THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

A STUDY OF THE POLITICAL THEORY OF AMERICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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but greater, expansion in administrative activity, providing new material for analysis and speculation.

The Ideological Framework

Up to this point we have been trying to discern the relationship between American study of public administration and its material environment—economic, institutional, “historical,” and so forth. But the relationship of administrative study to the main currents of American thought during the past fifty years is equally important. In some measure the distinction between material and ideological environment is a false one. The relationship of ideas to the existential world is a matter of profound scientific and philosophical dispute; and in the above attempt to delineate the influence of “events” there has been occasional reference to ideology. However, it is assumed that ideas affect as well as reflect the course of events.

The choice of “dominant ideas” must be in some degree arbitrary, but both because of their widespread acceptance by the national community and their obvious influence upon writings on public administration the following are chosen for brief examination: the democratic ideal and related ideas such as the “mission of America,” the belief in “fundamental law,” the doctrine of progress and “progressivism,” the gospel of efficiency, and faith in science.8

Democracy and the Mission of America.—Democracy has long been not only the form of government for the people of America, but a faith and an ideal, a romantic vision. This has been peculiarly our form of patriotism, our form of spiritual imperialism. The “mission of America,” whether stated in religious terms or not, has been conceived as witnessing Democracy before mankind, bearing democracy’s ideals of freedom and equality, and its material blessings, to the nations of the world. Belief in this mission perhaps has become less widely and intensively held during the past fifty years. Nevertheless, the romantic vision of democracy has been dimmed remarkably little by our continued experience with “realistic democracy” and realpolitik. Of the general influence of the democratic ideal there can be no doubt.

How have the students of public administration fared with respect to this national Ideal? Have they allowed their devotion to scientific objectivity to cut themselves off from the national com-

8 On the American climate of opinion in the past century see R. H. Gabriel’s *Course of American Democratic Thought* (New York: 1940); and V. L. Parring-
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munity of sentiment? A few lines from one of the foremost of these students will suggest the answer: "One of the most inspiring movements in human history is now in progress. . . . A wave of organized democracy is sweeping around the world, based on a broader intelligence and a more enlightened view of civic responsibility than has ever before obtained. The theory that government exists for common welfare, that a public office is a public trust, is . . . old. . . . But responsibility for making this theory a vital principle in an empire whose sovereignty is abstractly conceived as residing in a hundred million souls and in which every officer of government is constitutionally a servant has not been considered with enough seriousness. . . ." These lines do more than suggest, they epitomize the answer to the problem: our students of administration have accepted the American faith and have made an heroic effort to realize this faith by improving our institutions.

This interpretation doubtless would appear wholly in error to those who think democracy incompatible with the extension of government services and instrumentalities—to the James M. Becks, the Ludwig von Miseses, and the Lawrence Sullivans. Nevertheless, American students of administration have not loved democracy the less, but the more, because of their critical attention to its institutions and their desire to extend its services. They have not loved it the less dearly when they have insisted that it be worthy of its mission abroad by being noble at home, and when they have concluded from viewing the international scene that democracy cannot compete with ethically inferior ideals without efficiency. If "The Devil has all the best tunes," it becomes necessary to plagiarize. Early writings are full of assurances that we can adopt the administrative devices of autocracy without accepting its spirit and its ends. Beginning with Wilson's famous essay it has often been confessed, to be sure, that the forms and ethos of democracy impose limitations

9 Of the Reform movement out of which public administration emerged there can be no doubt. Thus Dorman B. Eaton concludes his famous study of Civil Service in Great Britain (New York: 1880) with this appeal: "Thoughtful citizens . . . feel that the United States stand before the world as the original and noblest embodiment of the republican ideal in government. As the oldest and most powerful republican nation—as the example to which young republics turn for wisdom and experience—the character of public administration in the United States does not concern merely the growing millions of her own people, but the republican cause and the fate of free institutions in every quarter of the globe now and for ages to come. . . . No amount of scholarship will cover the disgrace to republican institutions of allowing the world to believe that republics must fall below monarchies in bringing high character and ability into places of public trust." 427-428.

10 F. A. Cleveland, Organized Democracy (New York: 1913), 438 (by permission of Longmans, Green & Co., Inc.).
upon the administrative process which test patience and ingenuity and make efficiency very difficult. But the obligation to reconcile democracy and efficiency has ever been accepted, never rejected.

More important than the fact that this obligation has always been accepted is the fact that in the Progressive era a political theory was evolved that made a virtue of the obligation. The dilemma of democracy versus efficiency was avoided by the formula that true democracy and true efficiency are not necessarily—perhaps not possibly—incompatible. The assumptions and syllogisms of this line of thought are familiar: Democracy means an intelligent and informed citizenry organized into groups, preferably as few as possible, on the basis of issues. To realize this condition the proper institutions, such as the short ballot, a merit system, a budget system and a reporting system must function.

The imperatives of specialization of function and adequate control must be observed in the modern world; it is the citizen’s proper function to learn, to judge, and to vote, while others specialize in actually running the business of government. In order for citizens to perform their functions adequately, machinery and issues must be simplified. Citizens must realize that there are two essentials in government: politics and administration, deciding and executing. When these two functions are properly separated and institutionalized it will be found that the resulting system is both democratic and efficient.

This attempt to summarize decades of political thought in a few lines may be somewhat distorting and unfair, but it is substantially correct. Until lately, administrative students have been generally concerned with excluding “democracy” from administration by making the latter unified and hierarchical, and with confining democracy to what is deemed to be its proper sphere, decision on policy. 11 It is only in more recent years that some writers have challenged the notion that politics and administration can be or should be separated and have urged that democracy is a way of life which must permeate the citizen’s working as well as his leisure hours.

The Fundamental Law.—The relationship of administrative study to the notion of a “fundamental law” is as important as its

relationship to democracy. It was widely and very firmly believed in the nineteenth century that there is a "higher law," a "fundamental moral order," upon which a firm and moral society must rest and in accordance with the rules of which it must be built. The nature and ultimate sanction of this fundamental order were differently conceived, according to the individual, but it was firm in our Christian heritage; and the "cosmic machine" of Newton and Descartes had become endowed with the moral sanctions and aura of this Christian tradition. As the century drew to a close, however, and especially as the present century has unfolded, the acids of modernity corrode this belief, and the "convention" view of law and justice has tended to come to the fore. The revival of humanism and neorationalism, the "socializing" of Protestant Christianity, the emergence of pragmatism, the rise of the so-called legal realists and the purging of natural law concepts from our jurisprudence, such events as these have marked our intellectual history since the Civil War.

From the beginning, students of public administration have been relatively sophisticated about higher law and the fundamentality of constitutional provisions and traditional institutions, about natural rights and the formulae of classical economics. These things they have generally rejected as the defense mechanisms of vested and antisocial interests, to be ignored or spurned. Yet it would be a serious mistake to suppose that American students have escaped the influence of the "higher law" notions widely accepted by the American community. Faith in democracy, already discussed, is just such an idea. To the extent that democracy has been thought superior and ultimate as a form of government and way of life, it has itself served as the higher law to which everything else must be referred; we have seldom permitted ourselves to doubt that democracy accords with the moral constitution of the universe. There is indeed a distinct aura of evangelical protestantism about the writings of the municipal and civil service reformers. They have always felt that moral issues are involved,¹² and until recently they have not hesitated to speak out on what they felt.

¹² Here is an example, chosen at random: "When I admit my belief that 'the principle of civil service reform' is one of high morality, I mean that all men who have sufficiently reflected and are sufficiently informed to entertain an intelligent opinion must and do think alike on the subject; that no one who has any claim at all to public attention really doubts that 'the principle of civil service reform' is just and beneficent; if he violates this 'principle' in official conduct, he does so, just as he may commit theft or adultery, knowing that he does wrong. I concede that there may be honest and enlightened difference of opinion as to the practical application of the principle . . . but these questions of policy have nothing to do with the principle of civil service reform." C. J. Bonaparte, Proceedings of the National Civil Service Reform League, 1889, 43-49, 43-44.
In other respects those who have produced our literature on public administration have adopted absolutist positions and insisted upon the moral imperatives of "the facts"; proposals for administrative change have too often hardened into "dogmas of administrative reform," propounded with solemnity and earnestness in the name of Science. But most important of all has been the manner in which the sanction of "principles" has been made to do duty for higher law.

Progress and Progressivism.—The past fifty years in America have been distinguished by a belief in the "doctrine of progress," so notably so that progress gave its name to an era. To be sure, the Great Wars dammed and diverted the rising stream, and most educated people now ease "progress" into their conversation in quotation marks. Still, in view of the fact that the "idea of progress" is peculiar to the modern world, the prevalence and intensity of the conviction among us has been a remarkable event in intellectual history; and it is pertinent to inquire how it has influenced administrative writers.

If the question is only: What has been the influence of the idea of progress? the answer, if not simple, must be brief. Americans, administrative students included, simply "accepted" progress—its reality and its desirability. It was a matter for apostrophe, not for argument. When in 1913 Woodrow Wilson exclaimed: "Progress! Did you ever reflect that the word is almost a new one? The modern idea is to leave the past and to press on to something new," he spoke for all the students and reformers who were writing and preparing to write on administrative subjects. His belief that man "by using his intellect can remake society, that he can become the creator of a world organized for man's advantage," has been a major premise which, though generally inarticulate, has fevered many brows and filled many pages.

But if the query is the broader one: What has been the influence of "Progressivism"? the answer is neither simple nor brief. For Progressivism was not an idea but a sheaf of ideas, old and new, and at times incompatible, held together by a buoyant faith in Progress. Progressivism found its basis in the old democratic faith, it was stimulated by the Muckrakers and the earnest efforts of Reformers, it attempted to bring ethical absolutism into the world of science, it recruited armies of Reform sworn to march in different directions into the Future, it found its highest expression in such men as Woodrow Wilson, Walter Weyl and Herbert Croly: it was
a welter of ideas given a momentary unity by a common basis of optimism.

At the very heart of Progressivism was a basic conflict in social outlook. This conflict was between those whose hope for the future was primarily that of a planned and administered society, and those who, on the other hand, remained firm in the old liberal faith in an underlying harmony, which by natural and inevitable processes produces the greatest possible good if the necessary institutional and social reforms are made.

This latter group felt a resurgence of primitive democratic feeling. They knew that man is pure at heart and was but thwarted and corrupted by bad institutions, that the realization of the ideal of the free individual depended upon restricting government and maintaining the open market. These persons believed that “the cure for democracy is more democracy,” and to that end they proposed such reforms as the initiative, the referendum, the recall, the direct election of senators, home rule, and proportional representation. They knew that the Future must well up from below. In opposition were those whose patience was exhausted waiting for the Promise of American Life to realize itself by natural and inevitable means, whose view of human nature was not so charitable and who had no faith in the devices of primitive democracy, who had begun to think of planning and who realized that builders need tools. These persons believed that democracy must re-think its position and re-mold its institutions; particularly it must create a strong right arm for the State in the form of an efficient bureaucracy. They knew that “the way to realize a purpose is not to leave it to chance,” and that the Future must be given shape from above.

This is oversimplification, but it is a valid and useful generalization in viewing the past half century in perspective. It is oversimplification because the two movements, the two views, have overlapped. Everyone but the rascals could agree to “turn the rascals out,” and “good government” is a formula wide enough to cover a multitude of differences. It is oversimplification also because formulae were evolved to bridge the gap between the two general trends; notably formulae reconciling “true democracy” with “true efficiency” were evolved by administrative writers and were accorded wide credence. Certainly the two viewpoints can be reconciled in the

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13 Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: 1909), 7. To convince himself of the reality of these two tendencies one need only attend a convention of the National Municipal League and go from a conference, say, on city planning, to a session of the Proportional Representation League.
realm of the ideal: an "ideal democracy" in which the citizens are all intelligent, educated, and of good will, so that very little authoritative direction is necessary, and when necessary is performed with economy and competence.\footnote{14} Some of the Progressives caught just such a vision and hence their insistence upon "citizenship" and their espousal of the ideal of "Efficient Citizenship." The Wisconsin of the elder La Follette and Charles McCarthy was a crude, earthly approximation of this Civitas Dei.

But although administrative students helped construct the most useful dialectic bridge between the two viewpoints, although they profess and believe in democracy, liberty and equality, they have generally accepted the alternative of a planned and managed society. This conclusion is obvious—axiomatic—but it is not so obvious as to preclude students of administration from often presuming that they labor in a sphere from which "values" have been excluded. American society is greatly in the debt of those who have given their time, energy and substance to improve administration. Still, it is in order to inquire whether, in narrowing their sphere of attention to administration only, students of administration did not also accept an unnecessary shrinking of their ideals. A society in which there are many "efficient citizens" must surely weigh heavier in the balance of American ideals than one in which there are only "trained administrators."\footnote{15} Undue attention to the "management" aspects

\footnote{14} See E. R. Lewis, A History of American Political Thought from the Civil War to the World War (New York: 1937), ch. 12, for a discussion of the different currents in Progressivism. Lewis says of the two broad trends I have sketched: "It might be thought that the contest was between efficiency and the democratic dogma. But I think it is fairer to say that, in a real sense, all were aspects of the same movement, all were attempts to obtain control of the political organization and make it responsive. . . ." 364-365. (By permission of The Macmillan Co., publishers.)

\footnote{15} The "efficient citizenship" movement of the Progressive era may have been futile, its ideal impossible. At any event we have been inclined in recent years to take a less generous view of the capabilities and potentialities of the "average citizen." It may be that the ideal of citizen participation through his sphere of expertise and by the medium of his professional group is all that can be salvaged from the larger ideal. But even this notion has generally remained undeveloped in favor of a vision of a trained, professional bureaucracy, ruling over a generally passive people. On the "efficient citizenship" movement see: J. D. Burks, "Efficiency Standards in Municipal Management." 1 Nat. Mun. Rev. (July, 1912), 364-371, 370-371; and Henry Brueer, The New City Government (New York: 1912), ch. 14.

The "efficient citizenship" idea is not completely dead. In the peroration of a recent address to budding administrators, M. E. Dimock allowed himself this optimistic sentiment: "Some time, perhaps, we may approach the ideal envisaged by James Bryce, when '. . . the average citizen will give close and constant attention to public affairs, . . . With such citizens as electors, the legislature will be composed of upright and capable men, single-minded in their wish to serve the nation. . . . Office will be sought only because it gives opportunities for useful public service. Power will be shared by all, and a career open to all alike.'" "Administrative Efficiency Within a Democratic Polity," New Horizons in Public Administration (University, Alabama: 1945), a symposium, 21-43, 43 (by permission of University of Alabama Press).
of group life in other eras has produced the not very lofty works of Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Mandeville.

The Gospel of Efficiency.—Every era, as Carl Becker has reminded us in his Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers, has a few words that epitomize its world-view and that are fixed points by which all else can be measured. In the Middle Ages they were such words as faith, grace, and God; in the eighteenth century they were such words as reason, nature, and rights; during the past fifty years in America they have been such words as cause, reaction, scientific, expert, progress—and efficient. Efficiency is a natural ideal for a relatively immature and extrovert culture, but presumably its high development and wide acceptance are due to the fact that ours has been, par excellence, a machine civilization. At any event, efficiency grew to be a national catchword in the Progressive era as mechanization became the rule in American life, and it frequently appears in the literature of the period entangled in mechanical metaphor.

However natural, it is yet amazing what a position of dominance "efficiency" assumed, how it waxed until it had assimilated or overshadowed other values, how men and events came to be degraded or exalted according to what was assumed to be its dictate. It became a movement, a motif of Progressivism, a "Gospel." 16 Some of the reasons for the acceptance of efficiency as a necessary objective and a sufficient criterion for governmental reform have already been suggested: fear of exhaustion of our natural resources; the urge to make America worthy of her Mission by those who, observing the frugality and dispatch of European autocracy, blushed for democracy's slattern ways; and simple fear for the future existence of American democracy when German efficiency moved Westward in 1914. 17 More fundamental is the fact that America was attempting to adjust old conceptions and traditional institutions to the require-

16 See Harrington Emerson, Efficiency as a Basis for Operation and Wages (New York: 1909), ch. 12, "The Gospel of Efficiency," for a remarkable apotheosis of efficiency. His remarkable credo was more extravagantly phrased, though fundamentally the same, as that of millions of his fellow citizens. See also, B. P. DeWitt, The Progressive Movement (New York: 1915) for an attempt at an analytical and objective statement of "The Efficiency Movement" (ch. 15) at the height of the Progressive movement.

17 At the climax of the First Great War, M. L. Cooke wrote as follows: "It has frequently been suggested during the past decade, and especially during the past four years of the war, that democracy is undergoing the test which shall determine whether it is to sweep over the world, or stagnate and finally perish. That test is based essentially on efficiency. Democracy, if it shall flourish, must be efficient..." From: Our City Awake, copyright 1918 by Doubleday & Co., Inc., 159. Cf. F. A. Cleveland. 2 National Economic League Quarterly, August, 1916, 9-16, 16.
ments of a machine technology, and efficiency came to symbolize the ideal of reconciliation. "A new era has come upon us like a sudden vision of things unprophesied, and for which no polity has been prepared," wrote Woodrow Wilson in 1901, reflecting on the confusion about him.18 Accepting efficiency as the essential ingredient, students of administration have tried to prepare a proper polity.

Faith in Science.—His powers and comforts daily increased by the agency of Science, the average American of the past generation has felt an almost limitless confidence in whatever bears the label of Science. The change in the externals of life was so amazing, the vistas of the future presented in the Sunday supplements so astounding that anything seemed possible; a Golden Age of peace and plenty for all seemed just a short distance across the years, an age in which the living might hope to end their days among its wonders—provided that death had not by then been rendered obsolete. It was the Great Engineer Hoover who visioned the "disappearance of poverty" in our lifetime. Naturally, the uninitiated—and often the initiated—looked with awe upon this Magic (even when, in War or Depression, they have thought it Black Magic), and "scientific" became an "honorary" word—even religion and ethics found it expedient to become scientific.

The contrast between the Brave New World that seemed so near, and the alarms and excursions, the pettiness and stupidities, the confusion and force of the world-at-hand stimulated many persons to ask, "Why?" Following the lead of many of the scientists and of most of the persons whose province of study was human affairs, they frequently concluded that the New Day would not dawn until science were applied to the realm of human affairs just as it had been to the physical world, until the "power-controlling sciences" were as well developed as the "power-producing sciences." An easy and unwarranted optimism abounded that at least a technique for solving these problems of group life, if not an actual answer to the problems themselves, lay hidden within the mystery of science.

So the humanities were re-named, new terminologies invented, new buildings raised, new endowments secured. Students and reformers of all kinds fell to making human relations and governmental practices scientific; the students by engaging in a new and recondite branch of inquiry called Scientific Methodology, and the reformers either by applying current conceptions of scientific method

or by the simpler method of putting a scientific wrapper on old nostrums. This faith in science and the efficacy of scientific method thoroughly permeates our literature on public administration. Science has its experts: so we must have "experts in government." Science relies upon exact measurement: so let the data of administration be measured. Science is concerned only with facts: so let the "facts" be sovereign. Science makes use of experiment: so let the mode of administrative advance be experimental.

Far from removing themselves from the realm of political theory, as many appear to believe, this devotion to a concept of reality called Science makes students of administration part of a well-known company of political theorists. Any political theory rests upon a metaphysic, a concept of the ultimate nature of reality. Students of administration, following a line of precedent which begins in the modern period with Hobbes, have simply been willing to accept the verdict of science—or more accurately, popular conceptions of the verdict of science—as to the nature of reality. It is appropriate to inquire whether these concepts of reality are consistent among themselves, whether they are valid within their proper realm, and whether, if valid, they have been extended beyond the bounds of their validity.