Who Governs the American Administrative State? A Bureaucratic-Centered Image of Governance

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ARTICLES

Who Governs the American Administrative State? A Bureaucratic-Centered Image of Governance

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ABSTRACT

Implicitly or explicitly, analysts of bureaucracy have used a great many theories, or metaphorical images, to describe the role of bureaucracy in the governance process. Yet no consensus has been reached that any particular image best describes the extent of bureaucracy's power. An image called the "bureaucratic-centered" view of governance is introduced in the first part of this essay and related both to the power and the vulnerability of bureaucracy. In the essay's second part, twenty other images of bureaucracy in governance are explored. Six of these images view bureaucracy as a weak actor: executive dominance; principal-agent; bureaucratic neutrality; "pure" pluralism; Marxism, or "pure" elitism; and bureaucratic capture. Eight images view bureaucracy as one significant actor among others: polyarchy; interest-group liberalism; subgovernments, or subsystems; iron triangles; the military-industrial complex; issue networks; advocacy coalitions; and corporatism. And six images view bureaucracy as the predominant actor: bureaucratic dominance, bureaucratic politics, technocracy, rationalism, public choice, and the garbage-can. The bureaucratic-centered image is used as a benchmark to evaluate each of the other images of governance.

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> In a modern state the actual ruler is necessarily and unavoidably the bureaucracy, since power is exercised neither through parliamentary speeches nor monarchical enunciations but through the routines of administration.
>
> Max Weber (1978, 2:1393)

How much power does bureaucracy have in the American governance process? Although this question would seem to be

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a crucial one for those who take a political approach to bureaucracy, curiously little explicit attention has been paid to the issue. At the same time, generalized discussions of bureaucratic power--discussions that tend to deplore its extent--abound in the literature and are commonplace among scholars and practitioners, as well as the general public. Nonetheless, straightforward attempts to address bureaucratic power from a theoretical perspective are rare.[1]

This is not to say that there are no theories of bureaucratic power. Those who study bureaucracy use theories at least implicitly, and many students of the larger governance process--often labeled "the policy process"--have created overarching theories that speak at least implicitly to the extent of bureaucracy's power. Many American social scientists who theorize about the policy process have little interest in the bureaucracy, however, and hardly discuss it. One often has to draw inferences about how their theories would treat the role of bureaucracy.

A conclusion often reached by those who analyze political science theories is that they tend to be woefully inadequate *qua* theories (Gunnell 1969). Many of the theories are best thought of as "images of politics," which, despite their theoretical inadequacies, people use to develop "pictures in our heads" that form a "pseudo environment," in Walter Lippmann's terms, that helps make sense of the swirling mass of political stimuli to which they are exposed (1922, chapter 1).

Psychologists discuss this phenomenon in similar terms, saying that once human beings attend to a given stimulus they must then integrate it into their "perceptual set," that is, their predispositions to interpret events in certain ways based upon past experience and the context of the situation. Talk of politics as a "game" or a "system," for example, uses metaphorical language that plays a crucial role in thought processes. Martin Landau warns against adopting metaphors unself-consciously, but also draws attention to the mental stimulation that may result from doing so consciously: "To call government a machine (when we know that it is not literally a machine)," he says, "directs us to the task of determining in what sense government is like (or unlike) a machine" (1961, 335). Such metaphors, or images, are important for several reasons. As Gareth Morgan emphasizes, "the use of metaphor implies *a way of thinking* and *a way of seeing* that pervade how we understand our world generally" (1986, 12; emphasis in original).

What metaphorical images are appropriate to use in thinking about bureaucracy's role in the governance process?

[1]Political scientists' failure to study adequately the phenomenon of bureaucratic power is a manifestation of their larger disinclination to take seriously the position of public administration in governance (see Hill 1991). I use bureaucracy in the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s sense of "government by bureaux" and find the term useful to evoke the power of large public organizations. Although Max Weber's ideal-typical conception of bureaucracy--organizations having authority that is legally delineated, depersonalized, and hierarchical, is valuable as a benchmark--use of the term here is not meant to limit attention to pure bureaucracies. Other entities, such as "matrix" organizations, fall under the rubric of "bureaucracy."

A Bureaucratic-Centered Image of Governance

The first part of this essay introduces an image called the "bureaucratic-centered" view of the governance process in order to examine the power and the vulnerability of bureaucracy. The second part, using the bureaucratic-centered image as a benchmark, explores twenty other images of the policy process in order to draw inferences about how--through those images--bureaucracy is related to governance.

PART ONE: AN ACTOR-ORIENTED, BUREAUCRATIC-CENTERED IMAGE OF GOVERNANCE

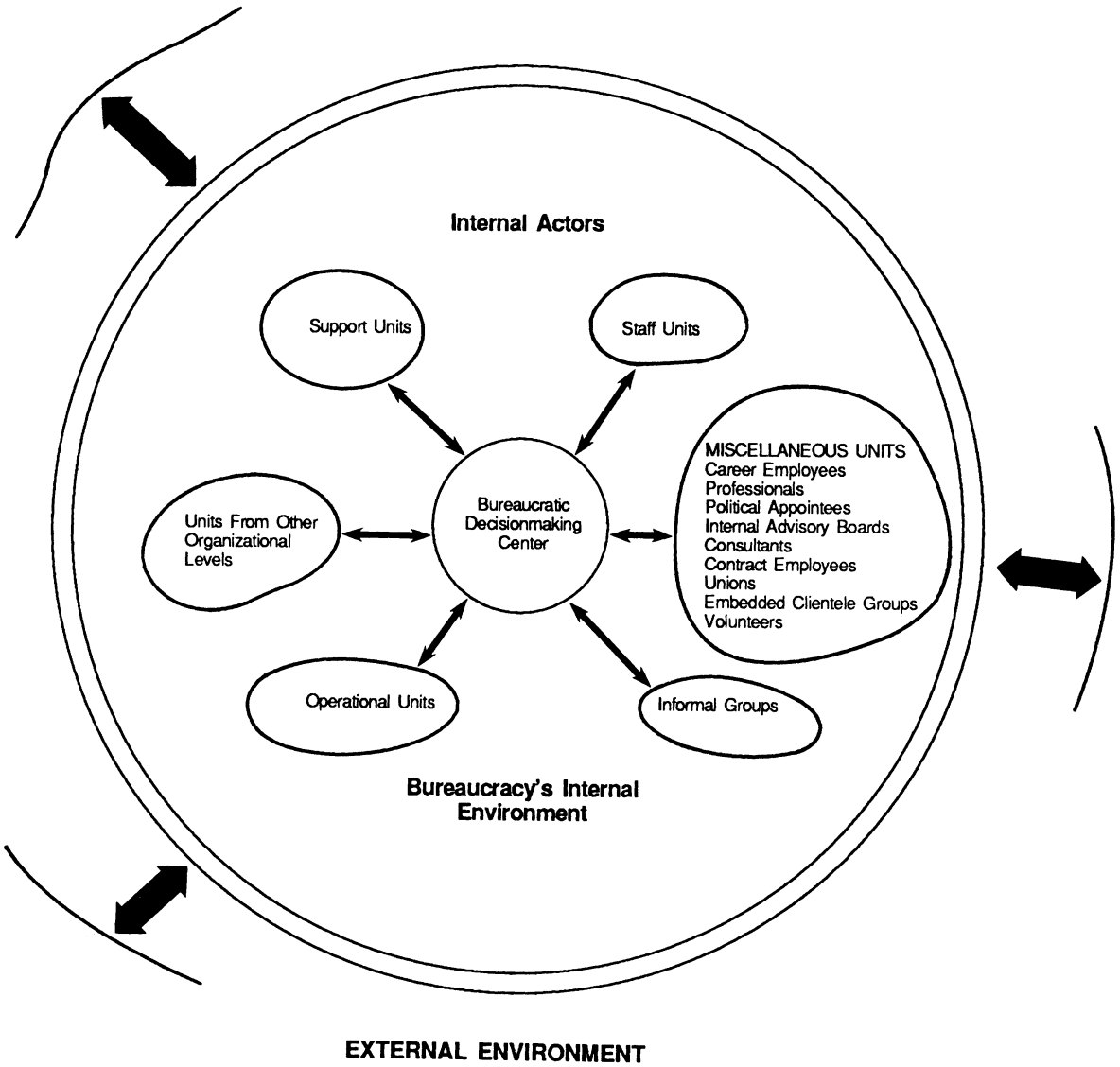
To adopt an image of bureaucracy's power in the governance process means to proceed on faith. Any image is only an approximation of a supposed reality that cannot be perceived directly. Even assuming one could learn what is "really" happening politically at a given time, we could not be sure that the particular events were representative of the general pattern or even that such a pattern exists. Of course, speaking of "bureaucracy" is to engage in oversimplification. Bureaucratic agencies certainly are not monolithic; their actual powers are highly variable, depending on such matters as their legal mandate, their size, and their political support. To the extent that generalization is possible, bureaucracy's power also may vary, depending on such situational variables as the type of policy (or even the issue) involved, the level of policy scrutinized, and the stage of the policy process under consideration.

Notwithstanding these very real methodological and epistemological problems, the actor-oriented, bureaucratic-centered image depicted in Exhibit 1A-B generally captures bureaucracy's role in the governance process. In a larger sense, this image is a field-theoretic image of governance (Yinger 1965, chapter 1). That is, it indicates a visualized field in which bureaucratic and other actors constantly interrelate as they encounter and help to create a never-ending series of political situations.

The approach here is actor oriented, but not in the sense that the participants are merely playing predetermined roles. Furthermore, although the game metaphor has become a popular vehicle for political analysis (see, for example, Smith 1988), its use here does not imply that the players are merely playing games. Instead, "actors" are simply those involved in this process who take action.

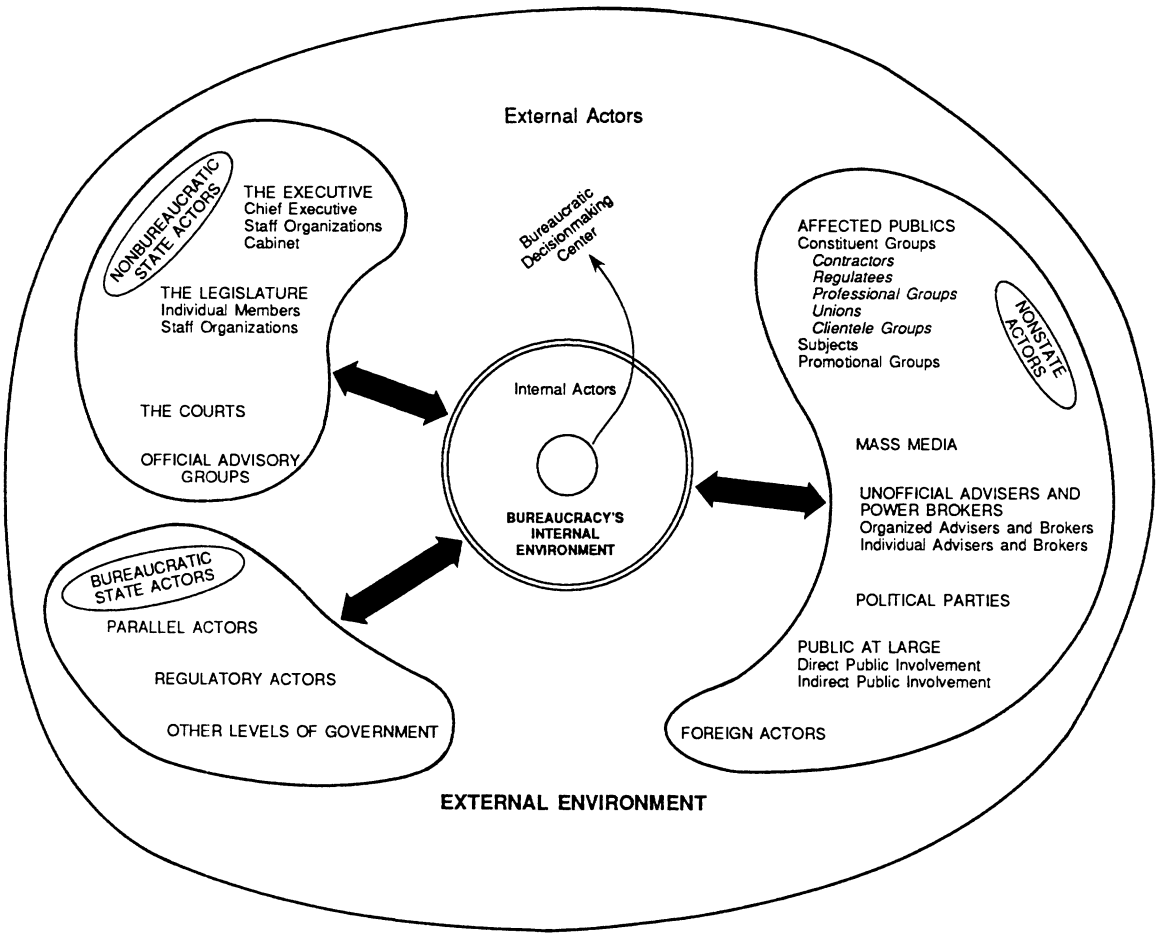
The focus here is only on actors and not on the physical environment or social or economic or natural forces as forces. These environmental forces become relevant only when an

Exhibit 1A



A Bureaucratic-Centered Image of Governance

Exhibit 1B



actor reacts to one of them; their effect on governance is thus indirect, not automatic. For example, an economic recession may have various consequences: some actors may work to cut back on social programs; others may work to raise additional governmental revenues and expand programs. Although the recession might profoundly affect the context of policymaking and restrict options, the outcomes depend upon decisions made by the political actors.

Focusing directly on those who take action is somewhat unusual, at least in the political science literature. Many treatments of the politics of the policy process involving bureaucracy quickly become so preoccupied with such abstract categorizations as subsystems, roles, and cohesion that readers are forced to make their own translations from the abstractions to concrete actors. While some treatments do examine the main "political" entities as actors so that behaviors of the Congress and the interest groups, for example, may be depicted, when the authors turn to bureaucracy the focus immediately becomes disembodied, abstract, and vague. Bureaucracy often is depicted as a "black box," a dependent variable that is acted upon rather than a set of independent actors. Even when a bureaucracy is conceived of as an independent actor, however, it is often depicted simply as a monolithic, essentially abstract "bureaucratic actor."[2]

Although abstractions certainly are useful in understanding political life, they are best employed at the secondary stages of analysis. The core focus here is upon acting entities: those individuals and organizations acting to further whatever interests they believe to be important. Furthermore, these people are motivated by the same kinds of selfish and altruistic impulses that affect other citizens.

A BUREAUCRATIC-CENTERED IMAGE

Without a doubt, bureaucratization increasingly affects the entire process of governance in the United States and elsewhere (see Jacoby 1973; Nachmias and Rosenbloom 1980). Yet the "bureaucratic-centered" image of governance does not imply that bureaucratic actors are necessarily the central actors in the process. Rather, this image represents a focus on the policy process from the perspective of the bureaucratic actors. Other perspectives, such as a "media-centered" or a "Congress-centered" view of governance would also be valid. Nevertheless, bureaucracy is a significant actor in the governance process, and the bureaucratic actor is able to rely upon a set of strategic advantages and power bases (briefly discussed in the next section) and exercises an important degree of discretion.

[2]Perhaps political scientists have tended to move quickly to embrace abstractions and to neglect actors in order to make it clear that they are real scientists--like sociologists and economists--and not merely descriptive chroniclers of political stories, like journalists and political activists who purvey the "inside dope." Perhaps scholars of public administration also have wished to avoid political actors and to focus on abstract analytical categories in order to emphasize the scientific nature of the enterprise of public administration and to downplay its political nature.

He or she may have the independent authority to make certain decisions and either individually or in concert with allies may attempt to impose his or her policy preferences on other actors. But bureaucratic actors also face certain vulnerabilities (discussed below) and are subject to the influence of a wide range of official and nonofficial groups.

The bureaucratic-centered image positions the bureaucratic actor in the center of the governance process; see Exhibit 1A-B. Any bureaucratic actor at any level of government may be the focal point: someone at the top headquarters, someone in a divisional office, or someone at the agency's local branch. What does the world look like to this bureaucratic actor? Who are the principal competing or supporting actors? The exhibit divides the relevant set of actors into two main types: external and internal actors. "Bureaucratic actor," however, is a term of simplification; as the multiple internal actors in Exhibit 1A-B indicates, it does not denote a monolithic bureaucratic actor.[3] The single label that Exhibit 1A-B gives for each actor in fact usually represents a large set of actors.

Exhibit 1A-B oversimplifies by showing only each external actor's linkage with bureaucracy and each internal actor's linkage with the bureaucratic decisionmaking center. In actuality any one of the external or internal actors also may be directly linked with any other actor. What is needed is a model showing the actors' relationships in n-dimensional space.[4]

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE BUREAUCRATIC-CENTERED IMAGE

Exhibit 1A-B is a "configurational" image; that is, it provides a view of bureaucracy's general position in the governance process in relation to other actors, but does not suggest a precise theory about bureaucracy's actual powers vis-à-vis those actors. Nonetheless, the image does have some implicit theoretical implications: How does the process work? Who decides in this process?

How Does the Bureaucratic-Centered Image Work?

According to the bureaucratic-centered image, significant political issues are decided through processes that are much more akin to an incremental model than to a rational-comprehensive model. This does not necessarily mean that bureaucratic-centered decisions are irrational; Lindblom's (1959) argument is persuasive: the incremental decision process with successive limited comparisons may promote decisions that are actually more rational--when observed from a long-

[3]Despite my distaste for abstract categorizations as organizing principles for analysis, I acknowledge that Exhibit 1A-B introduces the possibility of internal actors playing multiple roles; for example, an individual may have a staff position as a budget officer, retain a professional allegiance as an accountant, and belong to an important clique that plays poker with the agency head. But whatever roles the individual may play, the main interest here comes at the point of action, and actions are taken by whole actors.

[4]The term "'nonbureaucratic' state actors" is intended to draw attention to the essentially political nature of these institutions; the quotation marks acknowledge the trend of bureaucratization of the staffs of executives, legislatures, and courts. Despite increased bureaucratization in many senses, however, the staffs of the traditional political institutions are best described as "patrimonial bureaucracies," in Weber's terms, because "the office and the exercise of public authority serve the ruler and the official on which the office was bestowed; they do not serve impersonal purposes" (1978, 2:1031). It is not necessary to subscribe to the politics/administration dichotomy to observe that the extent of the effect of increased bureaucratization on these political actors and of increased politicization on the bureaucratic actors are important issues for students of governance.

term, overall perspective--than are decisions reached through a rational-comprehensive process. In any event, the bureaucratic-centered image features ad hoc, "political" decisions rather than decisions reached through a process of coherent, rational planning.

Authority is fragmented in the bureaucratic-centered image. In general, no one is in charge; centralized control is lacking. Power shifts from time to time; Washington insiders frequently talk of the "power float" (Smith 1988, chapter 1). Fragmentation also extends to decision sites, which may range widely from Washington, D.C., to the smallest sewage district. Because nobody is in charge of outcomes, they are contingent. The bureaucratic-centered image is a "possibilist" conception of governance; the outcomes are not predetermined. At a given time, in a given policy area, at a given stage of the process, almost anything can happen. One can make tendency statements and say that much of the time some actors are more important than others, but the only way one can answer who is in charge or who is the principal actor is to examine a particular case.

This is not to say that things "just happen" in the bureaucratic-centered governance process. There are proximate political antecedents to administrative outcomes. Things happen because of individual actors' attempts to persuade or to exercise political power. Environmental influences may have a crucial effect on the outcomes, but in large measure the political actors shape that effect. Competition is endemic in the bureaucratic-centered image; the governance process features both conflict and bargaining.

The bureaucratic-centered process tends to be very complicated. For this reason, many decisions are slowly reached, yet timing remains extremely important. Some decisions must be made quickly, a source of bureaucratic power. But the complexity of the process is one feature that helps distinguish the decisionmaking process in public policymaking from that in private policymaking. In public policymaking, several actors often have to be allowed to register their opinion and, perhaps, give a "clearance"; this may take a long time.

Who Decides in the Bureaucratic-Centered Image?

Bureaucracy, in this image, is both a dependent and an independent variable. Extrabureaucratic actors take actions that affect bureaucratic agencies. At the same time, bureaucratic agencies act so as to influence the other actors. The most prevalent overall interpretation of American politics is that

extrabureaucratic actors are the prime influencers and that bureaucracies mainly respond and are acted upon. But in this image, bureaucracies are also independent actors. The bureaucratic actors are given the various powers enumerated below and are thrust into a political situation in which they must develop an authority structure.

The potential participants in many decisions about governance are often quite numerous. Exhibit 1A-B contains a reasonably complete, composite list of the categories of potential actors who might become involved in many sorts of issues. A high degree of actual participation by the potential actors tends to occur in the bureaucratic-centered image. This differs from the general rate of participation in American politics, where citizens seldom vote or participate much in other ways. Why does participation tend to be high in the bureaucratic-centered policy process? Because the actors feel they have something to gain by participating. According to Miles's law (1978), people easily interpret their self-interest in terms of where they sit. Thus when they see an interest threatened or see an opportunity to pursue an interest, they are likely to take action.

How many of these actors are involved in this process as a part of their jobs? Virtually all of the internal actors, certainly. Which external actors are not employees of the affected interests? Only some representatives of promotional groups, the subjects, and the public at large are not likely to be employees of an organization. All of the other actors probably are participating because they are doing their jobs; they are on company time.

Not only are many of the participants paid employees of the organizations involved, but also they are professionals. That is, they often have training in a field and think of themselves as pursuing a career rather than simply as employees of a particular organization. For example, the reporters are trying to prove themselves professionally and may hope to get a Pulitzer prize or to move on to the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*. Many of the other actors are bureaucrats or paid lobbyists who have parallel drives and pursuits.

But many of these professionals may have a long career involving jobs with a variety of kinds of actors. An important recent development has been the evolution of networks of lobbying professionals (Heclo 1978). Especially at the national level, but at the state and sometimes the local levels as well, hundreds of thousands of people work in the overall policy network as a career. Some of these people specialize in a

limited policy sphere and spend their entire professional careers working on issues affecting defense, energy, housing, agriculture, the handicapped, and so forth. Others may move from one policy sphere to another. In either event, the professionals may spend a few years working for a congressional office or a staff committee; they may spend a few years working for an interest group or a trade association; they may spend a few years working for a professional group, a union, or a media outlet. These professionals may have qualifications in such fields as the law, accounting, or public relations, or their expertise may be founded upon years of experience working in one or more policy areas.

One may see a record of the career movements of these professionals in the *National Journal*, the Washington news weekly. Its "People: Washington's Movers and Shakers" section records the comings and goings of various categories of professionals in the network. Over a period of years, many of these people come to know each other, which facilitates interaction. They also pursue their objectives assiduously partly because they want to prove their professional competence and position themselves for career advancement, perhaps with another actor, in the future.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE BUREAUCRATIC-CENTERED IMAGE

The preceding discussion has provided hints about the extent of bureaucracy's power. What are the bases of that power, and to what extent are the bases counteracted by political vulnerabilities? The following discussion of bureaucratic power bases, which is synthesized from Max Weber and many other sources, is divided into two sections: the first focuses on those bases that are inherent in the nature of bureaucracy; the second features those that are peculiar to the position of bureaucracies in American society.

Power Bases Inherent in the Nature of Bureaucracy

All public bureaucracies share certain legal, material, and organizational resources. These resources are translated into power when bureaucratic-action agencies use them to develop political capacities.

Legal resources. The law is a principal power resource for bureaucracy. According to Weber, the bureaucratization of modern states, which was nascent as he wrote, is but a consequence of the adoption of a rational-legal basis as opposed to a traditional or a charismatic basis for structuring official

authority relations. In fact, he identified bureaucracy as a subcategory of rational legalism, calling it the "purest type of exercise of legal authority" (Weber 1978, 1:220).

The law provides a basis for bureaucracy's existence, specifies its powers and jurisdiction, and enables its decisions to be enforced. Because they are official, legally endowed representatives of the state, bureaucrats' actions are usually considered to be legitimate by other actors, who are predisposed to comply with bureaucrats' instructions. Citizens and other political actors know that bureaucratic actors have the legal authority to reward and punish, to encourage or forbid, to subsidize or to prosecute many activities. Those actors are thus likely to treat bureaucrats as authority figures and defer to their wishes.

Material resources. Bureaucracies' monetary and other capital resources, which are likely to be greater than those of competitors, are important power resources. Simply having access to multi-million dollar budgets; computers and other equipment; data analysts, caseworkers, and secretaries are all likely to be significant sources of political power. In addition, material resources may provide a basis for the building of further bureaucratic power. For example, as bureaucracies spend money in the normal course of events, they often "buy" the allegiance of constituent groups, which may multiply the agencies' political power.

Strategic-organizational resources. Bureaucracies frequently are monopoly providers of services for the public and for other key actors in governance. Thus these actors may have nowhere else to turn to have their needs met and may feel highly dependent on the agency. That dependence is increased by the widespread appreciation of the importance of bureaucracy's ability to process large numbers of routine cases quickly. In addition, whereas many of the other actors in the governance process are temporary and their involvement may be episodic and limited to certain issues, bureaucracies--largely staffed by career employees--are permanent actors and enjoy the power resource of continuity.

Expertise, knowledge, and specialization are further strategic-organizational ingredients of bureaucracy's power. As professionalization and subprofessionalization become ever more important in modern society, bureaucracies employ more and more professionals, who gain additional authority by virtue of their professional credentials. Bureaucratic expertise is frequently founded upon nothing more exotic, however, than repetitive experience in making mundane decisions.

Another important strategic-organizational source of bureaucracy's power is the ability to affect the context of decisionmaking, particularly through controlling the flow of information and the timing of decisions. Bureaucracies frequently control information crucial to governance. In fact, they often maintain a near monopoly over important information, whose existence may be unknown to other actors, and bureaucracies may aggressively protect their secrets.[5] A special aspect of bureaucracy's informational control is the organizational memory, which is frequently stored in computerized data banks under the bureaucracy's control. Bureaucracies also may have an impact on the context of decisionmaking through affecting the timing of decisions. Thus they may act quickly or delay in order to maximize their impact. Occasions for making decisions are presented to bureaucracies on an emergency basis ranging from natural disasters or oil spills to wars or recessions, certainly increasing their power.

Political-action resources. Bureaucratic agencies are behaving entities, or organizations in action. They have the ability to harness all of their legal, material, and organizational resources and develop a capacity to accomplish their missions. The members of a bureaucracy become committed to those missions, they socialize new members of the organization, and their leaders strive to achieve the bureaucracy's objectives.

Finally, in the long run, political issues become bureaucratic issues, and the inherent power of implementation is a key to bureaucracy's political power. Bureaucracies have the action. They are expected by other actors to exercise discretion, meet their responsibilities, and get on with the job even if the bureaucrats' choices may differ from those of other actors.

Power Bases Related to the Peculiar Nature of American Politics

Although bureaucracies everywhere share the preceding power resources, American bureaucracies--disliked and disparaged as they are--actually enjoy some unusual power resources. Owing to the sharing/separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, American bureaucracy faces fragmented, multiple controls; since no single institution is in charge of American bureaucracies, they may play their nominal controllers off against each other. At the same time, American bureaucracies do not have an official political protector. The obvious contrast is with the Western European parliamentary regimes, whose executives--fused with their legislatures--are able to offer such political protection. Hence,

[5]Weber emphasized (1978, 2:292) that administrative secrecy was an important bureaucratic power base: "Bureaucratic administration always tends to exclude the public, to hide its knowledge and action from criticism as well as it can." Furthermore, he said: "The concept of the 'office secret' is the specific invention of bureaucracy, and few things it defends so fanatically as this attitude which, outside of the specific areas mentioned, cannot be justified with purely functional arguments."

in order to defend themselves and accomplish their missions, American bureaucracies must be politically proactive.

Furthermore, the unusual strength of American political groups of various sorts along with the fragmentation of the state's controls over bureaucracy encourages agencies to convert the interests they share with their constituencies into an independent power base. Since it is an iron law of politics that groups flow to power, they seek out agencies that have jurisdiction over the groups' interests, and the groups and the agencies pursue their common cause.

Also, in the post-World-War II period, most American laws have been vaguely drafted whether because of a decision to defer to bureaucratic expertise, a lack of political consensus, or cowardice on the part of politicians. The vagueness of statutes allows bureaucrats to create policies, especially when writing rules to implement the law. Largely owing to rivalry with the executive, however, in recent years the Congress often has attempted to write more detailed legislation.

In addition, in the highly partisan American political environment, where consensus on specifics seldom exists among official and nonofficial actors, bureaucrats often are viewed as nonpartisan, honest brokers between factions. Notwithstanding the heat of the never-ending political battle, all parties eventually realize that somehow the work of government must be accomplished. Especially at the state and the local levels, bureaucrats may be trusted more than any other political force and allowed to exercise much discretion.

Finally, because distrust of "politics" is a key component of the American political culture, decisions that would be political in other countries may be translated into technical, managerial, and other supposedly nonpolitical issues subject to the jurisdiction of American bureaucrats. For example, regulating the money supply is entrusted to the "nonpolitical" Federal Reserve, and urban citizens hire nonpartisan city managers. As suspicious as Americans are of bureaucrats, they are sometimes even more suspicious of politicians.[6]

Bureaucratic Vulnerabilities

The inventory of power bases discussed above is, of course, only a list of resources that may be available to a bureaucracy. Whether bureaucracies are successful in using those resources to establish "a system of domination" in Weber's terms (1978, 2:987) over the political process remains an open question. Although American bureaucrats may have

[6]Rourke (1991a) refers to many of these peculiarly American bureaucratic power bases under the heading of "exceptionalism."

access to the important powers discussed above, they also are burdened with significant vulnerabilities.

Because American bureaucracy does not have a constitutionally based legitimacy, it is dependent upon the three traditional branches of government. For example, the executive and the legislature share control over a bureaucracy's existence and structure, its legal authority, and its material resources. And the judiciary may issue rulings that profoundly affect its activities. Furthermore, the distinctive American practice of naming large numbers of political appointees to significant positions in agencies allows politicians to penetrate bureaucracies, frequently into their depths. Private groups may penetrate bureaucracies as well, even "capture" them.

In addition, unlike the situation in some other countries, American bureaucracy certainly is not monolithic. Except for parts of the personnel function, American bureaucracy is not organized at the macro-level in such a way that it is a unified civil service capable of taking political action. And, because agencies lack protection from an authoritative political sponsor, they are dependent upon finding political support among politicians, clients, groups, and the public; such dependence fosters vulnerability to these supporters. Furthermore, many agencies have been assigned goals that are contradictory or ambiguous; some missions are virtually impossible to perform. Thus bureaucracies are aware that even if they perform heroically they are frequently subject to criticism. Finally, antibureaucratic, antigovernmental sentiments are prevalent in American political culture, and the general level of public support for agencies is low. Thus agencies know that they cannot count on the public in a crunch, and they are seldom able to recruit the brightest and the best as employees.

All in all, despite their significant powers, agencies may be highly vulnerable to other political forces. If they are not fortunate or skillful, bureaucracies are at constant risk of losing authority, missions, and their very existence.

PART TWO: OTHER IMAGES OF BUREAUCRACY IN GOVERNANCE

How is the bureaucratic-centered image of governance related to other images, or metaphors, of bureaucracy in governance? In answering this question, the following discussion, while not pretending to be an exhaustive survey of metaphors used in political analysis, does capture most of the predominant metaphors that bear directly on the question of bureaucracy's power in relation to other actors.[7]

[7]The results here are based on an impressionistic, preliminary survey. A full investigation of the use of metaphors in thinking about bureaucracy would require lengthy interviews with a number of scholars as well as systematic analysis of the literatures on bureaucracy and on the policy process. Over the past several years that I have been concerned with this question, however, I have adopted the less-ambitious methodology of asking colleagues about their images of bureaucratic power and collecting authors' statements about their images. I have not attempted to make an inventory of every metaphor used in political analysis. Indeed, some of the most prominent metaphors, such as systems theory, are only briefly mentioned here because they focus little on the question of bureaucracy. In addition, Morgan's *Images of Organization* (1986), which is the most thorough treatment of metaphors in organizational analysis, does not examine any of the metaphors discussed below because he operates at a different level of analysis and does not focus on the organization's power in relation to other political actors.

Several of these images are frequently identified with one or a few scholars. Once the images are in the public domain, however, they take on a life of their own; other writers and teachers may develop them quite differently from the way they were originally conceived. The brief discussion of each image here focuses on its implications for bureaucratic power and does not attempt a comprehensive treatment in the image's own terms as set out by particular authors.[8]

The images are discussed according to the relative power that each accords to bureaucracy and divided, as ideal types, into three categories:

- those suggesting bureaucracy is a weak actor in the governance process;
- those suggesting bureaucracy is one significant actor among others in the process; and
- those suggesting bureaucracy is the predominant actor in the process.

Each description is followed by a brief evaluation from the viewpoint of the bureaucratic-centered image. This evaluation employs a quite general perspective because there is no basis for making definitive judgments about the usefulness of these images of bureaucracy's role in governance.

IMAGES OF BUREAUCRACY AS A WEAK ACTOR

Six images treat bureaucracy as a weak actor in governance: executive dominance; principal-agent; bureaucratic neutrality; "pure" pluralism; Marxism, or "pure" elitism; and bureaucratic capture. In general, these weak-actor images do not take into sufficient account bureaucracy's substantial powers.

Executive Dominance

The theory of executive dominance argues that bureaucracy is not and ought not to be a significant, independent actor in the policy process. The executive simply gives orders to the bureaucracy, which carries them out as intended; the implement, or tool, is not really an active participant. This view of bureaucracy's role was suggested by old-fashioned civics books and by early scholars of political science and public administration who believed in a "politics-administration dichotomy." According to this view, bureaucracy should be subsumed under one of the traditional branches of government--

[8]I may use some of the images in ways that writers who are identified with the label did not originally intend, but hope this procedure does not distort their contributions. Although I sometimes cite an image's proponents in order to give credit where credit is due and to facilitate communication with my readers, I give each image the theoretical status of an ideal type, an artificial construct. A few of the constructs I mention are seldom employed in actuality, but are included here to illustrate a rather full range of the options that might be used in thinking about bureaucracy's political role.

the executive (President's Committee 1937). If the bureaucracy simply does what the president, the governor, or the mayor wants, then the bureaucracy does not count politically. This interpretation of bureaucracy's proper political role is widespread among the American public. A great many members of the public and editorial writers periodically become incensed when they learn about instances of supposed bureaucratic "defiance" of the executive, defiance that is seen as illegitimate.

Evaluation: Although recent presidents, especially those since Richard Nixon, have demonstrated considerable interest in increasing their control over bureaucracy, their success has been limited. President Reagan had some noteworthy successes--for example, in appointing agency officials who shared his antibureaucratic inclinations, in attempting to sabotage such agencies as the Environmental Protection Agency, in increasing the power of the Office of Management and Budget to supervise agencies, and in starving certain agencies for funds. But the power of some agencies, particularly those related to defense, grew under Reagan, and it is difficult to see that, overall, bureaucracy's power was substantially reduced during his presidency. The biggest problem for the theory of executive dominance is that it underestimates the independent strength of bureaucracies and the ability of the Congress, the courts, and private groups to affect bureaucratic actions.

Principal-Agent

Economists interested in increasing managerial control over work-aversive employees have developed principal-agent models for studying this struggle: the employer is the principal; the employee is the agent. Some scholars have attempted to apply such models to the relationships between politicians (principals) and bureaucrats (agents). Among the main interests of those using such models are the extent to which "utility-maximizing" bureaucrats attempt to control policy decisions through structuring the options ("information asymmetry") and the ability of politicians to control outcomes, mainly through budgetary allocations. If the principal-agent model holds, the bureaucrats are supposed to bow to the wishes of the politicians.

Investigations of these phenomena tend to take place at a high level of theoretical abstraction (see, for example, Bendor *et al.* 1987). The attempts to operationalize the models normally involve plugging sets of aggregate data into complex mathematical formulae; the usual conclusion is that politicians do exercise considerable control over bureaucrats. One commentator went so far as to argue that the principal-agent research

was "seminal," and it "transformed scholarly thought on political control of the bureaucracy" (Wood 1989, 974). An important problem for the models is the question of identifying which politicians are the principals. Most investigators argue for a president-as-principal conception (Bendor *et al.* 1987), which would seem to result in what is essentially a variation of the executive-dominance image. Other investigators argue for a Congress-as-principal conception (Weingast 1984; Weingast and Moran 1983), which would seem to introduce a congressional-dominance image. Yet others argue for a multiple-principals conception (Cook 1989).

Evaluation: Applying principal-agent models to the control of bureaucracy does not appear to have made a significant contribution to political understanding. Those who have studied executive-bureaucracy relations or Congress-bureaucracy relations surely did not need the language of economics to tell them that the respective branches of government (in addition to other actors) exercised substantial influence over bureaucracy. Of course, it would be obvious to scholars of the executive, the Congress, or the bureaucracy that bureaucracy has more than one principal.[9] And modifying the image to create a multiple-principals image would seem to violate the assumptions of the principal-agent model and result in little more than the statement that both the executive and the Congress often influence bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic Neutrality

Bureaucratic neutrality, or neutral competence, arrives at nearly the same place as executive dominance, but by a somewhat different route. According to classical notions of how bureaucracies should work, hierarchy is the operative principle, and officials are supposed to be politically neutral. Although bureaucrats may express their point of view, they are obligated to implement lawful orders from whatever source. Max Weber clearly articulated this view:

> An official who receives a directive which he considers wrong can and is supposed to object to it. If his superior insists on its execution, it is his duty and even his honor to carry it out as if it corresponded to his innermost conviction, and to demonstrate in this fashion that his sense of duty stands above his personal preference." (1978, 2:1404)

According to the theory of bureaucratic neutrality, bureaucrats are not quite policy ciphers, but their duty is to translate the directives of their superiors--including their political superiors--into action, not to be important policymakers.

[9]Wilson (1989, 254-56) devotes a special appendix to a critique of the principal-agent model as applied to the Congress.

Evaluation: American bureaucratic agencies are mission oriented and cannot depend upon a political protector. Thus, they tend to behave politically and are likely both to protect themselves and to pursue their missions. "Neutrality" often is not an accurate term to describe the bureaucracy's orientation though it may well describe individual actors at particular times.

"Pure" Pluralism

Pluralism has been the most prominent theory of the American policy process among political scientists for at least the last forty years. But so many varieties of the doctrine exist that using the general label conveys little information. "Pure" pluralism, as used here, assumes that policy emerges out of the conflict between a large variety of groups. It assumes that, over time, no dominant policy actor exists and that there is a shifting balance of power among the groups. Some theorists of pluralism talk extensively of the "political process," seldom mentioning government at all. When it is mentioned, they often assume that government is just another group whose activities need to be taken into account, or they see government as a neutral field in which group conflict occurs. Others of this persuasion see government as the prize that the winner takes in the competition for power.

According to pure pluralism, government is epiphenomenal and simply reflects the underlying balance of power among the groups at a given time. Government and its working arm, bureaucracy, are not independent variables that have to be taken into account as important actors. Another assumption is that conflict among the groups is endemic; furthermore, as the group conflict is played out, something like the public interest emerges through a balancing of interests across the groups. Major groups arrayed on one side of an issue are likely to attract major groups on the other side. In the words of John Kenneth Galbraith (1952), the competing groups have "countervailing power" over each other. Thus, big labor on one side of an issue puts big business on the other. The groups tend to keep each other honest, and each has veto power over the other so that neither wins the whole game. This notion is analogous to the idea of the "unseen hand" in classical economic theory.

Evaluation: In its various forms, pluralism highlights both the importance of process and the manifold actors, particularly the nonofficial actors, who may play important political roles. But pure pluralism tends to underplay the importance of the state, and this is its principal limitation as a theory of

governance. The "political" arms of the state play significant roles in the process of governance; so also do the "bureaucratic" arms.

Marxism or "Pure" Elitism

Many varieties both of Marxism and elitism exist, and some strains have only limited affinities with each other. Nevertheless, for the sake of brevity, the two are combined here. According to the theory of elitism, which is usually depicted as the polar opposite of pluralism, a narrow socio-political group dominates the American policy process. A number of varieties of elitism exist; mild versions really say only that people from higher socioeconomic groups have more political power than do others and that bureaucrats--because the middle classes are overrepresented among them--also are a part of the elite. According to a strict elitist analysis, however, the bureaucrats are not members of the elite. They are simply puppets whose strings are pulled by the members of the elite. The elite is economically based under all such theories, with Marxism featuring economic determinism.

The assumption of "pure" elitism is that a few wealthy people control American society and its corporations, culture, and government from behind the scenes. Elitists, looking at such matters as interlocking directorates among corporations and the degree of concentration of wealth, assume that the elite is pulling the strings of the puppets in the presidency, the Congress, and the bureaucracy. As Marx said, the government is simply a committee of the bourgeoisie. Contemptuous of bureaucrats and bureaucracies, Marx hardly mentioned them in his writings. Various varieties of elitism and Marxism have become popular in many American universities.

Evaluation: The United States is certainly not a democracy in the classical Greek sense of that word, and the followers of Marx and other elite theorists have contributed to political analysis by drawing our attention to important concentrations of economic power. Yet power is more widely dispersed than is suggested by those who follow strict Marxist or elitist doctrines. At the least, the "political" branches of government and the nonofficial groups indicated in Exhibit 1A-B often act independently of the wishes of any elite group. Furthermore, as indicated above, bureaucratic agencies also exercise significant degrees of autonomy. Despite research indicating that the upper-middle class is overrepresented in the higher reaches of the bureaucracy and that certain large corporations may influence procurement and other financial decisions of government, there does not appear to be any

that documents, in specific terms, a pattern of elite domination of American bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic Capture

A final theory that finds bureaucracy to be relatively unimportant is the theory of bureaucratic capture, which posits that agencies, especially regulatory agencies, are finally captured by the groups they are supposed to govern or regulate. Some theorists believe that the idea of control on the part of the bureaucracy is a sham; governments simply appoint people who are sympathetic to the interests of those who are being regulated, whether the bureaucracy is a military agency, a communications agency, a transportation agency. According to another version of the theory, public agencies (especially regulatory agencies) have life cycles. Agencies may begin with reforming zeal, but because they need expertise, they are likely to recruit employees from the industry being regulated. As the agencies mature, linkages are built up so that both the regulators and the regulatees see the world the same way. The regulators eventually are captured by the groups they are supposed to regulate (Bernstein 1955).

Evaluation: Examples of apparent bureaucratic capture can be identified, e.g., the Federal Communications Commission and the Federal Aviation Administration seemed for years to be dominated by their respective industries, the broadcasters and the airlines. Yet captures, even among regulatory agencies, never have been as pervasive as was sometimes suggested, even though that is the type of bureaucracy for which the image seems to be most appropriate. In addition, capture may be short lived. Perhaps, also, what seems to be capture is often misunderstood; perhaps something like a subgovernment, discussed below, is actually operating. Furthermore, the executive and the legislature would at least have to acquiesce in any capture, and they would then have to abandon further involvement for true capture to continue.

IMAGES OF BUREAUCRACY AS ONE SIGNIFICANT ACTOR AMONG OTHERS

Eight images view bureaucracy as one important actor among others: polyarchy; interest-group liberalism; subgovernments or subsystems; iron triangles; the military-industrial complex; issue networks; advocacy coalitions; and corporatism. This disparate set of images sees bureaucracies as actors that have important powers, but that also are dependent upon and vulnerable to other political actors. The bureaucratic-centered image shares this interpretation.

Polyarchy

Polyarchy, developed by Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblom (1953), is a variety of pluralism. But they saw government as more than a neutral field within which competition for power occurred: government was itself an actor in the process. According to the polyarchy image, the governance process is diffuse and complicated and made up of conglomerates of groupings that might come together on a temporary or a permanent basis to compete, bargain, and compromise. Rather than majority rule, we have rule by shifting minorities. Government plays an important role in this conception of "rule-by-many" groups. In Dahl's study of New Haven, *Who Governs?* (1961), he found that many people, rather than a small elite, were "in charge" and, depending on the policy area under consideration, the influentials differed. He concluded that the policy process was very complex, composed of multiple groups loosely tied together, and that it was a mistake to assume that a unified elite really controlled important decisions. In this heterogeneous policy process, the experts in governmental agencies might play a significant role.

Evaluation: The polyarchy image is generally compatible with the bureaucratic-centered image. But those who use the former usually display little interest in bureaucracy. Public agencies are mentioned in Dahl's later work, for example, but they remain shadowy figures; he hardly discusses public agencies in his American government textbook (1967). Other theorists of polyarchy have displayed more interest in bureaucracy (e.g., Lindblom 1980). Even if many writers are witting or unwitting adherents of polyarchy, however, as theory it does not offer a great deal to students of bureaucracy's relative power in governance other than to affirm that public agencies might play consequential roles.

Interest-Group Liberalism

Another variety of pluralism was given the label of interest-group liberalism by Theodore Lowi (1979). Lowi looked at the American policy process, taken broadly, and saw that pluralism was leading to disaster: the policy process did not operate in a benign way. The various groups did, indeed, pursue their own interests, but the public interest was unlikely to result from their competition. Instead, he believed, the public interest was lost in the scramble for self-interest as public authority was parcelled out to the groups that developed very strong support in the Congress and with the agencies. Whereas pluralism is acceptable in the legislative process, Lowi argues, it should not be transposed into the

administrative system. Public agencies usually are close allies of the stronger of the competing groups, Lowi feels; sometimes those groups capture the agencies, sometimes the agencies act as a kind of holding company for group interests, sometimes the agencies supervise bargaining among the groups.

Evaluation: The bureaucratic-centered image is not inconsistent with the interest-group-liberalism image. That is, a situation in which interest groups have a high degree of power over a policy area and enlist public agencies as allies to further group interests is a possible configuration of power illuminated by the bureaucratic-centered image. The interest-group-liberalism image, however, puts too much emphasis on interest groups and neglects the importance of the many other external and internal actors depicted in Exhibit 1A-B. In addition, it does not seem likely that the confluence of interests between groups and agencies is as close as this image suggests. Agencies just as frequently have enough autonomy both to avoid being coopted by groups and to play more important roles in the governance process than merely supervising bargaining among groups.[10]

Subgovernments or Subsystems

Other theorists view the policy process as comprising a series of "whirlpools or centers of activity focusing on particular problems" (Griffith 1939, 182), as subgovernments (Cater 1964), or subsystems (Freeman 1955).[11] This conception is that the leaders of various groups of public and private institutions and other activists within a policy sector communicate with each other, bargain, and reach decisions with some degree of independence from the officials and other actors at the apex of the political system. Proponents of this image argue that those considered "outsiders" usually have great difficulty in penetrating the subgovernment and having an important effect on outcomes. Some writers are more cautious, however, and note that subgovernments are not dominant in all policy arenas and that the image is most useful in describing the making of routine policy (Ripley and Franklin 1991, 7).

Evaluation: The bureaucratic-centered image as applied to a particular policy area might be generally congruent with the subgovernment image, at least as far as routine matters are concerned, but some divergences should be mentioned. Regardless of how generally accurate the subgovernment image may have been at one time, it was developed before significant changes in the governance process occurred during the 1960s. Relative policy consensus in many fields began to

[10]Although I agree with Lowi (1979, chapter 11) about the importance of the rule of law, I do not agree with his proposal to limit administrative discretion by turning to "juridical" democracy. According to the bureaucratic-centered image, this would simply result in increasing the power of the courts in the governance process. Adopting such a proposal might drive a wedge between groups and agencies, but the role of groups probably would not be reduced. Because powerful groups have easy access to the courts, the groups would be likely to use the legal process to thwart, or at least delay, undesired agency actions.

[11]For a review of this stream of literature by one who also has contributed to it, see Redford (1969, chapter 4).

break down, and top officials in the three branches of government sometimes began to involve themselves in the subgovernments' business–the administrative presidency began to intrude in lower-level policy matters; the congressional power structure was cracked, if not broken (subgovernment protectors moved off the scene; competitive subcommittees proliferated); the courts began to supervise agencies much more actively.[12]

Other "outsiders" also became involved in the subgovernment's business. For example, the number of interest groups exploded. Sometimes new groups were created through the process of differentiation of existing groups; sometimes completely new groups having interests antagonistic to those of the established groups (e.g., public-interest groups) intruded into the process. And such other actors as new regulatory agencies and the media also began to become involved in what previously might have been mainly the concerns of a subgovernment. Thus few agencies now have the luxury of looking out into their environment and feeling that it is safely dominated by the agency's allies or other actors with which it has reached a modus vivendi.

Iron Triangles

The iron-triangle image (sometimes reference is made to a "cozy" triangle), which is frequently mentioned in the newspapers as well as in academic literature, is a subspecies of the subgovernment theory. The notion is that within a given policy sector an alliance exists between three key sets of actors: the interest groups, the congressional committees and subcommittees, and the bureaucratic agencies; they all may be fairly equal partners in serving their own interest or that of the "subgovernment," with the sides of the triangle forming a barrier against potential gate crashers.

Evaluation: Because the iron triangle image is a variety of the subgovernment image, the above comments also apply to the iron triangle. The number of consequential actors viewed in the bureaucratic-centered image is likely to be much greater than three sets.

The Military-Industrial Complex

The military-industrial-complex image was popularized by President Eisenhower in his farewell address. Many of the ideas in that speech were similar to those that Harvard sociologist C. Wright Mills offered in *The Power Elite* (1956). In this image, powerful defense contractors work closely with the

[12]For a recent discussion of these changes, see Rourke (1991b).

Pentagon and with their mutual friends in the Congress to affect policy. A prominent feature of the complex is the revolving door between contractor and Pentagon personnel. The military-industrial-complex image is essentially the iron-triangle image applied to the defense-policy sector.

Evaluation: The notion of the military-industrial complex is closely related to the subgovernment and the iron-triangle images, so the comments above also apply here. Relations within this particular iron triangle sometimes are not very cozy, given the bitter competition that sometimes arises among rival defense contractors.

Issue Networks

Many experienced administrators have often talked of tending their personal networks or of their relationship to a broader policy network for a given field. In recent years, policy theorists have begun to write about "issue networks," which are seen as being broader than subgovernments. In addition to the iron-triangle members, such other actors as social science researchers, journalists, academicians, congressional staffers, and bureaucrats from other agencies may also be members of the issue network. The network image emphasizes, of course, the myriad of ways in which the members may be interconnected, and communication and authority may flow in unconventional and nonhierarchical patterns (Heclo 1978; Gormley 1986).

Evaluation: The image of issue networks is largely compatible with the bureaucratic-centered image. In general, the two images see the same sets of actors, although the bureaucratic-centered image reserves a place for a large number of potential actors. These potential actors could become involved at any time, but some probably would not show up as network members--particularly those who may be opponents of the designs of network members. In addition, the concept of network is too politically neutral to capture adequately the dynamics of power that pervade the process of governance. The bureaucratic-centered image focuses upon power relationships among all the actors and between the central bureaucratic actor--which is attempting to develop or maintain a structure of authority--and the other actors.

Advocacy Coalitions

Those interested in emphasizing the ideological base of politics within the network over time have introduced the image of advocacy coalitions for various policy areas; more

than one coalition may exist for a given policy area (Sabatier 1988). Although both the network and the advocacy-coalition images tend to move away from a focus on institutional actors, both assume that individuals who work in bureaucracies are prominent members of the network or coalition.

Evaluation: Because the network image is closely related to the advocacy-coalition image, the above comments apply. Perhaps the "advocacy coalition" has closer ties, however, with the image of a bureaucratic-centered governing process. Central to the advocacy-coalition idea is the assumption that the coalition's members are competing for the hearts and minds of the remainder of the policy network's members. Thus, the advocacy-coalition and the bureaucratic-centered images share a focus on the competition for power.

Corporatism

Many American political scientists have recently embraced the image of corporatism, long a key image for European analysts (Williamson 1989). According to corporatism, policy is made through negotiations among the most powerful legitimate and organized forces in society, such as government, unions, employers. In a fully developed corporate state, "peak" organizations representing such major forces as unions and businesses are seen as important political actors. Government is another partner in this corporate state, and important decisions on issues such as tariffs, wages, levels of employment, and inflation are negotiated among the groups at the macro level.

Corporatism was a principal feature of Mussolini's fascist state. In some countries, different corporatist forces--for example, the army, the church, or landowners--are components in the decisionmaking process. A modified form of corporatism, called tripartism, existed in Great Britain when Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979. She explicitly threw out that decisionmaking pattern, saying it was the job of government to govern, and she would not allow the labor unions and the employers to share the job. According to corporatism, government represented by elected officials and, especially, permanent bureaucrats plays an important role in negotiating with the other main sectors of society.

Evaluation: The American state is more robust than many theorists imagine. Such events as the Lockheed and the Chrysler bailouts, the move toward developing an industrial policy, and government-sponsored initiatives to promote the international competitiveness of American business all

underline the increase in planning, corporate bargaining, and government-business partnerships that are characteristic of corporatism. Nonetheless, the American state does not appear sufficiently hierarchical, consensual, collectivist, and unified to be accurately labeled a corporate state.

The United States has virtually no peak organizations that are authorized to bargain for their sector of society, and the relations within government and between government and other sectors are seldom harmonious enough to satisfy the requirements of a theory of corporatism. In addition, permanent senior civil servants are thought to play important roles as bargainers in a corporate state, whereas in this country such officials have in recent years lost to temporary political appointees much of whatever power they once enjoyed. Finally, Exhibit 1A-B depicting the bureaucratic-centered image contains many more actors than appear reasonable in a corporate image of governance.

IMAGES OF BUREAUCRACY AS THE PREDOMINANT ACTOR

Six images view bureaucracy as the predominant actor in the policy process: bureaucratic dominance, bureaucratic politics, technocracy, rationalism, public choice, and the garbage-can.[13] In general, these images exaggerate bureaucracy's influence and fail to take into account its vulnerabilities.

Bureaucratic Dominance

Although the theory of bureaucratic dominance has not been very important in the United States, it is widespread in some other countries. The assumptions are that the bureaucrats really run things in the government, that the bureaucracies constitute a permanent government, and that the elected executive and the legislature exercise little meaningful control over the bureaucracy. Governments come and governments go, but the bureaucratic state endures. Those assumptions are frequently made in several European countries and in Japan. For example, analysts say that Japanese politicians may worry about such things as the level of rice subsidies, whereas the bureaucrats in the Ministry of International Trade and Industry are deciding how much money should go into the race to build new generations of super computers. Although American editorial writers sometimes decry individual instances of apparent bureaucratic "usurpation" of power, few citizens believe that the bureaucrats really are, in general, the domineering force in political life (Roche 1983).

[13]I chose the word "predominant" rather than "dominant" because, in the words of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, some of the images argue only that bureaucracy is the principal actor "at a particular time or for the time being."

Evaluation: Although bureaucrats may play a decisive role in any given situation, the bureaucratic-centered image of governance is not in general an image of bureaucratic dominance. As indicated above, American bureaucratic agencies are highly vulnerable to the actions of many governmental and extra-governmental actors, and many of those actors are likely to play crucial roles in the governance process as it involves bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic Politics

The bureaucratic-politics image argues that the permanent bureaucrats and the presidential appointees who work together are the most important actors in the policy process. The best-known expositor of "bureaucratic-politics" theory is Graham Allison, who developed it in his book, *Essence of Decision*, where he introduced it as a "governmental (bureaucratic) politics paradigm" (1971, 62). Allison and Halperin have articulated the perspective as follows: "What a government does in any particular instance can be understood largely as a result of bargaining among players positioned hierarchically in the government" (1972, 43). Bargaining and strategic interaction are key concepts for the bureaucratic-politics image. A large literature now uses bureaucratic politics as its framework.

Evaluation: It is unfortunate for the general understanding of bureaucratic politics that Allison's subject concerned a defense crisis, that secrecy was involved, that few actors participated (of whom hardly any did not serve in public agencies), and that decisions about reacting to the placement of Russian missiles in Cuba had to be made very quickly. Similar foreign policy decisions, not all of which involved crises, have provided the subjects for other analyses by Allison and his colleagues (Allison and Halperin 1972; Halperin 1974). Perhaps even within the foreign-policy arena, however, the bureaucratic-politics approach exaggerates the importance of the bureaucratic actors and underestimates the importance of such extrabureaucratic actors as the president (Rosati 1981).

In any event, one should not assume that Allison's findings can simply be extrapolated into the general process of governance, which--in nondefense areas--often includes situations other than crises, frequently involves large numbers of actors (and often features extrabureaucratic ones), and usually lasts a long time, with much of the interaction taking place in the open. Although the bureaucratic actors do occupy key strategic roles and often have an important effect on outcomes, they are not predominant actors in many situations and also suffer political vulnerabilities.

Technocracy

Another image of bureaucratic dominance is the theory of technocracy, which originated in Europe, especially in France. Jacques Ellul (1964), who has written extensively about technocracy as a new governing form, contends that we are now being governed by technocrats. For years, some Americans have talked of being governed by "professionals"; now "technocrat" is becoming an increasingly common term. The idea is that as society becomes more technologically based and more professional expertise is required, power goes to the experts. Soon it will be so difficult for amateur politicians even to understand what the technocrats are doing--whether they are based inside or outside public bureaucracies--that any idea of popular control will have to be abandoned.

Evaluation: The image of technocracy points to the importance of expertise and professionalism that increasingly has a technical base. As information technology becomes more sophisticated, as other forms of problemsolving become more complex, and as society becomes more tightly interrelated, those inside or outside of bureaucracy who master the new technologies are likely to enjoy increased power. Nevertheless, expertise is only one significant base of political power. Nonexperts in the Congress, the interest groups, the media may retain considerable amounts of power. For example, politicians who may despair of understanding the technocrat's arguments may adopt a simplifying strategy and say "Yes, but you can only have this much money; see what you can build with it, or we'll cancel the project." Perhaps, also, the diffusion among the population of certain technologies may result in limiting the technocrats' powers: for example, the democratization of computer knowledge has reduced the powers of the high priests of computers; now that computer literacy is widespread, proposals about computers may be scrutinized by large numbers of fairly knowledgeable actors. The increasing power of technocrats ought not to be dismissed, but substantial checks on their power continue to exist.

Rationalism

Rationalism is a notion that has become widespread in American society because such big institutions as corporations, universities, and the military have trained large numbers of people as policy analysts, systems theoreticians, and systems engineers. For the last thirty years, for example, virtually every military manager has been trained to consult PERT charts and to systematize responses to problem situations in other ways. Rationalism also has become a major perspective in academic

life. For example, a recent handbook of systems analysis provides extensive advice on devising an analytic strategy for any problem using such techniques as expert judgment, operational gaming, screening alternatives, quantitative methods, forecasting in scenarios, program evaluation, validation, and quality control (Miser and Quade 1985).

The underlying assumption of this image is that one should handle problems rationally, perhaps through applying the computer's binary logic to them: to know what the enemy is likely to do in a given situation, play a war game. According to many versions of rationalism, the assumption is that one is not dealing with political decisionmakers; if, for example, a bureaucracy needs to decide whether to adopt a new regulation, a rationalist solution is simply to abide by the results of a cost-benefit analysis. If the analysts are in charge, governance becomes in its essence a rational decisionmaking process.

Evaluation: The pattern of decisionmaking in the bureaucratic-centered image definitely is not a purely rationalist pattern. Nonbureaucratic actors control some important decisions affecting bureaucracy, and they also succeed in penetrating the bureaucracy for their own purposes. Furthermore, at least as far as important decisions are concerned, the pattern of decisionmaking within the bureaucracy is likely to be quite political rather than purely rational. This is not to say that the pattern is irrational: Weber's observation that the rise of bureaucracy was concomitant with the development of rational-legal society was, of course, apposite.

But one of the most interesting features of American bureaucracies is that they mix the political and the rational. Rational techniques may be employed as tools within agencies, but much actual decisionmaking occurs within a political context, as internal bureaucratic actors vie for control and take into account the pressures from external actors. Of course, the internal struggle takes place within a hierarchical context; sometimes bureaucrats may seem to make decisions rationally, such as in following a decision rule that makes automatic budget cuts in an agency's divisions. Even in such cases, however, one should look for politically grounded deviations. Furthermore, supposedly rationalist solutions "mandated" by a decision rule may be rationalizations for decisions actually made on quite different grounds.

Public Choice

The discipline of economics has provided the theory of public choice, which really is a subcategory of rationalism

(Niskanen 1971). According to this notion, bureaucrats are simply maximizing their utility in choosing alternatives that will best help them to build their own empires or make life easy for themselves. They justify whatever it is they want to do in some other terms, such as the "public interest," but bureaucrats seek only their self-interest. Thus public-choice advocates campaign for such programs as privatization, contracting out, and user fees in order to bypass or down-size traditional bureaucracies.

Evaluation: The question of what motivates human beings has concerned psychologists and other investigators since the time of the Greek city states. Without rejecting the possibility that bureaucrats and other political actors may be motivated to pursue the public interest out of a spirit of altruism, it seems a safe strategy for investigators of governance to assume that these actors are pursuing strategies that will bring them satisfaction in some sense, even if the gratification sought is only psychic. Miles's Law, "Where you stand depends upon where you sit," seems a safe place to begin an investigation of bureaucratic motivation.

Nonetheless, certain assumptions of the public-choice image sometimes seem to be empirically wrong--for example the assumption that bureaucrats always seek to expand their budgets--and the image appears to exaggerate the importance of bureaucrats. In comparison with the bureaucratic-centered image, the public-choice image is deficient in that it fails to convey the richness of the interaction and the diversity of the values pursued in the governance process. Being told simply that bureaucrats selfishly seek to maximize their utility, even if that should appear to be true in a particular case, is quite an incomplete image of their role in governance. Considering the power of the other actors in the bureaucratic-centered image, the public-choice assumption that bureaucrats are likely to be able to enforce their budget-maximizing desires is facile.

The Garbage-Can

Finally, the garbage-can image of decisionmaking has been set out by James March and his colleagues (Cohen *et al.* 1972). They also are interested in rationalism, but in looking at how decisionmakers actually make choices, these scholars found that decisionmakers seldom behave rationally. They were not doing what they should have been doing according to the precepts of systems analysis, policy analysis, and pure rational thinking. Instead, they often acted irrationally. Frequently, in the bureaucracies, or "organized anarchies," that March and his colleagues studied, a number of alternative

problem solutions (often developed over a period of years, each with its perennial champions) were floating around looking for problems into which to be plugged. Arguing that outcomes were highly contingent, March and his colleagues concluded that outcomes often were arrived at simply by the decisionmaker reaching into a garbage can at a given time and grabbing one of the solutions that was floating around. Rational criteria might then be used to defend that position or to rationalize it. This process is conducted mainly by the bureaucrats; political decisionmakers are not featured players in the garbage-can image.

Evaluation: Discussion of the garbage-can image usually strikes a responsive chord with students who are experienced bureaucrats. They tend to be strongly attracted to the interpretation that the bureaucratic process often is nonrational, that choices and solutions often seek problems and decision situations, and that decisions often are made arbitrarily. But how accurate is the garbage-can image when applied to the overall governance process? Of course, the image was never intended to be applied in such a way. Instead, it was developed only to apply to choices made by organized anarchies, organizations such as universities and research institutes (Sproull *et al.* 1978). A focus on the larger governance process points to the importance of the extrabureaucratic actors contained in the bureaucratic-centered image. In the broad range of bureaucracies beyond organized anarchies, many more external and internal constraints, tighter hierarchies, and clearer missions often come to mind than those contained in the garbage-can image. Nevertheless, even within the bureaucratic-centered image, when analyzing the bureaucratic-decision process, applying the insights of the garbage-can image may be useful.

CONCLUSION

Conducting an inventory and evaluation of the variety of metaphors used to describe the role of bureaucracy in governance emphasizes the importance of the metaphors chosen. Because they define the world as it is analyzed, self-consciously appraising and periodically reassessing the metaphors would seem to promote what Landau calls "'hygiene' in metaphorical usage." Engaging in such practices also "would enable us to run far less risk than we take with the hidden, implicit, and rigidified metaphors that one frequently finds in the textbooks of political science" (1961, 336, 353).

A Bureaucratic-Centered Image of Governance

Offering the bureaucratic-centered image as an overarching framework for considering the process of governance is not intended as arguing for it as the one true image. Morgan's argument for a multi-image approach is persuasive: "For organizations are complex and paradoxical phenomena that can be understood in many different ways" (1986, 13). But the bureaucratic-centered image offers a capacious framework for understanding bureaucracy's role in the policy process. To be sure, the bureaucratic-centered image could be criticized as a lowest-common-denominator approach and as incapable of being tested empirically. Yet similar problems plague the other images discussed above; each usually can be operationalized only by making assumptions that oversimplify reality or that obviously are not generally applicable.

All the images discussed above, including the bureaucratic-centered image, are best thought of not as theories but as metaphors, or "pictures in our heads," in Lippmann's terms, that powerfully affect visions of reality. The prevalence of such metaphors in the social sciences tends to reinforce Lippmann's conclusion that they are necessary:

> For the real environment is altogether too big, too complex, and too fleeting for direct acquaintance. We are not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations. And although we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can manage with it. To traverse the world men must have maps of the world. Their persistent difficulty is to secure maps on which their own need, or someone else's need, has not sketched in the coast of Bohemia. (1922, 16)

Once we acquire, as analysts, a map of the governance process, we often develop a strong allegiance to it. For example, veteran journalist and percipient political observer Hedrick Smith became so wedded to the iron-triangle image that he continued to use it to describe defense policy even after bowing to the demands of a changing reality and introducing the image of a rival "dissident triangle" composed of the Pentagon's internal critics, their congressional allies, and the press (1988, 163-73). If the actors in both triangles play significant roles in a larger governance process, however, should not some new, less-solid geometric entity be introduced to encompass them all--perhaps a plastic hexagon? Thus, my expectations about recruiting supporters for the bureaucratic-centered image are modest. Some colleagues will, I trust, find the image to be a useful metaphor for interpreting bureaucracy's role in governance. At the same time, I hope also that the image will not prove to be a map of Bohemia's coast.

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