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# Truth Taking a Beating Nowadays

A RECENT news story told of a swindler who posed as a priest to gain confidence of bank employees, so they would cash his forged money orders.

On the same page was another story about dummy cameras at the airport, either to frighten potential baggage thieves or to make travelers assume "Big Brother" was watching their luggage.

In either case, deviation from the truth is apparent, and perhaps this is a reflection of our times. There is no evidence that mankind ever has been completely honest at any stage in history, and truth certainly is taking a beating nowadays.

Deception, misdirection, fibbing, outright lying, fraud, cheating, embezzling and other ripoffs seem to be usual elements of social, business, political and recreational life. Deceptions often are practiced on the assumption that a worthwhile objective justifies questionable means.

Most cases of deception might be

described as indiscretions, while milder forms may be regarded as acts of discretion. For example, who would offer a completely truthful response to a woman who asked: "How do I look in my new split skirt?"

In the so-called new morality, just as in the sterner old morality, the question is: Does anyone have the right to do wrong?

Many people seem to think so. The Internal Revenue Service finds so many instances where people have understated incomes and overstated deductions that IRS officials say additional collections more than pay costs of auditing.

Government-guaranteed loans are made to help students complete college educations. Most borrowers keep their promises to repay the money, but it is reported that 390,000 have defaulted. Some of these are now working in well-paid government jobs.

These are only a few current examples of widespread deceptions that affect the public, as well as

individuals. Truthfulness does not show up as a dominant human trait.

In a seminar on ethics and professional standards held in California by the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Philip Rhinelander, emeritus professor of philosophy at Stanford University, said: "Ethical standards apply to human character or conduct. While terms like good and bad have comparative terms (good, better, best), terms like right and wrong do not."

Some might argue that they should be allowed to do as they please, or to do "wrong," because they think no one else should be allowed to determine what is "right" for them.

In a functioning civilized society, "right" and "wrong" must be determined for the public good. Usually this is based upon the people's traditions, beliefs and concurrence.

Citizens in such a society are obligated to observe its moral law. Deceptions weaken a nation and its people.