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 UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



**Assignment 1:
Thoughts on Your Own
Personal Public Philosophy**

For this first assignment, I'd like you to try to identify and to articulate the essential features of your own "underlying philosophy" in the sense in which Cardozo uses it in the excerpt given below. I'm particularly interested in this personal philosophy as it applies to evaluations of public policies and the conduct of your own professional life in the public sphere.

As Cardozo (with changes to focus on "you") notes:

forces which [you] do not recognize and cannot name, have been tugging at [you]--inherited instincts, traditional beliefs, acquired convictions; and the resultant is an outlook on life, a conception of social needs, a sense in James's phrase of "the total push and pressure of the cosmos," which, when reasons are nicely balanced, must determine where choice shall fall.

Benjamin Cardozo: The Nature of the Judicial Process
(Yale University Press, 1921)

This assignment asks you to begin to recognize and articulate the essential features of your own personal public philosophy, and to identify--to the extent that you can--their origins, in personal experience, important events or people in public life, religious beliefs, etc. One of the goals of this course is to have this be an easier assignment by the end of the term. And having a clearer sense of your personal public philosophy will help when it comes to thinking about how it fits with your identity as a public policy professional.

One thing you might do to help with this assignment is to think about a policy choice in which values you hold dear are in conflict and then think about how you would choose if required to and why you make that choice. Thinking about problems that have consequentialist considerations in tension with non-consequentialist considerations is also useful.

Only the instructor and the GSI will read these papers and the contents will be considered to be confidential. No grades will be assigned for these papers.

Length: 2-3 pages

Format: The paper should be double-spaced. Beyond that, format is not important. Whatever format or style helps you to write as clearly as you can about the topic is fine.

Due on September 22. Submit the assignment as a Word document attached to an email message (sending a copy to the instructor and the GSI). Use your last name as the name of the document so we can organize our files.

An Underlying Philosophy of Life

We are reminded by William James in a telling page of his lectures on Pragmatism that every one of us has in truth an underlying philosophy of life, even those of us to whom the names and the notions of philosophy are unknown or anathema. There is in each of us a stream of tendency, whether you choose to call it philosophy or not, which gives coherence and direction to thought and action. Judges cannot escape that current any more than other mortals. All their lives, forces which they do not recognize and cannot name, have been tugging at them--inherited instincts, traditional beliefs, acquired convictions; and the resultant is an outlook on life, a conception of social needs, a sense in James's phrase of "the total push and pressure of the cosmos," which, when reasons are nicely balanced, must determine where choice shall fall. In this mental background every problem finds its setting. We may try to see things as objectively as we please. None the less, we can never see them with any eyes except our own.

Benjamin Cardozo: The Nature of the Judicial Process
(Yale University Press, 1921), pp. 21-22.