UNH Professor Available to Discuss Anticipated Lance Armstrong Apology

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“Oprah and Lance Armstrong: The Worldwide Exclusive” airs at 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday on OWN network.

“Sometimes apologies interest us because we care about or otherwise identify with the wrongdoer. Armstrong, however, has become increasingly difficult to support. He maintained a superhuman image as a cancer survivor who went on to inspiring athletic achievements, but he burned a lot of goodwill with years of aggressive cheating, lying, and using his power to destroy the careers of those who dared to question him. Having said that, this could indeed be the beginning of Armstrong’s redemption,” Smith says.

“Apologies provide many, many different kinds of meanings, and we should avoid oversimplifying by asking whether the apology is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ or classifying it according to some other binary notion. Instead, I’ll watch Armstrong’s apology with a few questions in mind that provide insight into the kinds of meanings that he provides and what he leaves out,” Smith says. These questions include:

- Does Armstrong explain what he did with an appropriate degree of specificity and set the record straight?
- Does Armstrong accept blame, and if so for what exactly?
- How does Armstrong plan to remedy this situation?
- Do we trust him?

“We will not have definitive answer to most of these questions at the conclusion of the interview. We will have clues, but the truth will lie in gray areas that will become clearer as Armstrong carries this burden for the rest of his life,” Smith says.

“Apologies are promises to change. Like promises, we cannot judge them fully in the moments they are spoken. Wrongdoers need time to search for the deepest values that orient their lives and to begin rebuilding their futures with habits that honor those principles. Although it may not make for good television, this sort of persistent growth creates good people. Moral development does not occur within a news cycle,” he says.
A former Manhattan attorney, Nick Smith is a professor of philosophy at the University of New Hampshire and author of “I Was Wrong: The Meanings of Apologies.” He is a regular contributor to major media outlets, including NPR, PBS, BBC, CBC, CNN, Guardian UK, and others.

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