

The Science of Public Administration: Three Problems

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The effort to create a science of public administration has often led to the formulation of universal laws or, more commonly, to the assertion that such universal laws *could* be formulated for public administration! In an attempt to make the science of public administration analogous to the natural sciences, the laws or putative laws are stripped of normative values, of the distortions caused by the incorrigible individual psyche, and of the presumably irrelevant effects of the cultural environment. It is often implied that "principles of public administration" have a universal validity independent not only of moral and political ends, but of the frequently nonconformist personality of the individual, and the social and cultural setting as well.

Perhaps the best known expression of this kind is that of W. F. Willoughby. Although he refused to commit himself as to the propriety of designating administration as a science, Willoughby nevertheless asserted that "in administration, there are certain fundamental principles of general application analogous to those characterizing any science" "A more recent statement, and evidently an equally influential one, is L. Urwick's contention that "there are certain principles which govern the association of human beings for any purpose, just as there are certain engineering principles which go-

vern the buildings of bridge."³

Others argue merely that it is possible to discover general principles of wide, although not necessarily of universal validity.⁴ Surely this more modest assessment of the role of public administration as a study is not, as an abstract statement, open to controversy. Yet even the discovery of these more limited principles is handicapped by the three basic problems of values, the individual personality, and the social framework.

Public Administration and Normal Values

The first difficulty of constructing a science of public administration stems from frequent impossibility of excluding normative considerations from the problems of public administration. Science as such is not concerned with the discovery or elucidation of normative values; indeed, the doctrine is generally, if not quite universally, accepted that science *cannot* demonstrate moral values, that science cannot construct a bridge across the great gap from "is to "ought." So long as the naturalistic fallacy is a stumbling block to philosophers, it must likewise impede the progress of social scientists.

Much could be gained if the clandestine smuggling of moral values into the social sciences could be converted into open and honest commerce. Writers on public administration often assume that

1. See, for example, F. Merson, "Public Administration: A Science," 1 *Public Administration* 220 (1923); B. W. Walker Watson, "The Elements of Public Administration, A dogmatic Introduction," 10 *Public Administration* 397 (1932); L. Gulick, "Science, Values and Public Administration," *Papers on the Science of Administration*, ed. by Gulick & Urwick, (Institute of Public Administration, 1937); Cyril Renwick, "Public Administration: Towards a Science," *The Australian Quarterly* (March 1944), 73.

2. *Principles of Public Administration* (The Brookings Institution, 1927), Preface, p. ix.

3. See fn. 12, *infra*, for the full quotation and citation.

4. This I take to be Professor D. White's position. See his "The Meaning of Principles in Public Administration," in *The Frontiers of Public Administration* (University of Chicago Press, 1936), pp. 13-25.

ownership and the amount of real estate and its cash value. *He may, if they are snugly insulated from the storms of clashing values; usually, however, they are most concerned with ends at the very moment that they profess to be least concerned with them. The doctrine of efficiency is a case in point; it runs like a half-visible thread through the fabric of public administration literature as a dominant goal of administration.* Harvey Walker has stated that "the objective of administration is to secure the maximum beneficial result contemplated by the law with the minimum expenditure of the social resources" which⁵ is sufficiently ambiguous to allow for almost any interpretation, but it suggests that the general concept involved is one of maximizing "output" and minimizing "cost." Likewise, many of the promised benefits of administrative reorganization in state governments are presumed to follow from proposed improvements in "efficiency in operation." And yet, as Charles Hyne- man has so trenchantly observed, there are in a democratic society other criteria than simple efficiency in operation.⁶

Luther Gulick concedes that the goal of efficiency is limited by other values.

In the science of administration, whether public or private, the basic "good" is efficiency. The fundamental objective of the science of administration is the accomplishment of the work in hand with the least expenditure of man-power and materials. Efficiency is thus axiom number one in the value scale of administration. This brings administration into apparent conflict with certain elements of the value scale of politics, whether we use that term in its scientific or in its popular sense. But

both public administration and politics are branches of political science, so that we are in the end compelled to mitigate the pure concept of efficiency in the light of the value scale of politics and the social order.

He concludes nevertheless, "that these interferences with efficiency (do not) in any way eliminate efficiency as the fundamental value upon which the science of administration may be erected. They serve to condition and to complicate, but not to change the single ultimate test of value in administration."⁸

It is far from clear what Gulick means to imply in saying that "interferences with efficiency" caused by ultimate political values may "condition" and "complicate" but do not "change" the "single ultimate test" of efficiency as the goal of administration. Is efficiency the supreme goal not only of private administration, but also of public administration, as Gulick contends? If so, how can one say, as Gulick does, that "there are . . . highly inefficient arrangements like citizen boards and small local governments which *may* be necessary in a democracy as educational devices"? Why speak of efficiency as the "single ultimate test of value in administration" if it is not ultimate at all—if, that is to say, in a conflict between efficiency and "the democratic dogma" (to use Gulick's expression) the latter must prevail? Must this dogma prevail only because it has greater political and social force behind it than the dogma of efficiency; or ought it to prevail because it has, in some sense, greater value? How can administrations and students of public administration discriminate between those parts of the democratic dogma that are so strategic they ought to prevail in any conflict with efficiency and those that are essentially subordinate, irrelevant, or even

5. *Public Administration* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1937), p. 8.

6. "Administrative Reorganization," 1 *The Journal of Politics* 62-65 (1939).

7. *Op. cit.*, pp. 192-93.

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 193.

false intrusions into the democratic hypothesis? What is efficiency? Beisen and Dachau were "efficient" by one scale of values. According to what and whose scale of values is efficiency placed on the highest pedestal? Is not the worship of efficiency itself a particular expression of a special value judgment? Does it not stem from a mode of thinking and a special moral hypothesis resting on a sharp distinction between means and ends?

The basic problems of *public* administration as a discipline and as a potential science are much wider than the problems of mere *administration*. The necessarily wider preoccupation of a study of *public* administration, as contrasted with *private* administration inevitably enmeshes the problems of public administration in the toils of ethical considerations. Thus the tangled question of the right of public employees to strike can scarcely be answered without a tacit normative assumption of some kind. A pragmatic answer is satisfactory only so long as no one raises the question of the "rights" involved. And to resolve the question of rights merely by reciting *legal* norms is to beg the whole issue; it is to confess that an answer to this vital problem of public personnel must be sought elsewhere than with students of public administration. More over, if one were content to rest one's case on legal rights, it would be impossible to reconcile in a single "science of administration" the diverse legal and institutional aspects of the right to strike in France, Great Britain, and the United States.

The great question of responsibility, certainly a central one to the study of public administration once it is raised above the level of academic disquisitions on office management, hinges ultimately on some definition of ends, purposes, and values in society. The sharp conflict of views on responsibility expressed several years ago by Carl Friedrich and Herman Finer resulted from basically different interpretations of

the nature and purposes of democratic government. Friedrich tacitly assumed certain values in his discussion of the importance of the bureaucrat's "inner check," as an instrument of control. Finer brought Friedrich's unexpressed values into sharp focus and in a warm criticism challenged their compatibility with the democratic faith.⁹

It is difficult, moreover, to escape the conclusion that much of the debate over delegated legislation and administrative adjudication, both in this country and in England, actually arises from a concealed conflict in objectives. Those to whom economic regulation and control are anathema have with considerable consistency opposed the growth of delegated legislation and the expansion of the powers of administrative tribunals—no doubt from a conviction that previously existing economic rights and privileges are safer in the courts than in administrative tribunals; whereas those who support this expansion of administrative power and techniques generally also favor a larger measure of economic regulation and control. Much of the debate that has been phrased in terms of means ought more properly to be evaluated as a conflict over general social goals.

One might justifiably contend that it is the function of a science of public administration, not to determine ends, but to devise the best means to the ends established by those agencies entrusted with the setting of social policy. The science of public administration, it might be argued, would be totally non-normative, and its doctrines would apply with equal validity to any regime, democratic or totalitarian, once the ends were made clear. "Tell me what you wish to achieve," the public administration scientist might say, "and I will tell you what administrative means are best designed for your purposes." Yet even this view has difficulties, for in most societies, and particularly in democratic ones, ends are often in dis-

pute; rarely are they clearly and unequivocally determined. Nor can ends and means ever be sharply distinguished since ends determine means and often means ultimately determine ends.

The student of public administration cannot avoid a concern with ends. What he *ought* to avoid is the failure to make explicit the ends or values that form the groundwork of his doctrine. If purposes and normative considerations were consistently made plain, a net gain to the science of public administration would result. But to refuse to recognize that the study of public administration must be founded on some clarification of ends is to perpetuate the gobbledygook of science in the area of moral purposes.

A science of public administration might proceed, then, along these lines:

1. *Establishing a basic hypothesis.*

A nonnormative science of public administration might rest on a basic hypothesis that removed ethical problems from the area covered by the science. The science of public administration would begin where the *basic hypothesis* leaves off. One could quarrel with the moral or metaphysical assumption in the basic hypothesis; but all normative argument would have to be carried on at that level, and not at the level of the science. The science, as such, would have no ethical content.

Can such a basic hypothesis be created? To this writer the problem appears loaded with enormous and perhaps insuperable difficulties; yet it is unlikely that a science of public administration will ever be possible until this initial step is taken.

2. *Stating ends honestly.* Some pro-

blems of the public services, like that of responsibility, evidently cannot be divorced from certain ends implied in the society served by the public services. If this is true, there can never be a universal science of public administration so long as societies and states vary in their objectives. In all cases where problems of public administration are inherently related to specific social ends and purposes, the most that can be done is to force all normative assumptions into the open, and not let them lie half concealed in the jungle of fact and inference to slaughter the unwary.

Public Administration and Human Behavior

A second major problem stems from the inescapable fact that a science of public administration must be a study of certain aspects of human behavior. To be sure, there are parts of public administration in which man's behavior can safely be ignored; perhaps it is possible to discuss the question of governmental accounting and auditing without much consideration of the behavior patterns of governmental accountants and auditors. But most problems of public administration revolve around human beings; and the study of public administration is therefore essentially a study of human beings as they have behaved, and as they may be expected or predicted to behave, under certain special circumstances. What marks off the field of public administration from psychology or sociology or political institutions is its concern with *human behavior in the area of services performed by governmental agencies.*¹¹

This concern with human behavior greatly limits the immediate potentialities of a science of public administra-

9. C. J. Friedrich, "Public Policy and the Nature of Administrative Responsibility," in *Public Policy* (Harvard Press, 1940); Herman Finer, "Administrative Responsibility in Democratic Government," 1 *Public Administration Review* 335 (1940-41). See also Friedrich's earlier formulation, which touched off the dispute, "Responsible Government Service under the American Constitution," in *Problems of the American Public Service* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1935); and Finer's answer to Friedrich in 5 *1 Political Science Quarterly* 582 (1936).

10. See Aldous Huxley's discussion in *Ends and Means* (Harper & Bros., 1937), and Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar* (Macmillan Co., 1945).

tion. First, it diminishes the possibility of using experimental procedures; and experiment, though perhaps not indispensable to the scientific method, is of enormous aid. Second, concern with human behavior seriously limits the uniformity of data, since the datum is the discrete and highly variable man or woman. Third, because the data concerning human behavior constitute an incredibly vast and complex mass, the part played by the preference of the observer is exaggerated, and possibilities of independent verification are diminished. Fourth, concern with human action weakens the reliability of all "laws of public administration," since too little is known of the mainsprings of human action to insure certitude, or even high probability, in predictions about man's conduct.

All these weaknesses have been pointed out so often in discussing the problems of the social sciences that it should be unnecessary to repeat them here. And yet many of the supposed laws of public administration and much of the claim to a science of public administration derive from assumptions about the nature of man that are scarcely tenable at this late date.

The field of organizational theory serves as an extreme example, for it is there particularly that the nature of man is often lost sight of in the interminable discussions over idealized and abstract organizational forms. In this development, writers on public administration have been heavily influenced by the rational character that capitalism has imposed on the organization of production, and have ignored the irrational qualities of man himself.

Capitalism, especially in its industrial form, was essentially an attempt

to organize production along rational lines. In the organization of the productive process, the capitalistic entrepreneur sought to destroy the old restrictive practices and standards of feudalism and mercantilism; to rid the productive process of the inherited cluster of methods and technics that characterized the guilds and medieval craftsmen; in short, to organize production according to rational rather than traditional concepts. The rational approach to production transformed not only the whole economic process but society itself. The rapid growth of mechanization, routine, and specialization of labor further increased the technically rational quality of capitalist production. It was perhaps inevitable that concepts should arise which subordinated individual vagaries and differences to the ordered requirements of the productive process: for it was this very subordination that the replacement of feudal and mercantilist institutions by capitalism had accomplished. The organization (though not the control) of production became the concern of the engineer; and because the restrictive practices authorized by tradition, the protective standards of the guilds, the benevolent regulations of a mercantilist monarchy, and even the nonacquisitive ideals of the individual had all been swept away, it was actually feasible to organize production without much regard for the varying individual personalities of those in the productive process. The productive process, which to the medieval craftsman was both a means and an end in itself, became wholly a means.

11. See Ernest Barker's excellent and useful distinctions between state, government, and administration, in *The Development of Public Services in Western Europe, 1660-1930* (Oxford University Press, 1944), p. 3. Administration "is the sum of persons and bodies who are engaged, under the direction of government, in discharging the ordinary public services which must be rendered daily if the system of law and duties and rights is to be duly 'served'. Every right and duty implies a corresponding 'service'; and the more the State multiplies rights and duties, the more it multiplies the necessary services of its ministering officials." See also Leon Duguit, *Law in the Modern State* (B. W. Huebsch, 1919), Ch. II.

Ultimately, of course, men like Taylor provided an imposing theoretical basis for regarding function, based on a logical distribution and specialization of labor, as the true basis of organization. Men like Urwick modified and carried forward Taylor's work, and in the process have tremendously influenced writers on public administration. Urwick, so it must have appeared, provided a basis for a genuine science of administration. "There are principles," he wrote, "*which should govern arrangements for human association of any kind. These principles can be studied as a technical question, irrespective of the purpose of the enterprise, the personnel composing it, or any constitutional, political, or social theory underlying its creation.*"¹² And again "Whatever the motive underlying persistence in bad structure it is always more hurtful to the greatest number than good structure."¹³

Sweeping generalizations such as these gave promise of a set of "universal principles": i. e., a science. American students of public administration could not fail to be impressed.

Aside from the fact that Urwick ignored the whole question of ends, it is clear that he also presupposed (though he nowhere stated what sort of human personality he *did* presuppose) an essentially rational, amenable individual; he presupposed, that is to say, individuals who would accept logical organization and would not (for irrelevant and irrational reasons) rebel against it or silently supersede it with an informal organization better suited to their

personality needs. Urwick must have supposed this. For if there is a large measure of irrationality in human behavior, then an organizational structure formed on "logical" lines may in practice frustrate, anger, and embitter its personnel. By contrast, an organization not based on the logic of organizational principles may better utilize the peculiar and varying personalities of its members. Is there any evidence to suggest that in such a case the "logical" organization will achieve its purposes in some sense "better" or more efficiently than the organization that adapts personality need to the purposes of the organization?¹⁴ On what kind of evidence are we compelled to assume that the rationality of organizational structure will prevail over the irrationality of man?

Patently the contention that one system of organization is more rational than another, and therefore better, is valid only (a) if individuals are dominated by reason or (b) if they are so thoroughly dominated by technical process (as on the assembly line, perhaps) that their individual preferences may safely be ignored. However much the latter assumption might apply to industry (a matter of considerable doubt), clearly it has little application to public administration, where technical processes are, on the whole of quite subordinate importance. As for the first assumption, it has been discredited by all the findings of modern psychology. The science of organization had learned too much from industry and not enough from Freud.

12. L. Urwick, "Organization as a Technical Problem," *Papers on the Science of Administration*, p. 49 (Italics added.) See also his "Executive Decentralisation with Functional Co-ordination," 13 *Public Administration* 344 (1935), in which he sets forth "some axioms of organization," among others that "there are certain principles which govern the association of human beings for any purpose, just as there are certain engineering principles which govern the building of a bridge. Such principles should take priority of all traditional, personal or political considerations. If they are not observed, co-operation between those concerned will be less effective than it should be in realizing the purpose for which they have decided to co-operate. There will be waste of effort." (Italics added.) See also his criticisms of the "practical man fallacy," p. 346.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The more that writers on public administration have moved from the classroom to the administrator's office, the more Urwick's universal principles have receded. As early as 1930, in a pioneering work, Harold Lasswell described the irrational and unconscious elements in the successful and unsuccessful administrator.¹⁵ Meanwhile, experimenters in the Hawthorne plant of Western Electric Company were indicating beyond doubt that individual personalities and social relationships had great effects even on routinized works in industry. Increased output was the result of "the organization of human relations, rather than the organization of technics"¹⁶ Urwick had said (with little or no supporting evidence): "The idea that organizations could be built up round and adjusted to individual idiosyncracies, rather than that individuals should be adapted to the requirements of sound principles of organization, is . . . foolish. . . ." The Hawthorne experiment demonstrated, on the contrary, that " . . . no study of human situations which fails to take account of the non-logical social routines can hope for practical success."¹⁷

In 1939, Leonard White seriously qualified the principle of subordinating individuals to structure by adding the saving phrase of the neo-classical economists: "in the long run." "To what extent," he said, "it is desirable to rearrange structure in preference to replacing personnel is a practical matter to be determined in the light of special cases. In the long run, the demands of sound organization require the fitting of personnel to it, rather than sacrificing normal organization relationships to the needs or whims of individuals."¹⁸ In the same year, Macmahon and Millet went far beyond the customary deductive principles of public administration theory by making an actual biographical study of a number of federal administrators.¹⁹ In the most recent text on public administration, the importance of personality is frankly admitted. ". . . administrative research," say the authors, "does not seek its goal in the formulation of mechanical rules or equations, into which human behavior must be molded. Rather, it looks toward the systematic ordering of functions and human relationships so that organizational decisions can and will be based upon the certainty that each step taken will actually serve the purpose of the organization as a whole."²⁰ And one whole

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14. See John M. Gaus's excellent definitions: "Organization is the arrangement of personnel for facilitating the accomplishment of some agreed purpose through the allocation of functions and responsibilities. It is the relating of efforts and capacities of individuals and groups engaged upon a common task in such a way as to secure the desired objective with the least friction and the most satisfaction to those for whom the task is done and those engaged in the enterprise Since organization consists of people brought into a certain relationship because of a humanly evolved purpose, it is clear that it should be flexible rather than rigid. There will be constant readjustments necessary because of personalities and other natural forces and because of the unpredicted and unpredictable situations confronted in its operations." "A Theory of Organization in Public Administration," in *The Frontiers of Public Administration*, pp. 66-67.

15. *Psychopathology and Politics* (University of Chicago Press, 1930), Ch. 8 "Political Administrators".

16. L. J. Henderson, T. N. Whitehead, and Elton Mayo, "The Effects of Social Environment," in *Papers on the Science of Administration*, *op. cit.*, p. 149. It is worth noting that this essay properly interpreted contradicts the implicit assumption of virtually every other essay in that volume; and it is, incidentally, the only wholly empirical study in the entire volume.

17. Urwick, *op. cit.*, p. 85, and Henderson, *et al.*, p. 155. Urwick has set up a false dilemma that makes his choice more persuasive. Actually, the choice is not between (a) wholly subordinating organizational structure to individual personalities, which obviously might lead to chaos or (b) forcing all personalities into an abstractly correct organizational structure which might (and often does) lead to waste and friction. There is a third choice, (c) employing organizational structure and personalities to the achievement of a purpose. By excluding purpose, Urwick has, in effect, set up organization as an end in itself. An army may be organized more efficiently (according to abstract organizational principles) than the political structure of a de-

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chapter of this text is devoted to informal organizations—the shadow relationships that frequently dominate the formal structure of the organization.

Thus by a lengthy and circumspect rouse, man has been led through the back door and readmitted to respectability. It is convenient to exile man from the science of public administration; it is simpler to forget man and write with “scientific” precision than to remember him and be cursed with his maddening unpredictability. Yet his exclusion is certain to make the study of public administration sterile, unrewarding, and essentially unreal.

If there is ever to be a science of public administration it must derive from an understanding of man's behavior in the area marked off by the boundaries of public administration. This area, to be sure, can never be clearly separated from man's behavior in other fields; all the social sciences are interdependent and all are limited by the basic lack of understanding of man's motivations and responses. Yet the broad region of services administered by the government; until the manifold motivations and actions in this broad region have been explored and rendered predictable, there can be no science of public administration.

It is easier to define this area in space than in depth. One can arbitrarily restrict the prospective science of public administration to a certain region of human activity; but one can not say with certainty how deeply one must mine this region in order to uncover its secrets. Does concern with human behavior mean that the re-

searcher in public administration must be a psychiatrist and a sociologist? Or does it mean rather that in plumbing human behavior the researcher must be capable of using the investigations of the psychiatrist and sociologist? The need for specialization — a need, incidentally, which science itself seems to impose on human inquiry—suggests that the latter alternative must be the pragmatic answer.

Development of a science of public administration implies the development of a science of man in the area of services administered by the public. No such development can be brought about merely by the constantly reiterated assertion that public administration is already a science. We cannot achieve creating in a mechanized “administrative man” a modern descendant of the eighteenth century's rational man, whose only existence is in books on public administration and whose only activity is strict obedience to “universal laws of the science of administration.”

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND THE SOCIAL SETTING

If we know precious little about “administrative man” as an individual, perhaps we know even less about him as a social animal. Yet we cannot afford to ignore the relationship between public administration and its social setting.

No anthropologist would suggest that a social principle drawn from one distinct culture is likely to be transmitted unchanged to another culture; Ruth Benedict's descriptions of the Pueblo Indians of Zuñi, the Melanesians of Dobu, and the Kwatiutl Indians of

mocratic state, but no one except an authoritarian is likely to contend that it is a superior organization—*except for the purposes it is designed to achieve*. Yet once one admits the element of purpose, easy generalizations about organizational principles become difficult if not impossible; and the admission presupposes, particularly in the case of public organizations, a clear statement of end and purposes.

18. Leonard White, *Introduction to the Study of Public Administration* (Macmillan Co., 1939), p. 38.

19. A. W. Macmahon and J. D. Millet, *Federal Administrators* (Columbia University Press, 1939).

20. Fritz Morstein Marx, ed., *Elements of Public Administration* (Prentice-Hall, 1946), p. 49, (Italics added.)

Vancouver Island leave little doubt that cultures can be integrated on such distinctly different lines as to be almost noncomparable.²¹ If the nation-states of western civilization by no means possess such wholly contrasting cultures as the natives of Zuni, Dobu, and Vancouver Island, nevertheless few political scientists would contend that a principle of political organization drawn from one nation could be adopted with equal success by another; one would scarcely argue that federalism has everywhere the same utility or that the unitary state would be equally viable in Britain and the United States or that the American presidential system would operate unchanged in France or Germany.

There should be no reason for supposing, then, that a principle of public administration has equal validity in every nation-state, or that successful public administration practices in one country will necessarily prove successful in different social, economic, and political environment. A particular nation-state embodies the results of many historical episodes, traumas, failures, and successes which have in turn created peculiar habits, mores, institutionalized pattern of behavior, *Weltschmerzen*, and even "national psychologies."²² One cannot assume that public administration can escape the effects of this conditioning; or that it is somehow independent of and isolated from the culture or social setting in which it develops. At the same time, as value can be gained by a comparative study of government based upon a due respect for differences in the political, social, and economic environment of nation-states, so too the comparative study of public administration ought to be rewarding. Yet the comparative aspects of public administration have

largely been ignored; and as long as the study of public administration is not comparative, claims for "a science of public administration" sound rather hollow. Conceivably there might be a science of American public administration and a science of British public administration and a science of French public administration; but can there be "a science of public administration" in the sense of a body of generalized principles independent of their peculiar national setting?

Today we stand in almost total ignorance of the relationship between "principles of public administration" and their general setting. Can it be safely affirmed, on the basis of existing knowledge of comparative public administration, that there are *any* principles independent of their special environment?

The discussion over an administrative class in the civil service furnishes a useful example of the difficulties of any approach that does not rest on a thorough examination of developmental and environmental differences. The manifest benefits and merits of the British administrative class have sometimes led American students of public administration to suggest the development of an administrative class in the American civil services; but proposals of this kind have rarely depended on a thorough comparison of the historical factors that made the administrative class a successful achievement in Britain, and may or may not be duplicated here. Thus Wilmerding has virtually proposed the transfer to the United States of all the detailed elements in the British civil service; although he does not explicitly base his proposals
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23. Lucius Wilmerding, Jr., *Government by Merit* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1935).

24. "The British civil service, which the whole world now admires, went through nearly twenty years of transition before its foundations even were properly laid. It went through another twenty years of gradual adjustment before the modern service as we know it today was fully in operation . . . In the light of British experience, and by taking advantage of modern knowledge about large-scale organization, we can easily save the twenty years in which the British were experimenting to find the proper basis for their splendid service. We shall, however, need ten years of steady growth, consciously guided and planned, to put a new administrative corps into operation, and probably another ten years before it is completely installed." *Government Career Service* (University of Chicago Press, 1935), p. 8.

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on British experience except in a few instances, they follow British practices with almost complete fidelity.²³ White has likewise argued for the creation of an "administrative corps" along the lines of the British administrative class. He has suggested that reform of the civil service in Britain and creation of an administrative class were accomplished in little more than two generations; profiting by British experience, he argues, we ought to be able to accomplish such a reform in even shorter time.²⁴ Since the question of an administrative class is perhaps the outstanding case where American writers on public administration have employed the comparative method to the extent of borrowing from foreign experience, it is worthy of a brief analysis to uncover some of the problems of a comparative "science of public administration." For it shows into stark perspective the fundamental difficulties of drawing universal conclusions from the institutions of any one country, and at the same time sharply outlines the correlative problem of comparing the institutions of several nations in order to derive general principles out of the greater range of experiences.

The central difficulty of universal generalization may be indicated in this way: An administrative class based on merit rests upon four conditions. All of these prerequisites were present coincidentally in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century; and none of them is

present in quite the same way here.

First of all, an administrative class of the British type rests upon a general political acceptance of the hierarchical idea. This acceptance in Britain was not the product of forty years; it was the outcome of four centuries. It is not too much to say that it was the four centuries during which the public service was the particular prerogative of the upper classes that made a hierarchical civil service structure feasible in Britain. The Tudor monarchy had rested upon a combination of crown power administered under the King by representatives of the upper middle and professional classes in the town and newly created members of the gentry in the country; Tudor authority was in effect derived from an alliance of King and upper middle classes against the aristocracy. From the Revolution of 1688 until 1832, public service was the special domain of an increasingly functionless aristocracy whose monopoly of public office was tacitly supported by the upper middle classes of the cities. Whatever the Reform Bill of 1832 accomplished in terms of placing the urban oligarchy overtly in office, no one in Britain had many illusions that a change in the hierarchical structure of politics and public service was entailed. The upper middle classes were no more keen than were the landed gentry of the eighteenth century to throw open the doors of public service and politics to "the rabble." Out of this long historic background the idea of an administrative class emerged. The unspoken political premises of the dominant groups

25. Significantly, the most recent study of reform of the American civil service states, "We do not recommend the formation of a specially organized administrative corps for which a special type of selection and training is proposed." *Report of President's Committee on Civil Service Improvement* (Government Printing Office, 1941), p. 57. Instead, the Committee recommends that "all positions whose duties are administrative in nature, in grades CAF-11, P-4, and higher . . . be identified as an occupational group within the existing classification structure." This is a noteworthy step in an attempt to achieve the advantages of an administrative class within the framework of American mores and institutions. It is therefore a great advance over the earlier proposal in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel, *Better Government Personnel* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1935), which recommended the outright creation of a distinct administrative class (p. 30).

26. This was the essential point, stated in more specific terms, of Lewis Meriam's criticism of the administrative corps idea. See his excellent *Public and Special Training* (University of Chicago Press, 1936).

27. It is noteworthy that the latest U. S. Civil Service Commission announcement for the junior professional assistant examination (November, 1946) follows.

in the nation reflected an acceptance of hierarchy in the social, economic, and political structure of Britain; the contention, common in the American scene, that an administrative class is "undemocratic" played no real part in mid-nineteenth century Britain. One may well question whether it would be easy to create an administrative class in any society, like the American, where egalitarianism is so firmly rooted as a political dogma; however desirable such a class may be, and however little it may actually violate the democratic ideal, one is entitled to doubt that the overt creation of an administrative elite is a practical possibility in American politics.²⁵ In any case, the idea must be fitted into the peculiar mores and the special ethos of the United States, and cannot be lightly transferred from Britain to this country.²⁶

Second, the administrative class idea rests upon a scholastic system that creates the educated nonspecialist, and a recruiting system that selects him. Too often, the proposal has been made to recruit persons of general rather than specialized training for an "administrative corps" without solving the prior problem of producing such "generalists" in the universities. The British public school system and the universities have long been dominated by the ideal of the educated gentlemen; and for centuries they have succeeded admirably in producing the "generalist" mind, even when that mind is nourished on apparently specialized subjects. It is a peculiarly British paradox that persons of high general ability are recruited into the civil service by means of examinations that heavily weight such specialties as classical languages and mathematics. In so far as this country has an educational ideal (a question on which this writer speaks with considerable trepidation), it appears to be, or to have been, the ideal of the specialist. Much more is involved, too, than a question of education; at base the problem is one of social mores that give the specialist a prestige and a social utility that no person of general education is likely to attain. That the recruiting process has been forced to adapt itself to the educational

specialization characteristic of American universities (indeed, one might say of American life) is scarcely astonishing. It would be more astonishing if the Civil Service Commission were able to recruit nonexistent "generalists" to perform unrecognized functions within a corps of practitioners where almost everyone regards himself as a subject-matter specialist.²⁷

In the third place, the administrative class idea rests upon the acceptance of merit as the criterion of selection. In Britain this acceptance was no mere accident of an inexplicable twenty-year change in public standards of morality. If patronage disappeared in Britain, it was partly because patronage had ceased to have any real function, whereas efficiency had acquired a new social and political utility. Prior to the nineteenth century, patronage had two vital functions: it provided a place for the sons of the aristocracy who were excluded from inheritance by primogeniture; and it placed in the hands of the King and his ministers a device for guaranteeing, under the limited franchise of the eighteenth century, a favorable House of Commons. Both these factors disappeared during the first decades of the nineteenth century. With the expansion of the electorate after 1832, the monarchy was forced to withdraw from politics, or risk the chance of a serious loss of prestige in an electorate that was now too large to control. Meanwhile, the development of dissolution as a power available to the Prime Minister upon his request from the Crown gave the executive a means of party discipline and control far more effective than the promise of office. Finally, the accession to power of the manufacturing and trading classes by the reforms of 1832 placed a new emphasis on efficiency, both as a means of cutting down public expenses and insuring economies in government, and (especially after 1848) of warding off the revolutionary threat that might develop out of governmental incompetence.²⁹ All these conditions make possible, and perhaps inevitable, the substitution of merit for patronage. To talk as if reform arose out of some

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change in public morality, obscure and mysterious in origin but laudable in character, is to miss the whole significance of British reforms. In the present-day politics of the United States, it is not so clear that the utility of patronage has disappeared; under the American system of separation of powers, patronage remains almost as useful as it was under the British constitution of the eighteenth century. And in any case, it is self-evident that the problem here lies in a distinctly different political and social setting from that of Victorian England.

Last, a successful administrative class rests upon the condition that such a group possesses the prestige of an elite; for unless the class has an elite status, it is in a poor position to compete against any other elite for the brains and abilities of the nation. It is one thing to offer a *career* in a merit service; it is quite another to insure that such a service has enough prestige to acquire the best of the nation's competence. The argument that the mere creation of an administrative class would be sufficient to endow that group with prestige in the United States may or may not be valid; it is certainly invalid to argue that this was the casual sequence in Britain. In assessing the ability of the British civil service to recruit the best products of the universities, one can scarcely overlook the profound significance of the fact that for centuries the public service was one of the few careers into which a member of the aristocracy could enter without loss of prestige. Like the church, the army, and politics, and unlike trade and commerce, public service was a profession in which the aristocracy could engage without violating the mores of the class. Even during the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, when the burden of incompetence and patronage in the public service was at its heaviest, government was a field into which the social elite could enter without a diminution of prestige, and often enough without even a loss in leisure. Throughout the age of patronage, the British public

service succeeded in obtaining some of the best of Britain's abilities. The effect of the reforms after 1853 was to make more attractive a profession that already outranked business and industry in prestige values. In Britain, as in Germany, the psychic income accruing from a career in the civil service more than compensates for the smaller economic income. Contrast this with the United States, where since the Civil War prestige has largely accrued to acquisitive successes. It is small wonder that in the United States the problem of government competition with business for the abilities of the community should be much more acute.

If these remarks about the British administrative class are well founded, then these conclusions suggest themselves:

1. Generalizations derived from the operation of public administration in the environment of one nation-state cannot be universalized and applied to public administration in a different environment. A principle *may* be applicable in a different framework. But its applicability can be determined only after a study of that particular framework.

2. There can be no truly universal generalizations about public administration without a profound study of varying national and social characteristics impinging on public administration, to determine what aspects of public administration, if any, are truly independent of the national and social setting. Are there discoverable principles of *universal* validity, or are all principles valid only in terms of a special environment?

3. It follows that the study of public administration inevitably must become a much more broadly based discipline, resting not on a narrowly defined knowledge of techniques and processes, but rather extending to the varying historical, sociological, economic, and other conditioning factors that give public administration its peculiar stamp in each country.

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