



APA NEWSLETTER ON

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Philosophy

Carol Quinn, Editor

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FROM THE EDITOR

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I invite you to enjoy a special issue with papers honoring distinguished LGBT philosopher, Richard Mohr. At the 2003 Pacific Division APA meetings in San Francisco, the Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy, in a session co-sponsored by the APA Committee on the Status of LGBT People in the Profession, inaugurated the honoring of a selected distinguished LGBT philosopher. This year's recipient was Richard Mohr. The speakers, all of whom have been especially influenced by Mohr's work, were Claudia Card, John Corvino, Raja Halwani, Robert Hood, and Jim Stramel. These papers, in addition to reflections by Mohr, and a follow-up response by Halwani, are included in this edition. I am delighted to report that three of the speakers — Halwani, Hood, and Stramel — are being awarded tenure this year. Congratulations to all and warmest wishes!

Contributions Invited

The editor encourages contributions to the newsletter, especially essays that might fall through the cracks elsewhere for being untraditional in scope or content. Pieces may range from opinion pieces to book reviews to short articles. Commentary on issues important to professional life — teaching, research, and service — are especially welcome. Early contact with the editor is strongly encouraged. Please contact Carol Quinn at Department of Philosophy, 9201 University City Blvd., University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, NC 28223.

FEATURED PAPERS HONORING RICHARD MOHR

Celebrating the Career of Richard Mohr: A Personal Historical Narrative

Claudia Card

University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI

In the mid-1980s, my eye caught a philosophy journal ad listing an explicitly gay article by a philosopher named Richard Mohr. I wrote him for a copy and to ask if he had tenure (he did). Thus began a long correspondence and exchange of papers. I soon got to review the manuscript

of his first award-winning gay philosophy book, *Gays/Justice* (Columbia University Press, 1988). He mobilized me to send Columbia a proposal for what became my first treatise, *Lesbian Choices* (Columbia University Press, 1995). He introduced me to the *Lesbian and Gay Law Notes*, which I read for many years, and recommended me for the editorial board of Columbia's lesbian/gay book series, *Between Men/Between Women*, of which he was the first chair. I still serve on that board, although Richard resigned, as a matter of self-respect, when Columbia became squeamish about publishing the photographs in his second gay book, *Gay Ideas* (it was published in 1992 by Beacon Press, which supports academic freedom with enthusiasm). Each December I look for the holiday photo-card of Richard and his husband Robert Switzer from one of their recent exotic vacations.

Through Richard, I met the late John Pugh, philosophy professor at John Carroll University and co-founder of our Society who left it a bequest. At the Central Division APA meeting in Cincinnati in 1988, John Pugh, Sarah Hoagland, and I met to found the Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy, which we called SLAGP (pronounced "slag-p"). Richard could not be present, but he was very much behind that meeting in promoting the establishment of the Society and very active in maintaining it through its early precarious years. We also established a Gay and Lesbian Caucus, with the idea that the Caucus would do political activism and the Society would do philosophy. John Pugh and I were the first co-chairs of both, and I recall that first year was a lot of paper work. Our by-laws provided for the election every three years of co-chairs, a lesbian and a gay man. During years when that proved unworkable, as too few lesbians were ready and willing to serve, we got by with one chair. The Caucus never took on a life of its own. But the Society thrived, thanks in large part to Richard Mohr, who for ten years arranged programs for meetings in all three APA divisions, a major responsibility which he carried out magnificently. But I'm getting ahead of the story.

SLAGP had to apply to be an APA satellite organization, to secure the right to hold sessions at APA meetings. In this we were strongly supported and encouraged by Professor Sandra Bartky (University of Illinois at Chicago) then on the APA Board. APA rules require membership in satellites to be open to all APA members. They also required organizations applying for satellite status to submit membership lists, but modified that rule for us in view of our policy (for obvious reasons) of confidentiality for members who do not explicitly waive that right. (Despite Richard's vigorous support of outing, such confidentiality about membership remains the Society's policy). The APA accepted a sample list of members who consented to be on it. That list included APA members who never identified as lesbian or gay but who support us (and want to counter others' assumptions). The application process (before email) took more than a year.

Meanwhile, we got permission to hold our first session at the 1989 Eastern Division meeting in Atlanta, a program that included an exchange between Ed Stein and Judith Butler on the issue of social construction.

Through Richard Mohr I also met Timothy Murphy (Medical Humanities Program at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Chicago) who was the SLAGP's first newsletter editor. Tim has edited anthologies on AIDS, gay civil rights, and sexual science, to one of which I contributed a piece on the military ban and the ROTC, and we have served on committees together. Richard facilitates many such connections, an invaluable service in a group whose members are not always readily identifiable to one another.

Richard gives innumerable lectures and interviews on gay topics, both academic and popular. In 1988, he gave a highly successful interdisciplinary University Lecture at the University of Wisconsin. This was my philosophy department's first encounter with a male philosophy professor lecturing on a gay topic. I have it on videotape. He later framed the colorful silk-screened poster for the event and hung it in his office at Illinois. In 1990, he arranged for me to lecture to the University of Illinois' Women's Studies Program and Philosophy Department, which is when I saw the poster in his office. He and Robert fed me, put me up at their house, and introduced me to their cats.

Richard was trained at the University of Toronto in ancient Greek philosophy (MA 1973; Ph.D. 1977). His first book, widely reviewed in academic journals, was *Platonic Cosmology* (1985). He is also a connoisseur of the arts, especially ceramics, and a collector of antiques. His latest book, *Pottery, Politics, Art: George Ohr and the Brothers Kirkpatrick*, was published in April 2003 by the University of Illinois Press. His gay articles, beginning sometime in the 1980s (many since reprinted and reprinted repeatedly), have appeared not just in academic journals but in newspapers, popular magazines, and activist periodicals. His three widely reviewed gay books are all award-winners: *Gays/Justice: A Study of Ethics, Society, and Law* (Columbia University Press, 1988), *Gay Ideas: Outing and Other Controversies* (Beacon 1992), and *A More Perfect Union: Why Straight America Must Stand Up for Gay Rights* (Beacon Press, 1994). The first two won the Gustavus Myers Center Outstanding Book Award on the subjects of intolerance and human rights; the second won, in addition, the Editors' Choice Award of the 5th Lambda Literary Awards, and the third won the Lesbian World Unity Award, sponsored by the *Lesbian World Newspaper*. Richard's early essays and chapters in gay philosophy became models for me of clarity, feistiness, humor, and scrupulous argument (and documentation) in addressing an audience inclusive of those not entirely friendly to the very idea of our existence, let alone to the heresy that we might actually have rights. Some, such as "Gay Basics" (reprinted 35 times and still counting), seem to have originated in course lectures to conservative students of the Illinois heartland. Others responded to issues within the gay community nationally, such as the essay on dignity that concludes *Gays/Justice* (my personal favorite) and the outing essay in which Richard proclaims with deliberate outrage that he intends to out every gay person he knows, as long as gays are not being shot.

I have publically disagreed with positions Richard defends on outing and on gay marriage. The disagreements probably emerge from our being differently situated as male and female in a society that is as sexist as it is homophobic. Arguments in favor of outing posed in Richard's *Gay Ideas* set the stage for my chapter, "Other People's Secrets: The Ethics of Outing," in my *Lesbian Choices*. His highly articulate defense of gay marriage is something I take issue with in discussing what I call terrorism

in the home (euphemistically known as "domestic violence") in Chapter seven of my book *The Atrocity Paradigm* (Oxford University Press, 2002). At a Pacific Division APA meeting SLAGP panel a few years ago Richard found what I had to say on that issue so exasperating that he exploded, "but that's just STUPID!" which astonished some present who did not yet know him very well. I knew him well enough not to be mortally offended. Richard's feistier essays and explosions are very democratic. Collectively, and following his Socratic model, they offer something to offend everyone. In one essay, for example, he actually disparages students (in a humorous way), to the horror of many feminist readers. Perhaps he will turn out in the end to be right about the marriage issue, if marriage is a more resilient institution than I have thought. We agree that it is wrong to discriminate against lesbians and gays. Disagreement centers on whether marriage is a legal right that we should seek. Yet, agree or disagree, I always benefit from Richard's work, which sets out point by point the central ethical issues and values at stake in whatever position one takes. And we do not always disagree. We both, for example, resist the view popularized by Foucault that sexual orientation is a purely socially constructed phenomenon with a history of only a little more than a century.

Not only does Richard Mohr set a high standard for publishing gay and lesbian philosophy, but he successfully reaches a wide audience, academic and non-academic, with his lucid, often irrefutable arguments. Introductory philosophy textbooks and applied ethics texts include his essays routinely. He has done an enormous amount to legitimate the field of gay studies, not just in philosophy but at the level of university certificate and degree programs in what have come to be known as LGBT programs (sometimes even LGBTQ programs), although I don't recall either acronym or even the word "queer" (let alone "postmodern") as part of his working vocabulary. These area studies were initially dominated by writers in literature whose training was influenced more by Continental European philosophical traditions. Richard, with his 1972 BA from the University of Chicago and his graduate degrees from the University of Toronto (like Marilyn Frye, trained in the 1960s at Stanford and Cornell and recently honored by the Eastern Society of Women in Philosophy) was among the very first with an analytic philosophical training to reach so wide an audience with philosophical essays on gay and lesbian experience. Today that influence is global.

And so I want to say, Thank you, Richard Mohr! Your enthusiastic, tireless, productive and creative work — and your Socratic activity as our gadfly — have contributed so much to this Society and to LGBT Studies in this country that it is more than fitting to acknowledge and celebrate it publicly and pass along a bit of this history to the next generation.

Honoring Richard Mohr

John Corvino

Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

When Raja Halwani and Robert Hood first floated the idea of doing a session honoring Richard Mohr, I immediately expressed interest in participating. Raja responded that he thought my involvement would be appropriate, because, given some of the pieces I've written for anthologies, I've become a "Little

Richard Mohr.” Raja no doubt intended this to be understood as “Little Richard Mohr.” But I heard it as “*Little Richard Mohr*,” which caused me to form a mental image of Richard Mohr with lots of eye makeup and Jheri-curls. I have yet to forgive Raja for this image, which is really quite frightening.

I first met Richard in 1990 when I was a 21-year-old new graduate student at Notre Dame. Notre Dame was (and from what I hear, still is) a miserable place to be gay. The administration frequently reminded us that the gay student organization could not be officially recognized because our views “conflict[ed] with Catholic teaching.” (We did have a Muslim student group on campus, and a Jewish student group on campus. Muslims and Jews both deny the divinity of Christ, which, when I went to Catholic school, was a very important part of Catholic teaching. But I digress.)

Anyway, Jim Sterba, knowing of my struggle there, encouraged me to attend a talk by philosopher Richard Mohr. Richard gave a defense of homosexuality in which he pulled no punches; he then proceeded to spend another hour forcefully responding to the barrage of attacks he received from faculty and students alike. I was in awe. Not only did he handle the questions deftly, but he maintained remarkable self-assurance in what was clearly a hostile environment. Afterwards a smaller group (invited by Sterba) met with him, and we enjoyed a much more pleasant dialogue. There I introduced myself and explained my situation to him.

A few months later I escaped Notre Dame and continued my graduate studies at the University of Texas. Shortly after my arrival there I received a note from Richard expressing concern about my philosophical and personal well-being. Thus began my mentorship by “Uncle Richard.” I’m not sure when the appellation “Uncle” began, but it was appropriate, and it stuck. I’d like to spend some time explaining the story of that mentorship, in part to thank Richard and in part to encourage others to follow his lead.

Over the next few years Richard kept in touch (this was before email became popular, so it was usually via letter). He encouraged me to channel some of my anger from my Notre Dame experience into philosophical reflection on some of the points of contention. This led to a short paper on “Homosexuality and Biblical Interpretation,” which he arranged to have me present at an SLAGP session, thereby spurring my involvement with the society. Apparently pleased with the paper, Richard contacted Richard Schneider at the *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* and encouraged him to take a look—the paper became the first of my three contributions thus far to that publication (now known as the *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*). Richard suggested to me that the paper would do more good and get a wider audience in that venue than in a philosophical journal; the letters I have received over the years in response to it suggest that he was right.

Richard was also involved in the genesis of my anthology *Same Sex*. In the mid-1990s, Jim Sterba was editing an ethics series for Rowman and Littlefield. With Richard’s endorsement, he approached me about doing a book with them. In hindsight, I can say that I was too young and inexperienced to take on an anthology project (I thought it was going to be easy—big mistake). Trying to assemble a couple-dozen authors—some of whom are hard to access, some of whom have big egos, some of whom are dead—is a daunting project for anyone, but especially for a graduate student without any academic clout. I made a number of mistakes along the way. But Uncle Richard was there throughout the process to offer guidance and support.

After completing *Same Sex* I turned to my dissertation (on David Hume) and soon thereafter went on the job market. Those of you who have been on the job market in recent years, who have mentored those who have, or who are on the market currently, know just what an occasion for despair the philosophy job market can be. Once again, Uncle Richard offered his encouragement and advice, and that was very important to me at what was truly a difficult time.

Since that time he has continued to offer support whenever I ask for it, usually in the form of reading drafts or just offering advice on some professional matter or another. In this way Richard has been a true mentor. And I haven’t even mentioned the way his philosophical work—especially *Gays/Justice*, but also *Gay Ideas* and *A More Perfect Union*—have shaped my own thinking on ethics, politics, and identity.

Richard can be a true pain in the ass. And I don’t think any complete discussion of him can omit that point. I remember his once visiting me with his partner, Robert Switzer, when I lived in Austin, Texas. I decided to cook for them, and when they arrived I invited them to go up to their room (which was actually *my* room) to rest a bit before dinner. About an hour later, when dinner was ready, he came downstairs and the very first words out of his mouth were, “You know, you need to dust the tops of your picture frames.” (He did later thank me for the room and the dinner.)

Another time Richard and Robert visited me in Detroit while attending a Modernism show. We went to dinner in Windsor, Canada and our waiter was somewhat inattentive. When he arrived at the table he said, “Okay, Ladies and Gentlemen...” even though all five of us at the table were male. Richard corrected him. A few minutes later he did it again. After that and a few other missteps by the waiter, Richard excused himself from the table and went and had a “talk” with the manager. Suffice it to say that I’ve never been back to the restaurant.

But this quality of Richard’s (which often reads as abrasiveness) is actually one of his virtues—at least most of the time. *Richard calls things as he sees them*. And for that reason, you always know where you stand with him and can count on him for honest criticism of your work.

Early in my career I often turned to Richard for support. Encouraged by his attention, I got a little full of myself. Then Richard sent a message cautioning me against “patting myself on the back to the point of bruising.” This very colorful metaphor—typical of Richard’s vivid prose—stuck: it was something I needed to hear, and I thank him for saying it.

It is fashionable in these events to spend some time saying how wonderful someone is and then to proceed to rip his work to shreds. I’m not going to do that today—not because I don’t think his work is worthy of critical attention, and not because I agree with it all, but because I want to conclude by talking about a piece with which none of us is likely to have any *serious* disagreement: “Gay Basics.” And I want to focus on this work because it is, without doubt, his most widely read piece, having appeared in dozens of anthologies and assigned to tens (maybe hundreds) of thousands of students.

This sort of work is often disparaged by professional philosophers, who tend to view it as “not very philosophical,” “not rigorous,” or (god forbid) “popular.” Richard escapes some of this criticism because he has published for scholarly audiences as well as for students and general readers. Still, there is a danger in confusing what is most “scholarly” with what is most important.

I know the importance of “Gay Basics” firsthand because I saw it operate in my own life when I heard the lecture-version of it at Notre Dame over a dozen years ago. And I’ve also seen it operate in the lives of students when I’ve had occasion to teach the piece in Contemporary Moral Issues courses. That piece—probably more than anything else Richard or any of us in this room has written—has helped people. It has helped gay and lesbian people directly, by showing them that they are not alone, and that the opposition to their lives rests on flimsy argument. And it has helped them indirectly, by forcing straights to confront their prejudice and answer for their views.

“Gay Basics” was written in the mid 1980s to fulfill an anthology editor’s request to address the views of what he called an audience of “boneheaded bigots”—that is, average college students. I went back and read “Gay Basics” this week, and I was struck by two things: first, how some (though only some) parts of it seemed a bit dated—a point I’ll address in a moment. Second, and far more significant, how powerfully the piece still reads after nearly two decades. My “Tommy and Jim” may be newer, but its prose is downright clunky next to Richard’s. Moreover, “Gay Basics” embodies a broad liberal vision that has yet to be matched by any subsequent article on gay rights.

I said that some parts of “Gay Basics” seem dated, and this is to be expected after 15-odd years in an article that addresses popular stereotypes. “Gay Basics” starts off discussing the invisibility of homosexual people—this was before *Ellen*, *Will and Grace*, the Clinton presidency, the Vermont domestic-partnership package, and other significant cultural and political milestones for gay and lesbian people. It notes how “discussions of homosexuality are taboo...particularly...in academe”—this was before much of the “queer theory” movement that Richard later criticized in *Gay Ideas*. It predicts that “if current discrimination, which drives gays into hiding and into anonymous relations, was lifted, far from seeing gays raze American families, one would see gays forming them”—this was before Rosie O’Donnell’s coming out as a lesbian in support of gay adoption.

But the point I want to stress here is that if a few sentences in “Gay Basics” seem dated, that is no doubt thanks in part to “Gay Basics” itself, which, as I noted, has shaped the minds of countless students. No one who reads that piece in a Contemporary Moral Issues course can rest comfortably in homophobic attitudes. No one who has been exposed to Richard’s op-ed work can fail to be moved by his well-reasoned and articulate defenses of liberty.

Richard is unabashedly a public intellectual, and we need more public intellectuals. I note with some embarrassment that among the briefs in the Lawrence v. Texas case, which was argued before the Supreme Court just yesterday, there were plenty filed by lawyers and historians but none filed by professional philosophers (except those like Andy Koppelman, who have academic appointments outside of philosophy). Richard reminds us through his magnificent example of the transformative power of what we do. And even though he is not yet retiring—and I hope he does not do so for some time to come—it is incumbent upon all of us here to pick up his mantle. We need not wait for a war to make our voices heard in public forums on matters of concern to us all.

I’d like to conclude by quoting the final paragraph of “Gay Basics.” Though written over fifteen years ago, we need these words now as much as ever:

Finally, and perhaps paradoxically, in extending the rights and benefits it has reserved for its dominant culture and extended selectively to others, America would confirm its deeply held, nearly religious vision of itself as a morally progressing nation, a nation itself advancing and serving as a beacon

for others—especially with regard to human rights. The words with which our national pledge ends—“with liberty and justice for all”—are not a description of the present but a call for the future. Ours is a nation given to a prophetic political rhetoric which acknowledges that morality is not arbitrary and that justice is not merely the expression of the current collective will. It is this vision that led, even in the absence of much articulate moral argument, the black civil rights movement to its successes. Those congressmen who opposed that movement and its centerpiece, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, on obscurantist grounds, but who lived long enough and were noble enough, came in time to express their heartfelt regret and shame at what they had done. It is to be hoped and someday to be expected that those who now grasp at anything to oppose the extension of that which is best about America to gays will one day feel the same.

Uncle Richard, for reminding us ceaselessly to push for liberty and justice for all, and for constantly supporting us who have tried in various small ways to do so, we thank you.

In Honor of Richard Mohr

Raja Halwani

School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Richard Mohr’s influence on LGBT studies is immense, and anyone who is familiar with Richard’s work and with the field of LGBT studies should have no difficulty in recognizing this. I will, momentarily, say more about one specific issue — outing — within LGBT studies on which Richard’s work has had tremendous influence. For now, I want to indulge myself in an account of how Richard has affected me personally and professionally.

It was Richard who, back in 1997, encouraged me to submit and read papers at SLAGP sessions at APA meetings. I willingly agreed, and it was because of this that I started reading papers at APA meetings. Moreover, Richard’s ability to see into people’s psyches was applied to my own psyche, and he immediately saw one highly neurotic and obsessive person, such that, if that person were to handle organizing the SLAGP sessions, he or she would obsess about getting it done. Richard (and Tim Murphy) asked me to be the programming chair for SLAGP, and I, highly flattered, agreed. I have been doing it since 1999, and my neurosis and obsessiveness have worked: we have had programs at every APA meeting.

But Richard’s influence on me was also philosophical. I remember one snowy day in Syracuse finally settling down to begin reading *Gay Ideas*. It was the first book by Richard I had read (I later read *Gays/Justice* and *A More Perfect Union*), and the first chapter on outing galvanized me into philosophical action, so to speak. I had always had a troubled relationship with the issue of outing, both philosophically and practically. While living in Lebanon, a country with more than its fair share of homophobia, I was outed in a way and by certain people such that my life, literally, was in danger for a few weeks. I had to leave my parents’ apartment in Beirut and take shelter in the mountains, where my grandfather’s house was (and still is) located. And the mountains of Lebanon were, by the way, the historical place where persecuted minorities took shelter from oppressive regimes. So in that sense, I lived Lebanon’s troubled history. But the point is that this event was an important one in my life. I was angry and frustrated at the brutality of some people and the actions they can take to make

your life miserable. That outing was specifically designed to put my life in danger and, more importantly perhaps, to hurt and shame me. For a long time since then, I had vowed not to ever out anyone — at least not in Lebanon.

But my relationship with my first serious boyfriend (I only had two serious boyfriends, including the present one) was suffering from the immense burden of having to maintain a web of secrets and lies. I was getting angrier and angrier at having to live life like this, and was pushing my boyfriend that we disclose our relationship to at least our intimate friends so that we didn't have to lie to them anymore and live a charade. But he would not agree. Finally, in frustration at the war and our relationship, and in desire to pursue a doctorate in philosophy, I came to the United States as a graduate student.

My coming out process here was gradual. But by the end of the first year of my stay in the United States, I was pretty much out. But I did continue to be swayed by arguments that outing is wrong. And then came that snowy afternoon when I read Richard's chapter on outing. Its effect on me was astounding, and I was aware that it was so. I have never reacted with such emotion to a philosophical piece of writing before. I found myself arguing against every point by Richard, trying to set him straight, so to speak. But at the same time, there was a feeling of immense joy inside of me. This was not the semi-masochistic joy many philosophers derive from criticizing others' work. For one thing, the joy in that case has to be based on good criticism, and my criticisms of Richard's views then were not good. For another thing, I could tell that the joy was due to something else. It was, to put it briefly, due to having found a position that responded to a desire in me to the effect that as gay people we should not feel shame and awkwardness when asked by others about other gay peoples' sexual orientation. Finally someone had the gall and the guts to say it: telling others that so and so is gay is not wrong, is not shameful. Indeed, that refusing to tell others that so and so is gay is shameful and mired in self-loathing.

The effect of reading Richard's work on outing was long lasting. After the initial reactions were over, I decided to write something on the topic, but I was not sure what. I wanted to defend Richard's views, and this resulted in a very bad paper that was not much more than a rip off of what Richard had already said. It was a little more than that, but the more was where the badness was located. So I chucked that paper. But the topic was constantly on my mind.

It took me years — I can often be slow — but I finally realized that something was wrong with Richard's views on outing. While I accepted his general non-consequentialist position, I nevertheless thought that the consequences of our actions do, and should, morally matter in our moral deliberation. There is a world of difference between saying that consequences are all that matter, and saying that they do matter. Because of this, I realized that Richard's stance on outing implies situations in which outing someone is simply morally wrong. Furthermore, while Richard argues that, given that privacy does not normatively cover sexual orientation, to put it crudely, outing is permissible, the chapter on outing in *Gay Ideas* concludes with the stronger conclusion that outing is obligatory. If, as Richard rightly argues, living in the truth is a moral issue, then it would seem that outing would be a consequence of living such a life. In other words, if I am to live life in the truth, then outing would have to be a consequence of such a life. This view, of course, does not mean that one should immediately go to one's rooftop and start shouting names of gay people. Rather, one should out others in the correct circumstances, such as when one is asked. Nevertheless, this does not seem to leave one much leeway in terms of taking the consequences of one's action into account. Richard states that the only condition under which one should refuse to out is when such outing would

lead to an overall loss of dignity, and he specifically gives the instance of a government shooting gay people as an example of this overall loss of dignity. But other than this, not much seemed to be an exception. Indeed, Richard's views do not allow for consideration of others' happiness, and, somewhat differently from happiness, they do not allow for refusing to out so as to shield others from harm.

Part of the issue was Richard's discussion of happiness and harm under the umbrella of the convention of "The Secret," which is a commitment to the gay community's belief in its own worthlessness. In other words, Richard's argument seems to be that when we consider people's happiness under *that* guise, then their happiness is not worthy of respect. But interestingly enough, this leaves room for people being closeted due to reasons other than their commitment to "The Secret," and here, harms to others would surely factor in one's moral deliberation. It seemed to me, and to many others, such as Jim Stramel and Claudia Card, that there are cases in which someone's refusal to out another does not stem from one's lack of dignity or abiding by the convention of "The Secret," but out of consideration for the lives of others. I decided that Richard's approach is correct in emphasizing particular aspects of our moral lives neglected by those who strenuously refused to give the morality of outing a second chance. But I also realized that Richard cannot be completely correct in this. What was needed was a way of reconciling these views.

Because I was working then on virtue ethics, and because virtue ethics emphasizes a plurality of non-relativistic moral responses, it seemed to me that it would prove fruitful to approach the debate on outing via such an ethics. And so I started work on the paper that eventually got published in the *Journal of Applied Philosophy*. It was a very bumpy ride. The paper was rejected by quite a number of journals. And the referees' reports were mostly very hostile to the project. In some of them, one could virtually smell the homophobia reeking out of their pages. But eventually I got conditional acceptance from the above-mentioned journal, and the one referee made a great suggestion (I found out later that it was none other than Rosalind Hursthouse), namely, that many of the moral concepts that underlie Richard's defense of outing could be construed as virtues. The concepts of dignity, pride, self-respect, and courage, some of which figure explicitly in Richard's account and some of which implicitly underlie it, are all virtues. At least, they are all good candidates for being virtues. This was a point that — again due to my slowness — had utterly escaped me in my zeal to focus on rights and privacy. But once the point hit home, the solution was staring me in the face. Because virtue ethics emphasizes a host of virtues (not too many, though!), the moral concepts that Richard emphasizes are virtues, and as such, are part of the list of virtues that includes more than these, of course. What is left, theoretically and practically, is to rely on the practical deliberation of a virtuous agent to decide whether to out or not, depending on the case. Dignity figures importantly, but so does compassion.

What is interesting is that even if Richard is not happy with virtue ethics as such, it seems to me that once he agrees that people can be closeted for reasons having nothing to do with "The Secret," then he would agree with the overall approach of balancing the different moral factors in a given situation to arrive at the answer as to whether one ought to out or not. For even if we have an obligation to out others, it does not follow that this obligation would trump all others in any given case. It might be the case that our obligation to shield another from harm is stronger in that particular case. But I have said enough on this issue.

Richard's influence on the issue of outing has been tremendous. No philosophical discussion I know of has

neglected to take Richard's views into account, nor can it. His views will continue to be the center around which all such discussions will revolve. To his rigor, his outspokenness, his truthfulness, his courage, his public intellectualism, and his influence, I say, with humble pride, "Thank you."

Professor Richard Mohr and Gay Studies

Robert Hood

Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN

I first encountered Richard Mohr's work on the shelves of a gay and lesbian bookstore when I was in the furtive, early stages of coming out. I thought I should read up on the topic a bit before proceeding; I was a philosophy major and needed *arguments* and *justification*. I remember stumbling across *Gays/Justice* (Mohr 1988) with the dawning recognition that this was a *philosopher* writing about queer issues. I found Richard's work in that gay bookstore because he had chosen to write not just for professional philosophers, but for a wider audience.

The expectation that academics write primarily for each other has become so entrenched that exceptions—those who write for a general audience of non-specialists, or those who write outside their field—have come to be known as "public intellectuals." To the extent this term holds any negative associations, then I would rather not characterize Richard's work in this way; instead I see his work as providing an example that all of us writing about gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer issues should follow.¹ There is an extensive literature on public intellectuals (Bender 1993; Posner 2001, Small, 2002), and my remarks will focus on only one aspect of Mohr's work in this regard. For example, there is literature about the difficulties of minorities, including sexual minorities, being public intellectuals (Gracia 2002), and critical examination of the assumption that somehow public intellectuals are merely popularizers or proselytizers of others' works, and that being a public intellectual is somehow less serious work, because it does not contribute to theoretical knowledge (Alcoff 2002). I'll take it as settled that Richard's scholarship exemplifies the idea of giving reasons rather than slogans, and that, *contra* claims made about some public intellectuals, his work is a serious and significant contribution to gay studies and philosophy. I mainly want to focus on the role of Richard's work in developing what I would call "moral imagination."

It is one thing to analyze, and another to provide a sense of direction about where and how we might proceed when the analysis is said and done. Philosophers can contribute analysis and clarification, draw attention to points of view that have been neglected and information that has been omitted, and expose errors in the reasoning of others. But we can also contribute moral imagination. By this I mean something like: exploring the implications of framing an issue one way rather than another, and teasing out the implications of different views. Moral imagination requires not so much the skills of an argument technician, but rather those of the mapmaker. The skill of the mapmaker lies in the capacity to create a reflection or interpretation of the terrain that organizes the information in a way that is helpful to navigation. The public philosopher's role is similarly one of conceptual mapmaking. Unique to the philosophical role in moral imagination is that it is developed by giving reasons, exploring options, and by helping individuals develop their own capacities to reason through issues.

Sustained throughout Richard's work is a moral vision of equal rights and full citizenship for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans people. Examples include the concluding chapter of *Gay Ideas* where he sees gay studies as a moral vision,

or the sustained discussion of marriage in *A More Perfect Union*, and particularly the last chapter where he lays out a series of specific and concrete steps people can take (Mohr 1992). In the concluding section of his work on marriage, Richard writes of America's promise that if

we take dignity and the openness which that entails as our polestar and if we guide our lives by principle and certify them with the sacrifice which principled living entails, then to a significant degree, gay justice can be ours through our own actions, our worth shining forth unsullied, clear, and free (Mohr 1994).

I think about Richard's work in terms of what have been called "maieutic ends" (Schmidtz 1995). These are ends that are achieved through a process of coming to have other ends. The decision to come out is a kind of end, but it is neither instrumental nor is it final. We do not come out *because* it is merely instrumental to some other purpose—indeed, coming out can thwart certain relationships and certain goals. We do not come out as a final end—surely life is about more than being out. Ultimately coming out and living openly are ends whose adoption helps us come to have other ends—such as equality and freedom, as Richard has so long emphasized. Coming out and living openly give a person something worth living for. At the same time, these ends require a person to be committed to something. Making and keeping this sort of commitment challenges the best within all of us. By our commitment to come out and live openly we change our preferences, our goals, our futures—we change ourselves and those around us. As noted above, I encountered Richard's work when I was coming out. I am very grateful for the ways his writings challenged me, and for the ways I have grown through his writing.

In addition to his writing I also want to note Richard's role in mentoring. Richard has been helpful, kind, and generous. He encouraged me to write about these issues, and to participate in the SLAGP while serving as the program chair for the SLAGP. He started sending me copies of columns he was writing in the *Boston Globe* or *Reason* and encouraged me to integrate queer issues into my interests in philosophy. All of these actions planted a seed: I saw that philosophy could address issues in public life because it had done so in my own life. I think of Richard's writings in gay studies like a good map: they are effective. They help you get yourself where you need to go. I am very grateful for that, and to Richard Mohr.

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Endnotes

1. A session on public intellectuals and gay studies, “Public Intellectuals,” was co-sponsored by the Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy and the APA Committee on the Status of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered People in the Profession at the Central Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in May 2001. Gracia, J. J. E. (2002). “Minorities and the Philosophical Marketplace.” *Metaphilosophy* 33(5): 536-551, Halwani, R. (2002). “The Philosopher as Public Intellectual.” *Metaphilosophy* 33(5): 495-501, Hull, D. (2002). “The Social Responsibility of Professional Societies.” *Metaphilosophy* 33(5): 552-565.

Comments for the SLGP panel honoring Richard Mohr

Jim Stramel

Santa Monica College, Santa Monica, CA

Where *does* one begin with Richard Mohr? (wink)

There are so many things to thank him for — most intellectual and professional, some personal and private. But above all else, I am delighted to have this opportunity to publicly thank him for converting me, for bringing me into the community. You see, when I met Richard I was — or I *thought* I was...uh...an epistemologist. ...Not that that's a bad thing.

You see, in 1992 I was struggling under inadequate supervision to pull together a dissertation on — get this — contemporary theories of justification and the connection between epistemic justification and truth. Then I read that Salk Institute researcher Simon LeVay — now known for his studies on the link between brain structure and sexual orientation — intended to create what came to be called the Institute of Gay and Lesbian Education in West Hollywood, California. It occurred to me that such an institution should offer a course that helped people to understand the variety of moral issues of concern to the GLBT queer Community: the nature and morality of homosexuality, sodomy laws and privacy, equal rights, same-sex marriage and parenting, gays in the military, etc. I submitted a proposal for a course entitled “Homo-Sexual Ethics.” It was accepted as one of seven inaugural courses and I taught it several more times. A few years later, my very supportive department of five disciplines at Santa Monica College allowed me to teach basically the same course as a special topics version of our “Contemporary Moral Conflicts.” To my knowledge, this is the only course on sexuality and gay/lesbian issues taught at a California Community College other than one in — you guessed it — San Francisco.

During my search for reading materials and preparation of the syllabus for this ‘gay ethics’ course, I discovered that very little attention had been given by philosophers to the variety of important moral issues surrounding homosexuality. Richard Mohr was the notable exception, having almost single-handedly invented the emerging field of gay ethics. His work showed me that good philosophical work both needed to be and could be done on these issues.

In 1993, Mohr published a second important book, *Gay Ideas*, the first chapter of which was an analysis of the ethics of the controversial practice of “outing”: publicizing in the media the homosexuality of closeted public figures in the name of gay liberation. I felt that much of what Richard said about outing was correct and I appreciated his very passionate defenses of gay dignity, but I was fundamentally unhappy with his view that outing does not violate any individual privacy right and with his

position that out gays, in defense of their own dignity, should out virtually everyone they know to be gay. I felt compelled to write a response. I was also troubled by the popular utilitarian justifications of both outing and the claim that gays have a duty to “come out of the closet.” It seemed to me that complex questions about the self-disclosure or other-disclosure of a person's gayness were not best approached from either a Kantian deontological position like Mohr's or from a utilitarian perspective. For many reasons, it seemed to me that a more realistic and comprehensive approach could be made from the perspective of virtue ethics.

Suddenly I had a clear thesis and a much more manageable project (whether writing a dissertation in Gay Ethics is a wise career move is another conversation entirely!). I went to my Dissertation committee and explained that the epistemology project was not happening but that I had this crazy idea that I was sure they'd never go for. Much to my surprise they did, and within two weeks I had formed a new committee and started writing — of all damn things — a dissertation entitled, “Gay Virtue: The Ethics of Disclosure.”

So, thank you, Richard; for now I appear to the world not as yet another nerdy epistemologist in a herring-bone blazer, but as a nerdy gay ethicist sporting a GirlsRule T-shirt.

But seriously — I'm confident that others are much better positioned to survey Richard's contributions to Philosophy and to all of us. So I will mention a few of the reasons why I cherish Richard as not just a fellow philosopher, but as a person and a friend.

Like many of you, my first introduction to Richard's work was teaching his ubiquitously reprinted essay “Gay Basics,” derived from the wonderful book *Gays/Justice*. Class discussions of Richard's arguments and diagnoses of homophobia gave me the perfect opportunity to begin coming out to my students. This was nerve-wracking at first, but I was buoyed by Richard's insistence on the self-respect and dignity of being out. With years of practice, coming out to my students — at a point in the term when it is relevant and sensible — has become my routine and is routinely a positive experience.

Even though I eventually took and maintain a position that is critical of Richard's approach and conclusions, he has always been — from our earliest correspondence — friendly, supportive and generous. He drew me into participation with the SLAGP, invited me to be on panels and he recommended my work to John Corvino for his anthology *Same-Sex*.

I also remember the surreal experience of reading a paper at an APA session chaired by Richard, who sat stoically while Johnnie Terrie criticized him at his left elbow and I at his right; yet he took it all in stride and it did not in any way diminish our relationship. His gracious and dignified way of befriending and supporting any number of young philosophers, even when they criticized him, is the very model of the virtuous philosopher.

On the personal level, when I was enduring a period of angst-ridden difficulty with a former relationship, Richard was a compassionate source of support and sound advice. On the professional level, it is fair to say that he has had more influence on the philosopher I have become — from 2000 miles away — than any of my dissertation advisors. For all these reasons, and many more, I am so pleased to join you in thanking Richard for his many contributions and achievements.

Thank-yous and Some History

Distinguished LGBT Philosopher, Richard Mohr

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I thank the Society warmly for this recognition, especially since my academic career has not been one weighted down with garlands. No outside offers. No named chair. None of that sort of thing. Which is not to say that it hasn't been quite an adventure. I've pretty much given up on trying to have a happy life and instead aim at having an interesting one, and am having fair-to-middling success in the attempt. What is particularly nice about this recognition is that it adds to both types of life.

I would like too to thank the members of the session individually. I'm pleased that Claudia Card allowed herself to be conscripted and has taken time from the flurry of activities surrounding her new book in order to participate, especially since our relation across the years — decades — has had more than its share of ups and downs. I thank Robert Hood for having been the proximate efficient cause of the session and for stepping up to the plate, along with Peg O'Connor, when the Society needed new leadership. And Raja Halwani for taking over from me the role of programming chair for the Society. After ten years at it, my steam was utterly spent. Plus he's doing a much better job at it than I did. His sessions have covered a far wider range of topics than mine ever did. I thank John Corvino for writing the essay to supplant my now very dated "Gay Basics." I thank Jim Stramel for being a path-breaker. A fair number of philosophy Ph.D.s have now gone on the market with lavender vitae, but I believe Jim's thesis on outing was the first and perhaps is still the only doctoral dissertation in philosophy on a specifically gay topic.

Now, it is amazing — well, at least statistically odd — that any of my collegial and mentoring relations with members of the panel have survived. For I have found that in developing what could be open-ended relations, I at some point eventually throw down a gauntlet, as a sort of test of the other person. I don't do this by design or even consciously, but looking back across my social history, I see there is a definite pattern. And at these gauntlet drops, many relations have ended.

There are others to thank as well. I had some early mentors for my gay work: Lee Rice, Fred Suppe, and Noretta Koertge, who for a time helped me with Society programming. James Rachel and Jim Sterba have offered important support along the way in getting my work 'out there' and sustaining for me a sense that it mattered that it was. Of officials in the Society, I have also to thank long-time newsletter editor Tim Murphy and the current editor, Carol Quinn, for also helping get the gay word out there and for enduring in a role, a chore, that is *way* under-appreciated. People seem to think that newsletters and paper sessions appear by magic rather than by hard work. Finally, even though toward the end I found him insufferable, I have to thank the late John Pugh, who was the cause of the Society's coming into being in the first place. He and I discussed the feasibility of such a society for a couple of years before it actually incorporated. He persisted and overcame my (fortunately false) Cassandra-like prediction that such a group would not take off within the APA, and, I must say, when you look out across an APA smoker, you still have to wonder that it did. I also wonder whether there could be some deep link between philosophy's status as the least queer discipline in the humanities and philosophy's status as currently the least self-reflective discipline in the humanities.

I'm not a committee person, so my contributions to the Society have largely been to serve as a transfer point in the flow of information, and such too has been my wider role in the institutional development of gay philosophy and studies, for example, by founding the lesbian and gay book series at Columbia University Press. One distinctive form of service that I have been able to render for gay academics as the result of my gay writings and academic post has been the task of writing letters of recommendation — for job applicants, grant applicants, publication support, and tenure and promotion cases. For my own promotion to full professor in 1989, a case based on my 1988 book *Gays/Justice*, the letter writers were for the most part straight liberal philosophers. In turn, I, a fuddy-duddy liberal gay philosopher, have written (I'm pleased to say) for the tenure and promotion cases of (the) two transsexuals in philosophy. Let us hope there is a trend, a pattern, here.

I did want to correct one possible misperception left by Claudia's comments about my tenure case in 1985. While the case was based on my Plato essays and my first book, *The Platonic Cosmology* (1985), the tenure papers were lavender. My first gay article, titled simply "Gay Rights," had been published by *Social Theory and Practice* in 1982. It was reprinted, the next year in Jan Narveson's anthology for Oxford University Press, *Moral Issues*. For tenure purposes, this reprint counted as a "chapter in a book," which, in the University's then newly instituted rules for submitting tenure papers, required its being listed immediately after the Plato book and before any of the Plato articles. So while it was not the first thing a reader of the tenure packet encountered, it was the second.

Gay Marriage

I still have hope that I might someday convert Claudia to my views favoring gay marriage. Her term "resiliency" is not exactly how I would characterize the variability of marriage viewed as an institution — at least where "resilient" means that no matter what one does to a thing, no matter how one distorts it, it always, like a plucked string, returns to its original profile. Rather I see marriage as an *adaptable* institution. Indeed it is one of the most adaptable institutions that America has. Over the last fifty years or so, changes in the institution of marriage have been substantial and, more importantly, have all been headed in the direction of justice. Topping the list here is the elimination of legally required and legally acknowledged gender roles within marriage and the shift from universal at-fault to universal no-fault divorce. There will be a dialectical development between gays and straights around the meaning and make up of marriage, with gays it is to be hoped getting straights to have more enlightened views on the role of sensuality within and around marriage.

Outing: Its Scope and Justification

My views diverge most consistently from those of panel members in my arguments favoring outing. Contrary to Claudia's claim, my acknowledged exceptions to the "Do out" rule are not limited to cases where the outing would precipitate the death of the person outed. I do not think that vindictive outing is okay, that is, outing which, in order to achieve the outer's purposes, draws on and fuels anti-gay attitudes in society. I do not think that outing which invests moral energy into the oppression of gays is acceptable, after all it is the dignity of gay people that is the engine of my argument. So, politically motivated outing is barred on my view, that is, the outing of anti-gay politicians in the hope that their constituents, outraged by the queer sexuality of their representatives, will depose them. And personal vendettas are ruled out, as in the sad, true story of

a lesbian soldier who was outed to the Armed Forces by a jilted lover.

And contra Jim Stramel, it is the dignity of the outer that I am primarily trying to protect by outing. The gay person cannot be put into a position of going along with social conventions that degrade him or her, conventions that treat him or her as abject. Maintaining other people's closets stokes the "don't ask, don't tell" convention by which society ritualistically marks a thing as abject (say, flatulence in an elevator). The refusal to ask and tell about gay people marks gay people as abject, as unspeakably gross.

Jim's main argument against my position is that outing violates the autonomy of the outed, more specifically the outed's choice to define himself to both himself and others. Outing preempts the outed's ability to make decisions about coming out. And according to Jim, preempting this ability mounts to the level of a violation of a right. But there is no right-to-define-oneself which gives me the authority to demand of others that they abstain from saying true things about me. If I have a fantasy that I'm a millionaire and maintain an air of class which makes it appear plausible that I am, still no one violates my "right" to self-definition by popping my bubble. Indeed to do so would be a public service. Outing is simply a matter of telling the truth in relevant contexts. Outing is reporting the news.

But it's not making the news. I do not believe, as Claudia seems to think, that the outer is supposed to go around tracking down people to out. Rather the outer is someone who, guided by his or her own dignity, lets issues and truths of gayness come up when relevant and does not, either by finessing the topic of gayness or lying about it, go along with the convention that treats being gay as a dirty little secret.

Though outing does preempt the choice of a gay person to come out, it does not violate liberty rights. Outing you reduces your options but it does not do so in a way that violates your rights. If I sell stocks in a company in which you own stocks, your stocks are worth less, you are harmed, and you have fewer options in your life. But no right of yours has been violated. If, on a first-come basis in a public parking lot, I take a parking spot that you were hoping to park in, I have limited your options and opportunities, but I haven't violated any right you have. Not everything that limits your options, not everything that harms you, violates your rights. Simply flagging that outing sometimes harms someone or limits the person's options, doesn't prove what would need to be proved if outing is to be morally prohibited.

One might attempt to counter by saying, "Well, coming out is such an important act for a person that outing really is not comparable to the first-come parking situation. The interest that a person has in controlling his or her coming-out is so important that it rises to the level of a right. Despite appearances to the contrary, the parking spot is mine alone." But even if one allowed that interests can adequately ground rights (something I don't think I believe), what is important about coming-out is not the raw act of self-reportage, "Ma, I'm gay." Rather the moral core of the coming-out experience is what Joyce Trebilcot has called "taking responsibility for sexuality," the claiming of one's sexuality, not being embarrassed by or for it. And this moral core, notice, is not preempted by outing. Barney Frank was outed — forced out — and went on to claim his sexuality and has become a leader for gay rights. True, some moral weaklings will just fall apart upon being outed, but we can't let our dignity be scotched because there are moral weaklings out there. That would be like saying that what an adult is allowed to read should be limited by what would be appropriate for a child to read.

Dignity is not a virtue

Raja Halwani, marching under the banner of virtue ethics, claims that dignity itself is a virtue, and so has to have its moral mass balanced against or mixed in with considerations of many other virtues (and vices) before one can come to a determination in any particular case whether outing is more justified than it is not. But dignity is not a virtue. Let me count the ways.

- 1) In its metaphysics, dignity is a state or condition, one that normatively informs personhood. It is not, as a virtue is, a disposition, habituation, or potentiality.
- 2) Though dignity is a state or condition, it does not have, as a virtue does, consciousness as a required substrate. It is not a mental state. We know this because of the nature of what counts as a harm to dignity — insult. One can be insulted behind one's back and be insulted all the same, even if one is never aware of this insult, and one can be insulted beyond the grave, though one is not conscious there.
- 3) While a harm to dignity is an insult, a harm to a virtue (if one can even talk of a harm to a virtue) is either an impediment (to its actualization) or a seduction (away from its ideal condition).
- 4) Dignity is not, as a virtue is, a mean between extremes. What would having too much dignity mean? What stands to dignity as temerity stands to courage? Nothing.
- 5) A person's dignity and a person's virtues endue others with different moral correlatives, call for different moral attitudes from others. The proper moral stance toward virtue is to praise it and perhaps even prize it. The proper moral stance toward dignity is respect.
- 6) Dignity is a trump. It is different in moral type, not (just) in moral grade from all other moral values. No amount of other values add up to it. Virtues, because they have to be balanced against each other, can never be trumps.
- 7) Dignity can ground a system of rights and duties. Virtues can not. Duties flow from dignity's demand of respect from others. Rights are generated from dignity serving as what normatively informs, gives the form of, personhood. Rights, then, are the constituent parts of personhood, the materials of personhood as dictated by its form. Rights stand to personhood as flesh stands to mammality, or as a stage, props, and lighting stand to a play.

By contrast, virtues, serving simply as ideals, do not have enough moral oomph to generate obligations. We are not obliged to do our best, though it is nice, even commendable, if we do. Nor are we obliged not to knowingly turn away from opportunities for virtue. Being a priest might be the full realization of the virtue of piety, but no one is obliged thereby to be a priest and no one has sinned if they turn from even golden opportunities to be a priest. And it goes almost without saying that virtue ethics is incompatible with a system of rights, since having rights gives a person zones of freedom where one's decisions are sovereign, where one's own values and ideals hold sway, not the ideals of society nor the norms of natural law, be they the older Aristotelian kind of norms in nature or the Platonic variety of the "New Natural Law." Virtues exhaust your moral agency, rights provide space for it.

Finally, it should be noted that the 'virtues' that are typically deployed against outing are not just morally overrated, they are evil, insidiously so. They operate by stealth, controlling behavior without articulating their content. These are what I call the "make nice" virtues. They all start with "c": cordiality, courtesy, collegiality, compassion, and civility. These are the weak acids that eat the soul, that corrode the individual as individual, and

then hand over the human remains to the *hoi polloi*, who are thereby nourished and strengthened in their tyranny. Civility is the smiling face of fascism.

The Heterosexual Presumption

Outing and being out about what I think is the most important cultural task that remains for gays and lesbians. Gays have won on one flank of the cultural wars, but not another. The taboo covering talk of gay issues has all but collapsed in the mainstream. This collapse is a major success for gays in the cultural wars. But the culture, even as it now talks about gays — and so presumably believes that gays exist somewhere — still acts upon a presumption that everyone is heterosexual. The fight against this presumption is the flank of the cultural wars that still needs to be won by gays.

It isn't just the teller of fag jokes that presumes there are no gays in his audience. *Newsweek* does too. Consider an astonishing juxtaposition of detailed knowledge of gays and the ability to assume that everyone is straight, the lead for an article on gay couples in the magazine's June 25, 2003 issue: "Yes, gay men are having more sex than you are. But if it makes you feel any better, lesbians are probably not." The article presumes that its entire potential audience — "you" Americans — has in it not one gay man or lesbian. Dock-side news reports of soldiers and sailors departing for and returning from the Middle East presume that everyone coming and going is heterosexual, is someone who smooches publicly without fear of reprisal. What does the press think gay couples do on the docks? Mainstream advertising and advice columns — "Ten Ways to Catch a Guy" — all presume that all people are heterosexual. Ninety-nine and forty-four one-hundredths percent of references to "having children" do the same.

This presumption is the culture's default position. The presumption does not operate like an appeal to an axiom in a mathematical proof. Rather it is an unarticulated background condition. It does not draw attention to itself, but is as pervasive as it is unobtrusive. It operates like air at room temperature or your computer's software; one is not aware of it, though it conditions everything one does.

What does get articulated by culture is the sudden oddball case, which, however, is then quickly re-absorbed into the fog of presumption. We, the culture, will speak of gays when there is a particular reason for attention to be drawn to them (say, in a news story, a court case, a gay-themed television program), but in the normal run of things, we will presume that everyone is straight — without ever having to articulate that this is so.

Lots of groups other than gays are subject to the same presumption. If I use the gender and race-neutral term "president," the image that probably springs to your mind is that of a white male, even if you are not a white male. Hardly anyone who is in the position to have the thought "Gosh, everyone on this airplane is white" ever does have it.

The lines laid out by such cultural presumptions plat what is to count as a person worth acknowledging, a person of relevance, a member of the moral community, one who belongs. The relevant analogy for the relation between the culturally presumed person and the irrelevant person is not the relation of a human to something viewed as having a lower moral standing than humans have, say, children, worms, fungus, excrement, the abject. The relevant analogy is the relation of citizen to alien. Gays are America's Canadians. It is not that Americans don't think Canadians are people, it's just that Americans have arranged their thoughts so they don't have occasion to take cognizance of Canadians, except if something comes up that draws special attention to them (say, the sudden

availability of full marriage for gays in Ontario). And it goes without saying that Americans don't think Canadians' interests count on a par with their own. For Americans, the concept "North American" has no cultural content. What could have a thick content and denote important relations between diverse social types (Americans, Canadians, and others) is at best for Americans a geographic concept that they heard about for the last time in eighth grade. I think it is Francis Fukuyama who disparages gays as "our internal aliens." In this phrase, he has captured an important aspect of America's cultural (mis)understanding of gays.

As the *Newsweek* example shows, culture can, without changing, absorb mountains of cognitive dissonance and contradiction: "Gays exist, but no one is ever one of them." Racial and gender examples show that such presumptions are deeply entrenched. Being out is one means of nibbling away at the heterosexual presumption. Outing and caricatures of heterosexuals are probably even more effective since they make a theme of the very issue in question: "You're wrong to presume that Dick is interested in Jane; he's gay." Movies like *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* and *Raising Arizona* manage to demythologize heterosexuality and attack its unacknowledged embeddedness, even without introducing any homosexual characters. I wonder whether there are additional ways to do this. Gays and lesbians need all the resources we can muster for addressing this problem, one that will probably still be with us even after gays are marrying in Utah.

A Response to Richard Mohr

Raja Halwani

School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Since the biggest chunk of Richard Mohr's philosophical comments is directed at my position on outing, I have been given the opportunity to offer a response, an opportunity for which I am thankful.

Richard, "marching under the banner" of a particular conception of dignity, claims that dignity is not a virtue. His argument basically is that since dignity's characteristics are not those of virtue, dignity is not a virtue. Yet Richard's view of dignity comprises *one* particular conception of it, and there is room for others. Richard believes that dignity is a "state or condition, one that normatively informs personhood." He further claims that it "is not a mental state," and that it does not have "consciousness as a required substrate." I can have dignity even if I am unaware that I have it. This does not entail the Kantian conception of dignity, that dignity is something we all have simply in virtue of our rationality. For it is possible that some may have it and some may not, and among the former, it is not a requirement that they be conscious of that fact. Yet other remarks that Richard makes indicate that he does have the Kantian view in mind. His view that dignity is a trump, that "no amount of other values add up to it," is an example.

But this view of dignity (and moral worth) is difficult to support. It is not supported by empirical evidence (nor did Kant intend it to be supported this way). It is supposed to be based simply on our rationality, or, more accurately, on our capacity for rationality. But this is not an argument, nor is it easy to see how one can provide such an argument. This view of dignity is simply an article of faith that many philosophers have accepted. I am not claiming that this conception of dignity is wrong. I am simply claiming that we should not trot it out as if it were an obviously necessary truth. So this is one reason why Richard's conception of dignity need not be the only acceptable one.

Moreover, there are considerations that support a conception of dignity along the lines of its being a virtue. We speak of people being dignified and undignified, as acting in a demeaning manner, as being servile, arrogant, and or haughty. (Perhaps these indicate that dignity could admit of a mean of sorts, contrary to what Richard thinks.) Virtues are supposed to be states of character that dispose their agents to act, feel, and/or think *rightly* in the context or situation at hand. There is then a way to think of dignity along such lines: a dignified person is one who never exhibits servility or arrogance, for example. Again, I am not saying that this is the correct way to think about dignity. I am claiming that the playing field is open. Contemporary virtue ethics, compared to other moral theories is still young (at this point in time, a pre-adolescent, I would say). There is much more work that needs to be done, most importantly, in my opinion, in the excavation and explanation of individual virtues. So when I claim that we think of dignity as a virtue, this is by way of suggestion, with the awareness that it needs elaboration.

If dignity is a virtue, this need not, as Richard seems to worry, seriously endanger its status as being a “trump” moral property. It is insane to think that all virtues are on equal playing field when it comes to their importance. I shudder at the thought that Aristotle’s virtue of wittiness is as important as that of justice. It may well be — and, again, more work here is needed — that dignity is a crucial virtue, like that of justice. Indeed, we may end up giving it the status of a higher order virtue, like that of wisdom. So it is too soon to declare that dignity will have the same weight as that of cordiality.

But even if Richard’s conception of dignity were correct, this would not endanger the view that we ought to approach outing from a virtue ethical standpoint. On Richard’s view of outing, certain instances of outing are wrong, namely those that stem from the wrong motives (such as personal vendettas and politically motivated outing). This seems to imply that, when it comes to outing at least, a certain consciousness of one’s dignity *is* a requirement (even if the outer does not use the word “dignity”). One outs others because one is not cowed by social conventions that imply gay people’s status as garbage. But this view will nevertheless require that the agent have a proper conception and attitude towards his moral status and personhood. Granted, in virtue of my personhood, I have dignity. But this is merely a formal way of characterizing it. What it needs is some flesh, some substantive content. Am I dignified, if by outing someone, I ruin her life? Am I dignified if I say, “I will feel no compassion towards this person; I will out her come what may because I shall never barter away my worth”? It seems to me at best contentious to make such a claim. My point is that even if dignity is a moral property that we all have, we still need to ask how we ought to act with respect to ourselves as people with dignity. In short, if Richard’s view of dignity were correct, what would follow is that we cannot conceive of dignity as a virtue. But what would not follow is that a virtue ethics approach to outing is ruled out. We would still need to think, theoretically and in actual situations, what and how dignity means to our moral lives. A position which claims that we should out others no matter what the consequences are is morally skewed in serious ways. To paraphrase Richard, such reference to dignity “operates by stealth, controlling behavior without articulating” its content. Such an uncompromising view of outing refers to an arrogant self-righteousness disguised as dignity; it is the ruthless “face” of narcissism masquerading as proper conception of individual worth.

There is one final point I wish to make. It concerns Richard’s grasp of virtue and virtue ethics. I must say that his comments betray a striking unfamiliarity with the work currently done in this area. First, few people today understand Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean as

being about amounts of excess and deficiency. It is understood, rather, as being about acting and feeling rightly, and there are many ways that this can go wrong. So any virtue may admit of more than two vices. Second, it does *not* go “almost without saying” that virtue ethics is incompatible with a system of rights. Indeed. Richard seems to think that basing the virtues on “the norms of natural law” does not provide “zones of freedom where one’s decisions are sovereign.” But there is much work that shows that such a conception of the virtues (and “natural law” here is misleading) does support such zones, and there is also work being done to indicate how virtues can ground obligations. Third, Richard’s comments about cordiality, courtesy, collegiality, compassion, and civility are frightening. Despite the fact that Richard describes these as “evil,” I sincerely hope that he is not asking us to be rude, disrespectful, and lacking compassion. Yes, these can often mask servility and corrode individuality. But when they do, they are *not* virtues. When Richard calls them “virtues,” he culpably forgets that a virtue is not just any dispositional character trait. A virtue is a character trait that disposes one to act, feel, and/or think *rightly* as the situation demands.

None of my remarks are intended to devalue Richard’s contribution to the outing debate. Dignity must play a crucial role in outing, and it has been for far too long been neglected in this debate. Yet dignity is perfectly compatible with refusing to out others in certain cases. My view is not that we should, as a matter of principle, refuse to out others. My view is that whether outing is called for or not depends on the case. My view is no doubt way less saucy than positions such as Richard’s and those that reject outing flat out. My hope is that it at least reflects a morally proper attitude towards outing.

Endnotes

1. A session on public intellectuals and gay studies was co-sponsored by the Society for Lesbian and Gay Philosophy and the APA Committee on the Status of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered People in the Profession on Public Intellectuals at the Central Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in May 2001. Gracia, J. J. E. (2002). “Minorities and the Philosophical Marketplace.” *Metaphilosophy* 33(5): 536-551, Halwani, R. (2002). “The Philosopher as Public Intellectual.” *Metaphilosophy* 33(5): 495-501, Hull, D. (2002). “The Social Responsibility of Professional Societies.” *Metaphilosophy* 33(5): 552-565.