

Political Hypocrisy and the Role of Professionals

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ABSTRACT: Defenders of political hypocrisy claim that it is a “lesser evil,” a necessary feature of political life in liberal democracies. Critics assert that hypocrisy undermines trust and, hence, faith in democratic institutions. In this article, I attempt to move beyond this opposition by drawing attention to the party that is largely absent from both sets of arguments: *the professional*. By refocusing the discussion thus, one may move beyond the structural opposition between “hypocrites” and “anti-hypocrites” that one finds in nearly all accounts of political hypocrisy. In so doing, this permits us to acknowledge the crucial role that professionals play within modern, procedural democracies. This is not to say that they are immune from those relations of dependency that foster hypocritical behavior. They are not. But, I suggest that it is to the professional that we must turn to check political hypocrisy’s worst excesses.

If someone obstinately and for a long time wants to appear something it is in the end hard for him to be anything else. The profession of almost every man, even that of the artist, begins with hypocrisy, with an imitation from, with a copying of what is most effective.

—Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon for politicians to be charged with hypocrisy. Mark Sanford, the (present) governor of South Carolina was once famed for his fiscal conservatism, requiring state employees to use both sides of their Post-it notes in an effort to save money. Yet, in 2009 when revelations of his use of state planes for personal trips (to get a haircut) and political ones surfaced, charges of hypocrisy followed.¹ And then, of course, there are the sex scandals, that perennial feature of political life, the extra-marital misdemeanors that seem to plague politicians.²

Public outrage against hypocrisy is matched by philosophical suspicion. According to Judith Shklar it is the “only unforgivable sin,” on a par with betrayal, that vice above all others that undermines trust in societies.³ Roger Crisp claims that hypocrites fail to take morality seriously, though not all forms of hypocrisy are necessarily bad.⁴ While Catherine McKinnon asserts similarly that the whole of morality is threatened by hypocritical behavior, which amounts to a “subtle form of sabotage.”⁵

Psychologists have also contributed to the discussion. In a recent study, Lammers et al. tested the connection between hypocrisy and power. They noted that persons randomly placed in positions of power were more likely to excuse their own hypocrisies while judging subordinates more harshly for similar transgressions. The authors concluded that there was also a direct link between incidences of hypocrisy and the perceived *legitimacy* of power. Those who believed that they ought to be leaders were far less self-critical than those who did not.⁶

Despite these indictments, many political theorists (Shklar included) defend hypocrisy as a regrettable but necessary component of liberal democracies. Ruth Grant makes the perceptive point that hypocrisy is especially common to liberal democracies that pretend to high moral ideals in public life amongst conditions of political dependency.⁷ In a recent book, David Runciman goes further claiming that hypocrisy is ubiquitous, a structural feature of liberal democracies and as “there is no way of breaking out from the hypocrisy of political life . . . all attempts to find such an escape route are a delusion.”⁸

In this article, I draw upon the relative merits of arguments from both defenders and critics of political hypocrisy. However, I do so by drawing attention to the party that is largely absent from the discussion: *the professional*. Focusing upon the role of professionals achieves two objectives. It moves us beyond the structural opposition between “hypocrites” and “anti-hypocrites” that one finds described in nearly all accounts of political hypocrisy. Second, it acknowledges the crucial role that professionals play within complex democracies. While hypocrisy may be a structural component of liberal democracies, I argue that it is to the professional that we must turn to check political hypocrisy’s worst excesses.

IN PRAISE OF HYPOCRISY

In *On Revolution*, Hannah Arendt pointed out that the distinctly modern dilemma of hypocrisy occurred at the confluence of two theoretical traditions: the Greek and the Christian. While the Greek advocated “role-playing,” the Christian saw in such “acting” deception, duplicity and mendacity. For Arendt, in Greek culture appearances could be truthful because they relied upon a different conception of the self, and the self’s understanding of itself. For Socrates, one appeared to others, as one would wish to appear. There was not a single, unique, eternal soul that would eventually be judged. The self was not one but two, in fact, engaged in reflection about itself, in a permanent dialogue with itself.

By contrast, the reflexive self of Christianity was decidedly inward looking and hostile towards political life. When Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, Arendt noted, his “pagan” approach to political life smacked of hypocrisy within a Christian culture

that (formally, at least) eschewed “appearances” in favor of “being.” Subsequent attempts to resolve this state of affairs via a commitment to the general will or “love of country” lead to a perpetual unmasking, and a desire to “ferret out the hypocrites,” paranoia, suspicion, and political madness. It was a short step, Arendt noted, from the appearance of Rousseau’s *l’ame déchirée* to the guillotine.

every effort to make goodness manifest in public ends with the appearance of crime and criminality on the political scene. In politics, more than anywhere else, we have no possibility of distinguishing between being and appearance. In the realm of human affairs, being and appearance are indeed one and the same.⁹

For Arendt, the confusion over hypocrisy and the disaster that accompanied the political desire to root it out in the political realm rested on a confusion about the nature of political life, and the proper relation between private and public life. In the conditions of contemporary mass society, the private realm of “intimacy” and “individual rights” had encroached upon the public realm of “impartiality” and the “public rights” of citizens to such an extent that it was small wonder that confusion and frustration over the motives of politicians should take center stage. Yet, she argued that only disaster could follow from the desire to expose private motives in politics for the simple reason that one could never be certain of those motives, either of one’s opponent, or, indeed, of one’s self. The human heart was, “a place of darkness which, with certainty, no human eye can penetrate.”

In the French Revolution, this privileging of the “authentic” self over legal personality resulted in the removal of one’s rights before the law in order to seek out and identify the true patriot. Yet, a person without legal rights, Arendt noted, without the “protecting mask of a legal personality,” was exposed to the whims of political power.¹⁰

Like Arendt, Judith Shklar noted the influence of the Greek and Christian traditions upon contemporary attitudes towards hypocrisy and the distinction that needed to be made between private and public life. For Shklar, the anti-hypocritical urge was a symptom of “massive moral confusion,” an unwillingness to acknowledge the epistemological problem of modernity: that there are no rational grounds for agreement in either morality or politics. Under conditions of moral pluralism, the charge of hypocrisy was likely to be advanced by those who clung unswervingly to their ethical convictions against those who recognized that compromise was an essential component of political life. Politicians were likely to charge their opponents with hypocrisy when they discovered that without appeal to the “common good” or a shared sense of “the good life” they could only undermine each other with the revelation that their opponent was not living up their own self-professed ideals.¹¹ Under Shklar’s formulation, the hypocrite and anti-hypocrite were locked in a perpetual struggle that could not be resolved except temporarily in moments of extreme crisis when their differences were put aside.

Nonetheless, this did not mean that all hypocrisies were the same or that hypocrisy should be readily accepted. There were different kinds of hypocrisy and each had different consequences for the hypocrite and his/her followers.

The most general theory of hypocrisy advanced by Shklar was that all people in mass societies engaged in hypocrisy in some form. There are the hypocrisies of everyday life, what we may call *social hypocrisy*. These hypocrisies take the form of democratic civility without which living together would be all but impossible. A brutal honesty in encounters with strangers would simply be inappropriate amongst a people divided by different beliefs and interests on virtually every subject matter.

Social hypocrisy takes other forms beyond civility, however. There is the social hypocrisy that is self-serving, protecting individuals from the brutal facts of social reality. "All of us" Shklar notes, "wrap ourselves in unreality to protect ourselves against people whom we are certainly not crushing, but whom we do not choose to see or to help. No one, in fact, can bear all the facts all the time."¹² This version of hypocrisy provides us with the rationale that enables us to ignore those who are less fortunate, a skein over the contradictions of democratic capitalism and our own unwillingness to be moved by the suffering of our fellows. Social hypocrisy permits the well off to convince themselves that it could not be otherwise and self-deception, a concept closely allied with hypocrisy, allows those who are unfortunate to reach a similar conclusion whenever a espoused moral principle conflicts with their own experience of social reality.¹³

But what of political hypocrisy? Politicians suffer from the same delusions as "ordinary" people. They also "studiously ignore actuality, employing a self-protective rhetoric that supports their world." Yet Shklar notes that they face the further difficulty of "pretending to a common touch." As candidates from privileged backgrounds, politicians employ hypocrisies of various descriptions, pretending to be good or better than they are; deliberately concealing their own shortcomings; and by suggesting that what is in their interest is somehow also in the interest of the public and that this happy combination is, Pangloss-like, the "best of all possible social worlds."¹⁴

Nonetheless, Shklar suggested that while we do not have to rejoice when "caring" politicians wax lyrical about their compassion or ability to "feel the people's pain," hypocrisy in the public interest is far better than no interest in the public welfare at all. Indeed, the unpleasant fact of the matter is that "hypocrisy upward" (the desire to appear better than one is) has often done more for the public good than the moralizing of anti-hypocrites: "Hypocrisy can do as much for equality as it does for inequality. It may be indispensable if we are every going to fully accept human diversity in all its individual manifestations."¹⁵

The best politicians will accept this state of affairs, much as citizens accept the fact that they will play little more than a nominal role in modern democratic politics. Unfortunately, Shklar suggests that the best sorts of politicians, those who can "reinforce the ideology upon which their authority is based and devise adequate policies" are in short supply. Politicians, like the citizens they govern, fall prey to self-righteousness, avoid any admission of wrongdoing, and constantly engage in "ethical adjusting" to ease their consciences by ascribing noble and altruistic intentions to much of their behavior.

Indeed, this is precisely the point made by David Runciman who expands on Shklar's description of hypocrisy for leaders by elaborating on the division

between, what he calls, first and second order hypocrisy. He provides the following definition:

First-order hypocrisy is the ubiquitous practice of concealing vice as virtue, which makes up the parade of our social existence. Second-order hypocrisy is concealing the truth about this practice, and pretending that the parade itself is a form of genuinely virtuous, and therefore self-denying, behaviour. We may need to hide the truth about ourselves in order to get by in this world, but we oughtn't to hide the truth from ourselves that this is what we are doing.¹⁶

Both Shklar and Runciman are convinced that hypocrisy is part of the warp and weft of modern democratic politics and that more "truth" is not the antidote required. Rather, the problem turns on the ability of contemporary politicians to face up to the challenge of political hypocrisy.¹⁷

"Do we really want to be governed or 'policed' by individuals" asks Runciman, "who lack the guile of the seasoned politician, and so are capable of being self-deceived?"¹⁸ Clearly not. But how to achieve this remains the issue. The individual capable of maintaining this delicate balance would indeed be a "virtuoso hypocrite . . . [one] not undone by self-delusion" as Shklar suggests.¹⁹ For Runciman, however, getting the balance right between a degree of moral flexibility, sincerity, and integrity, which all seem to be required if first-order hypocrisy is to be maintained, while simultaneously avoiding the slide into self-deception, is as he admits, "a nightmarishly difficult" challenge.²⁰

Shklar's and Runciman's discussions of political hypocrisy reinforce the case for a "political ethics," a set of standards or manner of behavior at odds with personal morality or those moral systems that demand consistency of principle. As advocates of this position have never tired of pointing out, we may sometimes want politicians to ignore moral problems while they govern on our behalf.²¹ At the same time, however, defenders of hypocrisy note that political life is so demanding that few individuals will be able to cope with the challenges this poses to moral integrity.

This is a problem for politicians who are prone to self-deception. It is a problem for the institutions of government, which maintain "legitimacy" by virtue of the trust placed in them by the citizenry. It is a problem for the political culture broadly, for if hypocrisy is without limit then hypocrisy threatens not merely to undermine trust, the first casualty of hypocrisy exposed, but to transform society from a "culture of suspicion" into a "culture of bullshit," where no one believes anything anyone says any more.²²

Towards the end of his book, Runciman repeats the idea common to defenders of political hypocrisy that modern democracy relies on a form of benign self-deception, the stability of which, "depends upon people growing comfortable with the mask that conceals some of the brute facts about power, and thereby moderating the ways that those facts play themselves out."²³ However, if neither politicians nor citizens are able to determine with any great certainty which kind of political hypocrisy is at play, then there is little hope of specifying when benign deception has become malevolent delusion.

HYPOCRISY'S CRITICS

A recent article by Peter Furia picks up this point by examining the limits of hypocrisy in liberal democracies. Furia takes hypocrisy to mean “failing to practice what one preaches” and takes up the challenge against hypocrisy’s defenders. While the latter claim that the obsession with consistency between public pronouncements and private actions is petty, perfectionist, or (even) endangers liberal democracy by engaging in a form of perpetual unmasking, Furia contends, nonetheless, that charges of hypocrisy “stimulate democratic discourse about ‘weighty’ political matters (e.g., matters of war and peace)” and that they “often serve as a check on overly ambitious schemes.” If politicians cannot live up to the principles they so openly espouse how might they expect citizens to do so? Finally, he asserts that the “mudslinging” of anti-hypocrites is “probably less dangerous than the ‘hands-dirtying’ of the leaders it impugns.”²⁴

For Furia, an interest in the personal lives of politicians, their inconsistencies and hypocrisies, may often be used as a device to turn the public’s attention towards neglected matters of policy. Indeed, there may simply be no other way of drawing interest to an issue without, first, focusing upon the shortcomings of a particular public personality. He notes: “when the very leaders who advocate morally demanding principles are unable to live up to them, ordinary citizens reasonably begin to discuss the practicability of those principles.”²⁵ Because politics might properly be considered a cult of personality, focusing on the personal may draw attention to more important policy matters. To attempt to do so without personalizing the issue is less likely to interest the public.

For Furia, anti-hypocrisy serves as an important heuristic. If a particular intense round of mudslinging occurs directed at politicians who, it turns out, do precisely the opposite of what they preach, this in itself is an indication of the state of the political culture and “may make us wonder whether affairs in a democracy have gone *unusually* wrong.” Far from threatening to destabilize the system, anti-hypocrisy can serve as a corrective to political hyperbole and an indicator of broader cultural trends.²⁶

In a related article, Suzanne Dovi expands on this point by considering the cynicism that results and the damage that occurs to liberal institutions when political hypocrisy is exposed. Like Furia, Dovi is sensitive to the complexities and urgencies of political life, one where all the “facts” are unlikely to be present. When hypocrisy does occur, she suggests that public officials must redeem themselves in some way in order to preserve the legitimacy of those institutions in the eyes of liberal citizens.

In Dovi’s view, while it may not be possible to eliminate hypocrisy altogether, it is better to approach it on a case-by-case basis. In each instance, it is necessary to determine whether a particular case of political hypocrisy may be justified from: (i) the reasons given by a political actor for abusing their declared principles, (ii) the context in which these actions took place and, (iii) the effects of those actions. The exigencies of political life notwithstanding, there are significant differences, Dovi asserts, between those who take decisions and act upon them as a result of what she calls “tragic compromise” and those that are taken from

the point of view of “vicious hypocrisy.” While the former simply reflects the facts of political life and attempts to provide reasons for difficult yet necessary compromises, the latter deliberately misrepresents a belief in order to advance a political career.

Dovi’s approach is a useful corrective to those general defenses of systemic hypocrisy. She is surely correct in asserting that examples of “vicious hypocrisy” may produce cynicism and distrust towards the public profession of moral principles; so much is evident in the case of British MPs. However, this is a problem from which there appears no ready escape. Although Dovi maintains that denouncing hypocrisy is necessary in order to get public officials to acknowledge and change their behavior she acknowledges the difficulty in determining when an act of hypocrisy has been committed. The relevant information necessary to form a judgment is either not generally available to the public or, when it is, is often difficult to interpret. Hence, Dovi cautions, “[i]nferred motivations from actions can be too blunt a tool for properly identifying censurable hypocrisy. Hence, certain ethical ambiguities will persist.”²⁷

We are probably more attuned to hypocrisy now than before because of increased political exposure. Yet, by the same token, the proliferation of media outlets and exponential growth in information availability that has resulted in a “culture of suspicion” provides no ready means to assess the veracity of claims or, by the same token, the hypocrisy of leaders.

Indeed, this was precisely the point made by one BBC News Editor who noted that as each story broke about British MPs’ expenses scandal in 2009 it became more complicated to determine whether each item claimed as an expense was legitimate or illegitimate. Unfortunately, there was no time to assess each claim for as each day passed a new story broke about the scandal and the public gaze moved on regardless.²⁸

This problem has been described by Onora O’Neill, who notes in a relevant context:

We can only judge whether there is deception, hence reason not to place trust, when we can tell whether we have been fed deliberate falsehoods. But how can we do this when we cannot even tell who has asserted, compiled or endorsed the supposed information? In a world in which information and misinformation are “generated”, in which good drafting is a vanishing art, in which so-called information “products” can be transmitted, reformatted and adjusted, embroidered and elaborated, shaped and spun, repeated and respun, it can be quite hard to assess truth or falsehood.²⁹

Dovi is surely right to point to the dangers of political hypocrisy and our inability to determine when and, indeed, whether it has occurred. This is deeply troubling for her and other critics of hypocrisy who contend that politicians can “blind liberal citizens” to the cruelties performed in their name by hypocritical politicians who are ultimately self-serving. Yet, given the capacity individuals—both politicians and citizens—appear to possess for dissonance reduction it makes Dovi’s recommendations for remedying the hypocrisy problem all the more puzzling. She notes:

Liberal democratic citizens need to reflect on the hypocritical acts of their public officials, and decide which of those acts they ought to demand that their public officials stop.

Democratic citizens need to attend to these conditions in order to determine when an act ought to be censured as hypocritical. Liberal democratic citizens would be misguided if they let public discussion consistently stop after merely acknowledging certain dangers of hypocrisy.³⁰

Both Furia and Dovi make a strong case for anti-hypocrisy and point to the very real dangers that political hypocrisy can pose to a democratic culture. Furia emphasizes the important function that the anti-hypocrite serves in democratic society, the manner in which “mud-slinging” may draw attention to policy issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. Yet, this point is likely to find assent from hypocrisy’s defenders. As Shklar notes at the end of her chapter on hypocrisy, the outraged anti-hypocrite “may well frighten politicians enough to inhibit them to a significant degree. . . . Each fears the other enough to restrain himself. Their discourse conveys little moral urgency, but it does maintain some standards of decency . . . they make for a society far less dishonest and far less cruel than its known alternatives.”³¹

Dovi’s case is somewhat different, however. She asserts that hypocrisy should be judged according to the merits of each particular case and that the burden of identifying which examples of political hypocrisy require censure falls to liberal citizens. Yet, defenders of “leader hypocrisy” are likely to point out, and not without cause, that the people play a minimal role at best within complex mass democracies. The majority of citizens tend to exhibit little interest in government or in the lives of politicians beyond the perennial interest in scandal. Indeed, Dovi acknowledges the very real structural limitations that minimize civic participation in modern democracies reducing civic discussion to an exchange of sound bites and advertising slogans.³²

Dovi’s main purpose is to remedy what she sees as the downplaying of hypocrisy’s dangers and, to that end, she succeeds admirably. What is less clear is whether her recommendations for rectifying the situation by relying upon the critical acumen of democratic citizens are as equally persuasive.

Taking the recommendations of hypocrisy’s defenders and critics together, we seem to face the choice between some version of an, as yet, unrealized deliberative democracy, and the hope that political hypocrites will develop the requisite judgment not to abuse their power. Yet neither party to this debate seems entirely persuaded that either situation, however necessary it is to maintain the integrity of democratic institutions, will actually come about.

FINDING THE BALANCE: HYPOCRISY, EXPERTISE, AND PROFESSIONALISM

In response to the perils of political hypocrisy both defenders and critics tend to limit their considerations to leaders and followers (*qua* voters/citizens). This is surprising given the growing number of *experts* who work in and for government. As Schudson notes, experts occupy an especially important and demanding role

in modern democracies because they possess knowledge that citizens do not; a fact that most modern proponents of “elite democracy” readily acknowledge.³³

According to Schudson, unlike most citizens who lack the relevant resources, the privileged position of experts results in their being able to: a) speak truth to power, b) clarify the grounds of public debate and improve the capacity of legislators and the general public to engage effectively in democratic decision-making, c) diagnose opportunity and injustice, and d) have the means to do something about both.

In Schudson’s view, it is simply unrealistic to assume that the general public possesses either the interest or the inclination necessary to monitor the actions of their leaders. To hold to such a view, “fails to see not only the complexity of democracy but the democracy of complexity,” a situation that demands technical expertise in order to deal appropriately with policy issues of enormous difficulty for which specialized training is required.

Schudson’s comments notwithstanding, the precise relation between experts and politicians, and how their expertise might limit the worst excesses of political hypocrisy needs to be considered carefully. For example, how might experts speak “truth to power” in a highly charged and competitive political atmosphere where different experts vie for career rewards? Would such competition exacerbate rather than check political hypocrisy? Further, given the technically difficult nature of their own area of expertise, where the particular “truth” might be incomprehensible to non-experts, how might the fact of having to “dumb-down” the truth for political representatives and citizens affect the status of that truth?

This latter point is of particular issue. For the philosopher Thomas More writing in the sixteenth century, one had to be “economical with the truth” to accommodate the hypocrisies of political life.³⁴ Intellectuals who worked for government were in a position to speak truth to power—but they rarely did. More noted how it was both necessary to modify one’s speech in order to be understood (“civil philosophy” was best instead of “academic philosophy”) and this was but one of the many challenges one faced in the highly charged arena of political life which. Both Arendt (*On Revolution*) and Shklar (*Ordinary Vices*) noted the importance of “role-playing” in their discussion of political hypocrisy. Yet, More pointed out that this was no less important for those intellectuals and professionals who worked for government. “Don’t spoil the entire play” says More’s character in his dialogue of counsel, “just because you happen to think of another one that you’d enjoy rather more.”³⁵ To try to break through the political charade was self-defeating and possibly even dangerous.

As Nietzsche pointed out in a relevant context, the difficulty with the leader/expert relationship is this:

The very powerful almost never learn the full and universal truth about anything—for in their presence one always involuntarily lies a little, because one is always subject to their influence and in accordance with this influence presents the truth one might communicate in the form of an adaptation by falsifying the facts in some degree or color, omitting or adding details, and keeping back that which absolutely resists being adapted.³⁶

In government, representatives are unlikely to possess the skills of “the expert.” They find themselves, therefore, facing a problem as to whether they ought to, *prima facie*, trust expert opinion. As Goldman points out, the non-expert very often cannot evaluate competing expert opinion as they have “no opinions in the target domain, or [do] not have enough confidence in [their] opinions in this domain to use them in adjudicating or evaluating the disagreement between rival experts.”³⁷

This difficulty is ostensibly “overcome” through a vetting process by government officials, which weighs political loyalty alongside proven technical competence. Appointments to government positions are made after it has been determined that an expert is “reasonable,” “on side,” or “one of us.” While this might satisfy the concerns of a representative for whom political loyalty is paramount, it leaves the expert in a potentially awkward position, as a person valued for both their loyalty to an administration *and* their professional integrity.

It might be useful, therefore, to consider expertise as a component of professional life, but not the sum total of it. To be a member of a profession is to exhibit an appropriate standard of expertise, normally acquired through institutionalized training, the completion of examinations, a high degree of work autonomy, and a commitment (at least formally) to upholding the integrity of their chosen profession and to a professional code of ethics. Professionals are persons, in short, who understand the demands and duties of their role as a *professional*.³⁸ On this account, at least, to be a member of a profession is to be committed to something *in addition to* the development of technical expertise or, indeed, an exclusive loyalty to one’s employers. One does not serve one’s master well, as Machiavelli pointed out in *The Prince*, if one is willing only to say whatever that person wants to hear.³⁹

In this sense, we can say that a view of professional conduct where the role of the “professional” is equated with that of the “functionary,” a person “conditioned” into compliance within the system, “chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence,” rendering him “a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism” thereby assuring stability, order, and the proper social, economic, and political functioning; while it might describe the obedient expert, fails to adequately describe the competing obligations of professional life.⁴⁰

Not everyone is likely to agree with this assessment, of course, particularly in the context of public service where loyalty to an administration is often regarded as paramount. Yet, the philosopher Immanuel Kant was convinced that properly understood, there would be no conflict between professionalism and politics, provided the right sorts of expert were employed. Much, of course, also depended upon the kind of leader whom one served.

There were two types of politician suggested Kant: a *moral politician* “i.e., someone who conceives of the principles of political expediency in such a way that they can co-exist with morality” and a *political moralist*, “one who fashions his morality to suit his own advantage as a statesman.” Sadly, the latter were more common so that it fell to professionals to convince men of practical affairs of the relevance of moral principle.⁴¹

Political Moralists, Kant noted, took a dim view of human nature. They were simplistic and reductive in their thinking, given over to arrogance, and assumed

that all political problems were essentially technical ones. Indeed, Kant noted that there was an almost obsessive concern with “law” among political moralists at the expense of good judgment: “they will follow their usual procedure of applying despotically formulated coercive laws in a mechanical manner, even in a sphere where the concepts of reason only allow for lawful coercion, in keeping with the principles of freedom, which alone makes possible a rightfully established political constitution.”⁴²

What the political moralist lacked was perspective. And this was no mere individual character flaw but a systemic reality as all political rulers eventually lost perspective or what Kant called a “higher anthropological viewpoint.”

It was precisely for this reason that Kant introduced, in the second edition of his *Perpetual Peace* in 1786, a “secret article” detailing precisely how this inherent dilemma of government might be checked. Fortunately, he noted, there was one group of individuals in society who were attuned to a “higher anthropological view-point”: *philosophers*. Consequently, it was philosophers who should be permitted to discuss government actions openly and publicly while, at the same time, secretly and directly advising government. Philosophers brought with them an understanding of political power, integrity as professionals, and an inability to form “seditious factions or clubs.” They were, in short, the ideal professional type who would check political hypocrisy’s worst excesses by providing the moral guidance that leaders so desperately lacked.

Kant’s recommendations sound self-serving, as indeed they probably were. We can equally dismiss as so much hyperbole the notion that philosophers cannot be as petty, inward-looking, and supercilious as any other professional group. Yet, the idea of professionalism, the commitment to a standard of professional conduct, in short to the *integrity* of a profession provides at least some safeguard against the opportunism we quite rightly associate with political life. As Calhoun notes in her discussion of integrity: “Persons of integrity treat their own endorsements as ones that matter, or ought to matter, to fellow deliberators. Absent a special sort of story, lying about one’s views, concealing them, recanting them under pressure, selling them out for rewards or to avoid penalties, and pandering to what one regards as the bad views of others, all indicate a failure to regard one’s own judgment as one that should matter to others.”⁴³

CONCLUSION

The absence of a form of patriotism that serves to bind politicians to a notion of “the common good” or “the good life,” combined with a lack of requisite judgment on the part of the general population to determine what is relevant amongst an avalanche of news information about their representatives, means that one has to look elsewhere to determine which resources are available to check political hypocrisy’s excesses. In this paper, I have suggested that hypocrisy ends, or is at least checked, when a person begins to take their professional responsibilities and ethics seriously.

Yet, as numerous scholars note, over the past generation it is precisely this aspect of professional life that has been sidelined by a greater concern with technical

competence and expertise. The result has, arguably, been moral impoverishment as ethics has been forced away from the center of professional life. Where ethics persists, it is often ghettoized in professional schools.⁴⁴ And there is evidence to suggest that graduates have little idea about the ethical issues they might face in their professional lives beyond a crude appreciation of their profession's codes of conduct, combined with a mixture of ethical relativism and moral intuition.⁴⁵

Much, indeed, has happened over the past fifty years to suggest that a sincere commitment to uphold "the public interest" amongst professionals is little more than a velleity. As Robert Gordon notes in a discussion of the legal profession, the status of lawyer as "statesman-adviser," someone who represented their client's interest with an eye on the long-term social benefit has largely been replaced by an ethos that is fundamentally self-serving. The legal profession is now populated by individuals who are expected to give almost total loyalty to clients in an environment where fear of liability trumps any thought about duties to something as nebulous as "the public interest." Gordon notes, "[i]f liability is in prospect, lawyers do not want to perform complex discretionary balancing of public and private duties; they want clear rules to follow. In to the resulting vacuum of silence about lawyers' aspirational ideals has rushed the only consistent ideal left: the ethic of unswerving zeal and loyalty to clients."⁴⁶

There are, of course, notable exceptions, and these ought to be studied not just for inspiration but to determine why some professionals take ethics seriously while others do not.⁴⁷ The point remains, however, that a modern, complex, democratic society cannot exist without the assistance of experts. That much is obvious. But without *professionals*, individuals in possession of technical competence and moral insight, political hypocrites are likely to win the day leaving democratic citizens to fend for themselves.

Endnotes

1. *The Economist*, "Five hundred more days?" September 3, 2009.
2. See Ari Adut, *On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics, and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
3. Judith Shklar, *Ordinary Vices* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1984).
4. Roger Crisp and Christopher Cowton, "Hypocrisy and Moral Seriousness," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 31.4 (1994): 343–9.
5. Christine McKinnon, "Hypocrisy, with a note on integrity," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 28.4 (1991): 321–30.
6. Joris Lammers, Diederik A. Stapel, and Adam D. Galinsky, "Power Increases Hypocrisy; Moralizing in Reasoning, Immorality in Behavior," *Psychological Science* 21.
7. Ruth Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 181.
8. David Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy—The Mask of Power, From Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 196.
9. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 98.
10. Arendt, *On Revolution*, 108. See also Lionel Trilling's *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
11. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 48.

12. *Ibid.*, 58.
13. See John T. Jost and Brenda Major, *The Psychology of Legitimacy: Emerging Perspectives on Ideology, Justice, and Intergroup Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
14. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 65, 47.
15. *Ibid.*, 77. For a discussion of “hypocrisy upward” see Robert D. Denam, “The Field of Selves: Wayne Booth’s Defense of Hypocrisy Upward,” *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* 7.1 (2007): 21–35.
16. Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 53–4.
17. In this, as in most parts of the discussion about hypocrisy and “political ethics,” Weber’s influence looms large. Consider his strikingly similar conclusion at the end of “Politics as a Vocation.”
18. Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 58.
19. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 51.
20. Dennis Thompson makes a similar point in *Restoring Responsibility: Ethics in Government, Business, and Healthcare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). He notes: “it is hard enough for any official, however conscientious, to separate proper from improper motives, and more generally to find the right balance of motives in making any particular decision. It is harder still for citizens, even well-informed and nonpartisan ones, to judge at a distance whether the official has actually found that balance,” 216.
21. See Michael Walzer “Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 2.2. (Winter 1973): 160–80.
22. See Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
23. Runciman, *Political Hypocrisy*, 203.
24. Peter Furia, “Democratic Citizenship and the Hypocrisy of Leaders” *Polity* 41. 1 (January 2009): 115.
25. Furia, “Democratic Citizenship,” 123.
26. The case Furia has in mind is the charge of hypocrisy leveled by Cindy Sheehan against President Bush for not having served in the U.S. Military.
27. Suzanne Dovi, “Making the World Safe for Hypocrisy,” *Polity* 34.1 (2001): 3–30, 14.
28. Nick Robinson, “Moats, Mortgages, and Mayhem” *BBC Radio 4 Choice*, aired 3 July 2009. To date over 500,000 UK pounds have been returned to the taxpayer and three MPs and one peer have been charged under Section 17 of the U.K. Theft Act.
29. Onora O’Neill, *A Question of Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 114.
30. Dovi, “Making the World Safe for Hypocrisy,” 5.
31. Shklar, *Ordinary Vices*, 86.
32. She cites Stewart Ewen’s, *PR! A History of Spin* (New York: Basic Books, 1996). Ewen has done much to describe the influence of public relations and advertising on political life since the Second World War.
33. Michael Schudson, “The Trouble with Experts—And Why Democracies Need Them” *Theory and Society* 35 (2006): 491–506.
34. The phrase “economical with the truth” was made famous by Sir Robert Armstrong, now Baron Armstrong of Ilminster, in the Australian “Spycatcher” trial of 1986.
35. Thomas More, *Utopia* (London: Penguin, 1965), 63.
36. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997), 451.

37. Alvin Goldman, "Experts: Which Ones Should You. Trust?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63.1 (July 2001): 85–110, 90.
38. The distinction is also made by Arthur Applbaum, "Professional Detachment: The Executioner of Paris," *Harvard Law Review* 109.2. (December 1995): 458–86.
39. Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (London: Penguin, 2003), chap. 23.
40. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1946), 229.
41. Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 118.
42. Kant, *Political Writings*, 119.
43. Cheshire Calhoun, "Standing for Something," *Journal of Philosophy* 42 1(995):, 235–60, 258.
44. Amita Etzioni "A Question of Ethics: How to Teach Them?" *New York Times*, March 21, 2004, 12.
45. See Robert McGinn, "Minding the Gaps: An Empirical Approach to Engineering Ethics, 1997–2001," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 9 (2003): 517–42, at 538; Lynn S. Paine, "Does Ethics Pay?" *Business Ethics Quarterly* 10 (2000): 319–30; Deborah L. Rhode, *In The Interests of Justice: Reforming the Legal Profession* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Bob Brecher, "Against Professional Ethics," *The Philosophy of Management* 4.2 (2004): 3–8.
46. Robert Gordon, "The Citizen Lawyer—A Brief Informal History of A Myth With Some Basis in Reality," *William and Mary Law Review* (March 2009): 1198.
47. In the context of political hypocrisy, the most recent instance of a person for whom professional responsibility outweighed loyalty to a political administration is Jack Goldsmith. See his account, *The Terror Presidency. Law and Judgment Inside The Bush Administration* (New York: Norton, 2007). For a criticism of this view, see David Luban, *Legal Ethics and Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).