

Anyone elected from public office is obliged to live

[Countries](#), [Philippines](#)



The issue of the importance of integrity over technocratic knowledge has always been an issue for public officials. In many democratic and democratizing nations, debates have ensued as to whether officials ought to live morally exemplary lives. The reasons for challenging the Confucian maxim on the benevolence of the public official have been diverse, though it could be intuited that some sort of private interest is at stake. In this paper, it shall be argued that all public officials should undoubtedly live morally exemplary lives.

Before anything else, it is very important that the term morally exemplary be defined. At least in this paper, morally exemplary shall be equated to the character or trait of being able to live up to public service morality. Public service morality refers to the set of values that a public official must hold in order to “ effect the ends for which the government has been instituted” (de Leon 434). As such, public service morality includes but is not limited to a high degree of responsibility, integrity, loyalty, efficiency, patriotism, modesty, and justice (de Leon 434).

To be able to argue that all public officials should live morally exemplary lives, it shall be argued that this claim is most reasonable in a democratic society. Afterwards, concrete examples of national experiences shall be provided to be able to show not only the reasonableness but also the historical validity of this claim. Specifically, the experiences of the United States and of the Philippines (a former U. S. colony) shall be used to concretize the claim. We shall begin with the reasonableness of the claim that public officials ought to live morally exemplary lives.

In any democratic society, the morality of a public official is always an important element. A public office is defined as “ the right, authority, and duty created and conferred by law by which, for a given period...an individual is invested with some portion of the sovereign functions of the government to be exercised by him/her for the benefit of the public” (de Leon 432). As such, precisely because of the grave power and function of public office on which depends the interests of the public, a public official ought to take his/her role as nothing less than sacred and that the “ violation thereof would be nothing less than a sacrilege” (Philippine 1971 Constitutional Convention in de Leon 433).

Common sense would tell us that the functions and the responsibilities of public official, being equated to the very sovereign powers of the government with the purpose of putting into effect the very “ ends for which government has been instituted,” demand an impeccable character. Hence, it could safely be said that the success or failure of a democracy or the democratization process of a country partly depends on the morality (or lack of it) of the persons who hold positions of trust. As such, a public official should undoubtedly live a morally exemplary life.

History provides us with a number of examples to show the moral exemplariness of the lives of public officials mattered in the lives of nations. Actually, that corruption and moral degeneration could in fact ruin an empire is a lesson we have learned from the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD. It is common knowledge that in the last few centuries of the empire, the old Roman virtues started to degenerate in the Roman army. Emperors also stopped thinking of the interests of the people and plainly thought of

supporting the army and maintaining a luxurious court (Perry 120). This, plus some other factors, led to the citizens' l

ost of confidence and loyalty in the empire (Perry 123) which made it more vulnerable to barbarian invasions, and eventually collapse in 476 AD. Nevertheless, this powerful lesson in history could easily be given less importance by modernists so we need to turn to contemporary examples.

That a democratic nation could truly be threatened by lack of public service morality in its officials is best demonstrated by the Watergate scandal. It should be recalled that the Watergate scandal involved a number of high ranking executive officials and President Richard Nixon himself. This scandal eventually led to the resignation of President Nixon, along with an undying infamy. It would be best to recount this scandal at this point.

In 1972, a group of people broke in and wire tapped the Democratic Party's campaign headquarters in the Watergate apartment in Washington, D. C. The burglary and wiretapping eventually convicted five men who were also connected to the president's re-election committee (Perry 828). Further investigations by the Senate eventually led to the findings that top presidential aides "planned the burglary and concealed evidence about it" (Perry 828).

These top ranking executive officers were U. S. Attorney General John Mitchell, White House Counsel John Dean, White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, and White House Special Assistant on Domestic Affairs Ehrlichman (Encarta "Watergate"). Eventually, more illegal activities were found by the Senate Committee. These plus the original burglary and

wiretapping crushed on the president himself which led to his resignation in August 9, 1974.

What could be learned from the Watergate scandal? It is simply the fact that the lack of moral exemplariness of public officials bothers the citizens of a truly democratic country. Moreover, it also threatens the democratic system that works on public trust. It is this very threat that the constitutional system of checks and balances protect a democratic nation against.

If the United States provides a very good example of how a democratic nation reacts and defends itself against the lack of public service morality, the Philippines will be a good example of how a nation is continuously negatively affected by the persistent lack of moral exemplariness of its elected public officials.

Up to the present, the Philippines, albeit its high literacy rate of 99% (Encarta, " Philippines") and relatively good economic fundamentals, remains behind many of its Asian counterparts. The Philippines, a tropical country with many beautiful natural tourist spots and originally endowed with abundant natural resources has an alarming rate of poverty level. What could be wrong in a country with a very high literacy rate not to mention a very good level of English, good economic fundamentals, and naturally endowed with resources? The answer seems to be homogenous: government graft and corruption.

According to Transparency International, the Philippines may be considered a country with a serious corruption problem. Working on a Corruption Perception Index of 1-10, with 10 being squeaky clean and 5 being the

borderline distinguishing countries with serious corruption problem and those without, the Philippines scored a 2.5. This puts the Philippines at par with Benin, Gambia, Honduras, Guyana, Nepal, Russia, Rwanda, and Swaziland (Infoplease “The 2006 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index”). There have in fact been a number of cases that showcase the grave problem with public service morality that the country has, a problem that viciously engenders and sustains corruption.

The famous case of the Marcoses is a classic. President Ferdinand Marcos became the president of the Philippines from 1965 to 1986, and left his post with bitter memories of the press being silenced, civil liberties being curtailed, dictatorship, torture and vanishing of thousands of political enemies, and a huge amount of behest loans (Wikipedia, “Ferdinand Marcos”) that resulted in the ballooning of the Philippine economy and in unresolvable debts and widespread poverty. Marcos fled the Philippines in 1986 to survive a revolution. He stayed in Hawaii until he died in 1989.

Marcos remained largely unpunished. This is telling of how the Philippines cuddles the very politicians that robs the nation. Just recently, President Joseph Estrada was tried of plunder, engaging in widespread illegal gambling, and gross corruption by the Philippine Senate. In this said event, more than half of the senator-judges voted not to open a controversial envelope that is supposed to contain strong evidence against the tried president.

This resulted in another revolution that led the Philippine High Court to decide, en banc, that his vice-president, Ms. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, to take his place. Up to the present time, Philippine politics is very much mired

<https://assignbuster.com/anyone-elected-from-public-office-is-obliged-to-live/>

in corrupt practices, concretizing the claim that Philippine politics grossly lacks political morality. This has time and again been responsible for the poverty that many Filipinos suffer.

In a democratizing nation such as the Philippines and in a highly democratic country like the United States, it has been demonstrated, both by reason and example, that the living of a morally exemplary life by public officials is a necessity. A democracy is rightfully threatened by the lack of a certain morality and a democratizing nation is viciously plagued by it, hampering democratization to truly happen.

There are some instances that might prove contrary to this claim, such as the existence of chaebols, i. e., big business conglomerates in South Korea that has some exerted political influence over public officials. This speaks of an undercurrent of corruption. Nevertheless, South Korea, a highly progressing Asian nation, has continuously progressed economically in spite of or with chaebols. But then again, it can be argued that South Korea improved not because of corruption but precisely because of the political will to punish erring public officials. A number of Korean presidents have already been tried of corruption. As such, the claim that in a democratic nation, the living of a morally exemplary life by all publicly elected officials is necessary remains valid.

Works Cited:

“ Ferdinand Marcos” Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia. 17 July 2007. 20 July 2007. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferdinand_Marcos.

“ The 2006 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index” 21 July 2007. <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0781359.html>.

“ Watergate” Encarta. CD-ROM. Seattle: Microsoft: 2002.

De Leon, Hector. Textbook on the New Philippine Constitution. Manila: Rex Books, 1987.

Perry, Marvin. A History of the World, Revised Edition. Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.