

Steven G. Koven, *Public Sector Ethics - Theory and Applications*, CRC Press, first published in 2015, 240 pp.¹

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“Public Sector Ethics - Theory and Applications” by Steven G. Koven, first published in 2015 by CRC Press, aims to lay a comprehensive foundation concerning the authors, themes and perspectives relevant to the field of public sector ethics. The book is structured in a logical and comprehensive manner, guiding readers through a systematic exploration of ethics in the public sector. After its introduction, the book provides an overview of the main philosophical and religious perspectives serving as the grounding for personal and professional ethics. It then examines the interplay between mission, ethical dilemmas, and organisational culture in public sector organisations, before delving into the personal confrontation of mission dissonance, exploring the ethical aspects of exit and voice. Koven then presents notable exemplars of public service who have displayed exemplary ethics in their roles, before closing the book with a reflection on the relationship between ethics and the public sector, with a view to enhancing ethics in public service, and to highlighting the importance of ethics as a foundation for good governance.

The introductory part of the book consists of an exploration of the primary philosophical and religious viewpoints that form the foundation for personal and professional ethics. The second chapter on philosophical grounding includes perspectives from leading exponents of each ethical current, presenting Immanuel Kant, John Rawls and Robert Nozick for deontology; Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill for teleology; and finally Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre and David K. Hart for virtue ethics. The author chose to stick to a recognisable structure for each of these philosophers, painting first a picture of their personal lives, then following with a concise explanation of their contributions to each of the three main currents, and finally summarising their perspective on the role of government. The third chapter instead focuses on religious perspectives, including Buddhist, Confucian, Judaic, Islamic and Christian ethics. For each of these, the author provides a summary of their basic tenets, followed by a “case study” related to a central figure in each religious tradition. The book acknowledges Confucianism’s peculiar status as

¹ Recensione ricevuta in data 20/12/2022 e pubblicata in data 14/07/2023.

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a religion and a philosophy by presenting Confucius' life followed by his work as both a teacher and a scholar, a division clearly not applicable in the cases of Buddha, Moses, Muhammad and Jesus Christ - the other figures that are analysed.

The first three chapters constitute the book's introduction, cementing the idea that a plurality of different systems exist and have always existed, giving rise to a number of different conceptions of public ethics. The distinction between each philosopher's general position and their thoughts on government is a welcome structural choice, as it allows for an easier comparison of the authors' positions. These chapters accurately represent each author's works; however, the fact remains that they only provide a high-level overview of what are still complex and extensive systems of thought. As such, the second and third chapters should be considered as the jumping off point for a deeper exploration of the authors' works and positions, or as a refresher for those already familiar with the authors mentioned. The fact that this overview is provided for both philosophical and religious perspective may be particularly useful for scholars well-versed in one but less so in the other, while at the same time setting appropriate expectations for the level of depth included in these introductory chapters.

The following chapters instead focus directly on difficult issues connected to public ethics. The fourth chapter, which focuses on describing ethics internal to organisations, first introduces mission statements as the backbone of organisational ethics and the premise for the exploration in the rest of the chapter. This allows Koven to spend the central part of this chapter on two categories of moral dilemmas between personal and organisational ethics: dilemmas of loyalty and dilemmas of resistance. While both are related to individuals' allegiance to their own morals vis-à-vis the organisations', the former includes various cases of the organisations' morals trumping the individuals', while the latter concern individuals' passive resistance to organisational morals they dissent with. Finally, the chapter explores the mission and culture of safety, research and knowledge organisations, and economic oversight organisations. For the first mission, the Author presents the US Marine Corps as a case study in "culture of the warrior"; the National Science Foundation as a case study in "culture of discovery"; and the Federal Reserve Board as a culture of "prudent management" connected to its mission of promoting general welfare. While these case studies are interesting, as they provide valuable models of real-world organisations with their specific ethical constraints and priorities, it is not immediately clear how the interplay of such tensions influences these organisations' approach to the themes included in the rest of the chapter, namely, moral dilemmas. Each of these sections contains a laudable attempt to identify values, heroes and rituals characterising each of the example cultures, but there is unfortunately no attempt to draw any further conclusions or common threads on this point at the end of this chapter.

However, the Author's categorisation of dilemmas of loyalty is particularly useful, as it provides an interesting and sound way of differentiating between a range of behaviours that lead to similar results - i.e. the organisation's morals overtaking the individual's. This chapter explores dilemmas of immorality for greater good or "Dirty Hands" - with reference to Sartre's play of the same name - whereby an individual feels morally compelled to act against their own moral principles in order to ensure a beneficial outcome for the larger community or organisation. In such a situation, Koven finds that two types of responses - co-optation or transfer of responsibility - allow individuals to act against their beliefs and in alignment with the organisation's. The former leads to situations of noncritical acceptance, where the effect of groupthink on suppressing any one individual's morals and pushing towards alignment with the group or organisation's. The latter takes two possible forms: the Nuremberg principle - a situation of blind obedience, where the individual feels compelled to act against their own principles as if morally "shielded" by the organisations'; or "agentic shift", where removal from action allows for the individual to more easily act against their principles, exemplified by the Milgram Experiment and the Zimbardo Experiment. The categorisation of dilemmas of resistance does not appear to be as systematic - which seems to be more a reflection of the fact that this specific point does not lend itself too well to these sorts of precise categorisations. It presents a picture of organisational failings that can lead to individuals resisting the pressure to conform to the organisation's morals. This part of the chapter focuses on organisational dysfunctions and their consequences on individuals' actions and mental states.

The fifth chapter explores individuals' options when confronted by mission dissonance, delving into Albert Hirschman's concepts of "exit" - leaving the organisation - and "voice" - whistleblowing as alternative strategies. The author explores the ethical implications of exiting an organisation and analyses three case studies of individuals who chose to exit their positions due to ethical concerns: Richard Nixon, exemplifying an exit due to direct external pressures; Elliot Richardson, exemplifying a principled stance against obedience; and Erik Shinseki, as a case of exit provoked by embarrassing revelations. For each of these cases, the Author explores three types of motivations that ultimately lead to choosing an "exit": the psychological consequences of remaining, the appeal of potential fallback options and the likelihood of continuation in the role after the mission clash. The second part of the chapter discusses the ethics of whistle-blowing and provides three case studies (A. W. Mark Felt, Frank Serpico and Edward Snowden) that highlight the complexities and consequences associated with speaking up against an organisations' morals in cases when they are not aligned with an individuals'. For each of the three cases, the whistleblowing actions are summarised alongside their aftermath.

The choice to dedicate a separate chapter to these two aspects is extremely relevant to an applied approach to public administration ethics. It covers one step

further from theoretical moral dilemmas - which elaborate on the balance between different moral positions in a single choice - by choosing to focus on concrete actions that individuals may take after being confronted with a moral dilemma. The distinction between exit and voice options is useful and benefits from the six case studies in this chapter, which allow for a varied although not systematic description of potential drivers behind the choice to disengage from an organisation in either way, while at the same time providing some grounding for ethical considerations on the basis of actual practice. The Author concludes [that, from Conjectural Cases in Exit and Voice].

In the same spirit, the following chapter provides a series of notable exemplary public servants, which are identified as virtuous according to the three main approaches to normative ethics (deontology, teleology and virtue ethics) described in the philosophical grounding chapter. These exemplary public servants are categorised following the same taxonomy as the missions in chapter four. For missions connected to safety, Koven introduces Norman Schwarzkopf and Madeleine Albright, representing military service and diplomacy respectively. For missions connected to knowledge, the book introduces teacher Jaime Escalante and administrator Leslie Groves, exemplifying knowledge dissemination and knowledge coordination respectively. Finally, he exemplifies virtuous public service in economic oversight with Alan Greenspan, before drawing some common conclusions and acknowledging the multiple issues that make it difficult to apply models of “ideal” behaviour in practice.

Each of the public servants presented in this chapter are introduced under the “lens” of the three approaches to normative ethics. In order to illustrate their good character, Koven presents testimonies of their personal lives, including family influences, early life and education, highlighting episodes demonstrating particularly virtuous traits. The teleological perspective is represented through each figure’s achievements, illustrating their effectiveness in pursuing their personal goals and their alignment with their organisations’. Finally, Koven focuses on each persons’ alignment with their own principles, highlighting the positive effects of their coherence both on them and on their organisations and communities. As for the choice of figures, what is perhaps a slight overrepresentation of individuals connected to defence - not just Schwarzkopf and Albright, but also Groves - may be a result of the intersection between the book’s focus on public service and the wealth of moral dilemmas present in military-related contexts, as well as their heightened emotional and moral salience connected to the underlying risks to human life. Precisely for this reason, the lack of representation of the medical sector is noticeable, and could perhaps be traced back to the author’s North American background which may lead to intuitively consider healthcare as separate from the public sector.

The final chapter of the book explores the broader relationship between ethics and the public sector. The author delves into the unique ethical challenges

faced by public sector organisations and discusses the role of ethics in promoting good governance and public trust. The chapter examines the importance of ethical leadership and the need for accountability and transparency in public institutions. The author also addresses the ethical implications of policy-making, resource allocation, and the use of power in the public sector. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the future of ethics in the public sector and the potential for positive change through ethical practices.

"Public Sector Ethics - Theory and Applications" is a comprehensive and insightful book that provides a wide-ranging understanding of ethics in the public sector. The author's decision to explore various theoretical perspectives, including philosophical and religious foundations, and their implications for ethical decision-making, ensures that the book is fully aware of the plural nature of administrative ethics, where each individual's moral grounding may be different. For this reason, the book emphasises the role of mission statements and organisational culture in shaping ethical conduct before delving into the ethical dilemmas faced by individuals in the public sector. Its systematic approach to the dilemmas themselves, as well as the wealth of examples and anecdotes, help bring this ethical landscape to life. Overall, this book serves as a valuable resource for academics looking for a comprehensive overview of public sector ethics, practitioners looking to conceptualise the daily interactions between their beliefs and their organisations', as well as for anyone interested in understanding and promoting ethics in the public sector.