



Political Psychology  
Research, Inc.  
William A. McConochie,  
Ph.D.  
71 E. 15<sup>th</sup> Ave.  
Eugene, Or. 97401  
Ph 541-686-9934  
Fax 485-5702  
Bill@Testmasterinc.com

## Life and Death Ethical Issues for Psychologists: Protecting yourself and your profession from corruption and murder.

William A. McConochie, PhD.  
August, 2008

This brief essay was inspired by papers, speeches, testimony and discussions by psychologists at the Berlin conference of the International Congress of Psychologists, July, 2008. It presents questions for psychologists in nations around the world, which can be answered via research or at least informed by research that psychology associations in those countries can sponsor.

Considering the findings of classic studies such as those instituted by psychologists Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo, which demonstrate how easily most normal citizens can be persuaded to participate in inhumane behavior toward fellow citizens, and considering the events in Argentina and several other South American countries during the "Dirty War" in the 60's, 70's and 80's where many citizens (including psychologists and psychology students) were abducted, tortured and murdered in the name of government, and further considering the events in Nazi Germany in the 30's and 40's when professionals and other ordinary citizens were persuaded to express inhumane behavior toward fellow Germans and toward foreigners...

1. How vulnerable to such government influences are psychologists today in various countries?
2. In what ways are they vulnerable to less dramatic but nevertheless real pressures by employers or governments to participate in unethical, immoral or illegal behaviors?
3. To what extent are they vulnerable to being "bought" or "silenced" by research grants or salaries to participate in or condone by ignoring job behaviors and research for departments of defense or other organizations whose motives or applications of that research or other purchased behavior are likely to involve inhumane ends?
4. How can state, national and international professional associations of psychologists inform, guide and protect their members from getting involved in such undesirable behaviors?
5. How can these associations inform, warn and protect their members from governments that might resort to abduction and murder to silence them?
6. What early warning signals can psychologists detect via research that warn of governments sliding into totalitarianism of the sort that poses such threats?
7. What access can psychologist associations gain to information on these early warning signals from related professions: journalism, law, political science, history?

8. How can psychologists inform and protect all citizens of their nations from insidious forms of inhumane government pressures? What research expertise do they have that uniquely qualifies them for research on such issues?
9. To what extent are professional psychologists morally obligated to conduct such research and disseminate the findings? For example, does acceptance of public loans or grants for one's education carry with it any moral obligation to serve the public whose money was used? And to serve in more than a narrow sense specific to one's areas of specialization?
10. To what extent can the profession of psychology contribute research into government-related matters from a psychological perspective, e.g.:
  - i. What different possible types of government are perceived by citizens?
  - ii. Which types of government are promoted by various types of humans?
  - iii. What human traits underlie the promotion of various forms of government?
  - iv. Which forms of government are pro-social and which are antisocial, e.g. which are favored by persons with anti-social traits (e.g. high on violence-proneness, warmongering endorsement, prejudice, xenophobia, etc.) and which are favored by persons with pro-social traits (e.g. high on human rights endorsement and endorsement of government serving the common good)?
  - v. How can candidates for political office of these pro-social and anti-social types be identified before elected and how can citizens be advised of this before voting?
  - vi. How can the Common Good be operationally defined, e.g. via sophisticated public opinion questionnaires?
  - vii. How can public opinion be measured and reported regularly to inform government decisions on specific policies, programs, etc., such as budget decisions, decisions re: waging or stopping war, etc?
  - viii. Can public opinion be used directly as rational and reasonable grounds for making important public policy?
  - ix. Which types of citizens think it can and should? Which types do not?
11. What governments, United Nations departments, private foundations or funds or other organizations can be approached to finance such studies?
12. What committees or other structures should assume responsibility in professional psychological associations to address these matters?

###