The Administrative State: Conclusion

Dwight Waldo

Students of administration, writes J. M. Gaus, have become "more uncertain in recent years as to the ends, aims and methods which they should advocate." It is difficult to view in their entirety and in perspective the writings on public administration that now pour from the presses. But this is hardly necessary to confirm the truth of Gaus's statement.

The situation at present is this: there is a large core of "orthodox" public administration ideology, but also a considerable measure of doubt and even iconoclasm; an increasing disposition to engage in empirical or functional studies in which theoretical postulates are obscure and perhaps denied, but also a number of foci of theoretical activity of great potential importance; and a number of theoretical problems that should be recognized, clearly stated, and competently treated. The field at present shows much evidence of vigor and growth, and considerable progress in criticism, synthesis, and creative thought can confidently be predicted. 1

At the heart of "orthodox" ideology is the postulate that true democracy and true efficiency are synonymous, or at least reconcilable. Clustered about this postulate are a number of formulae for effecting this reconciliation. Another important doctrine is the politics-administration formula; the notion that the work of government is divisible into two parts, decision and execution, and that execution (administration) is or can be made a science. "Science." to the orthodox, connotes fact-finding, rejection of theory, and perhaps Pragmatism. The notion that there are "principles,"

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In view of recent tendencies it is pertinent to ask of those who are digging ever deeper into the "stuff" of administration, whose object is to present a section of unvarnished administrative truth or criticism of naive "principles," this question: Have you not gone too far in rejecting principles and embracing an uncritical empiricism? In some sectors the pertinent question is whether sophistication has become cynicism, whether in rejecting nineteenth-century concepts of "principles" the purpose or theory that must enlighten and inform any significant inquiry has not also been denied. Without faith or purpose, individuals or societies stagnate. 2

The future of administrative theory is dependent, of course, upon what happens in the world at large, and particularly what happens in and to these United States. Whether the One World for which we poured out our treasure of life and goods becomes Two Worlds and then, one day, No World—this is the First Fact. If new forms and methods of international—or "world"—cooperation do develop, administrative thinking will be turned in new directions (although to date the considerable amount of "international" writings on administration is generally characterized by a pedestrian, earth-bound quality). 3 Upon the success of our business civilization in meeting the extraordinary economic and social stresses of postwar readjustment depends the course of much future thinking. In one way or another the development and use of atomic energy will have effects reaching to the very foundations of administrative thought. But before its implications can even be projected in imagination it is necessary for the thinking organism to recover from the shock of so fundamental and spectacular a fact. Administrative thought will affect, as well as reflect, the future events. But it will not be one of the Prime Forces, at least in the near future. The number of its devotees and the range of its influence is limited. It is only now freeing itself from a stranglehold of its own devising—the instrumentalist philosophy of the politics-administration formula—that has limited its breadth and scope.

Whatever the far-reaching implications of world cooperation and atomic energy may be, the Second Great War's aftermath of chaos and Bi—will seems likely to have more important effects upon administrative thinking in the short run. Two observations as to these effects may be hazarded. The first is that, since crises usually result in centralization and integration of authority, we may expect a strengthening of the currents of centralization and integration—at least in comparison to what might have been the case had the end of the war brought with it "peace" and "normalcy." The second is in some sense the converse of the first: the success of the movement to decentralize and "democratize" administration depends upon the subsidence of threats to the security of America. Whatever force there is in the socialist belief that "you can't build socialism in one country" applies similarly to democracy.

In addition to economic, political, and social events that will influence the future of administrative thought, there are a number of movements and personalities that at present are impinging on administrative thinking and may give it content and direction in the future. . . .

Perhaps most important of the theoretical movements now influencing American administrative study is scientific management. At the level of technique or procedure, borrowing from and liaison with scientific management will undoubtedly continue. Although some doctrines, such as "pure theory of organization," have already affected public administration, how influential other theoretical aspects of scientific management will be remains to be seen. In its "democratic" or "anarchistic" doctrines, conceivably, there is enough force to reconstruct present patterns of administrative thought, at least if conditions become favorable, M. L. Cooke, 4 Ordway Tead, 5 Henry Fayol, 6 Oliver Sheldon, 7 Lyndall Urwick, 8 and Elton Mayo 9 may be mentioned as among the more prominent of those associated with the scientific management movement whose writings may possibly affect the future of public administration—as they have already in some degree. Several of these writers have been influenced by the philosophy of Mary Parker Follett. This is not the place to embark upon a discussion of her theories, but an understanding of some present tendencies must depend upon a reading of her works, as well as those of the more reflective scientific managers.
It is possible—though it appears at present unlikely—that Pragmatic philosophy may play a larger role in the future than in the past. In recent essays by Horace S. Fries,11 for example, an attempt is made to demonstrate that Pragmatism (of the Dewey variety) is not only the philosophy of science, but the proper vehicle for expanding "democracy" in both scientific management and public administration.

The probability that the recent influx of foreign, especially continental, students of administration will exert a measurable influence over theoretical development has been touched upon above. Of the simple fact of influence there can be no doubt, but it is yet too early to state with any certainty what will be its force.

The problem of the place of the expert in a democratic society, particularly the expert in "things-in-general," cannot be regarded as having been satisfactorily treated,12 and will probably continue to engage the attention of administrative writers. The problem is perhaps too broad to be solved by a few thinkers in a short period of time. The answer should evolve out of experience and the gradual reconstruction of our theory by thinkers in many fields.

Closely related is the problem of providing adequate preparation and a "philosophy" for our administrators. Are training in the mechanics of administration and codes of professional ethics enough? Or should our new Guardian Class be given an education commensurate with their announced responsibilities and perhaps be imbued with a political philosophy?

The present gap between the content of our administrative curricula and what we announce to be the responsibilities of our Administrators is appalling.13 Presuming that we are in the midst of some sort of "managerial revolution,"14 can we say that either the program of our philosophy about managers or the proper philosophy for managers has been satisfactorily treated?

The problem of the philosophy that our Administrators entertain is intimately related, in turn, to that of the adequacy of "theory of organization." The question is this: Are students of administration trying to solve the problems of human cooperation on too low a plane? Have they, by the double process of regarding more and more formal data over a wider and wider field of human organization, lost insight, penetration? Is formal analysis of organizations without regard to the purposes that inspire them but a tedious elaboration of the insignificant?

The main tenets of the public administration movement emerged in the decades preceding 1914; they crystallized into a general political theory in the Progressive years. This "orthodox" point of view is by no means an unchallenged faith; but generally, it is still gospel in our schools, at least in undergraduate courses. Perhaps the tenets of orthodoxy still represent the "truth" for our time and our needs. Assuredly, their air of certainty and stability appeals to the emotions in these days of crisis and confusion. But the apparent likelihood of a disintegration of the old outlook and the synthesis of a new must be recognized. In any event, if abandonment of the political-administration formula is taken seriously, if the demands of present world civilization upon public administration are met, administrative thought must establish a working relationship with every major province in the realm of human learning.

Notes

1. There have been many evidences of a thirst for philosophy in recent years, and not a few invitations to students of political theory to join in broadening public administration. But any fruitful cross-fertilization will take considerable time and awaits development of a "philosophy for the philosophers." For the "political theorists" have also become objective, scientific; they are now in the position of the art-museum curator of cartoon humor, who "knows all about art, but doesn't know what he likes." Students of administration have generally been unread in the history of political thought, but they have had no doubts about "what they like." Students of theory can offer "sophistication" to students of administration, but they have a long way to go before they can offer much positive assistance with fundamental problems, such as the relationship of administration to democracy, or to science. Cf. Donald Morrison, "Public Administration and the Art of Government," Pub. Adm. Rev. 5 (winter 1945):

83—87, 85, on the divorce of "theory" from "administration"—with mutual stultification.


3. The barrier between politics and administration, though being destroyed in the domestic field, is almost completely intact in our thinking about international matters. Urgently needed is some hard, creative thinking in the area lying between advanced administrative thought and advanced thinking on the future of world politics, represented—in my opinion—by E. H. Carr's Nationalism—And After (New York: 1945).


8. The Philosophy of Management (London, 1924). This is widely cited, but it does not appear that all the juice is yet squeezed from it.


11. "Some Democratic Implications of Science in Scientific Management," Advanced Management (October 1940): 147—152; "Liberty and Science," Pub. Adm. Rev. 3 (summer 1943): 268—273. Fries's essays are profound statements of a legitimate viewpoint. But this viewpoint is to me as unsatisfying as the in a Hindu cosmology—and for the same reason.

12. In an introduction to Scudder Kylce's The Universe (Winchester, Mass., 1921), M. L. Cooke expresses the opinion that Kylce's work provides a philosophical justification for the exercise of power by technical experts. I cannot comment on this, as I am unable to understand Kylce's strange work.

13. Speaking in 1945 to the Washington Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration, Herbert Emmerick listed as first among the administrative lessons of the war the failure of our administrative curricula to produce adequate line administrators, as distinguished from persons trained to do housekeeping and staff work. To the same effect see M. E. Dimock, "Administrative Efficiency within a Democratic Polity," in New Horizons in Public Administration, Alabama: 1945) symposium, 21—43, 41—42.

14. James Burnham's The Managerial Revolution (New York, 1941) is perhaps a significant book. It is not, however, within the scope of this essay. In terms of Burnham's treatment, the literature with which this study is concerned would be the ideological trappings of the new ruling group.
The fundamental defect of Burnham’s book, the reviewers have emphasized, is that, despite the fact that the argument is set forth as a refutation of orthodox socialism, it is essentially Marxisan. Burnham, that is to say, has a Marxisan past, and the characteristic vices of that habit of mind are carried over—the neat black and white categorizing, the itch for simplicity, the presumption of omniscience, the proclamation of inevitability. Burnham simply puts new wine in the old Marxisan bottles. (In his more recent The Struggle for the World [New York: 1947], in fact, he performs the feat of turning the Marxisan approach against the Marxists.) For an essentially Marxisan refutation of Burnham’s “Marxism” see J. Donald Kingsley and David W. Paterson, “The Technicians and the New Society,” chap. 14 in Strategy for Democracy (New York, 1942). This is an interesting essay discussing the general failure of left-wing movements of all kinds to recognize the need for “management” to achieve their objectives and the means by which a bureaucracy can be made to serve the ends of a “democratic collective state.”

The Coopticative Mechanism

Philip Selznick

To risk a definition: cooptation is the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence. With the help of this concept we are enabled more closely and more rigorously to specify the relation between TVA and some important local institutions and thus uncover an important aspect of the real meaning and significance of the Authority’s grassroots policy. At the same time, it is clear that the idea of cooptation plunges us into the field of bureaucratic behavior as that is related to such democratic ideals as “local participation.”

Cooptation tells us something about the process by which an institutional environment impinges itself upon an organization and effects changes in its leadership, structure, or policy. Cooptation may be formal or informal, depending upon the specific problem to be solved.

Formal Cooptation When there is a need for the organization to publicly absorb new elements, we shall speak of formal cooptation. This involves the establishment of openly avowed and formally ordered relationships. Appointments to official posts are made, contracts are signed, new organizations are established—all signifyiing participation in the process of decision and administration. There are two general conditions which lead an organization to resort to formal cooptation, though they are closely related:

1. When the legitimacy of the authority of a governing group or agency is called into