DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 307 694 EA 021 017

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TITLE Conscience, Community Mores and Administrative Responsibility: A Prologue.
PUB DATE Mar 89
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Francisco, CA, March 27-31, 1989).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrators; Community Influence; Elementary Secondary Education; Moral Issues; *Moral Values; *School Administration; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Green (Thomas)

ABSTRACT

Discussed is the apparent tension that school administrators may experience between community demands for administrative compliance on the one hand and the personal imperative for defensible moral action on the other. The paper uses conceptual analysis as its method, informed by discussion of practical administrative situations. The first part of the paper conceptualizes the problem of conscience in terms of the "voices of conscience" articulated by Thomas Green. The second part looks at tensions at work in the context of school administration. The third section focuses on the nature of administrative responsibility in the context of the discussion of conscience and community mores and offers an approach to reconciling the apparent contradiction. Appended are nine references. (SI)

CONSCIENCE, COMMUNITY MORES AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITY: A PROLOGUE

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Conscience, Community Mores and Administrative Responsibility: A Prologue*

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What is the responsibility of the school administrator faced with a conflict between community and self? Is it to comply with the expectations and demands of the community or is it rather to hear and respect the 'voices of conscience'? This paper discusses the apparent tension that school administrators may experience between community demands for administrative compliance on the one hand and the personal imperative for defensible moral action on the other.

I have long wanted to write this paper, certain in my own mind that the topic is of signal importance to the practice of administration, while at the same time realizing that the difficulty of the dilemma addressed is intense and possibly intractable. The impetus for the article arose from several sources. It arose first from my long standing interest in the principle of individual responsibility for action implied by the judgements at Nuremberg and in the consequences of this principle for administrators in a variety of organizational settings including schools (Stimson, 1947). Second, my doctoral studies at the University of Chicago fostered my interest in these kinds of questions; in particular, I participated in a fascinating seminar offered in the Law School on "Conscience, Community Mores and the Law" which examined, in historical and contemporary perspective, the claim of conscience made by individuals who refused to comply with the demands of the state and who grounded their refusal in their respective situations on the principle of individual responsibility (Blum et al., 1969). Third, the brilliant analysis by Singer and Wooton of Albert Speer's administrative genius during his service first as architect and later as Minister of Armaments in the Third Reich, juxtaposed so well the tension between technical efficiency and ethical nihilism (Singer & Wooton, 1976). Fourth, Greta Morine-Dershimer's paper "But Conscience Could Make Cowards of us All" presented at AERA in 1985 (Morine-Dershimer, 1985), introduced me to the work of Thomas F. Green in the 1984 John Dewey lecture, "The Formation of Conscience in an Age of Technology" (Green, 1984) — ideas that I use in this paper.* And, finally, my long standing belief that the practice of administration is quintessentially a normative enterprise in that it deals with questions of value; in this sense the technical aspects of administration — those which unfortunately tend to dominate much of the literature — should quite properly be secondary to the fundamentally important questions of the ends or purposes of the administrative endeavour. In short, the argument is that the practice of administration should correctly be concerned first with

* Paper presented at the 1989 Annual Meeting of A.E.R.A. in San Francisco.

* I should also acknowledge here my debt to the anonymous reviewer of my AERA proposal who directed me to Bellah, Robert N., et al., Habits of the Heart (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) and to MacIntyre, A., After Virtue (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

the defensibility of the value choices reflected in the 'ends' of action and, second, with the 'means' of accomplishment.

At the heart, however, of the issues reflected in these concerns is the question of the ethical integrity of the administrator -- what we often in conventional language call 'conscience', the role of community mores in circumscribing, constraining and in some instances determining administrative action, and the mediation and reconciliation of these sometimes competing pressures within and sometimes without the law. The literature on school administration is replete with discussions of the role of the principal and superintendent. Much less is available about the preservation of moral integrity by the school administrator in conditions of ethical or professional conflict (Erickson, 1972). There are, then, at least two questions requiring clarification: 1) what is the nature of ethical integrity for the school administrator? Or put another way, how do we conceptualize and think usefully about the notion of conscience in the context of school administration? and 2) how do answers to these questions help us to focus on and resolve the administrator's dilemma? This paper addresses these questions.

The paper uses conceptual analysis as its method informed by discussion of practical administrative situations. The first part of the paper conceptualizes the problem of conscience in terms of the 'voices of conscience' articulated by Thomas Green. The second part looks at tensions at work in the context of school administration. The third section focuses on the nature of administrative responsibility in the context of the discussion of conscience and community mores and offers an approach to reconciling the apparent contradiction.

The Voices of Conscience

Educational administrators may wonder what 'conscience' has to do with the tasks of administering and managing schools — questions of conscience may appear to be appropriate to discussions of Socrates, Thomas More, or to decisions made by many young Americans to refuse induction into the U.S. armed forces on the grounds that the war in Vietnam was morally wrong But schools...? Clearly, questions of conscience do arise in schools: they arise for example in the decision of the classroom teacher or school principal to comply or not to comply with the ruling of U.S. Supreme Court that the reading of the Bible and recitation of the Lords' Prayer was and still is unconstitutional; they arise in the way in which youngsters from culturally different backgrounds are treated in schools; they arise in the refusal of a teacher to treat Darwinian evolution as the only explanation for the origin of the species.

More particularly, however, I am concerned here with the school administrator and the question of conscience. Such discussion relies heavily on Thomas Green's powerful essay, "The Formation of Conscience in an Age of Technology." In this essay Green's main purpose is to explicate the formation of conscience as alternative language to moral education; my purpose is to apply

Green's scheme to the work of school administration which I consider to be an enterprise of moral importance.

At the outset, Green talks of conscience as "this capacity of ours to be judge, each in our own case, is all that I mean by conscience. Conscience, as St. Thomas puts it, is simply reason commenting upon conduct" (Green, 1984: 2). Such a characterization invites school administrators to apply reason to their conduct in a reflective manner. Green, however, distinguishes several voices of conscience.

> But this conscience speaks to us also in different voices. Sometimes it speaks not of right or wrong, of what is just or unjust, but of what is wise, foolish or skillful. There is, in short, the conscience of craft and it speaks to us in one of the voices of prudence. But conscience speaks also of our affections, of our relations to others, our ties of membership in some group. There is, in short, the conscience of membership. Then again, sometimes conscience speaks to us of duty, even against our inclinations. There is, in other words, the conscience of sacrifice. It proclaims the lofty principles of obligation. And at other times, conscience calls upon us to rise above principle and to the thing that not even duty commands. (Green, 1984: 3).

These voices Green calls i) conscience as craft, ii) conscience as membership, iii) conscience as sacrifice, iv) conscience as memory, and v) conscience as imagination. Listen to each voice in turn.

Conscience as Craft

This voice of conscience concerns the "sense of craft" that one develops in one's trade, occupation or profession and involves knowing the standards of performance required in one's chosen field, being able to distinguish "what is good, what might be better, and what is downright unacceptable" (Green, 1984: 4). Such a voice of conscience is clearly generally applicable to trades, occupations or professions. Yet our concern here is with the practice of administration, and more particularly the practice of administering schools, conceived as deliberately structured social organizations with distinctive educational purposes. Such application implies for the school administrator that the development of a sense of craft requires understanding and appreciation of the social and educational purposes of schools, of the role of administration in achieving these purposes, of the standards of performance appropriate to the tasks of administration and of the importance of such a sense of craft. As Green points out:

> We make a serious mistake if we fail to recognize the conscience of craft, and to acknowledge that it may be in the acquisition of a "sense of craft" that the formation of conscience takes place most clearly. (1984: 5)

Conscience as Membership

This voice of conscience for Green involves the acquisition of the norms of conduct associated with membership in the group — not any group, of course, but the particular group in which membership is sought or held — in this case the group consists of school principals or educational administrators. By 'norms of conduct', however, Green explicitly disavows the currently misused notion of how administrators behave and emphasizes the normative character of the idea — that 'norms' of conduct invoke questions of ethical deliberation — questions of 'ought' and 'should'. Such questions for school administrators raise the issue of professional responsibility, of public trust and consequently the voice of conscience as membership applies to the discharge by school administrators of their professional responsibility in the context of public trust.

Conscience as Sacrifice

This voice of conscience directs our attention to the quintessential problem of sacrificing prudence and self-interest to the requirement of moral action. For the school administrator such a perspective mitigates against seeking to please or placate the diversity of interests trying to influence the school, to secure a 'prudential' or 'safe' administrative option and commends commitment to defensible independent and moral action. As Green notes "[T]he moral practices of promise keeping, truth telling, keeping contracts, preserving confidences — these are the paradigm practices in which the voice of conscience as sacrifice speaks most firmly" (1984:20).

Conscience as Memory

This voice of conscience focuses on rootedness, on a sense of history — history learned and remembered, a sense of origins. Green characterizes this voice like this:

> When we speak of the formation of rootedness we speak of course of teaching history, but not history conceived merely as "how things really were." We refer rather to history as remembered. We refer to the recovery of lived history. It is sufficient for none of us to find our roots simply in some space or in some profession or in relation to our contemporaries. We must find them also in some membership that extends through time. And so there is an educational problem posed by the simple fact that, in any literal sense of the matter, our memories cannot be longer than our lives. It may be our nature that we need it, but it can only be by education that we can acquire a social memory whose reach is more remote. (1984: 23)

Such a voice implies a sense of history for the school administrator, a sense of rootedness in a tradition of formal education, in schools, in their history and their social context. Memory, limited by personal knowledge but extended by reading and vicarious experience, provides the anvil upon which the steel of administrative integrity is forged.

Conscience as Imagination

Finally, this voice of conscience brings to the fore the need for vision, the capacity to dream, for such are essential to leadership. This voice presupposes the other voices, particularly that of membership:

> So there is the conscience of membership but also the conscience of critical imagination. It is only imagination that allows us to speak to other members about the chasm that exists between the hopes and fair expectations of the community and the failures of our lived lives. It is, in fact the rootedness of that voice in membership that gives the judgment its sting. That judgment hurts because it comes to us as the voice of an insider, speaking out of a shared memory and turning it against us to reveal how great a distance there is between the ideals we espouse and the realities into which, willy nilly, we seem always to lapse. It is not a pleasant thing to be brought to see how blind and to hear how deaf we are. (1984: 25)

In the case of the school administrator, such a voice requires a sense of new ideas, fresh starts, alternative possibilities; it involves the idea of principled change, it is challenging to all involved because it necessarily threatens the status quo and invites conflict. But it is also the possibility of "...transformation, the urging, the invitation to enter now the realm of possibilities that exist so far only in the imagination and that being acted upon will change the future. That, I [Green] believe, is the moral significance of the conscience of imagination" (1984: 26). The rhetoric of school administration is replete with discussions of the role of school principal as an educational leader, a change agent, but the reality seems to be that significant change rarely occurs at the school level. Political constraints both inside and outside the school restrict change, but so too does the inertia that arises from familiarity with the status quo; inertia that condemns administrators and institutions to self-satisfaction and complacency. As Green rightly concludes:

> There is thus a profound and tenuous balance that must be secured in our institutions. They must be malleable enough so that good and skillful persons who dream of what is not yet, but might be so, can be set free to decide and to act. But our institutions must also be sufficiently resistant to change so that those whose conscience is merely technical and limited to skills of managing the political apparatus, but who are rootless in their souls, may not do irreparable harm. Rootedness and vision ultimately is what provides both the only salvation there is of those institutions and the only fixed point for the guidance of persons engaged in public policy. (1984: 27-28)

Tensions in the Administrative Context

The school administrator occupies and works in an administrative context with inherent tensions — tensions that give rise to the need to reconcile competing claims, tensions that in some cases more than others involve the voices of conscience and require their recognition and affirmation. Administrative success, from the vantage point of the discussion in this paper, depends upon the way the administrator handles these tensions in the everyday world of administrative life. Here I focus on two of the most obvious such tensions: between bureaucratic/managerial demands and personal moral integrity, and between the pluralism of community mores and distinctive educational leadership. There may well be others that need explication and I invite comments and suggestions that would help me appreciate and understand such others.

Bureaucratic/Managerial Demands v. Personal Moral Integrity

Much of the theory and practice of school administration is influenced by Weber's conception of bu- cracy and the nature of bureaucratic authority. Four features (at .east) of this bureaucratic orientation constitute the source of tension for the administrator: the notion of bureaucratic effectiveness, the use of value neutral language, the emphasis on technical processes and competency, and the corresponding emphasis on 'means' as opposed to 'ends'. Consider each briefly in turn.

The notion of bureaucratic effectiveness pervades discussions of formal organizations including schools (although some would argue, as indeed I would, that schools are not pure Weberian bureaucracies, I group them loosely here for heuristic purposes). Such discussions are reflected in t language of organizational goal attainment, goal displacement, goal succession *inter alia*, and reflect an overwhelming concern with achieving the goals (whatever those might be) of the organization as the *sine qua non* of organizational effectiveness. Further, such discussions apply equally to munitions factories producing armaments as to social service agencies providing shelters for battered women. As Macintyre notes:

> Thus effectiveness is a defining and definitive element of a way of life which competes for our allegiance with other alternative contemporary ways of life; and if we are to evaluate the claims of the bureaucratic, managerial mode to a place of authority in our lives, an assessment of the bureaucratic managerial claim to effectiveness [is] an essential task. (1984: 74)

Related to the emphasis on effectiveness is the use of value neutral language in organizations. Such use flows from the mistaken though pervasive belief that bureaucratic 'managers' are morally neutral characters whose work is to be concerned about their organizations' effectiveness (MacIntyre, 1984: 74). Emphasis on the technical processes of the organization and the technical competence of the members of the organization further compound the tension and the ensuing moral vacuum. Obsession with the 'means' of the organizatic. is intrinsically symptomatic of this bureaucratic orientation. The complex of properties produce a form of administrative 'technicism' exemplified in Albert Speer's administrative genius. As Singer and Wooton correctly note:

> The lesson from Nuremberg is that there is a tremendous potential for human and societal abuses when decision-making processes of organizations are shrouded in collective and moral neutrality. The normative question of creating organizational environments responsive to individual accountability and moral judgment appears to be an imperative consideration for both the organizational theorist and the change agent. (1976: 91)

The image of 'shrouding' is important because it brings to mind the process of gradually losing sight of the important moral and ethical questions, of subverting integrity, the voices of conscience. Such a process, perhaps, involves the initial little compromise, the averted glance, the ignored distortion of truth, fact or figure; gradually as compromise builds upon compromise, as technical language induces the stupor of the myth of value neutrality, as emphasis on

effectiveness and means seduces the will to see clearly, the administrator's compromised position includes failure to recognize the surrender/abdication of principle, the loss of moral integrity; then the shroud is complete, value neutral language deludes the organization and its managers in their belief in effectiveness and technical competence. Technicism becomes the new idolatry; ethical nihilism its ground.

By contrast, the notion of personal moral integrity, so seldom seen in discussions of administrative theory and bureaucratic organization, involves a strong view of administrative responsibility. Such a view requires a clear sense on the part of the administrator of his or her moral agency and integrity. Central to this view is an appreciation of deeply rooted core values, values rooted in the voices of conscience as craft, membership and memory; in addition, this view requires a strong sense of self, an appreciation of an ultimate stance — the point beyond which the ethical ground of personhood is fundamentally violated by one's failure to defend one's stance.

Related to the definition, establishment and maintenance of moral agency for the administrator is the capacity to make defensible moral decisions in the context of the purposes of the organization, to engage in deliberative moral discourse in the process of decision-making, to develop and have a capacity for such deliberation, and to assess the defensibility, suitability and desireability of the 'ends' of the organization. Such assessment may well invoke the several voices of conscience, particularly those of membership, memory and imagination and may under particular conditions lead the administrator to a position of principled opposition, thence to principled disobedience (Hogan & Henley, 1970: 143) and, ultimately, to resignation. Principled opposition, even principled disobedience, under certain conditions may be preferred solutions because such opposition will require the organization to confront the nature of the problem — it provides the opportunity for change of direction, for redemption.

Pluralism in Community Mores v. Distinctive Educational Leadership

Schools, of course, do not exist in a social vacuum. They are deliberately contrived and structured social organizations with clear purposes variously characterized in terms of socialization and education. The socialization function of schools, the 'schooling' function concerns the inculcation in the young of the values, norms, attitudes and knowledge necessary for them to move into adult roles in the community. The educational function of schools, the 'enlightenment' function, if you will, concerns the development of the capacity of critical reflection such that students become autonomous moral agents capable of evaluating their lives and their world and acting creatively upon them to change them if desired. The principal leads the organization with these purposes.

The community of the school, however, may not only differ in its view of the purposes of schools, there may well be widely differing views within the community, some sectors preferring vocational training to academic study, some preferring emphasis on 'basics' rather than the 'cafeteria' style curricular choice, etc. More

importantly, however, the fundamental values held by community members clearly differ. Bellah et al. (1985) have amply documented the array of fundamentally different values held by individuals in the United States, the changes that have taken place in the evolution of the Charter founding national values to the present, the uncertainty and tension generated by the 'culture of separation' and the search for the 'culture of coherence, the tension between the historic commitment to modernity, industrial development, scientific and technological progress and the emerging reality of sensitivity to social ecology, the tension between material affluence and the spiritual poverty of such affluence. Bellah and his colleagues comment

> We have imagined ourselves a special creation, set apart from other humans. In the late twentieth century, we see that our poverty is as absolute as that of the poorest of nations. We have attempted to deny the human condition in our quest for power after power. It would be well for us to rejoin the human race, to accept our essential poverty as a gift, and to share our national wealth with those in need. (Bellah et al., 1985: 296)

A retreat to the traditional, core values is perhaps the simplest stance for the school administrator to take; such values emanating from the Puritan ethic are well known, solid and prized. But the world and the society are changing and the school principal, as with other educational administrators, is placed in the position of navigating the school through the shoals of change. Such a responsibility requires distinctive educational leadership — a sense of direction, a sense of what is educationally worthwhile, deep understanding of the society the school serves, its directions, currents and whirlpools.

Such leadership requires the capacity to evaluate the arguments proposed to remove books from library shelves and to say 'No, the book stays'; confronting the interest and pressure groups, responding to the demands of individual parents, these are the commonplace of everyday administration. Above all such leadership requires understanding of the voices of conscience so that the school can effectively be and be seen to be a genuinely educational institution.

Administrative Responsibility

The judgments at Nuremberg were indeed landmarks in law. Not only did they establish the principle that the making of aggressive war is a criminal act, and the character of crimes against humanity, they also explicitly rejected the defence in the case of individual defendents that "I was following orders." In so doing the Tribunal clearly affirmed the responsibility of the individual for his or her own actions and clarified that this responsibility is in no way reduced or mitigated when that individual is acting as part of an organization — military or administrative. It is this principle — the principle of individual responsibility for action — that lies at the heart of the Nuremberg judgment and has clear implications for administrators in all kinds of organizations. As Singer and Wooton note:

> At Nuremberg, Speer endorsed a principle of individual responsibility in organizational life that may become one of the keystones of executive behavior in large-scale organizations. The move today to make organizations more "socially responsible"

> is a move to implant the spirit of Nuremberg into the decision-making processes of those organizations. If this trend continues, it may well be impossible for an executive to disclaim responsibility for actions of the organization simply because he was unaware of these actions. (1976: 97)

At the heart of this principle is that obedience to law or to a superior's command or instruction is not primarily a matter of loyalty or commitment to the person or organization rather it is a personal and individual decision that must be grounded in ethical deliberation about what is right. Such a view carries with it the clear possibility or principled non-compliance — what Hogan and Henley call "principled disobedience" (1970: 143).

What, then, does such a view set in the context of the claim and voices of conscience, faced with the real tensions that exist in the administrative context, imply for the educational administrator, the school principal? At the least such a view places upon the principal the responsibility to model moral decision-making, to act as a moral exemplar; I do not mean by such language to suggest that the principal should try to play out the role of 'saint'; I do by contrast mean that the principal 'should' or 'ought' to demonstrate in his or her behaviour and administrative life the struggle to moral maturity, being attentive to the voices of consciences. The image of a moral journey comes to mind, replete with dilemmas, tensions, doubts and human fallibility. The children and students in the nation's school need to see distinctive educational leadership at work, attentive to community more but harkening primarily to the voices of conscience.

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