

A Positive Ethics for Public Administration. Altruism, Self-Interest and the Concept of the State

Una ética positiva para la Administración Pública.

Altruismo, auto-interés y el concepto de Estado

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ABSTRACT: *The paper begins by discussing the normative principles of the two main theoretical currents in public administration in our days: New Public Management and Neo Weberianism. Both orientations are very influential, not only from a theoretical point of view, but also as blueprints for administrative reforms. The paper focuses on the differences between the two currents regarding normative principles: rational self-interest, in the case of New Public Management, and civic duty or altruism, in the case of Neo Weberianism. The paper discusses such normative principles or normative motivations with some references to the history of political thought, particularly to Hegel's criticism of Kant regarding the concept of the state and its relationships to the market. In a final section, the paper develops some proposals for institutional designs that could promote desinterested (altruistic) motivations among civil servants. The institutional designs materialize thus the idea of a positive ethics for public administration.*

RESUMEN: *El trabajo comienza por discutir los principios normativos de las dos principales corrientes teóricas en administración pública en nuestros días: Nueva Gerencia Pública y Neo Weberianismo. Ambas orientaciones son muy influyentes, no sólo desde un punto de vista teórico, sino también como programas para reformas administrativas. El trabajo se concentra en las diferencias entre ambas corrientes respecto a sus principios normativos: autointerés racional en el caso de la Nueva Gerencia Pública y deber cívico o altruismo en el caso del Neo Weberianismo. El trabajo discute estos principios o motivaciones normativas con algunas referencias a la historia del pensamiento político, particularmente a la crítica de Hegel a Kant respecto al concepto del estado y sus relaciones con el mercado. En su sección final, el trabajo desarrolla algunas propuestas de diseños institucionales que pueden promover motivaciones desinteresadas (altruistas) entre los funcionarios públicos. Los diseños institucionales materializan así la idea de una ética positiva para la administración pública.*

KEY WORDS: New Public Management, neomanagerialism, Neo Weberian State, neoweberianism, self-interest, rational egoism, altruism, Hegel, Kant, state, civil service, state bureaucracy.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Nueva Gerencia Pública, neogencialismo, Estado Neo Weberiano, neoweberianismo, auto-interés, egoísmo racional, altruismo, Hegel, Kant, estado, servicio civil, burocracia estatal

Introduction

Thus every part was full of vice, yet the whole mass a paradise [...]
Fraud, luxury, and pride must live; whilst we the benefits receive.

Bernard Mandeville – *The Grumbling Hive*

In their comparative study of public administration reforms carried out in developed countries in the last twenty years, Pollit and Bouckaert (2004) distinguish two main reform models, which served as guiding principles behind the reforms. Both models were similarly influential, although in different parts of the world. On the one hand, the New Public Management (NPM), which has been applied most decisively in a *central core* of countries including Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. On the other hand, the model characterized as New Weberian State (NWS), which has been implemented mainly in Continental Europe. However, the literature on public administration has tended to ignore the second, neo-Weberian model, or to consider it invalid and wrong as an orientation for public administration reforms—in the few cases where it was mentioned at all. Precisely, one of the main goals of Pollit and Bouckaert's study is to compensate for this shortcoming in the academic debate, and to provide a discussion of both models as equally deserving of consideration. The discussion should compensate therefore for the fact that many authors, in the Anglo-Saxon literature, tend to consider as merely "backwards" those countries where the New Public Management was not enthusiastically embraced, that is to say, those countries in Continental Europe that followed a neo-Weberian model of public administration reforms.

Now, after the description and discussion of both models of reform, as well as their application and results, a significant conclusion of Pollit and Bouckaert' (2004, 140) study is that the international reform movement, in the last twenty years, has continued its "onward march" without any systematic regard for the results of the reforms already undertaken. In other words, the symbolic and rhetoric dimensions of the reform models have been much more important than their actual results, in order for governments to decide over their adoption and implementation. And a crucial factor in such symbolic and rhetoric dimensions are normative assumptions, the normative "charge" of the reform models. Pollit and Bouckaert (2004, 201) mention the issue of normative assumptions, but their study does not focus on this point. Therefore, the normative content of both reform models are not closely examined.

The present work analyzes this specific research question: what are the different normative presuppositions that characterize the New Public Management and the New Weberian State? As mentioned above, such normative presuppositions can have a decisive role for the fact that some governments decide to follow one or the other model. Therefore, it is a research question with more than theoretical interest. Besides, normative assumptions are not only significant for an analysis of the "rhetorical and symbolic" dimensions of administrative reform models. As we will see, the same normative principles operate also as methodological principles in theoretical and empirical research. As an example of this phenomenon, we will particularly consider the supposition of a self-interested agent or, simply put, the principle of self-interest. The principle of self-interest plays a central role in the history of political liberalism and continues, to this day, to be upheld by liberal authors. In this sense, it is a normative, etico-political principle. But, at the same time, the principle of self-interest operates as a central descriptive or theoretical assumption in neoclassical political economy, public choice, and rational choice schools in political science. In order to describe reality, these schools of thought assume that social agents rationally pursue their self-interest. It is a distinctive trait of the method of the social sciences that normative principles operate at the same time as theoretical or methodological suppositions, as was first remarked on by the NeoKantians in the XIX century. The same "duality" of normative principles, the fact that they operate at the same time as methodological suppositions, had a foundational role for the sociology and theory of bureaucracy in Max Weber.

The principle of self-interest has been one of the most prominent features of the New Public Management, as a theoretical approach to public administration, and also as a reform movement. Most or perhaps all of the administrative reform proposals introduced by the New Public Management are linked to the supposition that state agents or civil servants, exactly like members of the public, act in a rational self-interested way (Denhardt and Denhardt 2000, 551; Maesschalck 2004; Shamsul Haque 2007).

In the first section below, the origins and initial development of the principle of self-interest will be briefly described and discussed, from its first formulation by Bernard Mandeville to its role as the a basis for the concept of the state by Kant. We will briefly consider Kant's famous dictum proclaiming that the "problem of establishing a state, as hard as it may seem, can be solved even by a people of devils, if only they have understanding." At the time of Kant's writing, the principle of self-interest was firmly rooted in political liberalism, and its argumentative purposes can very clearly perceived in this context.

In contrast, the first formulation of the concept of the state, which came much later to be defined as the "Weberian" state, can be traced to Hegel's critique of Kant on the

specific issue of self-interest. Using traditional republican ideals like "virtue" and "patriotism" as a starting point, Hegel defines the role of the civil servant in altruistic terms. This altruism is not based on moral inclinations of the civil servant, his or her supposed "moral goodness". On the contrary, Hegel proposes a specific institutional structure that should secure the *autonomy* of the civil servant, and of the state itself, from the sphere of self-interested actions which Hegel defined as "civil society"—what we would rather define as "the market" nowadays. The Hegelian concept of the state, its autonomy, and its relationship to the civil service will be briefly described and discussed in the second section of the paper.

Hegel was to be quite unjustly associated, in the scholar interpretation of the first half of the XX century, with the authoritarian model of the Prussian state, of which he was supposedly a defender. However, Hegel's concept of the state corresponds quite clearly, as will be shown, to the laicistic and democratic legacy of the French revolution. He carefully avoids to base altruism, which he regards as a possible and desirable motivation among civil servants, on a paternalistic conception of authority, on a religious doctrine of virtues, or on mere morality. On the contrary, as mentioned before, Hegel employs for this purpose the concepts of *virtue* and *patriotism*, which are characteristic of the republican tradition in political thought, and which had a significant presence in the French revolution. These two concepts represent the main support for the kind of motivation ascribed to the active citizen in a republic, first articulated among classical roman authors, and reintroduced in the modern world by Machiavelli.

Hegel's concept of the state had a significant impact on the beginnings of public administration as a scientific discipline. One of the founders of such an approach to public administration, Lorenz von Stein, based explicitly his work on Hegel. Until then, the administrative activities of the state were the object of the technical disciplines known as "Camerarism". Taught in universities in Continental Europe, the authors in this academic field regarded their studies as auxiliary technical knowledge at the service of an enlightened monarchy. Stein conceived the state, in contrast, as an autonomous entity, separated from the person of a particular ruler, and separated from the sphere of self-interested interactions defined by Hegel as civil society.

The specific tasks of the state as an autonomous entity are also postulated by Stein along the lines of Hegel's proposals on the subject. As will be also discussed in the second section of the present work, Hegel's main argument against the (supposedly) beneficial effects of the principle of self-interest points to the fact of industrial pauperization. The phenomenon of mass poverty in industrial cities, and the consequent political marginalization of a whole class, reveal for Hegel that civil-society, the sphere of self-interest, does not lead to benefits for all in a self-regulating way. Therefore, Hegel (1821, § 242-244) calls for a systematic and general public commitment to the fight against poverty, not only regarding the material deprivation of the industrial poor, but also considering the difficulty for the poor of enjoying the political freedoms and the intellectual advantages of modern society.

After creating a theory of social movements, and applying it to explain the social basis of the French revolution, Stein (1870, 3, 440) presents a concept of the state with two main components: the constitution, and the administration. For Stein, the political freedom of the individual, already legally guaranteed by the constitution, has to be ensured by a "social" administration against unintended or arbitrary social developments, specially industrial pauperization. The work of Stein had a considerable influence in the XIX century, not only in Continental Europe, where it formed, in any

case, the basis for the creation of the earlier social states (Koslowski 1989). Stein's work had as much influence in America. First of all, Hegel's ideas on the state and the civil service became known in the United States through the mediation of Stein. Stein's major works were quite familiar, and a main source of inspiration for Woodrow Wilson and Frank Goodnow, founders of the discipline of public administration in the United States (Miewald 1984, 19). The distinction between constitution and administration, the need to pass from a constitutional "age" of democracy to a period of administration and social progress, constitutes the starting point, and a clear reference to Stein, of Wilson's famous essay on the study of the administration (Wilson 1887, 198).

After considering the starting point of the controversy on self-interest vs. altruism in Kant and Hegel, we will consider in the third and final section the practical consequences of a principle of altruism for contemporary public administration. The purpose of this brief examination will be to assess the possibility of an altruistic or *positive ethics* for the public service.¹ As mentioned before, self-interest operates in certain disciplines as an important theoretical or methodological assumption. The neoclassical political economy, as well as the rational and public choice schools in political science, postulate theoretical models based on the presupposition of a social agent that acts in a rationally egoist way. In the third section, we will examine some recent criticisms to the methodological principle of self-interest, particularly in the field of political science. For some authors, the idea of a rationally egoist agent cannot be universally applied outside of market contexts. In non-market contexts of interaction, the motivations of the agents must be often understood as cooperative or altruistic. The fact that social agents can act in altruistic ways has significant consequences for public administration. A positive ethics attempts to take this consequences into account, by means of proposals that promote good behavior among civil servants on the basis of cooperative / altruistic motivations. Such an ethics is positive, therefore, in the sense that focuses on disinterested motivations for doing good.

We will attempt to outline, in the third and final section of the present work, some elements of such a positive ethics for public administration. We will not merely discuss principles, however, we will attempt to introduce in this part three kind of organizational structures that can support and secure the "positive" commitment of public servants to certain basic ethical values and norms. Our proposals, in other words, focus on institutional design rather than on the philosophical discussion of ethical principles.

1. Political liberalism and rational egoism.

Amongst the diverse ideas and principles associated with political liberalism, a particular thesis of moral philosophy advanced by the Scottish enlightenment represents one of the most significant. It is the famous notion that private vices, like pride, envy and vanity, can be the source or motivation for sets of actions that have as a result the public good. The actions are coordinated by some kind of organizing principle, which has not been, however, conceived or put in practice by any particular person or group of persons. The organizing principle is spontaneous, so to speak.

The thesis was originally proposed by Bernard Mandeville, but it becomes widely known after being employed by Adam Smith, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow. Smith coined for the thesis the denomination of "invisible hand," and he came to be considered, because of this and other reasons, as the founder of modern economics. Nevertheless, the idea that the personal and selfish in-

terest of many can have as a result the public good of all, by means of the unintended coordination of actions, impacts well beyond the field of economics. It is not only one of most important normative principles associated with the origins and development of political liberalism, it continues to have widespread influence on the political philosophy of our days. This influence can be observed, for example, in the fact that a version of the thesis of self-interest forms the basis of the "theory of justice" developed by Rawls (1971). In this work, probably the most influential exposition of contemporary political liberalism, Rawls presents his famous "original position." The original position is a procedure of theoretical construction, employed by Rawls to formulate the principles of justice for a liberal society. The original position consists basically in a thought experiment, the imaginary depiction of a group of reasonable people. These people deliberate on the best set of principles they could adopt for an ideal society. Now, the only motivation for their proposals and positions in the debate is self-interest, that is, they only aim at obtaining the best results for themselves individually, in the future society where they are going to live. However, the self-interest of the participants or *parties* in the original position is filtered by the so called *veil of ignorance*. The veil of ignorance imposes a general lack of knowledge, among the parties, about the talents, personal fortune, ethnicity, gender, religion and other characteristics they will have in the ideal society where they are going to live. This does not mean to be a realistic assumption, of course, it is only a thought experiment, as stated before. Now, under these specific circumstances, Rawls considers that every rationally self-interested person will support the principles of justice of a liberal society. Therefore, the coordination of individual self-interest in the original position cannot be regarded as completely unintended or spontaneous, as is the case with the invisible hand, but the principle of rational self-interest constitutes even so the basis for the entire situation.

The political impact of the principle of rational self-interest was very significant during the 18th century. In fact, the principle of self-interest represented one of the most powerful and conclusive arguments against a modern absolute monarchy, that is, against an enlightened despotism. Enlightened despots justified their claim to rule on the basis of their benevolent and progressive character. Goodness and expertise allowed enlightened monarchs to govern much better than people would govern themselves, since human beings are visibly affected by vices like ignorance and superstition. Having enjoyed the best education, and with the advice of the best minds, the government of an enlightened despot is the sure way to reach the best possible government, or so the supporters of enlightened despotism argued. In order to counteract this paternalistic doctrine, political liberalism chooses not to defend the moral goodness of the majority, which is a counter-intuitive claim in the best of cases. On the contrary, political liberalism accepts the idea of generalized evil and even exaggerates it. No one has altruistic motivations, which means, of course, that the monarch cannot be altruistic or benevolent, his or her enlightened character notwithstanding. However, although altruism and benevolence are inexistent, according to the doctrine of self-interest the public good results nonetheless from a coordination which has no need for a benevolent authority. Every one purses his self-interest in a rational way, and this is the key for the public good.

In the field of political philosophy, the most prominent expression of Mandeville's thesis can be found in Kant's essay on perpetual peace. Here, Kant (1795, A 60 / B 61) declares that even a people of devils can solve the problem of establishing a state, if only they have understanding. By having understanding, it is clear that Kant means that the devils will establish a proper state if only they can pursue *rationally* their own

interest. In other words, rational self interest by itself leads to institutional arrangements, and these secure the public good without requiring a benevolent or enlightened legislator. A very similar approach to the one defended by Rawls in the XX century. The parties or participants in Rawls' original position could perfectly well be Kantian devils, there is nothing benevolent or altruistic about them: they only seek to maximize their benefit.

Now, it is clear that Kant only admits the rationality of self-interest in the political sphere, but this must be condemned from a Kantian moral perspective as mere selfishness. He refers here very clearly to *devils*. In contrast, the individualism of the Kantian moral agent is framed in the categorical imperative, which focuses on universality and autonomy. The moral agent treats fellow beings as ends in themselves, not only as means for maximizing the agent's own benefit. All interests are thus reconciled in the "kingdom of ends", a necessary regulative ideal defined in the third formulation of the categorical imperative. To constitute a state, however, it is not necessary to act as a moral agent, the morality of the citizen remains outside of the sphere of public institutions. Kant articulates thus a strict liberal foundation of the concept of the state.

The rationality of the self-interested agent, in the context of the market, or in the context of the state as strictly political—and not moral—institution, is defined by its result: without central planification, without benevolence or altruism, the result of the interaction of self-interested agents is beneficial for all. The attribution of this kind of rationality to the self-interested agent can be found in the idea of the invisible hand. Smith takes for granted that persons act according to their self-interest in a rational way, securing thus results that are good for all. Now, this rationality means that people pursue their own benefit through the appropriate means to this end, in the short and long term. The assumption of rationality does not insert into Smith's model normative principles "from the outside". However, this could be affirmed in respect to the veil of ignorance in Rawls' model: it contains normative assumptions, at least a liberal assumption of equality. Since none of the partners in the original position knows if he or she is going to be rich, poor, black, white and so on, they are forced to act on an equal basis, thus granting equal rights to every citizen, for fear of being disadvantaged after the veil of ignorance is lifted.

Kant's strictly liberal foundation of a concept of state was not very influential during the XIX century and the first half of the XX century. At that time, authors like Benjamin Constant and John Stuart Mill were regarded as the foremost representatives of political liberalism. It is particularly since the publication of *A Theory of Justice* by Rawls that Kant comes to be considered as the classic *par excellence* of political liberalism, and displaces other authors from this position. And it must be remarked that neither Stuart Mill nor Constant employ the principle of rational self-interest as a methodological assumption for constructing a theory of the state. Contrary to a vague but widespread assumption, for political liberalism the significance of the principle of self-interest has tended to grow in the last decades.

In any case, the employment of the principle of self-interest as a basis for the concept of the state, as done by Kant, represents an innovation in the history of Western political thought. Until then, all proposals contrary to absolute monarchy, supporting either separation of powers, or participation of citizens in the government, or both, were based on *republican* political traditions. The republican ideals were recovered by Machiavelli from classical roman authors, specially from Livy (Pocock 1975). One of republicanism's central foundations was the concept of virtue. Repub-

lican virtue represented the main motivation for active citizenship, and the basis of its claim to self-government, which started in the modern world with the Italian republics in the 14th century. Self-government was founded on the virtue of the citizens that took part of it, the active and patriotic citizens, and it was assumed that not all citizens would be disinterested enough to pursue this public good. Therefore, republican virtue represents a kind of altruism, a motivation contrary to self-interest.

The republican political tradition was obscured for decades due to the rise of political liberalism in the XIX and XX centuries, but it has resurfaced in the last decades (Skinner 1998). Republicanism exerts again a significant influence on contemporary democratic theory. Habermas (1992), for example, one of the leaders of the widespread academic orientation that supports deliberative and participative forms of democracy, coined the concept of *constitutional patriotism*. This kind of patriotism should motivate citizens for political participation beyond the self-interested pursuits of private life, and particularly of private life in the economic sphere. The debate between the two traditions of democratic thought, liberalism and republicanism, continues thus to this day, as can be seen in the debates between Rawls and Habermas on this and other issues (Rawls 1995; Habermas 1995). Both traditions support and promote democratic government and human rights, but there are between them certain basic *family differences*. One of the main differences concerns the question of the state and its relationship to the citizen. Simply put, many liberal thinkers—although not all of them—support the principle of rational self-interest, and take it as a starting point for their understanding of the relationship between the individual and the state. The individual citizen supports the state since it corresponds to the citizen's rational self-interest to do so. The republican perspective on this issue is very different. Republican authors conceive the citizen, in ideal terms, as an engaged participant of political life, whose motivations for this activity base on some cooperative or altruistic disposition, that is, on some kind of political virtue.

The origins of public administration as a scientific discipline are closely linked to a particular moment of the debate between liberalism and republicanism. As already mentioned above, Hegel develops his concept of the state by taking distance of the Kantian proposals in this matter, which were constructed on the basis of self-interest, like Rawls's original position many years later. Hegel's concept of the state was to represent the starting point for the creation of a science of public administration by Lorenz von Stein, which included the outlines for the social intervention of the state, that is, for a social administration. This point will be discussed in the next section.

2. Altruism and the Weberian state.

Hegel developed a critique of the Kantian concept of the state that takes as its starting point the same political premises of the enlightenment assumed by Kant, i. e. secularism and the popular legitimation of the government. According to Hegel, there is a fundamental problem with Kant's liberalism, and its radical rejection of altruistic dispositions in politics. As seen above, Kant's rejection of altruism or political virtue leads him to consider self-interest as the state's main organizing principle. However, Hegel points out that individual acts based on self-interest do not seem to invariably produce beneficial results for all. On the contrary, potentially dangerous conflicts between groups or social classes seem to be arising in modern societies. A whole *class* of people—the term is also Hegel's—are being driven to poverty because of the intrinsic workings of the market. It is a new and specifically modern phenomenon, de-

scribed by historians as “industrial pauperization”, and accurately described by Hegel. The pauperization of a whole class of citizens implies their exclusion from the enjoyment of political rights. Poverty is an unintended consequence of the industrial development unleashed by market forces, and it is obvious that civil society—the market—cannot resolve this by itself:

When civil society is in a state of unrestrained efficacy, it concerns itself with the internal development of population and industry. The generalisation of the connection of men through their needs, and through the ways to produce and distribute the means to satisfy them, leads to an increase in the amassing of riches—because it is from this double generalization that the largest profit derives. But the same process leads also to the isolation and narrowness of the particular work. And from this results the dependence and distress of the class [*Klasse*] tied to work of that kind, and this is related to the incapacity to perceive and enjoy the broader freedoms and particularly the intellectual benefits of the civil society. (Hegel 1821, § 243)

As described by Avineri (1972, 148), Hegel was the first author to diagnose poverty as a problem with very specific characteristics in industrial societies. At that time, it was still usual to consider poverty as a relict, a “leftover” from ancient times, soon to be solved by the development of market forces. A kind of deficiency, in other words, affecting mostly social groups that had not been able to integrate in the modern industrial development. For Hegel, on the contrary, it is the modern development of the market which generates and intensifies social polarization. From this process results marginalization and the loss of political rights for a group or class of persons in civil society. Confronted with this situation, finally, Hegel rejects every reliance on private charity and supports the intervention of public institutions:

The uncertainty of carity, of foundations, like the burning of lights in front of images of saints, etc., is to be completed by means of public institutions for the poor, hospitals, street lights, etc. To the charity remains enough to do [...] In contrast, the public organization is to be considered all the more perfect as less remains to do for the individuals according to their own lights, compared to what is organized in general terms. (Hegel 1821, § 242).

It is an obvious corollary of his proposal that Hegel will define the public servant, as a social agent, in terms that do not correspond to mere self-interest. Because the main problem that the state has to confront originates precisely in the sphere of self-interested action, civil society. Industrial pauperization shows that the invisible hand does not work for a whole class of people, it does not lead to benefits for all. Hegel thinks necessary to reintroduce the possibility of altruistic motivations, as traditionally postulated in political thought, motivations like political virtue, patriotism, fraternity. Nevertheless, Hegel carefully avoids to support the kind of paternalistic benevolence that represented, as seen above, the main claim to political legitimacy of the enlightened despotism. He proposes a class or corps of civil servants which he characterizes as “the general class”, since it does not pursue, or should not pursue, particular interests. The general class is composed of individuals recruited by meritocratic criteria. Any citizen can become a member of the public service, a fact underlined by Hegel and a clear reference to one of the principles of the French revolution, which came to be associated later with the Bonapartist regime. Hegel defines here one of the main principles for the kind of bureaucracies that were to be later described as “Weberian”:

The business of government [...] has to be carried out and achieved by individuals. Between the state and the individuals there is not a natural and direct link; the individuals are not appointed to office on account of their birth or natural personality. The objective factor in their appointment is knowledge and proof of ability. Such proof guarantees that the state will get what it requires; and as the only condition of appointment, it also guarantees to every citizen the chance of joining the class of civil servants. (Hegel 1821, § 291)

Civil servants are thus recruited by the equalitarian principle of merit. But Hegel deals also with the problem of their motivations for performing their duties, once they are members of the civil service. For Hegel, the servants of the state must receive a compensation that allows them to live "outside" of the sphere of self-interest, that is to say, of the market. This compensation must assure their livelihood in such a way that they are "liberated" from every subjective dependence (of a patron) or external influence. It follows that the civil servants must be autonomous:

The general class [the class of the civil servants] has for its business the general interests of the society. It must be relieved from direct labor to supply its needs, either by having private means, or by receiving a compensation from the state which employs its work, with the result that the particular interest finds its satisfaction in the work for the general interest. (Hegel 1821, § 205)

The individual, appointed to the professional public service by the sovereign's act, depends on the fulfillment of his duties, the essential part of his work, as condition of his appointment. As a consequence of this essential relationship, he finds his livelihood and the assured satisfaction of his particularity; his external circumstances and his official work are also liberated from other kinds of subjective dependence and influence [...] Moreover, the service of the state requires the sacrifice of the personal and discretionary satisfaction of subjective ends, and it provides precisely by virtue of this sacrifice, the right to find such satisfaction in, but only in, the proper discharge of duties. (Hegel 1821, § 294)

In this way, Hegel is the first author who confronts the issue of the *positive* motivations that public agents are supposed to have in a laicistic and democratic state. Kant relied on the negative, that is to say, he considered all social agents equally motivated by self-interest, including of course the servants of the state. However, for Hegel this reliance on the principle of self interest can be a problem. In fact, as we have seen, the sphere of social action regulated by self interest—civil society or the market—leads to the pauperization of a whole class of citizens. Kant's optimism in the beneficial effects of self-interest, which is the same optimism of the Scottish enlightenment, turns out to be unjustified. For Hegel, precisely, one of the main goals of the state has to be the development of policies against industrial pauperization. Of course, this idea of Hegel is surprisingly contemporary, it has become a basic assumption about the role of the state in our days. During the 19th century, the idea was further developed by Lorenz von Stein, and it formed the basis for the creation of the first social state in Europe.

Considered as one of the founders of public administration as a scientific discipline, Lorenz von Stein attempts to redefine the main tasks of the state on the basis of empirical knowledge provided by social science. Of course, the social sciences—primarily sociology—were only starting to develop at the time. In 1842, Stein publishes a work on socialism in France, where he develops a theory on the evolution of industrial society. On the basis of this work and others, Stein is also considered as the

founder of sociology, at least in Germany (Rutgers 1994, 397). A member of the socialist party, and depute of the parliament of Schleswig-Holstein, Stein regarded as the main purpose of administrative science the design of state organizations that could confront the social question.

Stein's proposals on public administration are based on his ideas about the state, ideas mainly inspired by Hegel. For Hegel, the state must be an autonomous and professional sphere of activity, relatively above social and political conflict. Hegel's ideas about the "neutrality" of the state were to be strongly criticized by Marx a few years later. For Marx, the state is a machinery for the oppression of the working class, it is not neutral at all. Contemporary perspectives on the state in the context of democratic theory seem to give reason to Hegel, after all. It is a commonplace, in our days, to assume that a democratic state can act for the benefit of the whole of society, as Hegel claimed. This does not mean at all that the state always and in each case promotes the public good. The neutrality of the state is not always assured.

Stein acknowledged that the public bureaucracy can become an instrument for the particular interests of a privileged social class, it can be "captured" as this phenomenon is described in our days. However, precisely because of this possibility, Stein claimed that a *public ethics* for civil servants is necessary, in order for civil servants to focus on the central purpose of the state: the liberty and the self-realization of all (Rutgers 1994, 399; Stein 1870, 10). These values can be realized through the reconciliation of two apparently conflicting social aspirations: social stability and individual liberty. For Stein, the state has to guarantee the liberty of the individual not only against eventual infringement by public agents or private persons, it has also to guarantee the liberty of the individual against the arbitrariness of socio-economical development. Therefore, liberty and self-realization for all citizens, the main goal that the state has to pursue, can only be realized by means of a social administration. The basis for the science of public administration is this idea of the state.

Stein considered that the need for a science of public administration arised from the fact that public activity had been for too long, at least in Europe, focused on constitutional law. Since the French Revolution and up to the middle of the 19th century, a number of constitutions had been designed and tested, and the discussion on constitutional rights still went on. For Stein, however, it was now necessary for public activity to concentrate on improving the situation of workers, their intellectual formation (*Bildung*), and their chances to acquire a material foundation, a basis of property, which would allow them to consolidate personal independence. As mentioned above, this had been already stated by Hegel: workers could not enjoy the political liberties of the constitution without educational and material improvements (Stein 1850, III, 206). For Stein, it was necessary to leave behind the constitutional era, and to enter into an era of administration. This same thesis was literally repeated by Wilson in his seminal article on the need to establish a science of public administration in the U.S., as a first step to enter into an era of administration (Wilson 1887, 198). The influence of Stein on Wilson has been well documented (Stillman 1973, 583; Miewald 1984).

Constitutional political freedoms remain purely abstract, for Stein, if the material conditions of workers do not improve through the activity of the public administration in diverse social areas. For this reason, Stein considered that "the key factor of future development lies on the administration. Not because in this way the constitution will lose significance, but because by means of the constitution we arrive at the administration [...]" (Stein 1870, 3).

3. Altruism and the civil service.

The idea that social agents act in a self-interested way can be considered valid in market contexts, that is, in the field of economics. The principle of self-interest cannot be automatically translated to the spheres of politics and government as a methodological foundation. Field studies (Tang 1992; Kaboolian and Nelson 1998; Ostrom 1999) and laboratory experiments (Davis & Holt 1993; Ledyard 1995; Offerman 1997) show that, in non-market contexts of interaction, the motivations of the agents must be often understood as cooperative or altruistic. Ostrom (2000) has synthesized and discussed ample results of empirical research, and arrives at the conclusion that the normative principle of self-interest constitutes an arbitrary theoretical assumption for political science and public administration. Of course, many actions are also motivated by self-interest in these fields, but it cannot be assumed that all such actions are:

These and other closely related empirical findings [...] consistently challenge predictions based on a presumption that all individuals can be characterized by a single model of rational behavior when they interact outside a highly competitive market setting. It is thus necessary to reconstruct our basic theories of collective action and to assume that at least some participants are not rational egoists [...]. At least some individuals in social dilemma situations follow norms of behavior—such as those of reciprocity, fairness, and trustworthiness—that lead them to take actions that are directly contrary to those predicted by contemporary rational choice theory. (Ostrom 2000, 8)

The real possibility of altruism, or disinterested cooperative behavior among social agents, allows to discuss on a firm basis the prospects for a positive ethics of public administration. This kind of ethics not only concerns itself with the avoidance of negative or bad behavior, like corruption and other forms of dishonesty, which have always been very present in the discussions on ethics and public administration. A positive ethics for public administration focuses on the conditions and circumstances that lead to altruistic behavior among public officials, as well as members of non-governmental organizations, that is, civil society in our current understanding of the term. Some recent contributions to an ethical approach of this kind can be mentioned. As mentioned before, Garofalo and Geuras develop an integrated ethical perspective for public administrators. The integrated ethical perspective comprehends the ethical and technical aspects of administrative responsibility, and it offers ethical *empowerment*: an awareness of ethical unity and the confidence to act as a moral advocate and as a steward of the public trust (Garofalo and Geuras 1999, 149). Frederickson (1997), for his part, argues for the role of public administrators in promoting citizenship, democratic participation, and sensitivity to values such as social equity and benevolence. For Frederickson, the public official can and should be animated by patriotism and benevolence. The OECD (2000, 25) introduces a distinction between two general approaches taken by governments to the task of improving ethical conduct in the public service. On the one hand, a compliance-based approach, that focuses on strict adherence to rules and procedures, controls and punishing of deviations. On the other hand, an integrity-based approach, that relies on incentives and encourages good behavior rather than policing and punishing errors and wrongdoings. Denhard and Denhard (2000) propose to redefine the role of the civil servant on the basis of democratic theory, and plead for a *New Public Service*. According to the authors, the public official should be motivated by an ideal of public service and the desire to contribute to society. In contrast to the New Public Management, which regards as the main task

of the government to facilitate the pursuit of self-interest, the New Public Service identifies the main responsibility of government with the promotion of citizenship, public discourse, and the public interest. Finally, Maesschalck (2004), in his work on the impact of NPM on civil servants' ethics, follows the *ethics management approach* in suggesting a combination of doctrines and points of view for the public administrator on the issue. For Maesschalck, rather than single-mindedly committing to a self-interested approach, or to a public service perspective, the public administrator should balance and combine these different ideas and prescriptions.

The New Public Management represents a rigorous liberal perspective on the state, strictly based on the idea that public officials, as well as the citizens, rationally pursue their self interest. This is a normative and factual statement. As a factual statement, it is quite arbitrary if supposed to apply generally, as such it has no empirical basis. We have discussed above the origins and development of an alternative perspective on the state, which are closely linked to Hegel and Stein. These authors attempted to define the role of the civil servant on the basis of altruistic ideals and motivations, which would secure some kind of autonomy for the state vis-à-vis the market (which Hegel described under the denomination "civil society"). The rationale for this state autonomy was the fact that the natural and spontaneous development of the sphere of self-interest—the market—did not produce benefits for all. For Hegel and Stein, the problem of industrial pauperization could not be resolved by the mere operation of rational self-interest, and therefore, some kind of public initiative seemed necessary to counteract the negative effects of modernization. Hegel's philosophical inspiration and Stein's proposals for a social administration represented the foundation for the model of state and bureaucracy which came to be characterized, decades later, as Weberian.

The model of administrative reforms which Pollit and Bouckaert define as Neo Weberian State needs to confront the issue of the conditions and circumstances that could promote and reinforce altruistic motivations among civil servants. The issue represents the main difference, from a normative point of view, between the Neo Weberian State and the New Public Management. In this context, we would like to advance three first tentative proposals for institutional designs which could reach the goal of promoting altruistic (cooperative) behavior among civil servants.

1) **Intangible rewards and civil service careers.** From a Neo Weberian perspective, it makes no sense to ignore the possible advantages of intangible, non-material rewards for distinguished public service. Political practices at least since the Roman Republic have conceded great significance to symbolic rewards, and to the public ceremonies where these are awarded. If we do not assume that social agents are motivated exclusively by self-interest, it is obvious that non-material rewards can reinforce altruistic motivations, and thus help to fight corruption and lack of professional motivation among civil servants. Most states only concede such distinctions to military personnel, France and the United Kingdom being well known exceptions. By its nature non-material, this kind of rewards cost almost nothing to the public treasury, but their impact could very well be worth considering. Intangible rewards can represent for a Neo Weberian perspective the parallel institutional design to performance related pay (material rewards) in New Public Management.

However, political liberalism has a healthy suspicion of such distinctions or moral "decorations". One of the argumentative purposes of the principle of self-interest consists, precisely, in depriving public officials of *moral superiority*. The principle of self-interest has a strongly equalitarian purpose, which serves democracy well. Therefore, in

order for a system of intangible rewards to retain political legitimacy vis-à-vis such entirely reasonable liberal misgivings, intangible rewards must be granted to all citizens with distinguished careers, not only civil servants. Certainly, this is the regular practice in Britain and France.

2) Community and networks among public officials and members of non governmental organizations. As the NPM promotes quasi-markets and other kinds of open competition amongst public and private service providers, the NWS should, in order to be consistent with its own philosophical foundations, promote the building of communities among public officials and members of voluntary organizations working for the public interest (ONG's). Liberalism tends to be very individualistic in its approach to ethics. In contrast, a Neo-Weberian perspective must naturally take into account "communitarian" approaches to ethical questions, which can be traced to the ethical systems of Aristotle and Hegel. A Neo-Weberian state cannot leave to chance the building of social communities amongst civil servants. Again, this institutional resource would not represent a heavy burden to the public treasury at all. The creation of social venues, and the organization of regular social events, would certainly consolidate networks among civil servants working for diverse public organizations, and even for diverse levels of government. Such social networks, communities in the Aristotelian and Hegelian sense, are the basis for shared ethical values and reputations. The issue of social reputations is crucial, of course. The most simplistic psychological observation shows that social reputations are one of the strongest motivations against unethical behavior. Again, not to employ this resource to strengthen the integrity of the civil service represents a clear waste. In this context, however, a possible critique could arise from the liberal suspicion against factions and cliques. The focus of liberal thinking on the individual as only source of ethical values and norms represents, again, a form of egalitarianism. Every individual is as much worth as any other, so the fact of belonging to a group does not award any distinction from a liberal perspective. On the contrary, for liberals, the support of the state for the creation of social networks among civil servants could very well represent a form of elitism. Liberals would tend to think that here, again, public officials celebrate themselves as the better citizens. Therefore, as well as in the case of symbolic rewards, it is vital to promote the inclusion of members of non-governmental organizations in all such networks and communities. This can only result beneficial for the civil service and would tend to counteract, in part, the entirely legitimate liberal suspicion against personal bonds, networks and communities.

3) Community and voluntary service as professional qualification. The third suggestion is a corollary of the second. First of all, from a Neo-Weberian perspective, voluntary service in non governmental organizations should represent a significant professional qualification for civil service positions. Secondly, it should be expected and required of civil servants to take paid leave of their positions in order to serve additional time in voluntary organizations of their choosing, among a list previously approved by official instances (obviously, not every organization of the private sector, voluntary or not, could qualify for this). There is another parallel to the New Public Management in this point. The NPM favors flexibility in public employment, in order to promote the circulation between private and public managers. For a Neo-Weberian perspective, a similar significance should correspond to service in voluntary organizations, in order to strengthen a democratic and altruistic disposition among civil servants. This kind of paid leave for civil servants would represent a public subsidy for non governmental organizations but, in fact, subsidies and other public benefits for certain voluntary organizations are very usual in most developed countries. The cir-

cultation of civil servants between public and voluntary positions would contribute to strongly reinforce the communities mentioned above. Then again, we must confront the issue of hypocrisy and cynicism. Surely enough, many civil servants without an altruistic disposition would regard such service in voluntary organizations as a nuisance, and only pretend to work willingly in the voluntary sector. This issue, however, should not represent a serious problem. Every institutional arrangement that attempts to promote ethical behavior must deal with constant hypocrisy in diverse degrees. This is unavoidable and probably healthy. Altruism among civil servants must be surely encouraged, but nobody would like to have saints running the state—liberals least of all, of course, but here as in other matters, they have a point.

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Notes

1. About ten years ago, Garofalo and Geuras (1999) developed what they call a *unified ethic*, an integrated ethical perspective for public administrators, which combines deontology, teleology, virtue, and intuition. Kantian ethics plays a significant role in the formulation of Garofalo's and Geuras' unified ethic, which must be considered a *positive ethics* in the same sense discussed here. The present paper seeks to further explore the idea of a positive ethics for the public service, considering also Hegel's contribution in this regard.