

How philosophy can enlighten public management in times of political polarization

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Abstract

Polarization has dominated the global political outlook for the past decade and has affected public governance. This study aims to demonstrate that public managers can analyze the decision-making opportunities in government by understanding the philosophical, political, and managerial-technical backgrounds, avoiding the harmful polarization of ideas present in the public environment today. This theoretical essay contributes to comprehending the nature of the knowledge structure applied to public administration. It also contributes to separate the private and the institutional dimensions. The reflection suggests that it is possible to avoid reifying political opinions and maintaining a democratic spirit, so managers can become more conducive to consider the plurality of ideas and be more open-minded without refraining from their convictions. These steps can be followed without losing focus on improving society's quality of life as an impartial and scientific outcome of public management.

Keywords: Public administration. Public management. Ethics. Philosophy. Political polarization.

Como a filosofia pode iluminar a gestão pública em tempos de polarização política

Resumo

A polarização tem dominado o cenário político global na última década e afetado a governança pública. O objetivo deste estudo é demonstrar que, por meio da compreensão do pano de fundo filosófico, da política e de técnicas gerenciais, o gestor da coisa pública poderá analisar, de forma mais clara, as oportunidades que envolvem a tomada de decisão nos ambientes governamentais, evitando a polarização nociva de ideias hodiernamente presente no ambiente público. Por meio deste ensaio teórico, espera-se contribuir para o conhecimento das naturezas que compõem a estrutura do conhecimento aplicado à administração pública, bem como para a separação entre o institucional e o privado. Com isso é possível evitar a reificação das opiniões políticas e manter o espírito democrático, o que permitiria ao gestor tornar-se mais propício, sem abster-se de suas convicções, a considerar a pluralidade de ideias e tender a ser mais tolerante com as opiniões contrárias, sem perder o foco na melhoria da qualidade de vida da sociedade como corolário imparcial e científico da gestão pública.

Palavras-chave: Administração pública. Gestão pública. Ética. Filosofia. Polarização política.

Cómo la filosofía puede iluminar la gestión pública en tiempos de polarización política

Resumen

La polarización ha dominado el panorama político mundial durante la última década y ha afectado la gobernanza pública. El objetivo de este estudio es demostrar que a través de la comprensión de los antecedentes filosóficos, la política y las técnicas de gestión; el gestor de asuntos públicos podrá analizar, con mayor claridad, las oportunidades que implican la toma de decisiones en el ámbito gubernamental, evitando la dañina polarización de ideas, presente en el ámbito público actual. Mediante un ensayo teórico, se espera contribuir al conocimiento de las naturalezas que componen la estructura del conocimiento aplicado a la administración pública, así como a la separación entre lo institucional y lo privado, a la no cosificación de las opiniones políticas y al espíritu democrático; lo que permitiría que el gestor –sin abstenerse de sus convicciones– se volviera más propicio a considerar la pluralidad de ideas y tendiera a ser más tolerante con las opiniones contrarias, sin perder el foco en mejorar la calidad de vida de la sociedad como corolario de una gestión pública imparcial y científica.

Palabras clave: Administración pública. Gestión pública. Ética. Filosofía. Polarización política.

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INTRODUCTION

There is not a consensual concept of polarization; on the contrary, for Bramson et al. (2016), there are at least nine distinct types to conceptualize it. Not always negative, it is often even desirable, as in democratic debate environments. However, the concept that best aligns with the context in this study is that polarization consists of the distribution of ideas and opinions at opposite extremes.

Recent events, such as the election of the controversial Brazilian president, Jair Bolsonaro, in 2018, the Brexit in the UK, Trump's election in the USA, the yellow vests movement in France, and the invasion of the US Congress by Trump's supporters who tried to prevent Joe Biden's victory certification session, have brought to the fore the marked polarization of ideas as an adverse factor in the realm of public administration, especially when addressing everyday problems that affect citizens' quality of life, and particularly in the fields of education, health, public safety, and the economy.

Polarization has always been present in political environments, such as the National Congress, since it is part of the democratic system. However, after the 2018 presidential elections, it became clear, through social media, that the bellicose proposition of ideas reached a large part of the population mass (Freitas & Boaventura, 2018). In public administration, this harmful polarization was evident when the politicization of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic occurred. While scientists recommended social distancing (Dandekar & Barbastathis, 2020), politicians ignored the facts by encouraging people to preserve the running economy at the cost of lives taken by the virus.

Many times, public managers do not pay attention to the fact that decisions to face social problems go through a chain of knowledge and values whose nature must be established so that decision-making can be more scientific and less dogmatic. Hence the need for all managers of public affairs to know at least some of the main points of debate in human thought that occurred throughout history and directly affect public administration in its ethical, political, and managerial aspects. It is expected that this minimum framework of humanities knowledge will allow public managers to adopt three attitudes inspired by philosopher Sandel (2015) that are essential to a healthy debate of ideas: the separation between the institutional and private realms, the non-reification of political opinions, and the democratic spirit. The choice for Sandel and also for Rawls (2009), who will be mentioned throughout the text, can be explained. We sought to investigate, in the philosophical tradition, authors who could serve the purposes of this study. In their writings, both Sandel and Rawls are concerned about the public debate of ideas and the construction of philosophical visions deeply based on the objective of building a just society. Many philosophers have the same intent, but contemporaneously both have been prominent in addressing issues that characterize the current Western society, always seeking the maximum reasonableness to solve complex issues, such as the construction of fair institutions. Sandel is prioritized in this analysis, without disregarding Rawls' constructive counterpoint, since the authors have different positions from the theoretical point of view: Rawls is a liberal writer, although he can be considered "neutral" from certain points of view, whereas Sandel is considered a communitarian. However, we have chosen not to emphasize the liberal or communitarian aspects of their views too much, but to use their ideas as philosophical tools that can be useful to public managers in times of polarization.

Belonging to the applied social sciences, public administration must face the ethical and political questions that used to be almost exclusive to philosophy, even as a way to mitigate the harmful effects of the polarization of ideas (Chaia & Brugnago, 2014). Philosophy, by its nature, has the characteristic of providing varied answers to similar problems. Precisely because it has a vision of the whole, it is capable of decisively helping particular sciences, which is something that we intend to elucidate in this article.

On the one hand, public managers are constantly pressured by society's demands, and cannot wait for endless political debates to take a stand and make decisions that meet citizens' desires. On the other hand, decisions without due reflection can lead to disastrous results, especially in situations in which the manager deals with decisions that impact the lives of thousands of people, as in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic. This necessary reflection would be possible by resorting to philosophical thought, specifically through the aforementioned authors.

By discussing important aspects of the philosophical, ethical, and political debates that affect decisions concerning public administration, we intend to stimulate public managers and students in the field of public administration to understand the structural nature of knowledge in that field, so that they can discern between the healthy discussion of points of view and

the harmful polarization of ideas, which has been so common in community environments in Brazil. We also expect to contribute in making public managers aware, without abstaining from their convictions, with regards to the plurality of opinions that are inherent to public environments, so that they can become more tolerant to contrary judgments, without losing focus on the improvement of society's quality of life as a corollary of public administration.

Next, some fundamental concepts and aspects of public administration will be addressed under the context of the authors considered relevant to the present discussion, from the field of ethics and politics, to achieve the proposed objective.

NORMATIVE ETHICS

Ethics considers the virtues, principles, and consequences on human beings, examining the nature of moral values and the justification of their life application, without neglecting rationality, impartiality, or moral freedom (Skorupski, 2002). Several questions permeate ethical reflections: What are the good and the virtuous life? Are there universal values of goodness? On a second level where these questions are asked, for example, are there objective answers to the previous questions? Such higher-level questions are called metaethical (Skorupski, 2002). Recent metaethical discussions have rescued interest in the objectivity of ethics by equating "moral judgments" with scientific propositions (Williams, 2002). In the 20th century, for example, the study of ethics was virtually restricted to the discussion on whether values were characteristic of the world or mere products of human preference. Moral problems were relegated, but after two wars, the rise of totalitarian ideologies, and several genocide attempts, the pressure for systematic moral thinking about fundamental values increased (Haldane, 2002). On that account, this topic will be devoted to the study of the need for normative ethics in public administration.

Before defining the scope of ethics to be dealt with in this paper more specifically, some concepts must be understood. The distinction between ethical theories and ethical definitions is fundamental. While ethical theories are extensive and complex, definitions are simpler and more straightforward (B. Gert & J. Gert, 2017). No one would be pretentious enough to consider that there would be an ethical definition applicable to any ethical discussion, yet there are two essential senses in which ethics has been approached throughout history: the descriptive and the normative senses. While in the descriptive sense ethics is understood as the study of a group's particular behaviors – such as political preference, religion, and ideologies –, normative ethics, on the other hand, refers to a code of conduct that is universal and applicable to all rational beings under certain specific conditions (B. Gert & J. Gert, 2017).

Two examples of moral attitudes that can illustrate normative ethics are: avoiding causing harm to others and being honest. Although ethical relativists deny the existence of any universal morality, which makes them known as "moral skeptics", the so-called "moral realists" believe that there is a minimum level of social cooperation to sustain the existence of any societies over time. This is the normative aspect of ethics, that is, the substantive definition that it is wrong to kill, steal, cheat, deceive, and so on (B. Gert & J. Gert, 2017). Kant, an advocate of deontological ethics, is almost a realist for his view of the categorical imperative (Williams, 2002). For Kant (1995, p. 23), morality is the rational, so much so that he created the axiom: "[...] act only, according to that maxim, by which you may, at the same time, want it to become a universal law". Therefore, Kant sought to establish the supreme principle of morality, which he called the categorical imperative (Kant, 1995).

Normative ethics is so powerful that it stands the test of the three main ethical traditions that have influenced the Western world: Aristotelian ethics, based on virtue; deontological ethics, based on duty; and utilitarian ethics, based on consequences. Commitment to the public interest and the pursuit of the common good (Aristotle, 1991), for example, are or at least should be normative for public administration. The lack of honesty of a public manager who embezzles public money for himself has a direct connection with this dualism.

From a deontological point of view, Kant called the instrumentalists rational egoists, those who reject morality by arguing that the individual is justified to 1) seek what is good for and avoid what is harmful to himself, 2) do whatever promotes his goals (Skorupski, 2002). However, thinkers such as Mandeville (1732) argued that human selfishness and vices are good for society. He claimed that the pursuit of self-interest would have as an unintended consequence a stabilizing character for society. The "common good" would not be a product of people's goodness or their virtues, but of their vices (Mandeville, 1732).

Utilitarianism holds that an individual's well-being has intrinsic ethical value. However, ethical value consists in general rather than individual welfare, although welfare resides only in concrete individuals. Therefore, the question remains: and what if an increase in X's welfare implies a decrease in Y's welfare? The principle of impartiality is necessary, in which no individual welfare is given greater weight in the overall sum. Even though utilitarianism has been devastated by critics, its concern for the collective over the individual cannot be denied. An example is Bentham's (1996) explanation of punishment. Taking into account that utility, happiness, or pleasure are almost synonymous in the utilitarian view and that they should be maximal, the punishment that causes pain to a transgressor is justified because it produces a greater reduction in pain elsewhere (Bentham, 1996).

Few ethical absolutes normatively apply to public administration, such as honesty and commitment to the public interest, because, "[...] there is no substitute for direct concern about other people as the foundation of morality" (Nagel, 2001, p. 68). It is noted that, for citizens and public managers, honesty and commitment to the public interest can be turned into absolutes to be followed, but such absolutes should not remain merely rhetorical. Although philosophy in the English-speaking world has fallen into closed academicism, which is inaccessible to common citizens and solely tied to the objective canons of argumentation, Socrates was an example of a philosopher who was concerned with the practical day-to-day application of philosophical knowledge - without losing rigor, "[...] he did not act in an academy, but in the marketplace and on the streets of Athens" (Wardy, 2002, p. 485). In public administration practice, the conformity of discourse with everyday practice is fundamental, for only then does the one who discourses clothe himself with the authority to propagate his knowledge.

Empiricism has also confirmed the importance of normative ethics. Even though its adherents have often fought ethics for its being in the field of value, it cannot be denied that many ethical propositions have been confirmed through empiricism itself. An example was the empirical trans-societal study which showed that people's intrinsic honesty has an inverse correlation with the index of "prevalence of rule violations". In other words, honesty has a high correlation with rule-obedience habits. The results further showed that weak institutions and cultural legacies that generate rule violations, such as the Brazilian way of doing things, have adverse economic consequences and hinder the smooth functioning of society (Gächter & Schulz, 2016). Common sense conveys the idea that poverty leads society to be dishonest; however, this study showed the opposite: the country perpetuates poverty because it has a corrupt and dishonest society.

Despite its name, normative ethics is more similar to principles than to rules themselves. In this abstract perspective of principle rather than the rule, there are premises or principles that everyone accepts (Sayre-McCord, 2014). This study advocates that public managers should focus their efforts on these universal points so as not to risk falling into circular debates, since both conservatives and progressives, at least rhetorically, are against corruption and in favor of the common good, which generates good quality of life.

POLITICS

At the level of practical application, politics is the arena where ideas contend descriptively. Descriptive ethics is no less important than normative ethics. However, we can classify it as distinct in nature, since it cannot be applied universally, but lies in the realm of personal opinions, customs, and culture, in which political opinions fall.

In the political and philosophical field, disputes and debates without a plausible conclusion go back a long way. In epistemology, despite its noble task of investigating the nature, origins, and validity of knowledge, the discussion about whether knowledge is a justified true belief, for example, goes back to Theetetho, the Platonic dialogue (Plato, 2005), written before Christ.

No less old and directly affecting public administration, the epistemological discussion between human autonomy and realism continues with voracious advocates on both sides. The idea of human autonomy was born with the first relativist thinkers in history; those who believe that nothing in the universe can be taken for granted because everything is relative. These philosophers who reject external realities to human consciousness claim that people's moral properties are not in the world,

but are projected onto it by feelings and reactions (Williams, 2002). While the Enlightenment view of science links reason to objective truths, relativists claim that rationality is a matter of conforming to the rules of a particular practice, making truth unattainable (Hollis, 2002).

Thinkers, philosophers, and scientists who defend human autonomy are usually relativists since they believe that participation in current controversies is conditioned by individuals' commitments, personal interests, and convictions (Searle, 2002) – in which case objectivity is an illusion. There are no neutral facts in interpretations when someone exposes something if it is based on their preferred theory of choice (Hollis, 2002). For relativism, society will be good when it is good by its own standards (Archard, 2002). History is an example of a particular science in which human autonomy reigns supreme. According to Pompa (2002), historians' value judgments affect their explanations in various ways and undermine the explanation of what happened, but this does not show that historical knowledge is less respectable than the natural sciences, which have more consensual assumptions concerning the nature of reality.

Even in mathematics, which is supposedly an exact science, the clash between realism and relativism exists. Whereas for the realist there is an eternal and unchanging fundamental order, relativists of Aristotelian conceptualism believe that the cosmos is a collection of individual things that change a universe that is partly contingent (Tiles, 2002). In this way, the idea that human beings are autonomous and independent of any kind of external reality gained strength, especially among progressives.

The idea that the world around us is completely subjugated to human consciousness, on the other hand, has many opponents. Realists believe that there is an external world to our consciousness, an objective reality in the world, and it is up to scientists to do the work of unraveling it. "Our acceptance of the external world is instinctive and powerful: philosophical arguments are not enough to rid us of it" (Nagel, 2001, p. 16). Moore so securely believed in realism, that demonstrating the existence of one's own hands was enough to prove the existence of an external world (Baldwin, 2002).

According to Blackburn (2002), the realist seeks real objectivity by considering the world of facts. Foundationalism, for example, uses the metaphor of constructing a building in which, if the chain of beliefs regressed infinitely, one would reach the types of beliefs that do not need a justification because they are self-evident. An example of this would be, "one plus one equals two" (Grayling, 2002). For Moore (2002), there will always be an epistemic type that can overcome all others; therefore, the idea that there is an ultimate, absolute type seems correct. This is the reason why scientists, philosophers, and conservative thinkers tend to approach realist epistemology and empiricism because the truths abstracted from the world of natural realities are very dependent on experiments. Progressives, on the other hand, tend to rely more on rationalism, since for them, human consciousness overrides the natural world.

For rationalists, necessary truths are reached by intuition and rational inference, and they are confirmed through instruments such as logic and mathematics (Grayling, 2002). For empiricists, authentic knowledge in the world is attained through experience and the use of instruments such as telescopes and microscopes. Empiricists believe that natural science leads to knowledge through observations and experiments (Grayling, 2002). Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and David Hume strengthened empiricist epistemology. The studies by the Vienna Circle from the 1920s to the 1930s showed that empiricism was the corollary of logical positivism (Taliaferro, 2002). Hume so strongly believed in empiricism that he went so far as to claim that all his theses were based on experience - for him only experience establishes facts. Experiments that are not testable or revisable are the enemies of genuine scientific investigation (Hume, 2009).

In the field of public policies, the tension between administration and political science is a constant reality (Paula, 2005). How can public managers get rid of these paradoxes that often paralyze thinking and argumentation in their work? This type of question is a trap for public managers. They are not responsible for solving dilemmas that have been discussed for millennia in the political and philosophical community. This is not because public administration is an inferior science, but because the political aspects of philosophy, especially those related to public administration in terms of epistemology and ethics, have never reached consensus, at least not until now. Does this make politics a lesser science? Not at all, this lack of consensus stems from the descriptive nature of politics.

Ethics also has its political aspects that do not demand consensus because it deals with divergent opinions. Therefore, public managers must adopt a scientific posture that is open to investigation and dialogue, never taking a dogmatic position as the bearer of unquestionable truths. For example, the ethical discussion that has been going on for millennia without a solution, namely, hedonism versus stoicism, has stoicism on one side, which advocates the culture of moral discipline, with reason as the ultimate purpose of life. On the other side, the adherents of hedonism seek pleasure as the corollary of existence. In other

words, whereas for hedonists, pleasure and the absence of pain were the ultimate end of life, for stoics, the ultimate end was living according to reason (Wardy, 2002). Few people deny that power, money, and pleasure are good things in themselves. Even religious people like Paul, the Christian apostle, attributed the root of all evil to the “love” of money, but not to money itself (Sociedade Bíblica do Brasil [SBB], 1995). However, these three elements form the tripod of hedonism, which has been defended and fought by many philosophers throughout history. For public managers, it is evident that these three elements have the power to potentiate human bestialization, being enough to notice that almost all crime has its origin in the obstinacy for money, power, or pleasure. For this reason, conservatives align themselves with the stoics to regulate hedonistic desires in the public arena, whereas progressives, on the contrary, seek to delegate to the individual the freedom to choose his paths, even if these decisions may be harmful to himself. That accounts for much of the tension in the public arena over issues such as drug decriminalization, abortion, and euthanasia.

Public managers have the common sense to balance the promotion of general welfare through the regulation of conflicting interests, without renouncing the guarantee of freedom that leads to each individual’s happiness. In this paradox, the polarization concerning decisions in public policies can compromise the spirit of impartiality that is essential for public managers. Therefore, the best option lies in the institutional framework allied to the democratic praxis. The best manager is the one who involves the collective and everyone’s decision under democratic institutional bases because good public managers are imbued with republican feelings. This directly affects decision-making and is evident in Denhardt’s (2013) analysis of public administration theories, in which he argues that such theories should be based on values such as equity, justice, and freedom, and not focus on issues related to power, as organizational theories advocate.

These conflicts have existed for millennia, and are therefore considered insoluble by many (Skorupski, 2002), which is why public managers who deal with real and imminent social demands daily should reflect on whether it is worth expending their energy on circular debates without consensus, arising from divergent political opinions, while the fight for what is normative takes a back seat.

It will be explained below how politics, regardless of its bias, lacks management techniques to be converted into tangible public policies for citizens.

MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Management techniques, widely used in public or private administration, are situational and transitory in nature. They date back to 3,000 years B.C. when the Sumerians made their first records of business transactions. Plato, in his work, *The Republic*, also showed the importance of managerial techniques such as the specialization of tasks and competencies. Administration, however, can be considered a newborn science, since the classical school of administration emerged in 1885 as a result of the Industrial Revolution (Pindur, Rogers Sandra & Suk Kim, 1995).

Frederick Taylor’s so-called scientific administration was well used during the Industrial Revolution to promote increased productivity and efficiency. However, the increase in efficiency and profits did not prevent the abuse of economic power by employers, requiring an ethical turn in this young science, which was marked by the emergence of the human relations school with Elton Mayo in the world of organizational theories. Mayo and his contemporaries realized that economic incentives were not enough to improve productivity since the healthiness of the environment and good interpersonal relationships with those in higher positions affected human motivation to act (Pindur et al., 1995). Human beings should no longer be seen as a mere money-making machines, but as social beings with intrinsic dignity.

The transient nature of management techniques cannot be forgotten either. Techniques, ideas, and knowledge in the administration world, although present in history since ancient times, have been adorned with fads. Authors who clothe old techniques in a new guise are elevated to the status of “gurus” (Parker Lee & Ritson, 2005). Unlike normative ethics, which, besides being perennial, permeates the other natures of knowledge, managerial techniques should only be applied with proper analysis of the context and guided by the normative principles that govern the republican spirit, otherwise, they may not have the desired effects (Rohan, 1986).

The dependence of management techniques on normative ethics is expressed through the history of applied ethics. In the specific case of this study, the history of public administration shows that the motivations in serving the public are different from those encouraged in the private sector (Perry, Brudney, Coursey & Littlepage, 2008). Human motivation, when targeting the public spirit of common good, runs through principles such as compassion, commitment to the public interest, and self-sacrifice (Perry & Hondeghe, 2008).

Codes of ethics determine professional values and responsibilities and are characterized by multidisciplinary dialogue. Normative practices are manifested from university teaching to corporate advice. In this context, however, the focus is on concrete situations, for the nihilistic danger of technical-scientific development is mitigated to the extent that value and purpose are linked to a philosophy of a teleological nature (Parizeau, 2003). With such awareness, public managers develop the understanding that, without normative ethics, technology and technical and scientific knowledge can bring many ills to society, as occurred at the time of World War II.

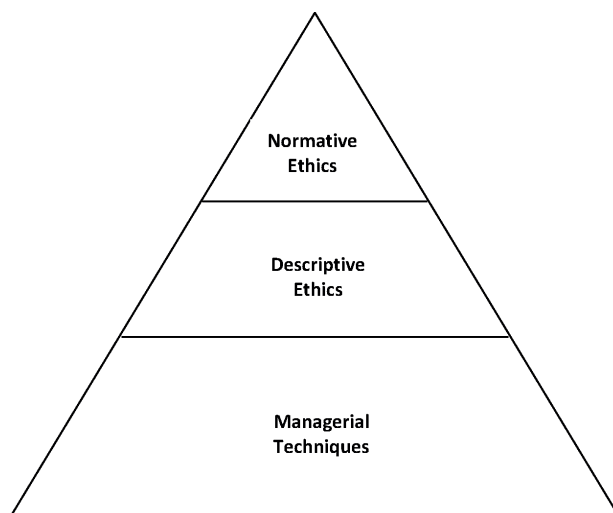
Management techniques in the public sector are expressed in the form of public policies. Thus, these managerial practices are also strongly influenced by the political context. The decision-making process in the field of public policies has been explained mainly based on three models: multiple streams, advocacy coalitions, and punctuated equilibrium. These three models admit the influence from the power relations of various actors (Almeida & Gomes, 2018).

Management techniques permeate the entire public policy cycle, including the phases of problem identification, agenda formation, alternative formulation, decision making, implementation, evaluation, and extinction (Secchi, 2013). However, each technique has its application very well defined according to the need corresponding to the respective phases. The decision tree technique, for example, is compatible with agenda formation, since the list of priorities for action by a government will become the public policy agenda (Secchi, 2013). In this way, the techniques work as tools available to the craftsman who uses them according to the need that the moment requires.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE THREE NATURES OF KNOWLEDGE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

As discussed so far, there are three distinct natures of knowledge that permeate public administration. The ethical-normative, the political-descriptive, and the technical-managerial natures. Although it cannot be stated that one is more important than the other, they have completely different roles and distinct capillaries as well.

Figure 1
The Natures of knowledge in Public Administration



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The issues concerning normative ethics have a universal nature in public administration. For this reason, they permeate all other natures of knowledge, making them dependent on the normative application of ethics. In other words, if normative ethics is not well applied, policy and managerial techniques will not provide the quality of life so desired by public administration. Therefore, many are the thinkers who believe that care for ethics in its normative sense is one of the main reasons that differentiate developed countries from underdeveloped ones (Gächter & Schulz, 2016; Gundlach & Paldam, 2009; Treisman, 2000).

The particular science of public administration essentially occurs through public policies based on real data and empirical experiments (Secchi, 2013), but they cannot disregard the fact that public managers must be guided by universal values of citizenship, honesty, and commitment to the public interest as rational principles that are the precursors of experiments.

It is noteworthy that normative ethics does not compete with or is inimical to descriptive ethics. It cooperates to make descriptive ethics work well, regardless of the adhering political position. Analytical philosophy has addressed this problem by analyzing the *analytical versus the synthetic paradox*. Analytical truths are propositions such as “ $2 + 2 = 4$ ”, “triangles are three-sided figures”, that is, the truth of the proposition is *a priori*, necessary, and determined by its meaning. Synthetic propositions, on the other hand, derive from an empirical, *a-posteriori*, contingent fact, for example: “unmarried young men die earlier”. Positivists claimed that relevant questions were either analytical or synthetic; all other propositions were meaningless or unverifiable (Searle, 2002). However, in their eagerness to demolish ethics, positivists entered the realm of values by distinguishing evaluative elocutions, such as “it is wrong to steal”, as unverifiable, therefore, meaningless (Searle, 2002). Hutcheson claims that human beings have a moral sense that communicates the moral ideas that move their actions through experience. He explains why certain moral opinions are common to people of all ages and cultures and also why these opinions are aroused spontaneously, independently of our will, when an offensive action causes outrage (Hutcheson & Leechman, 1755).

Hume (2009), however, believed that moral or normative judgments are not genuine propositions, but only affective expressions of decisions or volitions. Many positivists have led this Humeian thought to have great influence in contemporary cultures, although it is losing ground in philosophy (Skorupski, 2002). Both views are correct if we think about the categories of natures. The descriptive nature of politics does not put it in opposition to the universal nature of normative ethics. Hence, it is not a case of which ethics is superior, but that descriptive ethics is highly dependent on normative ethics as a practical prerequisite that precedes it.

When a scientist begins a research project, his intuition will always contain political elements of his worldview; however, serious researchers do not distort methodology to reach their desired ends. Even if this occurs, the scientific community exists as a critic of scholars' work. Therefore, public managers should abide by a sincere investigation of the evaluation of public policy results, regardless of their preferred epistemological or political bias, never forgetting that, despite their political point of view, healthy normative ethics should permeate it.

As for operational and technical administration issues, besides also being highly dependent on normative ethics, they are in a constant state of obsolescence. Therefore, they are situational and transitory in nature. Despite the permanent condition of innovation of managerial techniques, they are related to the common thread of public administration theories, which are based on the intellectual heritage from Max Weber, with emphasis on rational bureaucracy and the political influence by Wilson, who highlights the dichotomy between politics and administration (Denhardt, 2013). For this reason, managerial techniques are indispensable to the decision-making process in public administration.

To prevent managerial techniques from becoming tools in the wrong hands, it is necessary to reduce the gap between the economic-financial, institutional-administrative, and socio-political dimensions. Technical efficiency cannot be sought as in the New Public Management (NPM) model, in which the managerialist movement sought it to the detriment of democracy and the public interest (Paula, 2005).

The classification of the three natures of knowledge in public administration is necessary, but not a sufficient condition for public managers to analyze decision making in governmental environments, thus avoiding the harmful polarization of ideas. Therefore, it is finally necessary to invoke the three attitudes inspired by Sandel to achieve this goal, namely: the separation

between the institutional and the private spheres, the non-reification of political opinions, and the democratic spirit (Sandel, 2015). Here, it can be seen how the dimension of normative ethics matters for public managers' decision-making.

The division between the institutional sphere, which is collective, and the private sphere, which is individual, is fundamental for a quality public debate of ideas. This becomes necessary because, at some point in the course of human history, there was a differentiation between what belongs to the group or community and what belongs to the individual. Personal beliefs, tastes, private properties belong to the individual, who exercises his freedom limited by the *res publica*, or public thing. It is equivalent to saying that, to a greater or lesser extent, individuality is under the supremacy of collectivity (Bobbio, 2007). Thus, institutions promote restrictions that structure political, economic, and social relations (North, 1991).

In considering the existence of the individual and institutional spheres, Rawls (2005) acknowledged that human beings should not shy away from their beliefs, devotions, and loyalties; however, these personal convictions should not be imposed on others at the institutional level. Non-reification of one's own beliefs, ideas, and political opinions is part of the sensible pluralism of the modern world. Rawls (2009) recommended the use of the veil of ignorance, a mental experiment in which the individual simulates not knowing what class he or she belongs to when defining social principles.

Finally, even though divergent political views are inherent to democratic societies, the spirit of democracy, beyond a system of institutional democracy, allows people to overcome culture wars. The explanation lies in the realization that ethical reflection is not an individual quest, but a collective one. The realization that, despite the attempt, the pursuit of neutral principles of justice is a mistake, does not allow social ethical principles to be deliberated by individuals in dissonance with the community (Sandel, 2015). At this point, Sandel's thought diverges from Rawls', as he considers community inclusion as decisive for deliberating on values that should guide collective decisions. Here, it is noteworthy that this article, as mentioned in the introduction, did not aim to deepen these differences. This short analysis is concluded with the observation that further studies on such topics and authors are required to show how normative ethics and, more generally, philosophy can enlighten decision-making in public administration in times of political polarization. After all, such times increasingly call for reflection and access to the philosophical tradition and argumentation to avoid wrong decisions and prevent future polarizations and other problems in public administration.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Regarding Sandel (2015) and Rawls (2005), it can be concluded that through the separation between the institutional and the private, the non-reification of political opinions, and the democratic spirit, it is possible to promote a quality public debate. When public managers become aware of the philosophical background and knowledge structure that guide the decision-making process in public administration, as was discussed in this study, they are expected not to neglect rationality, impartiality, or moral freedom, as Sandel (2015) and Rawls (2005) pointed out. Although there is a clear polarity of ideas in the world of political issues applied to public administration, a sensible balance between these poles is desirable for the scholars in this science. This is not to say that it is not appropriate for public managers to position themselves, for ethical theory does not simply consist of thoughtful responses to reasons for action (Skorupski, 2002). Public managers, however, cannot evade the duty to make technical, fact-based decisions, ensuring the correct use of scientific methodologies, regardless of their beliefs and political options. Who has the power to examine these facts? The scientific community together with public administration practitioners both allied to social control.

As shown, many conflicts of ideas have been present for millennia, and have not found consensus. It would be temerarious if, to implement public policies, managers first tried to resolve these dilemmas. But by knowing the nature of these clashes, they will become more likely to consider the circular effect of these discussions and, thus, prevent the polarization of the issues that paralyze decisions within public administration. Moreover, understanding that the progress of a society depends on the permanent vigilance of the universal principles that sustain it is essential for policies and managerial techniques to achieve the expected results within the scope of this applied social science called public administration.

Among the limitations to this article, two important unanswered questions can be highlighted. The first is the following: would it be possible to empirically prove that normative ethics, which defines the universal principles of public administration, is so important in achieving the increase in society's quality of life that public administration proposes? Consequently, if it is possible to prove the empirical importance of normative ethics for public administration, what would the essential universal principles of public administration be? If, on the one hand, this article could not answer these two questions; on the other, they are excellent paths to guide future research. And, in this case, the inverse path is also possible, that is, how can public administration and its concrete cases help enlighten philosophy.

Added to the main objective in this study is the fact that knowledge is the only way to intellectual autonomy and opinion development. This applies not only to public servants, but to students and any other citizens who value the independence of their critical sense. Far beyond the mastery of management techniques, public managers need to master a cognitive portfolio of humanities and sensibilities to understand that often the best technical solution can greatly harm people. This should be a major concern of governments. The pluralism of values is an inevitable feature of modern existence, notwithstanding that conflicts require consensual principles to regulate the costs and benefits distributed among the members of society. To the extent that citizens are more tolerant, civilized, and willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the common good, society will become more just (Rawls, 2009). In this vein, there is no reproach for those who promote peace, tolerance, cordiality, and communal good living.

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