Renee: Hi. Taylor & Francis and Routledge would like to thank Thomas Catlaw for taking the time to interview with us today. My name is Renee Locorriere and we’re going to speak with Tom about two articles that he published in *Administrative Theory & Praxis*. Hi Tom, how are you?

Thomas: I’m great. How are you, Renee?

R: Awesome. I’m doing well. You recently had two articles published in *Administrative Theory & Praxis* that in different ways explore the ways in which public administration relates to humanism— in terms of limits of humanism, anti-humanism, and even trans-humanism. Before getting into the specifics of the articles, can you tell us about what humanism means and why it receives the attention it does in your work?

T: Yeah. First again thanks for having me. It’s great to have the chance to talk to you about this work. And so, let me just say that humanism has some different meanings. In my work though, I’m interested in two basic ideas that are associated with two different traditions of humanism. So the first concern, the idea as a lot of people may know. Let’s just say Alexander Pope, the poet who said that man or human beings are the measure of all things And in this sense, humanism expresses the idea that human beings represent the center of the universe and all things in the universe are assessed and valued basically in terms of how they address or advance human purposes. And historically this idea of humanism follows from the Renaissance and kind of de-centering of the divine or God from where people thought the original meaning or significance was. So with humanism, humans take center stage and humans become the measure of all things. But that’s one idea of humanism that is at work in these articles. And the second idea of humanism is related to the first but is somewhat distinct. And this is the idea that there is a core or a central quality or qualities that all human beings possess. To put it in a different way, it’s the idea that there’s a universal human nature of some kind, some kind of an essential humanity that every human being regardless of where they are all share. And so when humans are the center of the universe, it’s this idea this core that does the measuring for something for these humanisms. And so what we argue in these papers is that both of these humanisms are kind of problematic enormously something. Both in terms of how we think the world is working and what kind of world is desirable or what we should be doing. So with regards to humans as the center of the world kind of humanism, we might say for example that there’s an ongoing awareness that people are meshed in these very complex social ecological networks and so it’s not just that we are individual in the center of the universe but that we are meshed in sort of these complex relationships. And normatively, things like the environmental movement, animal rights movement and so on raise the question about whether or not human needs really should be first and foremost. Why shouldn’t we protect the rights and value of the planet and the oceans and animals. And so this is the idea that human beings are the measure of all things something comes into question. And second, the idea of a universal human nature is problematic and we’ll probably get into some of this in a little bit but here this is the idea that human beings are not only the center of the universe but the idea that there is this kind of universal measuring stick that all of us share some kind of parent humanity or quality is
increasingly coming into question. So that is to say that there’s a huge diversity in how human beings live together, how we create meaning and organize ourselves and some of these things really come into question theoretically and again in terms of some of the things that are going on in bio-technology. And finally, one point is that many theorists and critics have said that the idea of human nature itself is more likely to be used as an instrument for exclusion or persecution than it is to create a common human family so people who look different or with disabilities that have been historically marginalized because they don’t fit these kind of models of human nature. So those are the two senses in which humanism is put to work in these papers.

R: Thank you. And another term I saw that cut through the articles is bio-politics. And in going further, can you tell us how that figures into your arguments?

T: Yeah, I think this is a really interesting topic for a few things going on in the world today. So in our view politics is always bio-politics and what that means is that political philosophies, policies, governing institutions are always some level regulating aspects of biological life and often determining what kind of lives can or should be lived. What is the good life so to speak? So to give you an example of societies that govern how, the biological prophecies around birth for example, the biological prophecies around death, that we regulate what kind of foods we can eat and so these all a kind of way in which societal norms govern an institution. They are, in a literal sense, biological prophecies, and sexuality is another good example here, but we also regulate the ways in which how people think about kind of lives are worth living. What is a good life? And there are over time different kinds of institutions and practices and technology that are brought there and how these regulatory prophecies happen. So an example would be the ability of national governance to martial statistics about national population for example allows governance to in a literal sense kind of quantify what the normal is in some ways. And sometimes it’s really good. We can set educational standards, we can see who’s falling behind and we can craft policies to help certain groups get better. Other times these things are used for less positive state led policies like eugenics and forced sterilization where the sort of lives worth living are being determined by the state. So again we can kind of go back and look historically at the various ways in which biological life is regulated and also the ways in which the good lives worth living are determined. And so that’s the way in which we think about bio-politics which is political, institutional prophecies that look at life in both of these senses, as a biological phenomenon but also as a cultural phenomenon. So really what our interest is in these papers is kind of exploring how bio-politics and humanism intersect with one another.

R: Awesome, thank you. So we can get right into discussing your articles. We can start with the first one. So, Regarding the Animal on Bio-politics and the Limits of Humanism in Public Administration, so going right off on as you were saying. And in this article you mention the idea anthropocentric orthodoxy in public administration. Can you please define that for us and also let us know how it is observed or how it relates to public administration?

T: Sure. So this is a paper that I wrote with a colleague Tom Holland and what he and I are saying in this piece is anthropocentric administration is the particular name we give to modern or contemporary public administration. Now, how this fits in with what I was talking about where in humanism we suggest that public administration is anthropocentric largely because it has been more or less narrowly concerned with thinking about government and public
administration, bureaucracy as serving or advancing human purposes. And to the extent that it engages with the natural world, it seeks to understand and harness the natural world. When really to serve particular human prophecies and so the natural world and non-human animals are seen as resources for humans and we see this in the history of the scholarship and research in public administration because if you look at that literature it’s basically bereft of any mention of non-human animals and to a lesser degree ecological prophecies and natural phenomena. And what I wanted to mention was why humans should be surprised by this, why it’s a problem. One thing I will say is that if you look at the actual governing in territories where public administration are engaged with animals, there’s tens of thousands of people engaged in laboratories, fish and wildlife regulations, parks, animal training and they say nothing of natural resource management so we think it’s actually pretty conspicuous, given the extent to which public administration as a practice actually engages with these kind of non-human animals. And what we say is that this kind of invisibility of these entities is largely a function of the anthropocentric quality of public administration.

R: Okay. Thank you. And in your article, you also talk about “speciesism” and “radical othering” in public administration and how that can connect with, and potentially influence, other human-human forms of marginalization. Can you please define both speciesism and radical othering and give examples of how that can cross over into other areas of marginalization?

T: Sure. So first I would say speciesism is kind of the ugly reverse of humanism. Humanism basically says that humans are the center of the universe and it celebrates us, that we’re the measure of all things. But to say that something is speciesist is to put the brakes on that claim and say wait a minute, putting humans into that position in the center is really a problem. And it doesn’t just put humans at the center but in fact it creates this hierarchy amongst humans and animals and human beings are at the top of this food chain and it’s an analogy to racism or sexism which says that a particular race, white for example, deserves to be privileged or a certain gender deserves to be privileged—male or female. And so what we’re arguing is that anthropocentrism in public administration actually has at its core this implicit hierarchy putting human animals above all other animals and other kinds of lifeforms and this is a problem that we should be examining. But we’re not making the claim that speciesism is just like racism, I think we’re making a stronger claim that speciesism is kind of the foundation of division of which sexism and racism are constructed so that’s why we call it radical othering. Now radical means in this context just going to the root in a literal sense that radical means. And so we’re thinking of radical othering in terms of being this kind of fundamental process so I think a lot of people are familiar with othering and in fact if you’ve been paying attention to the campaign for president in the last year, there’s been a lot of conversation about ways in which the Trump campaign has ‘othered’ groups of people in American society and so what othering really means is to try and construct an identity by dividing a line between the other and us—between us and them. Now, it doesn’t necessarily have to be a problem. It doesn’t necessarily have to create violence in a nation, but it has a tendency to and often what groups do is to attribute negative qualities to the other. For example, certain groups may be call more uncivilized because they don’t eat or dress or behave the same way we do and in times of economic distress and political upheaval often others become the false diagnosis for social
problems. Of course, the famous example here is in Nazi Germany and the othering of the Jews. With American political discourse, it’s things like immigration—particular people who are identified as the cause of social and economic problems. What we say in the paper is that the reason we can think about animals as being a foundational other is that this is the original dichotomy. In other words, there is a distinction between human animals and it creates a symbolic space in which particular human groups are deposited. If you look at the history or philosophy going back to Descartes that animals are viewed as inferior because they can’t speak, they supposedly have no mental states, they have lower cognitive capacities. And so what we say is that by making that fundamental distinction between species and hierarchy which in effect what happens is that these human groups become animalized. A great example here is discourse around slavery and race which allowed enslaved men and racial hierarchy in part because these slaves were viewed as just like beasts so they don’t have the same cognitive capacity. Women are often degraded in ways that are related to the ways in which animals are characterized— not being rational, being overly emotional. What we say is that basically animals and the animal other creates this basic architecture that we then can move particular groups into. Because we have this basic distinction between humans and animals, we can do a lot of terrible things to animals because they’re inferior. We allow ourselves to move particular groups of people into those categories.

R. Thank you. So moving on to another question—Several limiting and violent consequences for animals and humans of this anthropocentric way of thinking are mentioned in your work—can you please tell us what some of those unsettling practices are?

T: Sure. We’ve mentioned some of these, in which groups of people are othered and become subject to mistreatment and harm because of how they become animalized or radically othered, but I guess also we can mention here some of the quite frankly gruesome ways animals in industrial food production are treated. It’s quite unsettling and there are reasons I think they industry really has made it difficult to publicize and get access to these facilities. In certain states it’s illegal to talk about the meat industry in a negative way. In egg production, male chicks are not useful because they don’t lay eggs so they’re just exterminated in quite horrific ways. I think it’s also worth noting and important to know that in many cases, the working conditions in these factories are really quite terrible as well and human beings are also subjected to some terrible conditions. So those are some of the things I think become justified or simply taken for granted in speciesism.

R: Now that we’ve talked a bit about the first article and in the interest of time, why don’t we shift over to your other piece. That was Is "Man" Still the Subject of Administration? Antihumanism, Transhumanism, and the Challenge of Entangled Governance. To start can you tell us a bit about what that question really means.

T: This is a piece that was written with Chase Treisman, a doctoral student in our program at Arizona State. What we try to do in this paper initially is to play with the idea of subjects. So, is man the subject of administration? Here we’re thinking of it in terms of is math a subject or is biology a subject. So what is public administration about? What is it’s subject? And to go back to our prior discussion, what we’re basically saying is that in anthropocentric administration, man is the subject which is man as the particular subject in public administration. On the other
hand we want to talk about subject in a way like when people talk about the queen’s subject or something like that, the subject of law. We want to think about what kind of subject or subjectivity is created when people are subjected to particular authority or power. Traditionally, in modern anthropocentric administration, it’s not unlike the animal others where in terms of power they are more of the receiving end of things, more in a passive position. What we try to show in the paper is thinking about man as the subject of public administration in an anthropocentric sense where he’s bound up thinking about people as being passive, but we also want to say that there are some things happening that make us say no, that man is not still the subject of public administration. We want to say that there may be a new subject in both senses, so is public administration about something different than perhaps the governing of humans and human interest and are different subjects to power and laws being created?

R: Awesome, thank you. Now, most of the article is dedicated to examining what you call there three problemizations. So, antihumanism, transhumanism, and anthropocentric administration. We’ve talked already about that one, but what about the other two? How do those other problemizations relate to it?

T: So, first off the idea of problemizations is to say that there are particular ideas or institutions, practices that pose problems for politics with anthropocentric administration we say that the problem that this poses for politics is how to use administration to advance human purposes. Now, humanism, antihumanism, and transhumanism we say that these pose a problem to politics because they call into question the basic ground of anthropocentric administration. These two trends pose really serious challenges to what the fundamental assumptions of what the modern state are in. And theoretical antihumanism comes out of a post structural tradition and raises questions about whether or not there’s a shared human nature. It says in effect where you think you see a shared universal human nature, really what we see are our partiality to masquerading as the universal. When somebody says “human” really what they have in mind is a white male, heterosexual, property-owning human. What this really means is that some humans don’t fit into the mold and become marginalized with regards to these assumptions about what a real human is. Transhumanism is pretty different. It’s a new discourse about the ways in which biotechnology- genetic engineering, robotics or artificial intelligence- will shape how we experience ourselves as human beings. What we see with transhumanism and antihumanism and why we think it’s so interesting is that they take on these two pillars of humanism. Antihumanism takes on the idea that there is this core humanity and transhumanism challenges the idea that the biological can be used as a foundation for human nature. A little bit about transhumanism because I’m not sure if a lot of people know about this, but it’s a pretty interesting worldwide movement that views this new technology as creating the conditions where biological will become a wholly contingent condition. There are some pretty far out things that people think are going to happen. Some people think that because of these advances we’ll be able to live forever, that we’ll be able to upload our consciousness into the cloud and data, that we’ll be able to design our babies. Some of this is a little out there and a little crazy, but what is pretty interesting is the way in which this idea of humanism is broaching the idea that the biological, the very fabric of life, is something that is now malleable. This is different than saying I’m going to change my body because I’m going to
get really fit and discipline myself. What we’re talking about now is altering biological, physiological prophecies in the body to create new kinds of humans. We argue in the paper that this is a new threshold for governing in biopolitics, that where previously biopolitics basically tried to regulate and discipline physical bodies, control the physical body. Now, we’re actually going deep into the code of life and changing these kinds of things. This poses some pretty interesting challenges for government.

R: Thank you. You also introduced to us the idea of entangled governance in this context. Can you talk a bit about what you might mean by that?

T: Yeah. This idea of entangled governance is trying to capture what seems to be a new relationship that people can have with themselves and with the world around them. What I mean is that we are gaining some understanding about how the condition which we live in we actually produce ourselves. I’ll give you an example of that. We understand that many of the institutions that we live in and work in actually have a very active effect on what we think. If we grow up in particular families, if we go to particular schools we, in effect, become certain kinds of people. With that knowledge though, we have new kinds of questions that we can ask because really what it means when we think about what kind of institutions we design, we’re actually asking a question about what kind of people do we want to become? Because there’s a construction, an active role that institutions play and practices play in creating a certain kind of experience for ourselves. What the word entangled governance is trying to get at is this dilemma of the fact that when we design institutions, when we design policies, we’re not just passively implementing things, we’re also actively constructing ourselves to these institutions that we are engaged in. Entanglement describes that complex dynamic which is quite different than the traditional ways in which we’ve thought about governing which has been more passive, but now we recognize that when we act on people we’re actually creating identities in some important way and we have to get some new language and some new understanding about what that means for people.

R: Definitely. Thank you. Just in the interest of time, we can go ahead to conclude this interview. Lastly, in conclusion, what needs to be done? How can we imagine and begin to create a new way of biopolitics?

T: Part of it, as we’ve touched on, has already happened. Part of it is people gaining new understandings of their bodies, new relationships to their genetic material. Even on your phone you can have apps where you think you’re rewiring your brain. People are thinking about the ways in which they have children and do a genetic screening. Some of these things have already happened. I think another good example is actually local food production which is putting people in touch again with origins of food, where these things are coming from. This, I think is a hopeful sign in terms of thinking about the ways in which animals are treated in industrial food production. And there’s a movement in the corporate world to change the ways in which animals are treated in global supply chains. There have been changes to the ways in which McDonald’s deals with its egg production. I really think the big takeaway that we have in these papers is that we really need to begin thinking differently about how we are interacting with the world around us in a pretty holistic way. We need to start thinking about and making more visible changes in which animals are a part of our lives. There is virtually nothing that we
touch today that does not have any kind of animal product. Touch a plastic bag, there is going to be some substance in there derived from animal fat. Pick up a crayon or cake mix, there is an infinite number of things that animals enable. We need to become conscious about the gratitude that we owe to nonhuman animals. I also think along these lines of entanglement a growing consciousness of the ways in which we are entangled and meshed with each other in important ways. We can try to other and separate ourselves from each other and other kinds of problems, but the idea of entanglement suggests that when we make that move, we are also in effect creating our own identities in a certain kind of living sense particularly in which many of us reflect on the outcomes of our election that the idea of entanglement and sensitivity to the ways in which we are connected with one another becomes a really important effort for all of us in our every day lives.

R: Awesome. Thank you. Well then, to conclude thank you again, Thomas for joining us today and taking the time for this interview. It was really informative and interesting. I really enjoyed reading the articles myself and if people would like to learn more check out Administrative Theory & Praxis the journal. It’s Taylor & Francis online and again the two titles that we were discussing today “Regarding the Animal: On Biopolitics and the Limits of Humanism and Public Administration” and the second one was “Is Man Still the Subject of Administration?: Antihumanism, Transhumanism, and the Challenge of Entangled Governance.” Again, those articles are located under Administrative Theory & Praxis on Taylor & Francis online. Thank you so much Tom for joining us

T: It’s been my pleasure, Renee. Thank you so much again for the opportunity to talk.