

Teaching Caselettes

MAYOR CARCETTI

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In Season Four of HBO's *The Wire*, Mayor Tommy Carcetti must choose between his long-term political ambitions and the short-term needs of his city. An overview of the "Understanding Hypocrisy and Integrity" framework accompanies this case study.

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In season four of HBO's *The Wire*, Tommy Carcetti, the fictional mayor of Baltimore, is faced with a difficult decision. Having campaigned for mayor as a crime-fighter, Carcetti takes office eager to reform the police department and eventually run for governor. Upon assuming office, however, Carcetti discovers that the Baltimore school budget is \$54 million in debt.¹ Addressing the school budget problem means diverting money from both the educational system and the police department. Carcetti's other option is to beg the current governor for money.

The governor agrees to give Carcetti the money but on two conditions. First, he must relinquish control of the school system to the state, something that will be very unpopular with Baltimore voters. Second, he must attend a press conference, in which the governor will announce that he (the governor) is generously bailing out Baltimore's school system because children should not bear the cost of the city's financial mismanagement. This press conference is clearly intended to improve the governor's chances of winning a gubernatorial election against Carcetti should he decide to run. Given that Maryland's suburban and rural voters will not be pleased to see their tax money used to run schools in Baltimore, a bailout from the state is likely to be a major issue in such an election.

Carcetti's advisors give him conflicting advice. One suggests that Carcetti should not put his own ambition above the needs of the city. Another advisor points out that the current governor has ignored both the city and its school system. Baltimore would be better off, he points out, with Carcetti in the governor's mansion.²

¹ Ed Burns and George Pelecanos (writers) and Joe Chappelle (director), "That's Got His Own (television episode), in David Simon (producer), *The Wire* (Baltimore: HBO).

² David Simon & Ed Burns (writers), and Ernest Dickerson (director), "Final Grades" in David Simon (producer), *The Wire* (Baltimore: HBO).

Understanding Hypocrisy and Integrity

Often ethical action is depicted as a continuum, with cynicism on one end, moral fanaticism on the other and integrity as the perfect mean. The problem with viewing ethical action as a continuum, Ruth Grant explains, is that it obscures the fact that there are multiple forms of integrity and hypocrisy. Grant is Professor of Political Science and Philosophy and Senior Fellow in the Kenan Institute for Ethics at Duke University.

She identifies two different forms of integrity: the integrity of the moderate and the integrity of the moralist. The moderate focuses upon the consequences of her actions and is willing to “be a little bad” in order to ensure a just outcome. The moralist, on the other hand, evaluates actions by the motivations that guide them and is inclined to obey her conscience, regardless of the consequences.

The moralist is unwilling to compromise her principles because she associates integrity with purity. Purity, she believes, is achieved by ensuring that her motives are not tainted by self-interest and her actions are not corrupted by compromise. The moderate finds this struggle for purity unproductive. Moral actors are unlikely to achieve complete purity of motivation, the moderate argues, as humans are complicated and conflicted creatures. While she believes that individuals should strive to ensure that selfish motivations do not prevent them from pursuing just outcomes, the moderate emphasizes that an obsession with the purity of one’s motives and deeds can hinder the pursuit of such outcomes.

Just as there are different kinds of integrity, there are different kinds of hypocrisy. The most obvious is the cynical hypocrite, who deliberately uses the pretence of virtue to obtain selfish and ignoble ends. However, most hypocrites are not consciously aware of their hypocrisy, and both moderates and moralists may be self-deceiving hypocrites. The moderate engages in hypocrisy by telling herself that she is compromising for the greater good, when she is really pursuing her own interests. Or, she is simply complacent, failing to recognize injustice rather than disturb her own comfortable position. The moralist engages in hypocrisy when she tells herself that she is standing on principle, despite when her actions are motivated less by the justness of the principle and more by a desire to feel and appear morally superior.

| | <i>Moderation</i> | <i>Moralism</i> |
|------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Integrity</i> | <i>Statesman</i> | <i>Moralist</i> |
| <i>Hypocrisy</i> | <i>Complacent Hypocrite</i> | <i>Righteous Hypocrite</i> |

Moralists and moderates have difficulty understanding each other, because each believes that their form of integrity is the only form of integrity. As a result, each sees only hypocrisy in the other. Whereas the moderate believes that all moralists are self-righteous hypocrites willing to sacrifice a just outcome for selfish reasons, the moralist regards the moderate’s willingness to compromise as a lack of conviction. Perhaps moralists and moderates would understand each other better if they recognized that there are multiple forms of hypocrisy and integrity.

See Ruth Grant, Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau and the Ethics of Politics (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pages 62-8 and 171-2