What are ethics?
What roles does ethics play in the making of public policy?
What types of ethical systems exist?
How important are ethics in today's society?
What are “ethics”?

Ethics are standards of moral conduct that individuals and groups set for themselves:
- Define what is right or wrong
- How things should be handled
- Defines character traits / life standards
How do ethics influence public policy / politics?

- Political ethics involve making moral judgments about political actions and political agendas
  - The ethics of elected office
  - The ethics of policy
  - The ethics of the law
What creates a politicians ethical code?

Many influencers:
- Upbringing / family
- Personal values
- Experiences
- Education
- Society’s legal system
- Religious faith
- Goal / aspirations
How do politicians use ethics in the making of public policy?

- In the making of public policy, politicians must weigh their own ethical code carefully
  - Issues of power
  - Issues of justice
  - Religious / societal issues
  - Issues of law
What is the history of ethics in political thought?

Plato
- (428 BC-348 BC)
- *The Republic* (380 BC)

Those who rule must do so wisely & well
- Identified as children
- Intensive training
- Cultivate an “incorruptible nature”
What is the history of ethics in political thought?

- Niccolò Machiavelli
  - (1469-1527)
  - *The Prince* (1513)

- Leaders must be willing to do what is right, even if it is un-ethical
  - “Ways justify the means”
What is the history of ethics in political thought?

- Michael Walzer
  - (1935-present)
  - Princeton University

- The “dirty hands” theory
  - In order to do what is right, politicians must get their “hand’s dirty”
The “Dirty Harry” Theory
What is a political “realist”? 

Politics & ethics belong to different realms of life
- Ethics = private life
- Power = political life

Ethics are useful only as a “cover-up” to the ugly facts of politics

Real rules of power have little to do with ethics or morality

“Nice guys finish last” – If you are a moral person, you will loose in politics
The Use of Guantanamo Bay / “Enhanced Interrogation” techniques
The Use of Killer Drones
What is the history of ethics in political thought?

Dennis Thompson  
(1940-present)  
Harvard University

Politicians are held to higher ethical standard then average people  
“No man is above the law”
The Watergate Scandal
What is a political “idealist”?

- Ethics and politics are inseparable
  - Politicians must be ethical to ensure a society’s social fabric

- Leaders are a reflection of the values / ethics of the society they represent

- Leaders cannot rule without the consent of the governed / power is in the hands of the people

- To be effective, true political power comes from the people

- Laws and the enforcement of laws are rooted in a society’s ethical code
What ethical issues currently exist?

- Many being debated in government & the courts
  - Civil liberties
  - Government power
  - Justice
  - Sexuality
  - Business / Economic
  - Affirmative action