

Power, Accountability, and Humanism

Book Review

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A review of Jerome B. McKinney and Lawrence C. Howard, *Public Administration: Balancing Power and Accountability* (Oak Park, Illinois: Moore Publishing Co., 1979), 436 pp.; Robert S. Lorch, *Public Administration* (St. Paul Minnesota: West Publishing Co., 1978), 314 pp.; Fred A. Krammer, *Dynamics of Public Bureaucracy: An Introduction to Public Administration* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, Inc., 1977), 290 pp., and Howard E. McCurdy, *Public Administration: A Synthesis* (Menlo Park, California: Cummings Publishing Co., 1977), 424 pp.

Alas, textbooks in public administration are dull and drab. But students need no longer despair at the prospect of plodding through staid and turgid writings. There is, fortunately, now a choice with the upsurge of textbooks from a new generation of authors who are aware of the plight of students and practitioners alike and know why they are turned off by public administration courses. The old reliables — Leonard White, John Pfiffner, Fritz Morstein Marx, W.F. Willoughby, Albert Lepawsky, Marshall and Gladys Dimock, and others are giving way to a new wave represented by the five authors under review. And there is a great difference in terms of style, content, approach, and marketing of the books. More and more, the concern of authors is to be relevant, readable, systematic, and appealing as well. Without such a conscious effort to design books for the consuming market the shelf life of the books being published or written would be as short as that of the bottle of milk in the grocery.

It is precisely McKinney and

Howard's purpose to address their book to a specific reading audience, namely, the middle and lower management levels (MLMs). The authors maintain that traditionally public administration books are biased towards upper level management — the top administrators and policy makers. However, the MLMs are the critical group in public administration because of their wide discretionary powers, professional status and monopoly of information, and continuity from one administration to another thus outlasting the changing of the guards at the top. At this level, accountability is a great problem because the MLMs exercise their power with low public visibility.

The potential for abuse exists at this level. Public accountability is shortchanged when MLMs begin to exercise power "away from public purpose to meet personal or professional needs" (McKinney and Howard, p. 110). According to the authors, administrative power is not by itself evil, but the way it is used has cast doubts on this. Administrators, especially MLMs, should not be denied the exercise of such power. In fact, the authors claim that MLMs should

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be given more opportunities to exercise power, balanced by a commitment towards accountability to the public. In their call for such a balance, McKinney and Howard submit that MLMs have the potential to achieve it through organizing and reorganizing and the pursuit of its linkage-building function.

What is the mechanism for inculcating accountability? Rules and external means of control cannot completely guarantee to wipe out "unethical behavior, inefficiency, and inadequate initiative" (McKinney and Howard, p. 31). McKinney and Howard emphasize internalized community norms and reliance on professional codes of ethics. It is also essential that MLMs "must know, through established criteria, to whom and for what they are accountable" (McKinney and Howard, p. 30). The authors chose this theme because of the sordid aftermath of Watergate in which the MLMs were equally culpable for perpetrating the misconduct and corruption in the executive department.

Unfortunately, McKinney and Howard are simply riding on the tide of Watergate books pouring out without accomplishing their own stated purpose. The book is not any more helpful as a rehash of public administration textbooks and in putting them in the context of power and accountability for MLMs. Dismally, the authors return to the same formalism and structural and functional approach in public administration. They promise at every end of a chapter to present a framework for greater accountability which never materializes. The authors are also not persuasive enough to show that a book — or possibly a sub-field of

public administration — should be focused on the MLMs. Reading the various chapters reveals that there is no substantial difference between the theories, concepts and practices that apply to top management and MLMs. There are generic principles of public administration and this should have been pointed out clearly. While there is a desire to search for a unifying framework in public administration, McKinney and Howard are breaking up the integral elements to suit a particular target group.

The valuable contribution of the book is its stress on balancing power and accountability as a complex and compelling issue today. Unfortunately they fail to bring up Michael Harmon's concept of "self-responsibility," that is, control is internal and informal. The individual imposes limits on himself and not through rules or laws.¹ The authors likewise overlook Eugene Dvorin and Robert Simmons, *From Amoral to Humane Bureaucracy* (1972) who also suggested looking into the educational and training processes of future administrators so that they can best function in a democratic society.² Harold F. Gortner in *Administration in the Public Sector* (1977) sums up more concisely the issues presented by McKinney and Howard in a brief chapter. Gortner takes exception to the McKinney and Howard thesis by arguing that we should rely on a combination of formal (laws, rules, regulations, court

¹See Michael Harmon, "Normative Theory and Public Administration: Some Suggestions for a Redefinition of Administrative Responsibility," in Frank Marini (ed.), *Toward a New Public Administration: The Minnowbrooke Perspective* (Scranton, Pennsylvania: Chandler, 1971).

²See Eugene Dvorin and Robert Simmons, *From Amoral to Humane Bureaucracy* (San Francisco: Canfield Press, 1972).

decisions, etc.) and informal controls (internalized norms and values) rather than depend on only one type of control.³

The book under review (McKinney and Howard) has also several distracting typo errors, for example: functionalisation (p. 382), emperical (p. 335), indemic (p. 335), Norman Beeman (pp. 76, 89), etc.

A sharp contrast to the old textbooks is the volume by Robert S. Lorch. This book has flamboyance and flourish, yet, is a solid and cogent presentation of the themes and issues in public administration. Such eye-catching titles as "Getting It All Together" (for Organization), "High Rollers and Moneygrubbers" (for Budgeting), or "Down with Spoils" (for the Merit System) should not deceive the readers because each contains a good introductory overview of the fields of public administration. While the author claims that he has no overarching theme, the reader cannot help but notice his linking pin throughout the book. Modern public administration, Lorch affirms, is characterized by the union of powers (to administer, legislate, judge and execute) in the hands of the administrators. He claims that such union has "crowned the profession of public administration, made it worthy of the best minds" (p. 22). Administrators did not grab such powers; they won them by default through the failure to decide by the various branches of government.

Lorch does not concur with the McKinney and Howard piece. Middle managers are simply sour grapes when administrative power is taken from them and transferred to the top. In fact, there are many advantages pointing to greater centralization of power at the top management and its staff. Logic favors it, Lorch muses. Moreover, Lorch claims that the top management is reluctant if not skeptical of the need to take academic interludes. Top managers believe in learning by doing and are "too shrewd to leave the ramparts to their competitors, even for two weeks" (Lorch, p. 39). Hence, in many training programs, agencies send participants who have very little responsibility or are not destined for higher responsibility. Even with this skepticism Lorch does not jump readily into believing that the MLMs are the saviors and bedrocks of public administration.

Lorch devotes three chapters to administrative accountability and responsibility — or Controlling the Beast. While formal checks on the performance of administrators may not have been as effective as before, the author is optimistic about alternative channels such as a responsible press, professional code of ethics, inspectors-general, investigating committees, chaplains, and ombudsmen. He has a good piece of advice to managers: Learn to sensitize any policy change to be made and "get in the habit of thinking how something new will be received, and how to minimize resentment against it" (Lorch, p. 220). Such homily can readily fall under his chapter on the Goebbels Touch which is about public relations or positive propaganda techniques.

How do we deal with the ineffective

³Harold F. Gortner, *Administration in the Public Sector* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1977). See Chapter 4 on "Accountability and Responsibility."

agencies or personnel? Lorch introduces us to the concept of "layering" which means removing the tasks performed by an agency or employee without necessarily disbanding the unit or firing anyone, and simply layering over such tasks by others who are hired to accomplish the same. It is also possible to eliminate the agency or individual, although there is the danger of submitting to long and delaying formal appeal proceedings.

Fred A. Kramer's book is sedate, yet appeals to the reader by its simplicity and conciseness. It covers the conventional themes of public administration (politics and administration, personnel, budgeting, organization and labor-management relations), decision-making and policy analysis. Kramer also presents three chapters on administrative controls, accountability and responsibility. He concludes that: "The basic lesson of the question of control of bureaucracy is that legislative and legal controls have serious limitations" (p. 262). In his judgment the solution is to be found elsewhere and, ironically enough, it is in the bureaucracy itself. We have long been accustomed to the standard remedy of avoiding redundancy, overlapping or duplicate functions and organizations. In this book Kramer argues instead for competition and competence among duplicate agencies. If competition is encouraged, it will perhaps inspire creativity, increase cooperation within the work environment of an agency, provide meaningful outlets and greater job satisfaction, and save the public's money. Underlying all these is the development of a healthy working atmosphere, more openness and sharing in problem solving situations. These are what

Kramer calls as "organizational humanistic values" which are the object of the new public administration.

The author also edited a companion reader, *Perspectives on Public Bureaucracy* (1977) which could be used together with this textbook.⁴ *Dynamics of Public Bureaucracy* has appendices which follow several chapters. The appendices amplify the discussions in the preceding chapter and present the useful techniques which students can easily grasp in dealing with problems in decision analysis or organization development. Because of the summary treatment in an introductory book, serious students are admonished by the author to consult other materials and to venture beyond the confines of public administration. He also includes some tips to students writing term papers which he inherited from Roscoe C. Martin. The book itself reflects how Kramer stood by these guidelines, for example his suggestion to limit the use of "bureaucratese."

Kramer believes that administrators could serve as powerful agents for social change. They now have the opportunities, the novel means and the resources at their disposal. The competition which Kramer advocates is the impetus towards new and expanding roles for the bureaucracy. Yet the author admits that there remain political and organizational constraints that would inhibit the bureaucracy from changing the way it has been doing things. The author writes bluntly: "Those who expect some magic formula that will energize all public bureaucracies and inspire them

⁴See Fred A. Kramer, *Perspectives on Public Bureaucracy: A Reader on Organization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop Publishers, 1973)

to new heights of service to the public will be disappointed" (p. 277).

The last book by Howard E. McCurdy is highly organized, integrated and interesting. It tries – and to a degree succeeds – to perform a very difficult task of synthesizing diverse theories and principles in public administration. The book is divided into four parts. Part One examines the characteristics common to public and private organizations, emphasizing the principles of organization and human behavior in organization. Part Two deals with the problems facing the bureaucracy, particularly the politics of administration. Part Three discusses the strategies available to the administrator such as policy analysis, executive power, management science, and organization development. These are the analytic, political, scientific, and behavioral strategies which an administrator can employ in problem solving. Part Four projects the state of the profession putting it into two contexts, namely, comparative administration and the future.

In writing this book, McCurdy was confronted by the enormous theories, methods, problems, and purposes of public administration. But in synthesizing all these he eschewed the use of a single point of view and instead attempted to weave all of these into "a pattern reflecting the richness and diversity of the field" (p. 13). The traditional fields of public administration are presented wherever relevant in each of the various parts mentioned above. However, McCurdy admits that diversity in the field is both a blessing and a curse. The contributions evolving in the field should convince critics that public administration is not withering on the vine. On the other

hand, such diversity has brought about a crisis of identity. Without a guiding theory – something to which Dwight Waldo had long aspired – diversity has created "an intellectual madhouse that forces scholars to flee to more solid disciplines" (McCurdy, p. 370, according to McCurdy). Somehow the search for the holy grail must continue. In the meantime, the future of public administration is to "straddle various discontinuities and the conflicting theories of administration" (McCurdy, p. 335).

A strand that seems to integrate public and private administration is the use of a model of administrative contingencies. It is a diagnostic, problem solving model developed by Lawrence and Lorsch, Woodward, Fiedler and Kaufman. There are no ready made solutions which could be pulled out of the hat to apply when problems arise. Rather the solution – if ever there is one – is the choice of strategies requiring judgment, diagnosis, and the knowledge of the various workable approaches in public administration that would suit a particular problem situation.

The book has suggested readings at the end of each chapter and an extended bibliography for the more ambitious. It also includes a useful glossary of terms with a chapter reference to where the terms were cited. Indicative of its behavioral thrust, there is only one organization chart – and a program management chart at that – in the entire book. However, there are many pictures, especially portraits of known scholars in public administration. Illustrations are well chosen except for one in the chapter on development administration. An American development advi-

sor is showing a Vietnamese farmer how to use a mechanical plow. Nothing is wrong with that. But no sensible Kansas farmer would ever be caught plowing a wheat field with a white shirt and striped necktie even if he is riding in an air-conditioned tractor.

Of the four books, only McCurdy's volume tapped fiction (movies and novels), biographies, and case studies to illustrate a point. *Cool Hand Luke*, *Bridge Over the River Kwai*, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, and others are used in juxtaposition with Gulick's *Papers on the Science of Administration*, Barnard's *The Functions of the Executive*, Simon's *Administrative Be-*

havior, among others. McCurdy adeptly employed fiction to temper what he called the profession's "curse of dullness."

The four books deserve a second look by those who intend to teach the basic course in public administration, by those who have relied by habit on White, Pfiffner, Dimock and Dimock, and others, by practitioners who cannot spare the time to do an "academic interlude" and by students who bemoan the boring and expensive textbooks around. These books provide us with a glimpse of the status of a maturing and growing discipline and what is in store for the future.