

Course #U6025  
**Public Sector Ethics**

Course Purpose

In this course we inquire about ethics in the context of the public good. Decisions which have an impact on the public are discussed from the standpoint of justice—"what is due" both in human society and from public officers and any others whose action affects the public good. A number of fundamental cross-cultural ethics are delineated, in both their personal or private form and their corresponding public form. Attention is given to both human character and social structure--i.e. what ethics has come to require of both individuals and society. Ethical faults and failings are discussed, with consideration of the basic social phenomena to which they and their rectification are related. Ethical guidelines for decision-making and ethical checkpoints for government are presented. Likewise, the common or usual grounds in ethical argument are ascertained (with consideration of how they tend to be undone), as are several core residual dilemmas which the policymaker can hardly avoid.

The course is a blend of current cases and general works, some of these traditional and some contemporary. Students are encouraged to explore and assess relevant intersections of the two kinds of material, and to bring their knowledge of timely public concerns to bear on class discussion.

Readings Required and Recommended

The cases assigned are available for purchase at the university bookstore and are on reserve in Lehman Library. Required journal articles, and books in which short assigned readings can be found, are also on reserve there. Most of the books are available for purchase at the university bookstore (although it is not necessary to purchase them), and a coursepack containing many of the required readings is available for purchase at the Village Copier. From time to time, brief additional materials may be distributed in class, with the aim of highlighting course topics, particularly by way of current events.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Class      Discussion

- 1      Introduction to the Subject
- I. An Analysis of Character: Speaking of Ethical Differences...
- 2      A. The Regulatory Ethic: Order, the End Pursued;  
            with a Consideration of Behavior.
- The Case, “Privacy and Publicity: The Senate Confirmation of Justice  
            Clarence Thomas” and Sequel.
- James Q. Wilson, The Moral Sense, Ch. 8.
- Plato, Republic, 543c-576d: On Fathers, Mothers, Sons, Behavior and  
            the Degeneration of Regimes.
- 3      B. The Constitutional Ethic: Happiness, the End Pursued;  
            with a Consideration of Strategy.
- The Case, “Jesse Helms v. Harvey Gantt: Race, Culture, and Campaign  
            Strategy in the 1990 Senate Battle” and Sequel.
- John Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Secs. 3-4, 24, 63-68.
- Aristotle, Politics, Bk. V.2-4, 10-11: On Equality, Inequality, Strategy  
            and the Subversion of Regimes.
- 4      C. The Revolutionary Ethic: A Republic, the End Pursued;  
            with a Consideration of Method.
- The Case, “Bringing Terror to Justice: The Extra-territorial Arrest of  
            Fawaz Yunis”.
- Bruce Ackerman, Social Justice in the Liberal State, Ch. 3.
- Kant, Perpetual Peace, Sec. I.; App. I and II: On the Moral Politician,  
            the Political Moralist, Method and Human Harmony.

- 5 D. The Nationalistic Ethic: The State, the End Pursued;  
with a Consideration of Purpose.

The Case, "Terrorism in the Cour d' Assises: The US v. France v. Georges Ibrahim Abdallah".

Jonathan Glover, Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century, Pt. 5.

Machiavelli, The Prince, chs. 15-19: On Praise, Blame, Purpose and the Prince.

II. An Analysis of Structure: Are Rights or Wrongs Guaranteed?

- 6 A. The Ethic of Academic Freedom: Inquiry v. Presumption;  
with a Consideration of Routine.

The Case, "Morley Affair" and Sequel.

Frank Sulloway, Born to Rebel, Chs. 12-13.

Paris, "Moral Education and the Tie that Binds in Liberal Political Theory" (APSR, September 1991).

- 7 B. The Ethic of Accountability: Responsibility v. Excuse;  
with a Consideration of Procedure.

The Case, "Two Oaths of Richard Helms".

Dennis F. Thompson, Political Ethics and Public Office, Ch. 2.

Thompson, "Mediated Corruption: The Case of the Keating Five" (APSR, June 1993).

- 8 C. The Ethic of Conscientious Objection: Integrity v. Role Performance;  
with a Consideration of Policy.

The Case, "Mayor Steve Judy of Coeur d' Alene, Idaho and the Parade Permit Request by Neo-Nazis".

John Kane, The Politics of Moral Capital, Pt. 1.

Burt, "The Politics of Virtue Today: A Critique and a Proposal" (APSR, June 1993).

- 9 D. The Ethic of Professional Expertise: Evidence v. Rationalization; with a Consideration of Mission.

The Case, "The Contemptuous Administrators: Radionuclides Regulation and the Clean Air Act".

Max Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, Essay I, pp. 1-27.

Galston, "Liberal Virtues" (APSR, December 1988).

### III. Grounds in Ethical Arguments...Posturing and Positioning

- 10 A. Intellectual Variations: Virtue, Conscience, Custom, Utility, Ideology, Pragmatism.

The Case, "Ethical Problems in Public Careers: Lying and Teaching" Note.

Plutarch, Makers of Rome, Ch. 8, pp. 223-241.

Jerome Kagan, The Nature of the Child, Ch. 4.

- 11 B. Practical Variations: Status, Tenet, Precedent, Preference, Platform, Budget.

The Case, "Telling the Boss He's Wrong: George Shultz and Iran/Contra".

Bentham, Handbook of Political Fallacies, Intro., Pt. 5, II-IV.

Robert A. Caro, The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York, Chs. 10, 29.

### IV. Troubles with Politics: Three Core Problems

- 12 A. The Element of Knowledge: Beclouded by Self-Interest.

The Case, "Politics of a Covert Action: The U.S., the Mujahideen, and the Stinger Missile".

Susan Rose-Ackerman, Corruption and Government, Ch. 11-12.

Stoker, "Interests and Ethics in Politics" (APSR, June 1992).

13 B. The Element of Sufficiency: Undone by Shortfalls.

The Case, "Seeking Neighborhood Revitalization in Philadelphia:  
Using Tax Credits to Link the Private and Nonprofit Sectors".

Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, Ch. 14.

Stark, "Beyond Quid Pro Quo: What's Wrong with Private Gain  
from Public Office?" (APSR, March 1997).

14 C. The Element of Voluntariness: Muddied by Dirty Hands.

The Case, "Twisting in the Wind? Ambassador April Glaspie and the  
Persian Gulf Crisis," Pts. A, B, and Update.

Jean-Paul Sartre, No Exit.

Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte Darthur, pp. 119-137, 706-750.

### Participation

With comments based on course readings, appropriate events, and independent observation and experience, students should participate regularly in class discussion.

### Preparation

Each week, the assigned readings should be completed before our class meeting. Students should seek to identify the important elements of each piece, particularly those connecting one piece to another.

### Papers

A term paper, fifteen to twenty manuscript pages in length, is required of each student. A draft must be submitted on each of two occasions during the semester: the first, due at the 5th class meeting, should be approximately five pages in length, and the second, due at the 10th class meeting, should be approximately ten. The paper should be a public ethics case study, one that weaves together independent research and relevant course material.

### Grades

Final grades will be based on the three elements of coursework described above.

### Office Hours

My office hours are typically on Wednesdays (in the Political Science Department), from 10:30 to 10:50 a.m., and again, from 1:00 to 2:50 p.m. On Saturdays, I will try to be available before and after class, in the area of the Picker Center, or in 407A. Occasionally other meeting times can be arranged. Students are welcome to communicate with me by e-mail ([ajg2@columbia.edu](mailto:ajg2@columbia.edu)) or telephone (203-438-9763).