

**TRENDS IN 20TH CENTURY UNITED STATES
GOVERNMENT ETHICS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a broad overview of five perspectives on the public service ethics agenda, incorporating a current debate which may well emerge as the initial reform agenda of the new millennium. Perspectives explored include the politics/ administration dichotomy, the New Public Administration's emphasis on individual responsibility in the context of strong organizational values and norms, the ethical risks of public entrepreneurship, and the recent emergence of spiritualism as a guide to public ethical decision-making. The authors conclude that we are entering a new era of public ethics where performance and morality will be accorded equal priority. They argue that public entrepreneurship is increasingly essential to meet the public's demand for government that works better and costs less. Most public officials will need on-the-job training and/or ethics courses in schools of public policy and administration to competently assess the ethical risks and dangers that a particular policy innovation may encompass.

VIEWS OF ETHICS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

As the twentieth century comes to a close, ethics is returning to the public sector reform agenda. Just as it was at the turn of this century the current focus is on the administrative branch of government. Then, as now, scandals involving elected officials prompted the reform initiatives. However, today there is far less consensus on the most appropriate elements of the reform agenda, perhaps reflecting a century of less than successful ethically-driven reforms.

This paper provides a broad overview of what we see as five perspectives on the public service ethics agenda, incorporating a current debate which may well emerge as the initial ethics reform agenda of the new millennium. From the late nineteenth century until the early 1970's, the central theme was reform and a key goal of the reformers was to separate politics from administration and established a professionalized public service. A second major theme emerged from the great social, political and cultural changes that began in the 1960's and stimulated the establishment of the *New Public Administration*. The New Public Administration incorporated an ethical focus on the need for career civil servants to accept greater individual responsibility. In the late 1980's, public administration scholars contended with the problem of maintaining a positive view of government in an anti-government era. In response, revived the ethics agenda from the progressive era. They also confronted and sought to address the difficulties of maintaining individual responsibility for ethical decisions within an environment of strong organizational habits and group norms.

A profound challenge to traditional public administration was initiated by the 1992 publication of David Osborne and Theodore Gaebler's *Reinventing Government*. Some public administration scholars believe reinvention's emphasis on entrepreneurship undermines many of the core values and ethical principles of public administration. H. George Frederickson and others have warned

against the ethical risks of public entrepreneurship and suggested measures to mitigate them.⁽¹⁾ These protective strategies have been characterized as spiritualism.⁽²⁾

Today, public administration ethicists are in the midst of a debate which will likely establish a new ethical paradigm for the upcoming century. In our view, the ethical trends of the century now ending should help place this current debate in perspective and perhaps provide some guidance as to how it should be resolved. We expect a new ethical consensus to emerge and hope that the following discussion will help to crystallize a more informed ethical agenda for the American public sector in the new millennium.

THE REFORM MOVEMENT

In Leonard White's classic, *Introduction to The Study of Public Administration* (1955), he suggests that the high ethical standards which characterized the early decades of the United States democracy were seriously eroded by the rise of mass political parties, the consequences of unbridled Jacksonian democracy and a "general decline" in moral standards across the banking, insurance, railroad and real estate industries. By the mid-twentieth century, White concludes that ethics of high standards were restored to all three levels of government. What changed our ethical course was a strong and broad-based reform movement that first emerged soon after the Civil War and remained strong and influential into the mid-twentieth Century.

The building blocks of the reform agenda were laid at the end of the nineteenth century with the publication of Woodrow Wilson's essay, "The Study of Administration" in 1887 and the passage of the Pendleton Act of 1883. It encompassed the basic principles of the civil service system, which grew out of the moralistic American spirit of the time. It was primarily a reaction to the abuses of the spoils

system and the corruption and conflicts of interests that characterized government in the United States during the Civil War and Reconstruction periods. In addition to getting rid of evil, the civil service reformers also hoped to make government more efficient.⁽³⁾ The key mechanisms of these reform efforts were: merit appointment; promotion through competitive examinations; an emphasis on administrative neutrality in the application of the law; and strict adherence to a hierarchical, chain of command decision-making structure.

Woodrow Wilson called civil service reform a prelude to a fuller administrative reform, maintaining that it established a "moral preparation for what is to follow."⁽⁴⁾ In the essay, Wilson established the foundation for the much discussed and later debated policy-politics/administration dichotomy by arguing that administration lies outside the sphere of politics. This principle was soon to be reinforced and more firmly established with the publication of Frank Goodnow's *Politics and Administration*⁽⁵⁾ in 1900.

This led a code of government ethics that addressed conduct for a variety of professional associations whose members work in the public sector by setting out principles and values to guide their members in providing the highest possible level of service to the public without discrimination or concern for personal interest or profit.⁽⁶⁾ Perhaps the most widely recognized and emulated code of that time was developed by International City Managers Association (ICMA) in 1924 (and revised in 1952). The ICMA code advised its members that:

1. They had an ethical responsibility to be qualified to perform their job well and an obligation to work at improving their level of competence;
2. Personnel should be evaluated on the merit principle;

3. Policy is made by the elected city council;
4. Honor, integrity, public service and social responsibility are important values; and,
5. They should curry no favors, or serve individual and personal interests.⁽⁷⁾

The key elements of the ICMA code were reflected in a variety of federal employee codes of conduct throughout the early and mid-twentieth century. Non-partisanship, fairness, courtesy and integrity were generally emphasized, as well as loyalty to the United States government, the obligation to keep secrets secure, and to protect public property. More often than not, the importance of economy, efficiency and effectiveness were also stressed.

Unlike today, the reformers of the first half of this century often viewed the American system of government itself as a series of devices to promote ethical choices.⁽⁸⁾ To them, democracy served to minimize the influence of special interests. Free elections ensured that policy-makers were chosen by the people and were thereby accountable to them. Hierarchy in public agencies assures the efficacy of that accountability by forcing policy decisions up the chain of command to the elected or those appointed by elected officials at the top of those agencies. This is the central theorem of "big democracy" popularized by Paul Appleby and his many followers at the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University.⁽⁹⁾

The potent threats to the good society come not from bad people but from imperfect institutions.⁽¹⁰⁾ Nevertheless, there were individual moral qualities and mental attitudes that could be fostered to ensure the best possible ethical outcomes from the public sector. The moral qualities include optimism (confidence and capacity), courage (to act when it is easier to withdraw) and fairness tempered by charity (an ongoing commitment to justice and the public interest). The mental

attitudes reflect an understanding of the moral ambiguity of people and policies, the contextual morality of public service (there are no absolutes in war, for example), and the paradox of procedures (fairness and openness are often in competition with the need for prompt, decisive action in the public interest).

For the reformers, "merit became the administrative expression and foundation of democratic government."⁽¹¹⁾ Frederick Mosher argues that the merit principle has deep roots in American ideology. Our "Protestant Ethic" values work not just as a practical necessity but also a moral obligation. Americans of that era believed that rewards should be based on superior performance assessed on the basis of clear criteria objectively judged.

The U.S. commitment to the merit principle was also based on a belief in the separation of politics-policy and administration and was reinforced by the powerful scientific management movement.⁽¹²⁾ The New Deal and our management of the Second World War effectively destroyed whatever practical credence there was to the politics/administration dichotomy but "left no adequate substitute."⁽¹³⁾ And in the post-war period, the rise of professions and unions in the public sector served to further erode the primacy of the reform agenda.

By the late 1960's, the primary ethical concerns were not waste, fraud and abuse ("comparatively trivial") but rather the ascendance of "the partial, the corporate, the professional perspective" over the public interest.⁽¹⁴⁾ For example, President Eisenhower's farewell address, warning of the dangers of the military-industrial complex, illustrates why Paul Appleby and other leaders of that time were so fearful of the trend to put experts on "top rather than on tap."⁽¹⁵⁾

Mosher argues that most public decisions have a high ethical content and that the choices available to most public servants are seldom black or white. He maintains that private ethics are not

adequate for public decisions; and, in fact, most professions are basically anti-government. For Mosher, politics and administration are the best protectors of public ethics, if the processes are open and transparent. He also stresses the importance of broad-based education to insure virtue and competence, overcoming the dangers of segmentation brought on through narrow, professional specialization. Therefore, the universities offered the best hope of making the professions safe for democracy.

THE NEW PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION'S ETHICS AGENDA

The New Public Administration presented a radical new philosophy for a tumultuous time. America's post-war celebration of prosperity, suburbanization, two cars in every garage and the heyday of rock and roll was rapidly eroding in the face of the escalating Cold War, the Space Race, the Civil Rights Movement, assassinations of political leaders such as President Kennedy, his brother Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King, Jr., and the widespread and sometimes bloody protests against the war in Vietnam and the lack of economic opportunity for minorities in our major cities. These societal issues and upheavals served to undermine the American public's faith in its government that was nurtured and deepened by the improvements of the progressive and reform periods.

America was deeply divided during these times. The so-called "silent majority" elected political conservative Richard Nixon as president over the once popular liberal reformer Hubert Humphrey. The election was marred by violence, the assassination of candidate Robert Kennedy, and the "police riots" during the Democratic Party's nominating convention in Chicago during the summer of 1968. The basic institutions of the American democracy were being challenged at their very core and raised the question: Could our government still provide the mechanisms through which we could govern ourselves fairly and peacefully?

In this context, a group of public administration theorists and practitioners published an edition of related papers setting out the philosophy and proposed agenda for a "New Public Administration."⁽¹⁶⁾ From the perspective of public ethics, the New Public Administration sought to break from the past and set out a radical, new philosophy of public ethics. The New Public Administrators began with the then accepted observation that the politics/administration dichotomy was contradicted by reality and experience. They also attacked the public administration's commitment to economy and efficiency in government, arguing that such a goal is meaningless when it is recognized that there is no universally accepted, objective standard of performance.

The New Public Administration emphasized the value of benevolence. Though a radical proposition at the time, we now see it as a core component of public administration ethics.⁽¹⁷⁾ For adherence to the New Public Administration, social equity was therefore of equal importance to economy and efficiency.⁽¹⁸⁾

In place of the traditional emphasis on administrative neutrality and chain of command decision-making, the New Public Administration proposed the view that a public administrator was first responsible to him- or herself. "Self-actualizing people," it was said, "will be responsible because they are healthy."⁽¹⁹⁾ The New Public Administration saw an environment of ambiguity, uncertainty and change, a temporary society that demanded greater democracy and individualism within the administrative branch of government. The New Public Administration encouraged public servants and citizens to assert their own personal values in the public arena. Unlike the ethical philosophy of the past, the New Public Administration urged public servants to use their individual ethical code and judgement to guide them in their workplace. Self-actualization for public servants was characterized as preferable to confrontation.⁽²⁰⁾

During the 1970s, this revolutionary, individualistic conception of public ethics was fueled by Watergate and the other very well

publicized scandals and ethical failures of the Nixon Administration. Defense Department employee Daniel Ellsberg's release of the classified Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times* reflected the revolutionary role model for ethical behavior in the public sector--what we now commonly refer to as a whistle-blower. Indeed, the Watergate revelations themselves came primarily from a previously little known ethical tool of the public servant--the anonymous leak of information to the mass media.

The New Public Administration approach to public ethics turned the principles of public ethics the virtually upside down. Scholars of the New Public Administration school of thought believed that elected officials and their political appointees represented the primary threat to ethical government. Ethically superior civil servants, who were also more knowledgeable about public policy issues were the best insurance the citizens had for good and honest government. To enable these civil servant guardians of public virtue to do their jobs well, the New Public Administration also stressed the need to get the guardians closer to the people--through decentralization, community control, and maximum feasible public participation in government decision-making. The legislative reforms of this period--freedom of information acts, whistle blower protections and the creation of a senior executive service sought to weaken political control over the administrative branch of government. And, at least to some degree, each of these acts implies a greater trust in the ethical judgement of individual civil servants than that of the elected chief executive and legislature.

The election of Ronald Reagan and the rise of conservatism in the United States in many ways reinforced the revolutionary era distrust of government. Unlike the Reagan conservatives, however, the New Public Administration theorists viewed reliance on the personal values and ethics of professional civil servants as the best way to keep government honest. Reagan and his supporters wanted to reduce the size and scope of government. To the Reaganites, government was the problem and the answer was to get rid of it. Just as the social

changes of the 1960's led to the New Public Administration and its individualistic brand of ethics, the political force of the Reagan revolution required that public sector professionals and scholars reexamine their fundamental beliefs about the centrality and purpose of government. This reexamination led to renewed interest in the late nineteenth century roots of public administration, when the public sector grew in response to the abuses and undesirable impacts of the market economy.

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS

By the late 1980s, public administration theory had begun to swing back to many of the ethical principles of the progressive years. In 1987, Louis Gawthrop wrote, "the field of public administration is too modest while individual public servants are often too power hungry and expansive."⁽²¹⁾ He argues that the field must develop a professional ethos focused on serving individual citizens. In this conceptualization, public ethics is defined as acting responsibly toward one's fellow citizens and to the community at large. Public administrators are to translate policies and programs into ethical processes and outcomes for and among citizens.⁽²²⁾ Ethical responsibility is established through a continuous, on-going and interactive relationship between public servants and customer/clients and among citizens themselves. This interactive process drives an open-ended assessment process of the relationships and transactions that occur through them, in terms of the intention, action and perception. The transactions bring the citizen and the public administrator together and establish the linkages through which a functioning community is created and maintained. Formful transactions build trust.

Based on a foundation of trust, faith and loyalty can evolve. And upon this foundation, an ethical regime can be constructed. As

Gawthrop maintains, "By forming a triad of faith, trust, and loyalty, public administrators emerge as critical determinants of the fuller development of the soul of the state."⁽²³⁾ In this way, public administration ethical theorists were seeking their way back to a viable and widely accepted behavioral code of conduct for public service that went well beyond the New Public Administration's individualistic approach to ethical decision-making. However, the quest was obstructed by the field's reform's traditional commitment to administrative neutrality. Political accountability and government itself had lost credibility during Ronald Reagan's anti-government administration.

The Reagan Administration substantially increased the number of political appointee positions in the administrative branch and filled those positions with intensely loyal followers.⁽²⁴⁾ They reinforced the neutrality principle for the permanent civil service with threats of escalating privatization, reductions in force (RIFs, or layoffs) and the opposition to civil service pay increases and benefit enhancements. Such heavy-handed tactics seldom hold sway for long in the United States and the politization of the public service by the Reagan zealots rather quickly came tumbling down in an avalanche of scandals and ethical corruptions unparalleled in the United States since the Civil War period.⁽²⁵⁾ The vast majority of the criminal and unethical acts of the Reagan Administration were carried out by his political appointees and loyalists, not merit civil servants or members of the Senior Executive Service (SES).⁽²⁶⁾

Dennis Thompson (1990) summed up the ethical progress and obstacles that emerged during this period by suggesting that an ethical construct based on neutrality and structure must be rejected if administrative ethics are to facilitate the advancement of moral principles in government. Thompson defines moral principles as:

- ▶ The rights and duties we should respect when we act in a way that might seriously affect the well-being of others; and,

- ▶ Conditions that collective policies and practices should satisfy when they affect the well-being of individuals, society and the whole.⁽²⁷⁾

The ethical principle of neutrality requires that administrators should follow the ethical principles and direction of the organization and not the individual civil servant. That ethical direction is set by elected officials or those appointed by them. The organization is responsible for the decisions and actions taken, not the individual public servant carrying out their job responsibilities as prescribed by the politically accountable policy-makers on top of the organization.

In practice, the principle of ethical neutrality has substantial disadvantages. First, no matter how much detail the law, the administrative code and policy directives provide, public servants usually face numerous choices and wide discretion in carrying out their responsibilities on a daily basis. Second, there are no readily available mechanisms for the career civil servant or street-level bureaucrat to voice their concerns or raise ethical questions regarding their organization's procedures or processes. Therefore, the public servant has only four rather unattractive options--obey, resign, go public, or go underground and undermine the unethical practice from within.⁽²⁸⁾

The ethical principle of structure states that individual public servants are not responsible for the morality of their organizations, but only for their own specific duties. The organization as a whole is to be held accountable for the morality of its policies and actions. The logic of the principle of structure is:

- ▶ No one person can be responsible for organization-wide actions;
- ▶ Motives of any one individual in an organization do not express the morality of the entire organization; and,

- ▶ Individual roles in a complex organization are narrowly defined and as such, no one person is capable of determining the ethical direction or tone for the agency as a whole.

There are fundamental weaknesses with this approach. Without individual responsibility, public servants may act without proper moral care. Citizens can have no expectation of an ethical impact when they challenge directly the morality of a public servant's decision.⁽²⁹⁾ What can be done to overcome these fundamental weaknesses in the ethical principles carried forward from the early reformers?

Thompson suggests that personal responsibility must extend beyond role responsibility. Acts of omission as well as commission must be assessed from an ethical perspective. Actions and results must count for more in the public arena than motive or intent (which are quite difficult to measure). And, public officials must exercise foresight regarding the outcomes of their actions.⁽³⁰⁾

During the 1980's, public administration scholars focused attention on ethical decision-making in an organizational context. A 1989 survey of American Society for Public Administration members found that 80% agreed with the statement, "While each individual is ultimately responsible for his/her ethical behavior, organizations define and control the situations in which decisions were made."⁽³¹⁾ That organizational identification can become so extreme that "what is likely to be substituted for ethical deliberation is an application of the individual's understanding of the norms and values of the organization."⁽³²⁾

While public servants function in a hierarchical chain of command, the discipline and obedience that accompanies such superior-subordinate relationships do not similarly bound the subordinate's ethical responsibilities.⁽³³⁾ As Carol Lewis states, "we (public servants) cannot hide behind our boss or our desk to escape (ethical)

responsibility."⁽³⁴⁾ Responsibility for ethical decision-making must reside in the individual manager. Codes and guidelines, after all, are often contradictory and usually subject to interpretation.⁽³⁵⁾

By the end of the 1980's, a practical, viable set of public ethics guidelines encompassing individual as well as organizational responsibility was emerging. The guidelines also suggested that both outcomes and processes must be subject to ethical examination. Despite this theoretical progress, by the early 1990's the public's esteem for the public service was at perhaps its lowest level in the 20th century. Peter Drucker called it the "bankruptcy of bureaucratic government."⁽³⁶⁾ David Osborne and Ted Gaebler reported that public confidence in government had reached record low levels.⁽³⁷⁾ A brief surge of public support following the success of the Gulf War quickly gave way in the face of a deteriorating U.S. economy, persistent high unemployment and a federal government viewed as overwhelmingly corrupt.

THE ETHICS OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

The publication of Osborne and Gaebler's *Reinventing Government* (1993) profoundly influenced the theory and practice of public administration throughout the world and particularly in the United States. While the authors shared the widely held view that government was failing, their solution was very different from Reagan and the conservative theorists. Reagan and his followers argued that government was the problem and privatization was the answer. Osborne and Gaebler argued that government systems were the problem and reinventing those systems was the answer. The central problem with those systems was of means and not ends.⁽³⁸⁾

Contrary to the belief of most theorists, researchers, practitioners and even reinvention advocates, reinvention does not recommend that government be run like a business. In fact, Osborne and Gaebler

conclude that the differences between the public and private sectors are so fundamental that government cannot be run like a business.⁽³⁹⁾ What they do suggest is that government needs to become more entrepreneurial. Entrepreneurial government seeks to move resources from areas of lower return to areas of higher return. It thereby suggests that where there are measures and information available, or where such information could be made available, government decision-makers should benchmark one government activity against another (education compared to education) as part of the resource allocation process (budget-making). It also encompasses a strong commitment to economy and efficiency as both performance and ethical indicators.⁽⁴⁰⁾

Osborne and Gaebler's ten principles of reinventing government are clearly directed at creating a results-oriented government and on doing more with less in the public sector. At the same time, reinvention theory recognizes the importance of ethics in government. Osborne and Gaebler explicitly reject the 1980's tools of ethical reform--inspectors general and auditors seeking to root out waste, fraud and abuse--as at best myopic and symbolic. After all, they remind us, wasn't most of the corruption and ethical lapses during the 1980s and early 1990s the work of elected officials and political appointees, not career civil servants.

Further, Osborne and Gaebler wonder that if it often costs more to find or prevent corruption than is ultimately saved by the intervention, it is worth the expense? Of even greater concern is the fear that in the pursuit of corruption-free government, we will and are constructing public systems that are also incapable of producing high quality, high volume outcomes.⁽⁴¹⁾ Results-oriented government can more efficiently minimize corruption by focusing on performance measurement and program outcomes. A focus on results and not rules is a more effective method of making government work better and also more ethical. Reinvention theory is also focused on responsiveness and political accountability in government. Unlike the

New Public Administration, reinventionists do not believe that government will become more ethical by encouraging public servants to apply their own personal values to public policy decision-making. Reinventionists see the growing demand for more customer-driven government as a result of what they describe as "an arrogance of bureaucracy"⁽⁴²⁾ This problem is exacerbated by the fact that most government agency budgets are not determined or even significantly influenced by the actions or opinions of their customers.⁽⁴³⁾

To correct this lack of responsiveness and accountability, reinventionists call for decentralized government, flattened hierarchies, labor-management cooperation and empowered public servants. But it is their advocacy for enterprising government--earning rather than spending which has sparked the great ethical debate over the reinvention prescription. This rather simple and not apparently provocative recommendation suggests to many that to achieve responsiveness and accountability in government, reinventionists are recommending that government operate more like a private sector business.

As we have noted previously, Osborne and Gaebler explicitly reject the idea that government can or should be run like a business. Rather, their overall thrust in this area is very close to the reform era's emphasis on economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Nevertheless, an ethical debate of rather substantial dimension has developed over the subject of public entrepreneurship. This debate is stimulating a much greater focus on ethics in the literature of public administration, which, in our view, may signal the beginning of a new era of public ethical theory and practice.

PUBLIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP VERSUS PUBLIC ETHICS?

In his book, *The Spirit of Public Administration*, H. George Frederickson suggests that the impetus of the development and

growth of modern public administration was the corruption in the United States government during the later half of the nineteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Despite this ethical foundation, most public sector practitioners see their primary mission as action, "getting the job done."⁽⁴⁵⁾ While many of the procedures and processes that define and circumscribe their work are designed to combat corruption (e.g., competitive bidding; merit appointments and promotions; and transparency laws), most practitioners focus on production and leave the issues of right and wrong to the theorists.

Frederickson and his theories are particularly important in the context of this analysis. He was one of the prime participants and theorists of The New Public Administration, is a noted and widely quoted writer on public ethics, and is perhaps the most out-spoken critic of reinvention and particularly public entrepreneurship. Frederickson argues that values are at the heart of public administration and that its core values are adherence to the law, honesty, professionalism, personal morality and a commitment to the constitution.⁽⁴⁶⁾ He further maintains that the current perceived crisis in government ethics is largely confined to elected officials. Professional, career public servants are held to the highest ethical standards and expectations and for the most part, their performance is quite good.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Nevertheless, public administration theorists and practitioners continue to struggle with establishing the proper balance between democratic control of the bureaucracy and the professional discretion and choice that is essential to effective administration. From an ethical perspective, taking personal responsibility for bureaucratic decisions and actions implies and requires administrative discretion that includes the principle of personal responsibility for public servants. This perspective is opposite that of Adolph Eichman and other Nazis responsible for the Holocaust who argued that they were simply carrying out the orders of their politically appointed superiors, who held them accountable.

Paradoxically, Frederickson suggests that the ethics laws and procedures instituted during the 1980s and thus far in the 1990s discourage and diminish the capacity of professional public administrators to exercise and accept personal responsibility for their government actions. Disclosure requirements for public administrators and even their family members, ethics officers, inspectors general, ethics boards and commissions probably deter criminal and ethically questionable behavior. However, they also serve to discourage aggressive pursuit of administrative effectiveness through the exercise of discretion and risk-taking in the public interest.⁽⁴⁸⁾ This is what John Rohr (1989)⁽⁴⁹⁾ and Carol Lewis (1991) have termed "the low road of compliance". Ethical behavior is reduced to following formal rules, careful attention to minor details, a focus on staying out of trouble and an overall negative attitude.

In the 1990s, legislators and elected executives are often trapped in a policy gridlock, with both major political parties fighting to occupy what is perceived to be the ideological middle in the general election, after courting the ideological extremes during the primary election. In such an environment, policy direction from the bureaucracy and the responsible exercise of administrative discretion may offer the best hope for creative public policy problem-solving for the next decade. Instead, the most common response to policy gridlock in the 1990's is privatization. The thinking seems to be that if the public sector cannot provide solutions to public problems rapidly, effectively and ethically, let's see what the private sector can do. Private sector provision of what were previously public services can offer competition, choice, profit-driven efficiencies, and also results in a smaller, cheaper government. Short of privatization, the Reinventionists and other reformers urge greater public entrepreneurship. As we have discussed in this paper and other works,⁽⁵⁰⁾ public entrepreneurship involves risk taking and can provide ethical challenges.

While we believe the ethical issues of public entrepreneurship can be managed, Frederickson sees a direct link between public sector

corruption and unethical behavior and the enterprise model of governance.⁽⁵¹⁾ The lasting and substantial impact of the ethically motivated government reforms of the early twentieth century was to increase the capacity of the administrative branch of government and decrease the influence of politics. Privatization and the enterprise model are reversing this trend with distinctly negative consequences for the ethical content of public policy outcomes.

Thomas and Cynthia Lynch voice similar concerns about what they call the "post modern values" of public management. In their view, in our present, post-modern public administration theory, values are relative and priorities among them are established through the political process. Morals are not an appropriate subject for policy management.⁽⁵²⁾ Yet, most Americans believe in God and the Golden Rule and therefore reject the post-modern ethical relativism.⁽⁵³⁾ This apparent disconnect between public administration theory and the ethical consensus of the American public would not be of as great a concern during the first half of the twentieth century, when a commitment to hierarchical decision-making forced all important decisions, ethical and otherwise, to the level of politically elected and accountable executives. In this time of flat organizations, empowered employees and public entrepreneurship, this disconnect becomes of greater concern. Lynch and Lynch suggest that a new administrative morality may be needed and that the application of spiritual wisdom to the practice of public administration is both appropriate and helpful.⁽⁵⁴⁾ Public ethics need to be made more central to public administration education. And they advocate the introduction of a broad spectrum of religious wisdom and values be included in the public administration curriculum.⁽⁵⁵⁾

A 1996 study of 750 randomly selected members of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) focused on members' perceptions of ethics in American society and government, the nature of integrity in public agencies, and ASPA's own Code of Ethics.⁽⁵⁶⁾ The researchers found that ethics is a matter of substantial and

increasing concern among public management academics and practitioners. A large majority of the survey respondents indicated that they wanted ASPA to strengthen and expand its ethics program and include in that program advocacy, consultancies and evaluation.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Interestingly, the challenge of reinvention, just like the challenge of Reaganism has resulted in a fundamental reexamination of the field. Both involved attacks on government and its ability to perform; Reagan sought to reduce government, Osborne to redesign it. In both cases, public administrators are confronted with different environments within which to define "right" or ethical behavior. In both cases, there is a desire to return to classical expressions of values, ethics and ideals.

CONCLUSION

In 1995, we commented on what we saw as a crisis in public management--a "decline in a sense of community and ability of society to act as a collective enterprise" and a "decline of values and public morality."⁽⁵⁸⁾ Our proposed solutions then and now include greater accountability for performance, fair procurement and fair hires practices, greater protections for and empowerment of whistle-blowers and stronger enforcement of ethics laws and professional codes of conduct.⁽⁵⁹⁾ For the individual public manager, we strongly urge them to accept personal responsibility for their public actions and to weigh the ethics of the programs and the policies they set in motion.⁽⁶⁰⁾ We also stress the recognition that the options of compliance, vocal objection and resignation are also available as a personal protection and public response.⁽⁶¹⁾ Our ethical reasoning and that of our profession continue to evolve.

The "messy inclusiveness" of a wide array of values, often in conflict, has long been characteristic of codes of ethics for the public service.⁽⁶²⁾ Such value conflicts and diversity need not be destructive.

“Only from the clash of opposites, contraries, extremes, and poles can come the accommodation that are themselves American public service ethics.”⁽⁶³⁾

We are entering a new era of public ethics where performance and morality will be accorded equal priority. We reject the notion of some *Reinventionists* that performance management alone will assure the proper level of public ethics. However, we also reject the contention of Frederickson and others that public entrepreneurship is too dangerous from an ethical perspective and should be rejected as a viable public management strategy.

Public entrepreneurship is increasingly essential to meet the public's demand for higher quality, more responsive government that also costs less. However, most public officials are not currently fully equipped to determine the ethical risks and dangers that a particular policy innovation may encompass. To deal with this skills gap, we support a more comprehensive ethics curriculum in schools of public policy and administration. This should be part of an aggressive on-the-job training program that must be a central element of advocacy agenda carried forward by ASPA and other professional associations whose members work in the public sector. Moreover, in addition to education about the ethical choices that result from entrepreneurial public management, we also favor the training of public managers to understand private sector business methods and practices.⁽⁶⁴⁾ In our earlier work we noted that incompetence in task performance could be a form of dereliction of duty and therefore a breach of ethics. Public administrators cannot fall asleep at the switch and use the excuse of ignorance when they mismanage an interaction with the private sector.

Ethical public administration can build on the wisdom of each of the perspectives discussed here. From the reform agenda, we need the clear sense of public interest and the effort to establish professional norms of ethical behavior. From the New Public Administration, we

need to adapt the key concept of personal responsibility and the ethical imperatives on individuals in complex organizations. The attacks on government's role (Reagan) and competence (Osborne) requires us to rethink the place of government in society and the tasks of government and to balance the exercise of individual ethical values in the context of organization's values and norms.⁽⁶⁵⁾

More recently, scholars, such as Frederickson and the Lynches, have written about the need to ensure that public administrators have a moral grounding. We also need to engage in the debate that Frederickson has reopened about the purpose of public administration. We are eager to participate in this discussion of the basics: what are the values, ideals, purpose and ethics of the public manager? In our view, it is an emphasis on education, competence and individual responsibility rather than investigation and privatization that will lead us into a new, more ethical and effective public administration for the twenty-first century.

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