Ethics and the Public Service*

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WHEN Dean Appleby was asked to deliver the Edward Douglass White lectures at Louisiana State University in the Spring of 1951, he chose as his topic, Morality and Administration in Democratic Government. He preferred the term “morality” because he did not wish to suggest his lectures were “either a treatment in the systematic terms of general philosophy or a ‘code of administrative ethics’.”¹

His attempt instead was to cast the light of his uncommon wisdom upon what he considered to be the central ethical and moral issues of the American public service. These issues centered upon the felicous interaction of moral institutional arrangements and morally ambiguous man.

In some ways Morality and Administration is a disconcerting book. The essays are discontinuous. Each one is chocked with insight, but in the collection viewed as a whole, theoretical coherence and structure emerge implicitly rather than explicitly. Some inhere weighted terms like “responsibility” are clarified only by context. The final chapter, “The Administrative Pattern,” is not the logical fulfillment of the preceding chapters. It stands beside the other essays, not on top of them. Furthermore, in spite of the highly personal connotation of the word “morality,” Dean Appleby spent most of his time discussing the effect of the governmental system upon official morality rather than vice versa. He saw in the American governmental system a series of political and organizational devices

> Hard questions of public ethics are not answered by the semantic concoctions, pious platitudes, and appalling lack of subtlety that often characterize the codes enunciated to guide political and administrative behavior. Building upon the “uncommon wisdom” and personal example of Dean Paul Appleby, his successor as Dean of the Maxwell School, Syracuse University, examines the mental attitudes and moral qualities necessary to an explicit theory of personal ethics in the public service.

for promoting ethical choices. The most serious threats to the “good society” came, in his estimation, not from the venality of individuals but from imperfections in institutional arrangements.

A Normative Model for Personal Ethics

His normative model ran something as follows: politics and hierarchy force public servants to refer private and special interests to higher and broader public interests. Politics does this through the discipline of the majority ballot which forces both political executives and legislators to insert a majoritarian calculus into the consideration of private claims. Hierarchy does it by placing in the hands of top officials both the responsibility and the necessity of homogenizing and moralizing the special interests inevitably represented by and through the lower echelons of organizational pyramids.² Both politics and hierarchy are devices for assuring accountability to the public as a whole. The public makes it known in a variety of ways and through a

²The intellectual as distinct from the moral implications of hierarchy have been suggested by Kenneth Underwood in his contention that “The policy-making executive is to be distinguished from the middle management-supervisor levels most basically in the excessively concrete, abstract dimensions of his work.” See his paper “The New Ethic of Personal and Corporate Responsibility,” presented at the Third Centennial Symposium on The Responsible Individual, April 8, 1964, University of Denver.

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variety of channels, but its importance is largely in its potential rather than in its concrete expressions. "Its capacity to be, more than its being, is the crux of democratic reality." Politics and hierarchy induce the public servant to search imaginatively for a public-will-to-be. In this search, the public servant is often a leader in the creation of a new public will, so he is in part accountable to what he in part creates. But in any case the basic morality of the system is in its forcing of unitary claims into the mill of pluralistic considerations.

The enemies of this normative model, then, are obvious: they are whatever disrupts politics and hierarchy. For whatever disrupts politics and hierarchy permits the settlement of public issues at too low a level of organization—at too private a level, at too specialized a level. As Madison saw in Federalist #10, bigness is the friend of freedom. But Appleby saw more clearly than Madison that bigness is freedom's friend only if administrative as well as legislative devices exist to insure that policy decisions emerge out of the complexity of bigness rather than out of the simplicity of its constituent parts. The scattering of power in the Congress, the virtual autonomy of certain bureaus and even lesser units in the executive branch, an undue encroachment of legal and other professional norms upon administrative discretion, the substitution of the expert for the generalist at the higher levels of general government, the awarding of statutory power at the bureau rather than at the department level, the atomized character of our political parties—these, according to Dean Appleby, are the effective enemies of morality in the governmental system. They are the symptoms of political pathology. "Our poorest governmental performances, both technically and morally," he wrote, "are generally associated with conditions in which a few citizens have very disproportionate influence." "... the degradation of democracy is in the failure to organize or in actual disintegration of political responsibility, yielding public interest to special influence."

Here, then, is the grand design. Government is moral insofar as it induces public servants to relate the specific to the general, the private to the public, the precise interest to the inchoate moral judgment. Within this context, a moral public decision becomes one in which "the action conforms to the processes and symbols thus far developed for the general protection of political freedom as the agent of more general freedom; ... leaves open the way for modification or reversal by public determination; ... is taken within a hierarchy of controls in which responsibility for action may be readily identified by the public; ... and embodies as contributions of leadership the concrete structuring of response to popularly felt needs, and not merely responses to the private and personal needs of leaders." It is no disparagement of Dean Appleby's contributions to a normative theory of democratic governance to point out that he dealt only intermittently and unsystematically with the moral problems of the individual public servant. The moral system intrigued him far more consistently than the moral actor. All of his books and essays contain brilliant flashes of insight into the moral dilemmas of individual executives, administrators, and legislators, but there emerges no gestalt of personal ethics in government. One can only wish that he had addressed himself to a systematic elaboration of the personal as well as the institutional aspects of public ethics. For the richness of his administrative experience and the sensitivity of his insight might have illuminated uniquely the continuing moral problems of those whose business it is to preserve and improve the American public service.

Perhaps, without undue pretention, this memorial essay can attempt to fashion a prolegomena to a normative theory of personal ethics in the public service—building upon and elaborating some of the fragments which Dean Appleby scattered throughout his writings and teaching.

Dean Appleby's fragments suggest that personal ethics in the public service is compounded of mental attitudes and moral qualities. Both ingredients are essential. Virtue without understanding can be quite as disastrous as understanding without virtue.

The three essential mental attitudes are: (1) a recognition of the moral ambiguity of all men and of all public policies; (2) a recognition of the contextual forces which condition moral priorities in the public service; and (3) a recognition of the paradoxes of procedures.

The essential moral qualities of the ethical

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1 Appleby, op. cit., p. 35.
2 Ibid., p. 214.
3 Ibid., p. 211.
public servant are: (1) optimism; (2) courage; and (3) fairness tempered by charity.

These mental attitudes and moral qualities are relevant to all public servants in every branch and at every level of government. They are as germane to judges and legislators as they are to executives and administrators. They are as essential to line officers as to staff officers. They apply to state and local officials as well as to national and international officials. They are needed in military, foreign, and other specialized services quite as much as they are needed in the career civil service and among political executives. They, of course, assume the virtue of probity and the institutional checks upon venality which Dean Appleby has so brilliantly elaborated. They are the generic attitudes and qualities without which big democracy cannot meaningfully survive.

Mental Attitudes

The Moral Ambiguity of Men and Measures

The moral public servant must be aware of the moral ambiguity of all men (including himself) and of all public policies (including those recommended by him). Reinhold Niebuhr once stated this imperative in the following terms: “Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.” America's public ethics finds its historic roots in the superficially incompatible streams of Calvinism and Deism. The former emphasized a depravity which must be contained; the latter emphasized a goodness which must be discovered and released. The relevance of this moral dualism to modern governance is patent. Any law or any act of administrative discretion based upon the assumption that most men will not seek to maximize their own economic advantage when reporting assets for income tax purposes would be quite unworkable. But so would any law or any act of administrative discretion which assumed that most men would use any and every ruse to avoid paying taxes at all. Similarly, any administrative decision threatening the chances of re-election of a powerfully placed Congressman almost inevitably invokes counter forces which may be serious both for the decision maker and for the program he or his agency espouses. But administrative decisions fashioned totally out of deference to private ambitions and personal interests can negate the very purposes of general government and can induce the righteous reaction of a voting public.

The fact is that there is no way of avoiding the introduction of personal and private interests into the calculus of public decisions. As James Harvey Robinson once wrote,

“In all governmental policy there have been overwhelming elements of personal favoritism and private gain, which were not suitable for publication. This is owing to the fact that all governments are managed by human beings, who remain human beings even if they are called kings, diplomats, ministers, secretaries, or judges, or hold seats in august legislative bodies. No process has been discovered by which promotion to a position of public responsibility will do away with a man's interest in his own welfare, his partialties, race, and prejudices. Yet most books on government neglect these conditions; hence their unreality and futility.”

The most frequently hidden agenda in the deliberations of public servants is the effect of substantive or procedural decisions upon the personal lives and fortunes of those deliberating. And yet the very call to serve a larger public often evokes a degree of selflessness and nobility on the part of public servants beyond the capacity of cynics to recognize or to believe. Man's feet may wallow in the bog of self-interest, but his eyes and ears are strangely attuned to calls from the mountain top. As moral philosophy has insistently claimed, there is a fundamental moral distinction between the propositions “I want this because it serves my interest,” and “I want this because it is right.”

The fact that man is as much a rationalizing as a rational animal makes the problem of either proving or disproving disinterestedness a tricky and knotty business. “I support the decision before us because it is good for the public,” may emerge as a rationalization of the less elevated but more highly motivational proposition: “I support the decision before us because it will help re-elect me, or help in my chances for promotion, recognition, or increased status.” But the latter may have emerged, in turn, from a superordinate proposition: “Only if I am re-elected (or promoted) can I maximize my powers in the interests of

1 The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Scribners, 1944), p. xi of Foreword.

the general citizenry.” Unfortunately, no calipers exist for measuring the moral purity of human motivations.

But, in any case, few would deny the widespread moral hunger to justify actions on a wider and higher ground than personal self-interest. In fact, the paradox is that man’s self-respect is in large part determined by his capacity to make himself and others believe that self is an inadequate referent for decisional morality. This capacity of man to transcend, to sublimate, and to transform narrowly vested compulsions is at the heart of all civilized morality. That this capacity is exercised imperfectly and intermittently is less astounding than the fact that it is exercised at all. A man’s capacity for benevolent and disinterested behavior is both a wonder and a challenge to those who work below, beside, and above him. It is in recognition of this moral reality that Dean Appleby wrote in one of his most eloquent statements,

“the manner and means of supporting one’s own convictions, including inventiveness in perceiving how high ground may be held, are one measure of skill in the administrative process.”

But appeal to high morality is usually insufficient. It is in appreciating the reality of self-interest that public servants find some of the strongest forces for motivating behavior—public and private. Normally speaking, if a public interest is to be orbited, it must have as a part of its propulsive fuel a number of special and particular interests. A large part of the art of public service is in the capacity to harness private and personal interests to public interest causes. Those who will not traffic in personal and private interests (if such interests are themselves within the law) to the point of engaging their support on behalf of causes in which both public and private interests are served are, in terms of moral temperament, unfit for public responsibility.

But there is a necessary moral corollary: a recognition of the morally-ambivalent effect of all public policies. There is no public decision whose moral effect can be gauged in terms of what game theorists refer to as a “zero-sum” result: a total victory for the right and a total defeat for the wrong. This ineluctable fact is not only because “right” and “wrong” are incapable of universally-accepted definition. It is because an adequate response to any social evil contains the seeds of both predictable and unpredictable pathologies. One can, in the framing of laws or decisions, attempt to anticipate and partly to mitigate the predictable pathologies (although this is rarely possible in any complete sense). But one mark of moral maturity is in the appreciation of the inevitability of untoward and often malignant effects of benign moral choices. An Egyptian once commented that the two most devastating things to have happened to modern Egypt were the Rockefeller Foundation and the Aswan Dam. By enhancing public health, the Rockefeller Foundation had upset the balance of nature with horrendous consequences for the relationship of population to food supplies; by slowing the Nile, the Aswan Dam had promoted the development of ener-vating parasites in the river. The consequence of the two factors was that more people lived longer in more misery.

The bittersweet character of all public policy needs little further elaboration: welfare policies may mitigate hunger but promote parasitic dependence; vacationing in forests open for public recreation may destroy fish, wild life, and through carelessness in the handling of fire, the forests themselves. Unilateral international action may achieve immediate results at the cost of weakening international instruments of conflict resolution. Half a loaf may be worse than no loaf at all. It also may be better in the long run but worse in the short run—and vice versa.

Awareness of these dilemmas and paradoxes can immobilize the sensitive policy maker. That is one of the reasons why both optimism and courage are imperative moral qualities in the public service. At best, however, awareness of moral ambiguity creates a spirit of humility in the decision maker and a willingness to defer to the views of others through compromise. Humility and a willingness to compromise are priceless attributes in the life-style of the generality of public servants in a free society. For they are the preconditions of those fruitful accommodations which resolve conflict and which allow the new to live tolerably with the old. Humility, however, must not be equated with obsequiousness, nor willingness to compromise with a weak affability. As Harold Nicolson once wrote,

\[ \text{Op. cit., p. 222.} \]
"It would be interesting to analyze how many false decisions, how many fatal misunderstandings have arisen from such pleasant qualities as shyness, consideration, affability or ordinary good manners. It would be a mistake . . . to concentrate too exclusively upon those weaknesses of human nature which impede the intelligent conduct of discussion. The difficulties of precise negotiation arise with almost equal frequency from the more amiable qualities of the human heart."

Men and measures, then, are morally ambiguous. Even if this were not a basic truth about the human condition, however, moral judgments in the public service would be made difficult by the shifting sands of context. An awareness of the contextual conditions which affect the arranging of moral priorities is an essential mental attitude for the moral public servant.

The moral virtues of the Boy Scout oath are widely accepted in the United States. But, as Boy Scouts get older, they are faced time and again with the disturbing fact that contexts exist within which it is impossible to be both kind and truthful at the same time. Boy Scouts are trustworthy. But what if they are faced with competing and incompatible trusts (e.g., to guard the flag at the base and to succor a distant wounded companion)? Men should be loyal, but what if loyalties conflict?

Winds Above the Timber Line

To the morally-sensitive public servant, the strains of establishing a general value framework for conducting the public business is nothing compared to the strains of re-sorting specific values in the light of changing contexts. The dilemmas here are genuine. If value priorities are shifted with every passing wind, the shifter will suffer from his developing reputation as an opportunist. If value priorities are never adjusted, the saints come marching in and viable democratic politics goes marching out. To be consistent enough to deserve ethical respect from revered colleagues and from oneself; to be pliable enough to survive within an organization and to succeed in effectuating moral purposes—this is the dilemma and the glory of the public service.

In general, the higher a person goes on the rungs of power and authority, the more wobblily the ethical ladder. It is not the function of the junior civil servant in a unit of a branch of a bureau to worry about Congressional relations—except on specific mandate from above. But a bureau chief, an assistant secretary, under-secretary, or secretary of a department may find himself contextually conditioned to respond frequently to Congressional forces whose effect it is to undermine the integrity of the hierarchical arrangements in the executive branch. The heroic proportions of the Presidency become clear when one recognizes that the winds are fiercest and most variable above the timber line. The very fact that the President has fewer moments in the day than there are critical problems to be solved, and that crises often emerge unheralded, means an unevenness in the application of his time and attention to adjusting or influencing the moral niceties of any single issue. Dean Appleby understood this when he wrote, "On many matters he [the President] will appear rather neutral; beyond enumerating items in messages and budgets he can expend his time and energies on only a few things. On as many matters as possible he normally yields for the sake of larger concerns." The crucial word is "yields." Put in another way, if the President had more time and staff assistance he would "yield" to far fewer private and petty claims than he presently supports tacitly or openly.

During the Kennedy administration, the President called together a small group of top legislators, cabinet officers, and executive office staff to advise him on whether he should support the extension of price supports for cotton. His staff reminded him of the bonanza which price supports gave to the biggest and wealthiest cotton farmers. Legislative and cabinet leaders reminded him that a Presidential veto on an important agricultural bill could mean forfeiting key and critical legislative support on subsequent domestic and international matters of over-riding importance to the nation’s security and welfare. The President agreed not to veto the bill, but the moral torment was there. According to one witness, he stared at the wall and mumbled to himself, "There is something wrong here. We are giving money to those who don’t need it. If I am re-elected in 1964, I’m going to turn this government upside down."

President Eisenhower was an honorable

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chief executive. Yet he publicly lied about the U-2 affair. The context was the crucial determinant.

If the heat in the ethical kitchen grows greater with each level of power, no public servant is immune from some heat—some concern with context. As Dean Appleby has written: "...a special favor, in administration even—as by a traffic policeman, to a blind person or a cripple—would be regarded as a political good when it appears an act of equity compensating for underprivilege."

There is not a moral vice which cannot be made into a relative good by context. There is not a moral virtue which cannot in peculiar circumstances have patently evil results.

The mental attitude which appreciates this perversity can be led, of course, into a wasteland of ethical relativity. But this is by no means either inevitable or in the American culture even probable. Where this attitude tends to lead the mature public servant is toward a deep respect for the constant forces which swirl around public offices, and toward a deeper understanding of the reasons why moral men sometimes appear to make unethical public decisions. An old American Indian proverb is relevant: "Do not scoff at your friend until you have walked three miles in his moccasins." Because it is not easy for any man to place himself empathetically in the arena of moral dilemmas faced by another man, charity is a difficult moral virtue to maintain with any constancy. But as we shall review more fully below, charity is an essential moral quality in the public service of a democracy.

Paradoxes of Procedure

The third mental attitude which the public servant of a free society must cultivate is a recognition of the paradoxes of procedures. Justice Frankfurter once wrote, "The history of American freedom is, in no small measure, the history of procedure." Rules, standards, procedures exist, by and large, to promote fairness, openness, depth of analysis, and accountability in the conduct of the public's business. Those who frequently by-pass or short-cut established means are thereby attacking one aspect of that most precious legacy of the past: the rule of law. Official whim is the enemy of a civilized social order. Not only does it sow the seeds of anarchy in organization, it denies to a new idea the tempering which the heat of procedural gauntlets normally provides. John Mill's "market place" is of little utility if an idea is never allowed to enter the town at all.

But, alas, if procedures are the friend of deliberation and order, they are also at times the enemy of progress and dispatch. Furthermore, there are procedures and procedures. There are apt procedures and inept procedures. The only really bitter comments in Morality and Administration are reserved for those members of the legal profession who believe that administration should be circumscribed by precise legal norms, and that a series of administrative courts should be the effective arbiters and sanctioners of administrative discretion. And this, of course, is only one aspect of the problem. Juridic procedures aside, both administration and legislation are frequently encumbered by rules and clearances which limit both responsiveness and the accountability they were presumably designed to enhance. The Rules Committee of the House of Representatives is not only the guardian of orderly procedures, it is the graveyard of important social measures. The contract and personnel policies of many agencies, federal, state, and local, have frequently led to what Wallace Sayre has termed "the triumph of technique over purpose." Anyone who has been closely associated with reorganization studies and proposals knows that every shift in organization—in the structural means for accomplishing governmental ends—is pregnant with implications for the ends themselves. Only a two-dimensional mind can possibly entertain seriously the notion that the structural and procedural aspects of government are unrelated to competing philosophies of substantive purpose.

The public servant who cannot recognize the paradoxes of procedures will be trapped by them. For in the case of procedures, he who deviates frequently is subversive; he who never deviates at all is lost; and he who tinkers with procedures without an understanding of substantive consequence is foolish. Of all governmental roles, the administrative role is

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34 See especially, op. cit., Chapter 4.
procedurally the most flexible. But even here procedural flexibility in the public interest is achieved only by the optimistic, the courageous, and the fair.

**Moral Qualities**

If mental attitudes related to the moral ambiguities, contextual priorities, and procedural paradoxes of public life are necessary prerequisites to ethical behavior on the part of public servants, they are insufficient to such behavior. Attitudes must be supported by moral qualities—by operating virtues. A list of all relevant virtues would be a long one: patience, honesty, loyalty, cheerfulness, courtesy, humility—where does one begin or stop? One begins beyond the obvious and ends where essentiality ends. In the American context, at least, the need for the virtue of honesty is too obvious to need elaboration. Although Dean Appleby has a chapter on "Venality in Government," he properly dismisses the issue with a single sentence: "Crude wrong doing is not a major, general problem of our government." And he continues with the pregnant remark, "Further moral advance turns upon more complicated and elevated concerns."15

The three essential moral qualities in the public service are optimism, courage, and fairness tempered by charity.

**Overcoming Ambiguity and Paradox**

Optimism is an inadequate term. It connotes euphoria, and public life deals harshly with the euphoric. But optimism is a better word than realism, for the latter dampens the fires of possibility. Optimism, to paraphrase Emerson, is the capacity to settle with some consistency on the "sunnier side of doubt." It is the quality which enables man to face ambiguity and paradox without becoming immobilized. It is essential to purposive as distinct from reactive behavior. Hanna Arendt once commented that the essence of politics is natality not mortality. Politics involves creative responses to the shifting conflicts and the gross discomforts of mankind. Without optimism on the part of the public servants, the political function is incapable of being performed. There is no incentive to create policies to better the condition of mankind if the quality of human life is in fact unviable, and if mankind is in any case unworthy of the trouble.

Optimism has not been the religious, philosophical, or literary mood of the twentieth century. But, in spite of a series of almost cataclysmic absurdities, it has been the prevailing mood of science, education, and politics. It is the mood of the emerging nations; it is the mood of the space technologist; it is the mood of the urban renewer. Government without the leavening of optimistic public servants quickly becomes a cynical game of manipulation, personal aggrandizement, and parasitic security. The ultimate corruption of free government comes not from the hopelessly venal but from the persistently cynical. Institutional decadence has set in when the optimism of leadership becomes a ploy rather than an honest mood and a moral commitment. True optimism is not Mr. Micawber's passive assumption that something will turn up; true optimism is the affirmation of the worth of taking risks. It is not a belief in sure things; it is the capacity to see the possibilities for good in the uncertain, the ambiguous, and the inscrutable.

Organic aging and the disappointments and disaffections of experience often deprive mature individuals of the physical and psychic vitality which in youth is a surrogate for optimism. That is why optimism as a moral virtue—as a life-style—is one of the rare treasures sought by all personnel prospectors whose responsibility it is to mine the common lodes for extraordinary leadership talent. This is true in all organizations; it is especially true in the public service. What else do we mean, when we speak disparagingly of "bureaucratic drones," than that they are those who have entered the gates of Dante's Hell and have "abandoned all hope"?

In the midst of World War II when crises were breaking out at every moment and from every quarter, an ancient White House clerk was caught by a frenetic Presidential aide whistling at his work. The aide asked, "My God, man, don't you know what's going on?" The clerk replied, "Young man, you would be terrified if you knew how little I cared." A sprinkling of such in the public service can be tolerated as droll. If a majority, or even a substantial minority of public servants become jaded, however, especially at leadership levels, an ethical rot settles in which ultimately

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destroys the capacity of a government to function effectively in the public interest.

A Capacity for Impersonality and Decision

The second essential moral quality needed in the public service is courage. Personal and public life are so shot through with ambiguities and paradoxes that timidity and withdrawal are quite natural and normal responses for those confronted with them. The only three friends of courage in the public service are ambition, a sense of duty, and a recognition that inaction may be quite as painful as action.

Courage in government and politics takes many forms. The late President John F. Kennedy sketched a series of profiles of one type of courage—abiding by principle in an unpopular cause. But most calls upon courage are less insistent and more pervasive. In public administration, for example, courage is needed to insure that degree of impersonality without which friendship oozes into inequities and special favors. Dean Appleby relates a relevant story about George Washington. Washington told a friend seeking an appointment: “You are welcome to my house; you are welcome to my heart . . . my personal feelings have nothing to do with the present case. I am not George Washington, but President of the United States. As George Washington, I would do anything in my power for you. As President, I can do nothing.” Normally it takes less courage to deal impersonally with identifiable interest groups than with long standing associates and colleagues upon whom one has depended over the years for affection and for professional and personal support. This is true in relationship to those inside as well as those outside the organization. Part of the loneliness of authority comes from the fact, again in the words of Dean Appleby, that “to a distinctly uncomfortable degree [the administrator] must make work relationships impersonal.” Appleby was quick to see that impersonality invites the danger of arrogance, but he also saw that the courage to be impersonal in complicated organizational performance is generally valuable as far as the affected public is concerned. “Its tendency is to systematize fair dealing and to avoid whimsy and discrimination—in other words to provide a kind of administrative due process.”

The need for this kind of courage on a day to day basis is probably greater, and more difficult to conjure, in the legislative than in either the executive or the judicial branches of government.

A second area for consistent courage in the public service is to be found in the relationship of general administrators to experts and specialists. It takes quite as much courage to face down minority expert opinion as it does to face down the majority opinion of a clamoring crowd. In some ways it takes more courage, for relationships with experts are usually intimate in the decisional process, whereas relations with the crowd are often distant and indistinct. Both courage and wisdom are reflected in the words of Sir Winston Churchill: “I knew nothing about science, but I knew something about scientists, and had had much practice as a minister in handling things I did not understand.”

Perhaps on no issue of public ethics is Dean Appleby more insistent than on the necessity of experts being kept in their proper place—subordinate to politicians and general administrators. “Perhaps,” he wrote, “there is no single problem in public administration of moment equal to the reconciliation of the increasing dependence upon experts with an unending democratic reality.” The expert, whether professional, procedural, or programmatic, is essential to the proper functioning of a complex and highly technical social system. But the autonomous or disproportionate power of experts, and of the limited worlds they comprehend, is a constant threat to more general consideration of the public good.

During World War II, a twenty-five-year-old civil servant in the soap division of O.P.A. found himself, because of the temporary absence of superiors, dealing directly with the president and legal staff of Lever Brothers. After a few minutes of confrontation the president of Lever Brothers turned scornfully to the government employee and asked, “Young man, what in hell do you know about soap?” A strong voice replied, “Sir, I don’t know much about soap, but I know a hell of a lot about price control.”

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This is the courage needed by a Budget Bureau examiner dealing with the Pentagon; this is the courage needed by an Assistant Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare in dealing with the Surgeon General; this is the courage needed by a transient mayor in dealing with a career engineer in the public works department; this is the courage needed by a Congressman faced with appraising the "expert" testimony of an important banker in his district.

Perhaps the most essential courage in the public service is the courage to decide. For if it is true that all policies have bitter-sweet consequences, decisions invariably produce hurt. President Eliot of Harvard once felt constrained to say that the prime requisite of an executive was his willingness to give pain. Much buck-passing in public life is the prudent consequence of the need for multiple clearances in large and complex institutions. But buck-passing which stems from lack of moral courage is the enemy of efficient and responsible government. The inner satisfactions which come from the courage to decide are substantial; but so are the slings and arrows which are invariably let loose by those who are aggrieved by each separate decision. The issues become especially acute in personnel decisions. Courage to fire, to demote, to withhold advancement, or to shift assignments against the wishes of the person involved, is often the courage most needed and the most difficult to raise.

Man's Sense of Injustice

The third and perhaps most essential moral quality needed in the public service is fairness tempered by charity. The courage to be impersonal and disinterested is of no value unless it results in just and charitable actions and attitudes. Government in a free society is the authoritative allocator of values in terms of partly ineffable standards of justice and the public weal. It requires the approximation of moving targets partly camouflaged by the shadows of an unknowable future. The success or failure of policies bravely conceived to meet particular social evils is more frequently obscured than clarified by the passage of time. As R. G. Collingwood once pointed out, "The only thing that a shrewd and critical Greek like Herodotus would say about the divine power that ordains the course of history is that . . . it rejoices in upsetting and disturbing things."\(^{21}\)

What remains through the disorder and unpredictability of history is the sense on the part of the public and of working colleagues that power for whatever ends was exercised fairly and compassionately. The deepest strain in our ethical heritage is "man's sense of injustice." The prophetic voices of the Old Testament repaired time and again to this immemorial standard. "Let Justice roll down like waters. . . ." Hesiod, speaking for generations of ancient Greeks, wrote "Fishes and beasts and fowls of the air devour one another. But to men Zeus has given justice. Beside Zeus on his throne Justice has her seat."\(^{22}\) Justice was the only positive heritage of the Roman World. The establishment of justice follows directly behind the formation of union itself in the Preamble to the American Constitution.

But the moral imperative to be just—to be fair—is a limited virtue without charity. Absolute justice presupposes omniscience and total disinterestedness. Public servants are always faced with making decisions based upon both imperfect information and the inarticulate insinuations of self-interest into the decisional calculus. Charity is the virtue which compensates for inadequate information and for the subtle importunities of self in the making of judgments designed to be fair. Charity is not a soft virtue. To the contrary, it involves the ultimate moral toughness. For its exercise involves the disciplining of self and the sublimation of persistent inner claims for personal recognition, power, and status. It is the principle above principle. In the idiom of the New Testament, it is the losing of self to find self. Its exercise makes of compromise not a sinister barter but a recognition of the dignity of competing claimants. It fortifies the persuasive rather than the coercive arts. It stimulates the visions of the good society without which government becomes a sullen defense of existing patterns of privilege.

The Essential Humanity

The normative systems of politics and organization which Dean Appleby elaborated in his writings are umbilically related to the


mental attitudes and moral qualities of the individual moral actor in the public service. They nourish these attitudes and qualities. They condition and promote public morality. But the reverse is also true. Without proper mental attitudes and moral qualities on the part of the public servant, Dean Appleby’s normative systems could neither exist nor be meaningfully approximated.

Bureaucracy and technology are the pervasive realities of modern civilization. Together they have made possible order, prosperity, and mobility in unprecedented magnitudes. But, unfortunately, they have demonstrated a perverse tendency to drain from man the blood of his essential humanity. The nobility of any society is especially encapsulated and made manifest to the world in the personal example of its public leaders and public servants.

Perhaps, therefore, Dean Appleby’s writings about morality and government—no matter how wise and how provocative—were of less importance than the lessons of his example as a public servant. For in selecting the mental attitudes and moral qualities of the moral public servant, I have been guided far more by my memories of Paul Appleby than by my perusal of his writings. Dean Appleby in his public career demonstrated an uncommon understanding of the moral ambiguities, the contextual priorities, and the paradoxes of procedures in ethical governance. Of all men of my acquaintance in public life, he was the most completely endowed in the moral qualities of optimism, courage, and fairness tempered by charity. While his wisdom illuminated everything he observed and experienced, his example shone even more brilliantly than his wisdom.

The Maintenance of Dignity and the Values of Democracy

To have faith in the dignity and worth of the individual man as an end in himself; to believe that it is better to be governed by persuasion rather than by coercion; to believe that fraternal goodwill is more worthy than a selfish and contentious spirit; to believe that in the long run all values are inseparable from the love of truth and the disinterested search for it; to believe that knowledge and the power it confers should be used to promote the welfare and happiness of all men rather than to serve the interests of those individuals and classes whom fortune and intelligence endow with temporary advantage—these are the values which are affirmed by the traditional democratic ideology. But they are older and more universal than democracy and do not depend on it. They have a life of their own apart from any particular social system or type of civilization. They are the values which, since the time of Buddha and Confucius, Solomon and Zoroaster, Plato and Aristotle, Socrates and Jesus, men have commonly employed to measure the advance or the decline of civilization, the values they have celebrated in the saints and sages whom they have agreed to canonize. They are the values that readily lend themselves to rational justification, yet need no justification.