The politics-administration dichotomy : a reconstruction

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4. Heterodox Criticisms

> "[W]hat was 'rejected' may have been oversimplified, distorted."
> (Waldo 1968a: 13)

4.1 A tenet of orthodoxy?

The politics-administration dichotomy formulated by Wilson, Goodnow, and Weber did not immediately raise many eyebrows in American Public Administration. Weber's writings were not translated until 1946 and therefore remained largely unknown, and Wilson's academic writings were not widely read either (Van Riper 1984). Goodnow, now the least known of the three, initially had the greatest influence, but even his ideas on the relationship between politics and administration received little attention.[1] So, at first the politics-administration dichotomy seems to have been quite uncontroversial; in fact, the idea was received with a silence that seems to indicate uncritical acceptance or perhaps general disinterest. Slowly but surely, however, the dichotomy became the subject of explicit discussion. It is not easy to say when exactly the winds of criticism began to blow. Campbell certainly picks at too late a date when he says that "[n]ot until the 1960s did a flood of literature begin to attack frontally the policy/administration dichotomy" (1988: 245). At the other extreme, Vile has found an occasional critical remark articulated "as early as 1908" (1998: 311), but this cannot count as an attack of any serious force. Considering the strength and the volume of the arguments raised against the dichotomy, Waldo's estimation seems the most accurate: "As the 1930s advanced, doubt and dissent increased. In the 1940s refutation and repudiation came to the fore. By the 1950s it had become common to refer to the politics administration dichotomy as an outworn if not ludicrous creed" (1987: 93). The combined though not necessarily coordinated and coherent assault on the dichotomy must be dated shortly before the middle of the twentieth century.

[1] This is nicely illustrated by an early review of *Politics and Administration* (Ford 1900) that includes a perceptive discussion of Goodnow's concept of state, but not even a mention, let alone critique, of his views on the relation between politics and administration. Remarkably, a 1939 review of Wilson's essay showed the same omission (cf. Lynn 2001: 148).

In this connection it is noticeable how soon the dichotomy was depicted as a notion of an already respectable age. In the 1950s the dichotomy was almost casually called "old" (Gulick 1955: 76; Mansfield 1959: 187), "conventional" (Long 1952: 808), "now-familiar" (Kaufman 1956: 1060), and "traditional" (Kaufman 1956: 1067; Smithburg 1951: 59). These widely shared characterizations cast doubt on Svara's claim that the dichotomy never actually was a part of the shared body of knowledge in Public Administration (2001). At the same time they should not be taken too literally. The dichotomy was surely not a particularly old idea in the 1950s, let alone a very familiar and long-debated one. What matters is the sometimes nearly explicit suggestion behind such characterizations that the dichotomy should be regarded as obsolete and out-of-date, a superseded idea belonging to a bygone era.

Many students of public administration have learned to regard the politics-administration dichotomy as one building block in a wider structure of thought known as Public Administration's 'orthodoxy'. Friend and foe agree that this idea of orthodoxy was especially developed in and popularized by Waldo's *The Administrative State*. This book presented pre-Second World War administrative thought as a more or less coherent set of ideas, consisting, besides the politics-administration dichotomy, of "the postulate that true democracy and true efficiency are synonymous, or at least reconcilable," the ideal of a 'scientific' study of administration and management, and the belief in the so-called "principles" of administration, later associated with the infamous POSDCORB acronym (1948: 206-207). Two publications in particular, both published in 1937, have come to be regarded as expressions of "the high noon of orthodoxy," namely the *Papers on the Science of Administration* edited by Gulick and Urwick, and the report of the President's Committee on Administrative Management, better known as the Brownlow Report (Sayre 1958: 103).

How strongly the dichotomy has come to be associated with the orthodox tenets is illustrated by Herbert Kaufman's thesis that that in its earliest phase American Public Administration was particularly concerned with the value of "neutral competence," which he defines as the "ability to do the work of government expertly, and to do it according to explicit, objective standards rather than to personal or party or other obligations and loyalties" (1956: 1060). As terminology already suggests, the concept of neutral competence is in fact an amalgam of two ideas, one referring to the absence of political involvement (neutrality) and the other to the presence of professionalism (competence). Here the dichotomy between politics and administration is directly related to a particular ideal of good administration.

In recent years, it has become clear that the concept of orthodoxy,

notwithstanding its merits, must also be qualified. It suggests a strong unity of thought, whereas in fact pre-Second World War administrative thought was much less coherent and less one-sided than has long been believed (Lynn 2001; Bertelli and Lynn 2006: ch. 3; Marini 1994: 3). The distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, moreover, applies only to American Public Administration and not to its equivalents in other parts of the world, notably Europe. Specifically important for our purposes, finally, is that treating the politics-administration dichotomy as part of a broader orthodoxy suggests that the dichotomy is necessarily and intrinsically related to the orthodox tenets. This false suggestion has done great harm to the acceptability of the dichotomy in post-orthodox Public Administration. Those who believed it necessary to abandon orthodoxy have usually also rejected the dichotomy as a part of that broader package.

Apart from being linked to the typical ideas of the Public Administration orthodoxy (administrative principles, Scientific Management), the politics-administration dichotomy is also often associated with a particular understanding of democracy, characterized by the idea of a popular will or popular sovereignty and the principle of legislative supremacy (Long 1952: 808-809; 1954: 24-25). Emmette Redford has captured these elements in what he called the "two-pyramid" or "overhead democracy" model (1969: 70). The basic idea of this model is aptly summarized by Waldo:

> "Politics-democracy proceeds upward to an apex at which the popular will is determined by law or otherwise, and then is bridged over to administration. Thereupon the will is realized downward through an organization that is hierarchical, functionally rational, professional, informed by science, and committed to efficiency. Responsibility, responsiveness, and accountability are then brought about by the same structures, but the direction is reversed. They go up the administrative pyramid to the apex, bridge over, and go down this structure to the voters" (1987: 92-93; cf. 1984a: xlviii).

This model is mostly presented as a proper depiction of parliamentary democracy systems with ministerial responsibility and of council-manager systems in American local government, but Redford himself applied the concept to American federal government as well (1969: 70-71). Many writers have related the dichotomy to this particular type of democratic government (e.g., Self 1977: 150-151; Kirwan 1977: 349; 1981: 346; Golembiewski 1981: 24; Meier and Bohte 2007: 135-136).

Thus, after the Second World War the dichotomy has become associated with two bodies of thought. The first is a 'scientific' view on the workings and organization of public administration, which has to be business-like and

value-neutral, and the other is a fairly radical understanding of majoritarian democracy. Lawler has captured these two bodies of thought under the single heading of "scientific populism" (1988: 50-51, 53; cf. Storing 1995: 403).[2] In a climate of scientific populism neither politicians nor administrators need to take responsibility for public policies. They can pretend to derive their goals from popular opinion and from politics, respectively. The scheme leaves little or no room for political leadership and morally responsible administrative behavior. It is understandable, therefore, that the association of the dichotomy with scientific populism has negatively affected its reputation. The question must be raised, however, whether the association is a necessary or merely a contingent one. A first tentative answer to this question is that it seems possible to endorse the dichotomy without endorsing scientific populism, too. One way to do so is shown by Weber, who sharply analyzed and also strongly opposed scientific populism, and who advocated the dichotomy in order to create room for the kind of charismatic political leadership that would otherwise have no place in modern government. In Chapter Six I suggest another way to understand and endorse the dichotomy that differs from Weber's but is, I believe, equally untainted by scientific populism.

This chapter leaves aside the question whether early Public Administration was really strongly infected by scientific populism and instead concentrates on the criticisms raised against the politics-administration dichotomy itself. These criticisms are of different kinds. In the previous chapter I have already discussed what might be called a historical line of criticism: the argument propounded by revisionist historiographers of administrative thought that the dichotomy has actually never been supported, at least not seriously, by the authors traditionally credited with its invention, particularly Wilson and Goodnow. I have rejected this view, arguing that these classical authors did advocate a distinction in theory and a separation in practice between administration and politics that is worthy of the name dichotomy. Whatever the support of the classical authors for the dichotomy may or may not have been, however, for the moment these historiographic debates can be left aside, because enough objections have been raised against the dichotomy itself.

In Waldo's writings we find the often-repeated observation that the politics-administration dichotomy was rejected for both empirical and normative reasons (1948: 128, 207; 1971: 264; 1980: 68-69; 1987: 93; cf. Golembiewski 1981: 52-

[2] The association of the politics-administration dichotomy with scientific populism is not something of the past, as Harmon illustrates when he associates the dichotomy with rationalism, moralism, and managerialism, on the one hand, and notions of 'popular will' and popular sovereignty on the other (2006: 122-123, 126-130).

53). Although this captures the two major lines of criticism, Waldo's treatment tends to neglect how exactly the heterodox authors conceptualized the dichotomy they criticized and what they required it to accomplish. This inattention to the content and purpose of the dichotomy is typical of but certainly not unique for Waldo. It has created the general but incorrect impression that the heterodox authors rejected the same, unaltered dichotomy they found in the writings of their classical and orthodox predecessors. In fact, however, the dichotomy fundamentally changed meaning in their hands. Their reconceptualization of the dichotomy must be examined before the empirical and normative objections can be discussed. A more complete and illuminating way of presenting the various types of criticism, therefore, is offered by Svara, who has classified the challenges to the dichotomy as three distinct yet interrelated types: conceptual, empirical, and normative (1985: 221). In the next three sections I follow Svara's classification and examine these three types of criticism successively (4.2 to 4.4). Next, special attention is given to the concept of discretion, which plays a crucial role in each of these challenges (4.5). The concluding section discusses and rejects the revisionist claim of Svara and others that heterodoxy was not a radical break but rather a continuation of earlier thinking about the politics-administration dichotomy (4.6).

4.2 From 'politics' to 'policy'

Svara describes the "conceptual" challenge to the politics-administration dichotomy as "the redefinition of key terms accompanying the behavioral movement" that flooded the social sciences during the middle of the twentieth century (1985: 221). In the behavioral approach, scholarly attention was directed towards the concrete level of individual action by citizens (especially voters), politicians, and civil servants, and away from formal institutions and normative principles. The most important "redefinition of key terms" in connection with the present subject is undoubtedly the transformation in the heterodox literature of the dichotomy between *politics* and administration into the "parallel, alternative, and occasionally synonymous dichotomy" between *policy* and administration (Dunsire 1973: 91). This reconceptualization can be traced back with remarkable exactness to Luther Gulick's essay 'Politics, Administration, and the 'New Deal'' (1933), which stands out as one of the first critical reflections on the politics-administration dichotomy as such.

Gulick opens his essay with a distinction between what he calls 'politics' and politics. 'Politics' (with quotation marks) refers pejoratively to the corrupt

politics of the spoils system, while politics (proper) refers to any "action which has to do with control of the rulers" (1933: 59). Gulick adds that "there is no objective method of distinguishing between 'politics' and politics" (1933: 60). In particular, one cannot determine to which category a particular governmental action or decision belongs by looking at that action or decision only: "the distinction between 'politics' and politics is not *in* the act itself" (1933: 60). Instead, one has to look at the motives of the politicians who perform the action or take the decision. When they are driven by self-interest they are involved in 'politics'; when they act out of a concern for the public interest, or at least out of a more general interest than their own, they are involved in politics. In most cases, Gulick asserts, there will be a mixture of both motives and there is no way to discern and institutionally separate the two kinds of politics (1933: 59-60).

This reframing of 'politics' into a broader and less pejorative concept of politics in itself need not be very problematic for the politics-administration dichotomy. The aim to protect administration against illegitimate forms of politics may historically have been the main justification for the development of the dichotomy in the Reform movement, but it need not be the only possible justification. One may well argue that administration must also be isolated from legitimate forms of politics. But Gulick goes further in redefining the concept of politics. He argues that it is always the goal of politics to "shift the direction of public policy" (1933: 60) – that is what (legitimate) politics is about. Top-down political direction is not the only way in which public policy is determined, however. There are also influences from below: "If any government employee, anyone of our 'rulers' [which for Gulick includes civil servants], has discretion, he not only has the power, but is by circumstances compelled to determine policy" (1933: 61). Thus, both politicians and administrators are involved in policy making, the former in their formal capacity and the latter in their discretionary action. Gulick realized that pointing out this overlap of politics and administration in the sphere of policy is a crucial step and he quickly drew the conclusion that it signs the fate of the dichotomy: "It follows from this that governmental institutions cannot be devised to coincide definitely with any scheme of clear-cut division between policy and administration" (1933: 61). Here the politics-administration dichotomy is subtly but essentially transformed into a policy-administration dichotomy.

Gulick not just broadened and neutralized the concept of politics, but also undermined the conceptual distinction between political and administrative issues. In his view, one cannot tell from a mere act or decision whether it is political or administrative (or executive, legislative, or judicial, for that matter): "[T]he classification of an individual act (…) will depend upon the existing institutional set-up and upon the prevalent pattern of values and interests

dominant at a given time and place" (1933: 62). What is a highly controversial political issue in one setting may be a mundane and unnoticed administrative issue in another. A particular act or decision of government is either political or administrative when those involved in a particular institutional setting regard it as such. No qualitative difference between 'administrative questions' and 'political questions' (in Wilson's terminology) can be found in the character of those questions themselves. Whether a particular question is political or administrative depends on its context.

However radical this view was, Gulick could still say that, given a particular context, an issue is either political or administrative. Indeed, he explicitly retained the dichotomy between the two, albeit for specific reasons:

> "The reason for separating politics from administration is not that their combination is a violation of a principle of government. The reason for insisting that the elected legislative and executive officer shall not interfere with the details of administration, and that the rank and file of the permanent administration shall be permanent and skilled and shall not meddle with politics, is simply that this division of work makes use of specialization and appears to give better results than a system where such a differentiation does not exist" (1933: 63).

This is a highly pragmatic argument indeed. The dichotomy is no longer founded on any fundamental "principle of government," but it is merely an efficient division of labor that happens to yield "better results".

After Gulick, the equation of politics/administration with policy/administration was adopted surprisingly rapidly and widely. Herbert Simon, writing only one decade later, uses the new formulation consistently in his *Administrative Behavior*, for instance when he speaks of "the distinction, so often made in the literature of administration, between policy questions and questions of administration" (1997: 55; cf. pp. 61-67). The new formulation was used most conspicuously, however, in the title and content of Paul Appleby's *Policy and Administration* (1949). In this book, which has been called the "scholarly death-blow to the simplistic formulation of the classic dichotomy, and a new classic statement" (Dunsire 1973: 98), Appleby straightforwardly defined the dichotomy as "a separation of powers which excluded from administration any – or at least any important – policy-making functions" (1949: 3). Here policy/administration fully equates politics/administration. What is more, for Appleby the distinction itself has become wholly relative. Any question government deals with, he argues, is both a policy question and an administrative question at the same time. People only perceive it differently, depending on their position in the government hierarchy: "In the perspective of each successive level everything decided at that

level and above is 'policy,' and everything that may be left to a lower level is 'administration' (1949: 21). Thus, a particular issue is regarded as 'policy' by those who operate hierarchically below the level at which it is settled, and as 'administration' by those who operate above that level. When an issue becomes more controversial it will rise in the hierarchy, so that the number of officials who see it as 'policy' rises, and the number of officials who see it as 'administration' decreases. For those inside government it is completely relative to their position within the hierarchy whether an issue is policy or administration, but for those outside the organization, including (significantly) the public administration theorist, it is always both at the same time: "In the perspective of an outside observer, policy and administration are treated together at every level" (1949: 22; cf. pp. 10-22). And when an issue can be characterized as both 'policy' and 'administration,' it is in fact neither. The very distinction between those categories collapses.

Appleby presented a really thorough reconceptualization and conceptual dissolution of the distinction between politics (or policy) and administration. Like Gulick, he could not easily get rid of the dichotomy, however. He continued to acknowledge a distinction, at the top of the governmental hierarchy, between partisan politics and other forms of politics: "Everything having to do with the government and everything the government does is political, for politics is the art and science of government. But in terms of mass, only a small part of politics is partisan" (1949: 153). This small part concerns only those highly controversial issues that capture "party attention" (1949: 153); other issues are resolved at lower legislative and administrative levels. When a controversial issue "emerges at the partisan-political level" (1949: 53), majority-seeking politicians will start their turf-seeking fights and no role will be left for administrators. Thus, even according to Appleby a relevant distinction can be made between partisan politics and administration: "This is the sense in which politics and administration may be most sharply differentiated" (1949: 53).[3]

Less than two decades after Gulick's essay it seemed as if the contrast had always been framed as 'policy/administration' rather than as 'politics/administration'. Waldo, who in *The Administrative State* had mainly used politics/administration, soon adopted the new interpretation as well, for instance when he defined the dichotomy as "the tenet that administration is separate

[3] Fry has summarized Appleby's position well: "Appleby contends that all administration is political. However, only a small part of either administration or government is partisan, and it is partisan political activity that Appleby would have the administrator avoid. Appleby's advice is that administrators handle political issues up to the point where they become partisan matters, not that they stay out of politics entirely" (1989: 1034).

from and should be separated from politics –with politics considered both as the activities of political parties *and as policy formulation*" (1952: 86; italics added). Today, the idea that the classical politics-administration dichotomy excluded administration not only from (partisan) politics, but also from policy making has become generally accepted. It is reflected, for instance, in the definition the *Public Administration Dictionary* gives of the politics-administration dichotomy: "The view that public administration should be premised on a science of management and kept separate from traditional partisan politics *and general policy making*" (Chandler and Plano 1988: 98-99; italics added).[4]

In the Public Administration literature this replacement of 'politics' by 'policy' has led to often very extreme understandings of the dichotomy. The most general tendency is to treat the dichotomy between politics and administration as one between willing and acting, deciding and executing. Simon, for instance, charges Goodnow with coming "perilously close to identifying 'policy' with 'deciding,' and 'administration' with 'doing'" (1997 [1945]: 63). Deciding/executing is also the dominant conceptualization of politics/administration in Waldo's early writings. In *The Administrative State*, he defines "the politics-administration formula" as "the notion that the work of government is divisible into two parts, decision and execution" (1948: 206) and elsewhere in the book he also directly equates the two distinctions (e.g., pp. 14 and 114). In *The Study of Public Administration*, a highly influential introductory text book first published in 1955, Waldo refers to the dichotomy as the doctrine saying "that the process of government, analytically considered, consists of two parts only, namely, decision and execution. It is necessary first to decide what should be done – the function and definition of politics – and then to carry out the decision – the role and definition of administration" (1968b: 40). Long was particularly extreme in his use of the willing/acting distinction: "In the conventional dichotomy between policy and administration, administration is the Aristotelian slave, properly an instrument of action for the will of another, capable of retrieving the commands

[4] Fred Riggs has suggested that the conflation of politics/administration with policy/administration may be less common in British than in American thought: "In England, 'public administration' and 'public policy' are virtually the same because top career administrators, as advisors to cabinet ministers, are able to manipulate top political decision makers. By contrast, their counterparts in the United States are transient appointees and their role as policy advisers is viewed as 'political,' whereas the role of career officials, working at a lower level, is viewed as essentially managerial, giving 'administration' a nonpolitical character. This enables some specialists in America to claim public policy as a 'political' process whereas in Europe it is more easily viewed as an 'administrative' function" (1997: 105). One would perhaps expect Continental Europeans to be tempted more than Anglophones to read politics/administration as policy/administration, given the fact that languages such as French and German refer to politics and policy by one single word (*politique* and *Politik*), but remarkably this seems not to be the case.

of reason but incapable of reasoning" (1952: 808). In his view, the dichotomy renders administration to a passive and unthinking tool in the hands of its political superiors, "an instrument rather than a brain" (1954: 22). Basically the same idea was expressed by Sayre when he said that for adherents to the dichotomy administration "was concerned exclusively with the execution of assignments handed down from the realm of politics" (1958: 103).

This is not the place to point out again that this interpretation deviates grossly from the classical understandings of the dichotomy. What is most relevant here is that because of the conflation of politics/administration and policy/administration the heterodox reconceptualization interprets the dichotomy as posing a very strict and instrumentalist relation between politics and administration: politics decides and administration executes. This reconceptualization is of course closely related to that other important development in the middle decades of the twentieth century noted in the previous section: the association of the dichotomy with 'scientific populism'. Given these reconceptualizations and associations, it is not surprising that the dichotomy soon fell under heavy attacks and was rejected "as a seriously erroneous description of reality" on the one hand, and "as a deficient, even pernicious, prescription for action" on the other (Waldo 1971: 264). In the two following sections these empirical and normative objections will be considered in turn.

4.3 'A seriously erroneous description of reality'

For many, the most important problem of the politics-administration dichotomy is that it offers an inadequate description of governmental reality. In the words of Long, the dichotomy "has one fatal flaw. It does not accord with the facts of administrative life. Nor is it likely to" (1954: 22). Because the dichotomy seems not to be supported by empirical evidence, it is rejected as "false" (Waldo 1948: 123; 1968d: 42, 61). Lawler says that "the distinction between politics and administration exists only as an intellectual abstraction" and must be rejected as "unrealistic and unreasonable" (1988: 51). Of all the weaknesses of the dichotomy, its empirical inadequacy is usually regarded as the most fatal.

In general, empirical objections seem directed much more against the separation of administration from politics than against its subordination to politics. As Appleby noted, politics (or policy) and administration are not two worlds apart: "Executives do not sit at two different desks treating policy at one and administration at the other" (1949: 19). Of course this does not mean that those who deny separation affirm subordination instead. Subordination is not the

only possible relationship between administration and politics, and most critics of the dichotomy think there are other, more equal and non-hierarchical relations between them. What they most adamantly reject, however, is the idea that some separation can be perceived between politics and administration in practice.

Since the Second World War, the Public Administration literature has actually shown two waves of empirical criticism of the dichotomy. The first wave emerged with the rise of heterodoxy in the 1930s and 1940s, when it was 'discovered' that administrators do not simply execute political orders as automatons, but have room to interpret and influence policy and to act, at least within certain limits, according to their own judgment. The notions of administrative decision-making and discretion became the main bridgeheads in the attack on the dichotomy. Herbert Simon, in his *Administrative Behavior*, emphasized that decision-making could not be restricted to politics, because administrators also make decisions. Hence he proposed the value/fact distinction instead of deciding/executing as an alternative conceptual foundation for the politics-administration dichotomy (see section 5.2). Likewise, from "the fact of administrative discretion and even administrative legislation" Long inferred that "anything approaching the conditions necessary to achieve a separation of policy from administration is highly doubtful" (1952: 810). (The argument from discretion is discussed more extensively in section 4.5.)

This first wave of empirical criticism of the dichotomy was not based on systematic empirical research. Of course, the idea that administrators have discretion is plausible enough and has later been confirmed by many empirical studies, most famously by Lipsky's study of street-level bureaucracy (1983), but when the argument from discretion was first presented it was mostly based on anecdotal evidence and practical experience. This has changed since the 1970s, however, when systematic empirical research of political-administrative relations appeared and initiated a second wave of empirical criticism. The main classical study in this genre is undoubtedly *Bureaucrats and Politicians in Western Democracies* by Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman (1981), but after them the literature has expanded rapidly.[5] Most empirical studies of political-administrative relations concern individual countries, but often a cross-national comparative perspective is also adopted. Most of these studies further concentrate on the national level of government, in particular on the interaction between ministers and their top civil servants, and only a smaller group deals with political-administrative relations in local government (particularly the American council-manager systems, but other countries are also studied). Studies aimed at political-administrative relations at

[5] Lee and Raadschelders (2008) offer a detailed review of the work of Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman and its reception.

the supra-national level have long been rare and are only now emerging.[6] Most of these studies are based on surveys or interviews with politicians and senior-level bureaucrats. This implies that they concentrate particularly on respondents' role perceptions. The advantage of this method is that the data are often extensive and rich, but the disadvantage is that socially desirable and subjective answers may be given. To the extent that this is indeed the case, such empirical studies show us the attitudes and espoused norms that regulate political-administrative relations rather than the actual behavior of politicians and administrators in their mutual relations (cf. 't Hart et al. 2003: 47-48). Although it is difficult to draw general conclusions from this wealth of studies, in general it has become clear that close interactions exist between members of the political and bureaucratic elites in Western democracies. They often come from the same social class, have close working relations, and sometimes they switch positions (a phenomenon known by the French name of *pantouflage*).

Thus, the two waves of empirical study have yielded two important findings. The first is that administrators do not simply execute political orders, but are heavily involved in the shaping of government policy in the preparation as well as the implementation phase. The second finding is that in modern government there is much interaction between politicians and administrators. They do not live in separate worlds but share close working relationships and other social connections. These two findings are often interpreted as 'falsifications' of classical models of political-administrative relations, and particularly of the politics-administration dichotomy. Hansen and Ejersbo, for instance, claim that the politics-administration dichotomy "contradicts several empirical studies" (2002: 734). And in a recent study of council-manager local governments in America, Demir and Nyhan (2008) conclude that their "analysis failed to produce satisfactory empirical evidence in support of the politics-administration dichotomy" (2008: 93).

The question is, however, whether such empirical findings can really manage to falsify the (classical) politics-administration dichotomy. As to the first finding, the fact that administrators are heavily involved in policy making is in itself not enough to disprove the politics-administration dichotomy. It is clear enough that administrators have to interpret policy in order to implement it and that they

[6] For studies of political-administrative relations on the national level, see Aberbach, Putnam, and Rockman 1981; De Baecque and Quermonne 1982; Derlien 2003; Dunn 1997; 't Hart *et al*. 2003; 't Hart and Wille 2006; LaPalombara and Beck 1967; Nieuwenkamp 2001; Page 1992; Peters 1988; Peters and Pierre 2004; Putnam 1973; Suleiman 1984; Svara 1985; Svara 1999b; Timsit and Wiener 1980; and many others. For studies about the sub-national level, see Mouritzen and Svara 2002; Reussing 1996; Svara 1985; Svara 1999b; Thomas 1990; Watson 1997. For the supra-national level, see Page and Wouters 1994; Wille 2009.

have the discretion to make certain decisions. This does not necessarily mean that they also determine policy, however, but merely that they have to fill in what has (perhaps deliberately) been left open. A strong policy role of administrators is not necessarily at odds with the politics-administration dichotomy. To the extent that public servants *have* become increasingly involved in policy preparation and policy formulation, this makes a dichotomy between *policy* and administration seriously problematic.[7] Again, however, the fact that public administrators have an important, perhaps even dominant role in policy does not mean that they are – without qualification – 'doing politics'. The much-documented policy involvement of public administration does not brush away its exclusion from other significant forms of politics. Politics and administration overlap in the sphere of policy making, but that does not make the two any more identical than twilight makes day and night. In one sentence that captures the whole point: "'Policy does nothing without the aid of administration'; but administration is not therefore politics" (Wilson 1887: 210-211).

Likewise, the high level of interaction between politicians and administrators (the second finding) need not mean that politics and administration are also becoming more similar. The mosaic of government may become more fine-grained and less ordered, but still its stones may retain their different colors. As Vile has said: "The distinction between political leaders and bureaucrats has simultaneously become sharper and more confused" (1998: 399). Lane has captured the same point: "It is true that 'top executives,' meaning the higher echelon of the civil service, are in constant interaction with politicians and that their efforts in implementing policy have political implications. Establishing and accepting this fundamental fact about public management does not entail, however, that one needs to reject the 'politics-administration dichotomy'" (2005: 240). Overall, there is no conclusive empirical evidence of a growing similarity between politics and administration in the direction of either a politicization of bureaucracy or a bureaucratization of politics. In fact, many studies find sustainable and starkly different role perceptions between the two groups, and often also much explicit support for the classical role models. For example, Mordechai Lee, a former member of the Wisconsin state legislature, concludes on the basis of his own experiences with political-administrative relations in that arena that there is in fact much support for the traditional dichotomy or 'separate

[7] There need of course be no doubt that administrators partake heavily in policy making: "Careful analysis shows," says Waldo (1984: 221), "that in fact politics, at least in the sense of policy, pervades all levels of administration (short, perhaps, of the completely mechanical operations)." But, as Waldo's two provisos in one sentence already suggest, some types of politics and administration are not "pervaded" by policy.

roles model' (2001, 2006).[8] In another example, Maynard-Moody and Kelly report their systematic analysis of fifty-four stories of public managers about their interactions with elected officials. Their conclusion is interesting enough to be quoted at some length, not least because it shows how these authors try to reconcile their prejudice against the dichotomy with their own empirical findings:

> "Although the distinction between politics and administration is intellectually untenable, as most scholars assert, these stories both reveal and construct a conceptual barrier between political and administrative agencies and actors. The politics-administration dichotomy remains important to the culture of public organizations. It serves as an interpretive guide to public administrators (and, we suspect, to elected officials), even though it does not accurately depict the work of public organizations. Stories such as those we have discussed sustain this normative fiction, a fiction that guides everyday interaction between elected officials and administrators and provides a gloss of legitimacy to public organizations" (Maynard-Moody and Kelly 1993: 89).

Third, Witte has concluded on the basis of a case-study analysis of tax politics that the classical dichotomy can be resurrected in its empirical and normative usage, albeit as a trichotomy between policy makers, policy managers, and administrators (1993). Aberbach and Rockman, finally, who in their 1981 classic thought they perceived a tendency towards an increasing mixture of administrators and politicians, later acknowledged that their "pure hybrid" actually remains a very rare bird (1988; see section 5.3).

Although we cannot make broad generalizations on the basis of a small number of studies, they do cast doubt on the common belief that the politics-administration dichotomy simply finds no empirical support whatsoever. Besides empirical findings of entanglement, interaction, and overlap between politicians and administrators, there is also evidence for persistent differences in role perceptions and activities between the two groups. Some have even argued that developments are in fact contrary to what is commonly believed. In recent years, several authors have seen evidence of a movement back towards more traditional and hierarchical relations between politics and administration (Aberbach and Rockman 2006; Peters and Pierre 2001). In country-specific studies this trend has also been observed for Britain and the Netherlands (Barker and Wilson 1997

[8] In the 2001 version of his article, Lee explicitly interpreted his experiences in terms of the politics-administration dichotomy. He stated that "Legislators – unknowingly – endorse the traditional and normative meaning of the politics-administration dichotomy" (2001: 371; cf. 368-369). In 2006, however, Lee published "an expanded and substantially revised version" of his 2001 article in a special issue of the *International Journal of Public Administration*, coordinated by Svara. In this new version he interprets his findings in terms of a typology offered by Svara, leaving out all references to the politics-administration dichotomy, which is recast as the 'separate roles model'.

and 't Hart and Wille 2006, respectively). As Thayer once put it: "Trends in government demonstrate the dichotomy's persistence" (1984: 264).

It is, however, not only the outcomes of empirical studies but also their focus that is important. Much empirical research deliberately focuses on the area of overlap and (potential) conflict between politics and administration. In their classic study Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, for instance, explicitly say that they have concentrated on the "contested territory" of policy making, although they acknowledge that politicians and bureaucrats also spend much time and energy on other functions besides policy making, such as "managing the administrative machinery of government" and "routine implementation of past decisions" in the case of bureaucrats, and "electoral and party affairs" in the case of politicians (1981: 20). Of course, this focus on the nexus of politics and administration and the neglect of other areas contributes to the underestimation of the difference and distance between them, and strengthens the impression of overlap and identity. It also strengthens the tendency to present the dichotomy as a straw man version of the original. The classical conceptualizations of the dichotomy of Wilson, Goodnow, and Weber did not suggest that politics and administration are two separate worlds and that administrators are mere executors of political orders. Ironically, with their vehement objections to orthodoxy, or rather to orthodoxy as they saw it, heterodox authors only echoed the classics, who had already observed that administrators have a will of their own.

So far my discussion of empirical criticisms has assumed that it is sensible to subject the dichotomy to empirical testing in the first place. This assumption is actually highly problematic, however. As we saw in the previous chapter the dichotomy was not originally meant as a descriptive model of governmental reality, but instead it was highly prescriptive. Therefore, the dichotomy cannot be 'falsified' by empirical findings. Trying to do so amounts to an inversed naturalistic fallacy: the logically unwarranted attempt to dispel an 'ought' on the basis of an 'is' (cf. Overeem 2006: 144). The very enterprise of 'testing' the politics-administration dichotomy through empirical research is misguided, because logically empirical findings cannot hurt a normative construct; at most they can show that a certain norm is not followed. Of course one could question the value of norms that are continuously violated; there is no use in norms that are naïve and out of touch with reality. But this is not the situation we face. On the contrary, as I will argue in section 6.5, the dichotomy does function as a norm in a particular but very real sense. The dichotomy still has greater normative force in governmental reality than many present-day Public Administration theorists would like to admit. Hence attacks on the dichotomy from a normative viewpoint may be expected to be more pertinent than empirical objections.

4.4 'A DEFICIENT, EVEN PERNICIOUS, PRESCRIPTION FOR ACTION'

Heterodox authors have argued not only that the politics-administration dichotomy does not correspond to reality, but also that a situation in which it did would be undesirable. Some have suggested that normative objections carry even more weight than empirical ones. Schick, for instance, has claimed that the dichotomy was rejected not so much as "a false separation" but rather as a political theory "that offended the pluralist norms of postwar political science" according to which public administration cannot and should not remain neutral in a highly politicized environment (1975: 152). In general, normative criticisms of the dichotomy have come in two forms. Sometimes the criticism is directed against the independence of public administration created by the dichotomy and intended as a defense of politics or the constitutional order. This line of thinking is mainly adopted by opponents of the administrative (welfare) state and often backed up with an originalist reading of the United States Constitution (e.g., Lawson 1994; Pestritto 2005, 2007). This line of criticism is aimed especially at the dichotomy as it was understood by Wilson and Goodnow, and much less at the version of the dichotomy proposed by Weber. Indeed, Weber's interpretation seems to belie the presumption of these theorists that the dichotomy must necessarily be directed at the emancipation of the bureaucracy and the expansion of the administrative state. This is not to deny the relevance of their concerns about the constitutional legitimacy of administrative power in general and the administrative state in particular. A rejection of the dichotomy on constitutional grounds is, however, not necessary (as I argue more fully in Chapter Six).

The second type of normative criticism is much more prominent in the Public Administration literature and it is this type that will be discussed in this section. This line of criticism aims not so much at the separation of administration from politics, but rather at its subordination to politics as it is supposedly prescribed by the dichotomy. It comes to the defense of administration and opposes the notion of political primacy. Often, authors adopting this approach ask for a more important role of the executive and the administration in modern government and argue that administrators, with their expertise, should not be denied a considerable say in the making of public policy (Waldo 1948: 128; 1980: 68-69). Like the orthodox authors, these critics are often biased in favor of administration and against politics and constitutionalism. Indeed, this bias is a continuous trait in the Public Administration literature. Sometimes this type of criticism is also inspired by an aversion to hierarchy as such. Frederick Thayer, for instance, author of a book titled *End to Hierarchy! End to Competition!* and affectionately called a "constructive crazy" by Waldo (Harmon 2007: 457), regarded the dichotomy

as the possible cause of major disaster, so that he even stated that "policy and administration must be merged if humanity is to survive" (1984: 267). He basically equated politics/administration with superior/subordinate: "The policy-administration dichotomy restates the principle of 'delegation of authority' by a superior (policymaker) to a subordinate (administrator)" (1984: 267). Because he wanted to do away with hierarchy in general, he also opposed the politics-administration dichotomy. Thayer himself was well aware that his ideas were very utopian, but however difficult, he regarded the abolition of hierarchy as absolutely necessary: "The ultimate task (…) is to design a world in which there is no hierarchy, hence no policy-administration dichotomy" (1984: 275).

In the mainstream literature the general concern of authors opposing a dichotomy that makes administration subordinate to politics is that it would relegate administration to the role of a passive instrument. Levitan has argued that the dichotomy turns public administration into a mere tool and that this has two undesirable effects: first, it negatively affects the quality of government officials and hence the quality of policy and of administration itself, and second, it creates the temptation to transfer administrative techniques to other countries where they prove to be unworkable (1943). While the latter point was already recognized by the classics, the former has also been brought forward by Waldo, when he claimed that the dichotomy is "prescriptively pernicious" because "administrators, more generally those in administrative operations, have knowledge denied [to] citizens and politicians, and this knowledge should become part of the policy-making process" (1980: 69).

These heterodox concerns about a situation in which administrators would unthinkingly and automatically execute the will of their political superiors should also be understood against the background of the horrors of the Second World War. In the argument for leaving administrators room to make their own value decisions, topical but mostly not very elaborate references tend to be made to Nazi Germany, the Nuremberg trials, and above all to Adolf Eichmann as the archetype of the obeying, unthinking bureaucrat hiding between his official status to evade responsibility for his actions (e.g., Waldo 1971: 267; 1984b: 108; 1987: 93; Rabkin 1998: 158). Long was again very explicit when he said he was glad the American bureaucracy was "no neutral instrument like the German bureaucracy, available to Nazi and democrat alike, pleading its orders from '*die höhe Tiere*' as an excuse for criminal acts. Be it noted that this plea of duty to carry out orders neutrally met short shrift at Nuremberg" (1952: 817). Thus ascribing the horrors of the Holocaust to an institutional arrangement like the dichotomy has the tendency, however, to obscure the importance of the personal (im)morality of the officials involved. One can wonder, moreover, whether these allusions and

references to Nazi Germany are very pertinent at all. In section 6.4 I will argue that the idea that Nazi Germany was characterized by an extreme dichotomy between politics and administration is very problematic. It rather seems that the dichotomy was severely violated there or drastically reduced to its subordination aspect. But even if the dichotomy had been an important feature of that regime, the abuse of an idea in one context need of course not make it useless in other contexts.

While most empirical criticisms of the dichotomy are aimed at the separation between politics and administration, most normative criticisms are directed at the idea of administrative subordination and instrumentalization. Thus, it draws directly on the heterodox reconceptualization of the dichotomy noted earlier: the idea that the dichotomy turns administrators into passive instruments in the hands of politicians. We have already seen that this is a misrepresentation of the classical dichotomy: neither Wilson nor Goodnow, nor even Weber wanted to do away (if they could) with the legitimate role and decision-making power of administrators. On the contrary, they granted public administrators considerable discretionary scope. Particularly Wilson and Goodnow aimed to protect public administrators against political interference. In my estimation the normative criticisms carry more weight than the empirical criticisms, because they point to real dangers caused by one-sided understandings of the politics-administration dichotomy. Strict separation without subordination, or strict subordination without appropriate independence, can ultimately have undesirable and perhaps even disastrous consequences. This should induce us, not to abandon the dichotomy as such, but to seek an understanding that keeps these aspects in balance.

4.5 A NOTE ON DISCRETION

In all three lines of criticism against the dichotomy – conceptual, empirical, and normative – the concept of administrative discretion plays an important role. This notion has been the starting point for many attacks on the dichotomy. We have already seen that, conceptually, administration was equated with policy making. As Dimock wrote, "politics (in the sense of law or policy) runs all the way through administration" (1937: 32). The notion of the "continuity of the policy-formulating process" was central to the earliest critiques of the dichotomy (Kaufman 1956: 1067). It meant that there was no rift between making policy on the one hand and executing it on the other: "The concrete patterns of public policy formation and execution reveal that politics and administration are not two mutually exclusive boxes, or absolute distinctions, but that they are two

closely linked aspects of the same process" (Friedrich 1981: 198).[9] But if public administrators are involved in policy making, how exactly do they contribute? Heterodox critics of the dichotomy have mostly not suggested that public administrators take the pen from politicians to draw the broad lines of public policy themselves. Instead, they believed that administrators shape public policy (both in its preparation and implementation) more indirectly through innumerous small decisions in their everyday work. Gulick said the work of public employees could be seen as "a seamless web of discretion and action," and administration was found to be "a continual process of decision-action-decision-action" (1933: 60). What may be called the argument from discretion runs as follows: because public administrators have (or should have) discretionary freedom to take decisions, they are (or should be) able to shape or at least influence public policy, and therefore they are (or should be) ultimately involved in politics – which makes the politics-administration dichotomy inadequate (in its descriptive and prescriptive form).

This argument from discretion is very common in the Public Administration literature and it is currently perhaps the main argument against the dichotomy. In his *Ethics for Bureaucrats*, for example, John Rohr uses administrative discretion to explain the "demise of the dichotomy," arguing that "[t]hrough administrative discretion, bureaucrats participate in the governing process of our society" and that "to influence public policy as a public official is to govern" (1989: 23, 48-49). The reasoning is seriously flawed, however. To see why, we must first look at the meaning of discretion as such.[10] In his book *Taking Rights Seriously* the legal philosopher Ronald Dworkin examines the discretion of judges and explains that it is not meaningful to use the concept of discretion whenever someone is free to make choices, but only under much more specific conditions:

> "The concept of discretion is at home in only one sort of context; when someone is in general charged with making decisions subject to standards set by a particular authority. (…) Discretion, like the hole in a doughnut, does not exist except as an area left open by a surrounding belt of restriction. It is therefore a relative concept. It always makes sense to ask, 'Discretion under which standards?' or 'Discretion as to which authority?'" (1977: 31).

So discretion, Dworkin argues, cannot exist without restrictions and presupposes a relation with an authority. This is not only true of judiciary discretion but of

[9] Only a few sentences later, Friedrich acknowledged that "there is probably more politics in the formation of policy, more administration in the execution of it" (1981: 198) – which is, according to his opponent Finer, "a delicious understatement" (1981: 210).

[10] For elaborate studies of discretion, both of judges and administrative officials, see Davis 1969 and Galligan 1990.

discretion in general and hence also of administrative discretion. In fact, the idea that discretion is by definition constrained was already acknowledged by Gulick: "Discretion, the use of judgment, is the right to choose within a constraining framework of necessity" (1933: 61). As long as we want to give administrators discretion, not free rein or sovereignty (as no critic of the dichotomy has proposed), we necessarily presuppose restrictions on their action. In modern forms of government such restrictions are typically defined by politics. Hence, the argument from discretion against the dichotomy cannot withstand close scrutiny. It runs too rashly from administrative discretion to policy making to political involvement. The fact that administrators have discretionary freedom, no matter how much or how little, in itself does not mean that they are involved in policy making, let alone in politics. And even when administrators are involved in the determination of public policy, they still cannot be said to be involved in politics.[11]

In his recent book *Public Administration's Final Exam* (2006), Michael Harmon employs the concept of administrative discretion to undermine the politics-administration dichotomy in another, more subtle manner. He tries to show that it is impossible to legitimize administrative discretionary action and that therefore the entire project of (rationally) legitimizing public administration is a failure. This seems an odd way to proceed. Instead of concentrating on the kind of administrative action that he presumes (plausibly enough) to be the most difficult to legitimize, he should rather have taken the kind that is most easy to legitimize: if that cannot be legitimized, no one can. Nevertheless, his discussion of discretion deserves our attention. He argues that, as long as we assume a dichotomy between politics and administration, discretionary administrative action by definition cannot be justified by an appeal to an external rule or authority, because if it could, it would not be discretionary (2006: 22). And, he continues, because discretionary administrative action cannot be justified by such an external rule or authority, it cannot be justified at all: "A justifiable discretionary act is a redundant term" (2006: 22; cf. pp. 131, 138). Thus, discretionary administrative action inherently involves, he says with reference to Sartre, getting one's hands dirty. Ultimately, the politics-administration dichotomy renders all discretionary administrative unavoidably illegitimate.

This is a sophisticated argument, but it overlooks the fact that within its restrictions discretionary administrative action may well be legitimated on other grounds than an explicit political command or regulation. Typically, the

[11] Another problem is that the precise nature and extent of administrative discretion are often left unconsidered in most criticisms of the dichotomy. It is simply assumed that public administrators have (a great deal of) discretion, but this issue deserves close empirical scrutiny as well.

restrictions on administrative discretionary action are laws and other regulations. This leaves open the possibility (indeed the probability and desirability) that administrative discretionary action itself is subject to other norms, such as professional or moral norms. In their work, and especially in their exercise of discretion, administrators should be guided not only by external incentives but also by an 'inner check' (cf. Finer 1981; Friedrich 1981). And when, finally, within the limits of all these norms still some discretionary room is left, choices made are not necessarily unjustified and dirty, as Harmon suggests, but instead they are all fully justified. Discretion, after all, means that one is *allowed* to do whatever one chooses within certain restrictions, and often there will be several ways to do a job that may all be, though perhaps not equally, acceptable. In the exercise of discretion, therefore, it becomes particularly clear that public administration can be regarded as a form of practical reasoning in which the virtue of practical wisdom (*phronesis, prudentia*) is of special importance (Morgan 1990; Dobel 2001: 361-363; Nieuwenburg 2003).

We can even go one step further. Not only does the argument from discretion not seriously affect the politics-administration dichotomy, but it can even be turned in its favor. The concept of discretion implies the notion of separation as well as subordination at the same time. Thus, it can serve as an important conceptual tool to combine political primacy on the one hand and some measure of administrative independence on the other. By granting public administration a subordinate yet legitimate scope for action, the notion of discretion nicely suits my constitutional understanding of the dichotomy (see Chapter Six).

4.6 A RADICAL RUPTURE

The previous chapter showed how revisionist historiographers such as Van Riper and Svara have cast doubt on the endorsement of the politics-administration dichotomy by classical authors, in particular Wilson and Goodnow. They have argued that these classics never seriously intended to separate politics and administration but rather favored a "complementary" relationship between them. More generally, they have argued that the dichotomy was not the founding theory of (American) Public Administration. Although such readings of the classics proved to be problematic, they have become widely accepted and are likely to have contributed to the further erosion of the dichotomy's respectability and acceptability. Somewhat ironically, however, these same revisionist historiographers have also qualified the abandonment of the dichotomy by heterodox authors. Svara in particular has claimed that what heterodoxy opposed

was not the idea of the dichotomy as such, but only its strictest manifestations in practice. As a result of this double move of qualifying first the classical endorsement and then the heterodox abandonment of the dichotomy, he has been able to claim a strong continuity between the two periods. Only during a short interval of orthodox thinking in the 1920s and 1930s, he argued, the strict dichotomy was really endorsed, but this was nothing more than an "aberration" (1998).[12]

Now it must be admitted that the heterodox authors sometimes do give reasons to think that their opposition to the dichotomy was not very solid. In his own contribution to the heterodox assault on the dichotomy, Waldo, for instance, asserted that "disagreement is not generally with politics-administration itself; only with the spirit of rigid separatism" (1948: 121). Moreover, he often added qualifiers to his declarations of the death of the dichotomy, writing that a "simple" and "sharp" dichotomy between politics and administration has to be rejected as untenable (1948: 128 and 207, respectively) and that "politics-administration, at least in the you-go-your-way-and-I'll-go-mine form, is fast becoming an outworn credo" (1948: 122; italics added). Thus, he suggested that other, more subtle versions of the dichotomy could perhaps be viable. Such nuances notwithstanding, however, the view that heterodoxy was just an extension of an ongoing tradition of 'complementarity' is untenable. The thrust of the heterodox arguments about the dichotomy is clearly dismissive. Whereas the classic authors intended to *disjoin* politics and administration the heterodox authors attempted to *join* them. This is a crucial difference of intent that cannot be blotted out without forcing the explicit arguments in the sources. When we further examine what exactly it was that heterodoxy rejected, we see that it was not only the practical separation of politics and administration, but also the conceptual distinction between them. Thus, the heterodox authors downplayed or rejected Wilson's basic proposition that "administrative questions are not political questions" (1887: 210). In general, the heterodox authors were convinced of three points: first, that a dichotomy between politics and administration was generally endorsed in Public Administration before the Second World War; second, that this

[12] Svara blames a 1958 essay by Wallace Sayre for "derailing the evolving discussion of the interaction of politics and administration" after the Second World War (2001: 178) and for introducing the view that the dichotomy was the foundation of Public Administration. By putting forward this 'creation myth,' Svara argues, Sayre's essay forcefully distorted both historiography and theory development: "From this point forward, the view that public administration is based on the simple dichotomy takes hold" (1999a: 684; cf. 2001: 178; 2007: 37). It seems exaggerated, however, to present Sayre's four-page essay as a "watershed"; it did not have that much impact. Studies such as Waldo's *The Administrative State* have been much more important to establish the historiography of Public Administration Svara opposes.

dichotomy was conceptualized mainly as an instrumentalist distinction between deciding and executing; and third, that the dichotomy, thus understood, should be rejected as both empirically and normatively indefensible. The fact that only the first of these claims bears some truth does not make their opposition to the dichotomy any less.

Thus, the idea that there is a strong continuity between heterodoxy and earlier thinking about the dichotomy must be rejected. The heterodox break-away from the dichotomy was a radical rupture in the tradition of thinking about the subject. Some (non-revisionist) Public Administration historiographers have found this change of attitudes towards the dichotomy strong enough to use it for dividing the history of the field into different periods. Henry (1987), for instance, used 'politics-administration dichotomy' to designate the earliest phase in the development of (American) administrative thinking. Likewise, Kaufman (1956) discerned a period of support for "neutral competence" in the history of Public Administration. Finally, Golembiewski (1977: ch.1) distinguished between four phases and argued that the dichotomy was endorsed in phase I ('analytical politics-administration') and II ('concrete politics-administration'), and rejected in phase III ('a science of management') and IV ('the public policy approach'). In all these variants, there is an important difference in administrative thinking about the dichotomy before and after the Second World War.

Within the study of public administration the advent of heterodoxy had multiple consequences, some of them positive and others negative. On the positive side, one can say that the subfield of administrative ethics has developed rapidly precisely because of the 'discovery' of administrative discretion and the concomitant rejection of the dichotomy (Rohr 1989; Svara 2007). This development can be considered a beneficial effect of the rejection, however misinformed, of the dichotomy. On the other side of the balance sheet, however, there are severe costs: in particular it can be argued that the heterodox rejection of the dichotomy has thrown Public Administration into a serious identity crisis, so that it "could not decide how it should define itself and by what principles it should act" (Waldo 1980: 69).

The heterodox assault has managed to establish the dichotomy as an extreme and instrumentalist idea in which public administration is excluded from policy making and turned into a passive instrument in the hands of its political superiors. Because most empirical and normative criticisms of the dichotomy are directed against this distorted interpretation they usually do not hold much water. As Thayer aptly wrote, "textbook attacks on the dichotomy are false advertising" (1984: 264). Nevertheless, the extreme interpretation is very persistent. Many knowledgeable theorists are decidedly prejudiced against the dichotomy and

deliberately stick to its most untenable understandings. Svara, for instance, has rejected out of hand a proposal by Montjoy and Watson to reinterpret the dichotomy in a way that allows administrators to participate in policy making and only isolates them from partisan politics: "The 'strict' definition *is* the dichotomy model. It is not conceptually possible, as Montjoy and Watson suggest and as many practitioners would prefer, to have a one-way dichotomy that keeps elected officials out of administration but allows administrators to be active in policy-making" (1998: 52; cf. p.57).[13] It is not at all clear, however, why this moderate understanding is "not conceptually possible"; Svara simply insists that the dichotomy poses "a strict separation between elected officials and administrators and a narrow, instrumental role for administrators" (Svara and Brunet 2003: 202; cf. 1999a: 678; 2004: 6). In its "strictest statement," he asserts, the "dichotomy model" consists of the following four propositions (2007: 37):

1. "Elected officials do not get involved in administration.
2. Administrators have no involvement in shaping policies.
3. Administrators occupy the role of a neutral expert whose responsibility is restricted to efficiently and effectively carrying out the policies of elected officials.
4. Presumably, administrators do not exercise discretion. To do so opens the door to interpreting policy and choosing how and to what extent it will be applied."

This is a very strict statement indeed. Of these four propositions, only the first can be reasonably regarded as an expression of (a part of) the politics-administration dichotomy. The other three are entirely alien to the classical or, for that matter, any other meaningful understanding of the dichotomy. We can easily grant Svara that, understood in this way, the dichotomy is wholly indefensible and that it has found little if any support in the history of the field, but fortunately this unduly strict view is not the only possible understanding of the dichotomy.

Although the heterodox authors have been very effective in their radicalization and rejection of the politics-administration dichotomy, the idea has not completely disappeared. After the heterodox assault the field has had problems getting rid of the dichotomy and its abandonment, however loudly proclaimed, has often been only partial and half-hearted (Harmon 2006: 13-20).[14] The great difference with

[13] As other moderate understandings of the dichotomy, he mentions those of O'Toole and Rohr (Svara 1999a: 698 n.2 and 700 n.18, respectively).

[14] Harmon has noted the impossibility of getting rid of the idea, given the American constitutional order, the established administrative state, and their "concomitant set of public beliefs about 'the way things are'": "No matter how persuasive my critique of public administration's standard narrative (…), some nominal distinction between 'politicians' (policy makers) and 'administrators' will persist for the foreseeable future, including continuing concerns about their proper spheres of influence and relation to one another" (2006: 7).

earlier thought is that the idea has entirely lost its respectability and support. It is now generally believed that the dichotomy, if not dead, is at least irrecoverably injured and that we should rid ourselves of the idea if only we could. Convinced that the dichotomy can no longer be seriously advocated, several administrative theorists have attempted to develop alternative conceptual constructs to capture the relationship between politics and administration. These alternatives are the subject of the next chapter.