

## INTRODUCTION

As various societies have created public commissions to help develop proposals for public policies relating to issues in bioethics, philosophers have sometimes been called upon to serve on the staff of, or to provide consultation to, these public bodies. The President's Commission, for example, had on its staff at one point or another Dan Brock, Allen Buchanan, and Dan Wikler. This issue of the *Journal* is devoted to examining problems that arise as one tries to articulate the proper role of philosophers serving in these capacities.

It is easy to see how such problems can arise. The academic philosopher usually sees himself or herself advocating positions which are supported by conceptual analyses and reasoned arguments, but which may or may not be acceptable to the political process of the community in which the philosopher operates. Public commissions, while engaged in reasoned arguments and analysis, seem by way of contrast also to be very much part of the political process, and to be looking for positions which are politically acceptable. How then does the apolitical philosopher fit into the political process of a public commission? And in fitting in, does the philosopher run the risk of losing his or her professional integrity? Each of the essays in this issue address these questions.

Frances Kamm begins by distinguishing three different contexts in which staff philosophers confront this issue: those in which everyone agrees on the correct conclusion but in which the philosopher and the commission disagree about the reasons for supporting that conclusion, those in which disagreement about reasons is accompanied by instability in the agreement about the conclusion, and those in which the commission members disagree about the conclusion. Kamm argues for staff philosophers maintaining their integrity by attending to their role as educator of the commission, and that this role involves both truly philosophizing and contributing to the development of morally appropriate compromises.

This notion of a morally appropriate compromise, which Kamm suggests might grow out of a contractarian commitment to respect individuals who represent views in the community defended in

accord with public reason, is central to Martin Benjamin's understanding of the role of philosophers in these commissions as they help develop compromises. Professor Benjamin identifies circumstances (complexity and uncertainty, need for policy and for continued cooperation, and limited resources) in which moral compromise is appropriate, and argues that a philosopher can help a commission develop a compromise position as the best possible recommendation. But the reader is cautioned to examine carefully these two authors' positions to see whether or not they are recommending the same thing when they talk about the value of compromises.

A special twist to this discussion is proved by Richard Momeyer's essay. Momeyer suggests, in the course of his discussion, that we need to consider the metaphysical issue of what counts as a moral truth when we talk about the role of philosophers in fashioning public compromises. If one sees truth in morality in a coherentist fashion, where truth emerges from a process of resolution among conflicting positions, compromise may be essential to ascertaining moral truth rather than challenging to integrity.

Paul Menzel approaches the issues with a rather different approach. He begins by arguing that bioethical controversies often raise fundamental underlying philosophical issues and cannot be resolved without attending to these issues. Menzel sees the role of philosophers as helping to identify these broader issues and helping to engage the commission and the public in this broad debate.

Each of our authors illustrate their point by reference to specific examples. E. Haavi Morreim's essay provides the fullest example of a philosopher (Morreim herself) actively engaged in a policy debate. At the end of her essay, Morreim attempts to draw conclusions from that example about the contribution of philosophers. One issue the reader will have to consider is whether Morreim's contribution would be different if she was on a public commission rather than a philosopher engaged in her own policy analysis.

It seems reasonable to suppose that philosophers will continue to be called upon to contribute to the activities of these public commissions. It is hoped that these essays will help philosophers and others understand what the role of philosophers should be in that task.