

# INTRODUCING A POST-CRITICAL SCIENCE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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## ABSTRACT

What is meant by "science" and whether it is an appropriate model for public administration has been a subject of debate since Woodrow Wilson called for a science of administration in 1887. This paper introduces another voice into that debate, the voice of a world-renowned physical chemist named Michael Polanyi.

Polanyi's sharp criticism of positivism reinforces the arguments of those questioning the legitimacy of an administrative science, but instead of rejecting it, he constructed an alternative definition of science that recognizes the indeterminacy of reality, the personal nature of knowledge, and the centrality of "the logic of tacit knowing." Because all knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowing, we can know more than we can tell and tacit knowing becomes evident in the dynamic order of polycentric entities and in their reliance on tradition and the person, constrained by community, and morally responsible for discovery and practice.

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## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is simple: it seeks a solution to a problem long at the heart of the American study of public administration. Specifically, it seeks to discover *how we can develop a science of administration*. Grounded in Polanyi's philosophy, in tacit knowing and personal knowledge, this paper will argue that a science of administration is a legitimate goal for public administration if, and only if, the prevalent conception of a detached, impersonal and instrumental, rational and empirical science is replaced by one that recognizes the personal nature and tacit structure of all knowing and its dependence on tradition, dynamic order, and responsibility to a community.

The first widely recognized American call for an administrative science can be seen in Woodrow Wilson's 1887 "The Study of Administration":

Seeing every day new things which the state ought to do, the next thing is to see clearly how it ought to do them. This is why there should be a *science of administration* which shall seek to straighten the paths of government, to make its business less unbusinesslike, to strengthen and purify its organization, and to crown its duties with dutifulness. (Wilson, 1887, p. 201, italics added)

Fifty years later, public administration in the United States came into its own during the Great Depression and World War II, but the orthodox approach which had developed at the turn of the century was already beginning to be questioned. What had emerged was a critique of orthodoxy that recognized a certain naiveté about a discipline that separated politics and decision from administration and execution; about a discipline that assumed that public administration could be studied in the same impersonal, objective manner as the physical sciences; about a discipline that believed that a set of law-like "principles" of administration could be discovered and applied in a detached manner; and about a discipline that treated economy and efficiency as the central or even the sole goals of administration. However, the critique of public administration orthodoxy came from two different sets of philosophical assumptions, and the result has been a bifurcation of the field of public administration around *the possibility* of developing a science of administration.

One set of critics are those who continue to embrace a science of administration as an ideal worth pursuing. While recognizing the fallibility of human beings and the complexity of human

relations, these scholars believe that objective, empirical knowledge is possible. Shortly after World War II, Herbert Simon captured this belief when he wrote that,

A valid approach to the study of administration requires that *all* the relevant diagnostic criteria be identified; that each administrative situation be analyzed in terms of the entire set of criteria; and that research be instituted to determine how weights can be assigned to the several criteria when they are, as they usually will be, mutually incompatible. (1945/1957, p. 36)

Importantly, this approach to administrative study assumes an "objective" reality that is fixed and certain and therefore discoverable. As did public administration orthodoxy, this system holds the physical sciences up as exemplars of how a science of administration may be defined, but it emphasizes the need for additional logical discipline through the use of formal methods and theoretical constructs to focus on facts.

A second set of critics have been those who see science, itself, as culpable. These critics emphasize the importance of understanding the values, like democracy and liberty, that underlie the work of public administrators, and promote an openness to alternative ways of thinking about the world. Dwight Waldo represented this second approach when he wrote that,

Students of administration ... have simply been willing to accept the verdict of science - or more accurately, popular conceptions of the verdict of science - as to the nature of reality. It is appropriate to inquire whether these concepts of reality are consistent among themselves, whether they are valid within their proper realm, and whether, if valid, they have been extended beyond the bounds of their validity. (1948, p. 21)

This second set of critics have explored a broad range of methods and philosophies, but what ties them together is their suspicion of a science defined in positivist terms.

The purpose of this paper is to add another voice to the debate about science in administration. This voice will not seek to remove science from public administration nor even to undermine its influence. Instead, it will seek to redefine science in a way that embraces values and opens it to the influence of alternative philosophies and to the use of alternative methods and models. This voice is the voice of Michael Polanyi, a world-renowned physical chemist who became acutely aware of the fallacy of a positivist approach to science when he was confronted by its logical conclusion in the Soviet Union of Stalin. "What philosophy of science had we in the

West to pit against this?" he asked (1946/1964, p. 9), for it was the very arguments used in the West to justify science that were being used under totalitarianism to destroy it. Beginning in the mid-1930s, Polanyi began criticizing central planning, totalitarianism, and a positivist approach to science through economic, social, and philosophical writings. With science always at the center of his thinking, he also began constructing an alternative philosophy of knowledge and reality.

Science, Polanyi claimed, is but one example of personal commitment to "the logic of self-compulsion with universal intent" (Polanyi, 1958/1962, p. 396). Like art, law, a market economy, and many other arenas, science can not be centrally managed through a hierarchy but depends on "coordination by mutual adjustment of independent initiatives" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 54). Scientific principles are enforced by a community through tradition and science is learned as a skill by apprenticeship to a master. Through a process of tacit knowing, it discovers an independent reality pregnant with possibility and rejects objective knowledge that is detached and impersonal. In practice, science itself relies on the type of alternative philosophy that Polanyi sought to reveal. Consequently, to understand his critique of central planning, totalitarianism, and positivism, it is necessary to understand his philosophical argument.

### **The Logic of Tacit Knowing**

Polanyi's central contribution to philosophy is the logic of tacit knowing. We know, wrote Polanyi, by integrating *subsidiary particulars* to a *focal whole*. This triad of context, person, and object of our awareness comprises *the structure of tacit knowing*. To understand this fully, we must first examine knowledge, itself. It is widely accepted that we may identify *two types of knowledge*. The formal knowledge that is found in books, databases, and so on, is *explicit knowledge*. The informal knowledge that we have of something we are in the act of doing or discovering is *tacit knowledge*. To use explicit knowledge, we must know it tacitly. In fact, wrote Polanyi, "All knowledge falls into one of these two classes: it is either tacit or rooted in tacit knowledge." (Polanyi, 1967b/1969, p. 195)

Take, for example, piano playing. Anyone who has listened closely to an accomplished piano player knows that the personality of the pianist is evident in her playing. A piano is designed so that only one sound may emerge from hitting each key, yet a pianist passionately reaches into the depths of a piano to pull out an infinite wealth of music. This is tacit knowing at work. Knowing the keys of a scale and how to place one's fingers are bits of explicit knowledge

memorized by a novice, but expert playing requires the pianist to learn how those bits fit together into *a comprehensive whole*. The context, including explicit knowledge, must be integrated by a person into the object of our attention.

However, not only are there two kinds of knowledge, but tacit knowing is characterized by *two types of awareness*. The piano player is *focally aware* of the music he is playing but he is also *subsidiarily aware* of the keys and of his arms and fingers and even his breathing. Skills like playing a piano, bicycle riding, or using a hammer are clear examples of tacit knowing and the two types of awareness integral to its logic. In fact, if the pianist turns his focus to his fingers or the keys, his playing may well hesitate and unravel, just as someone riding a bicycle may crash if she turns her focus from her destination to her feet on the pedals.

Tool usage helps to demonstrate another key aspect of tacit knowing - when we use a tool, it becomes an extension of our body. When I pick up a pen, it is my focus, but when I *use* it to write a sentence or to draw a picture or to adjust the time on the back of my clock, I turn my focus to the sentence or the picture or the time and I become aware of the pen subsidiarily, rather than focally. The sentence or picture or time, then, become *the meaning* of my use of the pen, and the pen, while essential to my knowing process, recedes into the background as part of the context. Polanyi argued that I *indwell* or *interiorize* the pen when I use it skillfully - I make it an extension of my body. Here we can again recognize two types of knowledge and two types of awareness, but we also recognize the importance of embodiment.

Perception also demonstrates tacit knowing and indwelling - when we hear someone speak we are subsidiarily aware of a plethora of sounds around us, but our focus is on the speaker. We interiorize the sounds that assault us while our minds integrate them together into a comprehensive whole. In contrast, someone trying new hearing aids may find that all sounds have become focal and the cacophony may make true hearing difficult, if not impossible. Likewise, when we see something, we focus on the sight but we are subsidiarily aware of a host of other factors - of objects at the edge of our visual field, but also of the muscles controlling our eyes, the tilt of our head, and so on. Our perception depends on our embodiment of these subsidiary elements. In fact, Polanyi argued, "All conscious transactions we have with the world involve *our subsidiary use of our body*. (1968/1997, p. 318, italics added). Indeed, our body is primarily known subsidiarily, as it bears on the objects of our focus.

Before the logic of tacit knowing recedes into the background, it may be helpful to

introduce some additional ways of understanding it. We may say that we *submit to* the subsidiary particulars of an integration when we *rely on* them by indwelling them, but we do so *responsibly*, for a purpose, for we *trust* that they bear on *a reality that can be known*, albeit *indeterminately*. This *reliance on* a context to *bear on* reality creates a *logical gap* that must be leapt, but once it is leapt, it is impossible to return - once we know something, we cannot un-know it. Furthermore, the *possibilities* of the background to point to reality infuse us with a *passion* that drives us onward. This is the *heuristic power* of tacit knowing - leaping a logical gap does not complete our task, but opens us to new possibilities and new discoveries.

The dynamics of tacit knowing involve *intuition* together with passionate use of *imagination*, but both intuition and imagination may be seen as *integration* of subsidiary particulars to a focal whole. In the former, that process occurs almost unconsciously; in the latter, it is more intentional. Yet central to both is the leaping of a logical gap through integration of a context to the object of our attention. When Polanyi wrote that "we can know more than we can tell" (1966/2009, p. 4), his use of the phrase "We *can* know" rather than "We *do* know" emphasized that tacit knowing is a process. Had he written "We *do* know" he would have left open the possibility of making tacit knowledge explicit, but he recognized that knowing is not only a *dynamic process* but results in knowledge that is indefinite and sometimes unsuspected or even unspecifiable. "We meet here with a new definition of reality" wrote Polanyi.

Real is that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately in the future. Hence an explicit statement can bear on reality only by virtue of the tacit coefficient associated with it. (Polanyi, 1946/1964, p. 10)

Like our knowledge of it, reality, itself, is indeterminate. Looking backward, the *orderliness* of a comprehensive entity reveals the involvement of a person, but looking forward, its indeterminate possibilities excite us with a *heuristic passion for discovery*.

Having recognized a relationship between an indeterminate reality and the logic of tacit knowing, it is a small step to recognize that the logic of tacit knowing becomes evident in the objects that we know, not just in our knowledge of them. Polanyi described *an ontological theory of a stratified reality* in which a lower level is characterized by principles which leave *possibilities* open at the margins. A menagerie of processors, memory, screens, buttons, and cases are each characterized by a set of principles, but each leaves open possibilities by which they may be used. It takes a higher-level set of principles, not evident in the lower levels, to assemble the components

into a phone or computer that gives them meaning as a comprehensive entity. The success of such an entity is determined by the success of higher-level principles, but once formed, its failure is determined by the lower-level components and the principles which characterize them. In examining such a comprehensive entity, it becomes clear that a stratified reality reflects the structure and logic of tacit knowing, and just as tacit knowledge *may emerge* from the integration of subsidiary particulars to a focal whole, so a comprehensive entity *may emerge* from the restraint of lower-level possibilities by higher-level principles.

Finally, it should be clear that *reduction* by turning our focus to the subsidiary particulars of a comprehensive entity does not simply shift our focus. Rather, it dissolves the integration that brings it into being. No longer do we know the context subsidiarily as it points to our original focus, for it has become our new focus and we are now depending on our subsidiary awareness of *its* context to give *it* meaning. Furthermore, to attempt to regain the comprehensive entity, we must reintegrate it, and the new integration must take into account new elements that make it into a new entity. I will always remember helping a friend reassemble his motorcycle transmission, only to find extra parts that belonged deep within. It still functioned but it was no longer the factory-built transmission it had been.

### **A Post-Critical Science of Administration**

With a fresh understanding of the logic of tacit knowing in hand, we may return to an examination of the bifurcation in American public administration scholarship around the possibility and legitimacy of developing a science of administration. Those who argue for a more robust administrative science tend to adopt what may be called the positivist model, a model which sees science primarily as a means for obtaining knowledge of the world through *empirical research* using *formal methods* that attempt to isolate *objective, impersonal facts* from subjective, personal values. Any data obtained through such methods is interpreted by *theoretical models* that may be used to establish *universal generalizations*. Tacitly assumed (but not necessarily acknowledged) are a *fixed reality* and a *deterministic relationship of its components*. Certainty is necessary to give meaning to reality and to justify its independence from the person. To account for freedom of choice, absolute determinism is eschewed, but recurring attempts to define reality precisely, to measure it exactly, to describe it explicitly, and to predict and control it, suggest a deterministic mindset. To be true, indeterminacy is recognized, but it is dismissed as anomaly and

is mitigated if at all possible. Given such an understanding of science, public administration scholars have focused their attention on impersonal facts that are separated from values; they have relied on formal theories, methods, and models, and they have privileged the positivist model and methods above all others.

Critics of a positivist model of administrative science have argued that fact and value cannot be separated for they are joined organically, that administrative means are always informed by values, that the study of valueless facts leads to meaningless action, and that separating fact from value forces administrative scientists to smuggle their own values into their work disguised as "scientific" terms. Critics have also argued that rigorous, formal method is problematic because it creates two worlds. On the one hand is a formula world that assumes a fixed and certain reality that can be disassembled, measured, and described in an abstract, impersonal manner; a formula world where the real is classified either as an example of the formula or as an accident or anomaly. On the other hand is the world in which we live and which is forced to respond to the formula world. Because of the difference between the two worlds, translation back and forth is necessary, and it is unclear that translation efforts are successful. Critics have suggested a number of alternatives to a positivist science, including "hands-on" approaches, story-telling, intuition, or judgment that involves "intimate knowledge" and "social rationality." Such alternatives synthesize data from multiple sources and demonstrate that "we know more than we can say" (Schmidt, 1993, p. 530).

As Polanyi recognized also about physicists and chemists, those who claim to follow a positivist model of science, do not actually do so in practice. We pretend to follow strict rules, to be "pulled by strings" as if we are puppets. Yet, in practice, we know that we are making judgments and decisions, that we have freedom to choose, and that a potential discovery inflames us "with creative desire" and imparts "intimations that guide [us] from clue to clue and from surmise to surmise" (Polanyi, 1946/1964, p. 14). The problem, Polanyi recognized, is that we have no philosophy to justify and support our *personal action*. So long as we accept the positivist model of science as valid, our only alternative is to reject science completely by embracing non-scientific models and methods and forms of knowledge.

One of Polanyi's greatest contributions to the study of public administration, therefore, is to give us an alternative definition of science that is based on the logic of tacit knowing. If we know by indwelling, rather than by dominating, reality, then our central concern becomes

*discovery*, rather than method. A science focused on discovery of what is hidden but knowable eschews both a subjective reality that is created at will, and an objective reality that is fixed and determinate. Instead, it embraces a reality which is expected to reveal itself unexpectedly in the future and which is anchored in personal encounter with the world. Such a *post-critical science* readily *submits to* and *relies on* the *tacit coefficients* associated with all knowledge, while *responsibly committing itself* to a reality that is *affirmed with universal intent*. The discovery of reality through personal intuition and imagination recognizes that it can only be described, measured, modeled, predicted, and controlled tentatively, by means of personal judgment.

Therefore, a *post-critical science of administration* is interested in *personal clues* rather than impersonal facts, for *indeterminate facts* are only *meaningful* if they point to, and are integrated by a person into, a comprehensive whole. As Waldo noted, facts without values are meaningless but, set within the logic of tacit knowing, there is no need to separate facts from values. Transformed into clues, they become meaningful as subsidiary elements of a comprehensive whole. Likewise, a post-critical science of administration does not rely on formal methods and theory, for formal processes overlook the personal appraisal necessary to turn facts into clues. Indeed, any attempt to exhaustively list all alternatives cannot succeed in the face of an indeterminate world. Nor can it evaluate alternatives without judgment nor define descriptive terms without tacit knowing, for formal processes are, themselves, personal understandings of the world. Furthermore, because discovery is central to a post-critical science of administration, it readily embraces alternative methods and models and forms of knowledge. Indeed, even a positivist model of science becomes useful in "detailing" of the context or background of a tacit integration.

A post-critical science of administration calls us to discover the world of administration through the logic of tacit knowing. Because of its *radically contingent* nature and its *reliance on belief*, tacit knowing is never general and universal and always runs the risk of being mistaken. It is possible only through humble commitment, held with universal intent. It is "the deliberate holding of unproven beliefs" (Polanyi, 1958/1962, p. 268).

In addition to re-defining science and how we know, the implications and influence of Polanyi's philosophy may be readily seen in several other arenas. *Community* is central to much of Polanyi's writing, and he defines *conviviality* as the "interpersonal coincidence of tacit judgments" (1958/1962, p. 151). That such conviviality makes communication possible is itself

important, but it is community's role in supporting and enforcing *tradition* that I wish to highlight. The premisses of a tradition "cannot be explicitly formulated," but may be "authentically manifested" only in practice (Polanyi, 1946/1964, p. 85). They are tacit, known only subsidiarily as they point to an object of attention. Therefore, "A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition" (Polanyi, 1958/1962, p. 53). Such submission, however, is not blind, for the premisses of a tradition as "transmitted to us ... are our own interpretations of the past" (p. 160) and our reliance on them also modifies them. *Tradition*, as Polanyi characterized it, is *self-modifying*.

In public administration literature, such an understanding of tradition may be seen in the writing of John Rohr who argued that the Constitution did not emerge *ex nihilo*, but is part of a continuing, active process. It may be seen as "the conclusion of the great public argument of one hundred and fifty years of colonial experience and the premise of the great public argument of the next two centuries" (Rohr, 1986, p. 173). Michael Spicer (1995) also recognized the importance of a self-modifying tradition by emphasizing the importance of the common-law reasoning by which judges turn to past decisions as guides for their own judgments, with those fresh judgments then becoming part of the background on which they, and others, will rely for future decisions. Both Rohr and Spicer were effectively describing self-modifying tradition anchored in the logic of tacit knowing.

In response to the abuse of science in the Soviet Union, Polanyi argued strongly in favor of the freedom of scientists to choose their own problems. He appropriated the term "dynamic order" from Gestalt Psychology to describe the giving of free rein to the elements of a system. In society, such dynamic or spontaneous order demonstrates "*self-co-ordination by mutual adjustment*" (Polanyi, 1967a/1969, p. 84), by the freedom of individuals constrained by their interaction with each other, much as the possibilities of a lower level are constrained by the principles of a higher one. Indeed, Polanyi argued that "[a] polycentric task can be socially managed only by a system of mutual adjustments" (1951/1998, p. 226). Such a dynamic order not only reflects the logic of tacit knowing, but it also provides an environment that supports such a process of knowing and being by allowing for indeterminacy. In contrast, a formal, centralized organization must rely on fixed, explicit knowledge and assumes a certain and determinate reality.

Polanyi pointed specifically to science, a market economy, and Common Law as examples of dynamic order, but he also noted that other domains, like art, are spontaneously ordered. Within

public administration literature, Timothy Dahlstrom has found dynamic order particularly relevant to "socio-intellectual" networks (2013), and networking and polycentricity literatures resonate some of Polanyi's ideas. However, the two most pointed applications of Polanyi's concept of dynamic order have been Spicer's characterization of civil association and Charles Lindblom's "Science of Muddling Through".

According to Spicer, the understanding of the state "which undergirds much of public administration, is one of purposive association" (Spicer, 1997, p. 90), "in which individuals see themselves ... bound together for the pursuit of a particular coherent set of common substantive ends" (p. 91). However, public administration in practice is largely characterized by *civil association* in which a set of rules of conduct limit "individual spheres of action" (p. 96) while individuals are otherwise given freedom to pursue their own ends. Lindblom's "science of muddling through" (1959), or "disjointed incrementalism" (1979), also picks up on the practical nature of dynamic order. He argued that a "rational-comprehensive" model of decision-making is effectively impossible and that, in practice, public administrators employ an incremental method that is clearly parallel to Polanyi's dynamic order. Importantly, both writers have not only described dynamically ordered systems, but have also acknowledged the importance of relying on a self-modifying tradition. Consequently, both have reflected the logic of tacit knowing in their writing.

Closely associated with dynamic order is Polanyi's concept of public liberty. Public liberty is not private freedom but is the freedom of individuals to act responsibly on behalf of a community. Many of the systems that he described as dynamic orders also foster public liberty. In science, for example, individual scientists are given freedom to choose their own problems, but their freedom is constrained by their submission to the scientific tradition. Through apprenticeship, they learn both explicit and tacit knowledge contained in that tradition, but it is only when they begin to *practice* science by *voluntarily submitting to* its premisses and standards, that they are granted freedom to act on their own. Their newfound freedom is not an individual freedom but a public one for which they have accepted responsibility, a freedom that leaves them also subject to the mutual authority of all other scientists.

Importantly, public liberty can be granted to a system as a whole. Science has been granted such freedom, just as it then grants freedom to individual scientists. The domain of Common Law and the "socio-intellectual networks" described by Dahlstrom have also been granted public

liberty, and it is this granting of freedom - to act responsibly on behalf of society - that characterizes *a free society*. Larry Terry's characterization of administrative conservatorship may be seen in this light. The primary function of bureaucratic leaders, he wrote, "*is to protect and maintain administrative institutions in a manner that promotes or is consistent with constitutional processes, values, and beliefs*" (Terry, 1995, p. 24). Terry described bureaucratic institutions as dynamically ordered systems granted freedom *by society* to act independently, but responsibly, *for the benefit of society*. Like science, such institutions foster public liberty by then granting freedom to individual administrators to act responsibly on behalf of said institutions and therefore on behalf of society as a whole.

In light of his understanding of a post-critical science, Polanyi suggested that our approach should be to "try training ourselves to study human affairs by intense participation in human problems instead of by detachment from them" (Polanyi, 1957, p. 482). Such a focus on personal encounter with the world around us has always been evident in American public administration - as the early work of settlement houses and more recent work by community and neighborhood development organizations bear witness. In recent public administration literature, I find the work of Nicholas Zingale particularly interesting for it demonstrates an understanding of the personal nature of knowledge and the responsible participation of the scholar. In Zingale's work, a person is not a passive puzzle piece to be manipulated at will, nor an instrumental cog in an organizational machine, for "being ... is a way of understanding who we are by carefully observing our engagements with the world and letting these tell us about us" (Zingale, 2007, p. 48).

### **Conclusion**

In a post-critical science of administration, then, the person becomes central. Yet such a person is not an isolated individual in the tradition of Hobbes, but a being emerging from community and demonstrating *harmonious particularity* (Jardine, 2013, p. 185; Wickstrom, 2017, p. 166). We are called to submit to the context in which we find ourselves; called "to lose ourselves in the performance of an obligation which we accept" (Polanyi, 1958/1962, p. 324). Such a responsible commitment is possible because our knowledge is personal rather than subjective or objective, and the knowing process, itself, is tacit.

Once or twice a week, the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) puts out an email news bulletin. Since February 14, 2025, the subject line of that bulletin has been "Federal

Workforce in Turmoil: A News Digest”. A significant portion of the apprehension reflected in that subject line can be attributed to the efforts of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) established by President Trump on January 20, 2025. However, DOGE was dissolved by the end of 2025 and career public administrators, particularly at the national level, were criticized long before it came into being. Indeed, the Pew Research Center has been measuring trust in government since 1958 when 73% of Americans claimed to trust their government. That trust began to decline after 1964 and has averaged less than 20% since 2011. While elected officials are also implicated, trust is built on relationships and the public’s most direct relationship to government is with local officials. Public administrators have been feeling pressure from the public for years; their sense of anxiety is exacerbated by initiatives like DOGE but there are other factors that contributed to the present-day turmoil.

In light of American Public Administration’s enhanced anxiety, it is interesting to consider how the embrace of a post-critical science of administration might affect a “Federal Workforce in Turmoil”. How much of its apprehension, how much of the public’s distrust of government, comes from claims of absolute knowledge of a static reality - claims that disappoint the public while placing undo strain on administrators pretending to know and act with absolute precision? If the massive accumulation of “facts” were seen, rather, as “clues”; if the knowledge described was recognized as fundamentally personal; if the fallibility of any actions taken were acknowledged; then public administrators could accept that the so-called “turmoil” was nothing more than an indeterminate reality revealing itself. If the importance of community and tradition were recognized, perhaps ASPA would change its subject heading from an emphasis on turmoil to an emphasis on opportunity, an emphasis on responsible action anchored in tradition. Likewise, if those attempting to bring about “efficiency” and “economy” understood the centrality of the tacit knowing process, of the personal nature of all knowledge, and of the undetermined and unspecifiable nature of reality, perhaps they might approach their work with a greater sense of responsibility for the community.

The “critical method” assumes that “the path to reality lies invariably in representing higher things in terms of their baser particulars” (Polanyi, 1959, p. 64). A post-critical science, on the other hand, recognizes that we rely on those baser particulars but their meaning and purpose emerges as we *dwell in* them or *look through* them - as we know them subsidiarily while integrating them into a comprehensive whole. A post-critical science of public administration, then, leaves

open the potential for separating *administration* from *politics*. Nevertheless, an absolute division is impossible for we focus on or attend to the one while relying on the other. A post-critical science of administration acknowledges the need for *economy* and *efficiency*. Yet it appreciates their foundation in an indeterminate reality and personal knowledge and, consequently, treats them as tools rather than as ends in themselves. A post-critical science of public administration understands the importance of *objectivity* but it accepts that all knowledge is shaped by the knower. However, “[t]he sense of a pre-existent task” – a calling to discovery – “makes the shaping of knowledge a responsible act, free from subjective predilections” (p. 36). If American Public Administration could accept Polanyi’s definition of science - as a passion for discovery of an indeterminate reality through “a more and more meaningful integration of clues” (Polanyi & Prosch, 1975, p. 178) - it would find that a partnership between impersonal, objective research and an emphasis on values and meaning turns out to be the most productive approach to understanding and executing public administration. The embrace of a post-critical approach to administration that submits to tradition without being subservient and that recognizes the heuristic power of an indeterminate reality, will find that the humble acceptance of the “inherently hazardous” (Polanyi, 1958/1962, p. viii) nature of personal knowledge opens the administrative state to wondrous possibilities. We *can* know more than we can tell.

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