Ethics In Politics And Business: An Oxymoron? Essay, Research Paper

Ethics in business and politics is an oxymoron Former PS 27 student.

I completely disagree with this accusation. No matter if you are in a private or public sphere, society s views are the leading functions of their continuation. Without society keeping universal rules in its life, society would end up as being another on of Darwin s Islands. With the collapse of societal ethics and morals, the collective (i.e. society) would prosper by Darwin s notion of the survival of the fittest . Whoever could get by in living in an area as the ends justifies the means, they would no longer live in a democracy (that is saying that the collective is located in the United States). There would no longer be a middle-class, only an oligarchy of rich along with an overabundance of the poor (economically speaking). In order to have a just society in one s state or in the globe, there has to be universal statutes under which they live. The theorists Sisselia Bok, Douglas Lackey, and Milton Friedman all believe in some way or another that there are universal laws in which society is bound to. Ethical laws which are used in the political as well as business type domains. And without them we would crumble as a democratic society. Yes, in many ways one can think of the use of ethics in business and politics as being oxymoronic. But when thinking about how our (USA) society runs, the business and politics are not the decision makers for the society. It is rather society instead which controls them. Therefore having business and politics not being regulated by the use of communal ethics concludes that neither does that society have ethics or morals. When the news at five o clock comes on the television, hypocrisies within the public and private sector are shown. And once these are displayed to the people, the people realize that there needs to be a new middle ground in which business or politics is living, thus causing change for the better in that certain sector. In this paper I will debunk the theory of the former PS27 student and explain why we need ethics in business and politics.

Sissela Bok expands upon the idea of lying, either in the public or private sector, in her book titled Lying. Although we don t want to admit that there can be a difference between public and private lying, Bok concludes that there is a difference. In the public arena, lying can be just for the benefit of the society. Like being a role player for society, the government (the public section) can lie to the public if it is for a national security. The only time that I would allow this is when the withheld information would be a threat for the society s well being and that is can be controlled. When something not controlled, for example a bomb threat, I feel that the government should tell its people. Of course there are many times when the government does not tell us (i.e. society) everything upon a certain matter. This is where the former student can believe that having ethics is an oxymoron. When the government lies to us, when morally it is unacceptably to lie, the public sense is being hypocritical. But as Bok speaks of in her book, there are a set of rule that are bounding factors of both the public and private practices.

The first part of these rules explain what is being violated when one is lying or is being lied to:

1) Universalizability: we all want to think that most people are being honest, and so we also tend to be honest. But if everyone had the idea that everyone else was lying to them, they can too. Then everyone would be lying. In business and politics, you are either trying to gain more customers or resoprosity, therefore you must be truthful about following through with your posted goals. If no, the business executive can be fired, or the governmental representative will not be reelected or even impeached.

2) Equality or respect: when one lies to you, you feel that you are not being treated equally. Even though that U.S. is not a complete egalitarian society, we are definitely a feudal society which includes the ladder of power. For example, when one talks to a stranger, there is a basic type of universal type of language that evolves from respect. But when one lies to you, that respect has subsided, leading to an unequal type of relationship, whether it is in business or in the public. The topical egalitarian line has been broken.

The second set of rules apply to when it is all right to lie. According to the former PS27 student, being ethical while lying is even more than an oxymoron, a complete hypocrisy. In essence this is true, as I will utterly discern. But then again, I also feel that there are certain times to lie to the public or to a private individual. Bok also feels that same way. Through her second set of rules, there are certain costs and benefits to lying. They are as follows:

Costs of lying ( the aftermath):

1) Trust credit: There are cases where individual societies are ranked by its trusting ability. If a certain type of people lie, then there is a national worry of the declining of the social fabric. For example, people in gangs can be together just because they feel that they are threatened in some way. Because of this it is very easy for them to live by lying. Once people live by lying the trust credit of the country declines.

2) Liar s dignity: When other people use others by lying to them for their benefit, it is considered inhumane. When you lie and other people know about it, your respect or dignity is lost for future relationships.

3) Potential harm to the person lied to: if you were the one being lied to there is a feeling of coercion. Sometimes people pre-contract . This where there is an agreement of when to lie and when not to. Even though people don t like being lied to period, there are still those little white lies that do not do any harm in telling and are minute enough to not care about when the truth about is told.

4) General phenomena: here, Bok explains that once a person lies, they can not stop. For example, a politician. Here is where I disagree with her. The only way I can see a politician lying is when he can not follow through with his purposed goals either because of budget or of the changing of the environment. But then there is the notion of log rolling , like letting one politician gain his goal by letting go of yours so you can get another goal of yours backed up by him later ( him is in all of general terms). Here is where the goals of the individual overcome the goals of his constituents and allows himself to lie continuously . But I feel that when this happens, there is no way he would be reelected and there is even a chance of impeachment from his position and these are ways that the continuous liars are ousted in the political community by society. Again another version of how society can control politics.

Benefits of lying :

1) Protection: in order to protect another lying can be used. For example, when there are lives at risk, it is all right to lie to the killers in order to save their lives or to minimize the numbers of lives lost.

2) Goods arise from it: goods here can be thought of as lives being saved or when a doctor can give a placebo to his patient.

3) Fairness: if they lie to you then you can lie back. For example, if everybody lies on their resumes for college acceptance letters, then you could too. Here is another place where I disagree. This issue is a like a circle for myself. I feel that lying on resumes did happen, or does happen, but when you refuse to then you resume will look very bad when compared to all others. This causes a basing factor to become a facade. No matter what you have to lie since all others did. I believe that this is a common problem when institutions asks for details on a personal criteria. Even in business, employers ask for references, but many of these references will not say how lousy you were for fear of a law suit. This is a circle because I find way to resolve this problem without completely abolishing the premise of asking for references (Can t people just rely on criminal records?).

4) Veracity: this is where people tell the truth but do not tell the whole truth. For example, churches wanting converts tell of their churches beliefs but don t tell of others truths that seem to be less appetizing. The notion that greater truths outweigh the lesser lies is affirmative. But when not telling the whole truth and nothing but the truth , I am sure that God will not help when the times comes for the person to tell all of the complete facts.

It is obvious that through my explanations of her rules that I agree with her. When applying these rule to business and politics would be incomprehensible for the former PS 27 student, I feel that these rules are applicable. On the issue of politics, Bok feels that selfish lying is not good and the if they do lie is should be under the rule of defending the common good of the society. They only way to actually find out when politicians are allowed to lie to their constituents is to go public and debate upon their acceptances. In reality, we all know that this is unlikely to happen and that the politicians did have time to do this then we would wonder who is really doing his job, if it s getting done that is. I also feel that she would feel the same way about business. That they can lie when it is helpful to the common good but when under selfish aspects, lying is not accepted. There are two cases in which I will use in this essay for ethics being used in business and politics. The first is the decision of dropping the two atomic bombs in Japan during WWII (politics) and the other, the decision of letting Ford s Pinto to be released on the American market.

The next theorist I will be dealing with when in the issue of politics is Douglas Lackey. In the case of the dropping of the two atomic bombs in Japan, the dropping of the second bomb was not necessary. It violated the first of his principles. This will be discussed later in the paper. Lackey also feels that the war is a way of means. There are six principles that apply to his theory of there being a just war . Eventhough some feel that war is never justifiable, like the former PS27 student assumes, think about how our life is today. We would not be where we are now if the world did not have successful and unsuccessful wars. It does sound like I rely upon fate to decide how the future goes, but in essence there are purposes of war and without them we would never have the goods that come from them. For example, there would not be a United Nations continually striving for a peaceful world. Without the history of war to exist It would be very hard to imagine how our world would be today, that is if would make it this far. Lackey agrees that there are instances for the need of war, but at the same time certain principles are needed to be used when doing so. These are as follows:

1) Rightful authority: Not just any group of people can start a war, there must be a legitimate institution that can only do that. For example, the armed forces of the navy, army or marines of the United States can be involved in the wars.

2) Must have the right intention, morally responsible: I am completely sure that the former student could easily debunk this point, for he/she would feel it completely unnecessary to kill anyone for anything. But in cases of where your country is being threatened by another country there is a just reason to fight back. Or there is a legitimate reason for fighting, not for reasons like Well, we need the oil so we are going to start a war. Lackey feels that there should be a moral principle to cause the war. The only problem with this is that the moral cause can be in conflict with the national interest. This is where I start to disagree with his ethical theory. I feel that it is more important to be within the flow of the national interest then it is to do the moral thing. In politics in America, the society is represented through government therefore we should have the say in the declarations of war or not. The only problem with this is that the president is the chief commander, so in essence we gave that power to the executive branch.

3) Just cause: if someone invades you, the rightful authority has a good reason to give a counter attack.

4) Proportionality: you should only declare war when you know that you will gain something from it.

5) Chance of success: you must be able to know that you are more likely to win the fight. There are also three standards that are the means of fighting in war.

6) Just peace: fighting in order to have just peace. Although it seem hypocritical, sometimes war is needed to allow a lingering peace for the future.

Once the need for war is justified, there are three standards during that time that need to be followed. These are also based upon before the consequences are considered.

They are as follows:

1) Necessity: attacks are necessary when you are able to leave limited distruction.

2) Proportionality: When you do fight you have to keep it upon equal terms with the others that are also fighting. If there is a small village upon village war, the American military is not in proportion with stopping the war by dropping a nuclear bomb.

3) Discrimination: One must use this when choosing a certain target of aim. For example, choosing a military target over a civilian target for a bomb. But then how can he justify the bombing of Japan?

I agree with all of Lackey s philosophies except for his last standard. Yes ethics should be used when in war, otherwise it would be a type of free-for-all , meaning that we could be going into another arms race between countries and then actually implementing them during war. In this case, if Russia, during the cold war, wanted to start a war and win quickly they could drop a nuclear weapon upon us, but then again we could counter attack and the only result from this situation is complete distruction, a violation of Lackey s third principle, necessity.

When using these three standards, Lackey explains his theory of just war . There is a just war when these ethical rule s are followed. I agree with his theories but a few are a bit vague, which I have already talked about when critiquing his theories of using ethics in war. But how can he justify the bombing of Japan, in WWII? When looking at his theories, a few would contradict the bombing. First, he speaks of necessity, where attacks should be of limited destruction. The bombing of Japan with the use of the atomic bomb caused much destruction. There was also a second bombing of Japan, in Nagasaki. Here, the necessity of using the bomb once can be justified as being a threat of our massive power to thwart them to surrender, or to just completely stop the fighting in order to save lives on both sides (proportionality). But when America dropped the bomb twice, the justification of it diminished. Therefore, his theory is would imply that the bombing on Japan is unjustifiable. Second, he says to use discrimination, meaning aiming the targets of destruction to mainly military targets, such as a military factory of weapons or the like. The atomic bomb in Japan was targeted to civilians, not on military grounds. The American government knew that the Japanese army was great and with the kamikaze attitude of dying for their country no matter what put the Americans in an awkward position. In these interests, the Japanese bombing was not a just war , even though the American government states that the bombing was needed. The only way that it could be a just war is that it was in self-defense from the attack on Pearl Harbor. But there is no justification of doing it twice. No matter what happens when dealing with other countries, politics is the focus of deciding (even though governments represents society, remember the executive branch s power), but when concerning international needs, the society has a stronger influence on what to decide.

When looking at the international business side of America, the theorist Milton Friedman announces the use of ethics in business. In his perspective though, the ethics is not that of the general interest of the public but that of the business itself. But then again, I conclude that with out having a society there is no way the institution of business to exist. Therefore, without stating this, Friedman can actually consider societal ethics as the driving forces of business, rather than the business itself. Others, like the former student, would see his view as being selfish in respects of the executive, but with my conclusion it can be seen in a different light. Even the title of his article, The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits , shows this attitude. He feels that from society s perspective, the pursuit of profit if morally valuable. I completely agree with this, and I am sure many other Americans also do. For the motto of America is the American dream from rags to riches . Just through this assumption, Americans are continually trying to gain some type of profit, weather it be money or other self-interests. Through the case of the release of the Ford Pinto , I will explain Friedman s theories along with mine.

Friedman feels that the only moral responsibility business has is to be morally responsible to gain profits for his owner. But when thinking that it is society that makes up the business world, the increasing of profits as actually increasing the profits for society, allowing society to gain more benefits. I am sure that the former PS27 student would disagree with this notion, for use of eithics in business is not ccompatable. The gaining of business profits is only for the individual executiv, but Friedman states specifically that the business he is speaking of are large cooperations or the like. He suggests that there are certain standars in which business have to be goverened. While being under the employer, the business must coinside with socities ethics. He gives three examples of this. The employee is to refrain from increasing the price of a product in order to contrubute to the social objective of preventing inflation , reduce pollution production , and is to hire hard-core unemployed instead of better qualified people in order to help with the social responsibility of reducing proverty. Through these examples, he does notify the need of using societal ethics in business. It is through these standards that a business must run. And it is through these standards that ethics come into play. I completely agree with these standards. IF a business just took it upon himself to do what ever it wanted, it would probably not make it because it is societ that governs the ethical views and it is society that makes up the business institution. Though his views may side towards the role of the selfish business man of just wanting to gain profits, one must remember there are components of society that allow businesses to exist. These componentsconsist of the employees, the employers, the stock holders and the customers, all of which are made from society. Friedman discusses his theory of principles and consequences of how ethics is used in business. The standards just mentioned above consist of the principles, and the consequences are the effects towards the societal components.

For example, the way these components are efected are when the principles are to be put into practice. When this happens, money is to be used. Through the stockholders, their money invested can be used, so it would be their money spent. Through customers, the business can higher the price, but then again that would defeat the principle of preventing infation. Or through the employees, the business can lower the wages, and use that money for spending, thus in a way spending the employees money. When Ford had the decision of putting the Pinto on the market they had similar decisions to think about. First let me explain the Pinto situation.

In the 1960 s the domination of the smaller, laighter cars were from the Japanese. Most fo the American cars were huge and clunky. The Americans wanted to get into this market, so Ford designed the Pinto . The only problem was time for their business, so they developed it so quickly to be pu ton the market that the car did not go through all of the valuable redesinging practices and safety procedures. Ford ended up selling a car that was 8/11 times liable to blow up when in a crash with even stationary objects. The main problem was the gas tanks position. Ford did not want to recall them for the $11 change, for it would be too expansive. The main reason the lead them to keep it on the market was through their cost-benefit analysis. This is where Friedman would agree. The price of fixing the car woudl be much greater then having to pay the bills of those who actually would be hurt or killed because of their car. Here, as Friedman would state, they are thinking in terms of profit of the business so it is all right to allow this situation. As for the former PS27 student, life is precious and invaluable, therefore Fods decision is not justifiable. But then again one can see that the world of profit making can only see their problem through money. I can agree with Friedman in two aspects.

First, if the people knew that cars like the Pinto can be hazerdous, there is information to be obtainaed where the safety analysis is kept. For example,, the customers could locate the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reports on the testing of Ford through the proposed Federal Motor Vehicla Standard #301. This states that a car going 20 mph should be able to withstand a fixed barrier crash with out any loss of feul. Eight out of elevan cars passed, and even those cars were altered. This typeof information can be obtained. The second is that business is business. Business want to make money and the only way they know how to make decisions upon this is through economics, therefor the use of the cost-benefit anakysis is justifiable. But then again, I disagree with the views of putting the Ford Pinto on the market. I think that there should have been other options added to the selling of the car. For example, it would not cost the company that must to tell of it s 310 reports and ask the customer if they would like to add $11 to save their lives. Iam sure that they think that their life is worth more than $11, so that would be all right. The only problem with this is that once the public knows of the test results there would be no sells at all. A solution to this is that they could jsut raise the price $11 and not tell why, and that way lives could be saved. I am sure taht could be more likely. Through this case, I am sur ethat Friedman would agree with the cose-benefit analysis because it is related to the social responsibility of business is to gain profits . But as I and the former student would agree, there is not price on a persons life, therefore the releasing of the Pinto withouth adding $11 is ludicrious.. Even though I do not like how businesss sometimes are run, I still feel that there is a need for them in order for society to have as many benefits as possible.

To conclude, I believe that there is a strong use of ethics in politics and business for they are both reflections of society. Without having this to be true, you can either say that these institutions are not entities of society , that they can act solely upon their own interests. As we all well know, this is not true, for it is true that society forms these institutions and constantly intermingles with them. When either in the public or private sector of life, ethics has been, is, and always will be used, otherwise we will no longer be able to form compromises when achieving a common entity, that is, in our case, a democratic-republican way of society. The formation of our society would completely diminish, leaving us to a life of the survival of the fittest .