

PPA 8990
Ethics in Public Administration
Mississippi State University
Summer 2006, (T, TH 6:00 – 8:50 PM)

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OBJECTIVES:

- To acquaint you with the major trends of moral theory in Western civilization;
- To help you integrate an ethical perspective with managerial practice;
- To examine coherent, morally-grounded management practices, and;
- To identify practical, effective practices that you, as a manager, can use to maintain integrity and preserve the legitimacy of your organization.

COURSE OVERVIEW:

Contemporary ethical discourse is bitterly divided about what constitutes morality and, therefore, what moral conduct demands. Rifts between various schools of thought are so deep that some protagonists describe the situation as the “culture war.” Public servants are caught in the midst of this disagreement. Sometimes, they use expressions like “objectivity” or “neutral competence” to avoid taking sides. Do not be fooled.

The problem of defining standards of ethically defensible conduct in contemporary governmental institutions is a species of a much larger problem of defining moral conduct *per se*. For this reason, it is necessary to examine contemporary ethical theories as they relate to the practices of public service in a pluralist, democratic society. Public administrators face several competing expectations and pressures, some of which pertain to moral questions, others not. They execute policies which are frequently the result of conflict, bargaining, and lobbying from competing interests over basic moral values. The policy-making process does not end when legislation is enacted, but continues into implementation. Thus, un-elected public administrators face many of the same pressures that elected officials face, often while working in the shadows. These pressures present even the most obscure public servants with several kinds of temptations, opportunities, and threats. Temptations include taking bribes (in more or less subtle forms), self-interested careerism, pursuit of secret policy agendas, abuse of authority for personal benefit, and the less obvious temptation to deceive oneself to maintain one’s self-image while committing wrongs of various kinds. The dangers of dismissing ethical standards are both collective (public) and individual (private). Acquiescence to any or all of these pressures could jeopardize the viability of government programs, damage the ability of governmental institutions to function, and destroy the moral integrity of the individuals who execute government policy.

Governments have adopted many policies to deal with these temptations, including sunshine laws, prohibitions regarding conflicts of interest, revolving door policies, financial disclosures, anti-nepotism laws, and assorted procurement and contracting requirements to prevent the most obvious forms of self-dealing and stealing. Within these limits, there is still ample room for manipulation, hypocrisy, and subterfuge. We will examine competing theories about what constitutes moral conduct and the practical implications of following one theory or another.

TEXTS:

Aristotle. *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Translated by Terrence Irwin, Hackett Publishing Company; 2nd edition. ISBN: 0872204642

Frankfurt, Harry G. *On Bullshit*. Princeton University Press, 2005. ISBN 0-691-12294-6

French, Shannon. *The Code of the Warrior: Explaining Warrior Values Past and Present*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. ISBN: 0847697568

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. University of Notre Dame Press; 2nd edition (May 1997) ISBN: 0268006113

MacIntyre, Alasdair. "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" The Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas, 1984 ASIN: 9994141627

* WebCT will provide lecture tidbits, excerpts, and a Q&A section.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Grades will be assigned on the basis of class participation (20%), a memo (10%), research paper (30%), presentation (10%) and final exam (30%).

Class Participation: Your contribution to group and/or class projects including the evaluation of film material and subsequent discussion, with briefing papers and presentations, will constitute your class participation grade. Come prepared to discuss the readings. Raising pertinent questions enhances this part of your grade (20%).

Paper/Project: Choose an area of public policy in which you, as a manager, would confront an ethical problem that is addressed in a relevant code of ethics or statute. The problem must be a real problem, not a hypothetical issue, as documented in a newspaper article, magazine, journal, book, audio or film work, or mentioned in a code of ethics. The final product has two parts (30%):

Part I: The first part of the project will describe the ethical problem(s) that you intend to examine. It will define the problem and explain its moral/ethical importance. The paper should be no longer than three, double-spaced pages with one-inch margins, excluding title and bibliography. This paper is due June 15 and constitutes the introduction to your final paper, which will recommend a plan of action to address the problem you have defined.

Part II: The final paper should describe any activities, behaviors, rewards, punishments, training schedules, or any other devices you would employ as well as a timeline, list of procedures and any other details that would demonstrate how you would implement your proposed remedy. Support for your position should be provided in the literature that you cite. The final paper should be no more than 30 pages, excluding title and abstract (200 word maximum) and bibliography. You may provide a rough draft for comment until July 6. I will respond with any questions I have regarding your paper by **July 20**. The final product will include Part I, as revised, as the introduction and is due on **July 27 via email to joe@joeadams.net**. (no hard copy)

Final Exam: You may be asked to outline and apply Utilitarian, Kantian, Thomistic, Nietzschean, Aristotelian, or Machiavellian ethics to a practical problem. Questions will be provided at least one week before the exam, perhaps sooner, on WebCT.

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE:

- June 1 **Theories of Ethics:** Principles, Duty, Absolutism and Relativism
Conscience and Consciousness
Harry G. Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Entire Book)
(Class Nietzsche, Section 335, *The Gay Science*), begin reading
After Virtue immediately.
- June 6-8 **Movie:** *Slingblade* (Assignment: Memo on Karl Childers)
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books I-III, VI-VII
MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 1-108
- June 13 **Class Discussion:** The character of Karl Childers
(Provide memorandum on Karl Childers)
- June 15 **A Disquieting Suggestion:** The Case of Karl Childers
Be prepared to discuss your area of interest for the paper
- June 20-22
(Paper Topic) **Politics, Administration, and Ethics**
Neutral Competence and Ethics
Theories of Authority and Leadership
Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books IV-V, VIII-X
French, *Code of the Warrior*, pp. 1-114
MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 108-203
- June 27-29 **Integrity and Ethics: Responsibility to Whom?**
Institutional & Sociological Aspects of Ethics
Video: Obedience (Stanley Milgram's Experiment)
Websites: <http://www.prisonexp.org/>
<http://home.swbell.net/revscat/perilsOfObedience.htm> ;
http://www.puaf.umd.edu/IPPP/Winter-Spring00/authority_and_excuses.htm ;
<http://www.is.wayne.edu/mnissani/pagepub/milgram.htm>
Readings: *The Taguba Report* (See WebCT)
Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) (See WebCT)
- Discussion:** Eichmann, Milgram & Zimbardo
MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 204-278
MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?"
French, pp. 115-229
- July 6 -11 **The Virtues:** Aristotle, Aquinas, Mill, Franklin,
Seven Deadly Sins: www.deadlysins.com
Integrity and Politics: Can you compromise with integrity?
MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, pp. 204-278.
French, 231-243.
Recommended Reading: Benjamin, *Splitting the Difference*

- July 13 **Board Game: *Scruples***
Purpose: Identify theories behind the answers (real points may be awarded for particularly good answers)
- July 18-20 **CODES of ETHICS: Professional and Institutional**
Assignment: Bring a Code of Ethics to Class for Discussion
- Professions:** Medicine, Clergy, Law, Military, Public Administration, Psychology/Psychiatry, Police
- Institutions:** Universities, Hospitals, Churches, Businesses
- Entities:** Enron, Arthur Andersen, WorldCom
- Writing a Code of Ethics & Implementing a Code of Ethics**
- July 25-27 **Paper Presentations**
- August 1-3 **Review & Final Exam (August 3)**

Recommended Readings:

- * Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil.*
 Bardach, Eugene. *Going by the Book: the Problem of Regulatory Unreasonableness.*
- * Benjamin, Martin. *Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics.*
- * Gardner, Howard, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon. *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet.*
- Hume, David. *An Enquiry into Human Understanding*
 Kant, Immanuel, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals.*
 Machiavelli, Niccolò. *The Prince and the Discourses.*
- ** Alasdair MacIntyre. ***A Short History of Ethics; Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry; Whose Justice, Which Rationality; Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues; Ethics and Politics (forthcoming)***
- John Stuart Mill. *Utilitarianism; Autobiography*
 Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science, Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Ecce Homo, and On the Genealogy of Morals*
 Pegis, Anton, C. *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*
 Weber, Max. *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*
 Wright, Robert. *The Moral Animal : Why We Are, the Way We Are: The New Science of Evolutionary Psychology.*

* Previously required