

Preface to the Fifth Edition

As I write these introductory comments for the fifth edition of *The Responsible Administrator*, I am struck by the fact that when I wrote the first edition, I never envisioned that the field of administrative ethics would grow so robustly that there would be four subsequent editions of this book. Indeed, this fifth edition is testimony not only to the growth of the field, but to the continued relevance of administrative ethics and the problem of responsibility. This fifth edition seeks to acknowledge the changes in the field and the advances in research while remaining true to the basic framework of the first edition.

The Responsible Administrator was written for students and practitioners of public administration who want to develop their ethical as well as technical competence. It is for men and women in public service, or preparing for it, who sometimes worry about the right thing to do, but who either have not taken the time to read books on ethical theory or suspect that such treatises would not be helpful at the practical level.

The education, training, and day-to-day practice of public administrators tend to be dominated by the practical problems of getting the job done. Concerns about what should be done and why it should be done get swept aside by the pressures of schedule and workload. Modern society is preoccupied with action, to the exclusion of reflection about values and principles. Theory is diminished to theories that concern means—"how to" crowds out "toward what end?"

Ethical theory, in particular, tends to suffer under the sway of this mentality. Because ethics involves substantive reasoning about obligations, consequences, and ultimate ends, its immediate utility for a producing and consuming society is suspect. Principles and values, "goods" and "oughts," seem pretty wispy stuff compared

viii PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

to cost-benefit ratios, GNP, tensile strength, organizational structures, assembly lines, budgets, downsizing, deadlines, outsourcing through contracts, interest group lobbying, and political pressures. The payoff for dealing formally with ethics is unclear for individual administrators and for organizations as well.

The result is a tendency either to totally ignore the study of ethics or to deal with it superficially. A study conducted by the Hastings Center two years before the first edition of this book was published revealed that “few higher-education institutions offer courses in ethics” (Watkins, 1980, p. 10). The researchers attributed this neglect primarily to the controversial nature of the teaching of ethics. Academicians apparently had difficulty agreeing on who should teach these courses, as well as some apprehension about “the dangers of indoctrination” (p. 10).

Since 1980 interest in administrative ethics seems to have mushroomed. (See Cooper, 2001b, for a review of the emergence of ethics as a field of study.) The demand for in-service training sessions has increased substantially, more articles on ethics have appeared in the professional literature, sessions on ethics have grown in number and attendance at the annual conference of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), and in 1989 ASPA conducted its first national conference on governmental ethics in Washington, D.C., with seven hundred participants, including both practitioners and scholars. ASPA now has a standing Section on Ethics (see www.aspaonline.org/ethicscommunity), which boasts a membership of four hundred scholars and practitioners and has hosted a number of conferences, including the first international conference in 2005. It publishes a thirty- to forty-page online electronic newsletter four times annually that has won the Best Section Newsletter Award from ASPA every year since its inception almost ten years ago.

In 1991 the first Conference on the Study of Government Ethics was held in Park City, Utah. The conference was led by George Frederickson and sponsored by the Section on Public Administration Research of ASPA, the Ethics in Public Service Network, the Institute of Public Management of Brigham Young University, and the Public Administration Program at the University of Utah. This two-day event focused on research on public ethics, the fifty to sixty participants consisting mostly of scholars from

around the nation. The nine sessions, with a total of twenty-one presentations, covered topics including Ethics and Organizational Controls, Ethics and Independent Controls: The Role of Commissions, Ethics and Professional Culture, Codes of Ethics, Administrators' Attitudes Toward Ethics and Professional Conduct, Legislative and Political Corruption and Ethics, Conflicts of Interest, Policy Ethics, and Organizational Ethics. The range of topics, participants, and research methods reflected in the program indicated that serious research was well under way on public ethics.

The next major milestone was the National Symposium on Ethics and Values at the Public Administration Academy in Tampa, Florida, in 1995, organized by James Bowman and Donald Menzel. This was the first national forum for examining the treatment of values and ethics in curricula, academic professional ethics, the ethical dimensions of faculty-student relations, research ethics, virtue approaches to ethics education, and the role of the academy in educating ethics officials in government. More than a hundred persons, mostly academics, participated in the two and a half days of deliberations, including thirty-one presentations.

The rapid development of research on administrative ethics is reflected in the publication of the first *Handbook of Administrative Ethics* (Cooper, 1994). The second edition of this volume (Cooper, 2001a), an overview of the state of the art in administrative ethics research, contains thirty-four chapters by forty-one scholars from around the world. The first edition of this book would have been inconceivable only ten years earlier; the expansion of the second edition after just six years is testament to the growth and relevance of the field. I have recently examined some of the major research questions before us in "Big Questions in Administrative Ethics: A Need for Focused, Collaborative Effort" (2004a).

Another important indication that administrative ethics had passed beyond the academic fad stage was the 1997 publication of *Public Integrity Annual*, sponsored by the Council of State Governments and ASPA. This book included chapters by both academics and practitioners and focused largely on practical administrative problems and applications (Bowman and Ensign, 1997). It was so well received that it is now a quarterly scholarly journal, *Public Integrity*, currently edited by James S. Bowman. It is currently considered a very high-quality journal on administrative ethics.

X PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

In spite of these significant developments in scholarship, the academy nevertheless seemed slow to adapt to these trends in the curricula of professional education for the field. April Hejka-Ekins (1988) surveyed 139 of the more than 200 schools and departments that belong to the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) and found that only 66 (31.4 percent) had offered an ethics course during 1985–86 and 1986–87. It appears that academe responded weakly to the emerging interest in ethics; there was a disturbing lag in developing courses as part of the core curriculum of public administration education.

Although it now seems that the treatment of ethics in graduate courses in public administration is growing, there are no current comprehensive statistics on the number of programs offering or requiring ethics courses. Fragmentary data suggest that graduate programs are increasing their emphasis on ethics. Catron and Denhardt (1994) reviewed the thirty-nine NASPAA self-study reports for 1989–91 and found that 18 percent not only offered ethics courses but required them. This amounted to a substantial increase in the number of required courses over an earlier study they conducted. Menzel (1997) indicates that 78 of the 225 NASPAA programs (35 percent) he surveyed in 1996 now offer ethics courses. My own review of the curricula of the twelve programs ranked in the top ten by *U.S. News and World Report* (March 20, 1996) indicates that eight (67 percent) offer an ethics course and four (33 percent) do not. None requires such a course.

The number of freestanding courses devoted entirely to ethics does not really tell the whole tale, however. Catron and Denhardt (1994, p. 52) point out that in 1989, a new NASPAA curriculum standard went into effect mandating that “the common curriculum components shall enhance the student’s values, knowledge, and skills, to act ethically and effectively.” In the self-study report instructions adopted in December 1996 (National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 1996), this was made more specific:

4.21 Common Curriculum Components

The common curriculum components shall enhance the student’s values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively:

In the Management of Public Service Organizations, the components of which include: Human resources; Budgeting and financial processes; Information, including computer literacy and applications.

In the Application of Quantitative and Qualitative Techniques of Analysis, the components of which include: Policy and Program formulation, implementation and evaluation; Decision-making and problem-solving.

With an Understanding of the Public Policy and Organizational Environment, the components of which include: Political and legal institutions and processes; Economic and social institutions and processes; Organization and management concepts and behavior.

This section is followed by a further requirement to indicate how ethical conduct is cultivated:

4.21.B. Ethical Action: Describe how the curriculum enhances “students’ values, knowledge, and skills to act ethically and effectively.” In the current standards revised in January 2002, the standards concerning ethics education are essentially the same except the 4.21.b requirement to spell out how the curriculum accomplishes the kind of ethics outcomes that are desired has been dropped.

The adoption of curriculum standards and reporting requirements by NASPAA has likely led to some treatment of ethics in all of the NASPAA programs, but that does not mean that all will have separate courses. In many cases, ethics has been integrated broadly into the curriculum by incorporating modules in various courses on management, policy analysis, human resources, public finance, quantitative methods, and research design. Responses to a query sent out on the NASPAA listserv about ethics courses produced responses that suggested that many programs prefer this approach and in some cases are too small to be able to offer a separate ethics course. For a period of about ten years, Robert Cleary, now an emeritus professor at American University, analyzed the NASPAA directory listings every two years and confirmed in a personal e-mail message that integration into courses on other subjects is the predominant mode of delivery. The possibility of requiring a free-standing course in all NASPAA accredited programs has been

xii PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

raised a number of times at both NASPAA and ASPA conferences but has received little support beyond those whose focus is administrative ethics.

At an earlier stage, there seemed to have been an uneasiness with the formal study of ethics rooted in an assumption that ethics is simply a matter of relativity and subjectivity. In a pluralistic society, where no one religious or cultural tradition is dominant, ethics has been viewed as a private, individual matter, not susceptible to the canons of rational inquiry. To address the study of ethics openly in an academic setting was thought to run the risk of either creating unresolvable conflicts among those who hold differing ethical perspectives or unfairly propagandizing for one particular point of view. However, Americans appear to have become more comfortable with the topic of ethics in public life and with offering academic courses on the subject or treatment of it in courses on other topics. One change since the fourth edition is that the role of religious faith and belief in public administrative ethics has become an increasing point of controversy in conferences and on the Section on Ethics "Ethtalk" listserv, although it has not yet surfaced in a major way in publications.

Although significant progress seems to have been made in accepting the legitimacy of studying administrative ethics, it is still true that once students leave school, they are probably not well equipped to think about the ethical problems they face regularly on the job and shape their conduct accordingly. Yoder and Denhardt (2001) argue, "No guarantee exists that even if public administration/affairs schools integrate and teach ethics in the most effective manner, administrators will practice what they have learned and act ethically" (p. 74). The mere acceptance of the academic legitimacy of ethics still sends a clear message to those preparing for careers in public service that it is not a top priority. The essential value-orientedness of the field of public administration remains largely unacknowledged. We should not be surprised, then, to see expedience and technical considerations dominate decision making. Even when ethical issues are recognized, often they are considered hopelessly frustrating and beyond the domain of rational analysis. We can predict that decisions involving value conflicts will not be engaged as systematically, seriously, or openly as matters of economics, politics, and organizational survival. Menzel

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION xiii

concludes his 1997 study on the impact of ethics courses with the assertion that ethics instruction has definitely found a niche in public administration schools and that however the topic is handled in the classroom, it seems to be making a difference in the professional lives of the students—but not enough of a difference. So there is still work to be done by those who believe that competence in ethical analysis and decision making are central to the field and should shape administrative practice.

Practitioners, however, do seem to have recognized the importance of ethics in their professional roles. Bowman and Williams's 1997 study of 750 public managers who are ASPA members concludes, "The respondents indicate that ethics is hardly a fad and that government has the obligation to set the example in society. They further hold that ethics in the workplace can be empowering, although not all organizations and their leaders have a consistent approach to accomplish this. The findings emphasize the key role of leadership—both by its presence and absence—in encouraging honorable public service" (p. 525). Their empirical findings reflect a substantial increase in the importance attributed to ethics by public administrators as compared to a similar study published by Bowman in 1990. This is a hopeful sign; perhaps academe will respond to these perceptions of practitioners more forthrightly in the years ahead.

