



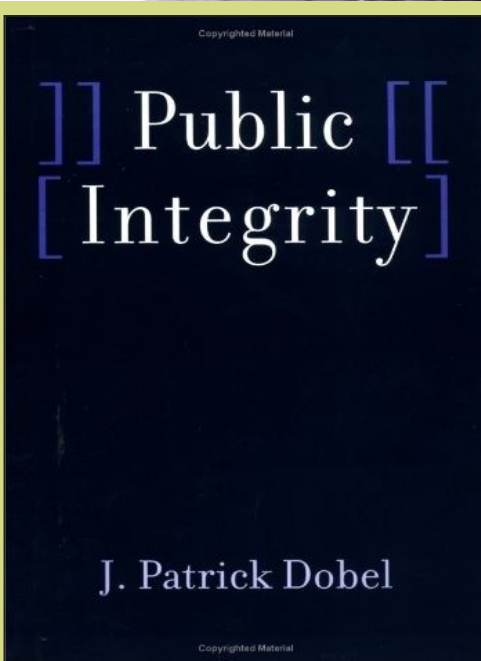
Chapter 1 : Integrity in Office

J. Patrick Dobel examines the moral obligations of “individuals who take on public responsibilities” (p. 213). When individuals are placed in the political environment, they are expected to exercise prudence in engaging their power to benefit others and to achieve lasting outcomes.

In this book, *public integrity* is defined as sustaining the promises that connect people as moral agents to the responsibilities of office. Maintaining public integrity involves an ability to balance judgments in three domains: *obligations of the office, personal commitments and capacities, and prudence* (p. 213).

According to Dobel, public integrity refers to the ability to make *sound ethical judgments* while balancing the responsibilities of the position, personal commitments and capability, and discretion. When these elements are in balance, sound judgments can be made.

The author compares public integrity to “the most solid moral vessel for navigating the moral shoals of this political sea” (p. xiii). This analogy of a ship navigating through water suggests that an individual must have moral weight, strong bearings and sound judgment in order to cope with the temptations and requests that come from all sides.



“Iterative process of Judgment”



Above diagram illustrates Dobel's three principles and how they relate to one and other.

The author maintains that public integrity consists of *three principles*:



• *Obligations of Office*

These refer to a public official's duty to serve the will of the people through the authority of “executive, legislative, and judicial processes” (p. 8). No matter how broad the discretion they possess, **officials are all bound by the same limits and obligations.**

• *Personal commitment and capacity*

These refer to the basic character, qualities and abilities of a person prior to taking office. According to the author, these “form the heart of integrity” (p.11). Part of **maintaining personal integrity in public office is accepting responsibility for one's own actions and behaviors.**

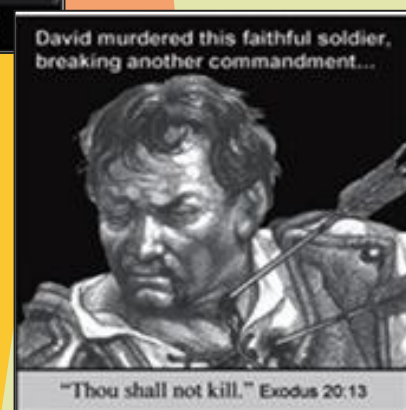
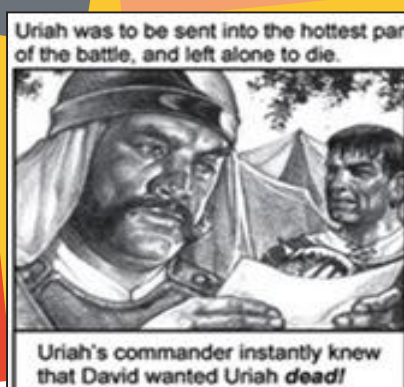
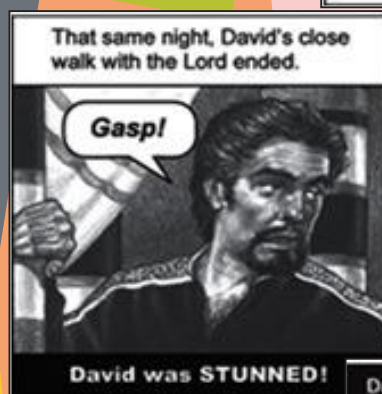
• *Prudence*

The “virtue of prudence takes its normative importance from the nature of a politically successful outcome” (p. 18) and its “obligations reinforce the link between responsibility and the capacity to do something about goals or wrongs” (p. 18). **Public officials must be prudent and discrete in balancing their responsibility** to those who elected or appointed them and their need to act for the public good.

Chapter 2 : The Temptation of Power

In this chapter, the author discusses *how public power can enmesh individuals and erode their integrity*. After many years in office, individuals may become disenchanted and therefore more vulnerable to losing their integrity. Substantial power can also destroy integrity and public commitment over time.

The author argues that the *distortion of power* tempts people to use the office for their *personal benefits*. As an example, he cites the story of the *Israeli King David's* misuse of power; David corrupted his own integrity and risked the future of his office for his own selfish desires. Desiring Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, he abused his power by placing Uriah in the forefront of battle, where Uriah was killed, leaving David free to seduce Bathsheba. This example shows how it is *difficult for public officials to resist the temptation of superiority*. Examples abound throughout history of officials who have used their status to maintain their own power and increase their wealth. If temptation is not resisted, the corruption of integrity can result.



Chapter 3 : The Moral Realities of Public Life



Dobel uses examples from drama and fiction to show that integrity is like “good art that engages emotions, stretches the moral imagination and influences judgment” (p. 48). He discusses **four aspects of morality in public office: the moral balance of self-hood, the role of decision and redemption, relations with others and the ironies of rectitude.**

The **moral balance of self-hood** “involves putting on a mask” (p. 51) and “changing oneself for a role”(p. 51) in public office, an act that the author maintains is not necessarily wrong.

The **role of decision and redemption** involves sustaining integrity, which “may require dangerous and painful decisions and actions” (p. 54).

The author cites the example of Phineas Finn, the protagonist of one of Anthony Trollope’s political novels, who is ambitious to escalate his social and political status but lacks money and resources. He corrupts his integrity by marrying a rich woman.



4 aspects of morality in public office

1. The moral balance of self-hood
2. The role of decision and redemption,
3. Relations with others
4. The ironies of rectitude

Relations with others are crucial in public office. The author points out that **friendship is central to political relationships** because it relies on the capacity to care. In public office, relations with others are governed by the individual’s capacity to care. The **ironies of rectitude** refer to the ability to set aside the suffering of individuals in order to focus on long-term goals and gains. According to the author, “Integrity resides as much in how the people hold and balance their beliefs and commitments as the beliefs and commitments themselves” (p. 65). Seen in this light, all rectitude involves betrayal. **Each dilemma generates confusion in public officials who are trying to keep their integrity intact while improving the lives of others.**

Chapter 4 ~ 6 :

Character and Moral Attrition

Staying In: The Ethics of Commitment in Office

Getting Out: The Ethics of Resigning from Office



These chapters examine the fundamental dilemma of public life, which, “exact a high cost on the integrity of public officials” (p. 68).

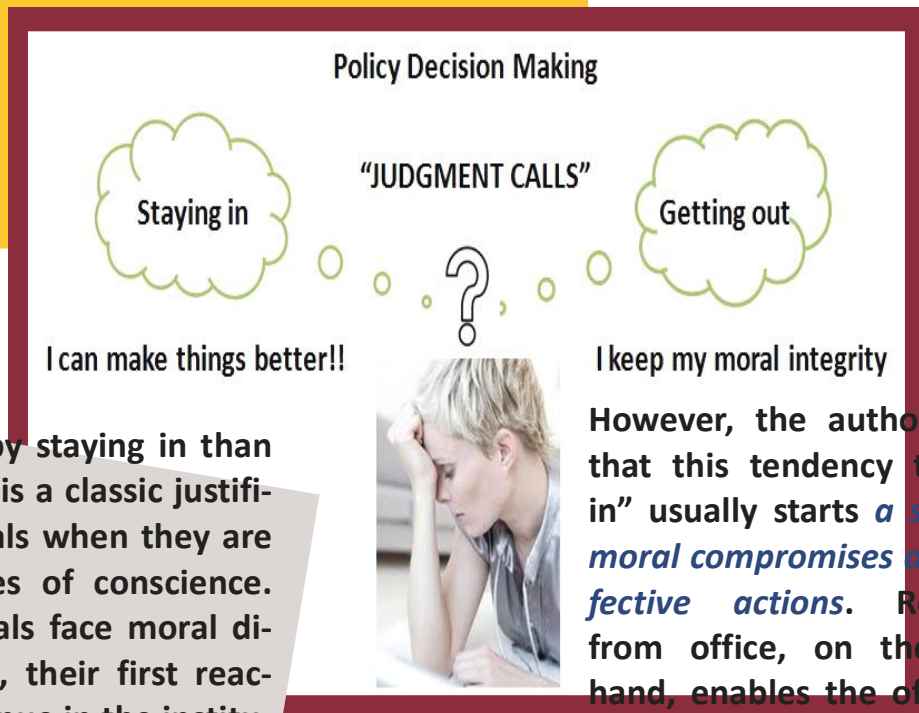
However, the author also quotes a **positive side of this dilemma** in that it can “provide the best insights into the character required in realms of political and moral life” (p. 70).



“Get out or Stay in?”

This choice marks a “defining moment for a person in public life” (p. 109).

Public officials have to make **“judgment calls”** (p. 109) when they participate in policy making with which they morally disagree. The author explains **the choice public officials must make when faced with moral disagreement**: to remain in their position or to resign.



“I can do more good by staying in than by getting out” (p. 93) is a classic justification for public officials when they are trying to resolve crises of conscience. When successful officials face moral dilemmas and problems, their first reaction is “usually to continue in the institution and try to work through the issues” (p. 93).

However, the author states that this tendency to “stay in” usually starts **a series of moral compromises and ineffective actions**. Resigning from office, on the other hand, enables the official to maintain integrity.



**Chapter 7 :
The Political
Morality of Sleaze
and Honor
Iterative process
of judgment**

The author states that public honor in this world “is the first casualty of sleaze” (p. 146) and concludes that “honor in public life requires that people respect the moral foundations of their power and understand and act with the psychological and moral self-discipline required by official power to resist the allure of sleaze in all its varieties” (p. 146).

 Public Integrity

According to Dobel, sleaze refers to a sense of moral weakness, tastelessness and lack of depth “that makes people less than they seem or could be” (p. 130). Sleaze has had a long tradition in politics.

He describes *three of kinds of sleaze*: honest sleaze, corrupted sleaze and zealous sleaze.

“Honest sleaze”

“the raw pursuit of self-interest in office” (p. xiv); according to this perspective, public *officials receive “lucrative rewards” for their self-interested behavior* (p. 131-132). *Patronage-based sleaze* falls into the category of “honest sleaze” and can successfully serve political purposes.

“Corrupted sleaze”

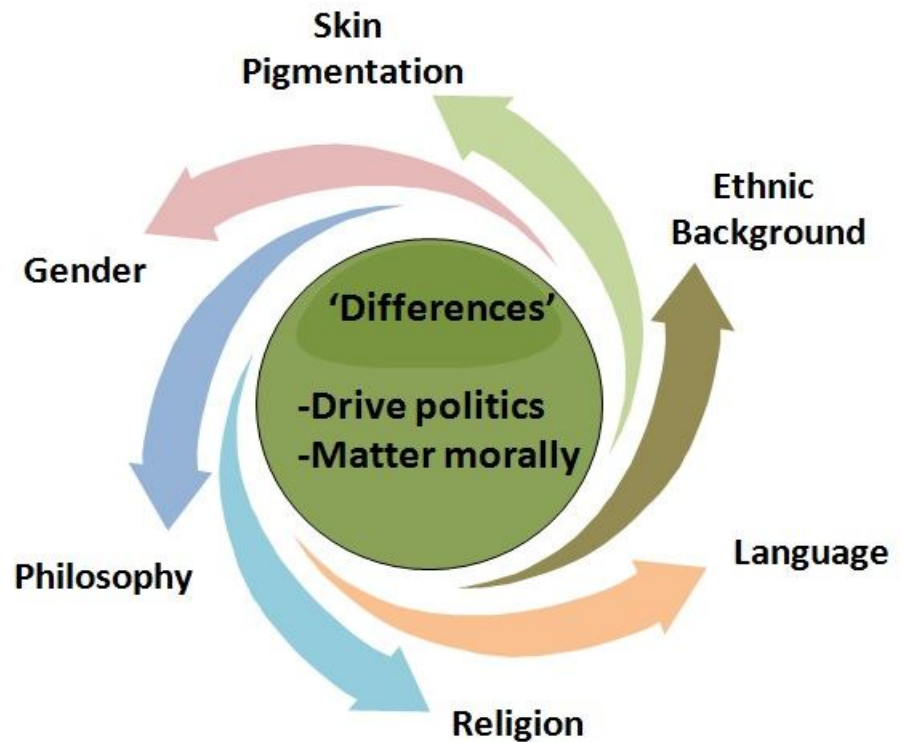
refers to *the erosion of idealism of public office* (p. 135). When people begin their political or public life, they usually identify with the goals of the office. When they *succumb to the temptation of power*, like King David, “corrupted sleaze” occurs. They become confused about their own personal goals and the goals of the office, and they *use the office to protect their own power and well being*.

“Zealous sleaze”

refers to “subversion values” in the name of “official action” (p. xiv): This occurs when in their zeal to *do good or achieve a higher moral purpose, public officials ignore the procedures and break laws*. This type of sleaze can stem from “an ideological self-righteousness that subverts public integrity” (p. 138). *Zealous sleaze disturbs and breaks the balance between public obligations and private commitments*.

Chapter 8 : Building the Common amid Differences

This chapter asks how to shape public integrity, given the coexistence of human differences.



The author explores the *advantages and disadvantages of human differences in politics*. Differences propel politics forward; out of debate can come new knowledge and wisdom; thus, without differences, society could stagnate.

Differences can instill in politics *a sense of dynamism and opportunity*; differences in ideas can gain huge political importance when groups coalesce and organize around them.

However, differences can also be *a source of mistrust, exclusion, injustice and conflict and lead to discrimination and suffering* (p. 147). They can also *create a sense of uncertainty and danger* (p. 167).

In order to overcome the differences, the author maintains that *the government is obliged to create a culture of tolerance*. This means confronting differences, achieving compromise and making peace.

Chapter 9 :
Saints, Sinners,
and Politicians:
How Private Lives
Matter



***“Public officials should
Beware of their own
self-righteousness”***

The author argues that in order to maintain public integrity, public officials must protect their private life.



MORAL COMMITMENTS



Accordingly, “public officials have a very strong right to protect their privacy” (p. 192). A private life provides individuals with balance and the social and emotional support they need to make “moral commitments” (p. 171). As well, public officials need to be able to retreat from their public function in order to reflect on the choices and dilemmas confronting them (p. 171). According to the author, privacy “gains moral worth from its central enabling role in human relationships” (p. 172-173) and “sustains integrity by contributing to critical judgment and encouraging free reflection” (p. 173).

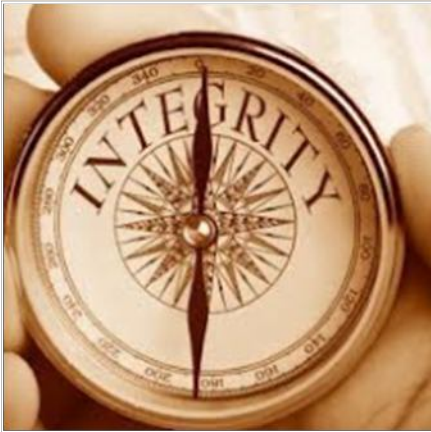
However, maintaining a personal life that is truly private has become extremely difficult in this day and age as the media prey on every indiscretion.

Such indiscretions can lead to serious consequences, even scandals, which can distract public official from the obligations of their office. Thus, indiscretions in the private lives of public officials can have serious political consequences as many people evaluate a politician’s integrity according to how he conducts his personal life.

In order protect the private lives of public officials, it is essential to “reestablish the social practices and norms of judgment that give strength to privacy claims” (p. 178).

When people confront the moral flaws of public officials exposed in their private lives, they should beware of their own self-righteousness” (p. 192).

Critique



In this book, the author discusses the elements of integrity in the lives of public officials and argues that these officials should embrace said elements and fully engage with their position in the office; they should strive to be morally upright and uncorrupted. He uses examples from history and fiction to demonstrate the challenge of public officials who try to maintain their humility and integrity while facing the temptations and corrupting influence of power. Other examples show public officials who do not even make this effort. Although the examples of King David and others are interesting, it would have been perhaps more engaging for the modern reader to read about contemporary. President Bill Clinton comes immediately to mind.

The author offers a clear choice for public officials faced with moral dilemmas: either “stay in” or “get out.” However, it would have been interesting to hear about other potential less drastic solutions that politicians might employ when facing difficult choices. Again, examples from contemporary politics would have been interesting here.

Finally, at times the book was not as clear as it could have been. Here is one example: “The virtue of prudence takes its normative importance from the nature of a politically successful outcome”(p. 18). The use of this kind of language combined with colloquial expressions such as “stay in or get out” and “sleaze” was jarring for this reader.