

Book Reviews

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Public Servants as Moral Exemplars for Business, Law, Higher Education Managed Health Care and the Citizenry

Charles Garofalo and Dean Geuras, *Common Ground, Common Future: Moral Agency in Public Administration, Professions, and Citizenship*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press Taylor & Francis Group, 2006. 191 pp., \$31.60

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Public servants as moral exemplars for citizens and the professions--business, higher education, health care, and law--is the overriding theme of the book. The work illuminates ethical implications inherent in public administration practice, constructs, theories and recurring themes. The authors offer an alternative framework for the study of ethics—the unified ethic. The unified ethic combines salient features of established ethics models taken from deontological, teleological, intuitionism and virtue theory.

The approach taken by Garofalo and Geuras in this comparative study of moral agency in public service and other professions is sensible and practical. The framework they have constructed—called the *unified ethic* is instructional and makes possible careful analysis of the proper place of public sector ethics in the context of business, higher education, health care, and law. Throughout the book, the authors remain steadfast that public administrators are well-suited to serve as moral exemplars for other professions and for all citizens. The ideas presented encourage active discourse and reflective debate among scholars and professionals interested in exploring new ways of thinking about moral agency and ethics in public organizations, in particular, and private organizations in general. The notion that public service ought to be the model for ethical conduct in the professions (rather than the other way around) is supportable and provokes new thinking about moral agency and ethics—metaethics.

This new way of thinking about ethics may strike a concordant note with Ethics instructors whose pedagogical preference incorporates the blending of traditional ethics models with those more recently minted. The book is a serious effort at (1) providing the foundation necessary for studying public sector ethics by focusing on traditional models arising from moral philosophy, (2) illuminating ethical implications of public

administration constructs and recurring themes; and culminates by (3) offering an alternative framework for studying ethics. The unified ethic combines salient features of established ethics models: deontological, teleological, intuitionism and virtue theory. According to the authors, the

“...unified theory asks the ethical decision maker to consider all of the questions suggested by the four theories and to attempt to find a consistency among his or her answers.” (14).

The questions suggested by the four theories and used in the construction of a new unified ethic are discussed in greater detail in a subsequent section of this review.

Traditional Ethics Models & Traditional Public Administration Theory

The authors use a three-prong approach to examine ethics and moral agency in the context of public service. Prong one provides the essential foundation needed for studying ethics consisting of an analysis of ethics models including deontological and teleological approaches gleaned from the moral philosophies of Kant, Plato, Aristotle, Bentham, and Mill. Students and professionals--in and outside public service--ought to know from whence flows the study of public sector ethics and this inclusion helps by providing a firm foundation from which other models may be compared.

Prong two consists of examining traditional views of public administration contained in the literature: Woodrow Wilson's (1887) administrative v. politics dichotomy with its call for removing politics from the delivery of scarce public goods and services; an examination of the basic tenets of the Classic Bureaucratic Model--with its emphasis on efficiency, economy, and effectiveness; to the Nonbureaucratic Model--emphasizing Wilsonian ideas of impartial decision-making; concluding with a discussion of the Human Relations and Public Choice Models. Garofalo and Geuras argue that among these models, only the Human Relations Model breaks outside the conceptual boundaries of efficiency and effectiveness and may be viewed as encouraging ethical agency by promoting self-actualization. (19).

The third prong provides the veritable *meat or substance* of the work. It presents the authors' thoughtful perspective of why public administration should serve as a model of moral agency and citizenship. They argue for a “reversal of the cliché that government should be run like a business, and...argue that, in a moral sense, business should be run like government.” (49). In this regard, their views are similar to those of Appleby (1952) who said, “In many respects, if not in all, it should be plain that public morality is of a higher order than private morality.” (42).

Throughout each of the eleven chapters, Garofalo and Geuras convincingly argue that public administration is inherently a moral enterprise. It is a moral enterprise because its sole purpose is to serve public values and public purposes. Garofalo and Geuras maintain that “the public administrator is a moral agent [worthy of serving as] a moral exemplar for the private citizen.” (1). They discuss differences between moral and ethical agents: “The moral agent acts in a manner that expresses concern for moral values as final ends. Therefore, the moral agent would often act against self-interest to advance something that he or she considers morally worthwhile.” (3). Examples of moral agents are Gandhi, Socrates, and Albert Schweitzer. They suggest it is possible to be an ethical agent without being a moral agent: “To be an ethical agent, one need merely pursue any goal in a morally correct manner...but a moral agent has a moral goal, such as the

promotion of human equality. It is possible to be a moral agent without being a fully ethical agent.” (4). An example is given where a citizen may lie to a jury because he/she mistrusts the jury. In such a case, the witness is not engaging in immoral conduct, but instead is using a higher moral principle—that principle is justice. By seeking justice, the witness demonstrates that he/she is a person of great moral character. Cooper (2001) suggests that “We need to understand character better, how it is shaped and how it supports ethical decision-making.” (345). Ideas presented in this chapter provide ample opportunity for academic rumination.

In chapters four through seven, the authors explore a series of ethical issues taken from business, managed health care, law, and higher education. They conclude that none of these professions provides the moral leadership necessary for public service.

Ethics Theories

The strength and appeal of chapter eight is that it succinctly and effectively describes several established ethics theories: ethical relativism which denies the existence of universal moral standards; teleological views that assert consequences of actions and decisions determine moral worth; utilitarianism approaches arising from the philosophies of Jeremy Bentham (1996) and John Stuart Mill (1907) arguing that an act is moral if it promotes the greatest good for the greatest numbers; the deontological approach of Immanuel Kant (1989) founded upon the belief that an act is morally good if it is consistent and rests upon established moral principals; the intuitionist perspective that human beings have innate moral senses enabling them to determine good from bad acts and, finally, to an articulation of the tenets of virtue theory--the view that the foundation of morality is the development of good character traits, or virtues—a person is good if she possesses virtues like courage, temperance, justice, and truthfulness. (105-111).

Garofalo and Geuras acknowledge that each theory contributes in its own way to moral decision-making and insightfully frame questions critical to capturing the essence of each:

- Teleology: What are the full consequences of all possible alternative actions?
- Deontology: What universal consistent principles best apply?
- Intuitionism: How do I feel about this action?
- Virtue theory: What character traits does it evidence and promote in both the person performing the action and other people?

From each question, the authors skillfully deduce theory-specific recommendations:

- Teleology: Act to produce the greatest happiness as a consequence.
- Deontology: Act according to the proper principle, and be consistent in applying it.
- Intuitionism: Act according to your inner sense of what is right or wrong.
- Virtue theory: Act as a person of good character, and set a good moral example for others to follow. (113).

Each theory and its respective answer will, of course, generate professional and academic debate about the differences and fallibilities each contains; however, the

authors declare the administrator who ultimately demonstrates his/her loyalty to the public interest remains the ideal model for moral agency because “moral agency is a part of the profession of public administration.” (114). Because of this inseparability, public administrators have much in common with private citizens; therefore, public administrators rightfully may serve as moral exemplars for citizens and professionals.

The authors understand the impracticality of expecting all public servants to reach the highest state of moral agency. Embarrassing headlines about errant public servants failing to live up to the ideal posited by Garofalo and Geuras will continue. Nonetheless, they argue (and who would argue with them) that because of its inherent moral nature and higher moral purpose public servants have the greatest potential to achieve the highest form of moral agency by striving to do that which is morally right and avoid doing that which is morally wrong—ethical behavior in its purest form. In other words, public administrators must strive always to do that which is morally right. This becomes more important since public administrators are under greater public scrutiny than their private sector counterparts and are more than likely to be held accountable for the decisions they make. Research suggests that accountability is one of the most salient recurring themes in public administration and it is generally understood that accountability is an external component of public life helping to assure ethical behavior. Ott, Boonvarak, and Dicke (2001) offer the following definition of accountability:

“In its simplest form, accountability is “answerability” for one’s actions or behavior...” (280). They say, “Accountability is a concept steeped in long-standing notions of governmental responsibility and popular sovereignty...[it] is more than a set of legalistic obligations. It is also a moral, professional, and ethical construct that results when public officials and contractors serve with a commitment to “do the right things.” (281).

Stated differently, public administrators perform their duties under tremendous media scrutiny. They must expect to be held accountable when overstepping the boundaries of administrative discretion and behave according to this dictum by striving to do that which is right.

The Unified Ethic

The unified ethic as the name suggests brings together or unifies the dominating ethical theories: deontological, teleological, virtue and intuition. They say,

“Each of the major ethical theories makes a strong case for a different aspect of ethics. Their problems lie in their exclusivity; the defenders of each theory maintain not that their theory accounts for an important part of ethics but that their theory includes all of ethics. We adopt the assumption that ethics, like human beings in general, is multifaceted yet unified into one organism.” (112).

This idea is further developed when they say:

“...we have offered the unified ethic, a moral construct that can leaven ideology, sectarianism, self-interest, and nationalism. Combined with transformational as opposed to transactional leadership...the unified

ethic has the potential to deepen our understanding of global as well as local interdependence and enliven our commitment to a national and international moral order.” (133).

The authors suggest that the unified ethic may be strengthened by the addition of appropriate Ethics Impact Statements tailored to the needs of either the public or private sectors—there is no uniform impact statement that would serve both sectors, because as they say, “Ethics Impact Statements...should express the ethical values of those organizations and the professions that they represent.” (156).

The discussion is brought to a close with the reality tinged sentiment, “Like theory, ethics is perceived by many as of little or no value in the real world of governance. However, like theory, ethics is embedded in both political and administrative practice and is, therefore, inseparable from governance.” (173). It remains incumbent upon public servants, scholars, and citizens to work towards the promotion of collaborative and meaningful relationships that involve moral examination and theoretical critique, greater understanding, and cooperative blending of theory with practice. Recognizing that ethics training is plentiful in both the private and public sectors, the authors say that even though ethics training is available, it is regrettable that simple obedience to rules is the organizational norm. Corporate ethics are measured too often by the number of law suits avoided or by the number of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) complaints. For Garofalo and Geuras, “...ethics training is a kind of risk-management device designed to prevent problems...” (178). They hope that a new style of ethics training will provide citizens and professionals much more in the way of helping them become more ethical decision-makers with a greater capacity for delivering scarce public goods and services to vulnerable populations.

Point/Counterpoint

The book comes full circle in the last chapter with the addition of a Socratic-like dialogue between Garofalo and Geuras with Garofalo assuming the liberal point of view and Geuras adopting a position from the conservative perspective. They engage in a brief point counterpoint dialogue to demonstrate the flexibility of the unified ethic framework.

Recommendation

Common Ground, Common Future: Moral Agency in Public Administration, Professions, and Citizenship resonates well with the study of ethics because it provides the strong foundation necessary for understanding the appropriate place of deontological and teleological moral philosophies in the context of public service; explores the relationship of ethics to salient public administration concepts like moral agency, accountability, discretionary authority, stewardship, efficiency, and effectiveness. It is especially appropriate for Ethics graduate courses designed as *capstone* courses in public administration. The unified ethic as a framework for the application of ethics in different contexts—business, health care, higher education, and law—offers a new perspective and therefore contributes to the field. In other words, as Williams (2000) suggests, “It is through a combination of perspectives that we can best meet the challenges the future holds.” (587). This is a well-balanced and thoughtful approach to the application of ethics. Moreover, public and private sector professionals must learn how to make good

moral decisions and this book may help them do it. I recommend it because of its value for teaching Ethics to a new cadre of public administrators.

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