PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND THE VERDICT

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I. INTRODUCTION

The standard material covered in a professional ethics class typically includes a unit on normative theories (e.g., utilitarianism, deontology, etc.), some consideration of formal codes of ethics from various professions and a selection of philosophical articles on ethical issues that arise in the professions (e.g., whistle blowing, informed consent, dealing with uncooperative clients, etc.). I believe this is all to the good, and I always cover such things in my professional ethics course. The vast majority of my professional ethics students are pursuing majors that will lead them to some form of professional practice, and possessing even a modest degree of competence with this material will undoubtedly serve them well in their careers. There are, however, many moral lessons that are equally important for professionals to absorb which are not as well represented in the standard material. Such lessons do more than provide head-knowledge of morality; they inspire students to be moral professionals. Fostering this sort of inspiration in the classroom is no easy task, but I have found that films can frequently go a long way towards making the importance of such lessons felt. Thus to supplement the standard material of the professional ethics class, I generally show a film that can aid in imparting these important lessons. One of the best films that I know of in this regard is Sidney Lumet’s, The Verdict (1982). This film is rich with the sort of supplementary moral themes that are helpful in a professional ethics course. My principal aim in this paper is to show how this is so.

Some of the moral lessons that, I believe, figure prominently in the film are as follows. First, people entrust very vital aspects of their lives (their health, their money) to the hands of professionals, and if those professionals behave unethically, grave harm can result. Second, being a professional often brings with it considerable wealth and prestige, and these two things can exert a strong corrupting influence on their possessors. One form this corruption frequently takes is a win-by-any-means-neces-
sary mentality. This mentality, in turn, can lead to viewing one’s clients merely as objects to be manipulated for profit rather than as people to be served. This mentality can also lead to losing sight of the deeper goals of one’s profession. If one is a medical professional, then one’s ultimate goal should be to promote the health of one’s patients. If one is a legal professional, then one’s deepest professional goal should be to promote justice for one’s client and justice in society in general. Third, the professions have often failed to allow equal access to their ranks to women and minorities and should strive to do better in this regard. While these points may seem like platitudes to which most people would readily assent, there is a need for them to be more than just assented to; their importance must be felt as well, and the felt importance is far less common than the intellectual assent. I believe *The Verdict* is a potent means for engendering such feelings.

When I teach the film, rather than beginning with the above themes and then citing examples from the film, I set forth a more comprehensive moral analysis of the film and its characters, and I point out the above themes as I go. I do this for two reasons. For one, the film is extremely well crafted and, I feel, is worth a thorough consideration in its own right. For another, I believe the students’ experience of the film and its lessons is enhanced by a more comprehensive examination of the film. Among other things, they come to appreciate how well crafted the film is and, as a result, ascribe more weight to its lessons. It has seemed best to me to follow this approach in the writing of this paper as well. My analysis of the film has three components. After offering a brief plot summary for basic orientation purposes, I first examine the morality of the film’s prestigious professionals. Next, I look at the morality of the less prestigious professionals and everyday people in the film. After that, I discuss the morality of the film’s leading characters, Frank and Laura, who are characters that undergo moral transformation. In the final section of the paper, I offer some additional (and more standard-material oriented) applications of *The Verdict* for professional ethics classes.

### II. Plot Summary

The film centers on the moral redemption of attorney Frank Galvin (played by Paul Newman). Galvin is an alcoholic, a self-described ambulance chaser, and has had only 4 cases in the past 3 years, losing all of them. Despite this, he is given a very promising medical malpractice case, a “money-maker,” by his devoted friend and fellow attorney, Mickey
Morrissey (played by Jack Warden). The case involves a woman, Deborah Anne Kaye, who, because she was given the wrong anesthetic by the attending anesthesiologists, Drs. Towler and Marks, choked on her own vomit and was left in a permanently comatose state. Initially, Frank’s goal is to settle the case out of court, but when he visits his client to take some pictures, he experiences a profound moral awakening. He comes to feel that he can no longer simply accept the settlement money; he must try the case in court so that the injustice done to his client can be exposed. He comes to view the case as his chance to turn his career and life around. Frank has his work cut out for him, however, as the attorney for the doctors and the hospital is the prestigious and brilliantly devious Edward Concannon (played to perfection by James Mason). Concannon beats Frank at every turn and very nearly destroys Frank’s case. He even hires a woman, Laura Fischer (Charlotte Rampling), to become romantically involved with Frank so she can pass on information about Frank’s strategies to him. Laura was an attorney herself at one point but is recently divorced and is hoping to come to Boston to practice law there. She actually falls in love with Frank, however, and later does not disclose a crucial piece of information to Concannon, and this allows Frank to win the case. Frank is thus able to recover his life. Frank learns that Laura had been spying on him for Concannon, though, and will not see her anymore. The film ends ironically with her drunk and repeatedly trying to call Frank, while Frank is sober, listening to the phone ring but never answering.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE VERDICT

A. Prestigious Professionals Behaving Badly

A striking feature of the Verdict is that virtually all of its prestigious professionals (Frank’s friend Mickey being an exception) are portrayed as being unethical. Standing in sharp contrast to this is the film’s equally uniform portrayal of the basic decency of the less prestigious professionals (the nurses) and ordinary (non-professional) people. This contrast, I believe, serves to emphasize the corrupting influence of the wealth, power and status that come with being a highly placed professional. Those who gain those things are often tainted by them, while those who do not are better able to remain untainted. In this section, I will discuss the film’s portrayal of the unethical behavior of the super-professionals, and in the next I will discuss its rendering of the more decent behavior of the lesser professionals and non-professionals.
1. The Doctors

Dr. Towler is one of the world’s leading anesthesiologists and together with his partner Dr. Marks, has written a highly respected textbook on anesthesiology. He was, however, negligent in Deborah Anne Kaye’s case. She had eaten a full meal only 1 hour before being admitted to the hospital and this was correctly noted on her chart. Dr. Towler failed to read her chart and so gave her the improper anesthesia which resulted in her vomiting into her mask and essentially drowning on her own vomit. What is worse than this negligence from an ethical standpoint, though, is Dr. Towler’s attempt to avoid taking responsibility for his mistake. Not only does he not confess his mistake to Kaye’s family, which, incidentally, is required by his profession’s code of ethics, he also goes to great lengths to conceal his mistake. He changes the 1 on the hospital admittance form to a 9 in the space where it asks how long ago the patient last ate. He also enlists the silence of everyone else involved in the case, including the admitting nurse, Kaitlin Costello, who first recorded the information on the form. He even threatens Costello, saying she will never work again if she reveals what she knows. He thus serves as a prime example of an eminent doctor who lacks the ethics that should characterize such a professional.

One prestigious doctor who initially, at least, seems morally upright is Dr. Gruber. He is the assistant chief of anesthesiology at Boston General and has agreed to serve as an expert witness against Drs. Towler and Marks. He is morally outraged at their negligence saying, “I don’t want those bozos working in the same profession as me.” Frank cannot believe his luck at finding such a credible witness to support his case and asks Gruber why he’s willing to do this. Gruber responds, “because it’s the right thing to do; isn’t that why you’re doing it?” However, Gruber turns out to be a profound disappointment. He leaves town just before the trial begins, traveling to a Caribbean island where they have no phones. All we are told about the reason for his disappearance is that “Concannon got to him.” Though this could mean various things (a bribe, blackmail, etc), it seems that Dr. Gruber was perhaps not as concerned about doing the right thing as he initially boasted.

2. The Judge

Though not as central to the ethical core of the film, Judge Hoyle still fits the film’s motif of portraying prestigious professionals as a generally unethical lot. According to Frank, Judge Hoyle is “a bag man for the
boys downtown.” He deals very harshly with Frank throughout the trial and, in various ways, shows favoritism to Concannon. In one scene, when Frank and Concannon are to meet with the judge to discuss the possibility of a settlement, Frank enters the Judge’s chambers and looks for a place to hang his overcoat. He fumbles awkwardly with his coat for a few moments and finally resigns himself to holding it on his lap. The judge watches him, but does not offer him a place to hang his coat. When Concannon is about to leave the room, and retrieves his coat, however, we see that he had been able to hang his coat in the judge’s own armoire, which, significantly is the place where the judge stores his judicial robes. At this same settlement conference, Frank reveals his intent to reject an offered settlement of $210,000 and take the case to trial. The judge is stunned by Frank’s decision and says, “I myself would take the money and run like a thief.” He would not have Frank’s desire to act on Deborah Anne Kaye’s behalf by exposing the injustice of what was done to her. He would only want the money. Thus, to the judge’s remark, Frank incisively (though imprudently) replies, “I’m sure you would.”

3. The Bishop

St. Katherine’s, the hospital at which Deborah Anne Kaye’s surgery took place, is a Catholic institution run by the archdiocese of Boston. Bishop Brophy presides over the archdiocese. His primary concern is to spare the archdiocese any embarrassment and so he is strongly interested in settling out of court. He never displays any interest in the injustice that was done to Deborah Anne Kay; reputational expediency is his bottom line. When he offers Frank the $210,000 settlement, Frank replies that if he accepts it, no one will know the truth. Bishop Brophy responds to this in a very Pontius Pilate-like manner by saying in an excessively philosophical tone, “What is the truth?” Clearly, in the film’s view of things, a moral direction for the case will not be found in the offices of the Church.

4. Concannon

Frank’s friend Mickey describes Concannon as the “Prince of f***ing darkness,” and he lives up to his billing. His approach to the practice of law is to win by whatever means necessary. Justice is quite beside the point. What is perhaps most disturbing about Concannon’s ethics is his coolly utilitarian justification for them. In the scene in which we learn that Concannon has been paying Laura to spy on Frank, we find
her racked by guilt over what she is doing. Concannon comforts her with these words:

I’m going to tell you something that I learned when I was your age. I had prepared a case and old man White asked me, ‘How did you do?’ I said, ‘I did my best.’ He said, ‘You’re not paid to do your best; you’re paid to win.’ That’s what pays for this office. It pays for the pro bono work we do for the poor. It pays for the type of law you want to practice. It pays for my whiskey. It pays for your clothes. It pays for the leisure we have to sit back and discuss philosophy as we’re doing tonight. We’re paid to win the case.

You finished your marriage. You wanted to come back and practice the law. You wanted to come back to the world. Welcome back.

Concannon essentially asserts that all his tactics are justified because of the good things that can be obtained with the money he earns from winning.

B. Lesser Professionals and Non-Professionals Behaving Decently

Just as the film is virtually monolithic in its portrayal of prestigious professionals as unethical, so it is monolithic in its portrayal of the basic decency of less prestigious professionals and non-professionals. In this section, I will describe the film’s portrayal of this latter group of characters. These characters are also significant for their moral assessments of prestigious professionals. These statements contribute much to developing the film’s thematic contrast between the unethical super professionals and the more ethical lesser professionals and everyday people. I will thus discuss these pronouncements as well.

1. Nurse Kaitlin Costello

After being threatened by Dr. Towler, she does not divulge what he has done, but she apparently cannot bear the dishonesty of not telling. She quits her job and moves to New York, and ends up leaving nursing altogether and working instead in a day care center. She is far too decent simply to cooperate with Dr. Towler and stay in her nursing job as though nothing has happened. Moreover, when Frank asks her to come to Boston and testify, she courageously agrees, and it is because of her
testimony that Frank wins the case. Justice is served because of her willingness to do the right thing.

2. Nurse Maureen Rooney

Maureen Rooney was the obstetric nurse during Deborah Anne Kaye’s delivery. She knows everything that happened. She is also a close friend of Kaitlin Costello. She does not support Dr. Towler’s conspiracy of silence and refuses to testify for his side of the case. But she is loyal to Kaitlin and wants to protect her from trouble, so she will not help Frank with any information either, as that might incriminate Kaitlin, since she has elected not to come forward. When Frank misguidedly threatens to subpoena her and force her to disclose what she knows, she gives this denunciation of high-level professionals:

“You know, you guys are all the same—you don’t care who you hurt. All you care about is a dollar. You’re a bunch of whores! You’ve got no loyalty. No nothing. You’re a bunch of whores!

3. Dr. Lionel Thompson

When Frank’s expert witness, Dr. Gruber, disappears, Frank engages Dr. Thompson to take his place. Dr. Thompson, however, does not have the credentials of Drs. Gruber or Towler. He is not board-certified in anesthesiology and holds only a courtesy appointment at a low prestige hospital. The biggest strike against his professional credibility, according to the lawyers on both sides, is that he is black. Frank has never met Dr. Thompson before and when he picks him up from the train station, he is visibly disheartened to find that he is black. Frank believes that the jury will be far less likely to respect his testimony because of his race. Even Mickey says, “Well, look at it this way: it’s refreshing when a doctor takes the stand and he’s not a Jew.” Yet Dr. Thompson emerges as one of the most admirable characters in the film. As he has not been corrupted by wealth and power, he is able to keep his focus on the weightier moral issues of the case. When Concannon grills him on the witness stand about his lack of board certification, Dr. Thompson says, “When a thing is wrong, as in this case, I am available....I’m not board certified. I’ve been practicing medicine for 46 years, and I know when an injustice has been done.” Dr. Thompson also makes what turns out to be a profoundly prophetic statement. Needless to say, Dr. Thompson’s testimony does not, once it has been twisted and manipulated by Concannon and
the judge, bolster Frank’s case at all. As he is about to leave, though, Dr. Thompson reassures Frank by saying (speaking primarily of the jury), “You know, Mr. Galvin, sometimes people can surprise you. Sometimes they have a great capacity to hear the truth.” Dr. Thompson understands that even when all the lawyer tactics have been played, decent people can still see through to what the just decision is. This, as we will see when we consider the jury below, is exactly what happens.

Dr. Thompson’s presence and treatment in the film also serves another purpose for the consideration of professional ethics. His presumed lack of credibility underscores another injustice in the professions: that minorities have frequently not been able to gain access to the highest levels of professional practice, simply because they are minorities. Therefore, in addition to being one of the less prestigious yet ethical professionals in the film, he is also a symbol of a further moral ill in the professions.

4. The Jury

Although Kaitlin Costello’s testimony is compelling and utterly believable, the judge orders the jury, as a result of a legal technicality plied by Concannon, to disregard her entire testimony. So, officially, the jury is to give no weight to it at all. But because the members of the jury have retained Dr. Thompson’s “capacity to hear the truth,” they rule in favor of Deborah Anne Kaye and even ask if they can award more than the damages Frank asked for in his pleadings. Legal maneuvering was thus unable to distract them from doing what they felt was just in the case. Frank’s closing statement to the jury essentially scripts what the jury does and captures well the theme of the basic justice of the ordinary person in contrast to the injustice wrought by many professionals.

You know so much of the time we’re just lost. We say, ‘please God, tell us what is right; tell us what is true.’ And there is no justice. The rich win and the poor are powerless. We grow tired of hearing people lie. And after a time we become dead….We think of ourselves as victims and we become victims. We become weak. We doubt ourselves. We doubt our beliefs. We doubt our institutions, and we doubt the law. But, today, you are the law. You are the law. Not some book, not the lawyers. Not a marble statue or the trappings of the court. Those are just symbols of our desire to be just. They are, in fact, a prayer, a fervent and frightened prayer. In my religion,
they say act as if ye had faith and faith will be given to you….If we are to have faith in justice, we need only to believe in ourselves and act with justice. See, I believe there is justice in our hearts.

5. Kevin and Sally Doneghy

Sally is the sister of Deborah Anne Kaye and she together with her husband, Kevin, are the ones who have filed the suit. They present no appearance of trying to cash in on the case. We learn that Sally visits her sister frequently and that she has cried herself to sleep every night for the 4 years since her sister became comatose. The Doneghys tell Frank that they intend to use a good portion of any settlement money they receive to set up an endowment for Deborah Anne’s perpetual care. They plan to use the rest of the money to move to Arizona. Sally has health problems that will be improved by moving there. In every way, they come across as honest, caring, blue-collar people.

It is through the mouth of Kevin Doneghy that one of the film’s most scathing denunciations of professional misconduct comes. Ironically, his remarks are directed at Frank. When Frank has his moral turnaround and decides that he cannot accept the Bishop’s settlement offer, he does so without consulting the Doneghys. As their attorney, Frank has an ethical obligation to present any settlement offer to his client before accepting or rejecting it.³ The Doneghys would have preferred to settle, as the $210,000 the Archdiocese was offering was more than enough for the Doneghys to provide for Deborah Anne’s care and move out west. Kevin and Frank have this exchange about Frank’s action:

Kevin: You didn’t have to go out there to see that girl. We’ve been going there for 4 years now. See, 4 years my wife has been crying herself to sleep—what they did to her sister.

Frank: Look, I swear to you I wouldn’t have turned down the offer if I thought I couldn’t win the case.

Kevin: I don’t care what you thought. I am a working man and I am trying to get my wife out of town. Now, we hired you, and I am paying you and I gotta find out from the other side that they offered $210,000.

Frank: I’m going to win this. I’m going to the jury with a solid case. I’ve got a famous doctor for an expert witness. You’re going to get 5, 6 times what you’re….
Kevin (interrupting with a laugh of disbelief): You guys! You guys are all the same. The doctors at the hospital, you; it’s always what I’m gonna do for you. And then you screw up and it’s, ‘We did the best that we could. I’m dreadfully sorry.’ And people like us live with your mistakes the rest of our lives.

I will have more to say about Frank’s lapse in this case and his general moral complexity in the next section. For now, I wish only to note that Kevin’s comments represent the ordinary person’s perception of the widespread ethical irresponsibility of professionals and the often severe impact on the ordinary person’s life when professionals behave irresponsibly.

C. Characters in Moral Transition

All of the characters examined thus far have been rather static morally. They are firmly fixed either on the side of the unethical super professionals or the side of moral decency. The characters of Frank and Laura, on the other hand, are attempting in their own ways, to move from the unethical side to the ethical. In this section, I will consider the moral transformations of each and relate them both to the larger professional ethics themes of the film.

1. Frank

Frank’s legal career had very promising beginnings. He graduated second in his class from Boston College and was editor of the school’s law review. He then practiced law with Mickey for several years until he joined a prestigious Boston law firm as a full partner. He married the daughter of the firm’s senior partner and seemed headed to the realm of happily ever after. However, in a case that Frank was trying one of the firm’s other partners bribed a juror to ensure that Frank would win. Frank was devastated and would not accept such “help”. He threatened to go to the judge in the case and disclose the bribe. Before he could, though, the firm fixed it so it would look like Frank had been the one to bribe the juror. Frank was charged with jury tampering. At that point, Frank decided not to rat on the partner and the jury tampering charge instantly vanished. Nevertheless, the damage was done. Frank was fired from the firm and his wife divorced him. It’s at this point that Frank’s drinking problem develops and he begins crashing funerals pretending to be a friend of the deceased person to pick up easy legal work (handling estate matters or perhaps wrongful death actions). Frank, though he was
a prestigious professional himself, thus became a victim of the miscon-
duct of other prestigious professionals. And he is victimized because he
refused to pervert justice by cooperating with the jury tampering.

In a very real way, then, Frank is not the sleazy alcoholic hearse-
chaser he becomes. So it is not that surprising that the decent man he
truly is would be awakened at some point. His visit to the bedside of his
client, Deborah Anne Kaye, is the catalyst of his moral reawakening. It is
abundantly clear when he begins to work on the case that his only desire
is to settle the case out of court and for as much money as he can
squeeze out of the Archdiocese. By his own admission, his only purpose
in visiting his client is to take pictures of her so that he can show them to
the Bishop and take his money. The film's scene at Kaye's bedside is
deftly constructed. Frank uses a Polaroid camera to take the pictures. He
snaps a couple and lays them at the foot of Kaye's bed. Then, as he looks
through the camera, he suddenly seems to see her as a person for the first
time. Until then he had only seen her and her condition as a bargaining
chip that he could use to gain a handsome sum in a settlement agree-
ment. But now he begins to see her, and the potency of the vision causes
him to stop taking pictures and slump down in a chair. Then all we see
for several moments are the Polaroids of Kaye as they slowly come into
focus. And it is at precisely those moments that Frank's awareness of her,
along with his moral vision, come into focus. Just then some nurses walk
by and tell Frank that he is not allowed to be in the room. Frank slowly
and with deep feeling responds by saying, "I'm her attorney." Frank has
come to see again that an attorney's client is not to be an object that is
used to make money; the professional has a duty to work for justice for
his client. Because of this, Frank realizes that he cannot simply accept the
settlement offer.

It is just after this that Frank meets with the Bishop to discuss the
settlement. Here is how Frank expresses to the Bishop the realization he
has had:

That poor girl put her life into the hands of two men who
took her life. She's in a coma. Her life is gone….And the peo-
ple who should care for her--her doctors and you and me--have
been bought off to look the other way. We've been paid to look
the other way. I came here to take your money. I brought snap-
shots to show you so I could get your money. I can't do it. I
can't take it, because if I take the money, I'm lost. I'll just be a
rich ambulance chaser. I can't do it, I can't take it.
It is a fascinating irony, however, that Frank’s regaining of his professional moral vision involves his committing an egregious breach of professional ethics. As mentioned earlier, attorneys have an ethical obligation to allow their clients to decide whether to accept a settlement. Frank, in gaining his sight of Kaye, temporarily loses his sight of his other clients, the Doneghys. He is, it seems, selfish in the pursuit of his moral redemption. In addition, Frank employs questionable tactics to obtain information at various points. He frequently lies, and even breaks into Maureen Rooney’s mailbox and steals her phone bill to obtain Kaitlin Costello’s phone number. True, he is doing these things, in part, because Dr. Towler’s conspiracy of silence, Concannon’s tactics and Judge Hoyle’s hostility toward Frank have made information tough to obtain in other ways. But Frank must take care not to give too much credence to the idea that the ends always justify the means, for that would be too close to Concannon’s rationalization of his tactics. He thus does not emerge from his moral awakening fully formed. His character still needs development, but at least he, unlike the other professionals, is now on the right track.

2. Laura

Like Frank, Laura is also in moral transition. She is trying to return to legal practice after her divorce. Concannon is apparently willing to give her that chance, but she must first work as his spy by becoming involved with Frank. He is paying her for this, but doing this very unethical undercover work is her required re-initiation into the professional world. She seems to be fine with this initially and faithfully relays important information about Frank’s strategies to Concannon. Later, though, as she learns of Frank’s ill treatment at the hands of his former firm and sees his idealism towards his present case, she begins to care for him. Ultimately, she falls in love with him and can no longer bear what she is doing for Concannon. As stated earlier, Laura withholds the crucial information about Kaitlin Costello from Concannon and this allows Frank to surprise him and Dr. Towler with her appearance in court. The jury is then able to hear her testimony and return the just verdict that they do. She also tries to confess to Frank what she has been doing for Concannon, but Frank is too busy at that moment to talk. Mickey then discovers a check from Concannon in her purse and tells Frank before she has a chance to confess. Her decision to place her career at risk by betraying Concannon is a morally courageous one, as is her intention to confess to Frank, and these decisions, I believe, indicate a true change for the moral better in her.
Her moral turnaround does not receive the vindication or affirmation that Frank’s does, though. She is left drunk and scorned at the film’s end. After learning that she has been working for Concannon, Frank does not say a word to her; he only (in one of the film’s most shocking scenes) slaps her and walks away. And, at the film’s end, it does not appear that he is ever going to forgive her. Of course, she will not be able to work with Concannon either. So, both professionally and personally she is left isolated. This, I believe, is too harsh a result for her in light of her moral turnaround. Why does the film deal with her in this way? I believe she, like Dr. Thompson, acquires the status of a symbol. Just as Dr. Thompson’s disrespectful treatment reflects the refusal of prestigious professionals to allow African-Americans and other minorities into their ranks, so Laura’s bad end reflects the difficult time women have had gaining access to prestigious professional positions. The unjust treatment of women and minorities by the super-professionals and the need to do better by them is thus one more moral lesson communicated by the film.

IV. OTHER PROFESSIONAL ETHICS APPLICATIONS

There are other professional ethics topics that can be profitably explored through The Verdict. For one, the film can be employed to introduce the use of formal professional codes of ethics. Though such codes perhaps do not fix all of the moral obligations of professionals, they set at least a minimum level of responsibility that all members of the respective profession are expected to follow. There are, as we have seen, some very clear cases of professional code violations in the film. Dr. Towler’s failure to disclose his error was one, and Frank’s failure to consult his client before he turned down the settlement offer was another. The American Medical Association and the American Bar Association both have straightforward rules against these behaviors in their ethics codes. Students can be shown the relevant portions of these codes to illustrate their use in the realistic cases in the film and to stress the serious professional ramifications of breaking the rules. The film can also be used as an entry point into philosophical discussion of issues in professional ethics. For example, the widely discussed issue of whistleblowing is displayed in the film via the person of Kaitlin Costello. General consideration can be given to the conditions under which one is obligated to blow the whistle, and then Costello’s situation can be examined in that light. Similarly, philosophic consideration of the duty of physicians (and other healthcare
providers) to disclose their mistakes can be broached through the film. Thus, The Verdict can contribute both to the teaching of the standard material as well as the not so standard themes described earlier, and that is why it is such an ideal accompaniment to a professional ethics course.

NOTES

1 Opinion 8.12. Patient Information. Code of Medical Ethics, American Medical Association (2006). Accessible at http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/2498.html. The AMA's directive reads in part: It is a fundamental ethical requirement that a physician should at all times deal honestly and openly with patients. Situations occasionally occur in which a patient suffers significant medical complications that may have resulted from the physician's mistake or judgment. In these situations, the physician is ethically required to inform the patient of all the facts necessary to ensure understanding of what has occurred. Concern regarding legal liability which might result following truthful disclosure should not affect the physician's honesty with a patient.

2 John 18: 33-38


6 See the cites to these codes given in notes 1 and 3 above.
