1978): 4-11; and D. J. Lincoln, M. M. Pressley and T. Little, "Ethical Beliefs and Personal Values of Top Level Executives," *Journal of Business Ethics* 10 (1982): 475-87.

<sup>601</sup>Haight, 125; Welch, *Conflicting Agendas: Personal Morality in Institutional Settings*, 49. See Chapter Two above.

<sup>602</sup>Robert Jackall, *Moral Mazes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

particular organizational situation."<sup>603</sup>

The logic and collective personality of the corporation can thus combine to outweigh and temporarily nullify the priorities, commitments and aspirations of individual workers.<sup>604</sup> Morality is institutionalized within a corporate social reality which, Selznick believes, "has its own dynamic and its own imperatives [and] lends texture to the organization." This reality forges a tribal "unity of persons" and a "commitment to ingrained, self-protective conduct."<sup>605</sup> Solomon describes the effects of corporate life on the individual:

As a culture, the corporation defines not only jobs and roles and rules for proper behavior; it also sets goals and establishes what counts as success. It circumscribes one's probable circle of friends, both directly, by setting up peer relationships and arranging daily face-to-face introductions, and indirectly, by cultivating characteristic ambitions, aspirations and expectations as well as the overall sense of competition and cooperation that defines so much of business life and ethics.<sup>606</sup>

By this description, the corporation qualifies as a "mimetic community" comprising a highly structured fabric of beliefs which "conspires to blur one's sense of individuality and to facilitate one's self-deception."<sup>607</sup> We will explore this possibility further in the

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<sup>603</sup>Ibid. Cf., Donaldson and Lorsch, 81-82. See Chapter Two above.

<sup>604</sup>Thiselton maintains that acting in behalf of the group "invites what Niebuhr calls 'that self-deception and hypocrisy [which] is an unvarying element in the moral life of all human beings.'" (Thiselton, 138; quoting Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 95.) "In the name of some corporate or social entity they devise programmes and implement policies of which, on a purely individual level, they would be ashamed." (Ibid, 137.)

<sup>605</sup>Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth*, 235. See also Peter Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, NJ: Anchor Books, 1966).

<sup>606</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 139.

<sup>607</sup>Wilshire, "Mimetic Engulfment and Self-deception," 398-399. See Chapter

sections below.

### The Corporation as Community

Although systems theorists and some sociologists have tended to see the influence of corporate culture as an insidious process of indoctrination shaping the thoughts and behaviors of employees who neither voluntarily nor cognitively participate, other thinkers have countered that corporate life provides a sense of belonging which is actually sought and embraced by many individuals who yearn to be part of a community of meaning or who wish to "'drown out' the call of their 'conscience' by fleeing into. . . life in the crowd."<sup>608</sup> White, like Taylor and MacIntyre, points to the disintegration of a common tradition (as a source of shared values) and its replacement by "many traditions *which are themselves largely insecure and isolated*. In other words it is not only the individual self that is fragmented, but the credibility and sustainability of traditions: the very medicine which could heal us is itself seeping out from broken bottles."<sup>609</sup> Similarly, Carver Yu connects the Western individual's yearning for community to a search for self which relates to "his ontological uprootedness, to the fragmentation of his personal identity and to the failure of human relation. . . .

To have a distinct personal identity, one has to maintain a distinct and unified structure of meaning, for one exists in and through one's intellectual and emotional commitment to that structure of meaning. When the structure of

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Two above. Cf. Donaldson and Lorsch, *Decision Making at the Top: The Shaping of Strategic Decision*, 81-82; and McFadyen, 239.

<sup>608</sup>Kipp, 275. See Chapter Two above.

<sup>609</sup>White, *Paying Attention to People*, 80.

meaning is fragmented, one's personal identity becomes ambiguous. At the same time, personal identity and human relations are dialectically in and through one's relation with others, and one's personal identity emerges also in the context of human relations. Thus the failure of meaningful relations is symptomatic of the problem of personal identity. . . .<sup>610</sup>

One source of "stable and dependable personal identities," McFadyen proposes, is the predictability and "routinisation of relations" in social institutions. Such structures represent the "ossification and institutionalisation of a shared history of communication into a stable form."<sup>611</sup> For many individuals, the modern corporation has emerged as an important meaning structure and source of stability, one which Michael Goldberg likens to a religious community, or "corporate cult." It is "more cherished, more venerated, than any other modern institution -- including churches and synagogues."<sup>612</sup> Echoing Solomon, he declares that at the end of the twentieth century,

some U.S. corporations may constitute the closest thing our society has to community. Such companies form communities of their members by providing them with common goals, and common standards for marking success and failure. Unlike most other associations in contemporary American life, ranging from men's clubs to marriages, the corporate community's existence depends on neither 'mutual admiration' nor a 'spirit of volunteerism'; businesspeople who find themselves in a corporate setting are not necessarily nor even primarily together because they like each other.<sup>613</sup>

Instead, it is by participating in the history and *stories* of the corporate

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<sup>610</sup>Carver T. Yu, *Being and Relation. A Theological Critique of Western Dualism and Individualism* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), 45; quoted in White, *Paying Attention to People*, 81.

<sup>611</sup>McFadyen, 233-34.

<sup>612</sup>Michael Goldberg, "Corporate Culture and The Corporate Cult," in *A Virtuous Life in Business*, ed. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houk (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield), 30.

<sup>613</sup>Ibid, 30.

community that many individuals gain a sense of identity and existential meaning. MacIntyre explains, "I can only answer the question 'What am I to do' if I can answer the question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'"<sup>614</sup> Personal identity is not formed in isolation; therefore, "all attempts to elucidate [it]. . . independently and in isolation from notions of narrative" are bound to fail,<sup>615</sup> as "the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity."<sup>616</sup> As we saw, McFadyen concurs, submitting that individual identity is formed largely by the "sedimentation" over time of information from relationships in which the self has participated. However, like White, he cautions that MacIntyre and other moral philosophers have erred in locating the identity of the self *solely* in human relations, for the self is a part of God's history in which "God's Word to humankind is heard and responded to within the limitations of specific and concrete social structures of communication such that there is some intrinsic relation between divine and human words."<sup>617</sup> As preceding chapters have shown, Relational views of the self

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<sup>614</sup>MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 201. Cf. H. R. Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 63. "In our responsibility, we attempt to answer the question: 'What shall I do?' by raising as the prior question: 'What is going on?' or 'What is being done to me?' . . . ."

<sup>615</sup>Ibid, 203.

<sup>616</sup>Ibid, 205.

<sup>617</sup>McFadyen, 59. He later writes, "If persons are the concrete manifestations of their relations then they cannot be known apart from them. They cannot, then, know themselves except as they are known in their relations. Communication oriented to understanding is not just an orientation on the other but upon oneself, so that one's identity and presence in the relation may become more genuine. In this process both partners may change by comprehending the understanding which others have of them and of their communication. . . . [O]ne's 'self' cannot be a direct phenomenon of experience. What we experience is the communicated experience God and others have of our 'selves.' Thus self-identity or self-understanding is a sedimented interpretation of our perception of others' experiences and understandings borne to us



-- including the so-called narrative self -- contrast sharply with the Rational, anthropocentric assertion that one can be whatever one wishes to be, quite apart from the influence of the social features of one's existence -- or the story of which one is a part.

Among the variety of communities which might be said to be story-based (families, schools, sporting teams, fraternal organizations, military units, etc.), only the church can rival the corporation as an institution where narrative plays such a central and defining role.<sup>618</sup> Many corporations, "like vibrant religious communities," have a powerful narrative tradition which "not only informs us but, displaying a vision to guide our present and future, also *forms us* in the way we envisage our world."<sup>619</sup> Charles S. McCoy compares the function of narrative in the corporate community to its function in the faith community:

Stories are a fundamental way in which humans relate to one another, interpret themselves and their communities to one another, and shape their actions and interactions in community. The Bible is made up for the most part of narratives and recitals of various kinds by which the Hebrew and Christian communities understand themselves, the world as created and governed by God, and the appropriate responses they are called to make within the divine and human context. . . . The same is true for other communities, for tribes in ancient Europe and present-day Africa, for nations whose history provides continuity and identity, and for organizations whose culture and character are

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in their communication. So the way we see ourselves is related to the way we experience and interpret others as seeing, understanding and experiencing us. I am therefore defined in my relations because I am for myself only as I am for God and others. (Though my understanding of others' understanding of me may be mistaken.)" (Ibid, 125.)

<sup>618</sup>See Alan Wilkins, "Organizational Stories as an Expression of Management Philosophy" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1978).

<sup>619</sup>Goldberg, "Corporate Culture and Corporate Cult," 35, 43.

communicated in communal stories.<sup>620</sup>

### Managing the Corporate Story

A distinctive feature of corporate narrative is that it seldom develops spontaneously or without management's direction. Unlike most other narrative communities, large companies invest heavily in systematic, professionally managed "story-telling" enterprises usually known as departments of public relations or corporate communications. John Swanson, creator of Dow Corning's ethics program, was an executive in such an office and was charged with oversight of communication from management to employees. Such intracompany communications may be carried by an array of media: newsletters, electronic mail, magazines, executive presentations, annual reports, computer-based "intranet" sites, even company television stations. Corporate story telling also involves elaborate programs of external communication designed to influence the behaviors and opinions of a variety of publics. The news media are often the channels of choice for the dissemination of public messages; therefore, public relations officials devote considerable resources to writing and distributing the corporate narrative (i.e., press releases), arranging news interviews for executives, responding to inquiries from journalists, and monitoring coverage of the company in national and international publications and broadcast outlets.

The strategic management and conveyance of corporate information is devoted

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<sup>620</sup>Charles S. McCoy, "Narrative Theology and Business Ethics: Story-Based Management of Values" in *A Virtuous Life in Business*, ed. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houk (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 58-59.

primarily to eliciting favorable responses from others, including employees, by encouraging them to perceive the company as it would like to be perceived. The public relations enterprise may thereby contribute to corporate self-deception by manipulating the internal and external social environments in order to structure the information these environments produce. Corporate story tellers create and manage the "self-presentational feedback loops" which Gilbert and Cooper have shown can alter others' conceptions of us in order that we may reciprocally convince ourselves of the validity of their impressions.<sup>621</sup> Jackall observes that "most corporations try to get their stories out on a regular sustained basis" and, like Dow Corning, tend to intensify these efforts during crisis periods.<sup>622</sup>

Those imbued with the bureaucratic ethos thus make every effort to mold public opinion to allow the continued uninterrupted operation of business. Moreover, since public opinion inevitably affects to some extent managers' own conceptions of their work and of themselves, public goodwill, even that which managers themselves create, becomes an important part of managers' own valued self-images. In this sense, both moral issues and social identities become issues of public relations.<sup>623</sup>

The corporation invites employees to see themselves as participants in a larger narrative in which they share in the achievement of common, instrumental goals. "Stories, by giving us a vision of communal quests toward some end accompanied by the requisite practices and virtues, thereby give us our 'values.'"<sup>624</sup> The corporate narrative becomes the individual's own story as it molds his or her beliefs and self-

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<sup>621</sup>Gilbert and Cooper, "Social Psychological Strategies of Self-Deception," in *Self-Deception and Self-Understanding*, cited in Chapter Two above.

<sup>622</sup>Jackall, *Moral Mazes*, 161.

<sup>623</sup>Ibid, 162.

<sup>624</sup>Goldberg, "Corporate Culture and The Corporate Cult," 31.

conception.

At Dow Corning, the defining story was one of remarkable scientific and economic accomplishment. The often-repeated narrative made icons of talented scientists who collectively invented more than 5,000 products and secured 4,900 patents in the relatively brief span of five decades. The most successful of these scientists were revered as corporate saints and enshrined in "something akin to a hall of fame. One long passageway that connects two buildings [housing the corporate headquarters] is lined with 14-by-20-inch portraits of chemists, with a summary of the individual's contribution under each one."<sup>625</sup> Financial success and rapid growth also were integral to the Dow Corning story,<sup>626</sup> as was the special pride the company took in its ethics program. The corporate narrative concerning the latter was canonized in 1984 when researchers from Harvard Business School wrote a series of case studies that lauded the ethics program as a model for corporate America.

Ironically, despite the fact that much of the modern corporation's communication serves ostensibly Relational purposes, the use of well-crafted narrative to influence employees and external audiences may actually betray a manipulative tendency to view human beings as means rather than ends, a perspective which Taylor calls "the kind of rationality we draw on when we calculate the most economical application of means to a given end. Maximum efficiency, the best cost-output ratio,

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<sup>625</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 25.

<sup>626</sup>Byrne reports that sales growth was so important to the corporate story that the chief executive officer in 1986 "commemorated the event by giving every employee -- some 7,800 -- a small Steuben glass American Eagle that, even though it was made by parent Corning, still cost the company \$125 each. At the time it was the largest order for a single piece of Steubenware in Corning's history." (Ibid, 26.)

is its measure of success."<sup>627</sup> The case of Dow Corning is brought to mind with Taylor's argument that "runaway extensions of instrumental reason" are exemplified by a "medical practice that forgets the patient as a person, that takes no account of how the treatment relates to his or her story and thus of the determinants of hope and despair, that neglects the essential rapport between caregiver and patient. . . ."<sup>628</sup>

When corporate narrative takes the form of planned monologue rather than open dialogue, true communication is lost and human beings are reduced to "'subjects' of an objective, imposed process of life; or, rather, they become subject to this form of life, and so are merely points of reception of an objective social process. . . ."<sup>629</sup> Ellul would warn that corporate propaganda operations facilitate self-deception and self-alienation by building "monolithic individuals. . . [and eliminating] inner conflicts, tensions, self-criticism, self-doubt."<sup>630</sup>

The alternative proposed by McFadyen is institutional openness. Although his theological account does not address the corporation *per se*, his description of totalitarian societies sums up several characteristics of the modern corporation which have been identified by a variety of thinkers:

. . . people are totally subject to the . . . institutions which contain the meaning of their existence; personal identity is then reducible to membership of and location in them -- the role, meaning and value one is ascribed by them. Similarly, anything or anyone who is outside the sphere of their influence, determination and regulation will be regarded either as meaningless or as posing the threat of disorder. . . . So the recognition of those outside the

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<sup>627</sup>Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 5.

<sup>628</sup>Ibid.

<sup>629</sup>McFadyen, 238.

<sup>630</sup>Ellul, *Propaganda*, 162. See Chapter Two above.

sphere of an absolute social structure . . . is severely restricted. This makes their admittance to and participation in the normal processes of communication problematic. Both external and internal information are restricted where they might contain alternative information and social codes which might have socially critical implications. This is, then, the closed communication context of a society turned in upon itself. The institutionalised 'memory' of the society will be structured according to [its] needs. . . to maintain itself. The past history of this particular means of ordering social life will be recalled, glorified and maintained. For the future must repeat the past and present since anything else is perceived as threatening the loss of meaning and order.<sup>631</sup>

### Corporate Pride and Self-Deception

We turn now to a more explicit analysis of the problem of self-deception in the modern corporation. To begin, it will be helpful to review the working definition that was proposed in the preceding chapter. The following conclusions were drawn from our interdisciplinary conceptual analysis of self-deception in the moral context:

- (1) Self-deception *does* occur and is a pervasive feature of the common life.
- (2) Self-deception obtains when one chooses willfully, but not necessarily consciously, to hold a belief about oneself or one's situation in reality, while simultaneously knowing that the belief is not true. The self-deceiver may have a veiled awareness that he is holding a false belief, yet he ensures that his knowledge of the truth is less accessible than the false belief.
- (3) In self-deception, the deceiver and the deceived, the victim and perpetrator, are one.
- (4) Self-deception may entail a willful ignorance and self-partiality which extends to circumstances, activities and people closely related to the self. The self-deceiver may refuse to turn an eye toward information that would dispute her

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<sup>631</sup>McFadyen, 237.

preferred conception of herself or her situation. This often includes a disregard of reproof and instruction.

- (5) Self-deceivers often maintain continuing moral or theological commitments that conflict with their actions or beliefs. As illustrated by the story of the biblical David, the self-deceptive project may actually be occasioned by a desire to maintain one's perception of oneself as a moral person.
- (6) Self-deception often involves interpersonal deception, as the self-deceiver seeks to create allies who, once deceived, may help to reinforce the deceiver's false beliefs.
- (7) The principal motivation for self-deception is human pride. In the fields of philosophy and psychology pride is synonymous with self-esteem and self-sufficiency, which are deemed to be worthy goals. In theology, however, this approval is withdrawn, for pride is defined as an idolatrous self-love which denies the truth of one's sinfulness, creatureliness and need for repentance and new life in relationship with God.

If it is true that pride motivates self-deception, the modern corporation provides ideal conditions for it to thrive: an environment where the drive for power, "self-sufficiency and self-mastery" can "blind the eyes of moral insight."<sup>632</sup> Of the forms of pride proposed by Niebuhr, three -- those related to power, morality and intellect -- are endemic to corporate life. The corporation's enormous power, described above, is "one of the most difficult problems in business ethics,"<sup>633</sup> for as

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<sup>632</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 188, 194. See Chapter Three above.

<sup>633</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 47.

Niebuhr demonstrates, "the easy subservience of reason to prejudice and passion, and the consequent persistence of irrational egoism, particularly in group behavior, make social conflict an inevitability in human history. . . ." <sup>634</sup> Thiselton notes that Niebuhr "was fully aware of self-deception in corporate structures for purposes of power," adding that "where truth has become largely absorbed into structures and spheres of power, argument and reason *collapse into a rhetoric of force*. . . ." <sup>635</sup> In the case of Dow Corning, a prideful self-partiality is revealed most clearly through inordinate claims of righteousness and a refusal to accept even the possibility of moral failure, scientific error or other weaknesses.

### Moral Pride

Numerous published statements suggest a measure of moral pride within the company's management. Phil Brooks, a Dow Corning manager in Hong Kong, wrote to Chief Executive Officer Jack Ludington to ask, "What is the need [for a code of conduct] if we already believe (as I do) that we are morally, legally and ethically correct in all aspects of our business conduct?" Ludington, too, was convinced that the company's employees "would not intentionally do anything questionable and would even blow the whistle if they learned of any actual wrongdoing within the company." Likewise, Silas Braley, the chemist who started the company's breast implant business, declared, "I can say, without any qualification, that never in my 30 years at Dow Corning did I ever know of anyone doing anything illegal, unethical or

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<sup>634</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, xx.

<sup>635</sup>Thiselton, 134-35.



immoral."<sup>636</sup> His confidence was shared by 92 percent of Dow Corning employees who, in surveys taken after the company declared bankruptcy, agreed with the statement, "Dow Corning is an ethical company."<sup>637</sup>

Business ethicist Daryl Koehn observes that this "certainty seems rather misplaced, given that the company experienced a good deal of resistance to some parts of the code [of conduct] from some of its managers who believed that the code was making DCC uncompetitive."<sup>638</sup>

More generally, such certainty on the part of management evinces an attitude that is antithetical to ethical reasoning. As Aristotle puts it, the "stuff" of ethical discourse is controversy because practical matters do not admit of the same degree of certainty as mathematical or scientific subjects. To reason ethically, therefore, consists at least in part in being willing to submit one's beliefs to the scrutiny and challenges of others. If agents begin with the position that they and their company have done no wrong, this very process of discussion is shortcircuited. This shutting off of the possibility of discussion may itself be an ethical wrong, yet this possibility cannot get raised in this atmosphere of certainty.<sup>639</sup>

St. Augustine had a similar self-confidence, later lamenting, "My sin was all the more incurable because I thought I was not a sinner."<sup>640</sup> Dow Corning's refusal to concede even the possibility of moral imperfection may thus signal the presence of self-deception, for "If we say we are without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not

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<sup>636</sup>These quotations appear in Daryl Koehn, "Where and Why Did Business Ethicists Go Wrong," in *Perspectives in Business Ethics* (Chicago: Irwin/McGraw-Hill, 1998), 209.

<sup>637</sup>Robert Woods, Manager of Human Resources, Dow Corning Corp., interview by the author. Chapter One above.

<sup>638</sup>Koehn, 209.

<sup>639</sup>Ibid.

<sup>640</sup>St. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 28. See Chapter Three above.

in us" (I John 1:8).<sup>641</sup>

Self-deception also is suggested by the company's rationalizations of its decisions to enter and remain in the breast implant business. Rationalization, Audi shows, is "one of the facets of behavior in which self-deception shows its true character"<sup>642</sup>; it is a self-protective attempt to "make otherwise unreasonable behavior seem appropriate",<sup>643</sup> often employing the following strategies:

1. Offering a reason -- or excuse -- for one's action (or belief, desire, motive, emotion), but not actually explaining why one did it.
2. Attempting to justify an action that others might criticize as unwise or immoral.
3. Providing a reason that is at least *prima facie* rational.
4. Providing a conscious rationale in hindsight for decisions that were made intuitively.
5. Serving a self-defensive purpose.

Rationalizations facilitate self-deception by helping maintain the veil between conscious and unconscious knowledge and "reveal much about the agent; what he values, believes and wants; even what ego need is responsible for his self-

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<sup>641</sup>It is not the aim of this analysis to ascribe self-deception to Dow Corning or its employees, for it would be impossible to do so with any certainty. Rather, it is our intention in examining the facts of the case to consider the possibility of self-deception as one explanation of certain actions and statements.

<sup>642</sup>Audi, "Self-Deception, Rationalization and Reasons for Acting," 93.

<sup>643</sup>*Ibid.*, 97. See also Sanford's account connecting self-deception and rationalization, but attributing self-deception to misunderstanding of one's psychological attitudes and motivations. (David H. Sanford, "Self-Deception as Rationalization," in *Perspectives on Self-Deception*, 157.)

deception."<sup>644</sup> When moral pride is involved, the ego need is to see oneself as a good person, despite evidence that one is responsible for a negative outcome.

Rationalization can take many forms, but the two types proposed by Snyder are particularly applicable to the case at hand.<sup>645</sup> The first, *reframing performance* (a maneuver aimed at lessening the negativity of an action by redefining its purpose, motivation or outcome), is suggested by the company's claims that it had a "moral obligation" to serve cancer patients and women with small or asymmetrical breasts.<sup>646</sup>

The company sought to redefine its motivation for manufacturing breast implants, from a profit-making pursuit to an altruistic contribution to women's well-being and women's rights, describing the products as meeting a "very real public health need"<sup>647</sup> (although 80 percent of the patients who elected to receive implants did so solely for cosmetic purposes). Such statements are consistent with Niebuhr's theory that the most common manifestation of self-deception in powerful groups is "the conscious and unconscious identification of their special interests with general interests and universal values. . . ."<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>644</sup>Ibid, 117.

<sup>645</sup>C. R. Snyder, "Collaborative Companions: The Relationship of Self-Deception and Excuse-Making," 35.

<sup>646</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning Will Continue to Provide Implant Information Package; Temporarily Suspends Hot Line Discussions."

<sup>647</sup>Dow Corning Wright, news release, "90 Percent of Women Polled Want Government Not to Deny Their Right to Choose Breast Implants."

<sup>648</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 117. Cf. Carol Agocs, "Institutionalized Resistance to Organizational Change: Denial, Inaction and Repression," *Journal of Business Ethics* 16 (June II, 1997): 924. "One of the prerogatives of a position of power is the comfort of assuming that one's own perception of reality *is* reality and that one's own interests are universal interests.

Snyder's second form of rationalization, *transforming responsibility* (a strategy of blaming one's actions on circumstances beyond one's control or responsibility), may be seen in the company's attempts to shift all responsibility for informed consent and patient health to plastic surgeons, asserting that its own responsibilities ended with the sale of the product. Dow Corning did not know, and apparently did not want to know, who the patients were.<sup>649</sup> Likewise, the company attempted to shift responsibility for product safety to the federal government, which it insisted should have required more tests if it deemed them necessary.

### Intellectual Pride

Intellectual pride also is perceptible in Dow Corning's actions, especially in the company's responses to external critics. Niebuhr describes this form of pride as "finite knowledge, gained from a particular perspective" that "pretends to be final and ultimate knowledge."<sup>650</sup> The self-deception which springs from intellectual pride is apparent in the degree to which one attacks a foe with accusations of errors in an attempt to "hide the finiteness and determinateness" of one's own position from oneself. It often includes derogating one's opponents and discounting information that conflicts with one's own position. These self-deceptive practices, also identified by Snyder as means of reframing performance, are consistent with Koehn's description of

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These assumptions easily give rise to the myth that there is universal agreement on assumptions that are central to the culture of the organization, and in terms of which decisions are legitimated. . . . [Deliberate] ignorance and denial may be preferred to learning and awareness. . . ."

<sup>649</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 84.

<sup>650</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 194. See Chapter Two above.

executives at Dow Corning:

Key players at DCC are certain that the breast implants they helped to design and manufacture are absolutely safe. Indeed, they are so certain of their moral rectitude that they dismiss as 'crazy' all of the women who think they have been harmed by their implants.<sup>651</sup>

Similarly, the company issued public statements attacking news reports which it called "grossly exaggerating,"<sup>652</sup> "sensationalism," "tabloid journalism" and "inflammatory." It boasted of its intellectual superiority, declaring that "as a science-based company, we must register our total disgust with this entire process."<sup>653</sup> When a salesman's internal memorandum expressing concern about implant safety was made public, executives dismissed it as "overdramatizing" a minor matter.<sup>654</sup> And as a growing body of scientific evidence questioned the safety of its products, the company continued to rely on its own scientists and their very limited research, refusing to fund new, independent studies.<sup>655</sup>

These responses are not atypical of the way corporations react to criticism, as Jackall shows: "The subversion of an opponent's credibility takes many forms" and frequently involves attempts to "question the particular scientific data that underpin a position that counters one's own interests."<sup>656</sup> We recall Swanson's characterization

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<sup>651</sup>Koehn, "Where and Why Did Business Ethicists Go Wrong?", 209-10.

<sup>652</sup>M. E. Nelson, letter to the editor, *Ms.*

<sup>653</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning and Its Employees Call San Francisco Jury Award Regarding Breast Implants 'Outrageous'; Characterize Breast Implant Debate as Sensationalistic and Politicized."

<sup>654</sup>Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 78.

<sup>655</sup>*Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>656</sup>Jackall, *Moral Mazes*, 174.

of the company as "scientifically arrogant. . . very arrogant. . . . The attitude was, 'We know what's best, we don't need someone from the outside telling us what to do.'"<sup>657</sup> (We will return to this discussion below in the section on The Self-Deception of Scientism.)

#### Four Types of Corporate Self-Deception

Having postulated that the powerful and prideful modern corporation is potentially fertile ground for self-deception, we will again consider the four theologically derived categories proposed in Chapter Three: tribalism, legalism, moral relativism and scientism. Each of these will be reviewed in light of the experience of Dow Corning with regard to silicone gel-filled mammary prostheses.

#### The Self-Deception of Tribalism

We have used the term *tribalism* to refer to group pride and the collective form of self-deception that obtains when others are similarly engaged, as when members of a group act in concert to produce evidence supporting a false belief while collectively suppressing or refusing to acknowledge evidence that might contradict it. This tribal tendency, Niebuhr shows, increases with the size and power of the group, and is maintained by bureaucratic systems that reproduce shared mores and attitudes through structured interactions, communication and socially routinized patterns. The conclusions of previous chapters and the above analysis of the corporation's influence on the individual self reveal that the *self-deception of tribalism* in the corporate

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<sup>657</sup>Swanson, interview by author. See Chapter One above.

context is characterized by:

1. Self-protective responses to perceived threats to organizational power, autonomy or group self-esteem, accompanied by a "we group" versus "they group" mentality.
2. Manipulation of information in the internal and external environments, such that preferred beliefs of the corporate group are affirmed while opposing views are avoided, suppressed or discredited.<sup>658</sup>
3. Deification of the group, with its dedication to common goals, as a perceived center of moral life; for the corporation's size and power alone are sufficient to give its members the "illusion that they are moral."<sup>659</sup>

In his psychological account of corporate life, Howard S. Schwartz concludes that business is ruled by the "law of the jungle," where an "us against them mentality" condones the imperative of protecting the group at all costs.<sup>660</sup> At Dow Corning, executives were "in general agreement that the threat [was] external,"<sup>661</sup> describing criticism from outside the company as an "affront to more than 8,000 Dow Corning employees."<sup>662</sup> We saw above that Dow Corning's defensive posture was consistent

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<sup>658</sup>Cf., W. Ouchi, "Markets, Bureaucrats and Clans," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 25 (1980): 124-41. Ouchi describes this tribal tendency in organizations as "clan control."

<sup>659</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 49.

<sup>660</sup>Howard S. Schwartz, *Narcissistic Process and Corporate Decay* (New York: New York University Press, 1990). Cf. Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 49.

<sup>661</sup>Woods, interview by author.

<sup>662</sup>Dow Corning Corp., news release, "Dow Corning and Its Employees Call San Francisco Jury Award Regarding Breast Implants 'Outrageous'; Characterize Breast

with a principal feature of self-deception, the tendency to disregard reproof and instruction through rationalizations and by derogating opponents.<sup>663</sup>

The self-protective tendencies of corporations are seen most clearly in institutionalized resistance to change, especially when change is proposed by the powerless or disadvantaged. Organizations are said to resist change for reasons including perceived threats to power, conformity to norms and blindness to alternatives.<sup>664</sup> "Resistance is understood to be a process of refusal by decision makers to be influenced or affected by those who advocate change in established practices, routines, goals or norms . . . ."<sup>665</sup> Organizational resistance can be a self-deceptive process which, according to Carol Agocs, is typified by denial of the credibility of both the message and the messenger, which often extends to attacks on

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Implant Debate as Sensationalistic and Politicized."

<sup>663</sup>At one point, the corporate legal counsel ordered members of the medical staff to destroy all copies of an independent research report which indicated that rupture rates were much higher than the company had publicly acknowledged. While this was a defensive measure intended to remove the possibility of such documents being discovered by plaintiffs' attorneys, it also had the effect of suppressing information that threatened to undermine the company's preferred story and self-image.

<sup>664</sup>N. Tichy, *Managing Strategic Change: Technical, Political and Cultural Dynamics* (New York: John Wiley Press, 1983), 344-60. Cf., Bonino, 108: "As we have seen, the question of power inevitably crops up in any discussion of change. Since social structures once established are recalcitrant about change to any degree, and the power entrenched in the obsolete structures has to be overcome, a countervailing power *for* change must necessarily be built. Historically, this has always meant a mix, variously proportioned, of three constant terms: (a) the pressure for change (from below); consent -- or resistance -- to change (from the top); and (c) conflict. The human cost of change is determined by the delicate balance of these three terms." In the case of Dow Corning, the "countervailing power for change" was in the lawsuits of thousands of women which succeeded in bringing the force of judicial and regulatory action to bear on the company.

<sup>665</sup>Agocs, 918.



the messenger. These patterns are visible in Dow Corning's responses to opponents' demands that it suspend production of implants. "Advocates who present a case for change in behalf of marginalized groups often find that their knowledge and expertise [are] discredited and dismissed. . . ." Their claims are seen as "exaggerated, biased, self-interested, irrational or untruthful."<sup>666</sup> Agocs' depiction of institutionalized denial is an apt characterization of Dow Corning's management, which also believed

. . . that change advocates must 'prove it' over and over again, in many different ways, and as time advances and conditions are alleged to change. Demands for more studies, more data, different data, and studies by different analysts are a familiar form of administrative orbiting that is a strategy of denial. The evidence of the need for change is never satisfactory; it is never presented in the preferred way. As change agents are kept busy with the role of 'chronic convincer,' their very persistence turns them into 'chronic complainers' who can be marginalized and dismissed.<sup>667</sup>

Institutionalized denial of the credibility of the messenger may also be expressed in personal attacks on change advocates in the form of public statements, innuendo transmitted in private conversation, or avoidance and marginalization. The objective of this activity is to stigmatize and thereby discredit the change advocate; to disqualify him or her from full social acceptance. . . . Suggestions that an individual should not be taken seriously because she is unbalanced, too ideological, irrational, too focused on a particular issue, or for other personal reasons, damage her effectiveness. . .

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Change advocates *within* organizations may be treated similarly, as they are excluded from the tribal "we group" and suspected of being in league with the external "they group."<sup>669</sup> They are "outsiders and trouble makers whose message need not be taken

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<sup>666</sup>Ibid, 922-23.

<sup>667</sup>Ibid, 924.

<sup>668</sup>Ibid, 926.

<sup>669</sup>Swanson recalls, "'Corporate political correctness says that once you reach consensus in a group, everyone should support the group view. . . . But listening to the minority opinion is extraordinarily valuable in many cases, even when it borders

seriously. This kind of institutionalized resistance is predictable in organizations in which decision making authorities constitute a homogenous and cohesive group whose members share many social characteristics and values,"<sup>670</sup> as at Dow Corning's headquarters where several executives attempted unsuccessfully to initiate discussions about product safety.<sup>671</sup>

Solomon describes a "pathology of corporations" which includes in its symptomology a tendency to resist change through moral defensiveness, falsification to prove that the company is right, historical revisionism, and addiction to practices it knows are unproductive or even destructive. Like Dow Corning, it "holds on to a product or subsidiary," or a way of managing a problem, despite the fact that it has long ago proved to be fruitless. And because of the "tendency to historical revision and self-fulfilling prophecies, it is impossible to break through the addiction. (Think of a compulsive smoker: 'But they've never really *proved* that smoking causes cancer.')<sup>672</sup>

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on allegations of disloyalty. I was trying to be constructive in my time left with the company by being, in a sense, disloyal -- disloyal only because I disagreed with our management.'" (Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 147.)

<sup>670</sup>Ibid, 926.

<sup>671</sup>Examples of this tendency to place internal dissenters outside the group are also seen in corporate documents of the Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, where one internal memorandum warned, "Cigarettes have not been shown to cause any disease. Thus, any statement by responsible and informed employees subject to a contrary interpretation could only result from carelessness. Therefore, employees. . . should be informed of the possible consequences of careless statements on this subject." (Peter Hanauer, et. al., "Lawyer Control of Internal Scientific Research to Protect Against Products Liability Lawsuits." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 274[3] [19 July 1995]: 235-40.)

<sup>672</sup>Solomon, 189-90.

Corporate tribalism also is typified by a self-contained, sometimes narcissistic world view which does not require justification for its actions on any grounds other than its own. In multinational companies this world view is encouraged by the limited external accountability discussed above and, in the case of Dow Corning, by an unusual financial structure which "led to a lack of accountability to any external stakeholders, including women with implants."<sup>673</sup> Another inherent factor insulating Dow Corning from the concerns of implant recipients was the company's male-dominated culture where no women held leadership positions as officers or directors during the years when mammary prostheses were produced and marketed. According to K. E. Weick's Principle of Requisite Variety, drawn largely from systems theory, diversity in management enhances organizational effectiveness by increasing the likelihood that the organization will be able to recognize external stakeholders as part of the environment. Weick maintains that environments are "enacted" rather than "objective" and that their attributes are perceived differently depending upon managers' race, sex or other characteristics. Thus, the fact that Dow Corning's leaders were nearly all male could have made it more difficult for them to recognize that the company had responsibilities for the health of implant recipients, who were women.<sup>674</sup> In addition, Dow Corning's corporate headquarters was itself ensconced in an insular environment: the small and homogenous community of Midland, where 80

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<sup>673</sup>Swanson, interview by author. Unlike most other U.S. corporations of its size, Dow Corning was not accountable to the public securities markets. As a joint-venture of Dow Chemical and Corning, the company answered only to its parent corporations, which were themselves publicly traded. See Chapter One, above.

<sup>674</sup>K. E. Weick, *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (2nd ed.) (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 188-95.

percent of residents were employed directly or indirectly by Dow Chemical or Dow Corning, and where the influence of the outside world was seldom felt in a direct manner. In such a setting, the company could manipulate information and communication to a greater degree than might have been possible in a larger, more diverse community. This is seen in management's apparent disregard for documented correspondence from independent researchers and Dow Corning employees questioning the safety of implants.<sup>675</sup>

Thus insulated from implant recipients and outside critics, the company systematically avoided negative information and worked to shape beliefs and attitudes in its external environment. At times, this included attempts to deceive others, as the civil courts and investigators found. (Recall that self-deception frequently involves interpersonal deception.) These attempts ranged from instructing sales representatives on how to prevent customers from noticing gel bleed during product demonstrations, to omitting potentially important information from pamphlets for patients, to altering research documents and laboratory tests. Despite courtroom decisions finding the company guilty of fraud for withholding vital information, management waged an aggressive public campaign to win support for its position. Subsequent employee polls and executive statements suggest the possibility that this sustained campaign of defensive communication reinforced internal belief in the corporate position. Public relations executive Swanson, who had access to much of the information questioning implant safety, remained confident in the products until well after his wife was

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<sup>675</sup>Correspondence included letters from researchers Vinnick (University of Chicago) and Heggors (University of Texas), and employees Rathjen, Talcott, Schnabel, Leach and various sales representatives. See Chapter One above.

diagnosed with an illness potentially associated with them. Could Swanson have deceived himself through his own efforts to defend the products? Jackall would not doubt it:

. . . even public relations men and women can become dazzled by their own technique. The magic lantern produces both light and shadows. What matters on the screen are convincing impressions of reality, plausible representations, and a conformity to conventional manners, faces and tastes. The images cast upon the screen do not so much displace substance, notions of truth, and principles as leave them in the dim periphery of the theater. Public relations becomes public-relations-mindedness, a circuitous institutional logic that makes placating various publics the principal and, at times, the only goal.<sup>676</sup>

Finally, corporate tribalism is suggested by the company's self-partiality and moral pride as discussed in the section above. Studies show that individuals believe they are far more moral than co-workers, superiors or managers in other companies.<sup>677</sup>

At Dow Corning, moral pride may have been encouraged, however unintentionally, by the company's continuous communication to employees about its highly regarded ethics program.

### The Self-Deception of Legalism

We proposed in Chapter Three that corporate self-deception is commonly manifest as legalism, which is understood theologically as a form of moral pride, or self-righteousness, where one sees only the ways in which one fulfills the law and blinds oneself to any moral obligations not legally prescribed. As we reexamine the *self-deception of legalism*, it is thus necessary to address first the question of whether

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<sup>676</sup>Jackall, 189.

<sup>677</sup>Thomas Tyson, "Believing that Everyone Else is Less Ethical: Implications for Work Behavior and Ethics Instruction," *Journal of Business Ethics* 9 (1990): 715-21.

corporations can be said to have moral obligations beyond what the law requires of them. A full discussion of the moral obligations of corporations is well beyond the scope of this study; however, it will be helpful briefly to review several arguments relevant to the debate about the extent of such obligations.

In preceding chapters we saw that proponents of neoclassical economics theory (Carr and Friedman) often contend that the moral responsibilities of corporations are limited to (1) increasing profits and (2) obeying the law. Although few people would disagree that these minimal conditions are pragmatically obligatory for survival within an established, contractual framework, some thinkers have held that businesses should be accountable not only to the law but also to a higher -- or supra-legal -- moral standard. In his popular essay, "Business Ethics: A Manager's Primer," Gene Laczniak concludes: "Proper ethical behavior exists on a plane above the law. The law merely specifies the lowest common denominator of acceptable behavior."<sup>678</sup>

Among those who disagree with Laczniak is James Fieser, who issues a three-part response:

1. A moral obligation is valid only if an agent can be reasonably expected to perform that obligation.
2. In our society, business people cannot be reasonably expected to perform obligations above what the law requires.
3. Therefore, in our society, business people do not have moral obligations above what the law requires.<sup>679</sup>

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<sup>678</sup>Gene Laczniak, "Business Ethics: A Manager's Primer," *Business* (January 1983): 23-29, quoted in Feiser, 459.

<sup>679</sup>James Fieser, "Do Businesses Have Moral Obligations Beyond What the law Requires?" *Journal of Business Ethics* 15 (1996): 462. He cites what he believes are shortcomings of Carr's and Friedman's well-known arguments, instead rejecting the view that business has additional moral obligations on the grounds that such

"Our society lacks a homogenous source of external morality. . .," he argues. "The moral mandates which remain (external to the legal system) do not have the backing of society to carry universal prescriptive force."<sup>680</sup> For this reason, he believes that supra-legal moral obligations "appear to be optional; and it is unreasonable to expect business people to be obligated to principles which appear to be optional."<sup>681</sup> While he does not rule out the possibility of an "ideal standard of morality," he contends that all of society's agreed-upon moral expectations of business are already expressed in the law.

In our culturally pluralistic society the only business-related moral obligations which are majority-endorsed by our national social group are those obligations which are already contained in the law. These include a range of guidelines for honesty in advertising, product safety, safe working conditions, and fair hiring and firing practices. Indeed, the unifying moral force of businesses within our diverse society is the law itself.<sup>682</sup>

A contrasting argument is advanced by Christian ethicist Max L. Stackhouse:

Much of morality is beyond the law -- both in the sense that morality is what makes some laws just and others unjust, and in the sense that much of morality has to do with how we ought to organize authority, establish policy and arrange human relationships within the law. Some perfectly legal business transactions are morally scandalous, and some business leaders who will never be indicted are scoundrels. These may even be quite successful economically; and it is doubtful whether all moral behavior could or should be controlled legally. Law is best when it provides general guidelines for organization and action, yet preserves maximum freedom, protects persons or groups from danger or exploitation, and constrains those who subvert the capacity to live responsibly. The point is this: *economics and law cannot generate business*

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obligations impose "unreasonable expectations."

<sup>680</sup>Ibid.

<sup>681</sup>Ibid, 463.

<sup>682</sup>Ibid, 464.

*morality alone.*<sup>683</sup>

Our theological analysis of legalism showed that wherever questions of morality are determined solely by the standards of the law, individuals and corporations "lie more open to. . . self-deceit, and give it greater scope and opportunities."<sup>684</sup> Bishop Butler, we recall, designates as the "very province of self-deceit and self-partiality" those occasions when one's sin is not explicitly prohibited by the law, or when it consists merely in a neglect of duty. Self-deceptive rationalizations thus begin with the questions: "Is there a transgression where no law is broken? A vice which cannot be defined?"<sup>685</sup> Such cases -- where morality cannot be reduced to fixed, determinate rules -- are not the rare exception but are "perhaps the greatest part of the intercourse amongst mankind." For this reason, there is great latitude and freedom for one to "determine for, and consequently to deceive, himself."<sup>686</sup>

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<sup>683</sup>Max L. Stackhouse, "Foundations and Purposes" in *On Moral Business*, ed. Max L. Stackhouse, et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995): 18 (emphasis added). See also Selznick's discussion of "Reason and Rationalism," where he argues that the "impoverishment" of legal positivism -- in Jeremy Bentham, John Austin and Hans Kelsen, among others -- is its insistence on making the law clear and determinate, resisting any blurring of boundaries between law and morality (50). Law is a product of procedures (legislative acts, courtroom decisions, etc.) and the "moral worth of the procedure -- its outcome for justice -- is always open to question." The legal positivist sees no intrinsic connection between law and morality, for "legal obligation is a political fact that may or may not be justified on moral grounds." He contrasts this view with that of the natural law tradition, which holds that "the law is inescapably part of morality. . . that legal obligation is a special form of moral obligation" (435-36).

<sup>684</sup>Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, 118. See Chapter Three above.

<sup>685</sup>*Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>686</sup>*Ibid.*



McFadyen equates legalism with moral pride and sees in it a Rational idolatry where the law is ultimate and where one believes one's own attempts to comply with it are sufficient for justification before others and God. "This may also enable the person to hide behind the requirements of the 'law' in whatever spheres of life it regulates, so abdicating personal responsibility in them."<sup>687</sup> Via, who reveals the link between legalism and self-deception in the writings of Paul, warns of attempts to use the law to seek self-righteousness rather than the righteousness of God. Ellul stresses that Christ's example is "neither that of an absolutizing nor of a spiritualizing the law, [for] there was never any question of doing less than the law required. It was a matter of going infinitely farther."<sup>688</sup> And Niebuhr shows that although the aim of the law is justice, the irony of legalism is that "the concomitant of pride is injustice."<sup>689</sup>

At Dow Corning, a legalistic mentality may have influenced corporate decisions concerning the safety of silicone and silicone gel-filled breast implants. At the time when the first devices were produced and implanted in women, no clinical tests had been conducted to verify their safety for human use. As external researchers raised questions in succeeding years about the products, the company declined to undertake a program of clinical research that would answer these questions definitively. Several observers have concluded that the principal reason for the dearth of corporate-sponsored research was that none was required by the law. Even when the United States Congress passed the Medical Devices Act, mammary prostheses

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<sup>687</sup>McFadyen, 250.

<sup>688</sup>Jacques Ellul, *To Will and to Do* (Philadelphia: Pilgrim Press, 1969), 254.

<sup>689</sup>Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 223.

were among the devices "grandfathered" and, therefore, excluded from the Food and Drug Administration's policies requiring proof of safety. The company's failure to conduct adequate clinical research may be not only an example of legalism, but also a case of willful ignorance -- a defining feature of self-deception.

Over time, of course, Dow Corning did learn of potential risks associated with the devices, through both external and limited internal research, as well as through anecdotal evidence provided by plastic surgeons. But little of this information was disclosed to physicians or patients, apparently because of a belief that the company was in compliance with the relevant laws governing research and disclosure related to product safety, and that fulfillment of these laws was all that was necessary. Ultimately, this proved to be a mistake when courtroom decisions found the company guilty of negligence and fraud. Corporate records documenting risks associated with implants were publicly disclosed only when the courts and the FDA required them to be. Indeed, a legalistic, institutional resistance to disclosure of such information appeared to increase as pressures from women's lawsuits mounted, and as Robert Rylee, chairman of Dow Corning's health care business, cautioned his colleagues, "We don't want to be overeducating plaintiff's lawyers."<sup>690</sup> Moreover, Snyder's concept of *transforming responsibility* may have been exemplified by the company's insistence that if more safety information was needed, it was the government's job to

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<sup>690</sup>Smart, "What Did The Industry Know and When," 95. "Ever since the company had lost the Stern case in 1984, Dow Corning seemed to have become nearly paranoid about its legal vulnerability. Decisions related even in the remotest way to the company's breast implant operations were almost always made or approved by the company's legal department." (Byrne, *Informed Consent*, 173.)

require manufacturers to produce it.<sup>691</sup>

The legalistic mentality at Dow Corning was not limited to its understanding of its responsibilities under civil law. A similar mentality appeared to inform the design and function of the corporate ethics program. Ethics audits tended to focus on issues of legality and never dealt with questions related to implant safety or patient health, even when audits were conducted at the facility that manufactured most of the devices. Employees were instructed to make ethically correct decisions by adhering to the letter of the code of conduct, which made no mention of responsibilities to customers for product quality or safety.

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<sup>691</sup>For a discussion of products liability law in the United States and the extent to which the current law may or may not suffice in defining the moral obligations of corporations, see Richard L. Lippke, *Radical Business Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), 165-86.

## The Self-Deception of Moral Relativism

Legalism can be a form of moral relativism, whereby individuals allow the law to define the standard of morality for the business sphere while acknowledging supra-legal obligations in other areas of life, such as home, church or neighborhood.

Certainly one could find no better example of this type of moral relativism than Carr's argument that business people cease to be private citizens when they enter the office and become "game players" whose only moral obligations are to comply with the rules of the game as defined by civil law. "The ethics of business are game ethics," he asserts, "different from the ethics of religion."<sup>692</sup> John Ladd advances a similar position:

We cannot and must not expect formal organizations, or their representatives acting in their official capacities, to be honest, courageous, considerate, sympathetic, or to have any kind of moral integrity. . . . Actions that are wrong by ordinary standards are not so for organizations; indeed, they may often be required. Secrecy, espionage and deception do not make organizational action wrong; rather, they are right, proper and, indeed, *rational*, if they serve the objectives of the organization. . . . [O]rganizations are like machines, and it would be a category mistake to expect a machine to comply with the principles of morality. By the same token, an official or agent of a formal organization is simply violating the basic rule of organizational activity if he allows his moral scruples rather than the objectives of the organization to determine his decision."<sup>693</sup>

Such an argument illustrates how a corporation's perception of itself and its purposes can shape its sense of moral obligations. If a corporation is a machine, as Ladd suggests, it follows that its actions can be evaluated only in terms of its success or

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<sup>692</sup>Carr, "Is Business Bluffing Ethical?", 144. See Chapter Three, above.

<sup>693</sup>John Ladd, "Morality and the Ideal of Rationality in Formal Organizations," *The Monist* 54 (1970): 499f, quoted in Selznick, 239-40. Selznick also quotes Herbert A. Simon: "Decisions in private management, like decisions in public management, must take as their ethical premises the objectives that have been set for the organization." (241)

failure in achieving instrumental, non-moral objectives. If, as Friedman contends, the corporation exists solely to make a profit for its owners, its actions should not be evaluated against moral obligations to other stakeholders -- employees, neighbors, suppliers, users of its products, etc. Or if we accept Carr's belief that a poker game is an apt metaphor for business, we must judge the corporation solely on the basis of how much money it accumulates without breaking the rules of the game.

At Dow Corning, the preamble to the first corporate Code of Conduct provides an indication of how the company perceived its purposes and responsibilities. This document states that in order to establish an "atmosphere of mutual respect and trust," the company "accepts as our responsibility a recognition, evaluation and sensitivity to social needs." However, the next sentence divulges the corporation's limited view of itself as primarily an economic instrument: "We will meet this responsibility by utilizing our technological and management skills to develop products and services that will further the development of society."<sup>694</sup> The extent of corporate moral responsibility is seemingly limited to producing goods that society finds useful, a perspective that is consistent with the corporate charter published by former CEO Goggin.<sup>695</sup> This view of corporate obligations is typical of what Jackall calls the Rational "occupational morality" that is encouraged by the very structures of bureaucratic organizations. "Their sole allegiances are to the very principle of organization, to the market which itself is bureaucratically organized, to the groups and individuals in their world who can demand and command their loyalties, and to

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<sup>694</sup>See Chapter One, above.

<sup>695</sup>Goggin, "How The Multidimensional Structure Works at Dow Corning," 61.

themselves. . . ."<sup>696</sup>

Such a definition of morality may be far more limited than that which individual managers would espouse on a personal level. And it is here -- in the teeth of conflicting moralities -- that individuals often find it expedient to compartmentize their lives, as Carr recommends, by engaging in self-deception or, to use Jackall's term, "self-rationalization. . . [to] escape the discomfort such compromises produce."

But self-rationalization, even for those willing to open themselves up fully to institutional demands, produces its own discomforts and discontents. As in all professional careers, particularly those dependent on large organizations, managerial work requires psychic asceticism of a high degree, a willingness to discipline the self, to thwart one's impulses, to stifle spontaneity in favor of control, to conceal emotion and intent, and to objectify the self with the same kind of calculating rationality that one brings to the packaging of any commodity. Moreover, such dispassionate objectification of the self frames and paces the rational objectification of circumstances and people that alertness to expediency demands.<sup>697</sup>

Corporate life is a favorite example in MacIntyre's discussions of the moral fragmentation of the self in modern culture. Far from seeing the corporation as a unifying structure of meaning that provides individuals with a sense of self and community, he is convinced that "corporate structures fragment consciousness and more especially moral consciousness."<sup>698</sup> For corporate existence "presupposes a separation of spheres of existence, a moral distancing of each social role from each of

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See Chapter One, above.

<sup>696</sup>Jackall, 11-12.

<sup>697</sup>Ibid, 203.

<sup>698</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, "Corporate Modernity and Moral Judgment: Are they Mutually Exclusive?" in *Ethics and Problems of the 21st Century*, eds. Kenneth Goodpaster and K.M. Sayre (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979): 122.

the others."<sup>699</sup> To explore this theory, Solomon conducted a group interview with corporate managers where he found that separate spheres of existence are desired but not easily maintained by managers. More often than not, their business roles have tremendous influence on their personal relationships and personal values.

. . . a significant number of "company men" insisted right from the start -- so that there would be no misunderstanding -- that they clearly separated their business and personal lives, and therefore also their business acquaintances and their friends. But after the briefest discussion, it became apparent that they all lived in the "corporate ghetto," as they called it, and spent almost all of their time at company-sponsored functions or with other employees of the company. They did not all spend time with the same people they saw at the office during the day, but they saw almost exclusively people at similar stations and with similar responsibilities in parallel sections of the company. Most of their friends "from the outside" -- apart from an occasional old college or army drinking buddy -- turned out to be in similar corporations and at a similar rank. One would be foolish to generalize from such examples, but corporate cultures set up the network of people and positions with whom we feel comfortable, and given the enormous power of peer pressure in ethics, one should not be surprised that the culture of the corporation -- rather than "individual values" -- is the primary determinant of business ethics.<sup>700</sup>

A philosopher in business ethics, Solomon (like Sartre and MacIntyre) stresses the influence of social roles in shaping personal identity and individual actions. Various studies demonstrate that moral perspective and agency vary by context, and that the principles upon which individuals base their moral reasoning are determined largely by role-settings.<sup>701</sup> Roles help to form identities whose characteristics are used by

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<sup>699</sup>Ibid, 126.

<sup>700</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 140.

<sup>701</sup>W. M. Kurtines, "Moral Behavior as Rule Governed Behavior: Person and Situation Effects on Moral Decision Making," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50 (1986): 784-91; N. Haan, "Two Moralities in Action Context," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (1978): 286-305; and *Idem*, "Systematic Variability in the Quality of Moral Action, as Defined in Two Formulations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50 (1986): 1271-84. For a contrasting view of role-derived morality in organizations, see Allen Buchanan.

individuals to define themselves and their actions in particular settings. James Luther Adams observes that the assumption of a role in business can actually blind one to one's responsibilities "within the context of the total fabric of life.

In this process, the [business person becomes] only a segment of a person. One is reminded of the epitaph in Scotland:

Here lies John MacDonald  
Born a man  
Died a grocer.<sup>702</sup>

In the corporation, managers learn that a corporate role may at times conflict with another social role, a clash which sociologists call "role strain" and which some theorists believe is an unavoidable part of the continuous, normal process of bargaining with oneself.<sup>703</sup> Echoing the findings of Solomon's group interview, MacIntyre contends that the role of manager proves dominant in the corporate setting and shapes or even supersedes the other roles with which the individual may wish to identify.<sup>704</sup> Similarly, Robert Derry finds that where one's desire to meet the demands of the managerial role appears to conflict with one's desire to protect welfare or meet human needs, role responsibilities in the powerful corporation tend to outweigh

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"Toward a Theory of The Ethics of Bureaucratic Organizations," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 6:4 (1996): 419-40.

<sup>702</sup>James Luther Adams, "The Social Import of the Professions," in *Voluntary Associations*, ed. J. Ronald Engel (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1986), 270-71, quoted in Stackhouse, "Foundations and Purposes," 16. We are reminded of Sartre's contention that society "demands that [a grocer] limit himself to his function as a grocer. . . ." (Sartre, 59). See Chapter Two, above.

<sup>703</sup>Brewer, "A Response to Alasdair Macintyre," 826.

<sup>704</sup>See Chapter Two, above.



considerations about other people, especially those outside the tribal group.<sup>705</sup>

We saw that role-playing is a concern of Existentialist philosophers who condemn it as "bad faith," to use Sartre's term for the self-deceptive tendency to view oneself as "nothing more" than one's role, or a "being-for-others."<sup>706</sup> Chanowitz and Langer suggest that while human beings do in fact allow themselves to be defined by their social roles, these roles actually result in "multiple selves" which emerge in social settings as appropriate.<sup>707</sup> Because these roles often involve culturally relative standards of morality, a measure of self-deception is required for one to be "untroubled" when endorsing "one standard while 'covertly' endorsing another, contradictory standard."<sup>708</sup>

Without first-hand accounts of the motivations and beliefs underlying the actions of individuals in the Dow Corning case, it would be inappropriate to speculate as to the degree to which the self-deception of moral relativism played a role in the case. One exception, however, is Swanson, who describes the role conflict he

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<sup>705</sup>Robert Derry, "An Empirical Study of Moral Reasoning Among Managers," *Journal of Business Ethics* 8 (1989): 855. Cf., M. Kelley, "Commentary on 'An Empirical Study of Moral Reasoning Among Managers,'" *Journal of Business Ethics* 8 (1989): 863. For an opposing view which rejects these contextually deterministic views of roles, see Brewer, 826. While acknowledging that corporate roles have much to do with managers' beliefs and behaviors, she argues that it is "not clear which role will emerge, as for example in a conflict between a putative managerial goal of economic efficiency and a moral goal of treating people with respect." She goes on to suggest a variety of alternative motivations for managers' behavior, some of which might actually conflict with role responsibilities and expectations. "A manager may be influenced by peer pressure. . . . Further, individual managers may act in the interests of their career rather than [the corporation]." (827)

<sup>706</sup>Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 221, 59. See Chapter Two above.

<sup>707</sup>Chanowitz and Langer, 125.

<sup>708</sup>Ibid, 124.

experienced as his wife became convinced that her failing health was caused by implants manufactured by his employer. This intrapersonal conflict is a recurring theme throughout Byrne's book about Swanson's involvement in the case.

Jackall borrows George Orwell's term, "doublethink," to describe the ability "to hold in one's mind and be able to voice if necessary completely contradictory versions of reality." He finds that public relations practitioners, like Swanson, are necessarily skilled at doublethinking and have a

talent for the intricate casuistry needed to broker whatever differences may exist between one's sense of self and the exigencies of immediate situations and, secondly, the ability to externalize one's casuistic ability to help others invent better reasons for doing what has to be done.<sup>709</sup>

. . . Such a separation of individual conscience from corporate action institutes a particular kind of casuistry, one that allows individuals to enjoy the benefits of corporate responses to exigencies while permitting personal feelings of moral purity. As it happens, the peculiar angle of vision that public relations work affords its practitioners demands continual casuistry. Greater proficiency in doublethink not only increases the ability to shape useable practical ideas but it also increases the sense of distance that practitioners experience between themselves and their occupational roles.<sup>710</sup>

In Swanson's case, it was his wife who played the role of the Biblical Nathan, declaring, "Thou art the man."

Viewing the problem of role-based moral relativism from a theological perspective, Hauerwas contends that the radical dividedness of the world is a reality that cannot be denied, so that consequently it is "implausible" to believe that an individual can avoid the "possibility of two or more systems of belief which are to

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<sup>709</sup>Jackall, 184.

<sup>710</sup>Ibid, 185.

some extent self-contained."<sup>711</sup> These belief systems are connected to roles and frequently result in the incongruity of a virtuous person performing actions which have evil consequences. "The source of each tragedy is a situation in which a character's multiple responsibilities and obligations conflict not only with self-interest, but with each other."<sup>712</sup>

Admittedly, the argument that moral relativism constitutes a type of self-deception rests to some degree upon the assumption that there is a general moral standard to which all spheres of life ought to be subject.<sup>713</sup> This is not to deny that there are special norms which inevitably apply in some contexts and not in others; however, we have established theologically that moral relativism can be a denial of the truth that all persons and groups must finally be assessed, as Baelz writes, "in light of God's purposes for them" as revealed through "the inescapable relation in which man stands to God, whether man recognizes it or not." The belief that any sphere of life, including corporate life, is not subject to this standard may therefore be understood as a self-deceptive denial of the God-relation.<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>711</sup>Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 103. He goes so far as to suggest that self-deception is required for one to believe that one can actually overcome relativism.

<sup>712</sup>*Ibid*, 107.

<sup>713</sup>See Selznick's chapter, "Plurality and Relativism" (91 *ff.*), for a concise discussion of culturally based moral relativism and its historical origins. From a sociological perspective, he contends that everyone, regardless of cultural situation or tradition, should acknowledge at least one moral principle: "*all people need and deserve respect. . . .*" (94)

<sup>714</sup>Baelz, 86. See Chapter Three above. *Cf.* Peter Drucker, "Ethical Chic," *The Public Interest* 63 (Spring 1981): 19. Drucker argues that even the manager in Western society who has no religious beliefs should be able to recognize "the fundamental axiom on which the Western tradition of ethics has always been based: There is only one code of ethics, that of individual behavior, for prince and pauper,

A final example of moral relativism in the modern corporation is the growing belief that management is a *science* where decisions are pragmatic, objective and devoid of moral considerations. The realm of management is thus rendered "value-free," a scientific domain with the "appearance of being more knowledge-based than it is."<sup>715</sup> (This belief may also be seen as an expression of the *self-deception of scientism*, discussed below.) Sejersted contends that "the fiction of value-free management" is a product of popular business literature which seeks to simplify the complex realities of business decision-making. The popularity of these theories, he believes, is explained in part by managers' "need to believe that the world is simple" and by their "tendency to self-deception."<sup>716</sup> His main concern is with the "ethical problem of the manipulative attitude to one's fellow persons which follows from instrumental reason,"<sup>717</sup> because "manipulation presupposes suspension of the general

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for rich and poor, for the mighty and the meek alike. Ethics, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is the affirmation that all men and women alike are creatures -- whether the creator be called God, nature or Society." Baelz takes a contrary position, rejecting the notion that there is "some single, ordered and universally valid set of duties and obligations which could be recognized by all men of good will and intelligence and which could therefore be called Morality. Twentieth-century anthropologists. . . have shown that the facts do not support this conviction. They have broken down the one, universal Morality into a number of different moralities." (Baelz, 9.) See also, Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 105: "Christians are forbidden to despair in the face of the dividedness of the world. On the contrary, we are commanded to witness to others that there is a God that overcomes our differences by making them serve his Kingdom. The task of the Christian is not to defeat relativism by argument but to witness to a God who requires confrontation."

<sup>715</sup>Sejersted, 75-76.

<sup>716</sup>Ibid.

<sup>717</sup>Ibid, 69.

ethical norms."<sup>718</sup>

We can clearly see ideological elements dressed up as science. This is nothing new, but on the contrary a general characteristic of our modern society, but it does stand out especially clearly in our present context. A corollary to this problem is. . . that morally questionable manipulation is legitimised by its presentation as value-free science.<sup>719</sup>

### The Self-Deception of Scientism

Sejersted sees the concept of "management science" as a source of implied legitimacy for corporate power and manipulation. The decisions of corporate managers are given an aura of validity and objectivity when they are thought to be based upon the "allegedly value-free science which modern society has adopted as its foremost source of legitimacy."<sup>720</sup> As a result, the manager sees his role as that of a technician who, Ellul believes, gradually becomes "far more competent in his specialty and far less capable of reflection."<sup>721</sup> Selznick concurs, suggesting that those in corporate roles are particularly susceptible to this narrowing of vision:

A necessary tension exists between the claims of specialized activity and the claims of morality. The former strains toward singlemindedness, the latter toward recognition of multiple values and commitments. Although this tension occurs in individual life as well, it is especially important in the moral experience of special-purpose groups.<sup>722</sup>

To whatever degree this tension may be experienced by managers, it is felt even more

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<sup>718</sup>Ibid, 71.

<sup>719</sup>Ibid, 75.

<sup>720</sup>Ibid, 77.

<sup>721</sup>Jacques Ellul, *The Technological System* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1980): 227.

<sup>722</sup>Selznick, *The Moral Commonwealth*, 241.

acutely by scientists, who encounter the conflict between role and person because they know they "cannot live by methodology alone," writes Natanson. It is common, therefore, for the scientist to blind himself to "questions of the worth or moral validity" of his work so that the "doubts or indecisiveness he may feel as a person do not enter his formal activity."<sup>723</sup> In a manner related to the self-deception of moral relativism, "The eclipse of the individual makes possible the fulfillment of the role."<sup>724</sup> It is this blindness to moral considerations which prompts Niebuhr to call "the so-called 'methods of science'. . . singularly deficient in generating *wisdom* in human affairs."

The essence of the *self-deception of scientism* is the Rational conviction that science and technology are sufficient to provide objective answers to all of the important questions facing the self or humanity.

But in the end, science does not provide the answers most of us require. . . . Moreover, the science-god has no answer to the question, "Why are we here?" and, to the question, "What moral instructions do you give us?", the science-god maintains silence. It places itself at the service of both the beneficent and the cruel, and its grand impartiality, if not indifference, makes it, in the end, no god at all.<sup>725</sup>

Faith in this science-god rests upon a self-deceptive denial of the God-revealed truth of human existence. In Niebuhr's estimation, scientism is the Rational antithesis of the Relational "turning of the self from itself as the center of life to God and the

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<sup>723</sup>Natanson, *The Journeying Self*, 71.

<sup>724</sup>Ibid, 135.

<sup>725</sup>Neil Postman, "Science and the Story that We Need," *First Things* 69 (January 1997): 30.

neighbor."<sup>726</sup> Jackall adds that the "rational/technical habit or mind. . . undermines nonrational, irrational or suprarational explanations for the way things are. It devalues myth, poetry and religion." With Postman, he believes that we live "in a world where science is god."

Organizations that place excessive confidence in science and technology "epitomize the exaltation of the human intellect."<sup>727</sup> In the modern corporation -- which increasingly relies upon science and technology for its success -- scientism is a common expression of intellectual pride. According to Postman, science-based companies like Dow Corning gained tremendous power as social institutions in the latter half of the twentieth century. "As technology grew so did the influence of drug companies and the manufacturers of medical instruments."<sup>728</sup> Niebuhr is concerned, however, that the "growing intelligence of mankind seems not to be growing rapidly enough to achieve mastery over the social problems, which the advances of technology create."<sup>729</sup>

One reason for this ineptitude, Ellul shows, is that when science judges social or moral problems only scientific criteria are considered. This appeared to be true at Dow Corning where all questions related to the safety of breast implants were answered from a technical -- rather than a moral -- perspective. Indeed, the company never wavered in its conviction that the devices were technically and scientifically

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<sup>726</sup>Niebuhr, "The Tyranny of Science," 464-65.

<sup>727</sup>Jackall, 150-51.

<sup>728</sup>Postman, *Technopoly*, 105.

<sup>729</sup>Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 50

sound. Rylee argued that the company's decisions were based upon "solid science" and Hayes proclaimed the company's confidence "in the strength and accuracy of our science."<sup>730</sup> Both men served as head of the company's medical devices subsidiary. When it was found that silicone gel was bleeding through the walls of the silicone envelopes, the company considered the phenomenon a technical nuisance rather than a health concern. And when the company ultimately withdrew from the implant business, its reasons were related to marketing and legal difficulties, not to weaknesses in the product nor its potential effects on patients.

Dow Corning also looked to science to justify the sale of mammary prostheses to women solely for cosmetic purposes. The company's scientists responded to criticism by formulating the elaborate rationalization that implants were actually the cure for "micromastia" (small breasts), a so-called disease that the company warned had stricken millions of women. This rationalization may be seen as a self-deceptive attempt to *reframe performance*, as the company's efforts to identify its motives with a concern for public health began only after it was criticized for its implant business.

Executive management at Dow Corning was made up almost exclusively of scientists (whom Byrne calls the "Brahmins"), usually chemical engineers with no training in the medical or biological sciences. These were the types of executives whom Ellul would say "owe their social status and credibility to the ideology of science."<sup>731</sup> As we have seen, individuals -- including, or perhaps especially, scientists -- who are part of prideful, powerful corporations are subject to conditions

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<sup>730</sup>See Chapter One above.

<sup>731</sup>Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Bluff* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans,



which may foster self-deception. The principal motivation for self-deception is pride, and the pride of power "blinds the eyes of moral insight."

[Scientific] experts are traditionally guardians of the objectivity of science, independent of opposing interests. They have a duty to speak the truth. But the public has now found out that experts, too, are part of the power game, that they belong to organizations, that they plead on behalf of these organizations. . . . [E]xperts who belong to an organization always justify it, for it is from the organization that they receive their power and authority.<sup>732</sup>

Self-deception may entail not only self-partiality but also willful ignorance of, or blindness to, information that would dispute one's preferred conception of oneself or one's organization. These characteristics are especially evident in the self-deception of scientism, for Ellul shows that scientific and technological systems lack mechanisms for feedback. "Technological progress is never questioned" because scientists are narrowly focused and generally incapable of reflection on how their work might affect other individuals or society as a whole.<sup>733</sup> "For the sake of innovation," he contends, "religious, moral and collective certainties must be done away with."<sup>734</sup>

Selznick, who cites Ellul's critique of technique, refers to scientism as a "technocratic mentality," a form of Rationalism that evades moral responsibility "under the cover of apparently technical decision-making." He sees a tension between instrumental reason and moral reason, with the former relying on clear criteria and preferring specialized or autonomous professional decisions that tend to "narrow

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1990), 191.

<sup>732</sup>Ibid.

<sup>733</sup>Ellul, *The Technological System*, 222, 117.

<sup>734</sup>Ibid, 215.

perspectives and limit responsibilities." Moral reason, by contrast, questions ends as well as means and broadens responsibility. The self-deception of scientism is upheld by avoiding moral questions: Are the ends worth pursuing, especially in consideration of the means required? What costs are imposed on other ends? Who might be affected, and what are our responsibilities to them?<sup>735</sup>

### The Rational Limits of Corporate Ethics Programs

Dow Corning's reputation as an ethical company stemmed largely from its elaborate and well-publicized ethics program. The company was among the first American corporations to adopt a code of conduct, undertake ethics audits, formally designate an ethics officer, and appoint a standing committee on business conduct. As with other multinational companies, the impetus for Dow Corning to create an ethics program was a federal law enacted in 1977 prohibiting United States companies from making payments to foreign officials to influence decisions regarding business transactions. With this law as a catalyst, the corporate ethics programs that emerged in the late 1970s focused primarily on compliance with those legal statutes where companies perceived the potential for civil or criminal liability.<sup>736</sup> By the mid-1990s,

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<sup>735</sup>Selznick, 53, 55.

<sup>736</sup>Research by the Center for Business Ethics in 1986 found that encouraging compliance with the law was the most often cited motivation for United States companies seeking to institutionalize ethics. (Geoffrey N. Soutar, *et al.*, "A Management Perspective on Business Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 14 [1995]: 608.) Other authors have cited a variety of additional motivations for corporate ethics programs during the 1970s and 1980s: Rejection of the premise that business and ethics are antithetical; the rise of social responsibility as a management concern; rejection of government regulation (Simcha B. Werner, "The Movement for Reforming American Business Ethics: A Twenty-Year Perspective," *Journal of*

91 percent of the 500 largest United States corporations had formal ethics statements, and three-quarters were developing programs of training and communication to institutionalize ethics.<sup>737</sup> (At the same time more than 500 business ethics courses were being taught in United States colleges, with nearly all business schools providing training in the area, and 25 textbooks and three academic journals on business ethics were in publication.<sup>738</sup>)

### A Focus on Legal Compliance

The prime objective of many corporate ethics programs during the 1970s and 1980s was to prevent employees from breaking the law, an emphasis that led critics to suggest that some programs fostered a dangerous, legalistic mentality in the workplace: "If it's not illegal it's O.K."<sup>739</sup> Or, to take the example of Dow Corning, "If it's not addressed by the code of ethics, it is not an ethical concern." Swanson, however, had no doubts about the effectiveness of the program he administered in

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*Business Ethics* 11 [1992]: 61); an increasing emphasis on quality of life; the growing power of external pressure groups; and the prospect of negative publicity for misdeeds (Leonard J. Brooks, Jr., "Corporate Codes of Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 8 [1989]: 117-29). See also Norman E. Bowie, "Business Codes of Ethics: Window Dressing or Legitimate Alternative to Government Regulation?", in *Ethical Theory and Business*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 234. According to Bowie, ethics programs are intended to serve a self-regulatory shield to avert unwanted government regulation, which companies perceive as potentially costly, a threat to institutional power, and an infringement upon corporate freedom and autonomy.

<sup>737</sup>Patrick E. Murphy, "Corporate Ethics Statements: Current Status and Future Prospects," *Journal of Business Ethics* 14 (1995): 727.

<sup>738</sup>Andrew Stark, "What's the Matter with Business Ethics?", *Harvard Business Review* (May-June 1993): 38.

<sup>739</sup>Ibid.

1989. Even as the legal storm involving breast implants was gathering on a not-to-distant horizon, he was confident that the Dow Corning ethics program had made it "virtually impossible for employees to consciously make an unethical decision."<sup>740</sup>

While there is no question of the practical value of a strategy to encourage legal compliance, Lynn Sharp Paine argues that "clearance [by lawyers] does not certify the absence of ethical problems. . . ."<sup>741</sup> Many corporate ethics programs, she believes, are founded on a Rationalistic view of human behavior.

A compliance approach to ethics also overemphasizes the threat of detection and punishment in order to channel behavior in lawful directions. The underlying model for this approach is deterrence theory, which envisions people as rational maximizers of self-interest, responsive to the personal costs and benefits of their choices, yet indifferent to the moral legitimacy of those choices. . . .

Even in the best cases, legal compliance is unlikely to unleash much moral imagination or commitment. The law does not generally seek to inspire human excellence or distinction. It is no guide for exemplary behavior -- or even good practice. Those managers who define ethics as legal compliance are implicitly endorsing a code of moral mediocrity for their organizations. As Richard Breeden, former chairman of the [United States] Securities and Exchange Commission, noted, 'It is not an adequate ethical standard to aspire to get through the day without being indicted.'<sup>742</sup>

Andrew Stark identifies several other shortcomings of compliance-oriented programs, including their tendency to concentrate almost exclusively on issues of right versus wrong, legal versus illegal. In practice, he argues, most ethical dilemmas

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<sup>740</sup>Patrick E. Murphy, "Creating Ethical Corporate Structures," *Sloan Management Review* 81 (Winter 1989): 82-83. Swanson's appraisal of the company reminds us that moral pride based on one's compliance with the law is precisely what Bishop Butler calls "the very province of self-deceit."

<sup>741</sup>Lynn Sharp Paine, "Managing for Organizational Integrity," *Harvard Business Review* (March-April 1994): 106.

<sup>742</sup>*Ibid*, 111.

faced by managers involve the more difficult questions of right versus right -- of competing goods.<sup>743</sup> At Dow Corning, for example, there was a tension between the obligation to inform implant recipients of potential risks and the obligation to protect the company's interests against that which it perceived as unwarranted external criticism. Prior to the decision in the *Stern* case, the law did not appear to provide much guidance.

Yet it may be that guidance in making "non-legal," ethical decisions is what managers need most from a corporate ethics program. Solomon submits that narrow, rules-based approaches to ethics may function flawlessly in preventing individual acts of wrongdoing; but they do not make an organization sufficiently self-critical, which is necessary to overcome self-deception. He and Stark agree that compliance-based ethics programs cannot always affect the systemic behavior of organizations.

In a small company ethics is just a matter of living together. In the larger corporation, ethics becomes mainly a function of management. . . . In impersonality there is always the danger that ethics will degenerate into a set of abstract rules rather than remain a living community of interpersonal relations, and abstract rules can too easily be compromised (or reinterpreted) under the pressures of the corporate hierarchy.<sup>744</sup>

Solomon describes the typical ethics problem as one where no senior executive or middle manager orders anything unethical, and no employee does anything unethical.

"It is not even that everyone is 'just a little unethical' . . . yet the net result is unethical because no one kept the entire system in perspective." He adds an

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<sup>743</sup>Stark, 38. Cf., Selznick, 244-45: "Moral failure largely stems from this competition between indefinite, elusive, but possibly higher goods and more definite or more immediate satisfactions. A major function of the moral order is to preserve inherently precarious values against ruinous competition from the cheap, the easy, the cost-effective, and the urgent."

<sup>744</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 144-45.

observation that has relevance for the Dow Corning case: "The system problem is most of concern in ethics when the errors in question have to do with the safety of the product or its impact on the community in general."<sup>745</sup>

Beginning in 1991, officers and directors of United States corporations were motivated by a new incentive to institutionalize ethics. The United States Sentencing Commission promulgated the Federal Sentencing Guidelines to standardize fines and other penalties imposed on organizations by the federal courts. The guidelines provide for substantial reductions in penalties for convicted organizations that have undertaken "an effective program to prevent and detect violations of the law" prior to the occurrence of a legal infraction.<sup>746</sup> As an example, consider two companies convicted of the same crime: Company A has a compliance program that meets the standards established by the sentencing commission and is fined \$685,000. By contrast, Company B has no program and is fined \$54,800,000.<sup>747</sup> One effect of the

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<sup>745</sup>Ibid, 186-87.

<sup>746</sup>United States Sentencing Commission, *United States Sentencing Commission Guidelines Manual* (Washington, D.C.: GPA, 1991), S8A1.3, 352.

<sup>747</sup>Southern Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, *The Federal Sentencing Guidelines: Implications for Corporate Ethics Programs* (Atlanta: Southern Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, 1998), 4-5. The sentencing commission specifies that seven minimum standards must be met by a compliance program: (1) it must be "reasonable capable of reducing the prospect of criminal conduct"; (2) specific, high-level individual(s) must have been assigned overall responsibility for the program; (3) the organization must have used "due care" in not delegating discretionary authority to individuals whom the organization knew, or should have known, had a propensity to engage in criminal acts; (4) the organization should have taken steps to communicate the compliance standards to all employees through training and published information; (5) steps must have been taken to monitor and audit compliance, and to detect and report criminal conduct; (6) the standards must have been consistently enforced; and (7) after an offense, the organization must have taken steps to prevent a recurrence. In addition, the commission specifies that a corporate program must be appropriate for the size of the organization, the nature of its business

guidelines is that corporate ethics programs in the 1990s are more likely than ever to be designed and managed by corporate law departments and, consequently, may be somewhat less likely to emphasize affirmative ethical responsibilities of a supra-legal nature.

The stated objective of the United States Sentencing Commission was to encourage organizations to prevent and detect violations of the law, but the commission's chairman, Judge Richard P. Conaboy, warns that the guidelines can be interpreted too legalistically. A compliance oriented approach is inadequate, he cautions, because "corporate crime appears to be the result of a failure to establish values and modes of conduct that are based on clear, ethical and moral standards." Moreover, he stresses that programs that are not based on such moral standards "have no chance of success," and he exhorts managers to "be in the forefront, not only by working to ensure that your companies' employees follow the law but by embracing and placing at the very top of your companies' priorities the basic good citizenship values that make law abidance possible."<sup>748</sup> Another member of the commission suggests that corporate ethics programs need to "have some soul."

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and its prior history of offenses. See also, Robert J. Rafalko, "Remaking the Corporation: the 1991 U.S. Sentencing Guidelines," *Journal of Business Ethics* 13 (1994): 625-36. "The new ideas contained in the Sentencing Guidelines are roughly analogous to the difference between cure and prevention. Whereas in the past medicine had been confined mainly to the search for medical cures, recent advances in medical care have come to stress *prevention* (or, as the popular jargon has termed it, '*wellness*.' ) The terms of that ethical or legal preventative medicine for business can be summed up by the incentives offered by the federal government to the corporation in terms of the creation of a comprehensive ethics compliance program within the company." (627)

<sup>748</sup>Southern Institute, 10.

Somebody said. . . that employees don't like you playing with their soul. I'm not so sure. I think they want you responding to their soul in the sense that people want to do the *right* thing, not just the compliant or lawful thing. . . . We heard from. . . a CEO who understands the difference between ethics and compliance. He not only knows the words of a compliance program but hears the soul in the music that goes behind it, and has moved beyond compliance to a value-based ethics program, to a good program that can really do the company some good.<sup>749</sup>

### Inordinate Emphasis on Decision-Making Processes

A primary focus of the recent literature in business ethics has been the presumed need for better decision-making processes to help corporate employees "identify, evaluate and propose solutions to ethical issues."<sup>750</sup> Characterized by a Rationalistic belief that "the essence of ethics is independent thinking,"<sup>751</sup> this emphasis in the literature has given rise to much discussion in both classrooms and corporations about how to teach employees the skills required for effective moral reasoning. Since the early 1980s, an assortment of ethical decision-making models have been proposed by business ethicists, social scientists and management behaviorists who concern themselves with designing instrumental processes for "resolving" ethical dilemmas.<sup>752</sup> These theorists generally assume that the modern

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<sup>749</sup>Ibid, 11. Remarks by Janet C. Cok, assistant general counsel, United States Air Force.

<sup>750</sup>Wharton School of Business, *Business Ethics Study Guide* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 17.

<sup>751</sup>M. Pastin, "Managing the Rules of Conflict: International Bribery," in eds. W.M. Hoffman, et al., *Ethics and The Multinational Enterprise: Proceedings of the Sixth National Conference on Business Ethics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 474; quoted in Peter J. Dean, "Making Codes of Ethics Real," *Journal of Business Ethics* 11 (1992): 286.

<sup>752</sup>For a review of recent theory, see Peter J. Dean, "A Selected Review of the



corporation can produce or transmit objective information which will, in turn, be received by individual agents who are capable of recognizing ethical issues and categorizing them as such for decision-making purposes. In addition, they tend to presuppose that corporate codes of ethics, properly communicated and explained, can provide sufficient information to make employees cognizant of ethical issues. Thus, a striking inadequacy of most decision-making models is their failure to acknowledge the problem of self-deception and its power to blind employees in the modern corporation to the moral dimensions of their activities. It stands to reason that these decision-making processes will fail to be activated at all if the self-deceptive tendencies of corporate life (e.g., tribalism, legalism, moral relativism, scientism) prevent employees from recognizing ethical matters in the first place -- the necessary

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Underpinnings of Ethics for Human Performance Technology Professionals - Part One: Key Ethical Theories and Research," *Performance Improvement Quarterly* 6:4 (1993): 3-32. The theories covered by his analysis include: the contingency factors proposed by O.C. Ferrell and L.G. Gresham (Ferrell and Gresham, "A Contingency Framework for Understanding Ethical Decision Making in Marketing," *Journal of Marketing* 49 [Spring 1985]: 87-96); a four-step process for decision making consisting of recognition, judgement, resolution, action (J.R. Rest, *Moral Development: Advances in Research and Theory* [New York: Praeger, 1986]); a theory, based upon Rest's, that ethical decision making is predicted and understood as an inductively driven process involving interaction of personal and situational variables (Lynn Trevino, "Ethical Decision Making in Organizations: A Person-Situation Interactionist Model," *Academy of Management Review* 11:3 [1986]: 106-617); six personal and environmental attributes said to influence ethical judgment (M. Bommer, et al., "A Behavioral Model of Ethical and Unethical Decision Making," *Journal of Business Ethics* 6:4 [1987]: 265-80); and a decision-making model that attempts to synthesize those of Ferrell and Gresham, Rest and Trevino, together with several additional models (T.M. Jones, "Ethical Decision-Making by Individuals in Organizations: An Issue-Contingent Model," *Academy of Management Review* 16:2 [1991]: 366-95). See also, Iordanis Kavathatzopoulos, "Development of a Cognitive Skill in Solving Business Ethics Problems," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (1993): 379-86.

beginning of any process of ethical problem solving.<sup>753</sup>

Perhaps the greatest inadequacy of such theories is their treatment of ethical decision making as a discrete and identifiable category of business activity. In truth, ethical concerns run intrinsically through all areas of business life (marketing, human resources, finance, manufacturing, etc.), so that there are no real-world decisions that can be properly categorized *solely* as ethical decisions. For one manager, ethical issues may arise in a cost-benefit analysis of a proposed product improvement, while another manager may encounter ethical issues in a decision about employee privacy in the office computer network. Because ethical problems involve not only conflicts of right and wrong but also of competing values, most decisions in business involve some degree of ethical judgment, whether or not the decision maker realizes it.<sup>754</sup>

All of this suggests that the challenge of business ethics lies not in designing better models for resolving issues that are categorized as *ethical*, but in overcoming the self-deception that prevents corporate employees from seeing the ethical

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<sup>753</sup> Thomas M. Jones and Lori Versteegen Ryan offer an insightful critique of models of ethical decision making and behavior in corporations, pointing out that most such models fail to take into account the powerful influence of the organization, its values and culture in the decision-making processes of individuals. They do not, however, deal with the difficult problem of moral recognition, the first step in Rest's four-step model. (Thomas M. Jones and Lori Versteegen Ryan, "The Effect of Organizational Forces on Individual Morality: Judgment, Moral Approval and Behavior," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 8:3 [1998]: 431-45.) Two studies that examine the problem of moral recognition in business but do not consider the possibility of self-deception are: F. H. Gaultschi and Thomas M. Jones, "Enhancing the Ability of Business Students to Recognize Ethical Issues: An Empirical Assessment of the Effectiveness of a Course in Business Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 17 (1998): 205-16; and Linda K. Trevino, "Ethical Decision Making in Organizations: A Person-Situation Interactionist Model," *Academy of Management Review* 11 (1986): 601-17.

<sup>754</sup> A. Cadbury, "Ethical Managers Make Their Own Rules," *Harvard Business Review* (Sept.-Oct. 1987): 69-73.

implications of their *business* decisions. New developments in artificial intelligence (AI) may add to the complexity of this problem as some corporations increasingly rely upon so-called "expert systems" to make business decisions. "Expert systems are knowledge-based information systems which are expected to have human attributes in order to replicate human capacity in ethical decision making."<sup>755</sup> This hyper-Rational approach is intended to mimic human intelligence but to solve problems more efficiently and reliably. According to Omar E. M. Khalil, "The general recognition of AI as a practical tool has led to the rapid deployment of expert systems by corporate America. . . [in] either operations or management information systems depending on whether they are being used to give expert advice to control operational processes or to help managerial end users make decisions." Khalil questions whether such systems possess the qualifications normally required of the "moral judge" or "ideal observer" as decision maker:

- (1) knowledge of all relevant facts;
- (2) in-biasedness;
- (3) freedom from disturbing passion; and
- (4) the ability to vividly imagine the feelings and circumstances of the parties involved.<sup>756</sup>

Although expert systems may meet the first three of these criteria, no system has yet

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<sup>755</sup>Omar E.M. Khalil, "Artificial Decision-Making and Artificial Ethics: A Management Concern," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (1993): 313. See also A. Ansari and B. Modarress, "Commercial Use of Expert Systems in the U.S.," *Journal of Systems Management* 41 (1990): 10-13, 32; J.A. O'Brien, *Management Information Systems: A Managerial End-User Perspective* (Boston: Irwin, 1990); and M.R. LaChat, "Artificial Intelligence and Ethics: An Exercise in the Moral Imagination," *The AI Magazine* 7 (1986): 70-79.

<sup>756</sup>Ibid, 315. These attributes were originally proposed in R. Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (March 1952): 317-45.

been devised which can incorporate human emotions or empathy into its analysis. Expert systems represent to an extreme degree how the "technocratic mentality" of corporations (discussed above) fails to recognize moral questions under the guise of technical decision making. Thus, we may conclude that corporations using such systems are potentially susceptible to the self-deception of scientism. Ellul warns of the modern inclination to approach moral and human problems as technical decisions:

It is rationalism. . . [when] intelligence is forced to act [solely] on that which can be seen, weighed, counted and measured. It acts strictly in the sphere of the material world and tends to deny the existence of any other. . . . It is more serious because a doctrine can be refuted, but one cannot question the technical method. The intelligence of modern man is no longer nourished at the source of contemplation, of awareness of reality, and is more and more absorbed by the instrument which it has created. . . .<sup>757</sup>

#### Toward a Relational Approach to Corporate Ethics

We have shown that Rationally instrumental views of management practice and of the individual self are characteristic of many ethics programs implemented by corporations in recent years. Consequently, for all their good intentions such programs may have the unintended effect of encouraging self-deception, with the ironic result that some ethics initiatives can actually darken ethical awareness. By seeking to enhance ethical performance through better rules, policies and decision-

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<sup>757</sup>Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, 92. See also Bersoff's discussion of self-deception: ". . . as social and developmental psychology have placed a greater emphasis on theories which posit judgment-based rather than strictly affective or motivational mechanisms underlying action choices, decision-making and the active interpretation of social situations, as a consequence, have become implicated to a greater extent in the performance of unethical behavior. Theories which acknowledge the influence of judgment and moral-decision-making on behavior, though, tend to be ill-equipped to explain readily why a person would choose to act against societal as well as their own personal moral standards." (Bersoff, *Why Good People Sometimes*

making processes, "management 'science' . . . has tended to obscure the basic fact that management is a relationship among people," notes Solomon. "As such management is an intrinsically ethical enterprise."<sup>758</sup> In Selznick's view, the issue involves a "fundamental conflict between rational organization on the one hand and more spontaneous, more organic forms of life on the other."<sup>759</sup>

This conflict is seen at both the organizational and individual levels. Taylor and MacIntyre agree that the antidote to the Rational (instrumental) conception of the self is a Relational view of "self-as-narrative," an individual whose history is formed in dialogical interaction with others.<sup>760</sup> McKoy makes much the same point in his proposal for a new approach to business ethics based on the methods of narrative theology. "Ethics in general and business ethics in particular has been weakened by the tendencies in recent decades to adopt rationalistic, individualistic models of ethics

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*Do Bad Things, 2.)*

<sup>758</sup>Solomon, *The New World of Business*, 156-57. Cf. Alan E. Singer and M.S. Singer, "Management-Science and Business-Ethics," *Journal of Business Ethics* 16 (1997): 385-95. The authors attempt to show how "the incorporation of social and ethical concerns into traditional 'rational' OR-MS [Operations Research or Management Science] techniques and management decisions" may be accomplished, arguing that there are "points of convergence or synergies" to indicate that "in the 1990s, Business Ethics and Strategic Management have. . . become one in the same" (385, 394). See also Gedeon J. Rossouw, "Rational Interaction for Moral Sensitivity: A Postmodern Approach to Moral Decision Making," *Journal of Business Ethics* 13 (1994): 11-20.

<sup>759</sup>Selznick, 250.

<sup>760</sup>Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, 105-06. "We are embodied agents, living in dialogical conditions, inhabiting time in a specifically human way, that is, making sense of our lives as a story that connects the past from which we have come to our future projects. That means . . . that if we are properly to treat a human being, we have to respect this embodied, dialogical, temporal nature."

and to abandon its rootage in story, history and narrative theology."<sup>761</sup> Citing H. Richard Niebuhr's insights in *The Meaning of Revelation*, McKoy declares, "Ethics commits suicide when it seeks its inspiration in dogma and rationalism; the inspiration of ethics lies in story and history."<sup>762</sup> Further, business ethics methodologies that limit reason and agency to individuals prove to be inadequate when confronted with the reality that humans "emerge from community, achieve self-conscious human identity as part of a community, and dwell symbiotically in community."<sup>763</sup> For this reason, he argues, a narrative approach is necessary if organizations are to overcome resistance to change.

. . . [E]thics based upon rationality tend toward static principles and prescriptions that resist the newness of each emerging present and seem to contradict the hopefulness of humanity as we anticipate the future. In parallel fashion, human character based upon habit rather than story has a powerful tendency to maintain the injustices and oppressions of the past rather than have human character called into new visions of justice by the changes time brings.

. . . On the basis of story understood in these dimensions, we move from theory to covenantal wholeness in ethics and open the way for dealing with the ethics of organizations.<sup>764</sup>

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<sup>761</sup>McKoy, 53.

<sup>762</sup>Ibid, 54. Niebuhr writes, "We do well to remind ourselves that the Christian community has usually -- and particularly in times of its greatest vigor -- used an historical method. . . . The preaching of the early Christian church was not an argument for the existence of God nor an admonition to follow the dictates of some common human conscience, unhistorical and super-social in character. It was primarily a simple recital of the great events connected with the historical appearance of Jesus Christ and a confession of what had happened to the community of disciples." (H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* [New York: MacMillan, 1941], 43-44.)

<sup>763</sup>Ibid, 58.

<sup>764</sup>Ibid, 61. Cf., Hauerwas, *Vision and Virtue* (Notre Dame, IA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 71: "We neither are nor should we be formed by the publicly defensible rules we hold, but by the stories and metaphors through which we

This perspective is consistent with Hauerwas' critique of "moral rationality," which he condemns for attempting to develop a purely instrumental ethic "as though we are members of no community, share no goods and have no common history." He observes that much recent moral theory has sought to formulate an abstract, Rational basis for ethical agreement based upon relativistic assumptions through which "the emotions and history of the agent are relegated to the private. . . ." <sup>765</sup>

Although McKoy is correct in visualizing a Relational alternative to the current emphasis in business ethics, a serious shortcoming of his proposal is that he limits his discussion of "narrative" to that which emerges *within* the organization itself. He does not consider the need to make the organization aware of its involvement in the stories of those with whom it relates in the larger community. Nor does he seem to be cognizant of the tendency for company-sponsored narrative to contribute to group self-deception. As we have discussed, organized storytelling is a well-established feature of the modern corporation, but one which frequently plays a manipulative role in conveying the preferred narrative of management. As Dennis McCann rightly observes, "storytelling is clearly the preferred way by which individuals are socialized into the ethos of business as a whole as well as into particular corporate cultures . . . ; [therefore,] what is called for is not another apology for narrative but a critical evaluation of the stories already communicated. . ." <sup>766</sup> McKoy proposes to

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learn to intend the variety of our existence. Metaphors and stories suggest how we should see and describe the world -- that is how we should 'look on' ourselves, others, and the world -- in ways that rules taken in themselves do not. Stories and metaphors do this by providing the narrative accounts that give our lives coherence."

<sup>765</sup>Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 120.

<sup>766</sup>Dennis McCann, "The Business of Storytelling and Storytelling in Business," *A*

incorporate corporate narrative into ethics programs through company-authored case studies; but as we have seen there is good reason to question whether such stories can ever be complete or objective. At Dow Corning, the stories that needed most to be heard were those of women who had experienced difficulties with mammary prostheses. Yet because these stories could not find their way into the corporate narrative, employees did not acknowledge the women's stories as integral to their own.

The narrative of the modern corporation thus becomes an instrument of self-deception. It provides the "explanatory myth" for the employee "who does not want to see for himself the real situation which the world constitutes for him." Ellul sees such myths as powerful tools to aid the individual's "unconscious refusal" to face "the reality of the facts which surround him."<sup>767</sup> The myth provides not only a way of understanding but also a coherence that brings logic and order to existence in the group.

This helps man to avoid the fatigue of thinking for himself, the disquiet of doubt and being questioned, the uncertainty of understanding, and the torture of a bad conscience. What a prodigious economy of time and means, which one can use to great advantage. . . . Modern man has a good conscience because he has an answer for everything; whatever happens to him, and whatever he does, depends on the explanation which is provided for him by the myth. But this process lands him in the most complete unreality. He lives in a perpetual dream, but it is a realist's dream, woven out of innumerable facts and theories in which he believes with all his might. . . .<sup>768</sup>

And again, he underlines the power of the self-deception of tribalism by adding that

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*Virtuous Life in Business*, ed. Oliver F. Williams and John W. Houk (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 141.

<sup>767</sup>Ellul, *The Presence of The Kingdom*, 82.

<sup>768</sup>*Ibid*, 85.



even intellectuals are prone to "shut their eyes, and accept the myth, in order to remain in fellowship with the majority." They simply adopt this sophism: "Doubtless the phenomenon and the myth do not correspond to the facts, but the moment that men believe they do they become real, and we must adhere to this reality."<sup>769</sup>

Swanson was beginning to recognize this truth during his last days at Dow Corning, when his formal evaluation of the ethics program concluded that its greatest flaw was a failure to identify and respond to all external stakeholders as legitimate participants in the company's story. "If there was one thing missing," he wrote, "it was that the program was not tied to the concept of managing for stakeholders [including implant recipients]."<sup>770</sup> R. Edward Freeman first brought widespread attention to the importance of acknowledging stakeholder interests with the publication of *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (1984), in which he revived and crystallized earlier discussions about how the modern corporation responds to the multiple constituencies with whom it has relationships.<sup>771</sup> He posits that a business's sustainability is determined largely by the extent to which it considers the interests of "any group or individual who can affect, or is affected by, the achievement of [the company's] purpose."<sup>772</sup> As Dow Corning learned, failure to "take stakeholder interests into account runs the risk of inciting adversarial or retaliatory responses from

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<sup>769</sup>Ibid, 88.

<sup>770</sup>Swanson, interview with author. See Chapter One above.

<sup>771</sup>R. Edward Freeman, *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Boston: Pittman, 1984).

<sup>772</sup>Ibid, vi.

stakeholders who perceive their interests as having been violated."<sup>773</sup> Freeman and other management theorists hold that an organization's effectiveness may actually be gauged by its ability to listen to vital inputs from external sources and to process and act upon these inputs in a manner that helps maintain a stable environment in which to operate. Being aware of and interacting successfully with all stakeholders, it is argued, ultimately results in more freedom and less external constraint.<sup>774</sup> Moreover, Selznick insists that "no transaction with the environment is more important than negotiating [the corporation's] place in the moral order, that is, dealing with demands that it be responsible and responsive."<sup>775</sup> We may conclude, therefore, that the extent to which self-deception obtains in a corporation will hinder both moral awareness and overall organizational effectiveness, as self-deception often entails willful ignorance and a refusal to accept external inputs that might dispute the corporation's preferred

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<sup>773</sup>Reginald A. Litz, "A Resource-based-view of the Socially Responsible Firm: Stakeholder Interdependence, Ethical Awareness and Issue Responsiveness as Strategic Assets," *Journal of Business Ethics* 15 (1996): 1358. See also Diana C. Robertson and Bodo B. Schlegelmilch, "Corporate Institutionalization of Ethics in the United States and Great Britain," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (1993): 301-12. From a comparative study using large-scale surveys of managers in the United States and Great Britain, the authors find that the ethical issues of most concern to U.S. managers are those where employee conduct may harm the firm. "In contrast, the issues which U.K. managers consider most important tend to be concerned with external corporate stakeholders rather than employees" (301).

<sup>774</sup>E. Yuchtman and S. E. Seashore, "A Systems Resource Approach to Organizational Effectiveness," *American Sociological Review* 3 (1967): 891-903. See also L. O. Thayer, *Administrative Communication* (Homewood, IL: Irwin, 1961). R. Walton assigns an even more central role to organizational communication: "It is contended here that the most significant factor accounting for the total behavior of the organization is its communicating system, and that the dynamics of the organization can best be understood by understanding its system of communication." (R. Walton, *Interpersonal Peacemaking* [Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969], 108.)

<sup>775</sup>Selznick, 237.

conception of itself or its situation.

Dow Corning's ethics program featured an ongoing self-assessment of ethical performance through internal audits which involved the company's employees but did not seek input from customers, communities, suppliers or other stakeholders. This internal process may have actually increased what McFadyen calls "the possibility of making formal and/or material errors, either through an inadequate self-understanding and subsequent presentation in communication or a genuine misunderstanding of the needs of the other."<sup>776</sup>

A person's self-reflection must be open to others' reflection of him or herself in their communication too. Openly attending to others affords an understanding of the others' understanding. The truth about a person is as much present in others' reply (return or feedback) as it is in self-communication. If another is seeking a genuine mutuality of understanding, then he or she will reflect on one's resistance to, reflection and questioning of him or her.<sup>777</sup>

In other words, he argues, a person who regards him- or herself as self-constituting "exists not so much in a social (i.e., moral) world, as in a causal one. . . . The communication of a monological subject is oriented towards success rather than understanding."<sup>778</sup> Such a person lives primarily in relation to him- or herself, rather than to others.

Dialogue provides a formative principle for personal ethics as it demands a particular form of openness in, to, and for others in which one 'puts oneself in their place.' By this I mean that one attempts to understand others' understanding and experience their experience by imaginatively understanding and experiencing the world including oneself from their personal locations (points of view and action) as if one were them (i.e., had their autobiographies

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<sup>776</sup>McFadyen, 163.

<sup>777</sup>Ibid, 164.

<sup>778</sup>Ibid, 123.

of relation).<sup>779</sup>

But like other theological thinkers, McFadyen does not suppose that ethical awareness and self-understanding will be gained solely by opening up communication with other human beings. He stresses that true communication can be established only through a "self-transcending, dialogical process" of responding to the divine presence, intention and call. Such a response allows God's understanding to inform my *self*-understanding, for "I am. . . for myself only as I am for God and others."<sup>780</sup> The ethical consciousness formed through this process of call and response not only illuminates my personal responsibilities to others, it potentially suggests a radically new view of the corporation's relationships with stakeholders. In the life of the individual, Reinhold Niebuhr writes, a "rational ethic seeks to bring the needs of others into equal consideration with those of the self," but a "religious ethic (the Christian ethic more particularly, though not solely) insists that the needs of the neighbor shall be met, without a careful computation of relative needs."<sup>781</sup> Brunner

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<sup>779</sup>Ibid, 125. Cf. Magill. The religious imagination is seen as a theological resource for resolving ethical issues in business. Magill argues that in business many, if not most, situations involve clashes between conflicting values which can make it difficult to discern the right action through discursive reason. "Imaginative discernment" is proposed as an alternative method of inferring obligations to others.

<sup>780</sup>Ibid.

<sup>781</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, 57. The Rational ethic, handed down from Aristotle and the Stoics, is urged by Benedict Spinoza, who writes that "reason. . . postulates, therefore, that each man should love himself, and seek what is useful to him -- I mean is truly useful to him -- and desire whatever leads man truly to a greater state of perfection. . . . Nothing, I say, can be desired by men more excellent for their self-preservation than that all with all should so agree that they compose the minds of all into one mind, and the bodies of all into one body, and all endeavour at the same time as much as possible to preserve their being, and all seek at the same time what is useful to them all as a body. From which it follows that men who are governed by reason. . . desire nothing for themselves which they do not also

agrees with Niebuhr, but fears that it would be "unfair and absurd" to expect anyone in business to act according to this principle. ("No one has ever conducted business on these lines or ever will; it is against the rules of business itself.") Nonetheless, he insists, the Christian business person's responsibility is to "fight with all his power against the evil autonomy of his official work," and to try "again and again to break through it, which means that he treats the people with whom he has to do in business as his neighbours, to whom he owes love, and that he conducts his business as a service to the community."<sup>782</sup> It is from such an understanding that a Relational approach to business ethics may be derived -- an approach that has the potential to counter the forces of self-deception inherent in the modern corporation.

## CONCLUSION

Jacques Ellul proposes that the "first duty" of the Christian is that of awareness, "that is to say the duty of understanding the world and oneself, inseparably connected. . . ."<sup>783</sup> The challenge, however, is that "the major fact of our day" is self-deception,

a sort of refusal, unconscious but widespread, to become aware of reality. Man does not want to see himself in the real situation which the world constitutes for him. He refuses to see what it is that really constitutes our world. This is true especially for intellectuals, but it is also true for all the people of our day, and of our civilization as a whole. It is as though we were confronted by an enormous machine, equipped to prevent man from becoming aware, to drive him into a corner to an unconscious refusal or to a flight into

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desire for the rest of mankind. . . ." (Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics* [1677; reprint, London: 1910], 157 [book 4, proposition 22]).

<sup>782</sup>Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 434.

<sup>783</sup>Ellul, *The Presence of The Kingdom*, 98.

the unreal.<sup>784</sup>

In the preceding analysis we showed that the modern corporation may be such a machine, at times suppressing moral awareness by fostering self-deceptive practices, attitudes and ways of thinking. Self-deception makes it possible to maintain false beliefs about oneself or one's situation by denying reality and avoiding the truthful self-examination and humility that God requires. This avoidance of the truth is understood theologically as a prideful attempt to achieve self-justification by choosing voluntary ignorance of the truth revealed by God; in effect, becoming like the sinner whom Brunner describes as ". . . without excuse because he could, and might, know God, and indeed still more, because he really does know something of God, but he continually denies this knowledge."<sup>785</sup>

The human self tends to be -- again in Brunner's words -- "blinded and drunk with self-love" and "puffed up with insane confidence in his own mental powers." Such pride is the chief cause of self-deception, and often expresses itself as inordinate faith in the capacity of human reason to

. . . define the whole range of truth from the standpoint of *man*. Hence the protest of 'intellectual honesty,' which the autonomous reason always makes, is -- even if unconsciously -- always a lie. The question is not one of 'intellectual honesty' at all, but of rationalistic, that is, positivistic arrogance and self-will. Faith does not come into conflict with reason itself but with the imperialism of *human* reason.<sup>786</sup>

This imperialism of reason -- and the pride that fuels it -- is nowhere more

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<sup>784</sup>Ibid, 82.

<sup>785</sup>Emil Brunner, *Revelation and Reason: The Christian Doctrine of Faith and Knowledge*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946), 52-53.

<sup>786</sup>Ibid, 213.

evident or influential than in the modern corporation, which we have shown is a powerful social and economic institution that plays a defining role in society and in the lives of individuals. In the fertile ground of the corporation, self-deception easily germinates and flourishes, particularly when pride motivates individuals and groups to deny the moral implications or consequences of their activities. Yet this crucial fact has not been understood by the leading business ethicists and management theorists who argue that if managers can be taught Rational decision-making techniques they will *ipso facto* become effective moral agents. In this extended essay we have contended that ethical action requires, first and foremost, ethical awareness (that is, the ability to recognize the ethical implications of one's business activities), and that self-deception is a powerful force preventing such awareness.

Despite this, the phenomenon of self-deception is not easily explained or understood. Our psychological and philosophical analysis in Chapter Two yielded many, sometimes conflicting, perspectives. Beginning with the question "Is self-deception possible?", we considered a variety of potential examples: a public speaker seeking to overcome stage fright; subjects in a study who fail to report being overpaid; an innkeeper who is convinced by his own lie that the wine he serves is better than it actually is; clinical researchers who minimize findings that conflict with desired outcomes; a weapons designer who views his work as a purely scientific pursuit with no moral implications; two television journalists who deny any moral responsibilities beyond reporting the news; the "Sunday-only" Christian whose moral standards vary greatly between Sunday and weekdays; and a Nazi official who does not permit himself to hear information about the atrocities he knows are being committed.

Although perspectives on self-deception vary by method of inquiry, field of study and other contexts of meaning, we concluded that self-deception can and does happen, and that it is a recognizable feature of the common life. Moreover, we determined that self-deception may be described conceptually as a self-directed, belief-misleading phenomenon that produces a cognitive, or epistemic, deficit which results in deliberate ignorance and/or simultaneously held, contradictory beliefs, one of which is not immediately accessible to consciousness. Such self-deceptive projects are undertaken in a variety of ways but always for a reason, which frequently is the protection of one's self-esteem or identity conception. These were useful findings, but the literature of psychology and philosophy provided no satisfactory answer to the question "How does self-deception obtain in persons who are otherwise psychologically healthy?"

Based on an interdisciplinary analysis, we proposed that understandings of *self-deception* are strongly influenced by underlying ideas about what it means to be a *self*, and that these views of the self may be categorized in either of two, broad categories: Rational and Relational. The Rationally conceived self -- a solitary, transparent and unchanging entity -- presents a philosophical paradox when one tries to imagine such a self succeeding in a self-directed lie. The Relationally conceived self, by contrast, is a growing and changing being that exists in dialogical relation to persons, organizations, the environment, history and moral contexts. It is through this essential relatedness that we begin to see the range of possibilities for self-deception.

In Chapter Three we sought an understanding of the self in relation to God, a relationship that is unique in its potential for bringing meaning and coherence to human



selfhood. Because God is truth, there can be no interpersonal deception between God and oneself, only prideful acts to keep oneself from awareness of the truth. The alternative of opening oneself to the God-relation, therefore, leads to self-understanding, self-surrender and, ultimately, to wholeness.

We found that a theological understanding of self-deception derives from theology's conception of the *self* as a creature prone to "deluded self-admiration," attempting to make itself, rather than God, the center of existence. This is the sin of pride, one of the chief barriers separating human beings from relationship with God. Pride denies God's rightful place in one's life -- the place of the highest good. Augustine, Calvin and Niebuhr are among many who agree that the truth we come to know in the God-relation is "the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all confidence in our own ability, deprive us of all occasion for boasting."

If self-deception is occasioned by pride, it is because pride requires self-deception to maintain itself. In corporate life, self-deception obtains both individually and collectively as the system works to protect the *status quo* and, in so doing, causes its individual members to subordinate their moral convictions to the corporation's drive for power, self-protection and self-preservation. This is the essence of the *self-deception of tribalism*, resulting in a "unity of persons" with shared mores and attitudes that are reproduced through structured interactions, communication and socially routinized patterns.

A theological view of the self also points to a type of self-deception based upon self-righteousness. In the *self-deception of legalism*, one sees only the ways in which one fulfills the law and blinds oneself to any moral obligations not prescribed by the

law or, in the case of some corporations, a written code of conduct. As demonstrated above, a narrow emphasis on legal compliance is typical of many corporation's programs designed to improve ethical conduct, raising the ironic possibility that such programs contribute to self-deception and, thereby, to moral blindness. Theological thinkers, including Luther, Thielicke, Via and McFadyen, see legalism as a self-deceptive attempt to use one's strict adherence to the law as a basis for moral justification before oneself and others, and even before God. By contrast, when one is in a dialogical relationship with God, justification begins with faith, which, in turn, requires humility, pride's opposite.

A third species of self-deception, the *self-deception of moral relativism*, is closely related to the first two. It denies the truth, available through the God-relation, that all persons and groups must finally be assessed in light of God's purposes for them. This denial often involves the belief that one's moral commitments and responsibilities are determined by, and may vary according to, the roles and contexts in which one finds oneself. This self-deception involves the false belief that "there are no universal moral standards to which all tribal moralities and tribal legal systems must be subject." This belief allows one to maintain an image of oneself as a moral person by convincing oneself that what counts as moral or immoral *for oneself* is relative to the situation in which the distinction is made. Hauerwas and Ellul join philosophers Sartre and MacIntyre in identifying social roles as "a ready vehicle for self-deception." To the extent that an individual conforms to the expectations associated with a role in corporate life, the self-deception of moral relativism may be required to maintain his or her unawareness of how the moral standard for this role

may conflict with the standard for other roles he or she may play outside of business. An example is the individual who allows the law to define the standard of morality for the business sphere while acknowledging supra-legal obligations in other areas of life.

A fourth category of self-deception in corporate life is described as the *self-deception of scientism*, the Rationalistic belief that science and technology are sufficient to provide objective answers to all of the important questions facing the self or humanity. When corporate managers subject questions solely to the authority of scientific or technological criteria, they refuse to acknowledge the truth that science is not capable of "generating *wisdom* in human affairs." They seek to justify their actions by instrumental reason, rather than by the truth revealed through the God-relation. The self-deception of scientism is motivated by intellectual pride, which actually seeks to raise human reason to the level of a god.

We have concluded that self-deception is a powerful force in the life of the corporation, a force that can impede moral awareness, effectively blinding individuals and groups to the truth about themselves and their activities. The means of self-deception described in these pages may take a variety of forms; but all entail a willful ignorance or disregard of the truth. Ironically, this deliberate unawareness is most often an act of pride by individuals who wish to see themselves as people of integrity and consistent moral character. Self-deception in matters of morality is deeply troubling, and perhaps more so when we discover that the best efforts of many corporations to improve their own ethical conduct have been less than effective, as the pride of self-sufficiency is itself self-deceptive.

Finally, it has not been the purpose of this inquiry to propose strategies for

preventing or overcoming self-deception in corporate life -- if, in fact, any may be found. Psychologists will argue that self-deception may be defeated by raising the level of one's self-understanding, possibly with the expert assistance of a therapist or psychoanalyst. They will insist that honesty with oneself is accomplished through introspective illumination of those areas of one's life (fears, past disappointments, unmet needs, etc.) that have become barriers to self-acceptance and self-understanding. By contrast, a theological understanding will suggest that neither self-examination nor expert therapy nor institutionalized ethics programs can be sufficient in themselves. For it is only through the redemptive grace of the God-relation that one can hope to transcend one's finite self-understanding and attain a truthful vision of oneself and one's situation in relation to the highest good.



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