UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

LYNDA M. MCCARTER

ENTITLED A DISCOURSE ON THE ORIGIN OF DYNAMIC INACTION

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Instructor in Charge

APPROVED

HEAD OF DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
A DISCOURSE ON THE
ORIGIN OF DYNAMIC INACTION

BY

LYNNE M. WOENIAK

THESIS

FOR THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS
IN LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
URBANA, ILLINOIS
1980
The illustrations used in this paper are true, for all their elements of implausibility. During the autumn of 1979, I served as an intern in the State Department's Bureau of International Organizations. This afforded me the opportunity to work with officers not only from my particular office, the Directorate of Agriculture, but with officers from the Departments of Agriculture and Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget, and the Presidential Commission on World Hunger. I have no scandals to recount and no interesting classified material to divulge. What I do have to relate are merely everyday occurrences in the government of the United States. These are curiosities enough. I have few profound theories to reveal on what has come to be known in a wistful and flattering phrase as "the power structure." However, I do have some reflections on why the power structure has become an inert Leviathan.

I do not claim to be clinically detached from the subject matter. I find it revolting, infuriating, and funny. Mostly, I find it puzzling. I suspect that I would have lost interest in it in a short while—there is a limit to the fascination of any puzzle—if I had not been compelled to speculate about the origins of ambiguous political language and its consequences. Concurrently, ambiguous political language is a cause and an effect and a means and an end of the political bureaucracy. But, this is not the bottom line.

While working in the State Department, I discovered what I believe to be one of the fundamental laws of government: Whatever happens in government...
could have happened more expeditiously, and usually it would have been better if it had. And to this law there is a corollary: Once things have happened, no matter how incomprehensibly, they will be regarded as manifestations of a Higher Reason. Or, for every argument inside the government that some weak bureaucratic arrangement should be changed, there are at least twenty arguments which show that the existing order rests on divine logic and that tampering with it will bring down the heavens. And to this corollary there is also a corollary: Dynamic Inaction will be preserved through bureaucratic language.

Bureaucratic language suffers from staleness of imagery and lack of precision. Its prominent characteristics include: euphemism, bombast, periphrasis, circumlocution, absurdity, hyperbole, tautology, and obscurity. Moreover, the use of this language in governmental agencies illustrates a bureaucratic gravitation toward “motion” rather than “movement.” Why do bureaucrats prefer motion to movement? In this paper, I submit three hypotheses to solve this question. One, motion tolerates self-preservation: bureaucrats are risk-averse to movement—the “credentialism theory.” Two, motion masks incompetence—the “incompetence theory.” Three, motion is the result of restraints, structural (internal) and external, imposed upon bureaucrats—the “restraint theory.” Language is used and misused to achieve motion over movement. Hence, my proofs exemplify how language is manipulated to achieve the desired ends of bureaucrats.

My first reaction to the obfuscation of governmental language and policies is to blame the obfuscation on the perniciousness or stupidity or laziness of foreign service officers and civil servants. After all, why would the general public confuse themselves anymore than they are confused already? Thus, the officials who promulgate the policies must be responsible.
This accusation has enough surface credibility to be persuasive. It is conceivable that officials intent on expanding their own power and protecting their own jobs, unconsciously if not deliberately, contrive a vocabulary that only someone completely familiar with it can hope to translate. Resultingly, bureaucrats' decisions can be challenged by outsiders only with difficulty, for full-time specialists are not easily defeated by insurgents who make their living at other pursuits and who cannot devote themselves exclusively to operating the system. It is a clever, self-serving strategy for officials to create linguistic monographs, conferring in themselves a near-monopoly from which they cannot be dislodged.

Conversely, it is equally possible that official stupidity and laziness may be responsible for the dynamic inaction and unintelligibility of bureaucratic language. Dull, slothful civil servants have to be furnished with specific, minutely detailed replies for every conceivable situation because, lacking intelligence or initiative, they cannot be trusted to devise sensible responses on their own. They are likely to formulate unsuitable and pointless decisions for two reasons. They lack the understanding to recognize the irrelevancy and inappropriateness of what they are doing, and they are not industrious enough to check all the facts or trace the effects of what they do. Some bureaucrats cling to familiar courses of action long after these methods cease to be appropriate. Wanting in wisdom to invent responses quickly or adhering slavishly to established procedures and rote recitation of past policies (the most imaginative behavior of which such people are capable and certainly the safest), these bureaucrats never arrive at solutions to problems.
Clearly, the two portrayals of officialdom are mutually contradictory. Nobody can be both diabolically clever and dull-witted at the same time. One may contend that some civil servants are of one kind and some of the other, and that together they are responsible for the murkiness in government. But, even though it is tempting to accept the notion that knaves and fools are the dominant elements among civil servants and foreign service officers, it is difficult to accept that the population consists only of two categories. There is no a priori reason to assume State Department officers are intellectually inferior to the rest of the population. Neither the credentialism theory nor the incompetence theory seems to be a complete explanation for the abundance of murkiness in language and action.

Some officers are disserved by general inaction and ambiguous language. They would like to pursue their program goals energetically, efficiently, and speedily. They chafe at the obstacles placed in their way, the restraints placed upon them, and the procedures they must follow. Their discretion may be legally limited by statutes, executive orders, and departmental directive. It may be politically limited by the need to accommodate interest groups and the demands of clients, and by the risks of adverse publicity in the communications media. Bureaucrats are often prevented from moving forcefully and promptly. They are also forced to allocate precious time and money to the demands for reports and information made by Congress and the public. They must process vast streams of data they do not want to collect but are obliged to collect for others. In other words, the costs, the inconveniences, and the burdens of governmental constraints oppress officials.

This is not at once an original, bold, comprehensive, and timely study (spoken by one who does not seek to show herself worthy of bureaucratic
responsibility, who does not solemnly demonstrate that she always places the nation's interest before her own, and who remissly (somewhat), com-
prehensively, and unambiguously faces facts). And because my illustrations can be criticized on grounds of subjectivity, I will acknowledge that an argument for preciseness of language has its limits. I do not know if grammarians were any less taken in by, for example, the Gulf of Tonkin af-
fair than other groups. I assume professors of logic often make mistakes.
Nine Justices of the Supreme Court may consult the same laws, check the same precedents, and have contradictory conclusions elegantly expressed.
Certainly, those in the State Department have more education and exposure to different cultures than the national average. Yet, there is a poverty of expression, an inability to say anything in a striking way, and an ad-
diction to language that is almost denatured and in which what little humor does occur is usually unintentional.

The analysis of most issues is quite accessible to anyone who wants to take an interest in them. The alleged complexity, depth, and obscurity is part of a created illusion which aims to make the issues seem remote from the general population, and to persuade them of their incapacity to organize their own affairs or to understand the problems without a tutelage of inter-
mediaries. It is important for professional bureaucrats to make everyone be-
lieve in an intellectual frame of reference which they alone possess. There-
fore, they alone have the right to comment on certain issues, or only they are in a position to do so.

How does this happen? In business, the constant pressures of younger
and more highly educated people coming up from the bottom are unlikely to discourage a tendency to conform. The more difficult it becomes to find and hold a job suited to one's abilities, the less probable it is that people holding important positions will feel inclined to adopt bold postures and put forward original ideas. This, in theory, should not happen in government where idleness and inefficiency are not barriers to continued employment and where a man or woman has almost to commit a criminal offense to lose himself/herself out of a job. Civil servants and especially foreign service officers owe much of their success and prestige to the specialized language they use. The fact that it is either incomprehensible or only half-comprehensible to the lay world allows them to surround themselves with a mystique which they feel, rightly or wrongly, acts to their advantage. To be asked to drop this special phraseology and the habit of mind on which it depends is, for some, to deprive them of their personality and they resist it.

Two or three weeks after I arrived, I learned about the glories of the collective protective product. Assigned to the task of preparing the 1960 Program Decision paper for the Food and Agriculture Organization, I outlined what I thought was the Department of Agriculture's understanding of the options available. Of course, no one in the Department of Agriculture could tell me what the perceived options were; rather, a memo was submitted to me on the subject. This untouched, unedited memo on their memo was given to my director.

"Position papers can be written only after a chief executive has decided precisely what his position is going to be." William Safire, *The New Language of Politics* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 347.
This is not so much an options paper as it is an "advocacy paper"—advocacy of a major change in U.S. policy from its present negative (U.S.D.A. perception) stance to one of active cooperation with FAO (its Director-General and its program) in furthering U.S. (read U.S.D.A.) objectives, i.e., an expanding U.S. financial contribution.

If my reading of the options paper is correct, 10 must decide whether it is willing to see the 1980 Program Decision paper be the vehicle for a re-examination of the direction of U.S. policy or whether it insist that the paper address FAO problems in the context of our present policy.

One does not have to be in this office very long to realize that U.S.D.A. and, in a more muted way, A.I.D. are not in sympathy with our policy toward the FAO (at least not down here in the trenches). It may be that Berland-Hewathway, Maynes and Nooter-Shakow are all in agreement and that the paper reflects the particular view of the author—to I cannot tell.

A few days later, this memo came back to me with my name on it.

The U.S.D.A. has disseminated to this office a paper containing what they perceive to be the five options surrounding the 1980 Program Decision issue area.

Whereas 10's traditional stance has been to regard this subject matter as an ongoing collaborative review process and to encourage increased fiscal discipline; the U.S.D.A. would prefer to effectuate a more active process of involvement and synthesisization. This would be made operative through a rigorous investigation of how current probimes in FAO interlink, how they are monitored, and how they are executed. Or, in other words, the difference between 10 and U.S.D.A. once again lies in that grey area between foreign policy and overt commitment.
With this documentary evidence at hand, it is my understanding that 10 may prioritize its objectives in one of two ways. One, the Program Decision paper may operationally function as a re-examination of the thrust of U.S. policy. Or, it may focus on the current situation in the frame of reference of our policy at this point in time.

Clearly, a great many systems have evolved to differentiate the positions of State, A.I.D., and U.S.D.A. Perhaps this paper is relying on the opinions of its author; it is not readily indicated.

To understand why "theirs" cleared and circulated as a document (when they did not even read the options paper) and why "mine" did not, let us first take a cursory glance at some of the language they used. For example, "an ongoing collaborative discussion review process" resembles the Duke of York's job in the words of a character in Shakespeare's Richard II. "Ales poor duke, the task he undertakes is numbering the sands and drinking the oceans dry." In other words, since it is not likely that the present process will be terminated in the near future, why initiate a new one? A more pertinent question, however, is what purpose does this serve? Interlink, you ask? (I did.) Is it different from connect? Is it a combined form of interface and linkage? "It's used as in electrical circuitry," a highly charged officer told me. "It's not just connected, current is passing through. It is important that we know how that current will flow so we don't hit a short." (Do you suppose he is a member of the electrical workers' union?) Nor is the gray area between foreign policy and over commitment something I would consider the epitome of exactitude. This troubled me for a while, but my director assured me "everyone knows where to find the gray area." Of course, I thought, it is out-of-doors under a
heavy cloud cover. A few years ago Kissinger spoke of the "twilight area between tranquility and open confrontation." Intuition tells me the grey area is right before the twilight area. Needless to say, visibility is not good in either one.

I find that few people can remain entirely unaffected by a regular daily diet of this glossy wordiness (theirs). Utterly memorable but clearly meant to impress, it can be churned out page after page by a reasonably skilled practitioner with very little effort. It numbs the mind and stuns rather than communicates. Those who work long under its influence destroy their ability to produce sharp-edged language. Furthermore, those for whom words have lost their value are likely to find that their ideas have lost their value... that is, if a new idea was there.

When I first told my director I did not think his version expressed my understanding of the options available, you might have thought I was telling him the sun was going to rise in the west tomorrow. As that conversation progressed, I realized I was attacking more than the language of a mere memorandum. I was attacking a creed, an organization's faith. In defending his version, he never said "I," he always said "We." He meant all of the people with whom he worked through all the years, all the people who developed the policy to that point and believed in it. Was I indifferent to everything that had been done? More importantly, was I implying that it was wrong?

This is the simplest source of the steady unmitting resistance which a new policy encounters in government. Perhaps, I should say this is the resistance I imagine a new policy encounters. I was not proposing a new policy; I was not even certain what the old policy was. A new policy dis-
possesses people; it takes their property away. The point of what they know how to do, of what they have always done is lost. The old group loses its rationale, its importance, its internal hierarchy. Somehow, a change or movement seems arrogant.

"The Department" is always present, impalpable, vast, moving at its own speed, living on its own terms. Ideas must be studied, cleared here, coordinated there. The product is not likely to differ sharply from what has been inherited. In most bureaus of the State Department, there is a feeling created by the procedure of rotating people in and out of posts, which seems characteristic of career services. The officers come and go, the ship remains; and the function of the officer while he is a-board is to see that the ship avoids collisions and stays in good repair. An officer comes to an assignment, and he is told what policy is. He must find a way to resist the pressures of people and events and to turn over the policy to his successor in the same condition in which it was when he received it from his predecessor. Thus, there tends to be an established tradition in each area of foreign policy.

The inertia of government, the sense within it that change is unjust or impious, means that when alternatives to what exists are under consideration, they are usually narrowly conceived. The larger the change proposed, the heavier the case against it. All the time that policies are studied, choices defined and orders given, in the background the muffled sound of papers being shuffled to protect acquired positions, whether intellectual or bureaucratic, can be heard. "Options are kept open," the saying goes, "through the proper channels."

Washington, appropriately, since it is the capital of the United States, is the place where language is most thoroughly debased. Bureaucrats are
more successful than advertisers, who are more successful than academi-
cians who regard someone talking to someone else as information transfer. 
Language is debased here because it assumes definitions which go unexamined. 
Definitions which go unexamined create the illusion of movement.

Consider the word "dialogue," that being what an assistant secretary 
who cannot think of anything to issue clarion calls for issues clarion calls 
for. "We need," he exclaims, "a dialogue." This means he is being construc-
tive. Rhetoric is used when an official wants to dismiss some argument or 
proposal as not constructive and to convey a tone of tolerable contempt. 
"This," he says, "is rhetoric." Calls for dialogue are not dismissed as 
rhetoric; if they were, political life in the United States would come to 
an end. Dialogues sanctioned by the Administration engage developed and 
developing nations, producing and consuming nations, East and West, North 
and South and are conducted in a meaningful, true, patient, honest, respons-
able, and conducive atmosphere. Soon after taking office, Carter, like most 
other presidents, called for a new dialogue with the nations of Latin Ameri-
ca, although most of these nations were not aware that the old dialogue had 
ended, or even had begun. Later he called for a deepening dialogue with 
Latin America. Until then, I thought a deepening dialogue took place be-
tween two men digging a hole.

Only those of deputy assistant secretary status and above may request 
a dialogue in the State Department, and it is assumed that the actors and 
subject involved are of relative importance. (Remember: relevancy is a 
state of mind.) I was involved in a dialogue once. Mr. Creekmore, the 
Deputy Assistant Secretary of the International Organizations Bureau, called 
me one afternoon and said "Let's dialogue now."

Somewhat confused, I peered into my director's office and asked,
"What does he mean 'Let's dialogue'?"

"A dialogue consists of meaningful initiatives followed by a constructive response. It's more than just talk," he said and then blushed.

Wondering if Webster would find this an acceptable definition, I climbed to the sixth floor and knocked on his door. "Lynne, he said, "we need to talk in full mutuality about the sisal problem in North Africa." (I did not know North Africa had a sisal problem, nor did I know that it had sisal. Furthermore, because sisal is a tropical plant and most of North Africa is desert, I did not think it was possible for North Africa to have sisal. Maybe this was the problem.) "Talk in full mutuality" is a dialogue. It offers a wonderful example of what is happening to the language. It is a word with a specific meaning in books, plays, and films. The meaning is being lost, as governments embark on a policy of dialogue and others follow along urging for policies of dialogue wherever they do not exist.

In a memo dated 1977, the State Department announced the appointment of an official to represent consumer rights and interests within the Department. He promised to "take those steps necessary and feasible to promote and channel these rights and interests with respect to the maintenance and expansion of an international dialogue and awareness," What might some of these steps include? "... Carrying forth in a spirit of dialogue." That is better than going in a spirit of monologue. But we are seeing dialogue don a mystical, magical quality, as if it meant more than a few people talking to each other and as if dialogue in itself were a solution.

It would be unfair to insinuate that only Washington "prioritizes dialogue." The United Nations is an avowed advocate of it also. In fact, the
U.N. Center for Regional Development publishes an "Interdisciplinary review" entitled *Asian Development Dialogue*. Allow me to quote a precis of one of its articles.

Our lead article views essential features of a framework for a comprehensive regional development analysis plan formulation and implementation which UNCRD (U.N. Conference on Regional Development, although I cannot confirm this) has developed in connection with its training cum regional development planning study exercise in Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Philippines. Comprehensive in this sense refers to coordination and integration of development efforts (broader defined) for a particular geographic space. Concern with development of a specific sub-national area does not imply that analysis and planning can be restricted simply to that politico-administrative level. Pertinent national and micro-level views and requirements need to be considered as well and this suggests that multi-level approaches be pursued. An additional consideration is the "critical minimum information" for comprehensive regional planning and development whose operationalization requires the not-insignificant determining of information precedence relationships—or principal types of decisions and associated information flow—in the process of analysis planning and implementation. However, the attainment of comprehensive planning and development in actual practice is more often influenced by certain characteristics of existing planning procedures and institutional arrangements than it is by the availability of techniques. In other words, issues of polity and society are not easily divorced from technical and administrative aspects of development analysis and planning.

(I hope you read this well. A quiz follows in the footnotes.) Perhaps
we should reconsider monologue.

This year the "process" has been the focus of most bureaucratic dialogues: the peace process, the shutdown process, the cleanup process, the budget process, the verification process, the intelligence process, the election process, the regulatory process, and the process of progressive decontrol. Process is bureaucratic shorthand for indescribable complexity. By naming something a process, politicians and bureaucrats confer dignity on highly ritualized acts of paper shuffling. If, in fact, something were called a paper shuffle, it would lack sonority.

My objection to process is that it is redundant in almost every case. The use of such a word seems to mask the realities of very intractable public problems by suggesting problems are easily amenable to solution. As used in government, process is the means to an end. Of course, ends are not called ends; rather, they are known as outcomes or products. Products, such as the final report of research projects, may even be called "portable products." In reality, since almost no one reads them, portable products are icons, signifying that a process has been completed. This is important because it is thought to show that bureaucrats have done their job. They have participated in a decision-making process, a budget process, a rule-making process or a finishing process, and marvelous to relate, they have produced an outcome for the policy-making and legislative processes. They have spent federal tax dollars wisely and well, especially if the outcome was subjected to an evaluation process of which a peer-review process was perhaps part. An evaluation is the pulling up of a process by the roots to see how well it was done.

The elegant secret of a process (besides the patronage created by its performance and administration) is that it negates individual responsibility
and promotes collective. Hence, there is faceless responsibility for
decisions and policies. Officials are never wrong, although a process
can be. If you will recall, this was the explanation created by the
Carter regime for the U.S.-U.N. Jerusalem vote mishap. The more sophis-
ticated the process, the more mystifying its substance to the laymen.
(Or, if something can be understood by only a handful of bureaucrats,
the jobs and budgets of civil servants are that much safer.).

Process also connotes progress, and therefore, it has a nice PR
ring to it. Unfortunately, the speed of a process is somewhat glacial.

Although I cannot state with any degrees of certainty, I do believe
processes are much more complicated in the State Department. On separate
occasions, I have heard State Department officials exclaim: "The process
is the reality," and "Process is our most important product." The
second is a place of breathtaking Voltairean symmetry—the means is the
end! Officials become so preoccupied with the process of movement, they
forget to move.

Clearly, through the gradual redefining of word, bureaucrats can
maintain their credentials. Yet, this is not enough; bureaucrats demand
justifications for their varying degrees of motion or non-motion from
each other. "Using a bomb for a flyswatter" is a favorite justification
among young civil servants. This cliche is normally used to explain why
the speaker did nothing. "It would have been like using a bomb for a
flyswatter." Transmission of this cliche is almost exclusively oral. If
the problem proves to be more serious than the one anticipated, one hardly
wants a memo in the files as evidence that one thought it was fly-sized.

"Using a bomb for a flyswatter" is, in part, replacing "maintaining
a low profile." One does not hear this too often today, but apparently it
was once welcomed as a godsend of a cliche. It is an impressive way to
describe what bureaucrats instinctively do best and previously sounded
apologetic about. One only has to compare it to "I'm not going to stick
my neck out" to sense the gain in tone. The "low profile" phrase was
probably military in origin, describing tanks or something. Like "game
plans," its current decline may be a temporary feeling that it is too
closely identified with the Nixon administration. I prefer to think,
however, that consciously or not, users of low-profile sense that it
sounds like "sloping forehead."

"Some political language," William Safire tells us, "captures the
essence of an abstraction and makes it understandable to millions." Distressingly, few bureaucrats show evidence of this kind of verbal ability
or interest in it. Credentialism fosters stagnation. It misconstrues
and fixes the limits of possible thought. "The magical associations per-
meating language are important for political behavior because they lend
authoritativeness to conventional perceptions and value premises and make
it difficult or impossible to perceive alternative possibilities," Edelman writes. Among the people in positions of responsibility, there
is a resistance to action and a terror of what the results of action
might be. Consequently, there is a resistance to accurate communication
and a terror of what the results of accurate communication might be.

---

6There may be a revival of low profile soon. In an April 26, 1980
news conference, a Defense Department spokesman said, "Colonel Beekman
is keeping a 'low silhouette' until he is debriefed." Low silhouette
sounds much more ominous than low profile.
The dull-witted bureaucrat is the mainstay of governmental agencies. He preoccupies himself with "routine" administrative matters. Routine administrative matters are those that could be solved in ten minutes were it not for the fact that the dull-witted has decided that the fate of the world depends upon it. Resultingly, this requires longer meetings and at least five extra clearances. In fact, clearances are the life-supports of the dullard. A memorandum came to me one day which I was asked to approve. It was on a subject which seemed rather dimly related to anything I would ever be doing (just about everything seemed to be rather dimly related to anything I would ever be doing), but it took less time to read the document than to explore the reasons it had come to me. Thus, I dutifully read it and affixed my initials at the bottom of the page under fourteen others. A week later this bureaucrat called me; the document was sent to me by mistake. Would I, therefore, erase my initials and initial the erasure?

Dull-witted bureaucrats are not exactly extolled for their work. Often they are accused, especially by "credentialism theory" bureaucrats, of rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic." This means they have overdramatized a wide range of trivial problems. Diabolically clever bureaucrats disparage moderately constructive measure with this phrase. For example: "Your're putting up a 'No - smoking' sign in your office? With all the pollution outside, that's like rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic!" The effect is to make a minor civility and this second theory bureaucrat seem
stupid. When these bureaucrats are not busy rearranging deck chairs, they are busily "reinventing the wheel." Clever bureaucrats want to imply that someone should not spend time or money doing something that was done before. Note, it implies the thing that was previously done was simple. No one cautions against "reinventing the pocket calculator." Apart from its triteness, my principal objection to this cliche is its frequent misapplication to situations where the point at issue is not creating something but learning something. Every executive repeats some of the experiments of his predecessors, including some that failed. And he should. If you are suddenly thrown into deep water, you should not hesitate to "re-invent swimming."

It is difficult to distinguish between those who are reinventing the wheel because they believe they are creating something unique and those who reinvent the wheel to discover the process. It is equally as difficult to determine who is the fanatic and who is the doctrinaire. If, for example, a bureaucrat refers to such concepts as "social justice," "the redistribution of wealth," "equality of opportunity," and "national interest" with great conviction, can we conclude that he is merely using phrases which will commend him to his colleagues and the public? Worse still, how can we differentiate between the two, one of whom is talking about the "redistribution of wealth" like a parrot and the other who is using, what seems to him, a carefully chosen and considered expression? In government, one person's cliche is another's profundity. When in doubt, however, it is always safer to conclude the cliche is what is being offered.

It is no easier to distinguish the dull-witted bureaucrat from the diabolically clever one by sight. Usually, diabolically clever officers
surround the assistant secretary whenever he walks down the hall, forming
his entourage. Entourage members open doors, are brisk but friendly, and
look as though they are standing by to be consulted on difficult questions.
This is not as easy as it sounds, because if the entourage member ever
seems to be at loose ends or superfluous, he runs the risk of appearing
to be a dull-witted bureaucrat. Diabolically clever bureaucrats appear
to be moving; dull-witted bureaucrats only appear to be motioning.

I think I have discovered a way of differentiating between the types
of bureaucrats. It is a complicated procedure which is time consuming and
may largely depend on intuition. It involves the study of memo language.
Generally speaking, there are six rules for writing a memo.

1. Be impersonal. Never name names; only allude to your passive
participation (much like the Spanish and Italian constructions: It made
itself unclear to me). Both types of bureaucrats have mastered this step.

2. Be obscure. Diabolically clever bureaucrats are unsurpassed
here. Bureaucrats never say what they mean in language anyone can under-
stand. Government spokesmen say very little in the most roundabout way
possible and regard the resulting confusion as capital gain. The use of
"non" is the Carter administration's favorite way of "making things clear
without facts, details, and hints." Remember the broadening dialogues which
go from the particular to the general to the global to the cosmic and then
to horizons not yet dreamed of? They are intended to enable nations to
del with each other on the basis of what used to be called non-belligerency,
or the non-use of force. Each side monitors the other closely to be sure
the force is what it is nonusing and pursues energetically all signs of
noncompliance. Jody Powell recently said, "You should not assume some form
of even non-violent military action is the next step." Unfortunately, the dialogue between the U.S. and Iran has stopped broadening. If it continued to broaden, we would have found ourselves non compos mentis.

3. Be pretentious. This is the domain of the dull-witted bureaucrat. Use phrases such as: perform as many of these functions as possible for does his job, disseminate for hand out or releases; I had come into possession of for I had; a great many systems evolved for got complicated; effectuate for carry out, and it was my understanding for I knew.

4. Be evasive. Only well-seasoned clever bureaucrats do this well. The most effective method of sidestepping answers or discussion is the use of the unexpected. Only here did I find U.S.D.A. officials to be more creative than State Department officials. I remember one fine meeting when an official vehemently stated: "There's no initiative (In FAO) and there's no stuff beyond the vegetable." We were talking about African swine fever at the time.

5. Be repetitious. Once again, this is the domain of the dull-witted bureaucrat. Here, the aim is total boredom in order to prevent your listener from following your line of thought. "Situation" is a favorite among bureaucrats for producing total saturation in listeners. After hearing it several hundred times, listeners tend to enter a state of inattention akin to hypnosis in which they are unable to judge the value of what they hear (in the foregoing situation, in an emergency situation, in a crisis situation, in these types of situations, in those specified situations, this fact situation, regarding this situation).

6. Be awkward. Diabolically clever and dull-witted bureaucrats are about equal here, although I am not certain why. Cases, instances, ideas, antecedents, and agreements should be grossly violated. Participles should
dangle wildly, and prepositions should be unattached or redundant.

Again, State Department bureaucrats exceed all expectations. Remember Lord Tennyson's Charge of the Light Brigade: "Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to do or die." The poets in the State's Bureau of Public Affairs vaguely recalled these words. Although the reason for choosing a military disaster as their metaphor in this case is unclear, the State Department crew title their publication giving the rationale for the strategic arms limitation treaty: "Part II: The Reasons Why." The "reasons why" is a solecism. (A solecism is what grammatical soft-liners call a "violation of conventional usage" and what hard-liners call a mistake in English.)

In Tennyson's use "reason" was a verb, and thus "to reason why" was correct. But when reason is a noun, why is not needed. The correct word to follow reason is "that" of "for," not "why" or "because." The reason why not is because it is redundant and in this sentence it is redundant twice over. In other words, the reason is that clarity beets clutter (not "the reason why is because clarity beets clutter.")

The discussion of the "Incompetence theory" is perfunctory. The problem the incompetent bureaucrat creates is straightforward: he generates work which is usually proforma in nature, and hence, he achieves an appearance of movement. It is only an appearance, because he lacks the creativity and savvy to know how to get anywhere. It is also difficult to differentiate between younger, inexperienced civil servants and the dull-witted bureaucrats. This may lead to the unnecessary persecution of people who may actually have some redeeming qualities. I do not like to dwell too much on a description of this bureaucratic personality; frankly, I find it as boring as the person. However, it does support the proposition "Civil service is a refuge for the mediocre."
I used to imagine, when the government took actions I found inexplicable, that it had information I did not have. But, after a while, I discovered the issue was often more complex: either the action was not really an action at all; or, the government knew something that the people on the outside did not know but it was not something that was necessarily true, and they acted upon it anyway. Bureaucrats worked hard to keep informed. Yet, at times, I suspected that I was not dealing with hard facts. Rather, I was dealing with collective illusions perceived as facts.

Structural constraints which force bureaucrats to gravitate towards motion are difficult to distinguish from the personality traits of the two types of bureaucrats. There are three internal structural constraints I will discuss here: the problem of action at a distance, the influence of short-range considerations, and the combination of factual and political judgements. I am not certain how these constraints took the forms they did, and I can only speculate why they took these forms.

It was probably the case of rice parbolling plants in Southeast Asia that brought my suspicions to a focus. One of the Food and Agriculture Organization's most "effective" programs was its sponsorship of parbolling plant construction. This program was supported directly by U.S. funds. Since most of the host countries did not have the resources or technology to build parbolling plants and since they had to import the particular hybrids of rice for parbolling, I questioned the program's "effectiveness."
How did we know it was "effective?" Why was it "effective?" "We knew it was effective," I was told, "from field reports" which told us "people preferred parboiled rice." According to one agricultural officer, to deny Southeast Asia rice parboiling plants was to deny them one of the great accomplishments of the West (Minute Rice).

I have an open mind about parboiling plants. What I learned from this incident was that after years of experience with such a program, the government could supply me with next to no substantial information to make my mind less wide open on the subject. And I think I also grasped a lesson of wider import from this experience. The system for providing information that supports the construction of parboiling plants bears fundamental similarities to the system for providing information that supports the governments' construction of airfields or that supports the exchange of symphonies as part of a cultural education program. It is a system with a bias toward self-deception built into it.

Large scale coordination is an effort to solve an ancient metaphysical problem -- the problem of action at a distance. A bureaucrat launches an action. But he is not where it arrives, where people have to live with its consequences. The report of what he has done must travel back to him past scores of people. The basis of aggravation is the elusiveness of standards by which people in government judge their success or failure.

In circumstances like these, facile language overwhelms: a "good result" is a "good report," and a "good report" is a report that is approved by someone whose approval counts. Standards of judgement are not adopted because they are relevant, but because they are convenient. What is the major factor that creates distortion and must be guarded against in the
language of government information? It is an institutionalized tendency to look on the bright side of things.

One of the functions of government reporting is to provide the people at the top with what they need to defend their policies against attack. The members of a Department are not going to be helped when they go before the Appropriations Committee if the information they are armed with reports their policies are a tissue of errors. But even if bureaucrats did not believe all non-bureaucrats were adversaries, the system still contains a danger of self-deception through an exchange of emanations. The man at the top sends out a query. He may think that all he wants is the cold facts. However, along with his question, he conveys an attitude, a set of hopes (or dislikes) and expectations. And the man who receives the query, though he may think he is reporting the objective facts, is reacting as well to the emanation he has received. I have seen replies take one of two forms. One, the questioned policy is "under review" and whatever the Department had been doing, it was not trying to do it again. Or two, the questioned policy was "effective"—killing the messenger who brings the bad news is an old custom.

Thus there is a kind of propitiatory optimism that creeps into government reports. Clearly, many sharp and hard-hitting reports are written. On the whole, however, they are outnumbered by those which season objective reporting with the sugar of positive thinking. This tendency is reinforced by the fact that reports go back through the channels, and that people all the way along the line read them. One can only guess the reactions if a negative tone is taken. What are you trying to do? Destroy morale? Hurt the organization? Such concern may be only half-conscious, but they affect
what people in government say to each other.

A faith is created. At each stage, along the line of command, the men who have to write a report or execute a policy see only part of the whole picture. From where he sits, the policy may seem unintelligible. But other people are carrying it out, and other people seem to believe in it. So a kind of rolling commitment to policy is created. At each stage, the responsible person imagines that somebody up the line has looked at the policy in cool objectivity and has seen that it is good. He writes his report in that faith and thus passes the faith along. And each man further along passes it to the next until it reaches the top men, who absorb the faith, assuming that, since everybody else has it, there must be something to it. Though nobody is lying, everybody may be deceived. Unfortunately, by its mere nature, propitiatory optimism precludes bureaucratic movement in any meaningful sense.

The second structural restraint is the influence of short-range bureaucratic considerations. Generally speaking, the material in government documents falls into two categories. The first contains broad studies of issues and projections of trends that are three, five, or ten years away, otherwise known as long-range studies. The language of these studies and their communiques is impeccably indescribable. For instance, consider the U.S. communique regarding the New International Development Strategy adopted by the U.N. Committee of the Whole (COM). It called for: growing interdependence, friendly and cooperative relations, the totality of varied relationships, a close and mutually beneficial relationship based on the principle of equality (it's only the beginning, only the beginning), a common determination, an enhanced scope for creativity, the maintenance of
peace and the evolution of a stable international order, peaceful settlement of outstanding issues, sustained and orderly growth, contributions made in light of responsibilities and capabilities, an effective and meaningful role, dedicated efforts, coordinated responses, intensified efforts, close cooperation (half way), global economic difficulties, the constructive use of human and material resources, an open and harmonious world economic order, constructive participation, a stable and balanced international money order, more efficient and rational utilization and distribution of world resources, enhanced cooperation, further international cooperative efforts, a new era of creativity (new) and common progress, constructive participation in multilateral efforts, the well-being of the peoples of the world, a steady improvement in technological and economic capabilities, a common concern, sound and orderly growth, new challenges common to mankind, broad cooperation (almost there), mutual understanding and enhanced communication, the expansion of cultural and educational interchange, the spirit of mutual friendship and trust, frank and timely consultations, potential bilateral and multilateral issues, pressing global problems of common concern, many diverse fields of human endeavor, major foundation stones (?), an indispensable element, a new page in the history of amity, and a promise to go on striving steadily to encourage a further relaxation of tensions in the world through dialogue.

Frankly, I was suspicious the moment I saw dialogue. However, the last page of the communiqué reconciled my fears. The committee ended the session with a call for "resolute action." Resolute action is what governments promise to take at the end of meaningless meetings. None the less, I do have to concede this is the Sistine Chapel of communiques, and it says what
has to be said on the subject forever."

The second category of government reports is the short-range. It tells about events as they unfold, deals in personalities, describes shifts in power that may or may not be permanent, and reports the progress of negotiations. As a day-to-day matter, long-range reports cannot compete successfully with short-range reports for most government officials’ attention. No matter how much sound study goes into long-range reports, history is too full of contingencies and politics is too full of accidents for a practical official to rely heavily on long-range explanations. Besides, the very nature of government encourages this point of view. Despite all the money that a government spends on research and analysis, its major job is operational. Most officials enmeshed in preparations do not have time to think two or three years ahead. Bureaucrats in the State Department may assent to the abstract proposition that detente should replace cold war (or the reverse), but what does that tell them to do about specific situations, especially those that seem only marginally related to the abstraction?

The life of an official does not merely turn him aside from more spacious reflections; it creates in him professional habits and a kind of professional pride which lead him to believe that policy is not made by great thinkers but by ordinary men who deal with each problem as it comes. Short-range language reflects this belief; it is less eloquent and ostentatious. However, it is no less imaginative and meaningful.

*According to the consumer affairs officer’s successor, a communicator should "say nothing in such a way as to fool the press without actually deceiving them." I leave you to draw your own conclusions about "talk in full mutuality."
Bureaucrats preoccupied with the nitty-gritty relate to tangible objects and common actions. For example, take the "Band-aid approach." Those who use this in reference to their own programs are implying that a transfusion of money would be better. Those who apply it to a rival's program mean that surgery is required. Debate focuses on whether the proposed remedy is adequate, rather than on the precise nature of the case.

Bureaucrats who panic at the sight of blood may simply "throw money at it." At no time in history would it have occurred to people to throw money at a problem. The myth of King Midas warns against avarice; I can think of no myth against public, as distinct from private profligacy. However, I do recall reading as a child a story in which the hero escaped from a mob by throwing gold coins in the street and getting away in the ensuing commotion. That may be the hope of some bureaucrats.

In lieu of blinding swabbing iodine and applying tourniquets, "biting the bullet" may help. This means take action or make some decision; just about anything will do. The expression is sometimes explained as deriving from a step in the loading of old rifles. More probably, it refers to giving a wounded soldier something on which to clamp his teeth during pre-anesthetic surgery. Either way, it implies the proposed action is more dignified than screaming. However, none of these clear the infection... or find the "root cause." The root cause of a problem may be anything from crime in America to the location of the office supply of No Doz. Idealistic Junior Foreign Service Officers have been known to blurt out root causes are being treated with band-aids. "The metaphor is ancient, as in 'the axe is laid to the roots of the tree,'" a senior officer told me.
"Anyone who still has actually tried to grub out the roots of some still living stump knows why prophetic zeal is occasionally acted upon. The roots are always deeper than one expects." Paradoxically, the same officers who recant the search for a root cause confirm their faith in the "bottom line." This is the cliche per excellence, and it is generally mischievous. It implies that there is a bottom line, that things can be reduced to some numerical profit-and-loss statement. In reality, only a few things can be so reduced. At best, the search for a bottom line is likely to lead to artificial and generally ignored cost-benefit studies by high-priced contractors. At worst, it encourages single-number indicators of results like "the body count," with pernicious side effects. There is no one line; neither is there a bottom. The effects of public decisions spread out in many directions. It would be an improvement if executives could turn to their staffs and say, "OK, what's the last ripple?"

In long-range reports, resolute action is never defined (at least to my knowledge). In the short-range, action is temporary; it meets the immediate crisis and leaves a more comprehensive solution to be developed later. Bureaucrats create a flurry of motions in both instances; however, they do not move. Movement is postponed until the next conference.

What comes to be accepted as a truth in government is usually a combination of factual and political judgements. This is the third structural constraint. The government's reporting system has a large element of bargaining in it, even though the bargains are not always explicit. Through countless meetings of inter-agency groups, the government builds a politically viable view of reality, a body of accepted ideas on the basis of which a coalition of power and interest can be created. Too often, this politically viable view of reality is only politically viable within the system. Policy
development, especially between inter-departmental groups, is more concerned with second-guessing colleagues rather than adversaries. Bureaucrats run concentric circles, either concluding something so specific it is meaningless or something so general it is meaningless.

The blueprint of a politically visible view of reality is "a hypothetical situation that does not now exist," according to Hoddling Carter, State Department spokesman. It is only when a hypothetical situation does exist that it warrants our concern. Depending on the importance of the situation, we may wish to get a "preliminary final count" on which of our allies will stand with us. Preliminary final count will have to do because it will be too early for us to draw a final conclusion. Those who want to draw conclusions will have to use the non-final variety.

My office took a preliminary final count of our allies for an issue that was placed before the Food and Agriculture Organization. A group of Arab rejectionists wanted to move the Mid-East regional office from Cairo in order to punish Egypt for signing the Camp David accord. Our allies would unanimously support Egypt in whatever action Egypt thought best. Unfortunately, a preliminary final count was not formally taken in the Bureau. When Egypt decided to close the office indefinitely and the U.S. delegation supported this, "loud shouting" echoed through the halls of the State Department. As one officer succinctly commented: "The move is preposterous and (there is always an end) beyond the realm of possibility." What was politically desirable for the Department was not politically desirable for the Egyptians. We spent more time second-guessing the next time. The quest for the ultimate Department consensus dissipates creative energy. Decisions reflect "glittering generalities representing the lowest common
denominators cannot be divided any further, these decisions do not move beyond the declaration level.

In addition to internal structural limitations, there are external political limitations which are disposed towards motion rather than movement. Newspapers which thrive on exposure and revelation, members of Congress who need the opportunity to nit-pick in order to show people at home they are on the job, and public sectors which demand to be informed at all times, force bureaucrats to consistently retreat and generate greater walls of paper. I offer my recollections of a typical constituent response. It kept coming back to me early in the morning at that hour before dawn breaks, when my resistance is low.

Dear Disgruntled citizen,

Your letter of the 19th is appreciated. The question that has been raised is under study. It is necessary that you be informed, however, that the results of this study are not expected for some time, and will themselves be subject to further review when they are received. Under the circumstances, it is felt that no answer can now be given to your inquiry. At such time as warranted by conditions, you will be informed.

Assurance is given of the existence of interest in inquiries such as yours from the private sector.

I call the tone that characterizes government correspondence "the public-passive voice." It has a special grammatical mode created for the conduct of correspondence between a government and its citizens. Use of this voice grants the letter a quality of coming from a world in which thoughts and emotions float around without belonging to anyone, in which decisions are always in the process but are never made, and in which the buck, when it is passed, is passed unerringly into the void. A letter written in this voice conveys a proper sense of mystery.
The merits of this voice are considerable but limits the
of the letter to glide away in a nameless nowhere, the opposition, in
consequence, cannot be quite certain that it is opposing anyone or any-
thing and becomes quite discouraged. The cunningness of this prose
cannot be overstated. There are problems in government which can only
be solved by being buried. And the public-passive voice is more than sim-
ply a technique for passing the buck. It is a technique for losing the
whole thing so it will not trouble people again. I am not an advocate of
the public-passive voice, and I do not wish to slight the importance of
public input and questioning. Yet, to the extent that the public does not
get any answers and bureaucrats waste time not giving any answers, the
process is useless.

Some people will accept the public-passive voice; Congressmen will
not. They insist motion be taken. My favorite example is the Congressional
impetus to form "multi-disciplinary" teams to replace the "inter-discipli-
nary" teams inside the State Department. Responsive to Congressional sug-
gestions, the State Department formed a Development Coordination Committee
Subcommittee on Developmental Activities of International Organizations and
Programs (DCC/DA/IOP). The subcommittee delineated the problem as "a wide
gap between multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary teams. Multi-disci-
plinary applies when various disciplines provide their views with minimal
cooperative interaction. Inter-disciplinary requires coordination among dis-
ciplines through a higher level organizing concept. . . ." If you find this
an estate and insightful delineation, you will be even more amazed by the
solution summarized: "The inter-disciplinary team and integrate imaginative
ideas originating from different disciplinary perspectives so that the work
product reflects an expanded lens of reality." The delineation was so
astute, it anticipated the remedy. (Multi-disciplinary and inter-
disciplinary teams are the same.)

This illustrates bureaucratic disbelief in change, or of the pro-
prietary interest in the status quo. In this instance, it came to the
surface in a disguised manner and it exerts its greatest influence not
in the form of active resistance to change but in the form of passive
cooperation with it. It is fortified by the procedures of government.
What loyalty to the past does not do, the democracy of committee of
does. The normal way to treat an idea is to "staff it out," find a com-
mittee to work on it. When the process is completed, chances are over-
whelming that the new idea will have been ground down into the old cate-
gories, the old habits of thought and action. The process is not always
a conscious one. The picture has not been painted gray by people who knew
it was green. It was painted gray by people who seen green as gray.

Assuming that by personal nature all bureaucrats are recidivists is
wrong. There are both internal and external restraints placed on bureau-
cratic actions. I acknowledge that these restraints reflect personality
traits, and it is likely that my personal biases account partly for this
underlying implication. The system lacks creativity and is self-preserving.
This may not be the fault of any presently employed bureaucrat; it is an
inevitable outgrowth of the system.

I am not given to animistic interpretations of my environment, but I
began to think, after I had spent some time in the State Department, that
perhaps there was something to be said for animism after all. It often seemed to me that an uncaptured Spirit dwelt on the sixth and seventh floors. At times I lived as though not Karl Marx but the Marx Brothers were poised outside my office door. It was the Spirit of the Bloated Bureaucracy and its operations that reduced me to fits of nervosa. The Bloated Bureaucracy has a life-span that ranges somewhere between the infinite and the eternal. This is partly owing to its languid nature. The Bloated Bureaucracy cannot be hurried; it travels at its own pace. Its longevity is also attributed to its ability to metamorphose from a ghostly type body which opponents find as difficult to capture as the breeze to an armored body which barbed shafts can seldom penetrate.

Diabolically clever bureaucrats who keep low profiles are the illusive ones. They are paralyzed and emasculated by the fear of one thing—non-promotion. Everyone, to some extent, is looking over this bureaucrat's shoulder every time he opens his mouth, and this makes it even more difficult to achieve a brilliant or memorable public performance. Clear speaking and clear writing can only come from confident people who are not afraid to express their real thoughts. Ambiguous speaking and ambiguous writing only perpetrate the status quo.

Dull-witted bureaucrats are not confident people who are not afraid to express their real thoughts. They are the ones who don heavy armor to protect themselves. Their armor consists of papers and clearance procedures and papers and routine ways of doing things and papers again. They are so burdened; they cannot move.

The simple arithmetic of the government's operations makes it hard to achieve consistency within it. Power spreads out. As it spreads,
more and more attention has to be given to keeping the different centers of power in touch with one another. Thus, forward movement is blocked because time and energy have to be spent on lateral communication and notifying the other branches of government. The government becomes like an immense, somnolent animal that cannot twitch its toe unless it first moves twenty other parts of its body. And before it can do that, it has to undertake a laborious task of self-inspection. It must notice that its tail is tangled in its rear legs and unwind it; it must cure its right front foreleg of its tendency to move backward whenever the left foreleg moves forward; and, at the end, it must probably take one extra foot, whose existence it had forgotten, out of its mouth. By the time it has finished the process, the animal is often too tired to twitch its toe--if it can remember that this was its original intention.

Some bureaucracy watchers submit that if civil servants behave in peculiar ways, and surround themselves with astonishing rules, and produce decisions that have the clarity of Finnegans Wake read in a thunderstorm, we should not be surprised. They also submit that a good deal of deceit and inaction is essential to the proper working of any kind of institution. Antipathies must be suppressed so that antagonists may work together for various purposes; the extent of support for or opposition to some measure must be falsified, for this knowledge will change the situation. For this reason, they conclude that politicians have elaborated a mellifluous and soggy form of discourse, justly famed for its vagueness and ambiguity. Political communications must say different things to different people, and preferably can be denied if they should cause embarrassment.

The relation between dynamic inaction and ambiguous language cannot be dismissed as easily as this. Personality traits as well as structural
problems confound the issues. Inconclusively, perhaps this is the bottom line.
1. What does the author mean?
   A. I don't know.
   B. He doesn't know.
   C. His editor doesn't know.
   D. Nobody knows.

2. What are training cum regional development planning exercises?
   A. exercises
   B. study exercises
   C. planning exercises
   D. all of the above
   E. none of the above

3. In what way is the author using the word "improvisation"?
   A. all-inclusively
   B. narrowly
   C. broadly defined
   D. in a way unknown before
   E. incomprehensibly

4. If you want to develop part of a country, can you ignore the rest of it when you draw up your plans?
   A. yes
   B. no
   C. The author doesn't say.
   D. The question is impertinent.

5. Determining information precedence relationships is:
   A. hard
   B. easy
   C. significant
   D. insignificant
   E. not insignificant

6. "Operationalization" is used as
   A. a verb
   B. a noun
   C. an adjective
   D. an adverb
   E. an absurdity
7. Whose operationalization is the author referring to?
   A. critical minimal information's
   B. planning and development's
   C. his own
   D. the additional consideration's
   E. the U.N.'s

8. Comprehensive planning is more influenced by:
   A. the bureaucracy in power
   B. actual practice
   C. unnamed characteristics
   D. availability of techniques
   E. the weather

9. Who isn't likely to get divorced?
   A. arts and society
   B. technical aspects and administrative aspects
   C. analysis and planning
   D. Indonesia and Pakistan
   E. the author and his editor

10. Why does the U.N. speak like this?
    A. It's smarter than I am.
    B. It's paid a high salary.
    C. Simple language helps across geographic space.
    D. Beauty and grace are important in language.
    E. It doesn't like me.


BIBLIOGRAPHY

