

# Communications Department

Forty-five American and Canadian scholars met at the Sheraton Conference Center in Reston, Virginia, on 10 to 12 April 1975 to participate in an Interdisciplinary Workshop on the Interrelationships Between Science and Technology, and Ethics and Values. The participants represented a variety of disciplines in the humanities, the social and natural sciences, and engineering. During the 2½ days of the workshop, they were able to exchange their insights on a number of broad theoretical topics such as comic and tragic modes in the practice of science, as well as on some rather well-defined case studies, such as criteria for the safety of industrial projects and practices.

The workshop was organized by William A. Blanpied and Wendy Weisman-Dermer of the AAAS Communications Department and was funded by grants from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Both agencies announced programs to support scholarly activities of an interdisciplinary nature on problems related to ethics and human values in February 1973. Many of the scholars interested in carrying out activities sponsored by these programs felt that intensive meetings with other scholars would be helpful in suggesting how the perspectives and methodologies of more than one discipline could be focused on the problems they proposed to treat. Thus the conference was organized as a means to help bridge the various barriers which appear to exist between the disciplines by providing an opportunity for concerned individuals to discuss various perspectives and professional methodologies in the context of problems of common concern.

A planning meeting was organized on 29 October 1974 in Washington, D.C., by Blanpied and Weisman-Dermer. It was decided during that meeting that the 2½-day workshop would be broken down into six working group sessions consisting of eight to ten people that would focus on theoretical topics during the first day and on applied case studies on the second. The groups would not be encouraged to outline tentative solutions to the problems set for them. Rather, they would examine the existing resources which the various disciplines could bring to bear toward a better understanding of those problems and identify areas of potential strengths as well as areas of deficiency. They would also be encouraged to outline tentative designs for research programs. Members of the planning group, each of whom agreed to serve as rapporteur for one working group topic each day, were Philip Bereano (Cornell

University), Peter Buck (University of California, Los Angeles), John Koller, (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), Joseph Meeker (Athabaska University), Van Potter (University of Wisconsin), and Dorothy Zinberg (Harvard University).

The conference began with opening remarks by William D. Carey (Executive Officer of the AAAS), Richard Hedrich (NEH), and Robert Baum (NSF). Brief keynote addresses were then given by Claire Nader (Oak Ridge National Laboratories), Thomas Nagel (Princeton University), Melvin Kranzberg (Georgia Institute of Technology), and Daniel Callahan (Institute of Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences). During the afternoon the first set of working groups met to discuss theoretical topics such as ethical and values aspects in the application of the "method" of the natural sciences to the study of human behavior.

The second morning was devoted to a series of talks by Milton Rokeach (Washington State University), Lawrence Cranberg, George Basala (University of Delaware), Barbara J. Culliton (*Science*), and William Davenport (Harvey Mudd College). Each speaker examined a case study in which a particular discipline had provided insights into a problem on the relationships between science and technology and ethics and values. During the afternoon the second set of working groups focused on the design of research programs on case study topics such as armament and disarmament.

It is still too early to determine what, if any, definite interdisciplinary projects may have evolved from this meeting. However, the participants departed with strong and generally positive impressions, many of which they expressed in writing.

John Ladd, a philosopher from Brown University, wrote that "Interdisciplinary work is *hard* work: it cannot be done simply from time to time and with anyone one meets casually who is interested in the 'same problems.' It isn't all that simple and easy. The key to interdisciplinary work is not motivation. It simply takes *practice*." Sally Gregory Kohlstedt, a historian of science from Simmons College, wrote that "The AAAS should use a conference such as this to identify areas of prime research interest and circulate these, while simultaneously 'lobbying' funding agencies to consider such proposals." A major criticism of the meeting was given by Claire Nader, as well as by several others, who felt that the meaningful work in the ethics and values area ought to involve a larger degree of participation from non-academics.

Despite the criticism and praise, most of the participants appreciated the opportunity to meet with a wide variety of individuals, most of whom they had never met before. Many felt that this would have an immediate, positive effect on their teaching. Some specific proposals have already materialized in basic forms such as symposia for the 1976 AAAS Annual Meeting in Boston, and a proposal for a summer institute. But it will be some time before the total impact of this meeting is felt. A workshop summary is being prepared and should be available from the Communications Department by mid-summer.

—WENDY WEISMAN-DERMER

## Notes from Other Offices

*Science Education:* A conference on science curricula and teaching in elementary and junior high schools was held at the University of Maryland in April. Curriculum developers, publishers and users, teacher educators, and other interested persons attended. Nearly 70 persons from throughout the United States participated.

The purpose of the conference was twofold. The first was to assess the situation today of introductory science education (for children 5 through 14 years) in the light of the various national curriculum development projects that have been supported by the National Science Foundation during the past 15 years. The second was to consider the directions of science education for the future—what should be done in the next 15 years.

It was agreed that there is still much to be done in the areas of implementation, communication, community involvement, and future development. Science curricula and teaching must accommodate social and economic changes, new knowledge in science and learning, and alternative viewpoints on the purposes, methods, modes, and settings of teaching.

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## NOVA Program Schedule

3 June. *Red Sea Coral and the Crown-of-Thorns*. Living literally on a platform in the middle of the Red Sea, a group of English biologists has been studying the crown of thorns starfish, notorious for the devastation it has wrought on the coral reefs of Australia and the Pacific (BBC).

10 June. *Strange Sleep*. For the men who discovered and pioneered anesthesia, personal payoff was bitter and tragic (WGBH).

17 June. *The Making of a Natural History Film*. A film about how you make films about nature (BBC).

24 June. *War From the Air*. A history of bombers and bombing and an exploration of the role of science and technology in warfare (WGBH).