

Book Review

Public Administration: A Very Short Introduction, by Stella Z. Theodoulou and Ravy K. Roy, Oxford Press, USA, 144 pp.

Before Treaty of Westphalia (1648) came into force when state boundaries were officially redrawn, the state was more concerned with defending its territory. The market later took over some of the state's functions, such as business entrepreneurship, leaving its traditional function related to ensuring access to good healthcare, education and other public utilities under the domain of public function. While such essential services could arguably be left in good hands with the individual state, new global problems, such as terrorism and environmental degradation that cross boundaries, require new approaches to the state bureaucracy theory, hence opening its traditional concepts of hierarchical and rational state to fresh scrutiny. Against this backdrop, Stella Z. Theodoulou and Ravy K. Roy published "Public administration: A Very Short Introduction", explaining how the field of public administration has evolved and is still evolving, highlighting its current and future challenges. The book is a part of the series of "A Very Short Introduction", published by Oxford University Press in 2016.

The focus of this book was on how to be an effective public administrator. It attempted to answer questions, such as, "If it is true that market power is the solution, what would life be like in the absence of government facilities, such as public hospitals, education institutions, roads, or even water and power supply?" In answering this question, the authors delve into the concept of leadership instead of management as the main ingredient of public administration, in the hope that new global problems could be handled with substantial credibility. To attract readers' attention, the authors begin with a rhetorical statement: citizens are not expecting a big government. However, what they expect is the government to remain vigilant when it comes to issues such as terrorism and global warming. This may require not only a high degree of alertness, but also a huge manpower. The authors discuss relevant theories and the philosophy of Public administration, directing readers' attention to early enlightenment thinkers, namely Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.

In chapters one and two, these philosophers' main ideas were discussed especially their views on public administration, especially immediately after the Westphalia Treaty, and how public administration later evolved into a new municipality in Philadelphia, United States. In Europe, when London was the locus of the enlightenment project, Hobbes postulated on

the importance of security and political stability, arguing that economic growth would only be possible if power is left in good hands of the absolute rulers, anticipating critics like Locke who argued on the importance of freedom and the minimum role of the state to protect life, liberty and property of the people. The authors also discussed the views of theorists and policy makers, especially on the question of state bureaucracy, namely whether it should be centred or dispersed. As the debate on who should be in control of power (state versus society) migrated to Philadelphia, Hamilton, Jefferson and Madison focused their attention on the newly independent British colony. Their debate was aptly termed by Donald Kelp as Hamiltonian versus Jeffersonian, in which the latter believed that power should be dispersed (versus the former), whereas Madisonian stood in between those two.

Believing in liberty and tolerance, it was the Jeffersonian school of thought in public administration which followed Locke's prescription that saw the potential tyrannical nature of the state, therefore championing the concept of limited or minimalistic government. Moving their discussion away from theoretical debate to the actual event, Theodoulou and Roy in Chapter 3 showed how public administration was influenced by progressivism movement, first in Europe, and later in the US. It is true the industrial revolution helped improve the living standards of Europeans. However, it also resulted in rampant poverty and income disparity. Hence, while the market can increase wealth, it also has a potential of being tyrannical. Progressivism as explained by the authors has influenced public administration to be more vigilant in its function, responding toward societal needs, especially to the poor, with a more welfare-oriented approach.

In this context, Weber's monumental work on bureaucracy, which is known by students of public administration as the seven characteristics of bureaucratic principles, was introduced and developed, responding to the need for more efficient civil service. The first and second World War also led to more poverty. Hence, beginning from 1950s onwards, a new welfarism, oriented towards public administration, was rolled out. The authors explained how a bigger budget allocation in US and Europe led to implementation of large scale and ambitious social programmes before the 1980s. Various social programmes were introduced in Germany, Britain, Sweden as well as US, such as old-age pension, unemployment insurance, medical leave (paid) and medical services. In this period, two opposing public administrations were developed: one championed by Herbert Simon with his scientific approach and the other by Dwight Waldo with his value-laden approach. The debate centred on the issue of science over value, in which Waldo emphasised that questions of value were not amenable to

scientific treatment, while Simon asserted that administrative science should take precedence over value-based approaches.

With the introduction of neoliberalism which emphasised deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation (following the economic crisis in the late 70s and early 80s), state bureaucracies were expected to make quick response by following the new approach of public administration, i.e. new public management (NPM). Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were the leading figures behind this movement, with academic and policy input from William A. Niskanen. It should be noted that NPM differs from NPA, as the latter is a management paradigm that emerged during the 1960s in line with Dwight Waldo's logic or emphasis of value, in which he believed is not determined by science. He was also influenced by Abraham Maslow's school of humanistic psychology. According to the authors, NPM is a governance paradigm based on a set of market-oriented principles that are rooted in a political-economic doctrine known as 'Neoliberalism'. The first wave of NPM was influenced by William A. Niskanen's work on *Bureaucracy and Representative Government*. In fact, the then British PM Margaret Thatcher made it a compulsory reading for civil servants.

In responding to new challenges, the NPM was revised during the administrations of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. This time around, Gaebler and Osborne's work on the ten principles of 'catalytic government' was widely referred to, and this was not only the case in the West but also in developing countries. The second wave of the NPM, as clearly mentioned by the author, was most notably associated with the policy agenda of Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. Their neoliberal agendas adopted many of the same principles of the Reagan and Thatcher period, but included several social justice-based initiatives, such as comprehensive welfare-to-work reform strategies, new minimum wage policies, and the expansion of tax relief schemes for the working poor and their families.

Osborne and Gaebler in *Reinventing government* outlined 10 government objectives. These principles appear to be the main source of NPM approach in public administration. Realising the importance of alternative approach in public administration, in Chapter Six of the book, Theodoulou and Roy explained the importance of public roles in policy making and its implementation, highlighting the usefulness of works by Robert B. Denhardt, Janet V. Denhardt and Maria P. Aristigueta such as *Managing Human Behaviour in Public and Non-profit Organizations*. The catchphrase "From best practice to reflective practice" appears to embody the spirit of new public services (NPS). In this chapter, the author discusses the concept of a learning organisation as the basis for NPS's development. The NPS focused on public participation by outlining its important tenets. It can be said that the new public services was developed

partly as a response to Dwight Waldo's earlier concern, and another due to new societal problems which require new experience and knowledge. The traditional structure of public administration which was heavily influenced by the Westphalian approach and Weberian individual state bureaucracy, which emphasises on hierarchy and rationality are now being challenged by the network governance approach.

In Chapter 6, the authors argued on the impossibility of the state bureaucracy to manage single-handedly current global problems. It is in this chapter the authors discuss current approaches in public administration, centring their discussion on the logic of network governance. It is near impossible for the individual state bureaucracy to be effective and legitimate if it does not tap into the expertise of its neighbour's bureaucracy. Haze and pollution, for example, spreads beyond borders without acknowledging boundaries. Terrorists who strike country A may hide in country B. Concerted efforts by states can deal with this issue. Hence, the solution which rests on the effort of individual state bureaucracy cannot be effective and this effort can be seen as suicidal. In preventing terrorist attacks and global warming, international collaboration and networking is required. As all requires network governance, the works of Robert Agranoff on types of policy and administrative networks as referred to by the authors must be objectively explored.

In the last chapter of the book, the authors provided some prescriptions and descriptions for future public administrations. Apart from leadership, the discussions were centred on issues of civil servant recruitment, e-government, public-private partnerships, co-venturing, co-creation, co-design, agility, interconnectedness and transparency. In general, the authors emphasised that it is not enough for civil servants to be just great individuals in managing public organisation. They should also be great at leading the organisation, so that not only can the individual solve problems faced by the organisation, but also objectively predict future instability. Therefore, it is not enough for public administrators to be good managers; it is equally important they become good leaders.

Although the title of the book suggests a very short introduction to public administration, the idea and coverage of the book is certainly neither short nor small. It covers a span of approximately 350 years without neglecting important ideas, theories and activities of public administration. This book is not only useful for students of public administration and political science but should also be a compulsory read for policy makers as well as public administrators.

Makmor Tumin
Department of Administrative Studies & Politics
Faculty of Economics & Administration
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur
Email: makmor@um.edu.my