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FRONTIERS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

by Alfred de Grazia

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SUMMARY

In this paper Dr. Alfred de Grazia, president of the Foundation for Voluntary Welfare, editor of the journal Political Research: Organization and Design (PROD), and author of The American Way of Government, Human Relations in Public Administration and other works, warns against technical virtuosity without substance in administrative research. He names three areas as especially requiring attention: government participation in social science, uncontrolled expansion of governmental activity, and the development of new forms of human organization for large-scale functions. Dr. de Grazia proposes that in every major agency of the government there be set up an "Anti-agency Accelerator" to study and report annually to Congress on means of decreasing the agency's scope and devolving its activities to private and decentralized units. He further advises against the enthusiastic endorsement of government support for the social sciences, particularly if that support is to be managed by an agency in the executive branch of government. He declares instead that a better form of administering national aid would be through easing existing obstacles to private research development or by setting up any necessary national foundation of social science as part of the Congress-controlled Library of Congress.

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(TEXT)

Advances in public administration theory and research come about both through technical and through substantive development. The "technical" includes new methods of studying human behavior in administrative situations; "substantive" development includes the study of new forms of organizing human behavior in administration. There have been almost no new techniques developed since World War II, even though the vast majority of applications have come since then. The survey method has been improved and perfected. The importance for the conduct of administration of the consumer behavior surveys of George Katona and the Survey Research Center of the University of Michigan is manifested in such early warning signals on the present recession as were given by the Center to the Federal Reserve Board.

The classification and analysis of data has also benefited from detailed improvements following up the early electronics revolution of the thirties and the War. As with surveys, applications lag somewhat, not so much perhaps for the giant machines, which are sometimes oversold, as for the rather rudimentary sorting and counting machines, even and especially including hand-punched and needle-sorted card systems, without which no administrative office can be complete.

Moreover, the age-old concern of political science with every action of a ruling group has descended to us in the form of the science of decision-making, which, depending heavily upon case studies, has brought to the fore and clarified numerous facets of public policy. I might cite, for example, a recent work by Alan Keith-Lucas, entitled Decisions about People in Need, a study of administrative responsiveness in public assistance.

Yet, to conclude, the improvement of technique is in the details. One need only peruse the entries in Lasswell, Casey, and Smith's annotated bibliography on propaganda, communications, and public opinion to make this observation, or to glance at my own annotated bibliography on Human Relations in Public Administration, written nearly ten years ago, to reinforce the impression.

I am not apologizing for this condition. Indeed I believe there are inevitably these necessary "administrative" and "deductive" periods following major new conceptions of a science. They are the way a science picks up flesh and muscle to force change upon the environment. If I have a complaint to make, it is not about the remarkable gadgeteering that has moved out along the major lines of methodological innovation.

My complaint would be directed at the stagnation of our pool of social data and secondly at the absence of a true sense of substance in the theoretical branches of social science, particularly in the science of administration.

The gathering of data on human behavior including its administrative sub-branch is far behind the needs and capacities of our science. We ought to ask an immense variety of well-chosen and well-phrased questions of representative samples of many general and special populations. Those epoch-making inventions--the sample, the standardized questionnaire and interview, and content analysis--should be used many times more frequently than at present. I am far from agreeing with those who say we have had too much of interviews and questionnaires and sample surveys; we have had too many bad ones, true, but one of the very reasons for some of the bad ones is the lack of funds and scope to the studies undertaken. Just as they give every budding young physicist a cyclotron nowadays, we ought to give every promising young social scientist a free ride on a national survey every couple of years. The library profession needs to be shaken from its cloth-bound snobbishness and to collect data that is live and useful. Just as one example, try to find a collection of the literature of political campaigns, yet think of all the generalizations that are made about political propaganda.

Am I suggesting a fantastic overloading of an already burdened small group of researchers? The group, true, is small, numbering only a few thousands, but they are underemployed. They are like the American labor force whose output has been shown to depend so greatly upon the machinery put into its hands. And, to pursue the analogy, why is it that giant million-dollar cranes are entrusted to grade-school educated operators while a university administration may regard a professor as a nuisance for wasting money to broadcast his questions to many informants instead of one?

However, overloading the research force would not seem to be a dangerous problem if our researchers studied more important problems than they do. This indeed is a major element of my presentation here. Though the army has many merits and I am proud to have given it several of the best years of my life, I

should not include among them that of using manpower under a master priority system as that term is ordinarily understood. Its frequently comical practices of having many men policing grounds and shining equipment while beseeching more men for other tasks, illustrates my point. We have too many leaf-rakers and car-polishers, ranging from the merely descriptive putterer to the mere technician.

What we need much more are persons willing and able to dare new hypotheses, and to base their researches upon them. This holds whether we mean pure or applied research (there is precious little meaning to these terms in either natural or social science). We need men to ask abstract and useless questions, and we need men to propose highly practical reforms backed by factual research. And I must say in candor that public administration is more needful of novel and courageous hypotheses than most fields. In public administration too many of our best minds are occupied by technical or banal questions. I am reminded of how much ingenuity and study went into the best can-opener for a combat soldier but how little attention was long paid the fact that half the soldiers were refusing consciously or unconsciously to fire at the enemy. True, more cans than soldiers were involved in the two types of researches, so the can-opener was a discovery of innumerable if narrow applications. But the results of the research on the psychology of combat were much more vital to the army, the country, the future of the world, and the development of the theory of general sociology.

So it is in administration. I can suggest several problem-areas where research of a high order is needed, but I guess many here would have to resign their jobs in order to conduct the work.

One of the subjects is the devolution of bureaucracy. If it be true that bureaucracy is one of man's greatest inventions, it is equally true that the greater invention remains to be made, and that is how to get rid of a bureaucracy.

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To clarify the point as well as to suggest where the unknown great inventor might turn, let me suggest a new institution, the Anti-Agency Accelerator.

The Romans developed the institution of the tribune of the people to protest oppressive actions on the part of the oligarchy of government. The modern state has never developed means of protesting actions and activities of the government on any institutionalized and regularized basis. The legislature is a fire-brigade almost all of the time. The political executive is usually interested in appeasing the massive bureaucracy. Hence we need a study of the possibilities of a new institution in the government that would constitute a permanent section of a division in every government agency, directed at the devolution of the activity of the agency. It would be within but independent of the agency. It would have full recourse to agency files and materials. It would provide an annual report and recommendations on what it thinks of the agency's budget, on activities that might be discontinued, on activities that might be devolved to other local levels of government, on activities that might be privatized and voluntarized, on activities that might be decentralized. Thus we would have a compulsory and free reporting by an agency in a position and with an obligation to know and to report, and a drive for private conversion would be inserted into all government agencies by means of a special staff charged with the obligation. Such would be the Anti-Agency Accelerator.

A second subject for fundamental research is the field of representation. All of politics--and that stretches a long way into administration and the law--can be pictured as a representative system in which certain values and interests are permitted, fostered, or discriminated against. Yet the history of politics and of representative government is a collection of hackneyed tales: the plot: an idea of representing a new interest is born, it develops support, it becomes an idée fixe, structures itself into the government and then is well-nigh unchangeable. True, the sequence of events may be a law of man's nature. But

if it isn't, we'd be a lot better off and the least we can do as political scientists is to keep studying and testing this alleged "natural law." My personal impression is that there is a host of true representative arrangements, ranging from the most rigid and formal to the quite unknown and fluid, and that we would in time acquire considerable social control over the degree of fluidity and variety in the representative system.

But first we need studies: there is no inventory of the myriad formal devices of representation of private interests in American national and local government. (An easy instance known to all would be the use of the Bar Association in various plans of selecting state judges.) There is furthermore no accounting within the framework of representation of the innumerable informal groups, of which the lobbies are only the most extrusive examples. There is no authoritative compendium and analysis of the striking development of many kinds of mixed authorities in the United States and abroad. A well-known example is the New York Port Authority; many others remain to be unearthed, as for instance a mental health clinic in Kansas City that is organized by private, professional, foundation, municipal, county, State, and federal personnel and funds. The veritable future of government is evolving beneath our feet while we gesticulate in the dialectic of the 17th century.

Yet a final frontier for administrative research may be indicated. That is the area of government and science. Let us call science knowledge systematically wrought and then we wish to know, how does government relate to the man of knowledge? It is that simple and broad a question.

In my capacity as editor and publisher of PROD, I have carefully audited the post-Sputnik exclamations, declamations, and explanations. The natural scientists have been plunged into a love-affair with the mass media. The educators have whistled up the affair like a prospective mother-in-law. And the social scientists skulk about like disconsolate suitors, with a fading bunch of violents in hand.

What has happened is that the problems of an organization are always two-fold--administrative and subject-centered--and the Sputnik crisis was a fine example of both. Yet the man of science was supposed to know not only how to shoot a rocket into space but how to organize the economy and government to permit him to do so. This is too much to ask even of 100%, red-blooded, star-spangled, naturalized Americans.

However the example of the Sputnik unreasonableness serves here to support the observation that we had better pay a great deal of attention to how science or knowledge can be hitched to government. The men of clearly specialized subject-matter knowledge are the worst sinners in this regard. The natural scientists hardly give a thought to the social scientists. The sociologists, psychologists, economists, anthropologists, and social work specialists hardly give a thought to administrative behavior or some even broader implications of political theory.

Thus an important manifesto was published on February 8 by a group of fifteen social and medical scientists entitled "National Support for Behavioral Science." Let us ignore the kinds of research recommended for support, although there is much to ruminate in that regard. Rather, let two structural recommendations or implications be considered. First, without even a deep breath, these distinguished colleagues leaped aboard the ship of State. Apparently no one has any responsibility these days for asking whether an activity should be added to the great many already engaged in by government. They didn't ask questions of means. They seemed committed to national support of the behavioral sciences, although numerous and grave objections can be delivered to governmental support of science, particularly social science.

In the second place, it probably did not occur to our distinguished colleagues that the specific mode of governing the proposed new research was in

itself a most important problem. The implications are that science, if it is going to be State-supported, can only be organized in the executive branch of government. Though this may be true with respect to many kinds of science, it is less true the broader, more abstract and searching the scientific work, whether in the natural or the behavioral sciences.

Now it is my opinion that the behavioral sciences, except for bread-and-butter research, should not be joined to the executive branch of the government, but ought to be an appendage of Congress. There is ultimately less political danger in such an arrangement. There is greater control of expenditures and program. There is greater expression of the needs of the local academic institutions of this large country. There is room for more deviant hypotheses and research personnel. There is greater sympathy for some types of political and administrative research. What is more, there would be less suspicion vented upon the research programs if the Congress better understood them. The Library of Congress and the Legislative Reference Service are already two research instrumentalities of Congress. The National Foundation of Social Science might be fit readily into an autonomous relation to these and to Congress.

I believe this arrangement would not only provide greater freedom from the dangers of statism when science is bureaucratized, but that a richer social science would be encouraged by association with the highest general legislative bodies of the government. Although Congress may often seem to us to be disappointingly cold toward factual investigation and systematic analysis of human problems, we should not forego any and all attempts to change this condition. In the long perspective of American government, it is better to have one Congressman request and vote support for a study of social problems than to have ten minor executives of the administration do the same. Social scientists may feel more assured and secure tucked away in the nooks and crannies of the National

Science Foundation, but they would develop stronger wills, keener senses of the important hypotheses, and more vivid imaginations if they worked a little nearer to the legislative halls. Political scientists are well adapted to considering organizational problems of this genre. It has been my fortune to live in widely separated areas of America and to observe politics in each place. I have noted that there is a general tendency of academicians to know something about the Presidency but nothing about Congress. However, political scientists, because they are more intimate with the political process, have much less fear and dislike of the legislature than their more naive colleagues. Perhaps there is some significance in the fact that not one of the fifteen behavioral scientists issuing the manifesto was a political scientist.

Time permits no further expansion of these views, but I am satisfied that I have put a preliminary case before you. I believe we have some very important political-administrative research frontiers that require exploration and development. More than the extension of technical devices, and equally as important as the gathering of more systematic and standardized data, these substantive areas promise greater orientation to and control of the administrative and political processes of our time.