

# Ethics and Epistemology in Public Policy

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## Focus

In an ideal world, policies would be justified with reference to goals that represent the will of the people, and with reference to scientific knowledge that guarantees that these goals can be achieved by those policies. Such a world could be characterized both by a broadly shared consensus regarding basic values to determine policy goals and the availability of objective knowledge regarding natural, social, economic, and political realities.

Among the many problems that such an idealistic scenario poses in the real world are two sets of philosophical problems. First, since any formulation of a policy goal involves value judgments that themselves need to be justified, there are *ethical* problems: How to distinguish between “good” and “bad” goals, actions, practices, and institutions? What is the right thing to do? How to define and justify normative standards of policy-making? Second, there are *epistemological* problems (the greek term *episteme* means “knowledge”): Is it possible to get the kind of objective, scientific knowledge on which we would like to base our decision- and policy-making? What kind of knowledge is generated in science?

The objective of this seminar is, on the one hand, to provide a substantial introduction to the problems and methods of ethics and epistemology and, on the other, to train the application of these methods to public policy problems.

## New Ways of learning

Public Policy is not only a field of theories, but also a *practice* that demands specific skills: we need to know how to read and understand difficult texts, reconstruct and represent arguments, criticize and improve arguments and positions, clarify ideas, learn socially through mutual criticism and support, and how to reflect on one’s own conditions and limitations of understanding. In order to foster those abilities, the basic activities in this seminar will be *reading, writing, discussing, re-writing, and presenting*. Our class meetings on Tuesday will be reserved for discussions about the readings. To prepare these discussions, you will find in T-Square (under “Assignments”) a few questions for each week that allow us to focus on the readings’ central points. Your job is to read the texts, to answer all these questions in about one page, and submit it via T-Square. The idea is that we are best prepared for our discussions when we have already grappled at home with the ideas we will focus on in class.

One interesting aspect of this will be to see how many different answers, interpretations, and arguments are possible. Our discussions will reveal these differences, and they will give you an opportunity to reflect critically on what you have done individually at home, and also an opportunity to improve your own thinking by learning from others. That is what is most important for learning. I am not interested in what you already know, but in how you improve your own thinking. To do this, your second task in each week will be to *revise* the answers you formulated for the preparation of the discussions. You will see that you are much better prepared for our discussions when you have already written something in advance. And I hope that our

discussions will motivate you to improve these writings in a second round of reflections at home again.

On Thursday, we will have presentations and discussions. In the first section, one of you will present a short summary of the Tuesday discussion (5 to 10 minutes). In the second section, another one will introduce themes from additional readings (about 20 minutes). Everybody has to sign up for one summary and one presentation. For details regarding both the Tuesday and the Thursday sessions see the section "Grading" below.

## Readings

### *Books to buy at the Engineers Bookstore:*

Longino, H. E. (1990). *Science as social knowledge. Values and objectivity in scientific inquiry*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Waller, B. N. (2005). *Consider ethics. Theory, readings, and contemporary issues*. New York: Pearson/Longman.

### *Additional readings*

(most of them can be downloaded from our course page at <https://t-square.gatech.edu>, folder "Resources." The rest is from books that are on reserve in the library):

American Society of Public Administration (2006). Code of Ethics (Publication.: [http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index\\_codeofethics.cfm](http://www.aspanet.org/scriptcontent/index_codeofethics.cfm))

Aristotle. (NE). *Nicomachean ethics* (C. Rowe, Trans.). Oxford; New York 2002: Oxford University Press. Book I.1-5, 7, 9, 13; II.1-2, 5-6 .

Bennett, J. (1994 <1974>). The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn. In P. Singer (Ed.), *Ethics* (pp. 294-305): Oxford University Press.

Biddle, J. (2007). Lessons from the Vioxx Debacle: What the Privatization of Science Can Teach Us About Social Epistemology. *Social Epistemology*, 21(1), 21-39.

Boersema, D. (2008). *Philosophy of Science. Text with Readings*. New York: Pearson Prentice Hall, pp. 239-264.

Mark B. Brown, "Ethics, Politics, and the Public. Shaping the Research Agenda," in David H. Guston and Daniel Sarewitz, *Shaping Science and Technology Policy : The Next Generation of Research* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 10-32.

Buchanan, A. (2002). Social moral epistemology. *Social Philosophy & Policy*, 19(2), 126-152.

Callicott, J. B. (2005). The Intrinsic Value of Nature in Public Policy: The Case of the Endangered Species Act. In A. I. Cohen & C. H. Wellman (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in applied ethics* (pp. 279-297). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Economist (2006). Liberalism and neurology. Free to choose? Modern neuroscience is eroding the idea of free will. *The Economist*, Dec 19th.

Economist. (2007). Pricking consciences. What is good for the individual is not always best for society. *The Economist*, Mar 15th.

- Elliott, K. (2006). The Case of Chemical Hormesis. How Scientific Anomaly Shapes Environmental Science and Policy. In D. H. Guston & D. Sarewitz (Eds.), *Shaping science and technology policy : the next generation of research* (pp. 124-148). Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Etzioni, A. (2005). The Limits of Privacy. In A. I. Cohen & C. H. Wellman (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in applied ethics* (pp. 253-262). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Friedman, D. D. (2005). The Case for Privacy. In A. I. Cohen & C. H. Wellman (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in applied ethics* (pp. 263-275). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Fuerstein, M. (2008). Epistemic Democracy and the Social Character of Knowledge. *Episteme* 5, 74-93.
- Godfrey-Smith, Peter (2003). *Theory and reality. An introduction to the philosophy of science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 19-38.
- Hacking, I. (1983). *Representing and Intervening. Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*. Cambridge Cambridge Univ. Press, pp. 1-17.
- Hoffmann, M. H. G. (2008). Structure of Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, Books 1 and 2. Retrieved Jan 3, 2008, from <http://tinyurl.com/8hrayh>.
- Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (2003). Collaborative Policymaking. Governance Through Dialogue. In M. Hajer & H. Wagenaar (Eds.), *Deliberative policy analysis. Understanding governance in the network society* (pp. 33-59). Cambridge, U.K. ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kant, I. (1994 <1785>). The Categorical Imperative (from The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals). In P. Singer (Ed.), *Ethics* (pp. 274-275): Oxford UP.
- Kant, I. (1994 <1797>). On a Supposed Right to Lie from Altruistic Motives. In P. Singer (Ed.), *Ethics* (pp. 280-281): Oxford University Press.
- Norgaard, R. B., & Baer, P. (2005a). Collectively seeing complex systems: The nature of the problem. *Bioscience*, 55(11), 953-960.
- Norgaard, R. B., & Baer, P. (2005b). Collectively seeing climate change: The limits of formal models. *Bioscience*, 55(11), 961-966.
- Norton, B. G. (2005). Values in Nature: A Pluralistic Approach. In A. I. Cohen & C. H. Wellman (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in applied ethics* (pp. 298-309). Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.
- Oppenheimer, M., O'Neill, B. C., Webster, M., & Agrawala, S. (2007). Climate change - The limits of consensus. *Science*, 317(5844), 1505-1506. (Doi: 10.1126/science.1144831).
- Oppenheimer, M., O'Neill, B. C., & Webster, M. (2008). Negative learning. *Climatic Change*, 89(1-2), 155-172. (Doi: 10.1007/s10584-008-9405-1).
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, pp. 11-22, 46-53
- Rawls, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard UP.
- Rawls, J. (1993). *Political Liberalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 3-7.
- Rawls. A glossary (link in "Resources").

- Schön, D. A., & Rein, M. (1994). *Frame reflection. Toward the resolution of intractable policy controversies*. New York: BasicBooks. Book summary at <http://www.beyondintractability.org/booksummary/10218/>
- Schön, D. A., & Rein, M. (1994). Homelessness in Massachusetts. In *Frame reflection. Toward the resolution of intractable policy controversies* (pp. 129-163). New York: BasicBooks.
- Shlaes, A., & Krugman, P. (2007). Are Tax Cuts Good for America? In G. McKenna & S. Feingold (Eds.), *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Political Issues* (15th ed., pp. 206-229). Dubuque, Iowa: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Shmueli, D., Elliott, M., & Kaufman, S. (2006). Frame changes and the management of intractable conflicts. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 24(2), 207-218.
- Stern, P. C. (2005). Deliberative methods for understanding environmental systems. *Bioscience*, 55(11), 976-982.
- Wong, D. (1993 <1991>). Relativism. In P. Singer (Ed.), *A Companion to Ethics* (pp. 442-450). Oxford Blackwell.

### Tools (links are in T-Square, folder “Resources”)

- “Tools for Philosophy.” A document that lists encyclopaedias (books and online) that can help if you have problems with philosophical terminology.
- Cmap (<http://cmap.ihmc.us/>), a freely available software that you can use to diagram the structure of complex texts and considerations.

### Schedule

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Texts</i>
1	Jan 6	Introduction: Thinking About Ethics; ASPA's Code of Ethics	Waller chapt. 1; ASPA (2006)
	Jan 8	Policy Controversies as Frame Conflicts	Schön & Rein; Shmueli et al.
		<b>Ethics</b>	<b>Waller 2008</b>
2	Jan 13	Ethics and Reason	chapt. 2; Kant 1785
	Jan 15	Presentation: Free will	chapt. 13; Economist 2006
3	Jan 20	Ethics and Emotions	chapt.3; Kant 1797; Bennett
	Jan 22	Presentation: Are Tax Cuts Good for America?	Shlaes & Krugman
4	Jan 27	Utilitarian Ethics	chapt. 4; Economist 2007
	Jan 29	Presentation: Privacy and Civil Society	Etzioni; Friedman
5	Feb 3	Social Contract Ethics; justice	chapt. 5; 3 × Rawls
	Feb 5	Presentation: Is there an obligation to promote global justice?	chapt. 19: Nagel and Pogge

<i>Week</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Theme</i>	<i>Texts</i>
6	Feb 10	Egoism, Relativism, and Pragmatism	chapt. 6; Wong
	Feb 12	Presentation: Does nature have intrinsic value?	Callicott; Norton
7	Feb 17	Virtue Ethics	pp. 102-112; Aristotle NE; Hoffmann
	Feb 19	Presentation: The role of social practices and institutions for virtues	Buchanan 2002
8	Feb 24	Care Ethics	chapt. 8
	Feb 26	Presentation: Framing homelessness in Massachusetts	Schön & Rein, 129-163
		<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Longino 1990</b>
9	Mar 3	Methods: Inductivism and Falsificationism	Boersema
	Mar 5	Presentation: Shaping research agendas	Brown 2006
10	Mar 10	Crisis of rationality and values in science	Hacking; Longino ix-15
	Mar 12	Presentation: Shaping environmental sciences and policies	Elliott 2006
	M. 17-19	<b>Spring break</b>	
11	Mar 24	Logical Positivism and holism	chap.2; Godfrey-Smith
	Mar 26	Presentation: Epistemic Democracy and the Social Character of Knowledge	Fuerstein 2008
12	Mar 31	Evidence and hypothesis	chap.3
	Apr 2	Presentation: Policymaking in times of scientific uncertainty	Norgaard & Baer 2005a+b; Stern 2005
13	Apr 7	Values and objectivity	chap.4
	Apr 9	Presentation: Lessons from the Vioxx Debacle: What the Privatization of Science Can Teach Us About Social Epistemology	Biddle 2007
14	Apr 14	Values and Science	chap.5
	Apr 16	Presentation: A provocative suggestion regarding climate change policies	Oppenheimer 2007 + 2008
15	Apr 21	Research on sex differences	chap.6
	Apr 23	Presentation: Collaborative Policymaking	Innes & Booher 2003

## Grading

The basis for the grades you can get for this course is your *continuous* reading, writing, participating in our class discussions, and a presentation. You have to work hard to get the grades you wish to have, but this work is equally distributed over the whole semester. There will be neither an extra essay, nor a final exam.

### *Participation*

10% of your final grade will depend on the amount and quality of your contributions to our class discussions over the whole semester. (I expect that you attend each seminar meeting. Please send me a short e-mail note if you are unable to attend). Maximum: **10 points**.

### *Homework, first version*

33% can simply be reached by sending each week your first version of the assignment **before class starts**. You will find the questions and tasks for each week in the folder "Assignments" in T-Square, and you have to submit your answers through the text field that you will find at the same location. Only T-Square submissions are accepted, but you should save copies on your own computer. You can "save" your work in T-Square (do that when you leave your computer for a while, because after a while you have to log-in again and everything will be lost otherwise), but you have to click "submit" before the deadline.

There are first version assignments for 14 weeks, but I will count only 11 weeks (that gives you some flexibility). I will not evaluate the quality of these first version answers, but you have to submit them before class on Tuesday (3 points for each if they are complete).

Maximum for first version homework: **33 points**.

### *Homework, second version*

What I will evaluate, however, is the quality of your revisions of your first version, especially the *progress* between first and second version (max. 5 points each; if you did not submit a first version, I will grade what you submit without evaluation as a first version). I expect these revisions before our next class meeting on Thursday. However, you can submit these second versions within three weeks (there is a second deadline set in T-Square which is invisible for you. Those submissions will be marked as "late" but that does not matter for the evaluation). For the last weeks of the semester, however, you will have less than 3 weeks for your second version because there is a final deadline at the end of the semester: April 30.

On these revisions depend another 45% of your final grade. A 5-points submission must not only be good, but excellent with regard to clarity and adequacy for the topic. I expect your homework assignments for 9 weeks out of 14 possible. If you submit answers for more weeks, I will count only the 9 best weeks.

Maximum for second version homework: **45 points**.

### *Presentation*

9% are based on a presentation. Go to "Section Info" in T-Square to sign up for a presentation. The presentation should be about 20 minutes; additional discussion time about 20 minutes. Maximum: **9 points**.

### *Summary*

3% are based on a short presentation that summarizes only your revised answers to the homework questions and some central points of the previous class discussion (5-10 minutes for the whole group). Talk especially about questions you might have and problems that are still open. You have to sign up for one summary in T-Square via "Section Info." The summary groups are listed here as "Labs" to distinguish them from the presentations mentioned above.

Maximum for the summary: **3 points**.

*Check your points regularly in the "Gradebook" of T-Square, and check my comments on your second version assignments to learn for later assignments.*

### *Transformation in letter grades*

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	0-59

### **Academic Honor Code**

Based on GT's Honor Advisory Council recommendation I would like to clarify the following points: You are allowed (and encouraged) to work together with other students on homework, as long as you write up and turn in your own solutions. Submitting any work other than your own is a violation of the Academic Honor Code. Quoting other authors, of course, is common scientific practice. However, you have to make absolutely clear what are your own formulations, and what those of others. You can quote the texts of our seminar in short form (e.g. "Waller, p. 52"). Other sources have to be listed under "References." Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the GT Academic Honor Code. Note that plagiarizing is defined by Webster's as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own : use (another's production) without crediting the source."

For any questions involving these or any other Academic Honor Code issues, please consult me or [www.honor.gatech.edu](http://www.honor.gatech.edu).

### **Contact**

Feel free to contact me if there are any problems you would like to discuss. My **office hours** are Tuesday 3:00-4:00 pm or by appointment. The office is located in the basement of the DM Smith Building, room 004. My **phone number** is 404-385-6083. The easiest way to contact me is by **e-mail**: [m.hoffmann@gatech.edu](mailto:m.hoffmann@gatech.edu).

**Enjoy the class, and let me know if there any problems!**