

Public Administration, Popular Sovereignty, and *la Police*

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This article moves the discussion of neutrality away from the ambiguities of the politics-administration dichotomy. It presents a reading of Woodrow Wilson's famous essay, commonly seen as a seminal statement on the identity of public administration, that engages Wilson's explicit concern with popular sovereignty as the problem of his age, a problem that administration must resolve. This reading opens an opportunity to introduce to the discussion of neutrality the contemporary concepts of *la police* and *la politique* from the work of Jacques Rancière. The discussion shows that public administration is necessarily non-neutral, because it is the institution of order to the exclusion of that which, in Rancière's words, does not have a part. Reading Wilson's essay by way of Rancière's *la police*, the article argues that the non-neutrality of public administration results from politics and administration, understood as it is through the politics-administration dichotomy referring to the same activity.

The debate over neutrality in public administration largely hinges on varying interpretations of what has come to be known as the *politics-administration dichotomy*, one of the "most slippery intellectual issues in public administration" (Svara, 2008, p. 46). A commonly cited source for this concept is Woodrow Wilson's (1887) article "The Study of Administration," although there is debate about the meaning. Wilson, as is well known, never uses the phrase, although he is explicit that the modern age has culminated in a period when the demands are no longer about what government looks like but how to run a government. The latter is the purview of administration, and in Wilson's words, "administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics. Administrative questions are not political questions. Although politics sets the tasks for administration, it should not be suffered to manipulate its offices" (Wilson, 1887, p. 210).

The context of Wilson's article is Progressive reformism, in particular the development of a professional civil service that would be legally and functionally protected from the direction of electoral posturing. It was in respect to the spoils system that Wilson emphasized the position that administration "not be suffered to manipulate" the offices of politics. However, as Stillman (1973) points out, a strict separation between politics and administration is a far too simplistic derivation from Wilson's essay. What Wilson seems to provide is an outline for an *idea* of administration¹ (Stillman, 1973, p. 588 quoting White, 1958, p. 46) and the possibility that administration be founded upon derived principles, "to rescue executive methods from the confusion and costliness of empirical experiment and set them upon foundations laid deep in stable principle" (Wilson, 1887, p. 210). Administration is a field of business, and Wilson regards the distinction between administration and politics as "now, happily, too obvious to need further discussion" (p. 211).

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This “obvious distinction” was far from obvious to post–World War II public administration figures like Paul Appleby and Dwight Waldo, but it appeared in a somewhat different form. Rather than a structural concern in which the affairs of administration are insulated from the whims of electoral offices, the dichotomy develops into one in which will and deed are separate and separable. Appleby (1949) exemplifies this point in his exposure of how *policy* and administration overlap. Waldo, who arguably coined the phrase “politics-administration dichotomy” (Marini, 1993, p. 412), or at the very least popularized it, framed the dichotomy as one between decision and execution, and rejected the distinction. He argued that the various observers of public administration in the 1940s were quickly relegating the distinction to irrelevance, to an “outworn credo” (Waldo, 2007, p. 122), although he struggled with what he saw as the paradox of this dichotomy throughout the later years of his intellectual career (Overeem, 2008). Herbert Simon argued that public administration was itself a political process, but he still maintained a remnant dichotomy between fact and value such that there were political questions (value judgments validated through “human fiat”) and administrative questions (factual propositions, or questions that could be resolved through scientific appeal to facts) (Simon, 1997, p. 56). Simon also echoes Appleby by framing the distinction as fundamentally between *policy* and administration. In many respects, the central argument of intellectual observers of public administration in the 1940s was that the politics-administration dichotomy was *empirically* indefensible. This framing of the debate ushered forth a so-called identity crisis in public administration characterized primarily by a debate over the scientific basis of the field. Simon suggests that public administration as a field of inquiry exists through the questions that are asked with respect to the field of action constituting the field of inquiry. For Simon, the distinction is between facts and values. He claims, “If it is desired to retain the terms ‘policy’ and ‘administration,’ they can best be applied to a division of the decisional functions that follows... the separation of ‘value’ from ‘fact’” (Simon, 1997, p. 66). Simon’s distinction does not lead to an identical parallel such that policy is value and administration is fact, and “it would be naive to suggest that the division of work between legislature and administrator in any actual public agency will ever follow very closely [such] lines” (Simon, 1997, p. 66).

Nevertheless, Simon himself acknowledges that the “attainment of democratic responsibility in modern government will require an approximation to those lines of demarcation” (policy-as-value and administration-as-fact, or conditions in which policy is concerned with value-based questions and administration with fact-based questions) (Simon, 1997, p. 67). The dichotomy, naïve as it is, is apparently a necessary fiction for modern democratic government, because it insulates administrators from “partisan politics” (Overeem, 2005). Seen accordingly, the empirical rejection of the politics-administration dichotomy misses the point, as the separation of politics and administration is a condition of responsible governance under democratic values. Framing the politics-administration dichotomy as an empirically falsifiable proposition verges on a straw-man argument; the question concerns how to make government work when there are many heads and not just one. This, of course, is the central question of Wilson’s essay in *Political Science Quarterly*: “The weightier debates of constitutional principle are even yet by no means concluded; but they are no longer of more immediate practical moment than questions of administration. It is getting harder to *run* a constitution than to frame one” (Wilson, 1887, p. 200). The “dichotomy” was functionally about insulating administration from partisan patronage (Rosenbloom, 2008) and was never really a dichotomy at all; it was part of a broader

mode of governance that could make government run in the face of potentially corrupting influences through electoral politics.

It is little surprise that the main takeaway from Wilson's article concerns the field of administration as one of inquiry, since, as the title itself suggests, the time had come for the study of politics to shift attention to the conduct of government and how best to *do* it—the study of *administration*. For Wilson, a comparative approach through which principles of administration could be derived as foundational to such conduct was the best path. But his essay does something far more profound from the outset: It assumes that questions about the constitution of government are largely settled. What Wilson submits is the question of how best to manage democracy, to discover the institutional principles that give form to a system of democratic governance. In doing so, Wilson's argument proceeds based upon a closure, a rejection of constitutive activity that could form institutions outside of the existing institutional framework. It is naive to claim that any single journal-length article could found a field of study as diverse as public administration, but the article demands so much attention that it is worth exploring the premises that give structure to Wilson's well-known argument. Moreover, the claim of neutrality in public administration commonly traces back to Wilson's article, as noted above in the brief outline on the politics-administration dichotomy.

Deriving a theoretical and a technical frame for the study of administration conceals an important point in Wilson's essay, the point that underscores the non-neutrality of public administration. Wilson rather explicitly expresses a lukewarm reception of democracy and sees in administration, evolved as it is from centuries of statecraft, the solution for the management of democracy. A remark by Stillman about Wilson's essay is pertinent to this point: "One might speculate that a clear definition [of public administration] was not Wilson's major intention in his essay. Rather what was more important to him and to his mugwump audience was finding an appropriate ideology to justify their efforts to strengthen the executive branch, centralize authority, and check congressional irresponsibility. And what would serve as a better rationale for their moral reforms in government than an abstract appeal to the higher law of administration?" (Stillman, 1973, p. 587). Stillman's remark skirts authorship by prefacing the claim with the rather ambiguous "one might speculate," so let the author of the present article be that "one." Inaugurating the study of administration is itself an act of closure (an ideology) seeking to establish a system of order under a perceived threat of disorder. Put differently, as I will discuss further below, public administration that follows a Wilsonian path is best understood through Rancière's concept of *la police*. As a system of order, Wilsonian public administration does not seek the proper balance of politics and administration; it is premised on the elimination of politics altogether. I hope to show that this is a thoroughly uncontroversial claim that fully dissolves any appeal to neutrality for the field.

WILSON'S CONSIDERATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

To begin, I must consider Wilson's treatment of democracy in his essay and the institutional entailments.

Kirwan (1977, 1987) finds three distinctions in Wilson's essay, what he calls the evolutionary distinction, the analytical distinction, and the prudential distinction, but only the evolutionary and the analytical are treated with any substance. The *analytical* distinction is what we

conventionally consider the politics-administration dichotomy that is the subject of much of the debate over the identity of public administration: Politics and administration are fundamentally different realms requiring fundamentally different approaches. “The field of administration is a field of business ... removed from the hurry and strife of politics” (Wilson, 1887, p. 209). Kirwan reveals the ambiguity in Wilson’s essay with respect to the analytical distinction as he works through the oft-cited passage in which Wilson claims that “administration lies outside the proper sphere of politics [and] [a]dministrative questions are not political questions” (Wilson, 1887, p. 210). Wilson, Kirwan claims, cannot sustain this distinction when he discusses public administration in practice, because Wilson recognizes that “the administrator should have and does have a will of his own in the choice of means for accomplishing his work” and that the administrator “is not and ought not to be a mere passive instrument” (Wilson, 1887, p. 212). There is no need to belabor the point of whether the analytical distinction is valid (in whatever sense), but it is important to note here that, as Kirwan interprets the essay, Wilson relies on the analytical distinction to carve out a unique place for administration and the derivation of administrative principles, but in practice he cannot escape the confounding condition that “there is no separate province, no sphere of pure deed or action, for the application of administrative science [because] *in practice*, politics—the evaluative—permeates everything” (Kirwan, 1987, p. 395).

Kirwan (1977, p. 338) says of the *prudential* distinction in Wilson’s essay: “Nowhere, of course, is the prudential distinction made explicit. But, as we have seen above, in examining his presentation of the analytical distinction, he is pushed toward the prudential distinction by his practicality.” This practicality is, apparently, the acknowledgment of two levels of politics, the suggestion being that these levels are policy and administration. How these levels are arranged is a central concern of the study of administration, but very importantly, the arrangement proceeds in a teleological way, toward a culmination of the principles of administration.

The teleological progress toward principles of administration is essential to what Kirwan considers the distinction of foremost importance in Wilson’s essay, the *evolutionary*. Kirwan, however, is not clear what factors this distinction distinguishes. Wilson considers history as an evolutionary process and embraces a Hegelian view of this process. Early in the essay, Wilson remarks how the questions of what a constitution does are of less pressing concern than how to run a constitution, and in the preliminary drafts of the 1887 essay, Wilson notes that “the period of constitution making is passed now. We have reached new territory in which we need new guides, the vast territory of administration” (Wilson, 1968, quoted in Kirwan, 1977, p. 327). Wilson identifies three periods of growth through which government has passed: absolute rulers, popular control without administration, and the present period, in which “the sovereign people undertake to develop administration under this new constitution which has brought them to power” (Wilson, 1887, p. 204). What Wilson presents, contra Kirwan, is not so much a distinction as a *worldview* that provides important and needed context to the argument put forth in the remainder of the essay. Wilson sees administration not simply as a scientific endeavor but as a necessary product of historical forces, by which questions about what government should look like will slowly recede as they pale in importance (as, he points out, they already have). The primary context of Wilson’s essay is that popular control has been achieved, and now the administration of such control is our central concern. To underscore the point, Wilson later says that the period of constitution-making “has practically closed, so far as the establishment of principles is concerned, but ... we go on criticizing when we ought to be creating. We have

reached the third of the periods I have mentioned, the period, namely, when the people have to develop administration in accordance with the constitutions they won for themselves in a previous period of struggle with absolute power; but we are not prepared for the tasks of the new period” (p. 206). Wilson is putting forth an end-of-history thesis a century before Fukuyama argued for consensual acceptance of Western liberal democracy (Fukuyama, 1992), although Wilson suggests only that there is a “tendency toward the American type—of governments joined with governments for the pursuit of common purposes, in honorary equality and honorable subordination” (p. 222).²

Given this framing of Wilson’s argument, we might expect his essay to be principally about making democracy work, but this is not the case. For Wilson, neutrality is primarily about the administration being neutral or independent from public opinion, from the masses. He confronts popular sovereignty as a problem for progressing to the third period of administration. The need to develop American administration that is “both free in spirit and proficient in practice... impels us to discover what there may be to hinder or delay us in naturalizing this much-to-be-desired science of administration. What then is to prevent? Well, principally, popular sovereignty” (p. 207).

In the section that follows this remark (pp. 208–209), Wilson upholds popular sovereignty as superior to absolute rulership or monarchy on normative grounds, but also outlines the main challenge of democracy as he sees it: that it is not one. He echoes a long history of opposition to democracy in which individuals massed together are essentialized as “selfish, ignorant, timid, stubborn, or foolish” while also lacking a “single ear which one can approach.” Those exceptional figures who seek progressive change, the reformers, are “bewildered by the fact that the sovereign’s mind has no definite locality, but is contained in a voting majority of several million heads.” Wilson is clear that public opinion “must rule” wherever it exists, but this means that the reformer must work to make “public opinion willing to listen and then see to it that it listen to the right things. He must stir it up to search for an opinion, and then manage to put the right opinion in its way.” Never does Wilson suggest that monarchy is superior to democracy as a constitutional form of government, but for the purposes of administration, popular sovereignty is a problem that must be solved. Wilson seems to worry that even if “we ... could form out of perfectly instructed heads a few steady, infallible, placidly wise maxims of government into which all sound political doctrine would be ultimately resolvable, *would the country act on them?* That is the question. The bulk of mankind is rigidly unphilosophical and nowadays the bulk of mankind votes” (p. 209). Even if the solutions were patently obvious and incontrovertible, even if Utopia was within reach, would the masses act? They would only if “not to act upon it [involved] great and pinching inconveniences” (p. 209), only if they were impelled to act. Thus the “peculiarly difficult conditions” under which we undertake administration are framed. Instead of an essay about making democracy work, Wilson’s is one about *managing* democracy.

The difference between managing democracy and making democracy work has a great deal to do with the fact that Wilson is intent on expressly delineating the role of public opinion in the conduct of administration. Wilson’s concern in the second section of his essay is with the subject matter of the study of administration, what he frames as a “field of business,” and since the authority of administration in democracy is diffused into multiple sovereigns rather than just one, Wilson considers the problem of “what part shall public opinion take in the conduct of administration” to be the “fundamental problem of this whole study” (p. 214). Wilson’s answer

is that public opinion will serve as “authoritative critic,” but the method through which public opinion expresses such criticism must be carefully considered. Wilson cautions against “the error of trying to do too much by vote,” because it will compromise the success of administration; he views the involvement of the public as a potential problem, as the public may not appreciate that “self-government does not consist in having a hand in everything.”

Wilson presents an early account of aristocracy *qua* epistocracy (Estlund, 2009) wherein the need for the public to submit to experts is essential to the success of the executive. The public can serve as a critic of government by noting what is done poorly or unsatisfactorily, but the public has no right to be a part of the activity to solve a given problem. This activity is reserved for the “body of administrators,” which, ideally, is a professional class “cultured and self-sufficient enough to act with sense and vigor” but is at the same time “so intimately connected with the popular thought . . . as to find arbitrariness of class spirit quite out of the question” (p. 217). This kind of language gives support to the claims of Waldo and others who see in Wilson a distinction between politics and administration, but what is important is that this distinction has less to do with the discretion of administrators than has been emphasized in the literature. Wilson is unambiguous on the importance of discretion for officials: “And let me say that large powers and unhampered discretion seem to me the *indispensable conditions of responsibility*” (p. 214, emphasis added). The problem for public administration is not discretion or power; it is the proper role of public opinion. As an early Progressive reformer, Wilson is concerned with making government work efficiently, a point he emphasizes consistently in the essay (see pp. 200, 203, 213, 215, 218, for a selection). To do so, it is necessary that the public understand “what things it has *not* a right to think and speak about imperatively [and that it] submit to be instructed before it tries to instruct” (p. 215), a process of “political education” that will inhibit the public from becoming meddlesome. This is the problem that Wilson confronts: “to make public opinion efficient without suffering it to be meddlesome . . . let administrative study find the best means for giving public criticism this control and for shutting it out from all other interference” (p. 215). One of the central tasks for administrative study, then, is to determine how to manage public opinion, granting it the control determined appropriate (by administrators, presumably), and excluding it from everything else. Put simply, administrative study must neutralize public opinion from imposing adversity on administrative conduct.

The next important step for Wilson is to determine how to make public opinion work for administration without allowing it to be “meddlesome.” There is no acceptable scheme for administration, he says, that does not “have democratic policy very much at heart,” but Wilson’s final word on the matter is ambiguous (p. 220). He reframes the question, toward the end of his essay, with the institutions of federalism in mind: “The question for us is, how shall our series of governments within governments be so administered that it shall always be to the interest of the public officer to serve, not his superior alone but the community also, with the best efforts of his talents and the soberest service of his conscience?” (p. 221). Keeping to the spirit of the essay as a call for study, Wilson does not answer this question. Kirwan suggests that Wilson ends his essay without a solution because, as Leonard White famously claimed, “administration has become and will continue to be the heart of the problem of modern government” (White, 1939, quoted in Kirwan, 1977, p. 339). As Kirwan points out, the problems of what governments should look like, namely, constitutional problems, have not “withered away [but] have increasingly taken the form of problems in public administration” (Kirwan, 1977, p. 339). But this formulation misconstrues Wilson’s central point: The problem

of modern government is popular sovereignty, not public administration; public administration is the *solution*, which is why it requires such careful study.

Thus far, I have tried to show that the central objective in Wilson's essay is to frame the study of administration in the context of popular sovereignty. Wilson sees his period as confronted with a third stage in the evolution of modern governments, in which democracy confronts demands of administration that were developed under the purview of absolute rule. The problem is centrally how to run a constitution in the absence of an absolute will. Throughout Wilson's essay, the issue of closure is ever-present: "Once a nation has embarked in the business of manufacturing constitutions, it finds it exceedingly difficult to close out that business and open for the public a bureau of skilled, economical administration" (p. 205). Although Wilson acknowledges that constitutions will be subject to "tinkering," and that the period when questions of what government should look like are only "largely" complete, the period for administration, nevertheless, is imminent. Wilson argues that the need now is for efficiency and order, which requires a study of the proper role for public opinion. And this is one of the main problems for administrators: to demonstrate to the public what is the public's right to do and what is not. The claim for neutrality is centrally about the management of democracy, and in the next section, I will show how this is not a neutral claim at all.

RANCIÈRE AND *LA POLICE*

Wilson's approach clearly privileges the administrative realm, the realm of order. In part as a result of Wilson's essay, the study of administration has been locked in a Manichean hold whereby administration and politics are separate and pure realms. My reading of Wilson's essay focuses not on an effort to carve out some pure space for administration and for politics, but on the central problems he raises, namely, the need to manage the expressions of the public (public opinion). As noted above, Wilson's central problem is managing democracy in order to make government work—the political values that constitute government are, in Wilson's view, largely settled, and the questions about running government now demand attention. But running government still requires determining the appropriate role for public opinion, and Wilson makes a very important and rather slight move by making this a problem not for constitution-making but for administration.

The role of the public in the running of government is a problem for administration. Moreover, it is the administrator who is charged with educating the public so that the public knows what is and is not subject to the influence of public opinion. The study of administration must determine how to make public opinion work without its being "meddlesome"—to determine how best to give public criticism control of what is deemed appropriately subject to public criticism, while excluding it from the remainder. Such a hermeneutic rendering of Wilson's essay leads to the position that public administration cannot *under any conditions* be neutral, because it is concerned with the neutralization of public opinion; it is popular sovereignty that hinders the "naturalizing of this much-to-be-desired science of administration" (Wilson, 1887, p. 207). Public administration is not only concerned with administering the government but also with the administration of the public.

This last remark has an obvious Foucauldian tone, but in elaborating on this point, I will rely on the work of Jacques Rancière, whose concepts of *la police* and *la politique* provide a

powerful conceptual language for critique. Rancière's concept of *la police* shares clear affinities with Foucault, as he himself concedes (see Rancière, 1999, p. 28), but Rancière is more explicit about the meaning he attributes to *la police* being political, for it designates what we conventionally consider to be politics. He explains, "Politics is generally seen as the set of procedures whereby aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for legitimizing this distribution. I propose to give this system of distribution and legitimization another name. I propose to call it *la police*" (p. 28).

Rancière anticipates one of the main problems with this term, which is that the typical attribution of the word *police* evokes "the petty police, the truncheon blows of the forces of law and order and the inquisitions of the secret police," but Rancière quickly moves past this and simply declares that the sense in which he uses *la police* is "nonpejorative" (1999, p. 29). He is conceptually capturing the entirety of those actions that achieve social order, which includes things that we conventionally call politics, such as interest-group negotiation, consensus-building, and even voting, as well as those things that are generally considered outside the purview of politics, such as forced labor or supervision. In this respect, Rancière offers *la police* as a neutral term capturing a range of non-neutral activities. At the same time, Rancière is very explicit about the essence of *la police* as a constitution of the social: All social order is hierarchic and entails inequality and structural domination. As Chambers succinctly puts it, "the police order is an order of domination and of hierarchy, and it operates according to its own presumption of a logic of inequality" (Chambers, 2013, loc. 767).

What Rancière submits is that *la police* designates order, and all order functions on a logic of inequality, because it necessarily entails exclusion. In the first place, *la police* is "an order of bodies," but it is also "an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise" (1999, p. 29). Not only does *la police* create the physical environment of possibility but also what can be known and expressed. In his "Ten Theses on Politics," Rancière explains more directly that *la police* "counts only empirical parts—actual groups defined by differences in birth, by different functions, locations, and interests that constitute the social body *to the exclusion of any supplement*" (Rancière, Panagia, & Bowlby, 2001, para. 19, emphasis added).³ The counting undertaken by *la police* is not a neutral engagement with nature but an actual and comprehensive creation of the parts; *la police* leaves no possibility of any addition to the established order. This is not to suggest that *la police* cannot change, but the changes must come from within the confines defined by that system of order.

In the next paragraph, Rancière explains that *la police* "is not a social function but a symbolic constitution of the social," which underscores the point that he is referring to a (neutral) social order through which (potentially non-neutral) activities then take place; its essence is "neither repression nor even control" but a partition of the sensible (*le partage du sensible*), a "cutting up of the world and of 'world'" (2001, para. 20). Rancière explains that it is through this partitioning of the sensible that any order becomes both visible and sayable; it determines what can be seen and heard (Chambers, 2013, loc. 1869), and the second use of "world" is bracketed in quotation marks to emphasize that a comprehensive sphere is being created. The partition of the sensible shares affinities with Scott's (1998) notion of legibility, which he describes as the condition for manipulation by a state. But Rancière's conception does not reduce to the state apparatus. The partition of the sensible is both more fundamental and more

radical in its formulation because it includes not only the physical partitioning and the assignment into groups in order to (ac)count (for) the community, but also defines what is intelligible. The partition is not only an instrument of the state to control or repress (this would mean that *la police* was a social function and not a symbolic constitution of the social); it has the double function of separation/exclusion and the allowance of participation (Rancière et al., 2001, para. 20).

Participation is, of course, always on the terms of *la police*. Therefore, if *la police* designates everything we conventionally consider to be politics (and that which we do not), what does Rancière want us to think of as politics (*la politique*)? In *Disagreement*, Rancière (1999, p. 29) describes politics as “an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that configuration—that of the part of those who have no part.” Read carefully, Rancière has here presented a paradox. To grasp this paradox, it is important to understand how Rancière represents democracy, which he links closely to politics.

On various occasions, Rancière uses Plato’s *Laws* to work through the meaning of *arche*, where Plato offers an inventory of the qualifications for ruling in Book III. Plato offers four traditional qualifications based on birth and two qualifications that are rather theoretical based on strength and knowledge. It is only the last of these six that provides a meaningful difference to Plato, which is the rule of those who know over those who do not. But Plato does not stop with just six; he also introduces a seventh “qualification” to rule: the drawing of lots, or what Plato regards as “the choice of god.” It is pure chance that designates the exercise of *arche*. As Rancière points out, Plato does not elaborate on this point; but Rancière interprets it as a description of democracy, “the complete absence of qualifications for governing ... the specific situation in which there is an absence of qualifications that, in turn, becomes the qualification for the exercise of a democratic *arche*” (2001, para. 10). The absence of qualifications is the qualification. This “redoubling” of *arche*, the rupturing of the logic of *arche*, is an “exceptional state [that is] identical with the very condition for the specificity of politics more generally.” Because democracy is a rupturing of any qualification to rule, it can never be, strictly speaking, a form of government or society (Rancière, 2006, p. 52). Democracy is not one of many political regimes; it is “the regime of politics in the form of a relationship defining a specific subject” (2001, Thesis 4) that exists as a rupturing of the logic of ruling. This is why Rancière often refers to politics as dissensus and sees in police consensus; consensus will always be achieved through police logic and those who have a part, whereas politics is the activity of those who have no part. It is intrinsically disruptive, because its basis is in the logic of equality derived from the absence of any distinguishing claims to rule. This is democracy: power to those who have no “natural” claim to power, the part-taking in that in which one has no part.

Thus politics is antagonistic to policing because it is a disruption of order, a break “that reconfigure[s] the space where parties, parts, or lack of parts have been defined” (2001, p. 30). But this is an important configuration of politics, because it is defined *in relationship to policing*. Politics, then, requires *la police*, and all correctly political activities occur within the spaces determined by *la police*. For something to be political, it must “give rise to a meeting of police logic (of inequality) and egalitarian logic *that is never set up in advance*” (Rancière, 2006, p. 32, emphasis added). The importance of this statement is that the meeting of these logics, in order to be political, cannot be set up in advance, because such a setting-up would

be done under the established logic of inequality, and therefore those taking part *would have been granted a part*. Politics and political activity inscribe into established order the logic of equality, which must always come from the part of those who have no part and entails a reconfiguring (without advance set-up) of spaces that are defined by *la police*. The suggestion by Rancière is that political activity gives rise to an encounter between these two conflicting logics, but must do so within the space of *la police* and not in spaces that have been set up in advance. There is a paradox to political activity in that the activity occurs within spaces that are not set up in advance in order to generate a reconfiguration of existing spaces. It would be too simplistic to call political activity “emergent,” because that would reduce it to the analytical categories of police logic. Instead, following Chambers (2013), the best way to confront this paradox is to resist attempting to resolve the paradox. Politics is itself paradoxical, and any effort to resolve this paradox entails the elimination of politics.

CONCLUSION

The reason for the introduction of *la police* is that what is conventionally referred to as the politics-administration dichotomy is not a dichotomy at all but a question about the proper institution of order and control. Rarely in the literature of public administration is the term *politics* defined clearly and unambiguously, and Rancière’s notion of *la police* offers some insight as to why: because politics and administration, the way they are conceived in public administration, are one and the same. The claim for neutrality is itself a remnant of this conflation, for it suggests that there is no alternative to the system of order presently instituted, an order that is free from conflict over values. But what Rancière’s work suggests is that any effort toward or expression of neutrality is itself an act of non-neutrality. Wilson’s approach clearly privileges the administrative realm, the realm of order. We have, in part as a result of Wilson’s essay, been locked in a Manichean view of politics and administration as separate and pure realms. Although Rancière designates two spheres, at least politics is never shown to be pure (Chambers, 2013). The realm of *la police* is always already confronted with an opposing logic because of its institution of exclusion (inequality), and *la politique* requires the spaces of *la police* in order to function, because it lacks any proper object of its own. However, *la police* does attempt to account for all empirical parts without making space for any addition (“à l’exclusion de tout supplément”), and thus the pure form of *la police* would be the complete elimination of politics. With this ideal in mind, Rancière can explain that there are better and worse police, but the better one is not “the one that adheres to the supposedly natural order of society or the science of legislators.” The better police is the one “most jolted out of its ‘natural’ logic [of inequality]” (2001, p. 31). Thus politics will never eliminate *la police*. Democracy is not a government; it is the part-taking of those who have no part.

In various places, Rancière emphasizes this point by explaining that historically democracy had no relation to representation: he says (2006, p. 53) “‘representative democracy’ may appear today as a pleonasm[,] but it was initially an oxymoron.” It has been an ongoing struggle constantly recaptured by oligarchy in the form of voting, which he says has no bearing on democracy. The “natural” elites use voting as a legitimating device for “the expression of consent that a superior power requires” (Rancière, 2006). Rancière does not say this to be incendiary but to underscore that there are better and worse forms of police, and that even those we regard as “democratic” are not so and are still characterized by this logic of inequality that is opposed

by politics. “The regime of public opinion as gauged by the poll and of the unending exhibition of the real is today the normal form *la police* in Western societies takes. Whether *la police* is sweet and kind does not make it any less the opposite of politics” (Rancière et al., 2001, p. 31).

The politics-administration dichotomy conceived as it has been in public administration is a distraction, possibly even a red herring.⁴ As I have indicated, public administration is a police form, and as such it is opposed to politics. Implicating public administration as non-neutral does not indict the field, because there is nothing “wrong” with being non-neutral, just as there is nothing pejorative about *la police*. There is, however, something devious about claiming to be neutral in the face of so much contrary evidence, to which the present article is but a single contributor. As Rancière explains, there are better and worse police forms, but all function according to the logic of inequality.

The central point is that the Wilsonian approach to public administration traces not a Manichean view of the world in which administration and politics function in pure and separate spheres. The project is one of *order* that seeks the elimination of politics by comprehensively applying its prevailing logic in such a way that the disruption of politics when alternative logics are expressed, namely, the logic of equality, is foreclosed. This is a central suggestion by Wilson when he says that it is the purview of administration study to determine the conditions under which public opinion is relevant.

As already stated, *la police* moves toward comprehensiveness and thus toward purity, but it is politics that renders it impure not simply because it is itself impure but also because politics is a disruption of order. So much attention has been granted to working through the demands of efficiency that concerned Progressive Era reformists like Wilson (an early progenitor) that there is a general belief that public administration is centrally concerned with making democracy work. The reading of Wilson presented in the first part of this article suggests that the primary concern, the central problem, was popular sovereignty and determining how best to use (and restrict) public opinion. The path that Wilson establishes demands that a central concern of public administration study is to understand the relationship between administration and democracy, but his language is quite clearly about managing democracy. Rancière’s concept of *la police* helps to show why: because public administration and democracy are in an antagonistic relationship. There cannot be democratic public administration, and, in fact, this term might be best described, with representative democracy, as an oxymoron.

NOTES

1. Stillman (1973, p. 588) quoting White (1958, p. 46).
2. To risk an ugly term that adequately characterizes Wilson as a Hegelian, I would suggest that he was a proto-post-political consensus theorist.
3. In the original English translation, the phrase “à l’exclusion de tout supplément” was excluded. But it is an essential part of Rancière’s argument, for it underscores the comprehensiveness of *la police*. See Chambers (2013, loc. 1138), for an important discussion of this point.
4. I say “possibly” here because a red herring is, of course, a logical fallacy that is presented in an argument in order to divert attention from the issue at hand in order to “win” the argument. Thus, to claim that the politics-administration dichotomy is a red herring would be to suggest intent on behalf of a long series of scholars (or at least one) to distract from the “real” issue, and I do not want to do so. But the red herring concept is itself useful if one sees with

public administration the logic of *la police* as I am suggesting in this article, which would mean that the cooptation of politics to mean simply “values” or the relegation of politics to the arena of deciding fully neutralizes politics to manageable conditions within *la police*.

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