What does it mean to be a “good worker”? How do young workers become good workers? And, equally important, what are the early experiences and habits of mind that have led some idealistic young workers to become jaded, unethical veterans? These profound and vexing questions have taken on new urgency as we have watched a succession of once respected and successful professionals—reporter Jayson Blair at the New York Times, auditor David Duncan at Arthur Andersen LLP, physicist Hendrik Schon at Bell Labs—stand accused of falsifying data or destroying documents and generally betraying the ideals of their professions and society's trust. Worse yet, studies have documented widespread cheating among high-school and college students—and an equally widespread belief that cheating is justified by the pressure to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy. Even those who do not cheat often appear to believe that ethical conduct is incompatible with professional success.

In the important new book Good Work: How Young People Cope with Moral Dilemmas at Work, a team of researchers from Harvard's Graduate School of Education addresses these central questions. The team is led by Hobbs professor of cognition and education Howard Gardner, whose work on “multiple intelligences” has reframed the way we think about human cognition. Since 1996, Gardner has been engaged in an equally important project to understand the nature, causes, and consequences of

Illustration by Dan Page

Good Work
On professional norms and the treacherous temptation of “moral freedom"
by DAVID B. WILKINS
“good work”—and how institutions and individuals can best promote this goal. In 2001, the “GoodWorks Project” produced Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet, a valuable study of how veteran workers in journalism and genetic research attempt to maintain their ethics in the face of pressure to cut corners or sacrifice their ideals. In this new book, Gardner and a trio of young researchers explore how young people in these same fields learn to become—or not to become—good workers. The result is a learned, thought-provoking, and accessible investigation of some of the most pressing issues of our time.

Gardner and his collaborators begin with this simple but profound premise: Every worker has both the right and the responsibility to be a “professional” who produces work that is “good,” both in the technical sense of being performed with skill and in the moral sense of responding to the needs of society. Individuals are most likely to be able to do so, the researchers contend, if the field in which they work is “well aligned” in that all stakeholders (for example, employers, workers, and those who receive or are af-

Nicholas Puner requests leads to lost favorites. In the first, a short story, a man is driven progressively around the bend by a malefactor who gradually shaves down the victim’s cane, making it increasingly difficult for him to walk. The others are a series of English detective stories for children involving the Mackie family, “set in coastal precincts” and published no later than the 1940s.

John Keedy seeks a poem with the phrase “the runner stumbles” in its title.

Margaret Rusk hopes someone can identify a fictional or nonfictional work, probably pre-1900, that she recalls about a companion animal named “Elegant.”

Victoria Henderson would like to learn the full text and author of a poem that begins, “Once there was a proper gent/Who walked to town each day.” The poem’s story duplicates Edward Arlington Robinson’s “Richard Cory.”

“Love calls us to the things of this world” (March-April). Sarah Manguso suggested as a source the following passage from Saint Augustine’s Confessions, (book x, paragraph 27, translated by R.S. Pine-Coflin): “I have learnt to love you late, Beauty at once so ancient and new! I have learnt to love you late! You were within me, and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you. The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have no being at all.”

Send inquiries and answers to “Chapter and Verse,” Harvard Magazine, 7 Ware Street, Cambridge 02138.
fect ed by the work) want more or less the same thing (for example, curing disease or fairly and accurately reporting the news). But alignment is threatened when stakeholders become motivated by things other than achieving these core professional ideals. Given the extent to which market forces have come to dominate journalism, science, and the arts—and much of the rest of our lives—it is not surprising that the authors devote most of their time to studying how young workers understand and respond to the potentially corrupting influence of money.

To investigate this question, the researchers interviewed high school students who had already exhibited a serious commitment to journalism, science, or theater and a group of professionals (in their twenties or early thirties) in the early stages of their careers. Researchers then analyzed the attitudes and experiences of the young workers and compared them with each other, with veterans in their own field, and with workers in the other two domains. (There is a concise, helpful appendix on research design.)

Based on these conversations, the authors begin by reporting an important piece of good news. For the most part, young workers are committed to the same overarching goals that veteran workers had previously identified as constituting the core ethical aspirations of the domain. Young journalists want to report the news accurately and fairly. Budding scientists want to conduct research of the highest quality and distribute its results broadly to serve the public good. Aspiring actors want to perform roles that entertain and educate.

But the bad news quickly follows. From the beginning of their careers, young workers feel pressure to compromise these lofty ideals. In order to satisfy their editors’ need to win the “ratings war,” young journalists are pressed to report sensationalized stories that they believe distort the truth and add little to the public debate. Those embarking on scientific careers are often asked to choose between their desire to conduct unbiased and thorough research that will be available to all who might benefit, and their need to “publish or perish” in order to gain access to increasingly scarce opportunities in academics or more plentiful and lucrative, but also more restrictive, positions in private industry. Aspiring actors must decide whether to accept demeaning or stereotypical roles to advance their careers. All these pressures increase as young workers move from the relative security of high school newspapers, competitive but well-defined science competitions, and theater clubs to the far more intense, less structured world of work.

OPEN BOOK

Seduction by Credit

In The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics and the Sociology of Science (Princeton University Press, 1923), published in February, the late Robert K. Merton, Ph.D. ’36, L.L.D. ’80, and the late Elinor Barber, Ph.D. ’31, eruditely and entertainingly trace the history of the word “serendipity” from its coinage in 1754 by Horace Walpole. The young Merton first happened upon the word in his very own copy of the Oxford English Dictionary, which he had acquired, he writes, as follows.

I t may be remembered that 1933 was the year in which Franklin Delano Roosevelt—soon known the world over as FDR—first took office as president of the then ailing United States. In an instant effort to cope with the years-long economic chaos that became known as the “Great Depression,” FDR’s first official act was to declare a “national banking holiday.” That “holiday” or “moratorium” closed all banks in the country, which meant that Americans would not have access to their bank deposits for some unannounced duration. And rather more egocentrically, it meant that I would not have access to my meager savings at the Cambridge Savings Bank conveniently located on Harvard Square.

But all was not lost. Deprived of their customary trade, merchants on Harvard Square swiftly adapted to that condition by offering to extend credit to properly certified Harvard students. And happily for us student bibliophiles—the owner of our favorite Phillips Book Store headed the list of those rational, ingenious, risk-taking, and sympathetic merchants making that inviting offer. That led less optimist bibliophiles, including myself, to rush to the bookshop in the thought that they might be able to convert at least some of their inaccessible and possibly irredeemable cash into books. Browsing through the bookshop...I came upon the 10 resplendent volumes of the OED that were once the domain of the public good. Young journalists want to report the news accurately and fairly. Budding scientists want to conduct research of the highest quality and distribute its results broadly to serve the public good.
From their nuanced evaluation of a range of moral dilemmas in each field, the researchers conclude that six factors play a pivotal role in whether young journalists, scientists, and actors succumb to these pressures: an individual’s long-standing beliefs and values, access to positive role models and mentors, values held by one’s peers, pivotal experiences that teach about or reward good conduct, institutional structures and policies, and periodic reinforcement of the idea of good work.

Significantly, the extent to which these factors are present varies across the three fields. After they leave the supportive cocoon of their high-school or college newspapers, for example, young journalists are left almost entirely on their own: they have few mentors and face largely antagonistic relations with their editors and highly competitive relationships with their peers. As a result, they have few resources to call on in framing a strategy to resist pressures to cut corners or sensationalize their reporting. By contrast, young scientists early on enter into strong, supportive developmental relationships with senior members in their field. Although these relationships help to reinforce standards for conducting research, they also create the potential for senior researchers to take advantage of their vulnerable subordinates (for example, by failing to give them credit for their work) and discourage young people from speaking up for fear of antagonizing these crucial patrons. Understanding these differences, the researchers make clear, is one of the principal challenges facing those who wish to promote good work.

Indeed, as Gardner and his collaborators move forward on the GoodWorks Project, I suspect that they will find even more evidence demonstrating a strong link between the normative and institutional characteristics of a given field and the practice of ‘good work.” Although some of this linkage, as the researchers demonstrate, is due to the pressure of market forces, it is also important to recognize that another potential source of misalignment is the traditional ideals themselves.

Thus, some of the ethical problems the book identifies—journalists fabricating their sources, scientists publishing results without giving proper credit to those who produced them, actors demeaning themselves to get roles—vio-
late any standard conception of the ethics of these professions.

The status of other conflicts between the technical and the moral senses of good work, however, is far more difficult to resolve just by relying on traditional ideals from the three domains. Should a journalist refrain from publishing truthful but potentially embarrassing facts about a public official for fear of “unfairly” influencing an upcoming election? Is a young geneticist responsible for how her scientific discovery is used, or the price charged for it? Are actors accountable for the degree to which certain audience members may be offended by their performance? Traditional understandings

Complicated Relationship

Freshman women officially joined their male counterparts in Harvard Yard’s dormitories in 1972. But 25 years later, when Harvard College dedicated a new gate into the Old Yard to celebrate that event, many assumed the anniversary hoopla commemorated the start of coeducation at Harvard itself. “Ironically,” writes Phillips professor of early American history Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, “the very effort to add women to Harvard’s public history erased a full century of their presence” at “its ostensible sister college,” Radcliffe. For many Radcliffe alumnae, “the new gate fortified old fences.”

Now, explains Ulrich, “a group of faculty, alumni/ae, students, and friends of Harvard and Radcliffe have joined together to begin ‘rewriting’ Harvard’s history.” Their new anthology, Yards and Gates: Gender in Harvard and Radcliffe History (Palgrave Macmillan, $26.95), also represents a collaboration between Harvard’s Warren Center for the Study of American History and Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library for Women’s History.

The essays, letters, diary entries, and historic illustrations reflect the fact that “there have always been women at Harvard”—and arguments for and against female education as well. They illuminate Radcliffe’s “rich and compelling” history, related to but separate from Harvard’s. And they demonstrate that “gender is present even when women are not” and that “attitudes toward women intersected with attitudes toward others who seemed marginal to Harvard’s mission.” The collection closes with a speech to the College class of 2005 by Drew Gilpin Faust, dean of the Radcliffe Institute. “In her view—and ours,” notes Ulrich, who edited the anthology, “a more inclusive Harvard demands a more inclusive history. This volume is one step in that direction.” (An earlier version of “Rewriting Harvard’s History,” Ulrich’s introductory essay, appeared as the cover story of this magazine’s November-December 1999 issue.)

~J.M.
of professional ethics in these three domains arguably suggest that the answer in each instance is no. Journalists, scientists, and actors are responsible solely to the values, respectively, of truth, discovery, and artistic expression. Compromising these values in the name of preventing bad consequences is not just unwise, in the eyes of many purists, it is unethical.

But it is just this single-minded focus that may ultimately undermine the ability of young workers to engage in the kind of ethical reflection that Gardner and his associates correctly identify as the key to good work. For example, it is at least plausible that the surprising disregard of the young journalists interviewed for keeping appointments and otherwise honoring their commitments to the researchers is connected to an arrogance born of the news professionals’ traditional view that they are uniquely responsible for discovering the truth and that all other obligations pale in importance.

(Th e book begins, for example, with a quote from Washington Post reporter Bob Woodward about how his early experience of surreptitiously reading confidential files in his father’s law office—an act that would clearly compromise his father’s ethical obligations as a lawyer, and Woodward’s obligation as someone working in his father’s office—led him to believe that he had a responsibility to reveal who people “really are.”) Similarly, the tendency the authors identify among scientists to deflect responsibility for decisions about the use or dissemination of scientific knowledge to government officials is plausibly connected to the ethical belief among many in the field that taking such concerns into account would compromise the goals of scientific inquiry.

Even the actors, whom the researchers admiringly describe as being “fully present” during the interviews, may be more likely to ignore how their work affects others because of traditional views about “art for art’s sake” that place self-expression above all other goods.

Uncovering and elaborating these connections will require even more attention to what the researchers call the “mission” of different kinds of work, especially in fields such as journalism or science—or my own field of law—which consider themselves to be “professional” in the more traditional sense of being governed by ethical rules that differ from those that apply to individuals who do not occupy these roles.

Ideally, exploring how to balance a profession’s own understanding of its role and the views and needs of society would be a central task of professional education. From the accounts provided here, however, there is little reason to be optimistic that anything like such an investigation is taking place. Young journalism students typically describe journalism school as a waste of time. Young scientists point to little in their training that equips them to handle ethical issues that arise in their work. Indeed, the clientist relationships that characterize the academic environment appear to reinforce rather than counteract pressures for unethical scientific conduct. Ironically, only a group of young actors attending a high school with an intensive theater concentration reported taking classes that directly prepared them for entering the professional world. But after high school, these aspiring professionals were pretty much on their own as well.

Left to their own devices, young work-
ers in all three domains tend to personalize ethical problems and their solutions. Rather than focusing on the structural or ideological causes of ethical conflict, the participants in the study wherever possible framed their choices in terms of whether they were living up to their own ideals. This framing is understandable in situations where young people feel powerless to influence most of the forces that control their lives.

But, as the researchers demonstrate, it is also fraught with ethical danger. In what many are sure to find their most disturbing finding, the authors report that time and time again young workers felt justified in exempting themselves from established ethical restrictions—lying about sources or methods, taking a stereotypical role—to accomplish ends that they believed justified the means. Some ends were truly altruistic: the case of a reporter who admitted lying to his editor by claiming a need to double-check facts in order to avoid running a story that the reporter believed would exploit those involved. Far too often, however, the end in question was simply self-promotion, as in the example of a young scientist who conceded that she misrepresented her research methods to win a prestigious prize. Although study participants repeatedly assured researchers that their ethical deviations were only temporary, we all know from hard experience that habits made in youth are difficult to break.

Moving beyond self-serving tendencies will require careful attention to both the important role that professionals play in our society and the competitive market conditions in which they must now work. By exposing the complex interplay among ideals, institutions, and personal commitments, excellent research of the kind contained here, and the efforts of the Good-Works Project generally, are crucial to this endeavor. I look forward to the further good work that these scholars will produce.