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By María G. Torres S. & Marcelo A. Rangel R.

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Keywords: *administration, epistemology, science, art, technique.*

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Administration: Science, Art or Technique? A Reflective Look at the Epistemological Status of the Administration

María G. Torres S.[α] & Marcelo A. Rangel R.[σ]

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I. Introduction

The approach to the administrative process or phenomenon has originated the construction of different epistemic perspectives, exclusive of each other. These definitions have been oriented as action, process, system, or phenomenon showing its practical application (processes, system, or administrative functions) and its teleological purpose – the fulfillment of the organizational objective(s) or purpose (s). This understanding of the epistemic in the sense of creation and individual or collective construction of knowledge, in this case, establishes the administrative reality.

A rational perspective has led to the construction of a generally objectivist epistemological vision. Depending on the author, the administration is glimpsed as science, technique, or socio-technics (Bunge, Bertolucci, Kliksberg among others). On the other hand, this reality from a relative perspective is assumed from a subjectivist epistemological vision leading to contemplate administration as a social discipline and even as art (Drucker, Gulick and Urwick, Valladares Rivera, Metcalfe, Mintzberg, etc.).

In this discursive thread, it is inevitable to question whether the administration is a science, an art, or a technique. Nevertheless, it demonstrates an unfinished discussion about the dimensions that configure and determine its epistemological status. This issue drives the present reflection.

Before advancing on this journey, it is necessary to highlight the following premises: First, the influence on the epistemic status of the administration (dissociation between science and philosophy) is due to the historical struggle given by the hegemony of some of these disciplines. Second, the notion of epistemology in this article refers to the way of approaching reality and the conditions under which facts and objects can become knowledge (Sandín, 2003). These theoretical foundations and methods of study of the administration are inferred. Third, the process of theoretical/practical articulation is considered a teleological aspect of the administrative discipline. Therefore, its purpose is to properly and successfully manage the elements, resources, or talents existing in an organization, whatever their nature, to fulfill or achieve the objectives or purposes set from their work (Taylor, 1969; Fayol, 1980; Koontz & amp; Heinz, 1998; Drucker, 1989). Last, the organization is understood here as a multidimensional space, to which different logics of action relate (technical, economic, political, cultural, emotional, etc.). Therefore, multiple actors with individual interests converge showing conflict and power. These are basic ingredients for its operation, which is also built on various structures and represents multiple projects difficult to dissociate from the rest of the other social constructions. These facts make up everyday life (Barba, 2013).

The article is an open reflection, guided by a qualitative methodological approach, which emphasizes a critical abstraction with nuances of complexity, or vice versa, given through dialogic argumentation. The reflection is based on a documentary review of the notion of administration. Its object, nature, and main

Author α: Professor and Cultural Promoter of UNERG-Venezuela. Licentiate in Arts (UCV), Licentiate in Education (UCV), MSc in Administrative Management (UNERG). Participant of the Doctorate in Administrative and Managerial Sciences (UC).
e-mail: mgts4ever@gmail.com
Author σ: Manager of Technology and Systems of the Municipal Tax Administration Service SATRIM, Maracay-Venezuela. Computer Engineer (UNERG), Master in Management of Information and Communication Technologies (UNEFA), Master in Administrative Management (UNERG), Participant of in the Doctorate in Administrative and Management Sciences (UC). e-mail: marcelounerg@gmail.com

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approaches of study have defined its epistemic status. Furthermore, some considerations are drawn about the characteristics of the discipline that are considered epistemic obstacles to its understanding. An interpretation emerges from the representation exposed here, which refers to a sense of creation and construction of knowledge in the administration. It is necessary to add that new controversies and unknowns may arise regarding the representation of administration as a theoretical-practical systemic epistemological framework that admits the complexity of the administrative phenomenon as science, art, and technique.

II. Charting the Administrative Phenomenon

Human beings have developed various forms since the primitive era of humanity. Modes or manners to dispose of resources have changed over the years, which helped to emerge the notion of administration. This category refers to an activity proper to the human being that practices and develops to take advantage of its resources, although in an intuitive and rudimentary way.

In ancient Greece, it was attributed to the purpose of better allocating the resources obtained, to meet the proposed objectives, exercise authority, and delegate responsibility. Demographic expansion of man as the emergence of rationalist and subjectivist visions caused these forms to result in an essentially cooperative conception of administrative action (Mendoza, 2018). The industrial revolution brought with it the concern for productivity and it led to the need to professionalize their actions. However, it was until the beginning of the 20th century that it became an object of scientific study due to the Taylorian approach to administration as the origin and potential solution to industry problems. Taylor´s theory generated questions that led to multiple administrative schools: Scientific Approach (Taylor and Gilbreth), Classical - Functional Approach (with Fayol, Mooney, and Urwick, among others), Bureaucratic Approach (Weber, Selznick. Merton, Gouldner, etc.), Structuralist Approach (Etzioni, Bau & Scott, etc.), Humanist Approach (Mayo, Maslow, McGregor, among others), Participatory Approach (Barnard) –which replaces the traditional and dominant conception of managing organizations based on engineering designs-; Systemic Approach (Bertalanffy, Katz, and Rosenzweig, among others), Strategic Approach (Andrews, Steiner, Kaplan & Norton); Competitiveness Approach (Porter, Ohmae, Nonaka & Takeuchi, etc.) Behavioral Approach (March & Simon); Organizational Development (Lewin, McGregor, etc.), Contingency or Situational Approach (Burns, Slater, Woodward & Child, Chandler, Stalker, Lawrence & Lorsch, etc.); among others. It should be noted that the latter influenced the emergence of the field of Organizational Studies and breaks with the universalist current of administration (Stonner, Freeman, and Gilbert, 1995; Chiavenato, 2004; Rivas, 2009; and Barba, 2013).

Administrative approaches are more or less concerned about the same thing: efficiency, efficacy, or effectiveness (depending on the theoretical perspective adopted). Therefore, the focus goes on whether the objectives of or in an organization are met. But, the orientation towards the tasks (techniques or procedures) or relationships (individual organization) varies between them. The postulates raised by the schools of administration define the object of study of the administration. Furthermore, they have established the methods used by the administration to give course to scientific inquiry and, it manages to validate the findings or results obtained, without neglecting the description and explanation of the discipline as a social practice.

In this sense, the administration is the accumulated historical result of the contribution of scientists and authors in multiple disciplines (mainly engineering, psychology, and sociology) which, are essentially nourished by philosophy and science. These findings led to the systematization of new knowledge at the beginning of the century and the end of the last century resulting in the birth of administration as a discipline due to the need to want organizations to operate with optimal efficiency (Etzioni, 1979: 16).

Under this discursive thread, the administration is understood, firstly, in the etymological sense of the word "administer", which comes from the Latin ad, which means "towards", "direction" or "tendency", and minister, related to subordination", "obedience" or "at the service of", recognized as an act of serving another, of taking care of the goods or resources of another in particular, of taking care of the affairs of another, and, by extension, administering also implies taking charge, caring, and Managing your affairs and resources.

In the same way, managing also means to rule or govern, it means directing the destinations, paths, and pathways of an organization, company, community, city, or town, in such a way that its objectives or purposes and its progress and well-being are achieved. Fayol (1980) conceived the administration in two senses: one of a broad nature, related to the action of governing a company or organization towards the proposed end, and another of a restricted nature referring to the administrative action of foreseeing, organizing, command, coordinate, and control.

Due to the above, the administration has traditionally been defined as the process of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the use of resources to achieve organizational objectives (Chiavenato, 1995; Sallanave, 2002). Thus, the existing theoretical distinctions between management approaches generally correspond to the dimensions that are considered to address it as a phenomenon,

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process, action, discipline, or praxis (conception of the individual-worker-participant, the environment or internal-external context, the organizational climate, organizational culture, among others).

The general purpose of the administration is inferred. The organization, regardless of its nature (business, social, public, private, producer of goods or services); and the specific object of study of the administration, the administrative action, that is, the processes or functions (planning, coordination, execution, control, and evaluation) is established by the main purpose of the organization. For example, from the classical Fayolian approach, the orientation goes in terms of processes, and from Drucker's neoclassical approach, the emphasis is the functions. Nevertheless, both approaches imply the achievement of the organization's objectives. In addition to this, the ultimate goal of the discipline is productivity, in terms of generating products, profits, or value.

III. Epistemic Status of Administration Science, Art or Technique?

The epistemological status of administration has become an unfinished discussion about its admission as a science, technique, or art, qualities that are generally mutually exclusive. This idea is relevant because it offers a context in which the concern to understand the epistemological status of administration arises. The discussion begins with the question: what is the adjective that accompanies it? The focus is on whether it should be considered a science, art, or technique. Therefore, another question arises: what is its object and method of study? This is to deepen the knowledge bases on administration. Furthermore, it validates a single body of the experience of professionals in the area.

The epistemic status of administration can be delved into when it is observed the way it is presented in our mind and consciousness: What is the appearance of this object like? What is its shape? This object is undoubtedly made up of some elements that we know and, we can define it abstractly as part of human activity. It is the result of an expression in the decision-making process and resource management through the processes of planning, organization, direction, coordination, and control. More specifically, the element that configures the administrative phenomenon under study is a specific human activity that consists of planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling, in other words, the resources of an organization.

Considering this, what we call administrative science aims to study the phenomenon that could be observed as a man acting. However, it is not any action, but what refers to planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and controlling activities or functions known in classical theory as administrative processes. Therefore, understanding the way of generating knowledge of the administrative process can be glimpsed from two perspectives: a rational one and a relative one.

From the rational or objective perspective, the first question adjective appears: science can be conceived as the knowledge resulting from making use of a certain method to achieve an expected end. According to Bunge (2005), science corresponds to a growing body of ideas characterized as rational, systematic, exact, verifiable knowledge, through scientific research, and therefore fallible. In other words, it consists of creating theories, models, or structures to represent the meanings of the reality that surrounds us. Science must be classified according to its object of study, with social science being in charge of addressing the behavior and qualities of the Human Being. In this way, since the administration is an activity proper to the human being, it can be conceived as a social science.

Nevertheless, science adheres to the episteme, the logos, the demonstration-explanation, the empirical, technical thought, rational and logical, as well as to the method based on the observation, deduction, and demonstration of hypotheses elaborated around a specific, tangible, and intelligible phenomenon or object of study (Abbagnano, 1951; Bunge, 1986). So, given the nature of the administration, this is the multiplicity or complexity of its object of study, the heterogeneity of its theoretical postulates, as well as the indisputable inherence of the context-phenomenon of study. Bunge (1986), states that administration does not comply with the analytical, precise, verifiable, legal, or universal precepts typical of scientific knowledge to be properly considered a science, conceiving it instead as a sociotechnical, in terms of administrative or technical (second adjective in question).

Furthermore, Bunge (1980) establishes that the technique has reached such a high level that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate science from social science. So, it aims to understand a part of reality, showing the relation between cause-consequence or cause-effect relationship in terms of research. Technique aspires to put this knowledge obtained into action through the creation or design of devices, action plans, or control models (in the case of administration) on what is known by science closely linked to the context in which it is proposed to apply or develop a design. This is how the denomination of administratécnia (mentioned previously) arises, as a characterization of the system of disciplines that study the administrative phenomenon. It uses the scientific method to understand and transform some of its aspects (tasks or activities, operation, relationships individual-organization, or the management of all of the above in terms of efficacy, efficiency, or effectiveness,

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depending on the theoretical framework used as a reference or basis).

The administration is constituted by a set of procedures, which are validated by knowledge and experience of the general or particular application. These procedures and resources modeled by the profession of administrator require constant exercise to acquire greater expertise and the ability to use them to solve practical problems.

The technique is not different from art or science in its most general sense from a philosophical perspective or from any procedure or operation capable of achieving any effect, being its field as extensive as that of all human activities (Abbagnano, 1951), which continues with the approach of the following adjective attributed to the administration, from the relative perspective, that of art.

Before addressing the notion of art, it is necessary to clarify the understanding of administration as a social discipline, as long as it is conceived from a relative thought system, which admits the subjective or intersubjective but has scientific criteria (Mendoza, 2018) because it has a set of systematically organized knowledge, which derive on the classical principles of administration. Taylor's 4 and 14 fundamental principles are an example of the application of the administrative process. In addition, it has a defined object of study, the organization. Its theoretical and methodological foundations are raised in a series of theoretical postulates (administration approaches), which are applicable to the general reality demonstrating to be reliable and likely to acquire a unitary character over time (Mendoza, 2018).

To address the notion of administration as art, it is necessary to take Plato's postulates as a primary reference. Plato establishes that art corresponds to all ordered human activity (including science) that exercises dominance over knowledge, divided between judiciary art and dispositive or imperative art. The first consists simply in knowing and the second one refers to directing based on knowledge of a certain activity. Regardless of the consequent considerations that emerged around the notion of art, associated only with aesthetics (philosophy of art and beauty) called or conceived as liberal, it is also relative to the intuitive, sensitive or creative. It is possible to rescue the productive, mechanical, manual, or servile nature of the imperative art that over time appears associated with the notion of technique, as a term with a broad meaning that designates all the normative procedures that result from its work in any field (ibid.).

It is precisely from this intuitive or subjective perspective that the notion of administration as art emerges in authors such as Drucker (1989), who proposed administration as a liberal art, which integrates knowledge with practice and application. Mintzberg (2000). Plus, he considered it in the sense of the trade, due to the intuitive judgment of the administrator. Therefore, this perception provides the administration with more to do with doing and then thinking than with thinking and then doing. Meanwhile, Mendoza (2018), states that the administration rescues the need to use creativity in solving problems that prevent the progress of the proposed strategies and objectives. So, the character of art is also presented by selecting simple, harmonious, and integrating solutions. The administration is conceived as an art and, it is characterized by having virtue, disposition, and personality to build a favorable scenario in an organization with varied and complex attributes that can be considered due to their nature as epistemic obstacles.

IV. Of the Epistemic Obstacles of Administration

There are a series of distinctive features of the administrative phenomenon that are considered to have acted as epistemic obstacles. These are elements that are difficult to integrate or even address as a unit, especially when learning about or apprehending the administrative phenomenon. Therefore, the complexity term appears in the equation and it becomes the most suitable category to characterize the diversity or multiplicity of the administrative discipline. As a complex phenomenon composed of various elements, it should be noted.

First, there is the diversity of its general object of study, the organization, due to its normative nature (legal), as well as its field of action (goods or services); its orientation, either towards tasks (a division of work, structure, operation, techniques or procedures, etc.) or towards relationships (with emphasis on psychological and sociological aspects inherent to the workforce that makes up an organization).

Resulting in the presence of normativism in organizational functioning, which can be considered an unbreakable principle. The foregoing in the sense of the prevalence or inclination towards compliance with the norm conceived as a kind of instruction to follow or respect, which may not necessarily be consistent with the context of action, taking into account not only the fact that the Legal frameworks, whatever their level within the Kelsen pyramid, must be updated, but also due to the flexible or dynamic nature of the (human) elements that participate in the administrative task.

Under this premise appears the subordination of the organization and the administrative processes to the ideological is highlighted, based on the legitimization of domination and subordination as a form of exercise of power in organizations, obedience that depends on the set of ideas that guides to the system of administrative thought and base the action of the

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administrator and, therefore, the culture, climate and functioning of the organization.

Another aspect to consider in this equation is the heterogeneity of theoretical approaches of the discipline. Koontz presented it as an administrative "jungle", made up of schools of administrative thought, raised throughout history becoming an attempt of researchers in the field for establishing a consensus precisely on the object of study of the administration. This variety far from simplifying its object or its study methods demonstrates its complexity.

However, it is necessary to point out that administration as an object of study is well documented in Taylor´s approaches regarding the planning of the method. Furthermore, Taylor states that to succeed the principles of administration require that the participants of the organization work together for a common interest. Taylor conceived it as the increase in productivity adding the principle of the complexity of the administrative phenomenon. This perspective unravels and justifies the emergence of the humanist approach to administration. Moreover, it is hence the perception of an administrative "jungle" spoken by Koontz. Besides, it establishes as well the multiplicity of methodological possibilities to address the administrative phenomenon.

In this same order of ideas, it appears consideration how difficult is to approach the management activities of the administration. To be more specific, the skills (creativity and negotiation) and values (morals) are required by the administrative task (which I would classify as a managerial role). Borgucci (2012) distinguishes creativity and, links it to negotiation as well as morality, which are characteristic or distinctive features of the administrator or manager's style. They affect the decision-making process and involve risk, according to the spatial context. Temporary of the organization, commitment that can be managed by taking into account postulates of the theory of contingency, organizational development, or the theory of managerial effectiveness.

These aspects of the managerial role should lead to solving problems by adequately using the tools or strategies according to the context they take place. From an ecological point of view, we talk about beneficiating all the actors involved in the organization, directly or indirectly. It becomes then a challenge for those in the managerial role in the administrative field, or the researcher to take this aspect as an object of study. Resulting in an obstacle of an epistemic nature.

The methodological status of administrative principles can be also considered another epistemic obstacle. It is understood as a set of socio-technical rules susceptible to periodic revision (and not as universal or general laws as required by the scientific tradition), with practical and moral aspirations. Due to the complex nature of the administrative phenomenon (conceived as a dynamic system), the administration's methods used must have a flexible and diverse perspective.

In addition, it is relevant to emphasize the presence of empiricism within this list of epistemic obstacles. Empiricism is conceived as the submission of the observer-researcher subject to organizational facts, in this case from a perspective alien to criteria of scientific rigor, that is, the possibility of uncritical empiricism. However, researchers in the field of administration have tried to advance toward its scientific nature, and authors such as Le Moigne (1997), Kliksberg (1992), or Bunge (2000) give an account of this, without ignoring the methodological possibilities offered by postpositivist, which address phenomena such as administration from the study of cases, justified in the postulates, for example, of systems theory, holistic theory, or complex thought.

In this sense, the directing of causality in the formulation of laws or administrative principles stands out, with a certain range of validity as long as they are conceived from specific contexts. Causality in its most general meaning refers to the relationship between two things, under which the second (the effect, result, or impact) is univocally foreseeable from the first (the administrative action). This is seen from a deterministic perspective (typical of experimental studies with a quantitative approach), which is complemented by the statement of the relationship between scientific knowledge and, administrative practice. It refers to the imperative need for what is stated in the context of scientific research (the theoretical postulates or assumptions) to transcend the practical (administrative work), by adopting the administration of the principles of science.

V. Final Thoughts: Administration as an Epistemic Framework

It is necessary to start by making an approximation to the knowledge of the entities within which the activities of human beings develop. Let´s start with the affirmation that administrative phenomenon at the level of popular knowledge as a human activity arises as to whether it is possible to study it scientifically.

Although there is not still epistemological consensus on the status of administration, the phenomenon or administrative process depends on the paradigmatic approach of its interlocutor. It is also accompanied by adjectives such as "science", "socio-technics" or "art". Regardless of the epithet used, the organization is considered the general object of administrative work. Plus, the exclusive object of study is the processes by which the participants or co-participants of an organization are led toward the achievement of its objectives or purposes. Since the object of a discipline is the portion of reality that works,

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this is precisely the disciplinary object. Currently, the administration is assumed as an independent discipline, of a practical and social nature, oriented to the management of the resources of an organization to achieve its objectives. So, administrative functions are exercised.

Characteristics of distinctive features of the administration previously understood as epistemic obstacles do not allow it to appropriate the adjective science. So, it is clear that this does not imply that it cannot be considered with the adjective scientific but within its canons. In addition, we cannot forget the modern postulates that speak of the end of science, or better yet, the emergence of ready approaches to address study phenomena that from the traditional perspective are not possible to consider in terms of validity and scientific reliability.

According to the above, we could assent to the consideration of the administration in terms of Bungian socio-technical, as long as its daring conjunction as art and discipline with a scientific nature is recognized, an assertion that could also become a research problem with all the rigor that this requires.

This is how we conceive what could be understood as an epistemology of administration in terms of a systemic framework in the sense that it represents a system of ideas that give rise to knowledge and administrative theories from which specific methods or strategies arise to investigate the administration. nature of the organizational reality, whose representation allows to give an epistemic connotation that transcends its conception as a science, as a technique, or as an art, but as a discipline in which the scientific, technical, sensitive, and intuitive criteria of the administration converge.

This is how, representing the administration from the fundamentals and approach of systems theory is very accurate since it arose to explain the principles of the organization of many natural phenomena and is currently applied to knowledge. of many other realities, both natural and social, etc.

Therefore, an organization applying the primitive principles of administration creates and forms this framework of all the parts towards the whole and the whole towards the parts, managing to establish a relational synergy of the entities of this great systemic environment seen from a holistic position, This allows us to have a perception of the organization as a flexible open system that depends on changes in the environment and technology, thus the evolution of the administration will depend on how it transcends the path of modernity and postmodernity towards efficiency and effectiveness. of the proposed results of the organizations.

In this sense, the administrative and organizational as a living system is a description and abstract representation of relationships that identify its components in autopoiesis, that is, a general pattern of organization in its multiple dependencies that allow building its autonomy. The previously described evidence is that in each case they raise precepts and methods that ultimately revolve around the same thing, to contribute to the ultimate goal of the administration.

Due to the above, we conceive a new way of knowing, or of representing the epistemic status of the administration, and therefore, of apprehending the discipline, which allows its admission as a science, art, and technique, without exclusions, where the perspectives rational and relative, mentioned above, act as sub-systems of an epistemic macro-system, in which the fibers are not arranged randomly, but woven according to a canvas, of a synthetic unit, in which each part contributes to the set, from which you can perceive and know the features or elements of the administrative phenomenon (it is theoretical, philosophical and methodological heterogeneity, considered as epistemic obstacles), but not simplify or fully apprehend due to its complex nature.

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