

Ethics in Public Administration: Theoretical Foundation

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Abstract— The main purpose in this article is to study the theoretical foundation of ethics in public administration. Methodology used in the study is a documentary research. The study found that there are three main groups of the theoretical foundation of ethics in public administration: (1) Rule-based ethics, based on rules and duties, proposed and supported by key philosophers or scholars: Immanuel Kant, John Rohr, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Gerald Pops and Thomas Powlak. (2) Result-based ethics, based on maximizing utility, proposed and supported by major philosophers or scholars: Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Vincent Ostrom. (3) Virtue-based ethics, based on good characteristics, proposed and supported by main philosophers or scholars: Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre, Terry Cooper, and David K. Hart. In this paper, the author has suggested that virtue-based ethics approaches more reasonable for public administration than rule-based and result-based ethics approaches.

Keywords— *Ethics; Public Administration; Public Administration Ethics; Theoretical Foundation of Ethics*

I. INTRODUCTION

In public administration, perceptions of what is ethical and what is not diverse remarkably; notwithstanding, some guides exist to help clarify the differing points of view about ethics. Three main approaches are discussed in the literature: (1) rule-based ethics or deontological ethics approaches, (2) result-based ethics or teleological ethics, and (3) virtue-based ethics. In this article, I would like to study about concepts and theories of these ethical approaches. The finding might be help public administrators in analyzing when they are faced with ethical problems and ethical dilemmas in public administration. The topics, I will present, are as follow:

- (1) Rule-based Ethics
- (2) Result-based Ethics
- (3) Virtue-based Ethics
- (4) Conclusion and Analysis

II. RULES-BASED ETHICS

Rules-based ethics sometime is called deontological ethics. The term “deontology” derived from the Greek root *deon*, or duty, and *logos*, or science. Deontology therefore can be perceived as the *science of duty*. According to this view, correct ethical choices necessitate an understanding of the rules that regulate duties. Generally in a deontological or rule-based system, duties, rules, and obligations are imposed by some higher power. Being ethical is therefore consistent with directives of the higher authority. [1]

Under rule-based ethics of public administration, administrators base their ethical decision making on the application of principles. Rule-based ethics public administrators use agreed-upon or settled values to determine one’s ethical obligation to act. To use this approach, public administrators need to have knowledge of a set of principles and the deductive capacity to appropriately apply those principles to actual situations. [2]

The key philosophers or scholars who proposed and supported this approach are Immanuel Kant, John Rohr, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Gerald Pops and Thomas Powlak. Concepts and theories suggested by these philosophers and scholars are demonstrated in table 1.

Table 1: Concepts and Theories of Rules-based Ethics

Philosophers/ Scholars	Concepts/Theories
1. Immanuel Kant	Kant suggested that actions are ethically praiseworthy if they are motivated by moral laws that can be universally applied and are derived from practical reason. He claimed that principle can guide people in every possible set of circumstance. For Kant, people are good if they have a good will or motive (normally driven by duty). This good will implies action and is more than simply good wishes. [3]
2. John Rohr	For Rohr, guidance and justification in making ethical decisions is found in “regime values,” as reflected fundamentally in the Constitution and in the law that interpret the priorities of regime values, which can be discovered through important decisions of the Supreme Court. Accordingly, public administration ethics based on the values of equality, freedom, and property. By this reasoning bureaucrats who internalize these norms and act in prudent ways in relation to them will be ethical. When the inevitable conflicts between the values occur, bureaucrats should look to the methods and spirit of Supreme Court jurisprudence to resolve them. [4]
3. John Rawls	Rawls is supportive of rule-based ethics through his development of the concept of

	justice. Rawls identified principles that were essential for equality and justice. The first principle provides equal basic liberties (such as freedom of speech and freedom of religion) for all citizens. The second principle (difference principle) would only permit social and economic inequalities to exist that work to the advantage of the least well off member of society. [5]
4. Robert Nozick	Nozick proposed the concept that each person has inviolable rights to live as he or she chooses. He claimed that individual have rights, and there are things no person or group may do to them. These rights include being free from interference, being free to legitimately acquire property, being able to freely enter into contracts, and being able to enforce contracts. As a libertarian, Nozick argued that justice in distribution of property depends on two requirements: justice in initial holdings and justice in transfer. He believed that the distribution of property and goods is just if it is brought about by a free exchange among consenting people even if large inequalities and disparities exist. [6]
5. Gerald Pops and Thomas Powlak	Pops and Pavlak argued that administrative decision-making should be linked and guided specifically to principles and procedures of justice. They conceive of justice as incorporating other public administration values such as public interest, social equity, and efficiency; thus, they believe, their framework superior than other ethical decision-making framework in public administration. For Pops and Pavlak administrative decisions are considered just to the extent that they (1) produce just outcomes (distributive justice) and (2) are produced by a process that is regarded as fair (procedural justice). [7]

III. RESULTS-BASED ETHICS

Result-based ethics, sometime called teleological ethics, contrasts with rule-based ethics or deontological ethics because of its emphasis on ends, purposes, and goals that result from actions rather than principles that precede actions. Consequentialism, one form of teleological approaches generally and utilitarianism approaches specifically, holds that there are no ethical principles that provide justification for an action a priori. An action is right or wrong depending on its consequences. [8]

Mill, one of the prominent philosophers who propose and support this approach, suggested that an action is good insofar as it contributes to good ends. Although there are various ways of calculating benefits, whether the individual or society as a whole, it is utilitarianism that is incorporated into thinking

about administrative ethics. When examining utilities for society as a whole, the preferred choice is that which produces the greatest good for the greatest number. One can either assess the consequences of each separate act or assess the consequences of rule that will persist as long as they produce the greatest net good. [9]

Result-based ethics approach seems to be a practical way to prepare public administrator to make tough ethical choices. Its values are pervasive and it is widely practiced. Public-choice model is largely derived from utilitarianism: maximizing amount of individual preferences is the major result-based value. What is sought is a maximum amount of individual choice in a society. In university studies of public administration and public policy, the teleological or result-based perspective holds the high ground. Because of the emphasis on efficiency, cost-benefit analysis, the market model and theories of games, and public choice; what is right or wrong, what is moral or ethical is to be judged in terms of utility of consequences. [10]

The outstanding philosophers or scholars who proposed and supported this approach are Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Vincent Ostrom. Concepts and theories recommended by these philosophers and scholars are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Concepts and Theories of Result-based Ethics

Philosophers/ Scholars	Concepts/Theories
1. Jeremy Bentham	Bentham, considering the founder of utilitarianism, developed the principle of utility which state that it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong. He believed that maximizing utility is the main goal of all individual or group action. The essence of utilitarianism is found in its stress on the effects an action has. Utilitarianism contends that if an action produces an excess of beneficial effects over harmful ones, then it is right; otherwise, it is not. Accordingly, the consequences of an action determine its rightness or wrongness. [11]
2. John Stuart Mill	Mill is credited which recasting the principle of utilitarianism in a more liberal and humane light. Departing from Bentham in his distinction between higher and lower pleasures, Mill insisted that there are qualitative as well as quantitative measures for pleasure. He prioritized mental over bodily pleasure, distinguishing between the higher pleasure of the mind and the lower pleasures of the body. Therefore, quality of pleasure as well as quantity should be considered. [12]
3. Vincent Ostrom	Based on the public choice theory, focusing on value of individual choice as the prime

	<p>criterion of deciding the goodness of consequences, Ostrom suggested that the task of government is to invent the means to aggregate individual choices and give them voice and articulation. He related concepts of individual citizen choice maximization to the ethical obligations of administrators, thus construction an ethics of administrative behavior. [13]</p>
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IV. VIRTUE-BASED ETHICS

Virtue-based ethics qualitatively differs from other ethical approaches in its concern with the totality of an individual's character, or how someone should be as a person. Virtue-based ethics tries to answer the question of what kind of life is best for human beings. This in turn is linked to personal choices of individuals. Virtues are comprehended as dispositions to choose what is fine or noble for their own sake and shun what is wicked or ignoble. [14]

Virtue-based ethics focuses on the role of character in ethical behavior. Generally contrasted with rule-based or deontological ethics and result-based or teleological ethics, virtue ethics emphasizes less on the action itself and more on the actor. Emphasis is placed on being a good person rather than doing good deeds. Virtue-based ethics links morally desirable ethics virtues to moral or ethical actions. Actions are perceived as a reflection of inner morality. Good actions are a sign of virtue; bad actions are the symbol of vice. [15]

The distinctive philosophers or scholars who proposed and supported this approach are Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre, Terry Cooper, and David K. Hart. Concepts and theories instructed by these philosophers and scholars are exhibited in table 3.

Table 3: Concepts and Theories of Virtue-based Ethics

Philosophers/ Scholars	Concepts/Theories
1. Aristotle	<p>Aristotle focused his ethical concerns on the need to find what was good for an individual and for a community. A good life was considered by Aristotle as one in accord with virtue or excellence and guided by practical reason. The concept of the golden mean, the desirable middle between two extremes, is central to Aristotle's notion of virtue. Aristotle reasoned that there are extremes of excess and deficiency. Avoiding extreme is what makes something virtuous. For Aristotle good character is something can be developed, not necessarily something a person is born with. Virtue and character are believed to be able to be acquired through exercise and practice. [16]</p>
2. Alasdair MacIntyre	<p>MacIntyre is credited with the recent surge of interest in virtue ethics. His conception of</p>

	<p>virtue is found in his discussion of internal and external goods. Internal goods are viewed as the outcome of a competition to excel, but their achievement is a good for the whole community. In contrast, external goods, when achieved, are always some individual's property and possession; consequently, the more one has, the less there are for others. He suggested that politics should be about the pursuit of internal goods (virtue) rather than external goods (those of control); it should be about people working together for a common good, for virtues, and for justice. [17]</p>
3. Terry Cooper	<p>Cooper believed that administrators become ethical by making ethical decisions. For Cooper, the ultimate aim of administrative ethics is taken to be action, with both theory and experience being essential to accomplish the end. He suggested that operational ethics is developed by each administrator through the decisions that one make over a period of time. The skill in making ethical decisions can be learned and cultivated by understanding and practicing a dynamic process of decision-making. For concretely practices, ethical decision-making is presented as a sequence of steps that moves from perception that there is a problem to a state of resolution. Cooper believed that if employed regularly, an intuitive decision-making skill will develop. [18]</p>
4. David Hart	<p>Hart argued that bureaucrats have a dual status. The fundamental obligation of a bureaucrat is to seek virtue as a citizen. In addition, bureaucrats also have professional obligations. He suggested that because public administrators have the day-to-day control over the bureaucracy, they incur special obligations. They must be more than value-neutral technicians; they must be proponents of regime values. For Hart, virtuous administrators will always be conscious of the moral obligation of promote virtue, among themselves and their subordinates. They must advocate an education in virtue to the followers from the earliest ages, and follow that up with policies, programs, and practices that will promote virtue. Finally, they must consciously try to become exemplars of the virtue that guides all of their actions. [19]</p>

V. CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS

There are three main groups of the theoretical foundation of ethics in public administration: (1) Rule-based ethics, based on rules and duties, proposed and supported by key philosophers or scholars: Immanuel Kant, John Rohr, John Rawls, Robert Nozick, Gerald Pops and Thomas Povlak. (2) Result-based ethics, based on maximizing utility, proposed and supported by major philosophers or scholars: Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Vincent Ostrom. (3) Virtue-based ethics, based on good characteristics, proposed and supported by main philosophers or scholars: Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre, Terry Cooper, and David K. Hart.

Rule-based ethics and result-based ethics are typically classified as cognitive ethics approaches. This type of ethical approaches holds that rationality can supply morality with a foundation by relying on a logical process to determine what to do in a given situation. But, in reality, life is too complex to conform to a simple formula; cognitive ethics over confidence in the power of reason to recognize and pursue the good. Ethics involves more than following general norms like rule or result. A preoccupation with the process of decisions cannot produce understanding about the actual content of an individual's morality. [20]

Virtue-based ethics, therefore, is an alternative to endless debates between rule-based and result-based in cognitive ethics. Reason may be essential in carrying out moral decisions, but the source of morality is human sentiment. The formulation of a problem can never be a purely technical procedure; reason is usually occupied with indifference by the heart. Ethics is about developing the right character more than following the right procedure. We cannot control circumstances, but we can control character. Even though rules and results are relevant, but they are most effectively considered in the context of individual character. Every action is measured in terms of character, one's internal moral compass. We must *be* before we can *do*, that is, one must be good before one can do goodness. Virtue ethics, consequently, is a way of life, not a mere method of analysis. [21]

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