
GLOBALIZATION, MORAL JUSTIFICATION, AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE

Charles Garofalo
Department of Public Administration
Southwest Texas State University

Abstract

This article argues that there is a profound connection between the public service and moral justification. In this age of globalization, it further argues that public administration would be wise to build on a global ethic. The author argues against a compartmentalized perspective on ethics and in favor of a unity perspective as presented in Garofalo, C. and D. Geuras. 1999. Ethics in the Public Service: The Moral Mind at Work (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press).

Introduction

Both popular and academic literature has amply addressed the scope and complexity of globalization, its assumptions, goals, strictures, and processes. Issues associated with human rights, labor conditions and compensation, environmental protection, national sovereignty, poverty, investment patterns and productivity are among the many concerns embedded in the broad theme of globalization. Analysts from a number of disciplines and political persuasions approach globalization from a variety of perspectives. Often they see globalization as either the inevitable next step in human progress or the evil free-trade juggernaut that threatens the future of most of humanity. What they tend to omit from these discussions, however, is an explicit concern for the underlying moral basis and justification for globalization and the particular role of public administrators across the planet.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to offer a moral framework for judging global policies, programs, and practices. This article shall

delineate the responsibility of public administrators in a process of justification and public reason grounded in a universal, unified ethic. Such a framework applies to all political, economic, and governance premises and processes, whether global or not. Globalization simply focuses the issues more sharply and spotlights the need for institutionalized processes of deliberation, dialogue, and disclosure. It also brings into clear focus the importance of justification and reason based on substantive moral content.

John McMurtry's (1998) *Unequal Freedoms: The Global Market as an Ethical System* demonstrates the need for establishing and elaborating a moral framework for globalization and a system of justification. McMurtry focuses on the underlying values that drive globalization, including what he refers to as the value program in which assertions such as "We must compete in the new global marketplace" are seen as given, natural, unalterable. As McMurtry states, in a value program

All people enact its prescriptions and functions as presupposed norms of what they should do. All assume its value designations and value exclusions as givens. They seek only to climb its ladder of available positions to achieve their deserved reward as their due. Lives are valued, or not valued, in terms of the system's differentials and measurements. All fulfill its specified roles without question and accept its costs, however widespread, as unavoidable manifestations of reality (p. 6).

According to McMurtry, the value program underlying the global market system consists of "efficiency of factor allocation, comparative advantage, increased export earnings, rise in market share, increased GDP performance and annual incomes, and, above all, vastly increased returns on investment in an area of chronic under investment" (p. 8). The master assumption is that the global market system is superior to any other. The underlying premise is that the private sector is efficient and the government is inefficient. Thus, "whatever the market does is good, and whatever government does is bad, unless it can be shown to serve the market" (p. 28).

The value program of globalization is a closed system of choice, which the acquisition of money drives society and the impact on the civil commons is either ignored or discounted. But, as McMurtry asks, "if the common interest is not protected and advanced by

government as distinct from the global market's demands, then what is left to serve the shared life-interests of society? What becomes of community goods which are not priced and by their nature can only be safeguarded or provided by government?" (p. 21). In McMurtry's view, there is no publicly accountable institution that can protect civil society other than government. Therefore, government's protection of the civil commons is the moral responsibility of public administrators, including their role in formulating, explaining, and justifying the moral choices inherent in global governance.

Justification

Douglas Yates (1981) argues that the American bureaucrat plays a preeminent role in public policy making. The bureaucrat chooses public policy values and makes hard choices when values conflict. Scholars have paid little attention, however, to the justification of the bureaucrat's value choices. Therefore, Yates calls for discussion of values in our "bureaucratic democracy" and of what is involved in choosing those values so that a dialogue can provide citizens the knowledge and information needed to make intelligent judgments about the process of governance.

Yates maintains that being elected and responding to constituents' interests exempts elected officials from value accounting. Bureaucrats, by contrast, lack this legitimacy, and, thus, justification of their policy decisions is necessary. An assessment of the implications of policy for major public values such as liberty, equality, community, and the public interest should be part of the answer to the question of "what should government do?" However, Yates is not optimistic that such an assessment would be helpful in offering clearer choices, illuminating policy dilemmas, and otherwise informing citizens.

He, therefore, offers a more modest approach to value clarification. He argues that where value conflicts are great and the accounting problems substantial, public officials should provide a value analysis that informs its citizens and thus realizes a democratic control of administration. Another reason for value accounting, which seems to belie Yates' pessimism about assessing the policy-values nexus, is the lack of a clear or coherent justification or set of justifications for government intervention. According to Yates, the

lack a firmly rooted public philosophy, which means that virtually no restraints or normative principles exist to guide governmental action or inaction. He claims that, as a result, bureaucrats *qua* policymakers make value choices and implicitly fashion new rationales and precedents for government intervention.

To adapt Yates' call for justification of bureaucratic choice to the global level requires consideration of justification and public reason together, for they go hand-in-hand in elaborating and extending the kind of value analysis and accounting that Yates advocates. Several writers combine justification and public reason into "public justification". Fred D'Agostino (1996), for example, suggests that public justification, which he claims is "the key idea in contemporary liberal-democratic political theory," means "no regime is *legitimate* unless it is reasonable from every individual's point of view." Furthermore, he notes that several theorists want to know how, "the ideal of public justification is to be properly articulated." For example, John Rawls, "the foremost exponent of the idea of public justification," according to D'Agostino, takes a more or less empirical position in determining reasonable from every individual's point of view. Others, such as Gerald Gaus, tend to take a normative position. Thus, for Rawls, legitimacy requires actual agreement, while for Gaus "reasonable" means supported by good reasons.

D'Agostino (1996) points out that with the Rawlsian position, "there is some danger that regimes will be judged legitimate which are supported only or mainly by 'bad' reasons – i.e., which depend for their 'legitimacy' on mistaken beliefs or morally inadmissible desires and preferences." He goes on and says that the Gaussian position is a "demonstrations of legitimacy may not be practically efficacious – i.e., they may need to be supplemented by forceful impositions of requirements which, while supported by 'good reasons', are not actually accepted by the individuals concerned". He concludes that much work concerns "the degree to which these competing demands – of 'practical efficacy' and 'morality' – can be balanced to yield some *public conception* of public justification.

D'Agostino (1996) also highlights what he calls three especially important ambiguities concealed by the phrase "reasonable from the point of view of every individual:"

- Empirical/normative;

- Consensus/convergence;
- Maximizing/universalizing.

With respect to the empirical/ normative ambiguity, D'Agostino's concern is with the fact that, empirically, we deal with actual beliefs and desires. We are not concerned with which are better informed, less selfish, and more committed. Instead, we accept or respect actual ways of reasoning, however defective they might be, as well as actual levels of evidential and inferential adequacy. Normatively, he suggests two counts of vulnerability:

“it presupposes an accessibly univocal reading of what it is reasonable to believe and desire and to infer from one's beliefs and desires with respect to public political arrangements”

“a normative approach seems to abandon an important guiding principle of justificationist accounts of legitimacy – to wit, their responsiveness to broadly ‘voluntaristic’ considerations”

In reference to the second ambiguity – consensus/convergence, D'Agostino (1996) focuses on the phrase “reasonable from every point of view”. He posits that we might read this phrase as invoking either the notion of a consensus or a convergence. If consensus, then members of a community share grounding reasons as their justification of the regime. If convergence, then they base their justification for a regime using the different reasons held by members of the community.

On the third ambiguity – maximizing/universalizing, D'Agostino claims that different modalities of reason are involved. From a maximizing conception, an individual might consider a regime legitimate if it maximally advances that individual's interests. On the other hand, from a universalizing point of view, an individual might consider a regime legitimate if it advances the interests of all seen from that individual's perspective. The first position suggests individuals thinking as private agents about their individual welfare; the second position suggests individuals thinking about the common good.

The central issue appears to revolve around the determination of an adequate conception of public justification, including balancing competing interpretations and demands. D'Agostino (1996) points to the difficulty of identifying a trade-off among the various desiderata

associated with public justification. He suggests that the prospects for public justification, therefore, are poor. He speculates that the postmodernists may be right, “in claiming that notions of legitimacy are inherently and inescapably themselves instruments of power, rather than ‘rational’ alternatives to force”. He contends that, “if there is no public conception of public justification, any regime is ‘legitimate’ only *given* a conception of legitimacy that is itself controversial, and hence can be imposed only by force-not by the inducements of ‘reason’ “.

D’Agostino is skeptical about the rational basis of justification and legitimacy. Nonetheless, the aim here is to demonstrate that such a basis can be identified and applied to public policies, programs, and practices, even on the global level. More specifically, the application of the unified ethic, as developed by Charles Garofalo and Dean Geuras (1999) in *Ethics in the Public Service: The Moral Mind at Work*, resolves the problems with justification, whether at the regime or policy level. The foundation of the unified ethic is the integration of deontology, teleology, and virtue ethics. This is contrary to the conventional compartmentalization of Kantianism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics or the compartmentalization of principles, consequences, and character. This unity, in fact, constitutes a single indissoluble entity that mirrors the unity of human nature. This, in turn, can inform our judgment and enable us to apply it to particular cases with intelligence, integrity, and consistency. It can guide our decisions and help us justify them on both empirical and normative grounds.

Consider the three ambiguities noted by D’Agostino

- Empirical/normative;
- Consensus/convergence; and
- Maximizing/universalizing.

Approached from the perspective of the unified ethic, these ambiguities dissolve. If, for example, we find on the empirical level defective reasoning or selfishness, we have in the unified ethic an integrated moral basis for judging it. The artificial separation of principle, purpose, and virtue does not hamper us. On the normative level, the unified ethic does not represent a univocal interpretation of reasonable beliefs, desires, and political arrangements. On the contrary, it is grounded in human nature and our innate need for

integrity. It goes beyond purely self-interest-driven beliefs and desires by precluding the purely self-interest – driven distortions.

The second ambiguity – consensus/convergence – is equally vulnerable to the value of the unified ethic as a moral lodestar. Whether citizens support a policy for the same reasons or for different reasons, their support originates in their shared normal point of view.

Finally, the third ambiguity – maximizing/universalizing – is clearly a revised version of the hoary conflict between individual utility and the common good. The unified ethic, while allowing for individual freedom, promotes a balance between our personal interests and the needs of the polity.

Thus, the unified ethic implies reforming the process of public justification and, indeed, decision making from an either-or approach to one that dissolves dualism by creating an integrated, coherent whole. In policy this integrated approach is especially beneficial. As Garofalo and Geuras (1999) indicate in discussing the application of ethical theories to unity, “Once they are understood in conformity with each other and applied to a case in mutual consistency, the ethical act can be reasonably explained in a comprehensive manner. The explanation, if compelling, elicits agreements from its audience, be they supervisors, subordinates, the public that is served, or their representative, defends the moral agent from charges of arbitrariness or worse; and serves as a model for other decisions and moral agents” (p. 129).

Global Moral Issues and Bureaucratic Choice

Justification is complicated by a number of factors, including balancing competing values and claims, defining what is reasonable to diverse individuals and groups, and identifying what is to be justified or legitimated. Nevertheless, despite these complications, in a democracy, we expect public officials to explain and justify their policies, programs, and practice, which they design and implement, with moral reasoning. As Yates (1981) says, “the first obligation of the appointive official or bureaucrat is to be *explicit* about the value premises and implications of public decisions” (p. 306).

For our purposes, justification of public policies, programs, and practices, as well as the conditions that result, can occur on two levels: the level of McMurtry's value program or the level of policies either on the agenda or actually in force. Although bureaucratic choices consciously occur on the second level, the first level provides helpful perspective and context for understanding bureaucratic justification. Therefore, we will review the major features of McMurtry's value program before turning to the policies, programs, and practices in contemporary global public administration.

We recall that, by value program, McMurtry means the unconsciously held, presupposed norms and assumptions that govern our political and economic choices and actions. In the market system, he argues, one of the fundamental assumptions is the right to private property, which contemporary society considers given or natural. McMurtry maintains, however, that contrary to this aspect of the value program, the right to private property is not natural. Instead, it is a moral institution open to choice and rejection, an ancient and profound moral issue.

Moreover, McMurtry implicitly raises questions about the limits of private property. If it is not limited, private property can be disastrous for whole societies such as Native peoples, Third World agricultural communities, and company towns. Nonetheless, he contends the market system rules out any limit on inequality of wealth or any dispossession of other people's means of life by profit maximization. Still, in spite of these outcomes, McMurtry characterizes the market as a moral system, at least in its own terms. "If we think of a moral system as a set of principles held to prevent harm and promote good, with penalties and consequence of violations of its principles or laws, clearly the market order is a moral system" (p. 54).

In McMurtry's value program, the ultimate and unifying value of market doctrine is individual freedom, which is, "the supreme and universal value from which market theory and practice derive their ethical force and meaning" (p. 54). Government should be neutral, although the market conception of what is good is in the government's province to enforce. For example, while government is not to interfere in the market, the first duty of government is to ensure the security of property rights, free exchanges, and profit opportunities.

Government, which is the market's delegate in this regard, is legitimate only to the extent that it represents private producers and consumers. With respect to freedom, McMurtry observes that market theory and its declaration of human freedom appear to be contradictory. "Market theory," he notes, "rules out any human or social responsibility for the laws of the market, for they are prior to and independent of society, as are laws of nature and God" (p. 73). But, then, he asks: "How can people be self-determining if they have no voice, say, or responsibility in the most basic principles of the way their society produces and distributes their means of live?" (p. 73). The answer is that so-called free choices must rest within the market's moral commandments. As McMurtry notes, "this value program is the unseen moral absolutism of our age" (p.62).

With McMurtry's value program as a backdrop, we now turn to the key issues confronting global institutions today. Although economists, journalists, development specialists, and others, such as Korten (1995), Mander and Goldsmith (1996), and Grieder (1997) discussed these issues, they are especially salient for public administrators who must adjudicate among them on a daily basis. For example, Ali Farazmand (1999) highlights several global challenges facing public administration, including public-private sector relations. He argues that, "change in the character and activities of the state and of public administration from 'civil administration to non-civil administration,'" privatization, and elitism combine to challenge "the human conscience of the public administration community" (pp.517-519).

With respect to the changing configuration of the public and private spheres, Farazmand (1999) maintains that, with the increasing dominance of the corporate sector, government's role, "in the allocation of resources, the equitable distribution of wealth, the stabilization of economy, and economic growth has been overruled by the globalizing corporate elites" (p. 517). As a result, the public sphere and citizen participation has shrunk. Therefore, "public administrators should resist shrinking this realm of public service by engaging citizens in the administration of public affairs and by playing a proactive role in managing societal resources away from the dominant control of globalizing corporate elites" (p. 517). In Farazmand's view, nothing less than the future legitimacy of public administrators is at stake.

The second challenge – the shift from civil administration to non-civil administration – is even larger. According to Farazmand, the traditional administrative state balanced corporate elite interests with broad public interests, but now “the balanced administrative state has been replaced by the corporate-coercive state” (p. 517). Thus, public administration is being transformed from administering public affairs to administering the public itself, “for social control and facilitation of capital accumulation” (p. 517). Public administrators with a social conscience, he argues, should resist this change.

Third is the challenge of privatization, which Farazmand claims “promotes greater opportunities for corruption” (p. 518). “Public administrators,” he contends, “must resist the market-based concepts of treating citizens as consumers and degrading them to market commodities” (p. 518). Fourth is globalization’s tendency to promote elitism and elites who operate as subsidiaries or agents of transnational corporations. Many of these “corporate mercenaries” in less-developed nations “run repressive regimes which violate the human rights of their own people” (p. 518). The paradox is that, “globalization has produced a massive concentration of corporate power and has centralized its organizational structure while at the same time governmental decentralization has been promoted across the world” (p. 518).

Finally, Farazmand asserts that, “globalization challenges the human conscience of the public administration community” (p. 519). Public administrators, who are “professional citizens of the global community,” are responsible for addressing many moral issues, “including the conditions and deprivations of the poor, wage slavery and sweatshops in global factories, environmental destruction, global warming, and inequity and injustice” (p. 519). Public administrators can raise global consciousness about global issues, “question the sincerity of the elites, oppose exploitation, and resist being used for undemocratic, unjust, and inequitable purposes around the globe” (p. 519). Farazmand suggests that the Internet and other communication systems can be helpful in this regard. The upshot of Farazmand’s position is that public administrators in both more- and less- developed nations are guardians of global community interests who “have a global responsibility to act ethically and morally in a coordinated manner” (p. 519).

McMurtry's value program and Farazmand's challenges represent the background and foreground, respectively, of contemporary global public administration. Together, they constitute the environment within which ethically conscious public administrators can play a dual role: they can set a moral example within their own institutions through justification of their value choices, and they can press for inclusion of policy and program justification in their institutions as a whole.

The unified ethic summarized in this essay and Nigel Dower's (1998) world ethic, which expresses the unified ethic and includes a set of universal values applicable to all people and a set of global obligations that link all people, should animate such public administrators. They should combine their conscience and commitment with moral coherence and conviction to effectuate a strategic moral vision exemplified by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such public administrators would subscribe to what Dower calls the cosmopolitan position, the core of which "is a belief that in the lat analysis all human beings live in one 'moral community' and that any form of organization at any level has to be assessed in terms of how well it allows or enables human beings to achieve well-being and moral agency" (p. 185).

For Dower (1998) rights are critical not only to the attainment of life's basic necessities but also "to what assures dignity and the exercise of rational autonomy" (p. 146). Dower argues for distinguishing between justified and unjustified negative effects of action, and that "either the idea of unjustified policies takes us back to more specific canons of fairness and justice . . . liberty, non-coercion, non-deception or it points us to a principle of not either directly or indirectly causing extreme suffering/poverty, a state of affairs below a minimum level of acceptability, as a basic principle" (pp. 147-148). Dower concludes that, "this cannot be an absolute principle, since there are many other Important goals of public policy with which it will clash, but it needs to be seen as an ever pressing consideration" (pp. 147-148).

Yet, even if committed in principle to Dower's world ethic, the morally and globally conscious public administrator doubtless would ask how such an ethic can be realized, given the level of moral sophistication and conviction prevalent in most public institutions. Such an administrator would be sensitive to the strategic and tactical dimensions of justification, as well as its moral importance and

implications, and would wonder how to act, to paraphrase Farazmand, in a morally coordinated manner. Therefore, a recommendation for institutionalizing justification of value choices in public administration must build upon but go beyond Yates' prescription by providing some guidance to administrators in their search for morally grounded decisions and actions. This is the role of the unified ethic.

As noted, the unified ethic is a concatenation of the major ethical strands in philosophy-deontology, teleology, and virtue. Together, they can provide the public administrator moral clarity, coherence, and consistency. These qualities, in turn, can empower the administrator in both thought and action and engender morally informed justification of decisions and actions. Bureaucrats would no longer have value choices hidden behind decisions as fragmented, with principles, consequences, and character considered as separate categories. Instead, the embodiment of the integrated ethic, imagined and implemented by autonomous and accountable moral agents, experts, and stewards of the public interest would articulate those choices.

We can translate this combination of philosophical and functional perspectives into morally grounded and skilled value choices and decisions through institutional support, training, and leadership. Organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, and the World Health Organization, are the forum in which we can address the justification of global policies, programs, and practices. They, other international forums, and the court of world opinion adjudicate the value choices behind those policies, programs, and practices.

At the same time, we must acknowledge the obstacles to creating and sustaining this process of justification. As Jane Davis (1986) notes, "international institutions may be suitable arenas in which to attempt to raise the moral consciousness of member states and their respective publics, but in reality they are somewhat less conspicuous for effective, practical implementation of agreed policies" (p. 161). Nonetheless, we must also acknowledge, as Davis observes, that North-South decision-making processes are infused with moral issues and that the North-South debate is replete with such notions as justice, equality, rights, and obligations. Therefore, despite the

amoral and immoral that some associate with international relations, the idea of introducing moral considerations into global decision making is not new. It is, instead, a persistent matter of political will, moral courage, and a commitment to begin.

Conclusions

The principal purpose of public reason and justification is to advance democratic deliberation and decision-making. Although the process is imperfect and limited in its application, the ideal can inspire all governments and global institutions. Clearly, however, realizing this practice is difficult. Ideological, instrumental, and cultural considerations, among others, obstruct progress toward intelligent and moral global policy making and lead many to concur with the adage that morality has no place in politics. Still, in one way or another, morality persists in intruding into the political and bureaucratic realms, leaving us to wonder, some say naively, about the prospects for a different, more humane, form of politics and government.

Richard Dagger (1986) argues that there are two ways to conceive of politics. The first is to see politics as an activity involving competition for power and advantage, advancing interests, usually at an opponent's expense, but essentially it is merely a strategic business. From this standpoint, accusations of "playing politics" or acting from "purely political" motives are appropriate. But if this were all there is to politics, then these would not be accusations. To accuse someone of playing politics is to charge impropriety, which Dagger maintains would be absurd if politics were only a competition for power and advantage.

The second way to conceive of politics is to see it as a fundamentally ethical enterprise in which we use strategy but it must always be subordinate to the larger requirement of the public interest. Politics is an ethical enterprise because political questions and decisions force us to consider how we are to order our lives as individuals and our life as a community. In politics, we are ultimately concerned with an ethos, a way of life. Thus, if politics is fundamentally ethical, we cannot justify political conduct on the basis of strategic considerations. "Political justification," according to

Dagger, “is a form of ethical justification,” requiring a compelling theory of ethics (p. 271).

The universal, unified ethic is, as it’s least, a compelling theory that can guide our decision-making. As an integrated moral and philosophical structure, the universal, unified ethic can provide a moral foundation and moral legitimacy to global dialogue and decisions. It can help us understand the nature and the implications of those decisions for the billions of global citizens whose voices are never heard in the boardrooms, courtrooms, and other inner sanctums of power and privilege.

At the same time, however, the universal, unified ethic, alone, is certainly not sufficient to alter entrenched perspectives and practices. Reformers will require other approaches as well. For example, just as OECD members were pressed to adopt more aggressive anti-corruption measures, so too might the public influence global institutions to recognize the underlying moral nature to institutional policies and to promote more democratic decision making processes. Public justification, as Stephen Macedo (1990) says, is not simply a philosophical or intellectual exercise. It is, instead, an attempt to create “a transparent, demystified social order” (p. 295). The universal, unified ethic can be a vital ingredient in that effort.

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