

THE AMBIGUITY OF EXPERTISE IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE STATE

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Abstract: When the modern administrative state emerged in America during the Progressive Era, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was typically grounded on the premise that administrative officials are experts who should be insulated from politics. This theory, combined with emerging ideas of scientific management, contributed to the intellectual justification for the administrative state. However, progressives never fully reconciled the tension between this theory and the democratic nature of American politics. Because of this ambiguity and tension in the progressives' theory of expertise, the politics/administration dichotomy was abandoned shortly after the administrative state was constructed. The place of expertise in the administrative state is still ambiguous, even in the twenty-first century.

KEY WORDS: administrative state, expertise, progressivism, politics/administration dichotomy, Walter Lippmann, Frederick Taylor, Herbert Croly, John Dewey

I. INTRODUCTION

The question of “who rules” is a perennial and fundamental question in political philosophy. Political theorists have advanced various responses to this question: virtue, wealth, consent, heredity, divine right, or the *demos*. The American Progressives were among the first to say that science should rule, and therefore that the expert who possesses scientific knowledge should be given political authority. The administrative state that the Progressives constructed was premised upon the rule of expertise.

But the notion of rule by expertise raises several important questions. What is expertise and what does it mean to possess it? Why does expertise have a superior claim to rule than its rivals? More practically, who is an expert and how can they be trained, cultivated, and identified? And perhaps most critically, what should be the relationship between expertise and policy-making?

The Progressives who constructed the administrative state never fully answered these questions in theory and practice. They posited the rule of organized expertise but left the precise role of expertise ambiguous. While they were highly confident in the role experts could play in making policy decisions, they either disagreed about or left unanswered the important questions about how expertise could be supplied and organized within the American constitutional system. Specifically, they never provided an adequate account of the relationship between expertise and policy

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making. Their most famous approach to this issue, the “politics/administration dichotomy,” simply said that expertise and politics should remain separate and that politics sets goals that administrative expertise implements. But that dichotomy was not precise enough to serve as a workable principle, and it was abandoned shortly after the Progressives formulated it.

In short, the principle of rule by experts occupies a central but ambiguous place in the Progressives’ political theory, and in the administrative state that they founded. This essay describes the Progressives’ writings and views on the idea of expert rule in the administrative state. It then explains how the ambiguity in that idea led to political and theoretical problems that Progressives never fully resolved. These problems occupied and divided Progressives during the 1912 presidential election and throughout the 1910s and 1920s. The New Deal saw Progressives abandon the idea of neutral expertise in favor of a theory of presidential management of administration, and scholars of political science and public administration largely abandoned the separation of politics and administration by the mid-twentieth century. This leaves the place of expertise in the administrative state unclear still today. The administrative state requires both neutral expertise and democratic legitimacy but has never fully reconciled the tensions between these principles.

II. THE PROGRESSIVE THEORY OF EXPERTISE AND ITS POLITICAL ROLE

The Progressives who supported the creation of the administrative state in the early twentieth century were filled with optimism for the capacity of expertise to solve modern problems. Rarely, however, were they explicit about the specific meaning they attributed to the term “expertise.” Scholars are left to infer such a definition from the various pronouncements that Progressive reformers made during the period in which they were writing and acting.

Progressives were not monolithic in their approach to the question of expertise. Although they differed in emphasis and formulation, their arguments were largely consistent. As this section explains, two theories of administrative expertise predominated among Progressive theorists. The first advocated the separation of politics and administration, while the second aimed to make government more efficient through implementing principles of scientific management.

A. The separation of politics and administration

The Progressive notion of expertise can be traced to Woodrow Wilson’s famous article, which has been credited as having launched the field of public administration itself. In 1887, Wilson wrote “The Study of Administration,” which Dwight Waldo has labeled “*the* most important

document in the development of the field" of public administration.¹ Wilson previewed what he called "a fuller administrative reform" of which civil service reform is "but a prelude." Administrative reform, he continued, would aim to "adjust executive functions more fitly" and "prescribe better methods of executive organization and action." In short, Wilson concluded, civil service would have to become "businesslike," not simply "unpartisan."²

Both Woodrow Wilson and Frank Goodnow famously described the separation of politics and administration in similar terms. As Wilson described it, "administration lies outside the proper sphere of *politics*. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices."³ "The field of administration," he emphasized, "is a field of business. It is removed from the hurry and strife of politics It is a part of political life only as the methods of the counting-house are a part of the life of society; only as machinery is part of the manufactured product."⁴ Goodnow explained the distinction less colorfully: "there are two distinct functions of government, and their differentiation results in a differentiation, although less complete, of the organs of government These two functions of government may for purposes of convenience be designated respectively as Politics and Administration. Politics has to do with policies or expressions of the state will. Administration has to do with the execution of these policies."⁵ Wilson and Goodnow emphasized the distinction between politics and administration, and the neutrality of administration. Administration, in their view, was about (in Wilson's words) "machinery" rather than judgment. It pertained to execution of will, in Goodnow's formulation, rather than expression of will.

Consequently, in their view, the separation of politics and administration would require the creation of an administrative branch that would be removed from politics, staffed by experts rather than elected representatives. In particular, Wilson asserted, the executive branch would have to be organized "by sending up to the competitive examinations for the civil service men definitely prepared for standing liberal tests as to technical knowledge. A technically schooled civil service will presently have become indispensable."⁶ The notion of technical competence was therefore central to the progressive theory of expertise. What, precisely, did Progressives mean when they talked about technically schooled experts? When they addressed this question, Progressives focused on ideas of efficiency and

¹ Dwight Waldo, *The Enterprise of Public Administration: A Summary View* (Novato, CA: Chandler and Sharp, 1980), 10 (emphasis in original).

² Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* 2 (1887): 210.

³ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 209-210.

⁵ Frank J. Goodnow, *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government* (New York: Macmillan, 1900), 18.

⁶ Wilson, "Study of Administration," 216.

scientific and specialized knowledge, as well as the crafting of experts in newly created universities.

B. Efficiency and scientific management

The publication of Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* in 1911 marked a watershed moment in the Progressive Era. Taylor is often overlooked as a significant Progressive-Era thinker because he was a mechanical engineer by trade rather than a political theorist. Nevertheless, his ideas formed the basis of the efficiency movement, and his influence is still acknowledged today by public administration theorists.

Taylor opened his short monograph by quoting Theodore Roosevelt's statement that "The conservation of our national resources is only preliminary to the larger question of national efficiency."⁷ In support of this statement, Taylor lamented the "waste of material things" which pointed to the need for scientific expertise to manage resources for the sake of greater efficiency (*Principles*, 6). He explained, "the remedy for this inefficiency lies in systematic management, rather than in searching for some unusual and extraordinary man," and to "prove that the best management is a true science, resting upon clearly defined laws, rules, and principles, as a foundation. And further to show that the fundamental principles of scientific management are applicable to all kinds of human activities" (*Principles*, 7). In other words, a scientific approach to management can be applied to all aspects of human society, which he believed could be planned and organized according to principles of efficiency. Taylor boldly claimed that scientific management principles "can be applied with equal force to all social activities: to the management of our homes; the management of our farms; the management of the business of our tradesmen, large and small; of our churches, our philanthropic institutions, our universities, and our governmental departments" (*Principles*, 8). This was not simply an approach to economic planning, but a comprehensive system for planning all human life. Taylor was effective in using principles of scientific management to increase economic efficiency in factories, and he believed that the same principles could be used to plan an economy to increase its efficiency as well, in spite of the fact that economic efficiency requires knowledge about ends that cannot be known in the same way as the ends promoted by technical efficiency.

Efficiency, the ultimate goal of scientific management, aims "to secure the maximum prosperity," or "the development of each man to his state of maximum efficiency, so that he may be able to do, generally speaking, the highest grade of work for which his natural abilities fit him" (*Principles*, 9).

⁷ Frederick Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1915), 5. Subsequent references to this book are cited in the text as *Principles* followed by the page citation.

Each person should be directed to work at maximum efficiency in order to secure the maximum prosperity of all. Taylor argued that this goal could be accomplished by applying a new approach to task management. According to the older approach to management, supervisors focus on getting workers to take initiative and work diligently, while the workers have all of the practical experience and day-to-day knowledge about how basic tasks are completed. Taylor called this the “initiative and incentive” approach (*Principles*, 34).

By contrast, scientific management puts new tasks in the hands of the managers. Their task is “the burden of gathering together all of the traditional knowledge which in the past has been possessed by the workmen and then of classifying, tabulating, and reducing this knowledge to rules, laws, and formulae which are immensely helpful to the workmen in doing their daily work” (*Principles*, 36). These managers assemble all of the relevant knowledge, and then “develop a science for each element of a man’s work” as well as “scientifically select and then train, teach, and develop the workman” (*Principles*, 36). This leads to the “task idea,” in which the managers plan all of the tasks of the workers in advance, and “each man receives in most cases complete written instructions, describing in detail the task which he is to accomplish, as well as the means to be used in doing the work” (*Principles*, 39). Central planning of the work will ensure that it is done most efficiently. Workers may choose less efficient means of completing their work because they do not have access to the data that the managers possess. In short, the goal of scientific management is to accumulate centralized knowledge in the hands of managers, who can use that knowledge to plan tasks so that they are done efficiently, with as little waste of effort and resources as possible.

While Taylorism was most obviously applied to factory work, Taylor and his followers believed that the entire society could be planned in this manner. Scientific management pointed directly to the need for centralized planning by experts, who became experts by virtue of their possession of centralized knowledge. Furthermore, scientific management was heavily reliant upon method that could be employed by most people rather than only those with extraordinary virtue. As Taylor put it, “In the past the prevailing idea has been well expressed in the saying that ‘Captains of industry are born, not made’; and the theory has been that if one could get the right man, methods could be safely left to him. In the future it will be appreciated that our leaders must be trained right as well as born right” (*Principles*, 6). In addition, Taylor’s theory clearly distinguished between the capacities of the planners and those whose activities were planned for them. In his practical illustrations, which take up most of the *Principles of Scientific Management*, Taylor advocated for managers to use their expertise to manipulate their subordinates. For example, in his description of how scientific management produces efficient handling of pig iron, Taylor wrote that “it would be possible to train an intelligent

gorilla so as to become a more efficient pig-iron handler than any man can be" (*Principles*, 40). As he concluded, "there is a science of handling pig iron, and ... this science amounts to so much that the man who is suited to handle pig iron cannot possibly understand it, nor even work in accordance with the laws of this science, without the help of those who are over him" (*Principles*, 48). In other words, the planners have superior knowledge to those whose activities are being planned for them. By implication, scientific planning requires getting people to do things for reasons that they cannot fully understand, because they lack the expertise possessed by the planners. This theory, applied to governmental planning, supported the politics/administration distinction. Political officials can set the goals of administration, but they do not have the expertise that administrative officers possess, so they should not be permitted to interfere with the administrators' use of discretion.

The influence of Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* on the Progressive Era was profound.⁸ Louis Brandeis made Taylor's work famous in 1910, one year prior to the publication of his monograph, during what became known as the "Eastern Rate Cases" in front of the Interstate Commerce Commission.⁹ Brandeis cited Taylor's work as evidence that the Eastern Rail-Road Company did not need to increase its rates to accommodate for increased wages. More efficient management would enable the railroad to continue to charge its current rates and pay its workers higher wages, he claimed. An entire movement known as the efficiency movement sprung almost directly from Taylor's monograph. While the efficiency movement is today most closely identified with municipal government, its principles applied directly to conservation efforts, as well as efforts to plan and coordinate industrial and agricultural life.¹⁰ Taylor's ideas also profoundly influenced the political ideas of Herbert Croly and Walter Lippmann, who incorporated scientific management into progressive political theory.¹¹ As management theory, it complimented the Progressives' political theory of separating politics and administration. When combined, the politics/administration dichotomy and the theory of scientific management provided ample justification for the expansion of administrative power and discretion.

⁸ For a treatment of the relationship between Taylorism and Progressivism, see Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

⁹ Oscar Kraines, "Brandeis' Philosophy of Scientific Management," *Western Political Quarterly* 13 (1960): 191–201, describes the impact of Brandeis's citation of Taylor, noting that scientific management became a major news topic as a result of Brandeis's attention to it during the hearings.

¹⁰ Even during the Progressive Era, the efficiency movement was most closely associated with municipal reforms. See B. P. DeWitt, *The Progressive Movement: A Non-Partisan, Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), chap. 15: "The Efficiency Movement," 319–40.

¹¹ Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift*.

C. *Efficiency and democracy: The politics of administrative aggrandizement*

Progressives sought to integrate the principles of efficiency and democracy within the contours of the politics/administration dichotomy. Woodrow Wilson foreshadowed this integration in an article in *The Atlantic* published in 1901: "Democracy is a principle with us, not a mere form of government. What we have blundered at is its new applications and details, its successful combination with efficiency and purity in governmental action We have declined to provide ourselves with a professional civil service, because we deemed it undemocratic."¹² In the Progressives' view, formal democratic institutions may be tempered by or combined with a notion of governmental efficiency. Democratic institutions can be inefficient, but the spirit of democracy, as a dedication to the collective good of the whole society, demands efficiency for its successful implementation.

Wilson's "Study of Administration" suggested that democracy would have to be rethought in order to accommodate the need for expert rule. The primary difficulty to confront, Wilson claimed, was "that besetting error of ours, the error of trying to do too much by vote. Self-government does not consist in having a hand in everything, any more than housekeeping consists necessarily in cooking dinner with one's own hands. The cook must be trusted with a large discretion as to the management of the fires and the ovens."¹³ As we seek to "naturaliz[e] this much-to-be-desired science of administration," Wilson argued, the thing we must prevent is "principally, popular sovereignty The very completeness of our most cherished political successes in the past embarrasses us."¹⁴ Paradoxically, the separation of politics and administration, according to Progressives, would require placing limitations on popular sovereignty in the name of democracy. Democracy would be more fully realized by limiting public influence on administration. The people do not need to have a hand in all of the decisions made by administrators. They should be the housekeepers, making sure that the cooks do not fail catastrophically in preparing the meal, but otherwise refraining from meddling in the specific decisions made by the cooks. Democracy must be efficient to be effective, and this requires limiting democratic participation. An inefficient government is not a government that works well for the people as a collective whole, which for Progressives was the central feature of any democratic government.

The combination of democracy and efficiency was most fully developed by Walter Lippmann, cofounder of the *New Republic* and one of the most prominent young progressive journalists.¹⁵ In *Drift and Mastery*, published in 1914, Lippmann presented his vision for "a sane, deliberate organization

¹² Woodrow Wilson, "Democracy and Efficiency," *The Atlantic* (March 1901).

¹³ Wilson, "Study of Administration," 214.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 207.

¹⁵ As president, Theodore Roosevelt told a foreign diplomat that Lippmann was "on the whole the most brilliant man of his age in all the United States" (William E. Leuchtenburg, "Introduction," in Walter Lippmann, *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current*

of national industry brought under democratic control" (*DM*, 85). The fundamental thesis of *Drift and Mastery* was the need to avoid what Lippmann called "drift" by utilizing scientific method and administrative expertise to achieve "mastery" of the new circumstances of the industrial age. "To do this," Lippmann asserted, "men have to substitute purpose for tradition; and that is, I believe, the profoundest change that has ever taken place in human history. We can no longer treat life as something that has trickled down to us. We have to deal with it deliberately, devise its social organization, alter its tools, formulate its method, educate and control it. In endless ways we put intention where custom has reigned" (*DM*, 147). In other words, instead of simply accepting the changed economic circumstances of the twentieth century, we must use science to impose our purposes upon the new circumstances. In Lippmann's words, "When we cultivate reflection by watching ourselves and the world outside, the thing we call science begins." When we do this "we find that our conscious life is no longer a trivial iridescence, but a progressively powerful way of domesticating the brute. This is what mastery means: the substitute of conscious intention for unconscious striving" (*DM*, 148).

Lippmann's call for mastery of the world put scientific expertise in a central role, through both private and public planning. "Rightly understood science is the culture under which people can live forward in the midst of complexity, and treat life not as something given but as something to be shaped," he wrote. Much of this shaping would come from the private sector, from business managers trained in methods of efficiency. As Lippmann explained, we must "have business administered by men with a professional training" which will "bring with them a fellowship of interest, a standard of ethics, an esprit de corps, and a decided discipline" (*DM*, 43).¹⁶

Mastery, in Lippmann's view, would primarily occur through the private efforts of business leaders to reshape industrial life according to scientific principles of efficiency. However, Lippmann also envisioned a role for government in planning economic life. Paradoxically, this led him to condemn Woodrow Wilson's approach to administrative power, as articulated by Wilson the presidential candidate in 1912. As explained in the next section of this article, Wilson's "New Freedom" criticized efforts to regulate the economic through centralized administrative agencies, instead advocating the breakup of large corporations and the return of what Lippmann derisively called "the village culture" in which economic transactions

Unrest, reprint [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985], 1). Subsequent references to this work are cited in the text as *DM* followed by the page citation.

¹⁶ See also *DM*, 98: "You have in a very literal sense to *educate* the industrial situation, to draw out its promise, discipline and strengthen it You have to see to it that technical schools produce men trained for such work; you have to establish institutes of research, that shall stimulate the economic world not only with physical inventions, but with administrative proposals. You have to go about deliberately to create a large class of professional business men."

occurred entirely within the spheres of small villages and towns (*DM*, 86). Lippmann had little patience for Wilson's "conservatism," because it denied that "it may be necessary to organize the fundamental industries of the country on some definite plan so that our resources may be developed by scientific method" (*DM*, 84). He disagreed with Wilson's views (as expressed in 1912) on the role of expertise in regulating the economic activities of large corporations. Wilson advocated breaking up rather than regulating trusts, but Lippmann believed that this was merely the expression of a nostalgic conservatism that feared the rule of expertise.

In contradistinction to Wilson, Lippmann noted, "there is a growing body of opinion which says that communication is blotting out village culture, and opening up national and international thought. It says that bad as big business is to-day, it has a wide promise within it, and that the real task of our generation is to realize it. It looks to the infusion of scientific method, the careful application of administrative technique, the organization and education of the consumer for control, the discipline of labor for an increasing share of the management" (*DM*, 87). While Lippmann was ambiguous on the question of how much planning was to be done by governmental authorities in administrative agencies, he clearly envisioned some role for administrative experts in the process of industrial planning and administration.

Unlike Lippmann, Herbert Croly (Lippmann's cofounder at *The New Republic*) was explicit about the role for centralized administrative planning. Like Wilson and Lippmann, Croly couched his vision for administrative authority as necessary for the realization of democracy, rather than a goal that is in tension with democracy. In a chapter from *Progressive Democracy* titled "The Administration as Agent of Democracy," Croly openly acknowledged that "progressive democracy seems to bring with it administrative aggrandizement."¹⁷

"The grant of any considerable responsibility and power to administrative officials," Croly conceded, "has been repugnant to the American political tradition both in its legalistic and democratic aspects" (*PD*, 350). However, Croly claimed, Americans need not fear the aggrandizement of administrative authority, because it would remain under the control of a democratic political system that would ensure its fidelity to the wishes of the people. "Its aggrandizement will necessarily be confined to certain limits, determined by the more fundamental necessity of keeping public opinion alert and acquiescent" (*PD*, 353). In other words, administrative officials would always be accountable to public opinion, and the requirement to remain within the boundaries of public opinion would prevent administrative power from undermining democracy. Croly granted that the traditional American distrust of "delegation of too much power to any one of the

¹⁷ Croly, *Progressive Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 349. Subsequent references to this work are cited in the text as *PD* followed by the page citation.

separate departments of government is explicable and justifiable" (*PD*, 279). Public officials would always have to present their proposals to the people, rather than imposing their will on them. As he explained, "social reformers must present their arguments primarily to the electorate, and welcome every good opportunity of allowing the electorate to pass judgment upon their proposals" (*PD*, 282).

Therefore, Croly assuaged his readers that administrators would be agents of democracy, not dictators. "The democratic administrator," he predicted, "will derive his legal powers and his reason for existence from a political and social situation wholly different from that of a continental bureaucrat. Any merely vexatious, any essentially coercive exercise of his authority would, in the long run, be suicidal. He is more of a probation officer than a policeman. He is more of a counsellor and instructor than a probation officer" (*PD*, 353-54). In Croly's view, administrators would understand that they cannot act without the support of the people, and this would temper their behavior. In fact, they will act more as "instructors" than as coercive officers. They will have to reason with the public, take account of their views, or lose their authority. Croly assumed that any administrator whose decisions offended the views of the public would lose the confidence of the public and therefore be removed from office.

This optimistic view of administrative officials' fidelity to law led Croly to place great trust in the discretion of experts. In his words, "clear-sighted progressives" such as himself "almost unanimously believe in a body of expert administrative officials, which shall not be removed with every alteration of the executive, but which shall be placed and continued in office in order to devise means for carrying out the official policy of the state, no matter what that policy may be" (*PD*, 355-56). He agreed with Goodnow and Wilson, in other words, that administrative experts should be shielded from politics, especially from removal by the president for political reasons. Their role, in Croly's view, is to carry out the policy of the state, which does not fluctuate with changes in political officials or the elections that bring them to office.

Like Goodnow and Wilson, Croly defined the authority of administrative officials broadly. Political officials, in his vision, would be "concerned primarily with the more tentative and experimental part of the social program," presumably those aspects which are not long-standing and entrenched. In contrast, "the administration would be concerned primarily with its comparatively permanent aspects" (*PD*, 360). New laws and programs would be contested in the political process, and once fully established, they would be placed in the hands of administrators and considered permanent additions to the government's overall social program. Administrators would then gain expertise in the operations of the program. As Croly put it, they "would become the official custodians of a certain part of the accepted social program" (*PD*, 360). As the custodians of the program, they would be more than mere technocrats. While an administrator "must

obtain the standing of an expert, he must also be something more than an expert," Croly explained. "He is the custodian not merely of a particular law, but of a social purpose of which the law is only a fragmentary expression." Therefore, "he must share the faith upon which the program depends for its impulse; and he must accept the scientific method upon which the faith depends for its realization. Thus with all his independence he is a promoter and a propagandist" (*PD*, 361). While giving extensive authority to administrative officers may seem to threaten democracy, Croly maintained that the fear of usurpation was misplaced. "The administrative commission are really free only to do right," he argued. "Just as soon as they go astray the bonds tighten upon them. They derive their authority from their serviceability, from their knowledge, and from their peculiar relation to public opinion ... They will disappear in case public opinion cannot unite upon a program, or in case they prove to be a defective instrument" (*PD*, 365).

But public opinion would, in important respects, be shaped and formed by the administrators who would be the propagandists of their programs. As Croly explained, "[p]ublic opinion requires to be aroused, elicited, informed, developed, concentrated and brought to an understanding of its own dominant purposes." Instead of waiting for the public to express its opinions on their decisions, administrators would lead public opinion to the right conclusions. "The value of executive leadership," Croly concluded, "consists in its particular serviceability not merely as the agent of a prevailing public opinion, but also as the invigorator and concentrator of such opinion" (*PD*, 304). It is reasonable to wonder how administrators would balance the obligation to be both agents and invigorators and concentrators of public opinion, but Croly did not clarify how this balance was to be struck.

III. THE AMBIGUITY AND ABANDONMENT OF THE POLITICS AND ADMINISTRATION DISTINCTION

The Progressives' vision for the administrative state, highly influential in the early decades of public administration scholarship, focused on the political neutrality of administrative experts and the importance of scientific management as a tool for centralized planning. As Mosher summarizes, "The development of the field ... of public administration during [the early twentieth century] may be regarded either as an offshoot of scientific management in the public sphere or as a similar, parallel movement. In much of their philosophy, approach, and content, the two were very nearly identical. Both were grounded in a society thoroughly dedicated to growth and progress; in a philosophy of rationality; and in a faith in science and scientific method and its applicability to the practical lives of men and women, a reawakening of Auguste Comte's positivism."¹⁸ Yet even as they

¹⁸ Mosher, *Democracy and the Public Service*, 74.

emphasized administrators' scientific expertise and political neutrality, they also acknowledged that administrators would have wide discretion and exercise significant power, and that they must share a faith in the goals of the modern state. They would be both scientific experts and faithful believers in the progressive state, both politically neutral and policy-making.

The problem with this vision lay in its ambiguity. The writings of the Progressives avoided the challenge of defining, with specificity, the relationship between expertise and political oversight. Progressives never offered an adequate reconciliation, in other words, of democracy and bureaucracy. Wilson, Croly, Lippmann, and others emphasized the need for democracy to provide space for experts to rule without being subjected to political oversight. Yet they also argued that expert rule would be compatible with democracy because it would make democracy efficient, and public opinion could always reassert its authority over administrative officials. Their arguments about the relationship between public opinion and administrative power, however, remained vague on the specific mechanisms by which public opinion could guide the exercise of administrative power. Progressives never explained, with specificity, how public opinion could remain in control of the new class of experts they wished to place in control of administration. In fact, some Progressives were less sanguine about the possibilities neutral expertise offered—including Woodrow Wilson himself on the campaign trail in 1912. Eventually, other Progressives such as John Dewey would also warn about the emphasis their movement placed on the authority of neutral experts.

A. The ambiguity of Progressivism and the 1912 election

This tension between democracy and bureaucracy was not merely academic. It was central to the contest between the two leading presidential candidates in 1912, Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" pressed for the creation of regulatory agencies that would direct and plan economic life on the basis of scientific principles. Wilson's "New Freedom," on the other hand, clung to the notion of decentralization and was skeptical of expertise because of the threat it poses to democratic control and accountability.

Dwight Waldo captured the debate in his classic book *The Administrative State*: "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," Waldo explained, "felt a resurgence of primitive democratic feeling." They were skeptical of centralized administration

and of rule by experts. In other words, not all progressives were as optimistic as Taylor, Croly, and Lippmann about separating politics and administration, keeping neutral experts in the bureaucracy free from political influence.¹⁹

“In opposition” to these skeptics, Waldo continued, “were those whose patience was exhausted waiting for the Promise of American Life to realize itself by natural and inevitable means ... [and] who had begun to think of planning and who realized that builders need tools.” This group concluded that “democracy ... must create a strong right arm for the State in the form of an efficient bureaucracy.”²⁰ Waldo’s two groups indicate the difference between Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom” and Theodore Roosevelt’s “New Nationalism,” competing visions of administrative authority that were central to the 1912 presidential election. The contest between Wilson and Roosevelt was an intra-progressive dispute about the proper relationship between democracy and bureaucracy.²¹ As Roosevelt later explained in his *Autobiography*, the New Nationalism’s central thesis was the recognition “that combination and concentration in business should be, not prohibited, but supervised and controlled” by administrative agencies that would be held accountable by the president.²² He advocated the creation of a new agency that would “furnish a steady expert control” of large corporations.²³ Roosevelt advocated, in short, the creation of an expert administrative agency, under the authority of the president, to regulate continually the activities of large economic entities.

This approach is precisely what Wilson’s New Freedom rejected. “I don’t want a smug lot of experts to sit down behind closed doors in Washington and play Providence to me,” he declared on the campaign trail. “I do not believe that there is any group of men of any kind to whom we can afford to give that kind of trusteeship.”²⁴ In a dramatic shift away from the confidence he placed in expert rule in “The Study of Administration” three

¹⁹ As with any major political movement, Progressivism was not a monolithic movement. There was considerable intellectual diversity among Progressives, including a diversity of views on the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy. Many Progressives were skeptics of the administrative state, especially Louis Brandeis and Roscoe Pound. For further discussion of the strain of progressivism that was skeptical of centralized administrative expertise, see Sabeel Rahman, *Democracy Against Domination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Joseph Postell, *Bureaucracy in America: The Administrative State’s Challenge to Constitutional Government* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2017), 190–204; Postell, “The Anti–New Deal Progressive: Roscoe Pound’s Alternative Administrative State,” *Review of Politics* 74 (2012): 53–85.

²⁰ Waldo, *The Administrative State*, 17.

²¹ The following description is a summary view of the debate between the New Freedom and the New Nationalism that appears in Postell, *Bureaucracy in America*, 190–204.

²² Theodore Roosevelt, *The Autobiography of Theodore Roosevelt* (New York: Scribner’s and Sons, 1923), 425.

²³ Roosevelt, *Autobiography*, 433.

²⁴ Woodrow Wilson, *Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (PWW) 25: 75, cited in Sidney Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt, the Progressive Party, and the Transformation of American Democracy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 211.

decades earlier, Wilson the presidential candidate emphasized the dangers of centralized administrative rule.²⁵

This tension between Wilsonian New Freedom and Rooseveltian New Nationalism, however, was largely left behind on the campaign trail. As president, Wilson governed very much like a New Nationalist. His first term in office saw the creation of the Federal Reserve Board and the Federal Trade Commission, the latter of which was the core of Roosevelt's New Nationalism. Thus, scholars have noticed that Wilson as president governed essentially as a New Nationalist.²⁶ Wilson's contemporary opponents noticed this as well. Herbert Croly proclaimed happily by the end of Wilson's first term that "the New Freedom had been discarded."²⁷ Wilson's dedication to the principles of scientific management and bureaucracy is illustrated by his appointment of William Cox Redfield as the United States' first Secretary of Commerce. Redfield's dedication to Taylorism and scientific management were set forth in his book *The New Industrial Day*, published in 1912.²⁸

B. "The idea of experts is substituted for that of philosophers"

As the 1912 presidential election and its aftermath revealed, Progressives had not resolved the ambiguity in their theory of rule by experts. The ambiguity extended into the 1920s and was a critical theme in a famous exchange between Walter Lippmann and John Dewey. Lippmann prompted the exchange by the publication of *Public Opinion* in 1922.²⁹ *Public Opinion* offered a sober, even cynical assessment of the possibility of responsible popular government. Society, he argued, was too complex for ordinary citizens to govern, particularly when considering the prejudices that distort popular judgment. Dewey offered a defense of democracy in his 1927 reply, *The Public and Its Problems*.³⁰ Both Lippmann and Dewey prioritized expertise, but they offered different visions of the relationship between experts and the governed.

²⁵ Wilson's concerns did not appear out of nowhere. In 1908 he shuddered at the prospect of establishing centralized administrative authority: "The government of the United States was established to get rid of arbitrary, that is, discretionary executive power . . . If we return to it, we abandon the very principles of our foundation" (Woodrow Wilson, "Law or Personal Power," *PWW* 18: 264).

²⁶ See Ronald J. Pestritto, *Woodrow Wilson and the Roots of Modern Liberalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield), 255, 259–62; Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 271.

²⁷ Croly, "The Two Parties in 1916," *The New Republic* (October 21, 1916), 286, cited in Milkis, *Theodore Roosevelt*, 272.

²⁸ William C. Redfield, *The New Industrial Day: A Book for Men Who Employ Men* (New York: Century, 1912). For Redfield's discussion of scientific management, see especially 35–40.

²⁹ Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922). Hereafter cited in the text as *PO* followed by page number. See also Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New York: Macmillan, 1925).

³⁰ John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953: 1925–1927*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008). Subsequent references to this book are cited in the text as *Works* followed by page citation.

The exchange revolved around a central question: What kind of knowledge is necessary to rule, and how can it be acquired? Lippmann argued that the complexity of modern life was too great for citizens to grasp. Our world is "altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance" (*PO*, 16). Lippmann distinguished between two types of problems. First, most people do not have access to the facts they need to form an opinion. In a famous passage in *Public Opinion*, Lippmann wrote that the "chief factors" that limit our access to facts are the "artificial censorships, the limitations of social contact, the comparatively meager time available in each day for paying attention to public affairs, the distortion arising because events have to be compressed into very short messages, the difficulty of making a small vocabulary express a complicated world, and finally the fear of facing those facts which would seem to threaten the established routine of men's lives," all conspire to limit our ability to understand what is happening in our world (*PO*, 30). On top of this, our minds are formed by our environments, distorting our perception of the facts that we can access. "In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture" (*PO*, 81). Our culture defines what we see in the first place, rather than perceiving the facts correctly.

Given these impediments to correct popular perception of the facts upon which good policy should be based, Lippmann was skeptical that public opinion could serve as a guide. In fact, Lippmann suggested that public opinion was merely manufactured by elites as a means of manipulating the people. In his view, public opinion was the product of "symbols" that were used by leaders to "fatten on many, deflect criticism, and seduce men into facing agony for objects they do not understand" (*PO*, 236). More colorfully, he asserted that "[i]n the crystallizing of a common will, there is always an Alexander Hamilton at work" (*PO*, 219).

Since public opinion was unreliable as a foundation for policy making, Lippmann turned to the experts. In *Public Opinion* Lippmann specified the role of experts more clearly than most of his fellow Progressives. He proposed "an independent, expert organization for making the unseen facts [of modern life] intelligible" (*PO*, 31). This organization of experts would not help ordinary citizens see these unseen facts. Rather, they would advise policy makers directly. Lippmann famously eschewed what he called "the theory of the omniscient citizen" (*PO*, 364). Their capacity could not be elevated even with the assistance of the experts. Thus, the experts should focus on improving the decision making of those in government.

Lippmann insisted that the experts should be entirely separated from decision-making authority. The expert would simply be the person who "prepares the facts for the men of action" (*PO*, 375). Echoing Wilson's and Goodnow's insistence on the separation of politics and administration, Lippmann criticized an American ambassador who admitted that he only

reported positive news to the public during World War I. The ambassador "did not understand that the power of the expert depends upon separating himself from those who make the decisions, upon not caring, in his expert self, what decision is made" (*PO*, 382). Lippmann's separation of expertise and decision, however, went further than Wilson, Goodnow, or Croly in separating the expert from political authority. Those progressives argued for separating administrators from politics, not from policy.

Lippmann seemed, therefore, to propose a much stricter removal of experts from policy than his peers. He was quick to clarify, however, that this separation did not make experts weak. "The idea that the expert is an ineffectual person because he lets others make the decisions is quite contrary to experience," Lippmann explained. "The more subtle the elements that enter into the decision, the more irresponsible power the expert wields" (*PO*, 384). To constrain this irresponsible power, he insisted on the need to "separate as absolutely as possible the staff which executes from the staff which investigates" (*PO*, 384). Lippmann seemed to envision a body of experts, in every administrative agency and department, that gathered facts through investigation and reported them, in detached manner, to those making the decisions.

Although he wanted to avoid getting into specifics, Lippmann advanced a proposal for an "intelligence section" in each federal department that should be independent both of Congress and of the head of the department, and "should not be entangled either in decision or in action" (*PO*, 386). These experts would have civil service and salary protection and would provide "expert mediation" to political officials (*PO*, 405). By this, he meant that they would confront partisan decision makers and guide their discussions so that they rely upon facts known by the experts. Discussion would be conducted "in the presence of some one, chairman or mediator, who forces the discussion to deal with the analyses supplied by experts." "The partisan voices should be there," he admitted, "but the partisans should find themselves confronted with men, not personally involved, who control enough facts and have the dialectical skill to sort out what is real perception from what is stereotype" (*PO*, 402).

This process would, Lippmann optimistically predicted, "disintegrate partisanship" (*PO*, 405). However, Lippmann did not clarify how these disinterested experts would be produced, how they could be involved in political discussions without inserting their own opinions about the choices that should be made, or how the process would serve to dissolve partisanship. Lippmann's criticism of democracy was built upon a sober view of the capacity of ordinary citizens to grasp and process the facts upon which policy should be made. Lippmann did not seem to apply the same sobriety in his judgment of experts or the influence they could exert over the political process.

John Dewey deeply respected Lippmann's challenge to democracy. He wrote that *Public Opinion* was "perhaps the most effective indictment of

democracy as currently conceived ever penned.”³¹ Though it was not a direct reply to Lippmann, Dewey wrote *The Public and its Problems* to grapple with the challenges he raised to democratic theory and practice. He noted explicitly Lippmann’s “revival of the Platonic notion that philosophers should be kings,” but with one important difference: “the idea of experts is substituted for that of philosophers” (*Works*, 363). It was not the idea of expertise that Dewey objected to, but the notion of making them kings. Dewey appreciated the need for expertise. He acknowledged Progressives’ “depreciation of the machinery of democratic political action in contrast with a rising appreciation of the need for expert administrators” (*Works*, 319). This depreciation, he granted, was understandable in light of the “confusion which has resulted from the size and ramifications of social activities” in the new industrial age (*Works*, 319). In other words, Dewey granted Lippmann’s premise that new conditions placed challenges on democratic citizenship.

Nevertheless, Dewey rejected Lippmann’s proposal to create an expert class that would advise political decision makers. Such a solution left out the people and was therefore out of bounds. While Dewey granted that the notion of an “omnicompetent” citizen was an “illusion,” he argued that democracy did not need such citizens. Instead, the knowledge a citizen needs “is a function of association and communication; it depends upon tradition, upon tools and methods socially transmitted, developed and sanctioned” (*Works*, 334). Human beings are not purely rational creatures, but are shaped by their environments, habits, and traditions.

Citizens, therefore, can acquire the knowledge of how to rule by receiving it from their society. The association and communication they receive can provide them with the ability to be deliberative democrats. Experts can be made to serve the interests of democracy by playing a central role in this process of association and communication. As Dewey explained, the interdependence of modern life means that the “only possible solution” is “the perfecting of the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and thereby direct action.” The problem, in other words, “is a moral one dependent on intelligence and education,” not a practical problem leading to the need for rule by experts (*Works*, 332).

Following this reasoning, Dewey’s proposal for expertise differed from Lippmann’s. If the solution required perfecting the means of communication so that the people could have rightly formed desire, the experts would have to educate the people, not the representatives. Dewey wrote that “the problem of the public” is “freeing and perfecting the processes of inquiry.” That inquiry “is a work which devolves upon experts. But their expertness is not shown in framing and executing policies, but in discovering and making

³¹ Quoted in Robert B. Westbrook, *John Dewey and American Democracy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 294.

known the facts upon which the former depend" (*Works*, 365). Experts would explore and disseminate facts to the people themselves, as part of the process of socially transmitting knowledge, to enable the people to govern themselves deliberately. While he agreed that "the expert organization for which Mr. Lippmann calls is inherently desirable," he believed it was directed at the wrong end. "Democracy demands a more thoroughgoing education than the education of officials, administrators, and directors of industry."³²

Dewey and Lippmann disagreed about the appropriate relationship between experts and policy makers. Lippmann proposed using experts as advisors to administrators, while separating experts from actual decision making in order to preserve their neutrality. Dewey, by contrast, advocated a social relationship between the expert and the people. Dewey used the metaphor of a shoemaker to illustrate his point. The person wearing the shoe "knows best that it pinches and where it pinches, even if the expert shoemaker is the best judge of how the trouble is to be remedied" (*Works*, 364). Like Woodrow Wilson's metaphor of cooks and housekeepers in "The Study of Administration," Dewey argued that experts know best how to solve social problems. However, Dewey added that experts cannot know what the social problems are if they are removed from the people in the way Lippmann proposed.

The exchange between Lippmann and Dewey further revealed long-standing tensions in Progressivism over the role of the expert in making public policy. Both Lippmann and Dewey supported the creation of a body of experts that would inform how policy should be made. They disagreed about how to set up such a system. Though progressives advocated separating politics and administration, the contours of that separation, and the definition of the roles of experts, administrators, and policy makers, remained unclear in the decades following the Progressive Era. The Great Depression and the New Deal would place pressure on reformers to resolve this tension as they created new administrative bodies to respond to the economic crisis, and gradually the progressives' theory came to be criticized and rejected in important ways.

C. *The political abandonment of the politics-administration dichotomy*

The ambiguity of the politics/administration distinction, which led to division among progressives about the proper relationship between democracy and bureaucracy, was not easily resolved. Eventually, however, the politics/administration dichotomy fell out of favor among progressives and scholars of public administration.

It is true that the Progressive Era saw the creation of the independent regulatory commission, which was premised on the separation of politics

³² John Dewey, review of Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, in *The New Republic*, May 3, 1922, p. 288.

and administration. During Wilson's first term as President, in spite of his protestations against bureaucracy on the campaign trail, the creation of the Federal Reserve and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 1913–1914 separated much of the emerging bureaucracy from presidential control and oversight. Both agencies were constructed as independent regulatory commissions whose chief officers could not be removed by the president except for good cause. Specifically, the statutes that created these agencies specified that the president could remove FTC commissioners "for inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office," while Federal Reserve Board members were simply empowered to "serve for a term of ten years unless sooner removed for cause by the President."³³

This was not the first time that Congress insulated administrative officers from the president's authority to supervise them through the removal power. The Interstate Commerce Act, which created the Interstate Commerce Commission, also specified (in language identical to the FTC's authorizing statute) that commissioners could only be removed for "inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office."³⁴ The General Board of Appraisers in the Treasury Department, established in 1890, used the same language to guard board members from presidential removal.³⁵ In the first successful removal "for cause" in American history, President William Howard Taft fired two members of the Board of Appraisers during the fall of 1912—precisely when Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were campaigning for the right to serve as Taft's successor.³⁶

These administrative structures perpetuated the separation of politics and administration that early Progressives such as Goodnow and Wilson had advocated. Their roots in the politics/administration dichotomy were most famously and emphatically asserted by Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland in upholding the removal protections granted to FTC commissioners in *Humphrey's Executor v. United States*.³⁷ Roosevelt inherited William Humphrey, a Hoover appointee, as head of the FTC. Roosevelt asked Humphrey to resign, because "I do not feel that your mind and my mind go along together on either the policies or the administering of the Federal Trade Commission."³⁸ Humphrey refused, and FDR fired him several weeks later. Humphrey insisted that his firing was illegal and that he was still entitled to his salary. Eventually, the Supreme Court was compelled to

³³ Federal Trade Commission Act of 1914, §1; Federal Reserve Act of 1913, §10.

³⁴ Interstate Commerce Act of 1887, ch. 104, §11.

³⁵ Customs Administrative Act of 1890, ch. 407 §12.

³⁶ Aditya Bamzai, "Taft, Frankfurter, and the First Presidential For-Cause Removal," *University of Richmond Law Review* 52 (2018): 691-748. As Chief Justice, of course, Taft would go on to write the opinion in *Myers v. United States*, which asserted the president's constitutional removal power. See *Myers v. United States*, 272 U.S. 52. The only other president to remove "for cause" a protected official was Richard Nixon. See Bamzai, "Taft, Frankfurter, and the First Presidential For-Cause Removal," 694 n. 16.

³⁷ 295 U.S. 602 (1935).

³⁸ Franklin Roosevelt to William Humphrey, August 31, 1933, cited in *Humphrey's Executor*, at 619.

address whether agency heads such as Humphrey could be removed from presidential control by insulating them from the president's removal power.

Answering in the affirmative, Justice Sutherland wrote that the FTC was "to be non-partisan, and it must, from the nature of its duties, act with entire impartiality. It is charged with no policy except the policy of the law. Its duties are neither political nor executive, but predominantly *quasi-judicial* and *quasi-legislative*."³⁹ Sutherland explained that the FTC "cannot in any proper sense be characterized as an arm or an eye of the executive. Its duties are performed without executive leave, and, in contemplation of the statute, must be free from executive control."⁴⁰

The establishment of the Federal Reserve Board and Federal Trade Commission, in short, along with the Supreme Court's validation in *Humphrey's Executor* of removal protections such as those granted to the FTC, may be regarded as the apex of the separation of politics and administration. The idea that administrators should be neutral experts did find some support among FDR's brain trust. Luther Gulick, who taught public administration at Columbia University and served on Franklin Roosevelt's Committee on Administrative Management (generally known as the "Brownlow Committee"), coauthored a collection titled *Papers on the Science of Administration* in 1937 that serve as, in one scholar's words, the "high noon of orthodoxy" for the notion of public administration as a science of neutral expertise.⁴¹ Yet Gulick's support for neutral administration was not shared by most in the Roosevelt Administration.

The Roosevelt Administration responded to the Supreme Court's endorsement of apolitical administration in *Humphrey's Executor* with a constitutional argument on behalf of presidential control over bureaucracy. This was most evident in the formation of the Brownlow Committee. The Committee was internally divided over the extent and application of the politics/administration dichotomy. While Gulick, a member of the Committee, was an advocate of the older, progressive notion of separating politics and administration, his view was not shared by the other committee members. Roosevelt himself was not nearly as dedicated to the merit system as his Progressive predecessors; the number of merit-system employees dropped from roughly 80 percent to 60 percent during his first years in office. He only reluctantly committed himself to civil service protections to avoid being attacked on the campaign trail in 1936.⁴²

While the Brownlow Committee was not unanimous in its support for making administrators accountable, its famous report reflected Franklin

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 624.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 628.

⁴¹ Luther Gulick and Lyndall Urwick, *Papers on the Science of Administration* (New York: Institute of Public Administration, 1937); Nicholas Henry, "The Emergence of Public Administration as a Field of Study, in *A Centennial History of the American Administrative State*, ed. Ralph Clark Chandler (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 44.

⁴² Paul Van Riper, *History of the United States Civil Service* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Co., 1958), 335.

Roosevelt's commitment to unite, rather than separate, politics and administration through the office of the presidency. As Donald Brand writes, the Brownlow report "identified the president as manager-in-chief of the federal bureaucracy" and "proposed a variety of reforms intended to enhance the ability of the president to play this role."⁴³ While some believers in traditional separation of politics and administration remained within President Roosevelt's inner circle, such as James Landis, the majority of the Brownlow Committee members abandoned that separation for the sake of giving the President tools to supervise, control, and manage the bureaucracy. The Committee's report went so far as to call the independent regulatory commissions upheld by *Humphrey's Executor* "a headless fourth branch of government, a haphazard deposit of irresponsible agencies and uncoordinated powers."⁴⁴ Leading advisors in Franklin Roosevelt's administration, in other words, criticized and condemned the notion that administrative agencies should be separated from politics. This was a dramatic shift from the earlier Progressives' writings on the relationship between experts and politics.

The Brownlow Committee proposed moving the independent regulatory commissions into the executive departments, essentially placing them under the authority of the president, and enhancing the president's management tools by expanding White House staff to help the president manage the administrative state. Congress only approved the latter proposal when it enacted the Reorganization Act of 1939. Nevertheless, the Brownlow Committee reflected changing opinions about the role of expertise in the administrative state and the extent to which administrators should be freed from presidential oversight.

D. The intellectual abandonment of the politics-administration dichotomy

Political scientists and public administration scholars were questioning the older notion of separating politics and administration at the same time that Franklin Roosevelt was pressing for greater control over the administrative state. A prominent criticism of the separation of politics and administration came from Harvard political scientist E. Pendleton Herring in 1934.⁴⁵ In a study of the Tariff Commission, Herring argued that even if experts could identify an objectively correct tariff policy "from a purely economic viewpoint," the task of setting rates was inherently political, and experts could not be impartial in that important respect.⁴⁶ Herring noted that the Commission's authority to adjust tariff rates was supported by those who

⁴³ Donald Brand, "The President as Chief Administrator: James Landis and the Brownlow Report," *Political Science Quarterly* 123 (2008): 71.

⁴⁴ Report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management, 36.

⁴⁵ E. Pendleton Herring, "The Political Context of the Tariff Commission," *Political Science Quarterly* 49 (1934): 421–40.

⁴⁶ Herring, "Political Context of the Tariff Commission," 422.

sought a “scientific method of tariff-making” and who believed “that tariff schedules could be fixed by formula and determined automatically by an impartial board of experts.”⁴⁷ The experiment failed, Herring argued, precisely because of the futility of this ideal of scientific policy making by impartial administrative experts. He concluded that “no commissioners, however well trained and impartial, can take the tariff out of politics.”⁴⁸ Two years later Herring was appointed the secretary of Harvard’s graduate school of public administration.

By the end of the New Deal in the mid-1940s, the politics/administration distinction was already under attack, or entirely abandoned. The most forceful and influential attack on the theory of neutral administrative expertise was Herbert Simon’s *Administrative Behavior*.⁴⁹ Simon, a distinguished professor who spent most of his career at Carnegie Mellon University, won the Nobel Prize in 1978 for *Administrative Behavior*. Best known for its theory of “bounded rationality,” (a term he coined later, but which was implicit in *Administrative Behavior*) Simon’s work focused on the limits of administrators’ supposed rational decision-making ability. Even administrators have limited information, insufficient knowledge of available policy options, and limited time and resources to search for optimal policy solutions. *Administrative Behavior* rejected the notion that bureaucrats were omniscient and capable of purely rational calculation of policy outcomes. As one scholar summarizes, “The ultimate effect of Simon’s *Administrative Behavior* ... and related critiques appearing in the late 1940s was to bury the belief that principles of administration, public or otherwise, could be discovered in the same sense that laws of science and nature could be. By mid-century the two defining pillars of public administration—the politics/administration dichotomy and [Gulick’s] principles of administration—had been abandoned by creative intellects in the field.”⁵⁰ This abandonment was captured by John Gaus’s conclusion in a 1950 article that: “A theory of public administration means in our time a theory of politics also.”⁵¹

By 1950, therefore, the Progressives’ theory of public administration, which had laid the foundations for the modern administrative state, were openly questioned and criticized by leading thinkers in public administration. Herbert Kaufman, one of these leading thinkers, concluded in 1956 that

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 426.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 439.

⁴⁹ Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Government* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

⁵⁰ Henry, “Emergence of Public Administration,” 47. Henry cites other critics of the traditional approach to public administration, such as Robert Dahl and Dwight Waldo, as contributing to the abandonment of the older theory, but he attributes the primary role to Simon.

⁵¹ John Gaus, “Trends in the Theory of Public Administration,” *Public Administration Review* 10 (1950): 168. Gaus was a Harvard professor of public administration who was prominent in the field. Today, the American Political Science Association awards the John Gaus Award and Lecture to honor lifetime achievement in political science and public administration.

there were “Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration.”⁵² Kaufman identified three core values of public administration: “representativeness, neutral competence, and executive leadership.”⁵³ Although they had made common cause against the patronage system of the nineteenth century, the principles of neutral competence and executive leadership had now come into conflict. As Kaufman explained, “the courses of action indicated by the second and third values have been not only different, but contradictory.”⁵⁴ “[T]he great stress on neutral competence” during the Progressive Era, he argued, “proved to be a mixed blessing.” It created fragmentation among various independent bureaucracies that “bred chaos ... fomented conflict ... opened gaps in the provision of service or regulation ... was costly ... And, most important of all, it led to irresponsibility.”⁵⁵ Consequently, the theory of presidential management and executive leadership was beginning to question, and even to supplant, the theory of neutral competence: “the politics-administration dichotomy fell out of favor in public administration, and the doctrine of the continuity of the policy-formulating process, better suited to the aims of executive leadership, began to replace it.”⁵⁶

In short, the Progressives’ optimism about expertise—that it could be acquired through education and deployed neutrally to find objective solutions to policy problems—was openly criticized by the leading scholars of public administration by the 1940s. As Simon’s work illustrated, its belief in administrative omniscience overlooked important problems inherent in administrative behavior. As others such as Kaufman noted, the Progressives’ faith in expertise led them to construct an inefficient administrative state that could not be coordinated and managed by the president, weakening their claims about the compatibility of bureaucracy and democracy. Public administration scholars examined the Progressives’ work in the 1940s and saw an irresponsible government that promised much more than it could deliver.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Progressive architects of the administrative state insisted that politics and administration could and should be separated. With rare exceptions, such as John Dewey, they never defined the nature of that separation or indicated how democracy could be saved from the threat that a class of experts separated from politics might pose to it. Eventually, Progressives and public administration scholars realized that the separation of politics

⁵² Kaufman, “Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrines of Public Administration,” *American Political Science Review* 50 (1956): 1057–73.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1057.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 1063.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 1067.

and administration was impossible, and that experts should not be empowered to make policy outside the political process. Both the movement toward accountability and the logic Progressives employed when they revived the notion of accountability were tacit admissions that administration is political rather than purely scientific.

Most Progressives and public administration scholars thought that presidential management was a better approach to bureaucracy than separating politics and administration. They did not think that Congress, the legislative branch, could serve as the locus of democratic accountability.⁵⁷ In either event, however, the underlying tension was the same. Progressives and public administration scholars eventually insisted upon the need to hold bureaucracy accountable, while at the same time justifying the existence of bureaucracy by appealing to the impartial expertise it could wield in solving problems. From the beginning of the administrative state's existence, the role of expertise has remained ambiguous.

Whether there is a right mix of expertise and accountability that would enable the administrative state to function properly is a separate question from the one pursued in this essay. Perhaps there is a possible intellectual resolution of the tension between expertise and accountability, or some way to amalgamate the two. The thesis of this essay is that the Progressives who espoused rule by experts and insisted that expertise could be easily integrated into the American political system never offered a sufficient intellectual argument for the coexistence of expertise and accountability. Consequently, expertise continues to occupy an ambiguous place in the administrative state they constructed.

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⁵⁷ An important exception is David Rosenbloom, *Building a Legislative-Centered Public Administration: Congress and the Administrative State* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000). Rosenbloom argues persuasively that Congress asserted its control over the administrative state in the latter half of the twentieth century and that this model of accountability is superior to the "orthodox" public administration view that the president should be the locus of accountability.