

Book Reviews

The Journal of Information Ethics. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1992-. Semiannual. \$38 (ISSN 1061-9321).

Like any other profession, librarianship has a continuing need to reconsider, and if necessary revise, the ethical foundations of its mission. Practicing librarians draw on these principles to make pragmatic decisions about such matters as access to information, censorship, privacy, conflict of interest, and intellectual property. When it was launched in 1992, the *Journal of Information Ethics* (*JIE*) promised to provide a forum for discussion and debate of these issues through editorials, letters from readers, regular columns, scholarly articles, and book reviews. Robert Hauptman, the journal's editor, is the author of the book *Ethical Challenges in Librarianship*. Norman Stevens and John Swan, both frequent contributors, have been active in intellectual freedom circles, and McFarland is known as a publishing company with a social and political conscience.

Regrettably, the first three issues of *JIE* are very uneven. Although the author guidelines describe it as a "scholarly journal," it is actually a miscellany that includes not only practical advice, opinion, and research but also such unconventional pieces as a stream-of-consciousness monologue on the theme of the homeless, an interview with an entrepreneur in the student term paper business, and a policeman's tips on library security. Publisher Robert Franklin's credo reflects the emotional tone of *JIE*'s editorial voice: "This journal is indicative of a devotion to an elitist, dying, even wrong-headed body of society: those who believe that there are ethics to be found in information." It seems to me that a journal devoted to philosophical and moral reasoning (ethics) should

carefully distinguish itself from an organ that seeks to disseminate and defend particular points of view, even views as hallowed as "freedom of information" and "the right to read." I therefore hope that the editor will work to achieve a more consistent identity and quality for the journal than is evident thus far.

Three central themes emerge from the initial issues of *JIE*: (1) the philosophical basis of information ethics, (2) censorship, and (3) electronic information and its consequences. Even articles that focus on specific institutional or social settings such as the university, the workplace, or the public library, usually turn out to be dealing with one or more of these three fundamental themes.

Joseph E. Behar's "Critique of Computer Ethics: Technology as Ideology" defines what it means to talk about an ethics of information. He points out that "where traditional ethical approaches are 'personalistic' and address individualistic orders of moral responsibilities, the industrial effects of computerization involve macrosociological dimensions of social and organizational change. . . . One key area of ethical philosophy in studies of technology involves the critique of instrumental reason." Richard N. Stichler ("Ethics in the Information Market") rejects the currently dominant post-Enlightenment schools of ethics, utilitarianism, and deontology (the Kantian categorical imperative that requires moral standards to be universalizable). In their place, he recommends a context-based neo-Aristotelian model that focuses on ethical practices. These and other philosophical articles seem to be ultimately concerned with the problem of information as commodity, and with the social consequences of the market approach to information. This is a question

that affects us all, from the small public library to the federal government.

Compared with this vexing problem, the question of censorship or suppression of information appears more amenable to compromise, although it can be difficult in practice to balance conflicting political and social "goods." *JIE's* writers come down on the liberal side of most of these issues. Contributors comfortably call for the publication of a Native American history of Little Big Horn, oppose the *Wilson Library Bulletin's* firing of Will Manley, and attack Pat Robertson, Dan Quayle, left-wing censors, and state terrorism around the world. They have not yet dealt with the thornier issues of pornography and hate speech.

Ethical discussions of computerized information often concern the integrity, privacy, and security of data encoded in this most fluid of formats. The computer can make information more widely accessible, as Senator Patrick Leahy proudly explains in a solicited piece. But it also makes information difficult to control: subject to damage, mishandling, hidden surveillance, and unauthorized reproduction and revision. Articles on this subject, such as Carol Tenopir's sensible "Ethics for Online Educators," tend to be recipes for the prevention of abuse rather than probings of ethical dilemmas.

Articles on ethical questions in academia cannot be said to share any particular problem or approach. Perhaps the theme of dishonesty would cover plagiarism, hackers, and book theft. Conflict of interest is addressed in a study of faculty textbook selection and in Adam Drozdek's warning about corporate and military sponsorship of university research ("Pecunia Non Olet"). Again, the underlying philosophical question is the possible danger to the public good of an instrumental approach to the generation and dissemination of information.

This theme of the public trust emerges once again in Fred Whitehead's column decrying the sale of the rare book collection of the Kansas City Public Library. Whitehead delivers an unusual argument against the conventional wisdom that librarians should manage their col-

lections without outside interference from the public.

An editorial in the Spring 1993 issue of *JIE* ends with this plea: "The point of all these warnings is to alert us to the dangers inherent in an increasingly technological society. Be wary! Individual freedoms require vigilance." The lesson contained within the journal's own pages is, I think, somewhat different. It points to the need for thoughtful exploration of the place of information (and of librarians) in the good ("ethical") life, both at the individual and the social levels.—Jean Alexander, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.

Gattégno, Jean. *La Bibliothèque de France à mi-parcours: de la TGB à la BN bis?* Paris: Editions du Cercle de la Librairie, 1992. 259p. FF 125 (ISBN 27654-0512-3).

"J'en ai l'ambition et je le ferai": This is my ambition, and I will do it. This statement typifies the July 14, 1988, letter of François Mitterand to his prime minister, announcing, in his visionary manner, a new project in the series of "grands travaux" that includes the Grand Louvre and the Opéra de la Bastille. Mitterand's letter created the textual blueprint for what was to become the Bibliothèque de France (BdF), also known as the Très Grande Bibliothèque (TGB). Its few paragraphs contain a philosophical conception of a library that had yet to become a shared vision. This new library, according to Mitterand, would be a "very large library of a completely new type. . . . [I]t will cover all fields of knowledge, will be open to all, and will use the latest technical innovations to transmit information." The contrast with the venerated but traditional Bibliothèque Nationale (BN) could not have been stated more clearly: the BN in its cramped site on rue de Richelieu has one of the richest and most important collections in the humanities but covers the other branches of knowledge only from a historical perspective. The BN has also been dependent on the *dépôt légal*, and as a consequence is weak in foreign imprints. Furthermore, the library has restrictive access procedures