

PART III

Politics versus Administration

In his famous essay, "The Study of Administration"¹ Woodrow Wilson distinguished categorically between politics and administration. Politics, he said, has to do with the great plans of governmental action and is the province of statesmanship; administration is the detailed execution of these plans and is a science. The science of administration had developed on the Continent, especially in Prussia. In America, where public opinion was enthroned, there had been no place of executive expertise: "advance must be made through compromise, by a compounding of differences, by a trimming of plans and a suppression of too straightforward principles." The time had finally come, however, Wilson wrote, when the public would have to be made to see that self-government does not consist in having a hand in everything; administration should be sensitive to public opinion, but a body of thoroughly trained officials "is a plain business necessity."

Business necessity or not, American government still advances by compounding differences, trimming plans, and suppressing too straightforward principles. That is the import of this volume as a whole, and especially that of the essays in this section.

"Ends and Means in Planning" denies the validity of the categorical distinction between politics and administration ("ends" and "means"). It does this by showing that even under ideal circumstances no choice can be scientific ("rational"); there must always be an arbitrary or subjective element in choice, and usually accident and uncertainty play a large part in a choice process. By way of illustration, a brief account is given of an effort of the Chicago Housing Authority to select sites in a rational way.

¹Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," *Political Science Quarterly* II:2 (June 1887).

The Chicago planners, like the Model Cities planners of the previous section, found that both the nature of a public organization (especially its having many vague and more or less conflicting ends) and the structure of government (especially the extreme fragmentation of formal authority) made "planning" indistinguishable from "politics."

The second essay of the section elaborates the difference between governmental and nongovernmental organization. The object of the essay is to identify the variables affecting corruption in government agencies. The approach is to ask how much and what kind of effort an efficient organization would put forth to prevent or limit corruption. From this perspective, striking differences appear between what a business organization and a public agency would do. The former, it is argued, would seek an optimal amount of corruption (i.e., it would try to maximize profit), whereas the latter would, perhaps not very effectively, seek to eliminate all corruption at any cost. Essentially the difference is that American public administration cannot be entirely separated from politics. The extreme fragmentation of authority that was mentioned before must be mitigated or overcome if anything is to be done, and this, by definition, involves corruption, for example, the intervention of a "machine" and its "boss." It will be seen that in this and other ways the dependence of a governmental organization on public opinion obliges it to violate the canons of administrative rationality.

The remaining two essays raise further doubts about the possibility of rational management under any circumstances. The first of the two points out that insofar as there is anything that may properly be called a science of administration it can be of use only to those relatively few persons who are concerned with the system of relationships that constitutes the organization, that is, with administrative management rather than the performance of substantive tasks. Even to such persons the value of the science of administration is very limited, especially with respect to their most essential functions: the making of judgments about matters of value, morality, and probability. It follows that what an executive needs is not science, or technical knowledge, but the kind of skill that is the art of prudent judgment. This, as the philosopher Michael Oakeshott has stressed, can only be acquired by experience.

Ironically, the final essay of the section sees in the postwar growth of "policy science" some danger that Woodrow Wilson's hopes may be realized. As the Founding Fathers so well understood, the great task is to create and maintain a public opinion devoted to freedom and capable

of intelligent discussion. Given the nature of man—“ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious”—this requires statesmanship. Insofar as “policy analysis” supplants statesmanship, the successful working of the political system is jeopardized. For an informative discussion of the record of both policy science and statesmanship with respect to national defense, the reader is referred to an article by Stephen Rosen, a member of the National Security staff.²

²Stephen Rosen, “Systems Analysis and the Quest for Rational Defense,” *The Public Interest* 76 (Summer 1984): 3–17.