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After Managerialism: MacIntyre's Lessons for the Study of Public Administration

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Abstract

Disappointing results and negative consequences of government reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM) ideas have recently stimulated Public Administration scholars to develop alternative approaches to governance. Prominent alternatives in current debates are the Neo-Weberian State, Public Value Management, new arrangements of civic participation, and evidence-based policy making. In this article, the authors build on a reconstruction of the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre to argue that these alternatives are likely to become as disappointing after their implementation as NPM, as they share its basic modernist and managerialist flaws. They believe MacIntyre's lessons for Public Administration point toward a more promising route.

Keywords

new public management, alternatives, modernity, managerialism, Alasdair MacIntyre

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The Current Discontent About Managerialism

Since the 1980s, New Public Management (NPM) has inspired many government reforms all over the world. Market-oriented reform strategies of the public sector have been introduced aiming at increasing effectiveness and diminishing bureaucracy and public spending (Haque, 2001; Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). Yet, over the past decade, NPM has become the *bête noire* of many in Public Administration.[1] A growing body of literature expresses strong discontent with NPM, mainly fueled by disappointment with its results. Across the board, the promised advantages (greater efficiency and accountability, leaner and stronger governments) have not been achieved (Dibben, Wood, & Roper, 2004; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). The comments also point to unintended but serious side effects: Those now exercising power cannot be effectively held accountable; civic participation has become a farce, especially those already well-off benefit from service provision; government rapidly looses expertise; and worst of all, NPM has compromised the specific character of *public* administration (Bozeman, 2002; Haque, 2001).

Some of those lamenting the practice and effects of NPM have presented remedies. A first set of commentators prompts us to abandon the path of creating governance arrangements and networks of actors. What we need to do instead, they argue, is returning to classical (state) government: not a government that is entangled in fuzzy horizontalism but one that actually steers, not one that is merely fine tuning markets and other competitive arrangements but one that is effectively in command, not one that depends on the knowledge and information of all kinds of stakeholders but one that encompasses an expert bureaucracy. What we need is a *Neo-Weberian State* (Haque, 2001; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2000). In a second line of comment, it is recalled that under NPM, the central value in public management, if any, is efficiency. According to these commentators, we should abandon this myopic focus on efficiency and concentrate on a broader range of values in management (Gay, 2000; Stoker, 2006). Public managers and civil servants should not just be evaluated by economic criteria but rather in terms of ethics and integrity (Dror, 2001; Stivers, 2008). What we need is *Public Value Management* (PVM; M. Moore, 2005) or an approach of "managing publicness" (Bozeman, 2007). Others, presenting a third advice, maintain that individuals should have a central role not merely as consumers but as participating citizens. The basic remedy against the serious problems NPM has brought on us would then be introducing new participatory arrangements at all levels of governance ("bringing the citizen back in"). Examples of such arrangements are

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referenda, citizen juries, client councils, and the like (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007; Jun, 2006). A fourth prominent voice in the current debate promotes *evidence-based policy making*. Although NPM offered one-size-fits-all solutions, public administrations rather need adequate and tailor-made knowledge leading to really effective interventions. Academically, this demands a Public Administration that provides robust causal knowledge (Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000).

The broadly shared criticisms of and the range of suggested alternatives to NPM are evidence of a general discomfort with that approach in public management. However, this phenomenon is remarkable in light of the earlier enthusiasm in Public Administration for the ideas of Osborne and Gaebler (1992) and their kindred. Will the approaches currently favored—Neo-Weberianism, PVM, civic participation, and evidence-based policy making—not be lamented in a few years from now? This could certainly be the case if it is not simply NPM that we should be concerned about but a more general orientation of which NPM is merely a species. The currently advocated alternatives might then belong to that very same orientation. Public Administration itself, in developing and advocating such alternatives, would then be part of the problem rather than the solution.

This disquieting suggestion finds ground in the analyses of modernity and managerialism offered by Alasdair MacIntyre. For MacIntyre, managerialism is an orientation pervading modern societies that is narrow-mindedly concerned with the effective realization of given aims. Although a central aspect of our thought and actions, it is problematic in its presuppositions and morally corrupting in its effects. If NPM and the alternatives presented for it indeed share in this managerialism, Public Administration is clearly on the wrong track.

MacIntyre presents an incisive criticism of managerialism, but he also provides ideas to develop a fundamentally different alternative. Although a renowned and widely influential political philosopher, he is unfortunately not much studied by students of public administration. To be sure, one can find occasional references to his work in the Public Administration literature, but so far no attempt has been made to provide a comprehensive analysis of his ideas on public administration and management. A reason for the neglect of MacIntyre among students of public administration in particular and social scientists more generally seems to be that he is considered too "normative." What is worse, he is often categorized as a communitarian, a conservative, a Catholic, a Marxist, or any combination of these and therefore disqualified without much further examination of his actual ideas (for instance, by Gay [2000], who spurns the alleged "Christian genealogy" of his ideas). However, dismissing MacIntyre's thinking on these grounds is evidently too easy and

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narrow-minded. Some characterizations, furthermore, do not do justice to the actual position MacIntyre takes. He himself criticizes, for instance, communitarianism as too heavily infected by liberalism—the political philosophy he is most adamantly opposed to.[2]

In this article, we aim to show that MacIntyre should not be discarded too easily. More specifically, we examine what analysis MacIntyre offers with regard to the problems of managerialism and NPM and what alternative he provides. In other words, what are MacIntyre's lessons for Public Administration? We start, in the next section, with an overview of MacIntyre's critical diagnosis of modernity. With this critique, he undermines the claims public managers and students of public management can rightfully make. In the sections titled "The Manager's Ethos of Neutrality" and "The Manager's Knowledge," respectively, we take a closer look at these claims concerning, first, the moral position of managers and, second, their knowledge and expertise. In the last section, we turn to the lessons that can be drawn from MacIntyre's analysis for Public Administration.

MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity

Over the last decades, many have shown serious concern about modernity and the sometimes postmodern developments it has engendered, for instance, the crumbling of traditional social and political institutions, globalization, and the increase of societal risks (e.g., Albrow, 1996; Beck, 1992; Castells, 1996-1998). These concerns have led to reflections on the crisis in or even the end of modernity and about structural shifts toward a late modernity, a reflexive modernity, or even a postmodernity that we can witness developing or should try to realize. MacIntyre's thought in many respects resembles these well-known critiques of modernity. His unmasking of dominant perspectives and his critical analysis of the impact of instrumental rationality show an affinity with Marxism and Nietzscheanism that brings him close to critical and poststructuralist schools. Yet, and that makes his approach especially interesting and promising, MacIntyre takes a unique turn in his diagnosis of modernity's problems: He points to the alternative that premodern concepts and practices can offer.

Enlightenment and Emotivism

To understand the impact of MacIntyre's criticisms and suggestions for the study of public administration, we must realize how this discipline developed and what its aims are. Public Administration aspires for a scientific base, a

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cumulative body of knowledge, and refined methodologies. Not satisfied with being merely a social *science*, it additionally aims to improve governments and thus assist them in creating a better world. Although public administration as a part of government is of course much older, and some scientific reflections on the subject can already be found in early modern times, Public Administration as a recognizable field of study primarily stems from Enlightenment ideas, especially positivism, developed and elaborated in the 18th and 19th centuries. The study of public administration, therefore, is above all a *modern* phenomenon.

Now, MacIntyre offers a very bleak diagnosis of modernity. Modern morality and science, he argues in the opening chapters of his most famous book *After Virtue*, are haunted by insoluble puzzles because they are badly constructed amalgams of fragments from earlier traditions. Of these earlier traditions, against which the Enlightenment reacted, one stands out: the Aristotelian tradition. For Aristotelians, calling a particular action just or right is to say that it is what a good man would do in such a situation. A good man is one who has developed his attitudes and abilities in the appropriate way, given his possibilities and capacities (MacIntyre, 1999). Basic in Aristotle's view on ethics is the analogy of "a man living well" to, for instance, "a harpist playing well" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 58). "Man" is thus taken as a functional concept. In the premodern tradition, moral judgments are related to "man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature." In developing and actually "living" his virtues, such a man is oriented toward the telos of human life: the good life and, ultimately, happiness (eudaimonia).

Modern thinkers, such as Hobbes, Kant, and others, have abandoned teleology. They embarked on what MacIntyre calls "the Enlightenment project," the attempt to justify morality by universally accessible reason. This project has failed, according to MacIntyre, not because insufficient brain power was devoted to it but because the absence of the idea of a telos made the project as such fundamentally impossible. Enlightenment thinkers wanted to do without functional notions in ethics and therefore started from the idea of "man-as-he-happens-to-be" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 54). However, to start from actual man is insufficient to justify moral rules. Modern thinkers present rules and rights merely in the form of obligations and prohibitions, unconnected to any idea of a good life. Individuals can claim their individual rights or proclaim utilitarian rules, but they cannot justify them in terms of the individual and collective *ends* they are supposed to help realizing. In fact, modern morality amounts to little more than a set of irrational and scarcely understood rules, that is to say mere taboos (MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 111-113).

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As a result of this failed project, MacIntyre argues, we now live in a culture dominated by *emotivism*. By this, he means that we have lost the belief that any rational or reasonable arguments can be given to justify our moral judgments. Instead, we regard and present them as merely unarguable preferences. Thus, for an emotivist "Thou shalt not steal" means nothing more than "Boo for stealing!" and "Be honest" means only "Hurray for honesty!" Apart from mere emotional preference, such moral judgments cannot be based on any further *reasons*. We have become utterly skeptical about the possibility of rationally justifying morality (MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 11-12 and *passim*).

Importantly for us, MacIntyre's criticism of modernity implies a frontal attack at the academic field of Public Administration as it stands. In its self-understanding as a scientific discipline, it has no room for teleology. Just as modern moral philosophy has no idea of the telos of human life, of the good life, likewise modern administrative "science" (and Political Science too, for that matter) has no idea of a telos of society, of the good society. In this respect, administrative science even seems doubly emotivist because of its subordinate, sometimes instrumental relation to politics.[3] As modern politics is void of thinking about the good life and the good society, similarly, or even more so, modern public administration, acting as the servant of democratic politics, is aimless: There is no fundamental consideration of ends but only of the proper means to achieve those ends that happen to be favored.

The Modern State Cannot Be a Political Community

MacIntyre's bleak diagnosis of modernity also questions the capitalist bureaucratic state. This institution, most famously depicted by Weber, is overwhelmingly powerful and continuously interfering in people's lives. To gain some legitimacy, it appeals to a limited conception of *public interest* as that what is necessary to enable citizens to pursue their own private ends. This reflects the liberal ideology that requires the state to be as reticent as possible in answering questions of good and bad, right and wrong. Just as moral rules are no longer justified in terms of a notion of the good life, likewise political and legal rules are not justified in terms of a notion of the good society. Thus, it is left unclear why citizens should feel obliged to such a state when it does *not* serve their private interests:

> In any society where government does not express or represent the moral community of the citizens, but is instead a set of institutional arrangement for imposing a bureaucratized unity on a society which

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> lacks genuine moral consensus, the nature of political obligation becomes systematically unclear. (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 254)

At the same time, to function if not survive, the modern state needs the support (and the money) of its citizens and the willingness of at least a portion of them to accept dangerous but necessary jobs (as police officer, fireman, or soldier). To this end, the state has to appeal to a larger good, but because of the liberal ideology it cannot do so openly and must do it surreptitiously. Hence, the modern state is a paradoxical and manipulative institution: On one hand, it claims to let its citizens (or rather clients and customers) free to follow their own private preferences, whereas on the other hand it expects from them the highest sacrifices. What it requires from them, MacIntyre (1994) quips, is "like dying for the telephone company" (p. 303). The modern nation state is not and cannot be a genuine community and misconceptions like a *Volk* are ideological disguises for sinister realities. The public interest the state says to serve, let alone the collection of public goods and services it provides, does not truly amount to the common good (*bonum commune*), the well-being of the entire community. Communitarian thinkers who want to infuse community values into modern states are wrong because they opt for the impossible (MacIntyre, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2006).

A return to the premodern Aristotelian orientation—and it is a revitalization of that virtue-ethical tradition that MacIntyre is after—points in a different direction. It would mean a return to relatively small and homogeneous communities (MacIntyre, 1984, 1999). It is one of the mistakes of communitarians, MacIntyre holds, to think that genuine modes of participation and virtue can be cultivated at the level of the state (1999). Therefore, on the final pages of *After Virtue*, he makes a call to retreat into small communities to fence out the corrupting outside world—much like monasteries in the Middle Ages: "What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 263). Out of such communities, resistance against the modern order should be enacted and attempts be made to reorganize current social structures against the grain of the modern ideologies (MacIntyre, 1999).

The Character of the Manager

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (1984) argues that every culture has some typical figures that he calls its *characters*: "They are, so to speak, the moral representatives of their culture" (p. 28). The local schoolmaster, for instance, was

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a figure who personified everything typical of Victorian England, as the military officer did in Prussia. MacIntyre invites the reader to get an understanding of our modern society by taking a closer look at the central *characters* of our society. He mentions three of them in particular: the (psychological) therapist, the rich aesthete, and, indeed, the manager of the bureaucratic (business or public) organization.[4] These modern *characters* all take the objectives or values of their clients, their protégées, and their organizations, respectively, as given and unarguable preferences. Thus, the rich aesthete restlessly spends his means on ever-changing ends to fight off boredom, whereas the manager and the therapist employ their specific expertise to provide the best means to achieve predetermined ends for organizations and individuals (MacIntyre, 1984).

MacIntyre uses the notion of *characters* to show that there is something fundamentally wrong with modern society and its culture. He does so by exposing flaws in the claims that are basic to these modern *characters*. The authority of managers' claims, in particular, rests on (a) "the existence of a domain of morally neutral fact about which the manager is to be expert" and (b) the possibility of "law-like generalizations and their application to particular cases derived from the study of this domain" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 77). MacIntyre dismisses these two assumptions of moral neutrality and scientific expertise as false. In the next two sections, we show how he discusses these two claims.

The Manager's Ethos of Neutrality

MacIntyre (1979) gives an affirmative answer to a question raised in one of his articles: "Corporate Modernity and Moral Judgment: Are They Mutually Exclusive?" But why? What makes the theories and practices of modern management morally problematic?

Managers typically claim moral neutrality, their only aim being the "morally neutral" value of effectiveness. However, according to MacIntyre, this claim is false. Not only is the effectiveness of a decision or policy always relative to the goals at which it aims,[15] but more fundamentally, the emphasis on managerial effectiveness itself in fact promotes a certain way of life, a certain culture:

> [T]here are strong grounds for rejecting the claim that effectiveness is a morally neutral value. For the whole concept of effectiveness is . . . inseparable from a mode of human existence in which the contrivance of means is in central part the manipulation of human beings into compliant patterns of behavior; and it is by appeal to his own effectiveness

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> in this respect that the manager claims authority within the manipulative mode. (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 74)

The moral neutrality of managers is thus an important “moral fiction” of modern culture. It is “part of a masquerade of social control” (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 75). Management is both an instrument and perpetrator of manipulation, and especially in the case of public managers, they contribute to the manipulative character of the modern state.

Management is Not a Practice

To clarify his accusation of the amorality and even immorality of management, MacIntyre introduces as a counterpoint the notion of a *practice*. A practice, in his much-quoted definition, is

> Any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 187).

There is a large variety of practices: apart from amusements like games and playing musical instruments, also certain kinds of work (in a crew of fishermen, for instance, or as a doctor or a teacher), and being involved in politics—politics, that is, in the Aristotelian and not in the modern sense. However, before investigating the scope of the concept, we should first clarify its core meaning. Take MacIntyre’s (1984) best-known and elaborated example: chess (p. 188ff). If someone, say a child, wants to learn to play chess, he or she has to accept the authority of an instructor and of the chess community more generally. The practice of chess has its own standards of what is good chess playing. To meet them, one must learn two types of rules, namely, the formal rules of the game as such to play chess at all (e.g., “bishops can only move diagonally”) and the more informal rules that say how to play well (e.g., “first conquer the midfield”). These rules are authoritative for chess players, although they may be changed, most commonly by the (international) chess community and a brilliant chess master.

Here enter two of MacIntyre’s most important distinctions. The first is between internal and external goods, or goods of excellence and goods of

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effectiveness (MacIntyre, 1984, pp. 188-191). With chess playing, or any other practice, one can usually gain money, honor, and the like. (In the example, the instructor may decide to give the child a candy for every good move he or she makes.) But these goods could also be obtained in other ways. They are in principle unrelated to the particular practice of chess. Hence, MacIntyre calls them *external goods*. However, there are also goods that cannot be achieved in any other way than by performing this particular practice, such as the enjoyment and admiration of the cleverness, brilliance, and beauty of certain moves on the chess board (even when they are made by the opponent in the game). These goods cannot be obtained in any other way than in being involved in the game of chess (even if in the audience). Hence, these goods are called *internal goods* of the practice.

The second important distinction is that between practices and *institutions* (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 194). Chess is a practice, but the FIDE or the local chess club is an institution. In his work, MacIntyre mainly wants to address the character of ethics, of individual orientations and values, not of institutional rules, but he realizes such rules are obviously of great importance. However, to understand their full significance we should understand them in relation to the goods they must help to realize and sustain, not only the external but also the internal ones. The distinction between practices and institutions is crucial, but the two are also closely related. Institutions are indispensable for practices to exist, but they also often pose a threat to them:

> Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. For no practice can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions—and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question—that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 194)

The moral problem of management, MacIntyre suggests, is that it is mainly occupied with the attainment of external goods at the cost of internal goods

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and with the development of institutions at the cost of practices. His point is not that many individual managers are greedily obsessed with money, status, and the expansion of their organization, although such viciousness is obviously a moral problem too. More fundamentally, his argument is that modern management thinking, based on the paradoxical combination of Enlightenment optimism and emotivist skepticism, actively helps to build the capitalistic-bureaucratic state and both overlooks and obstructs the realization of the good life and the good society.

Virtues, Narratives, and Traditions

To guarantee the well functioning of practices, and to prevent damage to them by institutions, *virtues* are of the utmost importance: "Without them, without justice, courage, and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 194). Virtues, MacIntyre (1999) argues, are indispensable for human flourishing, to achieve and exercise practical reason for ourselves and others. Moral rules are of importance, of course, but they should be understood as guidelines and never be substituted for real virtuous deliberation. In MacIntyre's (1984) definition, virtues play a crucial role in practices and the achievement of internal goods: "A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (p. 191, italics removed). This can be easily understood. If someone cheats in a chess game, for instance, he may still gain the external goods of the game (get the honor of winning and the prize), but he unavoidably forfeits its internal goods. So the virtue of *honesty* is necessary to perform a practice well. The same goes for the virtues of industriousness and perseverance (in practicing and training), and many other virtues. Some virtues are important nearly everywhere; MacIntyre (1984) discusses honesty, justice, and courage. In general, the more complex the practice, the richer the variety of virtues required.

MacIntyre (1984, pp. 199-200) himself addresses the question whether inherently bad activities, such as torturing, can also be a practice, sustained by virtues. There may, after all, be certain standards of "good" (i.e., effective) torturing. However, in response, MacIntyre maintains that although there may be practices that occasionally work as sources of evil (he actually doubts that torturing is a practice at all), it does not follow that we can say nothing against them. The very notions of virtue, moral law, and the like provide us with ample ammunition to condemn those activities. Thus, we can only speak of good torturing in a very restricted sense. This example implies an

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important lesson on management: When moral goodness is reduced to mere effectiveness, the worst effects of modernity become possible. So virtue is a crucial and indispensible element of a practice, and management cannot be a practice as long as it does not require and foster virtue.

Most people are of course involved in a large variety of activities, some of which are practices. However, to be well lived, human life has to be an integrated whole, be it as a Homeric warrior king, as a citizen in the polis, as a bourgeois citizen, or any other alternative. Hence, after practices and virtues, MacIntyre adds a third building block to his practical philosophy: the notion of *narratives* (compare. Williams, 2009). To be truly virtuous, MacIntyre (1984) claims, human life should have a "narrative unity" (p. 208ff). However, for modern people, this unity is very hard to attain. Their life is fragmented and they do not "live a story line." In modern society, MacIntyre holds, there are no appealing, coherent narratives left that instruct us about the good life. What we have, instead, is conflicting traditions with their own type of rational justification (MacIntyre, 1988). These traditions are incommensurable, which implies that no common standard exists against which they can be measured against each other. This does not imply that they are equally valuable. Indeed, saying that moral traditions are incommensurable inevitably also makes it impossible to say that they are of *equal* value.[6] Clearly, MacIntyre does not regard "being a manager" as a very meaningful and attractive narrative.

Criticisms and Replies

MacIntyre's bold criticisms of modernity and managerialism have, unsurprisingly, met with fierce opposition. It has been argued that MacIntyre's case is based on weak evidence, as in *After Virtue*, he in fact refers to only three management books to support his claims (K. B. Brewer, 1997).[7] Alternative examples could be cited, of course, of books in which the manipulative and effective manager *is* criticized. Yet, it is a mistake to argue that such counterexamples of managers and management literature prove MacIntyre's failure. The point about *characters* as central figures of society, MacIntyre (1984) maintains, is not that there is universal assent in a culture about the beliefs that they express but that they are focus points for disagreement: "The morally defining character of the managerial role in our own culture is evidenced almost as much by the variety of contemporary attacks upon managerial and manipulative modes of theory and practice as it is by allegiance to them" (p. 31). In other words, even critical management theory reinforces modern managerialism. Thus, there is a "ritual dance" in many

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management books, for instance in that of March and Simon, he claims, in which "an explicit repudiation of Weber" is followed by "an unconscious return to Weber" (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 65). After Weber's bureaucracy model is rejected as descriptively inadequate, other models are proposed that are no less based on his emotivist outlook.

Critics have also maintained, against MacIntyre, that management actually *is* a practice. Individuals, after all, can develop and employ excellence in management and leadership and acquire and develop multiple virtues in organizations, they maintain (K. B. Brewer, 1997; Hine, 2007).[8] The problem with these arguments is that they do not consider the question for the realization of *which aims* management is necessary (Beadle, 2001; Coe & Beadle, 2008). To underline the importance of aims, one should only recall the example of torture.

For MacIntyre, we can conclude, the manager is a *character* typical of modern culture and its failures. Moreover, management is not a practice. It is predominantly concerned with realizing given ends and achieving external goods, and violates the internal goods of respectable practices such as teaching or nursing. Notwithstanding Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence*, there are actually no standards of excellence inherent to management. It is a masquerade behind moral fictions, especially that of neutrality ("only means, no ends"), but effectiveness is not morally neutral. The moral talk of managers is in fact little more than a mask for utterances of preference and manipulation in a basically emotivist society. All this is squarely at odds with the virtue ethics MacIntyre calls for.

The Manager's Knowledge

In large part, MacIntyre asserts, the central role, authority, and prestige of managers in modern society are based on his alleged expertise. It is their typical knowledge that enables organizations, like state bureaucracies, to make policies work effectively. Not accidentally, the history of bureaucratization coincides with the development of the modern state, a state that is both large scale and interventionist, and the bureaucrat's counterpart is the intellectual social reformer—be it of a utilitarian, Fabian, Saint-Simonian, or other stripe. Governments have emphasized their bureaucratic expertise and thereby legitimized their social interventions (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 85).

The idea of managerial expertise thus supports the authority and power of bureaucrats and state alike. Yet, MacIntyre asks, what kind of expertise is it? And his disturbing answer is that there in fact is no genuine managerial knowledge. Rather, we are governed by an illusion. We are not oppressed by power and knowledge but by impotence and ignorance. If the manager of a

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government bureaucracy—or of a business organization, for that matter—turns out to be "effective" in some issue, we are actually witnessing the medicine man performing a successful rain dance. Put differently, managerial effectiveness fulfills a function similar to the one Ayer ascribed to "God." The notion of effectiveness is used to sustain and extend the authority and power of managers (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 76). What exactly is wrong, then, with managerial expertise and how can it at the same time be so successful in legitimizing authority?

Social Science and Sources of Unpredictability

The knowledge managers and bureaucrats would need to be effective includes law-like generalizations because these would enable them to predict and thereby control the social environment. This is the type of knowledge that is typically provided by the natural sciences. The expertise of bureaucratic managers therefore depends on a social science that aims to provide equivalents, for human affairs, of Newton's laws (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 83). However, MacIntyre contents, the social sciences have not provided and cannot provide such laws, and, therefore, they do not have the predictive power needed (1984, p. 88). In this regard, the Enlightenment project was overly optimistic. Despite 200 years of huge investments in terms of time, energy, brain power, and money, the social scientists have not been able to produce any sustainable law-like generalization whatsoever. The best social sciences can do, apparently, is offering indicative generalizations.

To sustain this claim, MacIntyre identifies a set of basic sources of unpredictability in human affairs. One source of unpredictability is the simple possibility of external incidents. Second, unpredictability flows from the human ability to decide and makes choices. The outcome of as yet unmade decisions cannot be predicted. A third level of uncertainty is added when it comes to trying to predict the reaction (or anticipation) of some to the decisions of others. In some settings, for instance in strategic warfare, it is profitable to act in unexpected ways and to be as unpredictable as possible. The last source of unpredictability is of a conceptual kind. It is inherently impossible to predict the development of radical new concepts because one would need those concepts to formulate the prediction (MacIntyre, 1984, 1998).[9] In this context, MacIntyre takes recourse to Machiavelli and his concept of *Fortuna*. We can to some extent outsmart this "bitch-Goddess" of unpredictability, but we cannot dethrone her (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 93).

This does not mean, to be sure, that there are no predictable elements in social life. People coordinate their activities in all kinds of ways. There are all

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kinds of regularities—express agreements, developed routines, institutions, and rules—that we can more or less rely on in everyday life. Research provides us, furthermore, with all kinds of statistical regularities. These regularities and the tacit knowledge of the predictable expectations of others enable us to some extent to plan our lives. Yet, showing regularity is not predicting, let alone explaining, as it does not amount to the knowledge of causes. The causal explanations that can be given, moreover, give ground only for a small ambition for the social sciences (MacIntyre, 1984). MacIntyre, in sum, makes a similar point as Aristotle who pointed out that in the study of human affairs, we can expect much less certainty and precision than in the study of nonhuman reality (Aristotle, 1982). This truth about social science is, however, concealed from many social scientists. Its ambition, that legitimizes its role in the first place, causes the misinterpretation of its real abilities.

Social Science and Its Blind Spots

MacIntyre's first argument against managerial expertise delivered by social sciences, thus, is that it cannot provide what it claims: a secure body of causal knowledge and solid predictions on social affairs. His second comment is closely linked to the idea of moral life as connected to flourishing practices. The guiding ideas of social science—"value neutrality" and the identification of causal mechanisms—drive them to overlook practices. Internal goods and the factors contributing to or hampering the flourishing of practices do not easily present themselves if one tries to avoid value judgments and focuses on easily identifiable causal relationships. However, external goods and their realization present themselves as ready candidates for research. Investigating how human resource management contributes to effective use of funds in schools fits the objectivist social scientist much better than inquiring how the realization of good education can be enhanced.

However, MacIntyre argues that a completely different "sociology" is possible. It is one that acknowledges its value orientation, that contributes to the functioning of practices, and that understands how breaches of their integrity can be precluded or remedied. In short, "[a] sociology which aspires to lay bare the empirical causal connection between virtues, practices and institutions" (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 196). It is furthermore a sociology of a comparative kind, investigating how different practices and institutions have dealt with stress and adversity, either successfully or not (MacIntyre, 1999). A proper social science is also one that acknowledges the fundamental disagreements that always exist in practices. A history of disagreements on what the practice is all about (education, health care, sustaining a political community,

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etc.) is an essential part of what a practice is. Its central concepts are always contestable and contested. Enhancing the practice implies recognizing these disagreements and participating in them. Bad social science tries to neglect these kinds of disagreements in institutions and to reduce surfacing disagreements to manageable types of conflict (MacIntyre, 1998). In fact, actions are often only understandable when they are understood as enacted in the context of a particular practice. That brings us to a last shortcoming, in MacIntyre's eyes, of the yearning of social science for causal explanations. For understanding human action, he maintains, causal explanations do not suffice. We also have to take into account intentions and the meaning actions have for individuals in specific contexts. Here again practices are of importance: They provide a teleological structure that makes us understand what people reasonably aim at (MacIntyre, 1984, 1986; compare. Turner, 2003). In the writing of comparative histories, the elements of comparative research, practices, and contexts all come together (MacIntyre, 1973).

Social Science as Ideology

The unwarranted large ambition of the social sciences in combination with their neglect or suppression of important aspects of human affairs (such as practices), combined with their manipulative character and effect, motivates MacIntyre (1998) to characterize the methodology of the social sciences as "the ideology of bureaucratic authority" (p. 60). As an ideology, social science masks certain kinds of conflicts over contestable concepts, and it presents an image of a world that is much more predictable and manageable than it really is. Indeed, to be valid, it aims to create a world to its own image: one that is quantifiable and predictable. Through their typical methodology, the social sciences try to imitate the natural sciences: They distinguish independently identifiable variables and formulate relationships between them that lead to predictable changes and thus to manipulations (MacIntyre, 1998). Just like the natural sciences, the social sciences produce their own technology, but it is in this case an oppressive rather than a liberating one.

It is this view that also pervades management books and studies in business and management. They provide examples and motivate (future) managers to be successful in accomplishing goals by employing the right means. Different theories and books might provide different types of means—formal structure of the organization, informal group processes, individual motivation structures, and so on—but the drift is the same: "The kind of knowledge which a manager has to have is causal, expressible in generalizations, and must provide him with an essentially manipulative ability" (MacIntyre, 1998,

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p. 64). Managers and bureaucrats learn to use the language of effectiveness and expertise in presenting and defending themselves. Moreover, in their work they employ the concepts of social science methodology (distinguishing categories, applying scores, and the like). As a consequence, bureaucratic authority and conventional social scientific methodology are mutually enforcing. Bureaucracies legitimize their authority by using the methodology of the social sciences, and the value and role of this methodology is underlined every time it seems to be actually employed. Ironically, even the unsuccessful employment of social scientific knowledge stimulates the funding of even more research (MacIntyre, 1998).

However, in truth, social scientists are not neutral, as their methodology privileges certain understandings and conflicts while concealing others, and bureaucrats are much less effective than they claim they are ("The most effective bureaucrat is the best actor"; MacIntyre, 1984, p. 107). Social science and bureaucracy join forces in neglecting and potentially undermining practices and thereby frustrating human flourishing and the realization of the common good. The legitimacy of contemporary institutions rests on a belief in expertise that is in fact unwarranted (MacIntyre, 1984). Of course, some individual managers and bureaucrats (and social scientists, for that matter) do occasionally acknowledge the limits of their own expertise. But, MacIntyre maintains, these expressions of modesty do not undermine the massive claim of the legitimacy of bureaucratic expertise. Sometimes, indeed, they are mere excuses for continuing the ideological masquerade (1984). In sum, managers' claims to neutrality and expert knowledge are flawed, but at the same time these claims have a legitimizing function in modern public administration. Therefore, any serious attempt to address the negative consequences of current approaches in public management (NPM in particular) should imply a review of Public Administration as a field of study.

Renewing the Study of Public Administration

MacIntyre's critique of modernity can help to explain the *Unbehagen* in our time with managerialism and NPM. After all, NPM can be understood as a typical example of a managerialist approach to increase administrative efficiency. It is emotivist in its denial of the possibility of (and neglect of the need for) deliberation about moral ends and the common good. In addition, to the extent that it aspires to be scientific in its use of theories about the effect of incentives and competition, it yields all the negative consequences of a skewed focus on external goods of social practices while neglecting, and thereby undermining, their internal goods. Citizens are reduced to mere consumers and

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public organizations are distinguished into service providers that concentrate on measurable output and auditing agencies. Hence, NPM must be understood as an example of the broader managerialist tendency in modernity. Those who want to oppose it seriously should resist this broader tendency and take care not to embrace just its next variant.

To escape from the endless series of variants of managerialism, we should go beyond the problematic scientific philosophy of Public Administration as it stands. There are basically two routes open to us, leading us away from a Weberian (i.e., modernist and emotivist) epistemology. One is the Nietzschean or postmodernist escape, a route that in Public Administration has been followed, for instance, by Farmer, Fox and Miller, and several others. The other is one that is inspired by the premodern Aristotelian tradition. In some respects, MacIntyre seems to follow the postmodern path. He unmasks the modern self-understandings and points out the ideological character of social science methodology. In a way similar to the "archaeologies" of Nietzsche and Foucault, his diagnoses rests on a history of the development of a specific worldview. Yet, MacIntyre clearly does not belong to the postmodern camp. Nietzsche, according to MacIntyre, remains too close to the modernist point of view. In an important sense, Weber and Nietzsche (and Marx, for that matter) are of the same category: They all share in the modern rejection of teleology. Central in modern thought is, as we have seen, the effective realization of given individual preferences. Eventually, Nietzsche's focus on the will (*Wille*) expresses this very orientation (MacIntyre, 1984).

Against both modernists and postmodernists, MacIntyre argues that it was a major mistake to abandon Aristotelianism in the first place. However, it can still be revitalized (MacIntyre, 1984). How exactly this could be realized and what it would imply for society at large is a subject that falls outside the scope of this article. We concentrate on implications of such a renewal of Aristotelian thinking for Public Administration. Developing MacIntyre's viewpoint beyond its explicit elaboration, we think we can now offer three main lessons for Public Administration and connect them to the recently proposed alternatives for NPM.

A Modest Public Administration

First of all, MacIntyre presents sound reasons for lowering our expectations of the social sciences. Surely, they can identify statistical correlations, regularities, conventions, and routines that make it quite reasonable to have certain expectations of other people's behavior. However, on the level of causal knowledge and law-like generalizations, we should be aware of the limited

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powers of science in human affairs. A modest Public Administration is aware of its limits and recognizes and respects the role of *Fortuna*. Social science is still possible, but it should be one that focuses on comparing the functioning of specific practices and communities to get insight into successful and failing ways to deal with stress or adversity (MacIntyre, 1984, 1999).

A modest Public Administration is also one that takes due consideration of the importance of tacit knowledge for the realization of public goals through professional organizations.[10] Organizations as practices have their own traditions in which relevant implicit knowledge has become accumulated and passed on by exemplary action from skilled new members.

From this viewpoint, the current advocates of evidence-based policy making (Davies et al., 2000) are right in their urge to differentiate between contexts and steer clear of a one-size-fits-all approach. However, in its quest for hard causal knowledge, it tends to overestimate the possibilities of social science, contributing thereby to an illusory promise of control and effectiveness. It furthermore tends to focus not on practices and internal goods but on the accomplishment of external goods and manipulative relations, which is morally pernicious.

A Public Administration That Fosters Practical Wisdom

Second, the value of Public Administration might not (primarily) lie in providing instrumental knowledge to practitioners but in supporting rational or prudential administration in another way. MacIntyre's Aristotelianism provides an alternative for the Weberian conception of rational government. As a discipline, Public Administration can contribute in different ways to the prudence (*phronesis*) of administrators. It might, for instance, assist and train policy makers and public administrators in developing moral and professional excellence. This perspective seems to connect most closely to the tradition that Raadschelders (2008) calls "practical wisdom": a philosophical approach to public administration, understood as a form of practical reasoning (compare. Nieuwenburg, 2003).[11] It involves programs that trigger bureaucrats and politicians to clarify the (hierarchy of) goods that are at stake in the practices in which they are involved. It means assisting them to fight the corrupting instrumental tendencies in their own thought and in organizational orientations. Part of it would be identifying important virtues and dealing in an appropriate manner with practice-undermining institutions. All such training programs would foster an orientation alternative to the one in which the effective realization of some given ends is central.

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Above we mentioned the PVM alternative for NPM. Prima facie, this PVM approach seems to share sides with MacIntyre in its critique of a managerialist, single-minded focus on the instrumentalist values of effectiveness and efficiency. Like PVM, MacIntyre does not simply abandon efficiency and the striving for external goods. His acknowledgment of the double nature of every organization leads him to a more sophisticated position. Efficiency and the realization of external goods are indispensable for any functioning practice, as they are for any individual person (MacIntyre, 1984). It is of the greatest importance to find a correct balance between realizing external and internal goods in a practice. However, to this end, the alternative PVM offers is insufficient. In MacIntyre's line of reasoning, not just a shift in values in public administration is necessary but a complete change in normative approach. From his viewpoint, the problem with PVM is not its focus on public values but its managerialist outlook. Abandoning that outlook would have consequences, for instance, in leadership studies. A virtue-ethical focus would here emphasize the importance of exemplary behavior and administrative excellence (Hart, 1994). True virtue is shown not in intentions or in words but in action (MacIntyre, 1999). A further example, one that to some extent has already been developed by Terry Cooper (1987), is that of ethics and integrity in public administration. Integrity and ethical conduct in a virtue-ethical approach is not about sticking to the rules but about safeguarding and furthering the common good.

A Public Administration Engaged in Realizing the Bonum Commune

According to MacIntyre, the credo of neutrality and objectivity tends to lead social scientists on the wrong path. It gets them involved in efforts to increase the manipulative potential of bureaucracies. However, a proper Public Administration should acknowledge its duty to the practice of sustaining the political community. A meaningful (and not self-deceiving) orientation for Public Administration lies in the acknowledgment of this value orientation.

The telos of politics and administration as practices is the common good, the *bonum commune*, which is different from the public interest or general good as it is mostly understood in modern theories. The public interest in such theories is understood to be an aggregation, in one way or another, of individual preferences. However, the *bonum commune* in several ways differs from such a conception. It is concerned with the desirable (virtuous) development of individuals and not just their current preferences. The realization of the good itself, furthermore, involves some participation of the

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members of the community. Participation, moreover, is one way of developing one's virtues and competencies (MacIntyre, 1984, 1999). A properly conceived study of public administration offers advice that contributes to the development of communities and participation in which this type of *bonum commune* can be realized.

The Neo-Weberian State approach, one of the current alternatives for NPM, shows itself to be concerned with the diminishing publicness of public administration. With their lack of orientation on practices and internal goods, governance systems and networks of competing organizations are typical parts of the world of managerialism. On this point, the Neo-Weberian State approach offers a critique analogous to that of MacIntyre. However, the two diverge in their view on the proper fostering of political community and organization. MacIntyre combines a consideration for small organizations with the idea of an encompassing political community. Such a political community is guided, furthermore, by the general virtues of justice, courage, and the like. It can be a state that protects and facilitates local organizations, but it cannot be a (Neo-) Weberian state. To realize the same forms of community and practice on the state level as one has on the local level would demand exactly the type of bureaucracy that undermines these very ideals (MacIntyre, 1984, 1999). The alternative to NPM networking is thus not a monolithic and bureaucratic state but a cooperative venture of practice institutions oriented toward the common good.[12] The organization of political and administrative practice is in need of another type of theory, one that balances the realization of internal and external goods through a proper organizational design.[13]

MacIntyre's analysis on this point also urges us to correct another widely advocated approach: the one that promotes civic participation. Its advocates criticize NPM for reducing citizen involvement to the customers' use of public goods and services. Now, for MacIntyre as well as them, the pure rent-seeking, interest-based orientation of consumers is clearly at odds with the idea of individuals as social, excellence-seeking persons. But the proper involvement of citizens in political communities—politics as a practice—does not simply mean supporting the types of interest representation that are currently proposed (referendums, citizen's juries, and so on at all levels of government). First of all, we must make sure that these new forms of participation not only give a voice to citizens to promote their private interests but also that they really can contribute to training in the virtues and the realization of the common good. Second, we should not try to introduce certain forms of reasonable debate on levels at which they cannot function. Real deliberation and participation on the level of a state, more specifically, is illusory. To be sure, states seem to be a noneliminable feature of the contemporary

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landscape; they even provide certain preconditions for the realization of the common good and human flourishing, such as security, basic goods, and the like. However, the relevant kind of community for proper participation can only exist on a local level (MacIntyre, 1984, 1999).[14] Although not a communitarian, MacIntyre thus provides philosophical support for similar arguments to strengthen local communities defended by others in and out of Public Administration (e.g., G. A. Brewer, 2003; Putnam, 2000).

In conclusion, MacIntyre identifies in modernity a strong tendency of managerialism. Efforts to counter NPM that are not based on a deep awareness of this tendency are prone to become part of it themselves. Currently advocated alternatives for NPM—such as the Neo-Weberian State, PVM, civic participation, and evidence-based policy making—might share that fate. MacIntyre's critical diagnosis of managerialism and his advocacy for an Aristotelian, virtue-ethical approach can help us to avoid that Public Administration will (again) become part of the problems it tries to remedy.

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Notes

1. In this article, we will use "Public Administration" (with capitals) to refer to the academic field of study and "public administration" (without capitals) to refer to the practice of government that is the object of this field of study. Analogously, the names of other academic fields are also capitalized (e.g., "Economics"). In this vein, "the study of Public Administration" would refer to metareflection on the academic field itself.
2. It is important to make this point, because in the field of Public Administration there is also a self-declared communitarian substream (of Robert Denhardt, Terry Cooper, and others) opposing NPM. However, its adherents do not and cannot draw on MacIntyre. MacIntyre (1994) argues that the modern bureaucratic state is not a suitable means to foster the common good. In his later work (1999), he points out that a state is much too large and diverse for the type of community communitarians want to mold it into.
3. In this line, management consultants seem even more deeply emotivist: They accept as given the goals of the directors of the organization they advise.

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4. That there are in fact more *characters* of our society is suggested near the end of *After Virtue*, where MacIntyre (1984) refers to "(t)he bureaucratic manager, the consumerist aesthete, the therapist, the protester and their numerous kindred" (p. 256). In the preface to the third edition of *After Virtue* (p. xiii) MacIntyre adds still another character: the conservative moralist. This is a figure he himself certainly wants not to be. In fact, he is remarkably critical of (neo-) conservatism, which he scorns for its individualism and modernism (1984).
5. The same point was forcefully and vividly made by Waldo (1984) in *The Administrative State*: "Things are not simply 'efficient' or 'inefficient.' They are efficient or inefficient for given purposes, and efficiency for one purpose may mean inefficiency for another. For the purpose of killing a bear, for example, a large-bore rifle is more efficient than a bag of meal, but for the purpose of keeping a bear alive, the reverse is true" (p. 193).
6. So, MacIntyre is not a moral or cultural relativist. Despite the incommensurability of moral traditions, it remains possible, MacIntyre argues, to stick to one moral tradition rather than another. This is the case, namely, when one tradition is able to solve problems that remain insoluble in another (on this issue see MacIntyre, 1988).
7. The three management books are as follows: Weber (no titles), R. Lickert, *New Patters of Management* (1961), and James G. March & Herbert A. Simon, *Organizations* (1958). However, from other sources, we learn that he knows his Perrow, Burns, and Stalker, and others too (MacIntyre, 1979).
8. The question whether a certain activity can be understood as a practice has been raised for journalism (Lambeth, 1990; Salter, 2008), nursing (Sellman, 2000), teaching (Higgins, 2004), business (Beadle, 2008; Dobson, 1997; Moore & Beadle, 2006; Wicks, 1997), and public relations (Leeper & Leeper, 2001).
9. In his reply to MacIntyre, Levine (1983) cites Max Weber, who pointed out sources for unpredictability in the natural sciences (development of new species, the path of a tornado, the direction of an avalanche). Yet, Levine misses MacIntyre's point who claims that social sciences and natural sciences basically do not differ on this particular issue. It is the consequences of free will (in the second source of unpredictability) and the constructivist point (in the last source) that in MacIntyre's view make the difference.
10. In this respect, MacIntyre's Aristotelian understanding of the social nature of practices and the need to acquire skills in contexts with their own traditions and standards bears some similarities with ideas developed by Michael Polanyi (1966).
11. Flyvbjerg (1998, 2001) offers an interesting attempt to develop a "*phronetic*" social science along Aristotelian lines and applies it to a concrete case of city politics in Aalborg, Denmark (although then mixed with a dose of Machiavellism and Nietzscheanism that would less fit MacIntyre).

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12. In an important sense, MacIntyre's diagnosis of modernity is close to that of Weber. Weber was also aware of the managerialist tendency in modernity and of the problems that entails. He metaphorically presented these problems as the *iron cage*: Modernity promises citizens freedom and autonomy but leads to them being controlled and oppressed. The advocates of the Neo-Weberian State, in their optimism, neglect this side of Weber's message completely. Critics of MacIntyre, Gay (2000) for instance, also miss this point in trying to defend "Weber's modernity" against him. By their appeals to Weber, these thinkers actually undermine their own argument.
13. See, for instance, Halliday and Johnson (2010) for a first small attempt in this direction.
14. By the way, local communities are not good per se, according to MacIntyre. Of importance is the existence of networks of small-scale communities and organizations that can function as practices in which individuals can become virtuous and function as "independent practical reasoners" (1999, pp. 81, 133-135, 142).

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