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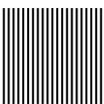
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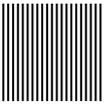
# ‘Without Affection or Enthusiasm’ Problems of Involvement and Attachment in ‘Responsive’ Public Management

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**Abstract.** *The paper focuses on the changing ethical template that programmes of ‘responsive’ or ‘entrepreneurial’ managerial reform require of civil servants. Contemporary demands for responsive public management contain two emotional injunctions to public bureaucrats. The first, derived from populist doctrines of political right, requires bureaucrats to be responsive to the needs of their ‘clients’. In the name of ‘recognition’ and the ‘politics of care’, for example, it is thought vital to inculcate in bureaucratic conduct a sense of ‘compassion’ or close identification with others’ feelings. Secondly, in the name of responsiveness to political superiors and the delivery of their policy objectives, bureaucrats are expected to exhibit ‘ownership’ of and identification with particular policies. They are required to be committed champions for and enthusiastic advocates of those policies. Both of these injunctions are deemed to be more in tune with democratic principles and the currents of contemporary ethical culture (‘diversity’ or ‘human rights’, for example) than what is represented as the unlamented Weberian world of rule-bound hierarchy. The paper seeks to question this assessment. **Keywords.** bureaucracy; enthusiasm; ethics; office; politicization; responsiveness*



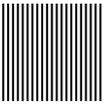


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It used to be reasonably easy to outline the contours of the administrative state, to distinguish public administration from other forms of organized activity, and to identify the professional role of state bureaucrats, public administrators or career civil servants in the conduct of government. No longer. Over the last two to three decades, public administration, particularly but not exclusively its Anglo-Saxon variant, has been subject to extraordinary degrees of turbulence. As the American scholar of public management, Gerald Caiden (2006: 515) has recently argued, there have been periods in the past when the public administration as an institution of government 'has undergone considerable upheavals ... but rarely ... at so fast and furious a pace, rarely so radical and revolutionary'. For another American scholar, Michael Lind (2005: 37), this continuous reform of the public administration is best seen as a vast political and managerial experiment 'as audacious in its own way, as that of Soviet Collectivism'. Among its most significant consequences has been what the French legal theorist Alan Supiot (2006: 2) terms the '*délitement*' or 'unbedding' of public institutions. He points in particular to the role of political elites themselves in this process of de-institutionalization, not least in their enthusiastic desire to be unencumbered by existing norms and machineries of government that might in some way abrogate their freedom to experiment. He argues that one significant casualty of this *délitement* has been a prized achievement of Western political and juridical practice—the distinction between a public office and the person who occupies it. 'Initially intended to characterize the office of sovereign, this distinction signifies that the office does not die, that it has a dignity transcending the human being who provisionally occupies it and who must respect it. When that respect is erased, public office from the highest to the most modest, is perceived as the private property of the present holder who can use it as he sees fit' (Supiot, 2006: 3).

The paper seeks to explore some of the reforms of the public administration as an institution of government that have contributed to this process of *délitement*, and to examine their consequences for the relationship between 'person' and 'office' in the practice of governmental administration. In particular, attention is focused on the changing ethical template that programmes of 'responsive' or 'entrepreneurial' managerial reform require of civil servants. I argue that contemporary political demands for responsive public management contain two emotional injunctions to public bureaucrats. The first, derived from populist doctrines of political right, requires bureaucrats to be responsive to the needs of their 'clients'. In the name of 'recognition' and the 'politics of care', for example, it is thought vital to inculcate in bureaucratic conduct a sense of 'compassion' or close identification with others' feelings. Secondly, in the name of responsiveness to political superiors and the delivery of their policy objectives, bureaucrats are expected to exhibit 'ownership' of and identification with particular policies. They are required to be committed champions for and enthusiastic advocates of those policies.



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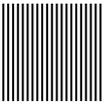
Both of these injunctions are deemed to be more in tune with democratic principles and the currents of contemporary ethical culture ('diversity' or 'human rights', for example) than what is represented as the unlamented Weberian world of rule-bound hierarchy.

The paper seeks to question this assessment. It does so through an engagement with the 'ethics of enthusiasm' in certain recent programmes of public management reform in the UK and elsewhere. The argument of the paper is that many of the political and administrative virtues associated with the development and reproduction of an ethic of bureaucratic office in public administration—in particular the capacity to act with a 'spirit of formalistic impersonality' hence 'without affection or enthusiasm, and without anger or prejudice' (Weber, 1994a)—are either unappreciated or simply ignored in contemporary programmes designed to inculcate the requisite 'enthusiasm' for 'responsiveness'. This carries with it certain dangers that earlier and now largely neglected critics of enthusiasm in civil and administrative life were more than aware of.

### ***Sine ira et studio: The Ethos of Bureaucratic Office***

Some sort of selective appropriation, no matter how opaque, of Max Weber's (1978: I–II) work on modern legal rational bureaucracy is often evident in contemporary political and organizational critiques of public bureaux. In particular, for those advocating enhanced organizational compassion, or those seeking to stimulate organizational enthusiasm and enterprise, the Weberian 'theory' of bureaucratic administration, and in particular its focus on the 'spirit of formalistic impersonality' regulating the work of officials, represents a useful foil against which to sharpen their critical knives. Here bureaucracy is viewed as the highly negative organizational embodiment of 'instrumental rationality, and its potentially disastrous consequences are highlighted—'dehumanization', 'the inversion of means and ends' and so on and so forth (Bauman, 1989; Scott, 1999).

What many critics fail to appreciate, however, is the extent to which Weber was not simply or exclusively interested in offering a formal organizational theory of 'bureaucracy' but rather, as Wilhelm Hennis (1988, 2000) has suggested, with indicating the ethical-cultural attributes of bureaucratic conduct. In order to approach Weber's work in this way—as an anthropologist of *Lebensführung* or 'conduct of life'—it is first necessary to dispense with the detritus of the Parsonian inheritance in Weberian scholarship, and to focus instead upon Weber as a somewhat eccentric and isolated moral theorist in a tradition of the ethics of office (Condren, 2006: 24). To put it in its most general propositional form: a presupposition of office was the expectation that people are educated (in the widest sense of that term) to live up to the demands and requirements of their respective offices. An office (*Lebensordnung*) was an 'identifiable and discriminate constellation of responsibilities and subordinate rights and liberties asserted to be necessary for their fulfilment' and manifested



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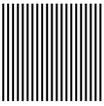
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not in an individual, represented as a distinctive, reflective and autonomous 'self' but rather in a *persona*. In other words, individual identity was specific to office, referring only to bodies considered as *personae*, as instituted statuses or conditions (Condren, 2006: 29).

For Weber, bureaucracy was a historically contingent and variable 'life order' constituting a distinctive ethical milieu in its own right, one whose practices of formalistic impersonality gave rise to certain substantive ethical goals. Thus, in his classic account of the 'persona' of the bureaucrat, for instance, Weber (1978, II: 978ff) treats the impersonal, expert, procedural and hierarchical character of bureaucratic conduct as elements of a distinctive ethos. Here office itself constitutes a 'vocation', a focus of ethical commitment and duty, autonomous of and superior to the bureaucrat's extra-official ties to kith, kin, class or conscience. The ethical attributes of the 'good' bureaucrat—strict adherence to procedure, commitment to the purposes of the office, abnegation of personal moral enthusiasms and so on—represent a remarkable achievement (Hunter, 1994: 157). In particular, Weber (1978, II: 983ff) stresses the ways in which the ethos of bureaucratic office-holding constitutes an important political resource because it serves to divorce the administration of public life from private moral absolutisms. Without the historical emergence of the ethos and persona of bureaucratic office-holding, Weber argues, the construction of a buffer between civic comportment and personal principles—a crucial feature of liberal government—would never have been possible. Indeed, without the 'art of separation' (Walzer, 1984) that the state bureau effected and continues to effect, many of the qualitative features of government that are regularly taken for granted—for instance, formal equality, reliability and procedural fairness in the treatment of cases—would not exist.

As Weber makes clear, the crucial point of honour for bureaucrats is not to allow extra official commitments to determine the manner in which they perform the duties associated with their office. 'On the contrary', the bureaucrat 'takes pride in preserving his impartiality, overcoming his own inclinations and opinions, so as to execute in a conscientious and meaningful way what is required of him by the general definition of his duties or by some particular instruction, even—and particularly—when they do *not* coincide with his own political views' (Weber, 1994a: 160). 'The official has to sacrifice his own convictions to his duty of obedience' (1994a: 204). This does not mean that officials only do the boring, routine work of public or state administration.

Independent decision-making and imaginative organizational capabilities are usually also demanded of the bureaucrat, and very often expected even in large matters. The idea that the bureaucrat is absorbed in subaltern routine and that only the 'director' performs the interesting, intellectually demanding tasks is a preconceived notion of the literati and only possible in a country that has no insight into the manner in which its affairs are conducted. (Weber, 1994a: 160)



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The key to understanding the ethos of bureaucratic office, Weber argues, resides in 'the kind of responsibility' associated with it. It is this, and not simple divisions between task complexity and simplicity, or between policy making and routine administration, that distinguishes the 'demands addressed' to this 'position'. As Weber (1994b: 330) puts it,

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, even his honour 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 ... This is the ethos of *office*.

Without this 'supremely ethical discipline and self-denial', Weber (1994b: 331) continued, the whole apparatus of the state would disintegrate, and thus all the political benefits deriving from it, would too.

Similarly, Weber (1978 I: 225–26) argued that it was odd for the *literati* to criticize bureaucratic conduct as antithetical to the realization of substantive ends; that is, as simply the organizational vehicle by which instrumental values supersede and/or eliminate all substantive values. Rather, as he made clear on a number of occasions, the 'formalism' of bureaucratic conduct—its instituted blindness to inherited differences of standing and prestige—produces the very substantive effects—enhancing democracy and equality, for example—that the *literati* claimed bureaucratic conduct would destroy (Weber, 1978 I–II: 1994b).

The dominance of a spirit of formalistic impersonality: '*Sine ira et studio*', without hatred or passion, and hence without affection or enthusiasm. The dominant norms are concepts of straightforward duty without regard to personal considerations. Everyone is subject to formal equality of treatment; that is, everyone in the same empirical situation. This is the spirit in which the ideal official conducts his office. The development of bureaucracy greatly favours the levelling of status, and this can be shown historically to be the normal tendency. Conversely, every social levelling creates a favourable situation for the development of bureaucracy by eliminating the office-holder who rules by virtue of status privileges and the appropriation of the means and powers of administration; in the interests of 'equality', it also eliminates those who can hold office on an honorary basis or as an avocation by virtue of their wealth. Everywhere, bureaucracy foreshadows mass democracy ... (Weber, 1978 I: 225–26)

In other words, the exclusion of extra official considerations from the conduct of official business, and the strictly formalistic impersonality with which that business was conducted, was a prerequisite not only of impartial and efficient administration, but also crucial to the production of mass democracy and increased social equality.

This idea that the 'formal' rationality of bureaucratic conduct itself gives rise to substantive ethical goals and effects, and is rooted in its own *Lebensordnung* or ethical life-order: that of the bureau, has been largely ignored by critics keen to 'rehumanize' official life. Like the *literati* chided



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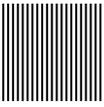
by Weber in his own day, contemporary anti-bureaucrats focus much of their attention upon the presumed negative consequences of the bureaucrat's formalistically impersonal obligations of office, and demand a shift in the relationship between these obligations and what they conceive of as the official's wider moral or political duties. It is to the work of these critics that I now turn.

### **Compassion and Enthusiasm: Problems of Attachment and Involvement**

Attempts to transcend the 'formalistic impersonality' characteristic of bureaucratic conduct and to re-humanize or re-enchanted official life in the name of the values of compassion or enthusiasm seem always to be with us.<sup>1</sup> In the 1970s, for instance, a young generation of teachers of public administration in the USA announced the arrival of the 'new public administration' (Marini, 1971). One aim of this movement was to help the poor and the powerless through equalizing economic and political power. A crucial means of achieving this end was to attack the principle of administrative impersonality.

The role of bureaucratic administration was to be re-imagined as somewhat subversive, promoting equality regardless of congressional or presidential mandates, or the wishes of so-called 'organized interests'. Administrators were encouraged to be basically partisan on behalf of the marginalized. Bureaucratic administration should no longer be judged on the efficient and effective securing of official purposes alone but rather on another 'unofficial' but more morally pressing set of concerns related to securing social justice. Here truly the ends would justify the means!

For critics of this movement, however, giving resources to administrators to allocate on the basis of their own moral consciences and sense of social justice left the door wide open for corruption (Thompson, 1975: Chapter 9). According to Thompson (1975: 66), for instance, it was difficult to see how a programme advocating the personal appropriation of public funds by administrators offered a solution to the problem of bureaucratic compassion. Rather, he pointed out—as Weber had before him—that modern, efficient legal-rational administration, and the democratic equalizations it gives rise to, was only possible when such partisan, particularistic practice was largely eliminated.<sup>2</sup> The modern administrative norm, which made efficient administration possible, was the rule that everyone that falls into the same particular administratively/legally specified category of person—pupil, retiree, spouse—should be treated equally. The result of this norm was to ignore aspects of individual uniqueness that fell below the horizon of visibility of the particular category, and to turn administration into a large scale process of dealing with cases within each category. Thus the norm was a prerequisite of many of the aspects of modern government that most people now took for granted—predictability, equality, and fairness in the treatment of cases, for instance.



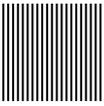
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These values of formal equality of treatment and considerations of due process meant that the public administration was constrained in its ability to act 'fast and loose'. It could not, for instance, drop the nuisance client (or 'marginal customer', as some would have it) for the sake of convenience (or moral outrage). For the public bureau, the client is everyone who meets (politically, administratively and frequently legally) pre-established criteria for service. The point is that once a clientele or category of person, is described with operational specificity, all individuals meeting that criteria have a claim on the administered service

Similar views about the need for enhanced bureaucratic compassion are to be found in contemporary demands for an 'ethic of care' or a 'politics of recognition' made by those who reject the claims of the liberal state and its agencies to substantive neutrality and formal evenhandedness (Shachar, 2000). Here, a long-standing critique of the one-sided instrumentalism of bureaucratic conduct joins hands with certain claims of contemporary social and cultural theory to encourage public officials to cultivate an independent mindset and commitments based upon wider moral considerations that transcend the office specific obligations of their given institutional milieu. For instance, office holders are encouraged to step outside of role in order to put themselves in the place of 'the other' (Bauman, 1989; Longstaff, 1994). However, like the NPA doctrine discussed above, this seemingly compassionate injunction may in fact undermine a rare and important ethical resource: the bureaucracy's 'official' capacity to separate the administration of public life from moral absolutes and zealous principle. In reducing matters of public authority and accountability to matters of individual morality and conscience, office holders for instance, are once encouraged to see their institutional obligations in terms other than those pertaining to the fulfilment of their official duties, and thus to blur distinctions between their sense of self—as a member of a particular religious group, say, or as a partisan advocate of some other collective cause—and the obligations of the office they occupy.

As John Uhr (1994: 166; 1999) has argued, though, ethics in governmental administration is about meeting the demands of public, not individual accountability. While ethics in administration can certainly involve questions of individual choice, that choice is not the individual's own one, but an official one: a choice facing him or her in their role or office as a professional public servant. Reiterating Weber's own conclusions, Uhr argues that the primary ethics question for public servants is not: what is my individual moral preference as to this or that course of action. 'Rather it is: "what is my duty or responsibility as a public official in relation to this or that course of action"' (Uhr, 1994: 166). We need only think for a minute about what might (and indeed has) happen(ed) to procedural fairness and hence formal equality when members of the police service decide for themselves what rules to follow and which to set aside on the basis of their own (say, racial) prejudices.

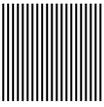


Since discussions about the ethics of bureaucratic conduct inevitably focus upon the ethics of an office or role, rather than the 'whole person', whatever that might mean, then clearly the ethical template, if that is the right phrase, needs to be tailored to the demands of that limited role, rather than expanded to cover the multiple ethical 'personas' that any individual human being can be implicated in.<sup>3</sup> As Weber (1994: 362–63) famously put it, 'we are placed in various orders of life, each of which is subject to different laws'. Is it then possible, Weber asked, 'that any ethic in the world could establish substantively identical commandments applicable to all relationships, whether erotic, business, family, or official, to one's relations with one's wife, greengrocer, son, competitor, with a friend of an accused man?' (1994: 357). Obviously state bureaux are no less in need of human beings who are in some basic sense 'sorted out' than any other institutions, but if, as John Rohr (1998: 21) argues, specific questions for government administrators must be postponed until they have first confronted the ethical demands of contemporary social and cultural theory, then 'we may never get on with our work'.

The idea that the state bureaucracy is a substantive ethical domain in its own right, and the associated notion that individuals are involved in multiple ethical personas, obviously seems strange from the perspective of a 'compassionate' morality committed to the generalization of a substantive 'ethic of care for the other' or to advancing a 'politics of recognition'. They seem equally suspect and bizarre though, to those for whom bureaucratic conduct is inherently conservative and un-enterprising. Those, for instance, who would encourage officials to exhibit a passionate commitment to, and to act with a degree of enthusiastic involvement in the delivery of, specific policies which is clearly out of kilter with what Weber understood as the ethical requirements of those acting 'bureaucratically'.

### **'Just Do It': The Ethics of Enthusiasm**

It would be difficult to underestimate the importance allocated to qualities of enthusiasm and enterprise in recent discourses of organizational reform in both private and public sector management. From the hyperbolic commandments of Tom Peters (1989) to 'develop a public and passionate hatred of bureaucracy' through to Gary Hamel's (2000) demands for 'revolutionary management', the emphasis has been on breaking with bureaucratic norms and forms of conduct in the name of innovation, risk-taking and organizational and personal liberation (Armbrüster, 2005; du Gay, 2005). While, in the aftermath of the corporate scandals at Enron, Worldcom, et al. the shine has somewhat been taken off of the tropes of revolutionary rule-breaking, nonetheless the equation of entrepreneurial enthusiasm with getting things done or delivering results, as the current wisdom has it, has far from disappeared from contemporary programmes of organizational reform. In discussions of public sector performance, for instance, governments of many different political hues have come to the



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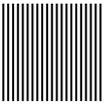
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conclusion that Weberian bureaucracy is not a solution but rather a barrier to 'delivery'. In their search for responsive, entrepreneurial forms of public management, party-political governments rail against the obstruction and inertia of conservative bureaucrats, and seek instead to surround themselves with enthusiastic, committed champions of their policies.

In recent years, for example, the issue of 'transformational leadership' has emerged as a hot topic within the field of public management (Newman, 2005). In Britain, the New Labour Government's White paper, 'Modernising Government' (CM4310, 1999) and its related policy documents (Cabinet Office, 1999a, 1999b) placed considerable emphasis upon the capacity of executive leadership to help change the culture of 'risk aversion' that it considered endemic to the British Civil Service. Thus, the White Paper stated that officials must 'move away from the risk-averse culture inherent in government' and that this was to be achieved through removing 'unnecessary bureaucracy which prevents public servants from experimenting, innovating and delivering a better product'. As with a previous attempt to inculcate 'real qualities of leadership' amongst senior civil servants, the *Next Steps Report* (Cabinet Office, 1988: para 35), quite what this meant in the British constitutional context, where ministerial accountability was still assumed to be a crucial constitutional convention, was not at all clear. At one level, encouraging all senior civil servants to become leaders and to take individual personal responsibility for their decision-making would make the accountability trail more, not less, complicated. With so many leaders among politicians and civil servants, where would the buck stop, exactly? Indeed, would not the distinction between these categories of person become somewhat blurred—and their respective 'responsibilities of office' compromised—if everyone is equally assumed to be a leader?

Throughout the Anglo-American world, governments have been busy preaching the virtues of entrepreneurial enthusiasm as part of a search for more 'responsive' forms of public management. In Britain, the current Labour government's obsession with 'delivery', combined with none-too-subtle distaste for the traditions of the civil service as the 'other governing profession', led it quickly to demand changes in the 'ethos' governing the conduct of public administrators. As the former British Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, put it in 2002, 'what I think we'd benefit from is a more effective managerial quality at the top, and I'd say put the "just do it" ethic in, is the change that's needed' (BBC Radio 4: 25 July 2002). Once again, the civil servant as part of an institutional 'gyroscope of state' and bulwark against, what Walt Whitman once described as 'the never ending audacity of elected persons', was to be reconfigured as a something akin to an enthusiastic, energetic and entrepreneurial 'yes-person'. The consequences of such a shift in style and emphasis for the civil service as a constitutional bureaucracy have become increasingly clear.

As I indicated earlier, the last three decades have witnessed a concerted attempt by governing parties in many different political contexts, to



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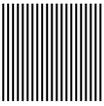
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strengthen their control over state bureaux. One aspect of this particular trend has been the erosion of the powers of centralized staffing agencies which safeguarded public service recruitment and promotions from political or official interference; strengthening ministerial control of top departmental appointments by removing the need to consult an independent staffing agency; substituting short term contracts for security of tenure in top official posts; and generating the general attitude that party-political governments should not have to tolerate obstruction or inertia from conservative bureaucrats, and should instead insist they were supported by enthusiastic advocates of their policies who would ensure that the latter were 'delivered' (Chapman, 2004). In attempting to achieve these ends, however, politicians and their advisers have arguably weakened the legitimate role of officials in government by undermining the Weberian ethos of bureaucratic office (Chapman, 2004; du Gay, 2000; Parker, 1993).

In particular, the tactic of increasing the use of external appointments to senior civil service positions, and, especially, the appointment of those with known prior policy enthusiasms, has given rise to two particular problems. The first is that of ensuring that standards in state service are maintained—that the obligations of office are lived up to; the second is that distinctions between office and self are not so blurred that the state service becomes a politically partisan institution.

In the UK, for instance, the political neutrality, or party political impartiality, of the British Civil Service, has flowed in no small part from its career basis (Bogdanor, 2001; Chapman, 2004). Career civil servants are expected to serve successive governments of differing party political hues. The key to being able to do this, as Weber indicated, is to cultivate a degree of indifference to the enthusiasms of all political parties. Traditionally, at least, civil servants have been trained to conduct themselves in such a manner. Indeed, in Britain, as elsewhere, people with strong party political or single issue interests have—until relatively recently—been unlikely to be appointed to senior civil service positions, or to present themselves for consideration as candidates in the first place (Chapman, 1988). As a result, civil servants have been likely to greet the panaceas of all political parties with caution. Inevitably, this leads them to embrace party political programmes with less fervour than party political enthusiasts would like. But this is part of their job, one assigned to them by the constitution. And in fulfilling this role they may be seen as servants of the state. It is precisely this *etatist*/constitutional role—an obligation of office—that is being affected by political demands for displays of 'enthusiasm' amongst civil servants, and which is evident in the growing number of partisan appointments to the senior echelons of the service.

New recruits coming from outside—whether from commercial organizations or social enterprises—will generally lack the traditional patterns of experience, such as those gained by being a private secretary to a minister, which help inculcate in civil servants those very conducts of impartiality



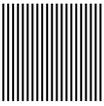
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described by Weber. Moreover, someone recruited from outside the service by virtue of relevant knowledge and approved commitments is likely to arrive with all sorts of partisan baggage derived from their previous situation. That is almost inevitable, if 'new' enthusiastic civil servants are expected to be cheerleaders for government, and act as committed champions for specific policies. It is not easy, however, for those same people to both fulfil such a role and at the same time to conform to traditional practices of subordination and lack of constitutional personality, their views being those of their minister, and not their own (Bogdanor, 2001).

As Bogdanor (2001: 296) has suggested, it is not clear, therefore, how far outside recruitment to senior policy positions in the Civil Service can avoid the dangers of politicization or at least a degree of prior policy commitment, incompatible with traditional notions of 'political impartiality'. The problem here, in effect, is that office and self become blurred, with committed champions coming to see the office as an extension of themselves, thereby effecting a confusion of public and private interests and identities. The American scholar Patrick Dobel (1999: 131) calls this 'zealous sleaze', a process whereby individuals come to view public office as an extension of their own will and ideological commitments—their enthusiasms. The introduction into state bureaux of too many people with prior policy commitments and enthusiasms sympathetic to the government of the day could therefore easily undermine the traditional obligations of office framing the conduct of the Civil Service as an institution of government. Similar objections can be made concerning the increased use of special advisers, especially when, as in some well known cases in the UK, this category of actor has been allotted extraordinary powers to issue orders to civil servants, or has, through its gatekeeper role with ministers, effectively been able to negate the influence of civil servants in the area of advising on policy issues (Daintith, 2002; Jones, 2002; Oliver, 2003; O'Toole, 2006).

Well before the latest manifestations of the ethics of enthusiasm and enterprise in government and public administration, the problems attendant upon the promotion of such capacities among officials was considered and foreseen by the Secretary to the Fulton Committee—perhaps the best known of the post-second world war parliamentary investigations into the role and function of the British Civil Service. As a result of his career in the British Civil Service, and his reflections upon its constitutional role and purposes, R.W. Wilding had some interesting things to say about the place of enthusiasm and enterprise in the professional ethic of the career public administrator. Writing in 1979, he argued that it was necessary for bureaucrats to 'distinguish energy from commitment; It is absolutely necessary to pursue today's policy with energy; it is almost equally necessary, in order to survive, to withhold from it the last ounce of commitment' (Quoted in Chapman, 2006: 6). For Wilding, as for Weber, enthusiasm for particular policies is dangerous for public administrators precisely because it means that bureaucrats become increasingly indistinguishable from



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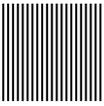
politicians (or entrepreneurs) in that they too are encouraged to engage in 'partisanship, fighting, passion—*ira et studium*' (Weber, 1994b: 330). If they act outside of office, or if the office itself becomes indistinguishable from another department of existence, bureaucrats will have ceased being bureaucrats and have become something else altogether. How then, can they continue to live up to the obligations of their office? The abiding problem of 'enthusiasm' in administrative life, is precisely the ways in which it can effectively undermine what Weber and Wilding see as the virtues of the non-sectarian comportment of the bureaucratic person. In so doing, the ethics of enthusiasm run the risk of returning the administration of public life to the pursuit of private moral absolutisms, rather than, as with bureaucratic ethics, divorcing it from them.

### Genealogies of 'Enthusiasm'

The conjoining of enthusiasm and moral absolutism may at first seem rather strange or even outrageous to modern minds. After all, in much contemporary usage of the term, 'enthusiasm' functions simply as an abstract noun which sums up what are taken to be the more or less praiseworthy qualities of keenness and verve as applied to any number of activities in a diverse range of walks of life. However, the semantics of enthusiasm have not always appeared quite so innocent. For most people in 17th century England, for example, enthusiasm was almost always linked to religious controversy, and meant something excessive by definition (Tucker, 1972: 4). While contemporary usage rarely implies a specific theological stance, enthusiasm nonetheless remains a rather slippery term. To be described now as enthusiastic cannot be taken as a simple compliment: there is still an implication of more heat than light, 'and not the heat that generates power at that' (Tucker, 1972: viii). In this way, perhaps, contemporary meanings of enthusiasm, enthusiastic and enthusiast can be seen to carry a trace of their early modern meaning.

The reoccupation of the terrain and tropes of religious faith and metaphysical speculation by their ostensibly secular counterparts (communism, nationalism and so forth) has been well documented (Blumenberg, 1985; Furet, 1999). Might such a reoccupation be taking place in relation to contemporary management ideas in the domain of public administration? Perhaps the current demand for responsiveness gives a clue—with its explicit incitements to 'enthusiasm' and its suspicion of mediation ('Just do it', civil servants are asked, don't ask clever questions). Certainly, the association of enthusiasm with moral absolutism has a considerable historical genealogy, such that demands for exhibitions of enthusiasm among state officials need to be greeted with considerable caution.

In her exemplary genealogy of 'Enthusiasm', Susie Tucker (1972) pays considerable attention to the use of the term during the period of religious civil war in early modern Europe. Her first port of call is a number of 17th century English dictionaries. In a text from 1656 *Enthusiasts* are



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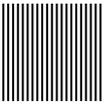
described as a 'sect of people that thought themselves inspired with a Divine spirit, and to have clear sight of all things which they believed' (1972: 15). The adjective deployed is Enthysiasmical, 'pertaining to an inspiration'.

Similarly, Edward Phillips in *The New World of Words* of 1658 describes 'Enthysiaists' as 'a certain sect of people which pretended to the Spirit and the Revelations'. By the 1720 edition, Enthusiasm has become 'Fanaticism, a making shew of Divine Inspiration'. In 1696, Edward Coles defines Enthysiasm (Enthusiasm) as 'the doctrine or principles of an Enthusion' (or Enthusiast) who 'is pretending to divine revelation and inspiration' (Quoted in Tucker, 1972: 15).

All are agreed that 'enthusiasm' is related to religion and that religious enthusiasm is a pressing problem. In the context of the enduring religious strife of the 17th century, such an understanding is unsurprising. Thomas Hobbes, for instance, dedicates considerable hostility in *Leviathan* to rival gangs of religious enthusiasts stirring up sedition and disobedience in the name of obedience to Divine revelation. Such men, he argued had been a principal cause of the English civil war (Condren, 2002: 67). Throughout texts of the time, a constant complaint is that 'enthusiasts' and 'enthusiasticals'—those who believed that God spoke to them directly and who therefore enjoyed an unmediated access to the truth—are so sure of their own righteousness whatever the evidence to the contrary that they will brook no opposition (Tucker, 1972: 23). Such private inspiration and 'enthusiasm' flows easily into antinomianism with disastrous consequences.

The automatic link between enthusiasm and excess that pervades seventeenth century discourse is therefore connected to what Condren (2002: 67) describes as 'a cacophony of priestly voices' clamouring for authority, inciting violence and rationalizing mayhem on the basis of a claimed direct relationship with the divine. Such religious enthusiasts, as Dominique Colas (1997) has shown, exhibit a hatred of mediation and a disgust of representation that seizes them each time they think 'it possible to bring forth, without delay, the Kingdom of God on earth'.

As is well known, Hobbes's solution to the problem of endemic religious strife was the establishment of single and supreme source of authority and political decision-making and power—the ultimate mediator—the sovereign state. This entity was to remain distinct not only from the people who were deemed to have originally instituted it, but also from those office-holders who might be permitted to wield its power at any particular time (Skinner, 1997: 15). The state is therefore instituted to ensure peace and security and in so doing it floats free of 'higher' religious principle and justification (Hunter, 1994: 41). The emergent ethical autonomy of the state is therefore dependent upon the sequestering of 'spiritual' issues from governmental politics, relegating the former to matters of 'private' concern and reconstituting the latter in the light of a worldly political rationality. Thus, a sharp distinction is to be drawn between 'the persona of the citizen as an inhabitant of the sovereign state, whose public obedience



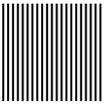
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to the law is a condition of social peace, and the private persona of the 'man' (*sic*) of conscience, who might follow his own spiritual path as long as this does not interfere with his public duty to the law' (Hunter, 1994: 157). Henceforth, the aims of public authority are to be purely civil and political in character and it is in rigorously adhering to such aims that the state will be able to put an end to religious conflict and to domesticate 'enthusiasm'.

However, the state's capacity to detach governmental decisions and actions from personal loyalties and religious enthusiasms required more than an idea to be accepted. It was dependent upon certain machinery being in place. So while Hobbes was no doubt correct to insist that civil law should define the rights and duties of the individual as citizen, the law alone was not enough to separate political administration from religious enthusiasm. As Weber's work suggests, it was the bureau that emerged as an administrative centre that could detach decision-making in government as far as possible from religious enthusiasms and other personal loyalties. The needs of the state to practically effect social peace therefore played a crucial circumstantial role in giving rise to what Weber describes as the central features of bureaucracy: formal division of jurisdictional areas; a hierarchy of distinct offices; a system of 'files' or information inscription and processing; procedural management of office routines; the maintenance of the office holder being secured independently of the income of the office and so forth. It is here we find the human and technical conditions for separating political administration from the personal will of those in power (Hunter, 1994: 157).

The development of the bureaucratic ethos, that non-sectarian comportment of the person outlined earlier, therefore furnishes the state with an important tool in its attempts to secure social pacification and a modicum of predictability in human affairs. The political and social virtues flowing from this bureaucratic ethos derive in large part from its own imperviousness to particular sorts of enthusiasm. This does not preclude bureaucrats from pursuing their instituted purposes with energy, demonstrating rigorous dispassionateness, integrity and propriety, including appropriate attention to criteria of efficiency, effectiveness and economy (as understood in a governmental sense) in the conduct of official business, for example. This commitment, though—one for behaving constitutionally, within the confines of their office, as servants of the state—precisely excludes enthusiasm for particular policies themselves. As recent events in the UK have demonstrated, most notably, perhaps, those surrounding the decision to go to war in Iraq, enthusiasm for a particular course of action, combined with impatience with due process considerations and the minutiae of bureaucratic record-keeping, can lead to all sorts of problems. After all, it is a matter of considerable public interest/statist concern if the mediating or 'buffering' role performed by bureaucratic ethos is bypassed or transcended, and enthusiasm, for an ideal of democratization, say, and hunch, about



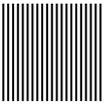
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the presence of weapons of mass destruction, for instance, play a greater role in governmental decision-making than a comprehensive and frank assessment of available evidence and as full and fair a consideration of the likely effects of those decisions as is practically feasible. Particularly so, when what is delivered as a result is the very opposite of that claimed and expected (a veritable 'war of all against all', in Hobbes's terms). Perhaps such an untutored appeal to 'enthusiasm' is a mechanism for returning us, in however oblique a sense, to the sorts of conditions—uncertainty, insecurity and so forth—the development of the state and the bureaucratic ethos were designed to prevent. In other words, such enthusiasms can produce that institutional *delimitement* described and condemned by Supiot (2006).

The antipathy towards enthusiasm inherent in the bureaucratic ethos has its own *raison d'être*. While it is easy to see how such an ethos can be viewed by politicians as a licence to obstruct, it was, until comparatively recently, generally considered indispensable to the achievement of responsible (as opposed to merely 'responsive') government, because, it was seen to balance and even complement political will, making governance more effective in the long run.

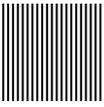
As John Rohr has suggested, the bureaucratic ethos is in important respects necessarily unresponsive. The role accorded to governmental bureaux in many polities has been deliberately devised to isolate officials from the electoral process, or from the demands of 'special interests', for example, thus institutionalizing the very 'unresponsiveness' which so many enthusiasts decry. And, it has been so organized to serve a positive political purpose—to help preserve a modicum of stability, consistency, and continuity, in the face of the vagaries and experimental enthusiasms of partisan politicians, for instance. In this specific and limited sense, the bureaucratic ethos is a conservative one. The bureaucratic comportment of the person embodies an acceptance, which no moral zealot really can abide, of the irreconcilable diversity of human goods, and an awareness of the possible costs, moral and otherwise, of pursuing one end to the detriment of another. In this way, the bureaucrat tends to see in every controversial change to existing social arrangements the possibility of important losses as well as the opportunity for certain gains (Larmore, 1987: xiv). Like the ethos of the Lawyer/Statesman described so eloquently by Anthony Kronman (1993: 161), the good bureaucrat 'is unlikely to be moved by that passion for purity which motivates the adherents of every great political simplification' and to approach programmes of radical change with a degree of caution unlikely to appeal to the party political enthusiast. In this way, though, rather than being soulless, uncaring 'pen pushers', unelected policy wreckers, or un-entrepreneurial 'automata of the paragraphs', as the *literati* (old and new) would have it, the bureaucrat's antipathy to enthusiasm can be seen to provide an important service to the state, and to make a crucial contribution to the long-range effectiveness of government.



## Concluding Comments

The main argument of this paper has been that contemporary political and managerial demands for increased ‘responsiveness’ and ‘enthusiasm’ when applied to the professional commitments of civil servants should be treated with considerable scepticism. As we have seen, the demand for greater levels of ‘personal’ involvement on the part of career civil servants in championing and delivering policies and related demands upon them for increased levels of personal attachment to those policies, has been a hallmark of a number of recent political and managerial initiatives in government. In the United Kingdom, for instance, as I indicated earlier, one area where this has become more evident is in the practice of appointing to civil service positions people with known policy commitments who governing politicians regard as ‘one of us’ in a way that they do not so regard career civil servants. This does not imply that these enthusiasts are necessarily members of the same political party as their recruiting sergeants, but simply that they are advocates of particular policy programmes or solutions favoured by the governing party, and are committed to seeing them delivered come what may. At the same time, and not unrelatedly, there has also been a substantial increase in the number of so-called ‘special advisers’ operating in government, some charged with executive responsibilities, and once again exhibiting a more partisan approach to policy making and delivery than career civil servant would be expected to manifest (O’Toole, 2006).

The consequences for the institutional and ethical integrity of governmental machinery of this embedding of enthusiasm or ‘partisanship’ within the organs of the state need careful consideration. Both historical evidence concerning the part played by zealous moral or spiritual enthusiasms in stirring up civil sedition and disobedience in the name of obedience to divine revelation, and contemporary problems attendant upon the creation of new breed of civil servants ‘more entrepreneurial ... more adventurous like their private sector counterparts’, individuals keen to take risks in their passionate desire to ‘deliver’ (Prime Minister, 2004), suggest that the contemporary passion for the ‘ethics of enthusiasm’ may be dangerously misplaced. In their search for greater control over the state bureaucracy and for a more committed approach from it to delivering what they want, politicians may well have weakened or undermined the important role played by the bureaucratic ethos—with its spirit of formalistic impersonality—in the responsible operation of a state and in the effective running of a constitution. When advocates of the ethics of enthusiasm characterize governmental administration as an unreconstructed Weberian world of ‘formal rationality’ they forget that for Weber such an ethic of *Zweckrationalität* was not merely ‘instrumental’ or dependent upon arbitrarily given ends. Rather an ethos of formalistic impersonality—‘without affection or enthusiasm’—was promised upon the cultivation of indifference to certain ultimate moral ends. This indifference was a remarkable, if ultimately fragile, achievement, requiring those



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subject to its demands to learn to take cognisance of the incompatibility between a plurality of enthusiastically held convictions about rival moral and spiritual ends—especially those religiously inspired enthusiasms—and hence the possibly disastrous consequences of pursuing one of them at the expense of the others. Seen in this light, formal rationality is not predicated upon an amoral instrumentalism, a wilful obstructionism, or a lack of care or recognition, but on what we might term a positive, statist 'ethics of responsibility'.

### Notes

- 1 In the event of a not entirely supportive 'official' reaction to this programme, the young revolutionaries indicated that 'it may be necessary for the New Public Administration to develop outside the existing institutional framework and thinking of the university and government' (Marini, 1971: 233). While this is a favoured trope of many a radical movement, it is nonetheless quite breathtaking. As one commentator remarked at the time, 'this viewpoint represents a most amazing effort to establish a new claimant in place of the owner (that is, in place of the public). It is a brazen attempt to "steal" ... sovereignty' (Thompson, 1975: 66).
- 2 As Weber (1994a: 161) puts it, 'the official should stand "above the parties", which in truth means that he must remain outside the *struggle* for power of his own. The struggle for personal power and the acceptance of full *personal responsibility for one's own cause (Sache)* which is the consequence of such power—this is the very element in which the politician and the entrepreneur live and breathe'.
- 3 The consummate butler, Stevens, in Kasuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day*, is frequently represented as someone whose absorption in the 'formal impersonality' of their professional role has damaging consequences for other aspects of their life, and indeed for the lives of those surrounding them (see, for instance, Knights and Willmott, 1999). Certainly, Stevens, and the equally dedicated bureaucrat in Bertrand Tavernier's marvellous, but now largely neglected film, *Life and Nothing But*, may well render themselves remarkably incompetent in 'matters of the heart', but as Jeffrey Minson (1994:4), for instance, has argued what we have to ask is whether such individuals are 'any more ethically (or emotionally) inadequate than those tiresome individuals who feel compelled to *integrate* their professional character, e.g. as a teacher or a therapist, into their political or family relationships'.

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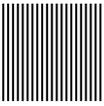
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