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Two Games for Introducing Political Science

by Steven Maser, Willamette University
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We wish to pass on two exercises that we have found useful in introducing political science courses. Typically, finding a common basis of experience from which students can relate to the concepts and theories of the discipline is a problem. A few students will have experienced politics in government by working in campaigns, for example, and others will have recognized that politics pervades many activities outside government. But these threads are only drawn together by an instructor with difficulty and, anyway, will be just second hand experiences for many students.

Introducing the students by using a brief game can solve the problem admirably. We will outline two games, each likely to consume an hour or so of class time; both could be conducted within one hour. They are manifestly *first hand experience* for all in the class and they provide an opportunity for drawing out all the major ideas to be discussed throughout the course. In addition, they are fun. Students will recognize that they are learning, but there won't be many furrowed brows.

In our view, the central idea of political science is "collective decision-making." Whereas *Economics* is uniquely concerned with decentralized decision-making mainly in markets, *Psychology* is concerned with finding out why we decide as we do, and *Sociology* is concerned with social decision structures such as the family and organizations, political scientists can claim as their unique subject-matter the problems associated with decision-making by groups *qua* groups. To introduce this idea, an instructor only needs to point to universities: who decides what requirements students will have to meet? To fraternities and sororities: Who decides how social life will be organized? And to households: Who decides what freedoms children will be given, and when? It is then a small step to point out the political issues: (1) The possibility of

disagreement among individuals about what the collective should do, or conflict of interest; (2) the necessity of rules defining how the collective decision will be reached, or the constitutional decisions with which *collective* decisions cannot be made; (3) the varying capacities of individuals to have their own preferences reflected in the collective decision, once made, must stick and so entails coercion; and finally, (5) all the wheeling-and-dealing, maneuvering, persuasion, agenda setting, bargaining, promise-making and, occasionally, violence that can happen when individuals try to exercise their power.

But even with the most homely illustrations, all this is only abstract stuff. The trick is to bring it to life. Our games do this by making several members of the class responsible for solving a "real" political problem. Maser's game, derived from Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, focuses on questions about institutional design or constitutional choice. Orbell's game, derived from the prisoners' dilemma, focuses on questions about individual cooperation and the justification of coercion. Both come at the same issues in collective choice, but from different directions. We will describe each game and identify the questions that generate fruitful class discussions.

A constitution for cutting cakes.

Begin by identifying five students who are hungry and who claim to like chocolate cake, or whatever kind of cake is available. Invite them to sit as a panel around a table in front of the class. Place the cake in front of them. Then, holding a knife, propose the following: "I will give you the knife with which to cut the cake as soon as you agree, unanimously, on the criterion by which you will distribute the cake, and a procedure for cutting and distributing the cake that *guarantees* you will implement your criterion." The issue is, of course, Lasswell's classic "who gets what," (continued on p.6)

Ethics and Public Administration

by Charles R. Embry
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As I began to write this paper, I was forced to confront, consciously, a fact which I had previously acknowledged only tacitly, viz., that there exists a plethora of issues — pedagogical, philosophical, political, and psychological, as well as disciplinary — which must be addressed. Not wanting to ignore any of these issues and in hopes of provoking a discussion of the role of the humanities in ethics courses, I have coached the paper in the form of "reflections". I shall first describe, without too much comment, the devising of such an ethics course and the general issues such a course raises, and secondly, I shall reflect upon the role of the humanities in such a course.

Devising an ethics course for an MPA Program

In preparing an ethics course for our MPA Program, I discovered that the problem of devising such a course is much harder than what should or should not be included in a Political Science or Public Administration course. Professor John Rohr, in "The Study of Ethics in the P.A. Curriculum," writes:

We can hope that graduate students in public administration programs have already acquired a rich background in the liberal arts and rejoice when our expectations are fulfilled. (Rohr, 1976, 399)

I think that there is scant evidence (based upon my experience in teaching graduate political theory and public administration courses) to support such hope and therefore little rejoicing; I'm not even sure that there is much lamentation when the hope is unfulfilled.

I began my preparation, then, in the belief that very few of my students — potential administrators and decision-makers — would not have much, if any, acquaintance with the nature of philosophical questioning and thinking, in general, or moral thinking, in particular. I also assumed that they would probably be rather (continued on p.9)

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