

A VOLUME IN **ETHICS IN PRACTICE**



**RADICAL  
THOUGHTS  
ON ETHICAL  
LEADERSHIP**

**Carole L. Jurkiewicz**  
**Robert A. Giacalone**  
Editors

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# **Radical Thoughts on Ethical Leadership**

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A volume in  
*Ethics in Practice*  
Carole L. Jurkiewicz and Robert A. Giacalone, *Series Editors*

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# **Radical Thoughts on Ethical Leadership**

**Ethics in Practice**

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*edited by*

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## **Dedication**

*Spencer and Crosby Jurkiewicz, and Lincoln Barber.  
Three extraordinary young men who are models of ethical leadership,  
and who give us hope for the future.*

—CLJ

*Karen, Elizabeth, and Joshua Giacalone, the three topmost reasons  
why an ethical world is so important to me.*

—RAG

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# FOREWORD

The *Ethics in Practice Series* provides a forum for exploring and discussing organizational ethics issues that may otherwise be overlooked in the usual professional venues. The focus of the series is interdisciplinary, which includes not only a focus on ethical issues in the public, private, and non-profit sectors, but on the body of knowledge on ethics that can be found in other disciplines as well. The series, therefore, seeks to help readers better understand organizational ethics from a variety of vantage points, including business, public and nonprofit administration, psychology, sociology, anthropology, criminology, and victimology.

As editors, our goal is to provide scholars, instructors, and professionals interested in ethics and social responsibility with a meaningful collection of books in key areas that expand thinking on issues of research and pedagogy. We see the series as a forum where new ideas can be surfaced and explored, future inquiry can be stimulated, and old ideas can be seen through different lenses.

This edited volume, *Radical Thoughts on Ethical Leadership* offers the reader such ideas. The thoughts articulated in this volume challenge and extend current business ethics research on ethical leadership using different disciplinary lenses. The chapters, all from the perspectives of well-known, scholars working in within different disciplinary foundations, provide innovative ideas that address a basic theme: extending our understanding of ethical leadership beyond the scope generally found in the mainstream scholarly literature.

We believe these original chapters will motivate and inspire new studies of organizational ethics and ethical leadership in different business sectors. But equally important, we hope these chapters will impact how business ethics and social responsibility are taught to business students and will serve to improve the practice of ethics in organizations.

—**Robert A. Giacalone**  
**Carole L. Jurkiewicz**  
Editors, *Ethics in Practice*

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# PREFACE

That there is an overwhelming need for ethical leadership in 2017 is not a radical thought. In fact it seems like a statement of the obvious. The world feels like it is changing rapidly, and for many, that change is an uncertain and quite frightening one. For millions of people, 2017 has started with a deep sense of unease over a national and international future that seems far less certain than previous years or even decades.

Despite its apparent obviousness, then, our initial statement begs a number of other questions. Where is the place of ethical leadership in a post-truth world? From whom? And to what purpose?

This book makes a significant contribution to these and myriad other questions. It brings together leading scholars from around the globe to present a range of perspectives from both theory and practice to advance our understanding of ethical leadership and where it stands today. Its radical thoughts can be found in the breadth and depth of the research presented here and it offers some positive paths for the future. But can thoughts on ethics ever be radical enough? I would respectfully suggest that there are a number of fundamental ideas about our understanding of ethical leadership that are too infrequently discussed.

The first of these is more of a plea to intellectual honesty. We appear to have now entered an age where untruth is official policy, whether this is shielded under the rubric of “alternative facts” or by simple, blatant repetition. But we need to remember that falsehoods have always played a significant role in the public realm. Exaggeration, confabulation, misdirection, etc. can all be traced in the histories of politics, business, the media, and

just about every institutional pillar of public life. Sadly, lying to the public is not a new development, even if its current manifestation seems more nakedly aggressive than most.

Yet the promotion of dishonesty arguably goes much deeper, and a more radical perspective, then, asks us to acknowledge that huge swathes of the entire Western political philosophical canon is either predicated on falsehoods (of a variety of shapes and sizes), or else promotes dishonesty as a legitimate act of leadership.

Let's start with Plato. Let us not forget that it was the musings of Socrates in *The Republic* that not only suggested that "noble lies" be told to the populace to keep them loyal, but that a leader's education should be manipulated to inculcate a sense of patriotism and duty. There was no room for truth, except of the partial kind through a blend of censorship and restricted content. Sounds remarkably familiar.

Aristotle's *Politics* was in many ways more benign, and his famous declaration—that "He who is unable to live in society, or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god"—rarely fails to inspire. That is, until we recall that the political life did not pertain to women, or slaves, or those outside the polis. Factor in this inherent and unashamed elitism, and Aristotle does not seem a million miles away from the dehumanizing effect of modern political rhetoric.

St. Augustine's *City of God* perpetuates a different kind of deceit; that of predestination and man's unquestioning obedience to a ruler, no matter who that ruler may be. When Augustine writes, "Earthly kingdoms are given by Him to good and evil men alike," he is telling us to accept our lot and that no matter what tyranny we live under, we should do so without murmur. He places an imposition on man not to try and effect any change, even against authoritarianism.

Machiavelli, of course, exhorted us to act like both fox and lion, but at least his leadership advice was entirely context-bound, a fact either forgotten or ignored by the majority of his detractors. There was never an indication that deception was a universally regarded standard of behavior.

And so onto those writers who still inspire much of our political thinking to this day—the social contract theorists. It would be unfair and unwise to accuse Hobbes or Locke (and others) of promoting lies, but perhaps they did something far more dangerous—mythologizing power. This was done not only through the formulation of the state of nature in its various incarnations, but with the idea of the social contract itself. Nobody has signed a social contract and they never did; it is nothing more than a convenient fiction upon which to offer post hoc rationalizations for the status quo.

A more generous reading would argue that these social contracts were never meant to be taken literally, that they were hypothetical constructs

designed to act as a foundation for other theories. That is a reasonable point, but it does not remove the inherently manipulative character of such hypotheses. At least Rousseau, of all the social contractarians, was honest enough to admit this: “The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying ‘This is mine,’ and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society.”

Even a modern giant such as Rawls can be seen in this tradition. Directly situating his work in terms of social contract, Rawls describes his own version of it, the original position, as “a purely hypothetical situation characterized so as to lead to a *certain conception of justice*” (my emphasis). The construct does not, of course, invalidate his principles of justice, nor suggest that they are inherently bad, but it clearly shows that they are the product of a rigged game, designed to appear neutral but resulting in pre-ordained principles.

I fully acknowledge that I can be accused of cherry picking my arguments here. Hopefully, however, they are illustrative of a number of radical positions. First, that ethical leadership does not necessarily have a very rich tradition, particularly in terms of political discourse. Yes, this is arguably because social values change and thus what may have been an acceptable position once is no longer the case. But that leads to a second concern, that moral fluidity makes it difficult to establish norms and values for future generations. Will the readers of this book wake one morning to find that their values are no longer acceptable to society’s decision and taste makers?

The only way to combat these issues is for fearless debate and continual reflection. Morality and ethics are not set in stone and we need to be ever vigilant that our values do not slip. This is particularly important today with a quite explicit attack on evidence and knowledge. We live in an almost paradoxical world; where more information is available to us, and more rapidly, than ever before, and yet truth seems harder than ever to find. Not for nothing has recent debate in the United States, United Kingdom, and mainland Europe questioned the very nature of expertise, and even truth. Alternative facts, anyone?

All of which underlines the importance of this book. Its authors take concepts old and new and recast them in the very latest research. In so doing they provide not only a wealth of knowledge, but more importantly a safe space for open thinking and honest reflection, which is now and forever will be crucial to our own development of practice.

That there is an overwhelming need for ethical leadership in 2017 may not be a very radical thought, but it is a crucially important one. This book goes some way in offering constructive ideas in responding to our need.

—Michael Macaulay