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## PubPol 580: Reading Notes for Class 2 (Sept. 11, 2009)

The next section of the course takes up briefly the complicated relationship between politics and morality. On Thursday we'll talk about these questions as they arise in domestic politics (including playing "political hardball" in American electoral politics). Next Tuesday we'll focus on political morality at the international level (where the issue of "dirty hands" is most salient).

One of the readings for Thursday is an article on "The Obligation to Play Political Hardball" by Bill Galston, a philosopher and policy professor who also served as a political appointee in the first Clinton administration. He divides political actions into three categories—softball, hardball, and dirtyball. Galston argues that political leaders (such as presidential candidates) have an obligation to take actions that will enable them to win, even if those actions would be seen by many observers as unethical—this is what he means by hardball. This way of talking about political action requires you to think about the question of whether there is a distinction between ethical actions in politics and ethical actions in everyday life. In Galston's typology, political actors have obligations to play hardball but may not play dirtyball. Even if you accept the typology, the question of which actions fall in which category leaves plenty of room for disagreement and fruitful discussion.

It's also worth thinking about different kinds of political actors and whether the typology might apply differently to them. For instance, are the obligations of a presidential candidate to do what it takes to win stronger than those of a candidate for the House or Senate? How about the obligations of proponents or opponents of ballot initiatives?

One challenge in applying this typology to judgments about political actions is to separate one's moral judgment from one's own personal preferences about what the political outcome should be. There is a tendency to see as softball cases in which your own preferred candidate lost in part because of actions that stuck too much the political high road (e.g., Galston faults Michael Dukakis for not playing hardball in the 1988 presidential election). Similarly, most of us have a tendency to label as dirtyball actions by the candidate we do not want to win. The typology is not going to do interesting work if you can't find examples of actions by your preferred candidate's that you judge to be dirtyball and examples of actions by your "unpreferred" candidate's that you judge to be softball.

After you've read the article, see if you can come up with examples of political actions that you think fall into the three categories. Better yet, see if you can find a few actions where you're not sure which side of the line they fall on.

I want to spend some time on Thursday hearing from students from other countries about their reactions to playing political hardball—would Galston's take on the obligations of political actors resonate with citizens and/or savvy political commentators in your country? This includes hearing from U.S. students who've spent considerable time in other countries and who have a sense of how citizens or commentators in those countries would react to our style of political campaigning.

Another reading is by Dennis Thompson, who grapples with the question of dirty hands in democratic politics (as opposed to the question of dirty hands in international politics, which we'll take up next week). He goes more deeply into the kinds of issues raised by Galston's hardball argument. His examples are from a generation ago, so you might think through his argument with counter-terrorism as the primary policy issue.

The final reading is once again by Galston, this time on the concept of the public interest. This focus here is different from the first two readings. The public interest is a prime candidate for being the standard for "good" public policy, and therefore a useful guide for policy analysts and managers as they make policy decisions. The discipline of political science tossed the concept onto the junk pile in the last generation and Galston is asking whether we can restore it and have it play a useful role in analyzing/critiquing public policy. Come prepared to talk about your reactions to his argument.