

***Dealing with ethical dilemmas in public administration:  
the 'ALIR' imperatives of ethical reasoning***

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## **1. *Introduction***

The new century seems to dawn with a renewed load of ethical and philosophical dilemmas which leave practitioners and academics of public administration alike in a predicament. Whereas at the beginning of the 20th century there seemed to be only answers and convictions, at the beginning of the new century we are surrounded by new questions, uncertainties and doubts resulting from the overarching processes of the globalization of market economies and information technology as well as the localization of political conflict, authority systems and culture. The phenomenon termed the institutionalization of doubt (Giddens, 1990) is then of wider significance.

Naturally, these features of modernity are not unique to civil society; they also affect the civil service and public administration in its various manifestations at both the national and international level. Administrative systems in western societies as well as emergent administrative cultures in developing countries often experience and are confronted with a number of opposing values and ethical dilemmas concerning the shape, conduct and orientation of public services. As a result, the burden of conflicting values and divergent responsibilities leave the contemporary administrator in an ethical quandary and in a state of personal anxiety or angst. However, it is not hard to realize that to overcome such a state of systemic doubt is not simply a matter of personal integrity and professional qualification. Equally significant and even harder to sustain is a threshold of institutional awareness of and receptivity to these emerging demands, as well as an increased capacity to respond adequately to and effectively deal with these challenges.

## **2. *The rise of ethical reasoning about morals***

In the history of philosophy, ethics was not among the earliest issues to be examined in a systematic manner, rather it was among the latest. A similar trend can be observed in the history of administrative thought about moral standards in governance and administration. Whereas in philosophy concern about nature physics - preceded concern about the inner world, in the evolution of administrative thinking attention gradually shifted from the purely structural and functional aspects of organization and management to questions about leadership and motivation initially and then to the proper conduct on the grounds of certain ethical and normative standards.

If ethics came after physics in philosophy, in administrative and organizational analysis ethical questions arose in the aftermath of earlier concerns about the specification of legitimate conduct on the basis of so called 'external' determinants. The focus of ethical analysis has shifted to aspects of value and normative dimensions of conduct; and how and to what extent they are internalized and respected by the individual civil servant in public institutions.

It is worth noting that the decisive moment that marked the transition from physics to ethics in philosophy is related to Socrates - who is regarded as the founder of moral philosophy - since ethics and concern with the inner - and not the outer - world became his chief object of thought and inquiry in the fifth century BC (Rowe, 1976; Snell, 1984). Socrates viewed ethics as the rational way that a thoughtful man could follow in order to achieve morality, which was, in turn, defined as the actual choice of the good - 'well doing' - after deliberation. In particular, Socrates related morality with knowledge; that is the knowledge of what is really, and not simply phenomenally, good and useful to man. The rational foundation of ethics consisted in searching for and reasoning about virtue. It is in this sense that 'virtue is knowledge' and unless wo/man

has or acquires knowledge s/he cannot be virtuous. Even more, it is only by these means, namely, reasoning about morality, that real and lasting happiness can be brought about. Evidently, the predominance of virtue in the Socratic discourse is predicated on the concept that only conscious and purposive action can be judged and evaluated from an ethical point of view and on the basis of moral standards. Indeed, Socrates advanced a unified and comprehensive idea about morality and happiness arguing that ethics is about the knowledge of the good things in life (Vlastos, 1991).

Moreover, Socrates may be credited with the contribution that he 'democratized' ethical theory in the sense that he made it available and accessible to the people at large. He did that with his dear and powerful method of discursive analysis - as Plato's famous Dialogues disclose - by means of which he was able to test people's views through constant questioning, hence discovering the true nature of virtue. He was persuaded that this type of discursive self-examination makes people better because it entails continual questioning of themselves and others about what to do and what to avoid doing on the grounds of ethical and moral standards.

Both Plato (Socrates' chief disciple) and Aristotle (Plato's successor) regarded ethics as part of politics, the main function of which was to provide the conditions under which the members of the human community, the Polity, would be able to achieve lasting happiness. Thus, knowledge and the approximation of real happiness becomes the essence of the science of the good, which is ethics.

It may also be pointed out that ethics for ancient Greeks referred not only to theoretical discussion about the topic, but essentially the actual practice of it; not simply to question and ponder what is good but even more significantly to become good. Indeed, the notion of science - 'episteme' - was inclusive not only of the abstract knowledge of a certain field of thought and expertise, but also of its artful application in life. As a result, a strong normative element permeated the whole scientific endeavour in the sense that values and normative standards ought to guide action and be translated into actual conduct. That, however, presents a major problem since the implementation gap is always there, yawning and inhibiting the transformation of value into action, the congruence of ultimate ends with concrete deeds.'

Yet that is what puts the moral integrity and responsibility of the doer to a decisive test: the courage and determination to live up to his/her proclaimed standards and values. Socrates himself demonstrated with his own personal example the essence of ethical responsibility when he said in his Apology:

You are wrong if you think that anyone who has value would count the danger of life or death or anything else, instead of aiming in his action only this: whether his action is just or unjust and whether it befits a good or a bad man's action. (28 B, 5-9)

In conclusion, for ancient Greek philosophers ethics consisted of knowledge and choice of the good things in life - and administration, to no lesser an extent one might add. Moreover, discourse about values that ought to guide conduct was considered as a value in itself that would bring about virtue and happiness if sought after in a persistent and systematic way. Thus, according to Aristotle, ethos is 'the habit of the good' and ethics is about choice, the choice of the good, which is then habituated in actual conduct.' A further implication of that is ethics cannot be conceived of as a matter of punishment and rewards, but rather as a matter of voluntary choice of the good, which is then consistently exhibited in one's conduct.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the prime criterion and objective of good governance was, for Aristotle, to accustom citizens (and civil servants, one may add) to the practice of virtue.

This is confirmed ... by what happens in states; for legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them, and this is the wish of every legislator, and those who do not effect it miss their mark, and it is in this that a good polity differs from a bad one.'

The central function of the statesman is then to provide for the moral education of citizens. In order to do that s/he will require knowledge, knowledge of virtue, and that kind of knowledge is acquired through constant search and questioning about things and action. Indeed, morality in essence consists in continually questioning it. This is the chief merit and benefit of human beings - otherwise life is not worth living. 'Life which is not subject to examination cannot be accepted by man', concluded Socrates in his unsurpassed Apology (38 A) for an ethical stance in life. And this is about what makes ethics such an interesting part of the 'Art of Living'.

### ***3. Dealing with ethical dilemmas in public administration***

When confronted with the fundamental question what to do and how to act in complex situations, and to the extent that contrasted values or decisional premises could apply in the situation, one is entering the world of ethical dilemmas or that of 'hard choices' (Hart, 1961).

A dilemma is something wider and more demanding than a problem, however difficult or complex the latter may be (Rapoport, 1960). The reason is that dilemmas, unlike problems, cannot be solved in the terms in which they are initially presented to the decision-maker. Caught on the horns of a dilemma the decision-maker is not only faced with opposed and perhaps equally unwelcome alternatives; even worse their incompatible juxtaposition also implies that they are mutually exclusive in the sense that the satisfaction of the one can only be made if the other is sacrificed. It is then the case that solving a dilemma resembles a zero sum game, whereby the choice of one value alternative is necessarily followed by the negation of the other. 'Solving' the dilemma in such a way would, therefore, be a contradiction in terms and a misnomer, since the solution reached likewise would seem to be no more than a scission and a dichotomic split of the intertwined aspects of the issue at hand.

A dilemma may, however, be dealt with in a more effective and appropriate way if the terms of reference are altered and the whole situation is reformulated and redefined so that full account is taken and due respect paid to the warring value options, which are then ordered and linked among themselves in a more systematic and coherent manner. Naturally, dilemmas abound in complex organizations, which fail to tackle them effectively.' As a result, state officials and civil servants exposed to acute dilemmas can hardly help succumbing to a state of confusion and embarrassment in which they are often quite unwillingly thrust. In circumstances like these public administration instead of functioning as a well ordered state of legitimate purposes degenerates into a state of confusion and indeterminacy. It is then the case that ethical vagueness and lack of clarity about overall values to guide action and choices in 'hard cases' may come close to unleashing a spirit of unbound relativism if not cynicism whereby everything stands. But if everything stands and anything goes, then nothing can be taken seriously, neither ethics and values nor rights and duties of public servants and citizens alike.

In an effort to make some sense out of the multitude of criteria that one way or another enter and frequent the organizational landscape of public administration a set of ground rules have been distinguished which, first, classify in an orderly way basic administrative dilemmas; and second,

ought to be taken into account whenever one is engaged in the business of dealing with them. It will be seen that the set of guiding ethical principles, which is heuristic in nature, is constructed on the basis of an ideal type (after Max Weber, 1964, 1978). The principles have also been arranged in the form of a lexical ordering and a kind of scalar logic (after John Rawls, 1971), so that the sequential mode of their application in concrete cases becomes manifest.

The advanced set of fundamental principles or criteria that integrate and rearrange the process of dealing with ethical dilemmas in public administration are: (1) democratic *accountability* of administration, (2) the rule of law and the principle of *legality*, (3) professional *integrity* and (4) *responsiveness* to civil society.

What may perhaps conveniently be described as the ALIR model of imperatives of ethical reasoning in public administration (from the initials of its key notions) would then take the shape given in Figure 1 in terms of a lexical ordering. Either through its classification function or its lexical ordering of legitimate criteria in dealing with administrative dilemmas, the ALIR model of imperatives provides in a condensed form an 'ethical canon' which is, of course, subject to and open to testing in practice and theory.'

#### **4. *The ingredients of ALIR***

There is no question that the major determinants of administrative conduct in the public sector include: (1) the wider political context within which administrative organizations operate, (2) the system of law and the kind of legal order that applies to it, (3) the body of public employees, who staff the public services and help deliver their products to the public at large and (4) the variety of citizens and users of public services who in the multitude of their associations form the particular type of civil society.

The ALIR idea forms something similar to Tailcoat Parsons' (1964) 'evolutionary universals' as far as public administration is concerned. As a matter of fact, both sets of concepts bear a close resemblance and may even be considered as complementary to each other. It would seem that the more inclusive evolutionary universals reflect on and propagate their counterparts in the administrative domain in an unmistakable way.

Taking account of the previous hypothesis about the underlying convergence between the Parsonian concept of 'evolutionary universals' and the ALIR imperatives of ethical reasoning expounded here, we may at this point reach a preliminary conclusion about good governance and the moral standards obtaining in it. Such a type of governance and administration would, therefore, have to be democratic, bound to the rule of law, capable of carrying out its missions and tasks efficiently and effectively and be responsive to civil society.

The interdependence and interconnectedness among these distinguished major premises of ethical reasoning in public administration suggests that dilemmas can only be dealt with in an effective and morally accepted way to the extent that full account is taken and due respect is paid to the four functionally associated imperatives:

- The principle of democratic legitimacy and accountability of public bureaucracy and administration;
- the rule of law and the principle of legality, whereby law and only law should govern the administration;

- the principle of meritocracy, professional integrity, autonomy and capacity of the administrative apparatus of the state; and\*
- the principle of responsiveness and responsibility of administration to civil society.

Consequently, the artful application of such a set of moral commands in concrete situations and circumstances will bear witness to the particular kind of ethical reasoning that a specific administrative system or public institution is able to achieve and sustain. The ALIR model of ethical imperatives can then provide an indicative 'ideal typical' standard or canon against which particular instances could be measured and evaluated, and even compared among themselves for analytical or explanatory purposes (Mouzelis, 1993).

### 5. *The imperative for accountability*

The distinction between politics and administration, which forms one of the most classic doctrines of modern political science and public administration (Wilson, 1887), connotes not only their division of function and their structural separation but also the subordination of the latter to the former. Thus, the primacy of politics in the politico-administrative nexus explains the ultimate political or rather governmental control of the administrative machinery of the state in a democracy. The loyalty of the bureaucracy to its political masters is grounded on the obligation of ministers in parliamentary democracies to be answerable and responsible to the legislature (ministerial responsibility to Parliament). It is only by that means that the representatives of the nation may hold the bureaucracy accountable to the will of the people and the general interest (*volonti ginirale*).

Since it is ministers who are accountable to Parliament, not civil servants, it follows that the latter are obliged to execute the orders of the former even if they disagree with their content, provided that they originate from a legitimate source of authority in the institutional hierarchy, and that authority insists on being executed despite the remonstrances put forward by officials. Subordination of civil servants to elected representatives who act as law-makers and policy-setter forms a sine qua non precondition of democratic politics. Unless subordinated to political control the bureaucracy and administration usurps power, which does not belong to it; if that happens the bureaucracy (civil or military) enters the political arena, undermines representative democracy and subjugates politics and government to its own interests and commands.

It is then a fundamental ethical duty bearing on civil servants in pluralist parliamentary democracies to subordinate themselves to political authority. Hence they owe a duty of loyalty and faithfulness to the duly elected or appointed political masters, however transient they may be. In the same vein they would have to show a spirit of neutrality and discretion in their official capacity as members of the administrative infrastructure of the state vis-a-vis partisan politics, and keep at bay their own personal preferences in the performance of their duties and responsibilities.

The conclusion that may be drawn is that 'democratic virtue' does form part and parcel of the core values and normative determinants of administrative behaviour in the public sector: namely, the administration should be held accountable to government and parliament on matters of policy and expediency. It should, however, also be stressed that the supremacy of politics over the administration in the constitutional division of powers does not amount to and cannot be taken to mean the politicization of public services and the state bureaucracy, because that would then undermine the instrumental value of the executive branch of government and administration.

*Fonctionnaires de gestion* (administrators) although guided by and subordinated to *fonctionnaires d'autorité* (politicians) are not their clients or servants in the partisan sense of the term. That would well have been the case in the context of the spoils system that prevailed in administrative practices in many a country in the past. Modern governance and administration, in contrast, is founded on the idea that the differentiation of roles and functions between politics and administration increases the quality and potential of either of them. In that regard, 'speaking truth to power' can be considered as a vital ingredient of professional ethics and moral integrity of civil servants and the administrative machinery of the state in general.

## **6. *The imperative for legality***

The rule of law (*Rechtstaat, Etat de Droit*), besides being one of the fundamental evolutionary universals in both modern politics and society, pertains in a very specific and significant way to administrative conduct. Respect and adherence to the principle of legality manifests a spirit of constitutionalism and forms an essential prerequisite for the legitimacy of state action and the exercise of authority; thus, it was regarded by Max Weber as providing the third type of legitimation of authority (charismatic, traditional, legal-rational).

Respect for and application of the principle of legality entails a particular type of control on administrative action that aims to see that public administration operates within the context of the law established by the legislature (Parliament). Since the source of all power is ultimately the people, according to the fundamental constitutional principle of popular sovereignty that is enshrined in most democracies nowadays, it follows that all power must be exercised in the name and to the general interest of the people. Consequently, government and administration alike as the executive branch of the state and indirectly of the nation itself have to respect the law, which is the expression of the will of the nation. In this sense, originating from the constitutional tradition of the French revolution, the state could be seen as no more than the mechanism which the nation set up for its own governance and administration. And for that to take place in an effective rather than an arbitrary manner the running of the business of the state has to be guided and determined by an articulate system of rules and laws. Their artful application in concrete cases by administrative or judicial authorities then forms the essence of the principle of legality and the rule of law.

The control of legality of administrative action, initially exercised by the administration itself and ultimately by independent courts of justice,' purports to ensure, in particular, that proper procedures have been followed and observed, as well as that equity, reasonableness and impartiality have been respected. It can then be argued and with good cause be expected that the artful application of the principle of legality in administrative performance would serve and promote the rule of law and the avoidance of abuse of power (Wade, 1977; Rivero, 1980; Jowell, 1985; Spiliotopoulos, 1991).'

The idea that people should be governed by law rather than by fiat is, of course, germane both to democracy and modernity. It could also be said that law establishes what may be described as the minimum standard of morality. Usually, unethical conduct - be it bribery, theft, favouritism, abuse of power, etc. - consists in a violation of law, that is putting someone above or beyond the law. Thus, consistent and fair enforcement of law can be a first priority of an ethics reform strategy. Even in antiquity, however, the concept of justice, in which all virtue is consummated, according to Aristotle,' required that people should recognize the sovereignty of law, not of other humans - the implication being that the legitimately established system of laws should be allowed to rule freely and without interference the affairs of the human community. Thus, Solon

abandoned power after establishing a set of rules for his native city-state of Athens in the sixth century Bc. What he intended to declare by this example was the value of respect for the law in itself, and that people should be ruled by law, not by themselves', otherwise he would be a tyrant, not a legislator.

## 7. *The imperative for integrity*

The application of knowledge and science in public affairs has been historically related to the advent of and increase in professionalism in their exercise. However relative or tentative that may occasionally have proven to be, it is nonetheless the case that a 'profession of government' (Chapman, 1959) has taken shape in Europe and elsewhere. Thus, the notion of public administration is usually inclusive of all public services exercising authority in accordance with public law and under the overall guidance and direction of politically responsible ministers or other elected officials at the central, regional or local level; in order to carry out their functions public agencies employ personnel having the status of public officers and are thereof governed by special provisions for recruitment, career, discipline and control. Professional integrity and autonomy - the 'professional virtue', as we may call it - qualifying absolute hierarchical subordination entails that public administration may be brought under political guidance and control but its staff is recruited and serves under the authority of law and in the public interest, and not on the basis of partisan favouritism.

The state's 'guardian elite' (Argyriades, 1996) is comprised of the body of civil servants, permanent officers subordinate to ministers who are responsible to Parliament. Civil servants are supposed to be fully competent on the basis of their ascertained knowledge, experience and expertise, and independent enough to offer official advice to ministers as well as to implement public policies and decisions in an efficient and effective manner in the public interest. To that end the essential features of the distinct profession of government and administration have, from a historical and comparative perspective, proven to be as follows:

1. Recruitment should take place on the basis of merit ascertained by special tests which are administered by assigned independent authorities so that entry to the service is no longer subject to spoils system practices (clientelism, favouritism, patronage). Thus, meritocracy becomes an important precondition of professional integrity and autonomy.'
2. Disciplinary measures should be taken by the service's own councils promoting a corporate spirit (esprit de corps) and self-government in the administrative profession; promotion on the career ladder should also be based on seniority (to the extent that longer service testifies wider experience) and merit (after rating and evaluation of performance).
3. Continuity or tenure of service and exclusiveness of practice in the designated field; that of course may be reserved for the necessary number of permanent civil servants whose duties and responsibilities involve either exercise of powers conferred by public law or/and safeguarding the general interests of the state. There could be excluded, therefore, from this category those employed on a contractual basis (unestablished staff).
4. Training and education should increase professionalism in government and administration as a whole; i.e. involving not only its legal or juridical aspects ('juristenmonopol') but also other branches and fields of executive action (engineers, doctors, economists, etc.).
5. There should also be a special set of rights and obligations promoting loyalty and integrity, including neutrality of practice; namely, a readiness to serve different legitimate governments regardless of one's personal preferences or choices.

Professionalism in public service could then be seen to accrue from a combination of knowledge, of expertise, of judgement and conduct in accordance to standards, as well as commitment to the field. Competence on the basis of knowledge, experience and expertise is in all established professions (doctors, lawyers, engineers, accountants, journalists, academics, etc.) usually accompanied by a set of shared values held by peers on how to use and apply this knowledge.

That is to say, knowledge and expertise would have to be used with certain standards defining professional ethics such as, for instance, avoiding corruption in the delivery of services. Otherwise, the profession is deprived of an essential precondition of its claim to legitimacy. As Hegel (1967: 191) supremely put it:

What the service of the state really requires is that men shall forego the selfish and capricious satisfaction of their subjective ends; by this very sacrifice, they acquire the right to find their satisfaction in, but only in, the dutiful discharge of their public functions. In this fact, so far as public business is concerned, there lies the link between universal and particular interests which constitutes both the concept of the state and its inner stability.

In this respect, the profession of government's administration and, to a comparable extent, the more recent profession of public management' I would be accompanied by a code of ethics consolidating professional virtue and integrity, and increasing morale and self-confidence. This is indeed often the case in many an administrative system in various countries. The imperative for integrity constitutes, therefore, a source of internal self-control in administrative conduct based on ethical standards and criteria shared and respected by the corps of professional administrators. Avoiding, for instance, corruption and exhibiting integrity would then be for them a matter of personal and professional honour and prestige in a culture of ethics, and not simply an externally imposed obligation." We may, therefore, conclude that the professional virtue for civil servants would impose on them certain rather austere standards and would require that they uphold and respect them in their conduct. *'Integer vitae sclerisque pours'* (integrity in life and pure from crime), as Horace put it in one of his Odes, would then seem to offer an appropriate definition of the ethical imperative for public servants.

## **8. *The imperative for responsiveness***

For Hegel public functionaries were the servants of the state only, not of civil society, since it was the former that expressed the general will of the people. The latter - *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* - on the contrary, was seen by Hegel as a conglomerate of particular and inconsistent wishes and interests. This then became the sphere of the particular, of concrete persons with their own private 'systems of needs' and the efforts to satisfy them. Whereas the state served the general interest, civil society was the state of partial interests.

In this somehow dichotomous idea of social construction, individuals actualize themselves while partaking in various activities in civil society and 'in becoming something definite, i.e. something specifically particularized' (Hegel, 1967: 133). The state, however, with its system of governance and law provides the underlying conditions by which individuals and their actions may find their fullest fulfilment. For that reason, the state was for Hegel the 'actuality of the ethical idea', that is the unity of the universal and the particular.

Hegel's thesis could be more readily understood if account is taken of the fact that he lived:

in a country where most citizens were simply 'subjects', without participation in the work of government, and where, therefore, a political life and tradition, like the English, was almost wholly lacking. His book was an attempt to educate Germans beyond 'civil' to 'political' life. (Hegel, 1967: 376)

Almost 200 years later we are now in a position to know that, unless there is an articulate and independent civil society, no political life and even less democratic polity is likely to grow and flourish. That is why civil society has been declared as one of the most essential preconditions of liberty and democracy (Gelineer, 1996; Argyriades, 1998). The new prevailing idea by the turn of the 21st century is that the state should neither command civil society nor be subservient to it; instead it would cooperate in building social capital to the benefit of the human community concerned. Thus, balancing a responsive state and an active civil society presents as an optimal strategy for enhancing the quality of and prospects for democracy.

In this respect, the 'civic virtue' of ethical reasoning in state action entails that public institutions be responsive to society and pay attention to the needs and demands of the people, facilitating access to services and creating an enabling environment for sustainable human and social development. Responsiveness is not restricted to market forces but also and even primarily concerns citizens' participation in all levels and layers of government, as well as empowering people in human communities (Bovens, 1998). Responsiveness also entails consultation in governance and the promotion of a kind of 'communicative ethic' (Habermas, 1987) in societal affairs. The transition, however cumbersome it may be, from the command type of authority over people to more communicative types of reasoning and administration of things seems to emerge as a paradigm shift in societal affairs radicalizing the features of modernity in our times.

In this context, civil society not only furnishes the state with needs and demands of an individual nature, but also with valuable sources of information, feedback criticism and evaluation of performance. Therefore, notions like decentralization, debureaucratization, privatization and citizen participation loom large in the repertoire of reform programmes and practices of many contemporary administrative systems, and affect the interface between civil society and the state. It is not only that citizens have increased their voice as taxpayers and customers of public services demanding value for money; citizens and civil are also seen to be acting as watchdogs to the state's performance or failure. Society is no longer at the mercy of state authority and control by the bureaucracy, rather the latter is under society's watchful eye (Buchanan, 1985).

In this sense, the imperative for responsiveness to civil society calls for an increased awareness and readiness to adapt to changing values and conditions in society at large, and stresses the need for an overall 'external' or societal accountability of state authorities and administration.

Naturally, 'a country's view of public administration reflects its underlying philosophy of society and the state' (Chapman, 1959: 309). State officials are affected by the way the public at large regards them. Eventually, civil servants forming a middle-class profession, par excellence, acquire the features that society expects of them. Public administration forms a partial regime in the societal complex; it is part of the state, which is subject to a distinct 'ethic of responsibility' - in the Weberian sense - vis-a-vis society.

indeed, the notions of responsiveness and responsibility bear a 'family resemblance', bordering on each other, as well as with the notion of accountability. However multi-layered their meaning may be, what cannot be missed in the bottom line is an obligation and a readiness on the part of the civil service to sincerely explain and justify its action in the public interest. Furthermore, it

should consistently act in such a way that the interests are well served and looked after by the administrators. As Plato put it in an early chapter in his Republic (A, 342 e), governors' and rulers' chief function is not to mind out for themselves 'but what is advantageous to the sailor and the ruled'. To that Thrasymachus though reluctantly agreed, comments Plato.

## 9. Conclusion

Even before the 20th century came to an end it was evident that states, governments and public services were entering a period of transition (Hobsbawm, 1994). This was essentially a transition if not a 'paradigmatic shift' from authoritarian, all powerful, states to more libertarian and associative types of social interaction between the public and non-public domains. A new type of balance between politics, the economy, culture and civil society inspires the recent discourse on reinvesting and redesigning the role of the state (and that of public services) vis-A-vis the economy and society.

In this regard, continuing to model public administration after the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy, inherited from the modernist tradition, attracts severe criticism; especially in the context of the post-modernist quest for a shift from hierarchy and control to autonomous and negotiated interaction among policy networks. Thus, new public management emerges as an alternative to old bureaucratic administration.

However, as the aim is to radicalize modernity, not to dilute it, the strategy for ethics reform in the public sector raises enormous challenges affecting as it does the quality of democracy, the rule of law, morale and morality in public services and the state's interaction with civil society. Indeed, what might be described as the intellectual vertices of the arena in the public domain also form the cornerstones of a unified administrative ethics.

Clearly, the key task ahead is to augment the moral competence and dimension of public agencies and institutions by advancing a reflexive kind of ethical reasoning that is radical and comprehensive enough. In our heavily organized if not bureaucratized societies it is often the case that moral and ethical standards enter rather as constraints to be taken into consideration rather than legitimate objectives. For this reason they tend to be overlooked or even ignored in the actual decision-making process. As a result, administration and management become divorced from ethics and morals.

There is little doubt that conflicting demands may make administration sound like a paradox; as a matter of fact, each one of the ALIR imperatives of ethical reasoning taken to its extreme would, from being a virtue, turn into a vice. Factional dissent between parts of a whole that disrupts the balance of the general condition can only be remedied if equal justice is paid to each one of them; or rather giving what is appropriate to each one (*suum quique*) would bring about justice to all. Not surprisingly, for Aristotle justice is the balance of passions and actions, 1 3 and moral virtues reside in middle states (Belfiore, 1992).

The basic aim would therefore be not the triumph of one principle or ethical imperative over the other, but rather the reduction of incongruence among them and the provision of conditions for their harmonious coexistence, mutual support and complementary fulfilment. Turning mutually exclusive dilemmas into solvable problems would then require a holistic and reflexive approach to ethical reasoning along the lines suggested earlier.

Here ethics has been conceived as a body of norms and values that guide official conduct in the public services. Their consistent and artful application is not so much a matter of sanction, but rather an issue of acculturation of ethics and the respective socialization of civil servants. This, in turn, signifies a shift in focus from external to internalized control and standards, as well as an enrichment of the normative content of administrative behaviour.

It has also been argued that unified administrative virtue is comprised of the components of the ALIR model of ethical reasoning. This model presents not only an endeavour for a heuristic synthesis of values; above all it purports to emphasize the significance of putting morality and ethics first in the public administration of tomorrow.

## Notes:

1. 'Naturally, action does to a much lesser extent touch upon truth than theory', Plato remarked in his Republic (473a).
2. Aristotle held that 'ethics is that which manifests choice' (Poetics, 1450 b, 8-9), and also that 'moral virtue comes about as a result of habit' (Nicomachean Ethics, 11 1 103 a, 17).
3. Aristotle in the Nichomachean Ethics, (11 1103 b, 6-9).
4. It is not surprising that organizations, especially those suffering from bureaucratic deficiencies in their reasoning and decision-making procedures, tend to confuse problems with dilemmas, and treat them indiscriminately (Makrydemetres, 1984). An exposure of some of the most easily met dilemmas in public organizations, besides those mentioned in the introductory section of this article, can also be found in Wayne Parsons' (1998) book.
5. Concerning the sources of inspiration in drafting the ALIR model of imperatives of ethical reasoning in public administration, the most prominent among these have been, first, Talcott Parsons' (1964) seminal theory about the major 'evolutionary universals' in society (market economy, rule of law, representative democracy, organized bureaucracy); and second, Tiihonen's (1993) elaboration of Lennart Lundquist's idea about the four loyalties in administration (loyalty to hierarchical order, to general utility, to professional expertise, to citizens and clients).
6. Needless to explain further that judicial review of administrative action neither excludes nor obviates financial control by special courts of accounts (Cour des Comptes) and efforts to combat maladministration by Ombudsman-type institutions.
7. Due attention ought, however, to be paid to the reservation about 'artful application' of legality, in the sense that it should not be allowed to degenerate to instances of excessive formalism, rigidity and legalistic bureaupathology which are often met in practice and tend to undermine the legitimate functions and objectives of the principle (Makrydemetres, 1984).
8. 'Injustice is every virtue comprehended' (Nicomachean Ethics, 1129 b, 29).
9. In that regard, open competitive examination offers guarantees for impartiality in judging the qualifications of candidates (Cassesse and Pellew, 1987). The idea that access to the civil service in the sense of becoming a civil servant should be open to all citizens without any preference except on merit has been one of the marked changes brought about by the French Revolution.
10. It is worth mentioning here Max Weber's timely distinction between two particular types of knowledge and expertise obtaining in bureaucratic organizations: these are, strictly speaking, technical knowledge of the facts of a particular object of administration ('Fachwissen'), on the one hand, and acquaintance with and command of the intrinsic qualities and procedures of the administration itself ('Dienstwissen'). The implication here is that the latter kind of administrative knowledge forms a prerogative to civil servants and is not available to those outside the organization, since it is acquired only through experience of running the bureaucratic system itself (Weber, 1964: 339).
11. It is not perhaps without good reason to argue that professionalism in government, that is in state bureaucracy and administration, has in a sense been a process that has run in parallel during the span of the 20th century with the formation of the 'principles of scientific management', as Taylor (1947) would have described it, and the rise of a distinct discipline and profession in business and enterprises. By the mid 20th century the latter process was even seen as amounting to no less than a 'managerial revolution' (Bumham ' 1945). In any case there can hardly be any dispute that the twin processes of professionalism in public administration and in managing enterprises has been a fact of

life in the public and private sectors of the economy. However elementary or fortuitous this process may, in certain cases, have proven to be, examples abound in which professionalism in government and management have crossed each other's ways and paths - the most recent of them being the rise of 'new public management' (Rhodes, 1991; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Hood, 1995).

12. Corruption as an instance of flagrant violation of ethical and professional standards is flourishing in 'hollow states' (or 'kleptocracies', as Caiden (1997) has called them) where an articulate and esteemed body of professional state administrators is underdeveloped or altogether missing.
13. Nicomachean Ethics, 1107 a, 1129 a. The text in David Ross' translation into English (Oxford University Press, 1980) reads as follows: 'Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e., the mean relative to us, this hem determined by rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passion and action, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is inter-mediate.'

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