

Governance in Dark Times: Practical Philosophy for Public Service, **by Camilla Stivers**

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Camilla Stivers is a well-respected writer in the field of public administration, known largely through her work on feminism and normative administrative theory. In *Governance in Dark Times*, she considers the impact of the 9/11 attacks in the deeper context of Hannah Arendt's definition of the phrase "the disappearance of the public realm." At the outset of this short and provocative book, Stivers provides a concise explanation of her use of "dark times" as a metaphor for the post-9/11 period:

At this moment in history, the United States stands at the conjunction of two kinds of "dark times." First, there are the events Second, we have the dark times about which Arendt wrote: the loss of an active, vibrant public space in which ordinary citizens engage with the issues of the day. (3)

It is this second aspect of dark times, the decline of the public realm, that occupies most of Stivers's attention. Contracting for formerly governmental activities, the ideology of managerialism that downgrades public sector values, and the use of market-based "governance" strategies have combined to limit the capacity of society to fully and honestly debate the issues at hand and the ability of the average citizen to participate meaningfully in public affairs.

The author's stated goal is "to evoke thought and conversation" (8). To accomplish this, she provides a critical analysis of competing visions of public life, based heavily on a comparison of the state envisioned by Thomas Hobbes in *Leviathan* with that of Hannah Arendt and Mary Parker Follett, an early twentieth-century public administration writer, which she calls "governance of the common ground," based on genuine dialogue between the agents of the state and citizens. As she states succinctly at the end of her chapter on

homeland security, “thus, we have two visions of governance, one focused on authority, the other on freedom” (87).

For those familiar with the school of normative administrative theory associated with the Public Administration Theory Network, much of the ground covered in this book is familiar territory: a sort of “road not taken” history of governance in the United States since the early twentieth century, with advocates of rationality and a technical, control-and-command vision of administration holding sway over the competing vision of pragmatism and experimentation. The rational school of governance is, we are told, based on a fallacy that fact-based, positivistic reasoning can identify an objective world of truth and, by so doing, contribute to justice and democratic governance. In fact, the opposite is occurring, as professionals occupy a privileged space, pass off their own interpretations of facts and events as truth, and inhibit dialogue between citizens and state agents.

Stivers organizes the book after a brief introduction into three parts: “Thinking, Reason, and Truth: Philosophy for Public Service,” chapters 1–3; “Two Models of Governance,” chapters 4–6; and “Philosophy for Practice,” chapters 7–8. Two chapters deal specifically with issues brought to the forefront by post-9/11 realities: chapter 2, entitled “Public Administration and the Question of Torture,” and chapter 4, “There’s No Place like Homeland: Security in Dark Times.” The separation of the two indicates that the author’s goal is not to provide a new descriptive look at the events of 9/11, the Gulf Coast hurricanes, or the War on Terror, but instead to use interpretation of post-9/11 governance to support her basic themes of the two competing visions of governance. Readers seeking a detailed analysis of post-9/11 public policy and administration will perhaps be disappointed in the limited coverage provided of specific policies and issues, especially the limited attention given to higher-level players like George W. Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfeld. Major actors such as Tom Ridge, George Tenet, Colin Powell, and others are nowhere to be found in a book whose emphasis is on the role that professional public servants can and must play in creating a new vision of public service appropriate for the times we live in.

How useful this is to the intelligence professional is hard to gauge. Almost by definition intelligence officers lack the ability to exercise voice, to engage the public with their professional expertise and knowledge—at least without violating rules on confidentiality and

putting their careers on the line. That said, I think Stivers makes a strong case for her book to be timely, thoughtful, and useful to all those involved in public service and governance, including intelligence professionals. First, Stivers provides an antidote to the most common criticism of the period after 9/11, that politics trumped professional expertise, that the truth was subverted for political ends, and that a politics based on intuition, faith, and disinterest in pursuing alternative points of view blundered into catastrophic mistakes that attention to professional guidance might have avoided. If only well-trained correctional officers instead of poorly led and trained reservists had been in charge of Abu Ghraib prison (which the author incorrectly notes as an example of contracting gone awry). If only the professionals had been in charge, and allowed to make decisions based on facts—an argument Stivers dismisses as simply a more rationalistic approach to governance in the Hobbesian model.

Second, Stivers's final chapter on ethics is one of the most balanced and thoughtful discussions of the topic in the literature, and a fitting and worthy conclusion to the volume. She acknowledges the need to balance knowledge and power in the work of governance, and relates this to the individual professional public servant. As she correctly notes, the key issue in public service ethics is not adherence to codes of conduct and rules, but rather an internalized sense of responsibility, which she says, again drawing from Arendt, comes from "a silent dialogue between me and myself, in which I figure out whether my actions are in agreement with my best sense of myself. . . . Ethics is a way of being rather than adherence to rules and precepts, or making a string of decisions" (147).

In sum, this short and dense volume is erudite, thought provoking, and ultimately satisfying. Whether the measures advocated by Stivers, which seem disconnected from action directly designed to mitigate threats to homeland security or provide guidance to intelligence agencies and the military, will provide the basis for rethinking public service in our dark times remains to be seen.

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