

In What Conditions Are Bureaucracies Abused for Totalitarian or Fascist Ends?

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ABSTRACT

This paper is going to assess conditions that allow for bureaucracy to be used for totalitarian or fascist ends. It will determine that some intrinsic traits of bureaucracy are inherently problematic because they facilitate for the system to get abused (for fascist ends). That is because, for instance, by nature bureaucracy dehumanizes people and separates one's private life from one's professional life. Moreover, the system does not allow for individual moral reflection (on the part of the workers), and it lacks the mechanism of individual responsibility. If they existed in a bureaucracy, the aforementioned factors would act as "checks" if the system started getting abused. However, there are several external conditions that allow for bureaucracies to get exploited - the presence of the "manipulative" and "authoritarian" type among the executors of actions as well as the implementation of the state of exception on the part of the government.

Introduction

In his 1989 book *Modernity and Holocaust* Zygmunt Baumann presented how modern, bureaucratic mechanisms, such as the division of labor into small tasks, the doctrine of rationality and efficiency at work (connected with the emphasis on the detachment from any moral or emotional judgments), and the following of rules as a virtue, were used and abused by totalitarian regimes, such as in Nazi Germany.

The aforementioned characteristics follow the traits of bureaucracies that Max Weber defined in *Rationalism and Modern Society*. The traits Weber (2015) mentioned are: a "rigid division of labor," "firmly established chains of command" (p. 76), extreme adherence and "binding to rules and regulation," (p. 78) as well as impersonality in the application of rules. Baumann drew on the works of Hannah Arendt who observed in *Eichmann in Jerusalem. A Report on the Banality of Evil* (2006) that in the murdering of Jews, Eichmann was guided by the bureaucratic principle of "following orders".

Nevertheless, the bureaucratic spirit is something that, to some extent, most would agree is desirable: it contributes and enables equality in the sense of the neutral (i.e., not biased) treatment of citizens, the separation from subjective judgments of bureaucrats, meritocratic assessments, and efficient production. So, a question arises whether bureaucratic mechanisms are inherently problematic¹ (as suggested by Enzo Traverso) or whether bureaucracy gets abused for totalitarian ends only in certain external conditions.

This paper will argue that while several traits of bureaucracy (the lack of accountability, lack of moral judgment by workers, automatization of people's work, and separation between private and professional life) are inherently problematic, there are several conditions that are usually co-occurring when bureaucracies are abused for authoritarian political ends. These conditions are: the bureaucratic workforce exhibiting "the manipulative" and "authoritarian" type and the implementation of the state of exception.

¹ This paper uses the adjective "problematic" to describe traits of bureaucracy that inherently make it prone to be abused for totalitarian ends.

Part I: Intrinsic Traits of Bureaucracy That Make It Prone to Be Abused for Totalitarian Ends

To begin with, there is an argument to be made that bureaucratic mechanisms are inherently susceptible to being used for immoral or totalitarian ends.

At the end of the 19th century, Frederick W. Taylor developed "Taylorism," an approach to modern industrial production. These included "a strict separation between the organization and execution of tasks, disqualifications and hierarchization of the workforce, and the segmentation of production into a series of operations controlled solely by those in command" (Traverso, 2003, p. 38).

The Lack of Accountability

The first problem with a bureaucracy is the potential lack of accountability. In the example of the extermination of Jews, not only was the process separated into stages - the "concentration, deportation, the seizure of the victims' possessions, the recuperation of certain parts of theory bodies, gassing and incineration of the corpses" (Traverso, 2003, p. 36) - but also in each of these stages the workers had a specific thing they did (ex. driving the car, counting the Jews, opening the doors to the gas chambers). This means that no single person was responsible for the murders. As Traverso (2003) put it, "the agents of this bureaucratic apparatus did not control the process as a whole, and when they did learn of its final purpose, they could justify themselves by saying that they bore no responsibility and that their own limited and partial function was in itself in no way criminal" (p. 42). Using this logic, one may say that the people tasked with opening the doors or incinerating the corpses were not responsible for the death of the Jews. This way, many people could be involved in the murdering of Jews while justifying to themselves or believing that their sole action did not lead to the extermination of Jews. In short, bureaucracy means that work is so fragmented that people are either unaware of the 'final product' they are contributing towards or believe that their small task is not immoral in itself. It may be argued that this trait of bureaucracy makes it inherently capable of being abused for immoral actions because it does not contain a check that would stop it from being used for such ends.

The Lack of Moral Judgment

Second, the approach is devoid of the workers' moral judgment. These could act as "checks" that would block the use of bureaucratic mechanisms if they started getting used for totalitarian ends. The work is so fragmented that workers have nothing to object to per se: the tasks usually do not involve anything "morally questionable." Moreover, in the Taylorist approach, there is no place for input from or opinions of the workers there is a strict hierarchy, and the only job of the workers is to fulfill the tasks given to them. As Traverso (2003) described it, "Taylor's ideal worker was an unthinking one, with no intellectual autonomy and capable only of mechanically accomplishing standardized operations. In short, a dehumanized, alienated being, an automaton" (p. 39). Furthermore, there is no time for workers to consider the morality of their actions or have reflections on them. As prescribed by Taylor, in Nazi Germany, workers were timed and had "just a few minutes to incinerate the corpses while a timekeeper ensured the rhythm was sustained" (Traverso, 2003, p. 38).

Quantitative Approach

Third, the Taylorist approach dehumanizes people involved in the process. Workers are supposed to focus only on the efficiency and the final product rather than the process and their work itself. Workers are only focused

on fulfilling orders given to them and on doing that as fast as possible - in no part of the process are the implications for the people affected concerned. This links to the "quantitative" nature of bureaucracy as described by Weber (2015): "from the start the foundation for bureaucratization involved" focus on "quantitative terms" (p. 91). Traverso (2003) explained the quantitative nature of bureaucracy by making a point about the extermination of Jews: "the victims of that project were no longer detainees but simply raw material- necessary for the mass production of corpses" (p. 45). Moreover, the strict adherence to rules and treating them as the primary criteria means that morality is not a criterion that workers are asked to and themselves assess or think about. As Weber (2015) writes, the primary objective for the workers is to "handle the task according to prescribed rules and "calculable" regulations, and "irrespectively of the person concerned" (p. 97).

The Separation Between Private and Professional Life

The last trait that allows for bureaucratic mechanisms to be used for totalitarian ends is the separation between private and professional lives, which Eric Fromm described as one of the reasons why modern society is not normal - i.e., not in line with biological, social, or human nature. In *The Pathology of Normalcy* Fromm (2010) explains how, in contrast to the "feudal society of the Middle Ages," in the modern Western world, the individual is not perceived, and does not perceive himself, as a "member of society" but rather as an "individual" (p. 22-25). In the Middle Ages, man "was primarily a member of the group" (Fromm, 2010, pp. 22-25). As Weber (2015) explained it, "bureaucratic organization separates the duties and interests of the official position from the private sphere of life" (p. 78). In addition, work became separated from one - it ceased being connected to one's character or life, but instead became a "duty" - a separate part of one's life. Fromm (2010) explained how, in modernity, "the pleasure in work" and "work as fulfillment" "changes to a duty" - "work became something abstract, a duty" and simply "for profit" (pp. 36-40). Work ceased being a vital part of one's persona or character because it stopped being connected to one's interest or passion. Instead, work started constituting a separate area of one's life - the professional sphere, because it was done not out of passion but rather as a means of making money. This dichotomy contributes to bureaucracy being used for totalitarian means twofold. First, people do not treat their work as an extension of their character - in private lives, they are guided by their morals; in professional lives, they are simply guided by criteria set by the supervisors - profit, completion of tasks, or fulfillment of orders. Second, due to the separation of private and professional lives, people are not judged in private for their professional undertakings, eliminating situations that could allow for moral reflection on the part of the manipulative and authoritarian types.

Evaluation

Looking at the points above, it can be extrapolated that bureaucracy is a problem in itself - it lacks mechanisms for assigning responsibility as well as moral judgments on the part of the workers. These could act as checks if the system were used for totalitarian ends. Moreover, due to its quantitative nature, bureaucracy in itself dehumanizes people without focusing on the effects that the actions performed have on the workers or people affected.

However, if used for "noble" ends, the bureaucracy would not lead to totalitarian abuses. If the Taylorist system was used in a book factory, surely, no harm would be done to third parties (i.e., workers), and one could not claim that the system was used for totalitarian ends.

So, one factor contributing to bureaucracy being used for totalitarian ends is the immoral intentions and aims of the owners/rulers. However, immoral goals are not enough in themselves - one can imagine a situation in which a group of mentally healthy people, with a strong moral compass, would not do something immoral, even if they were ordered to do so. So, there are other conditions that, together with the inherent traits of bureaucracies and unethical aims, allow for bureaucracies to be used for totalitarian ends.

Part II: Conditions in Which Bureaucracies Are More Likely to Be Used for Totalitarian Ends

The Manipulative Type

The first condition are individuals with psychological predispositions to unquestioning obedience to orders and supervisors. In his 1950 book Theodor Adorno formulated his theory on the titular "Authoritarian Personality," of which, according to Arendt, Eichmann was an example. Based on his studies, Adorno identified numerous 'personalities' that were susceptible to follow authoritarian and fascist rulers. One of the personalities was the "manipulative" type. Adorno (1950) noted that "their organizational way of looking at things predisposes them to totalitarian solutions." For them, the "world is divided into schematic, administrative fields" (p. 767) - following orders is of primary importance for authoritarian personalities.

"Manipulative" types naturally do not concern themselves with the 'morality' of their actions; rather, they believe that they ought to follow orders and rules. They have an almost "complete lack of [...] emotional ties" (Adorno, 1950, p. 767) -they lack empathy and moral reflection. Arendt (2006) noted this trait in Eichmann when she observed Eichmann's "incapacity to think from another person's point of view" (p. xiii)

Arendt (2006) observed how Eichmann "would have had a bad conscience only if he had not done what he had been ordered to do" (p. 25) and Eichmann himself stated that a "leaderless" life, without "directives, orders, and commands" would be a "difficult life" (p. 32). Eichmann had nothing against Jews - Arendt (2006) stated that Eichmann had no insane hatred of Jews" (p. 26). As examples indicating Eichmann's lack of antisemitism, Arendt (2006) points toward the fact that he had had Jewish family members who were "among his "private reasons" for not hating Jews" (p. 30) and that he had a Jewish mistress (something that could be considered the greatest crime for a member of the SS). Furthermore, in his trial, Eichmann recalled how once a half-Jewish daughter of a friend came to see him for permission for her emigration to Switzerland, so he "*of course*, granted this request" (Arendt, 2006, p. 30). All these point to the lack of ideological purity or deep hatred towards Jews that Eichmann had; what he did was "simply" carrying out orders.

Taking Adorno's logic, for some of the Nazis, the goal was not to exterminate Jews per se, but rather the administrative aim of 'completing the task' - "the construction of gas chambers" (Adorno, 1950, p. 767). What is important to note is that the detachment of 'workers' from the 'final product' (in this case, the death of Jews), as described by Adorno, significantly contributes to the lack of moral reflection (described in part I) by "manipulative" types.

Numerous Nazis, including Eichmann, never actually saw Jews dying - instead, they focused on the bureaucratic fulfillment of orders their supervisors gave. Eichmann was convinced that "with the killing of Jews, [he] had nothing to do. [He] never killed a Jew" (Arendt, 2006, p. 22). However, what is important to note is that when authoritarians come to power, it is ultimately the responsibility of all involved to resist and deny the carrying of orders. Without the 'executors,' a single ruler has no power.

Similarly, in *Escape from Freedom*, Eric Fromm (1965) described personalities that have "the tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self" (and therefore their own thinking) and listen to someone else - an authority (p. 163). He writes how these people "tend not to assert themselves, not to do what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces [authorities - leaders]" (Fromm, 1965, p. 164). These people want to "get rid of the burden of freedom" (which may be the burden of making individual judgments and decisions or the problem of isolation) and give all their freedom to the authority (e.g., the leader/fuhrer), who tell them what to think and what to do (Fromm, 1965, p. 173).

The State of Exception

Second, bureaucratic and modernist mechanisms can be abused during the "state of exception." Carl Schmitt, a Nazi legal scholar, formulated this concept in his book *Political Theology*. He defined the "state of exception" as something similar to martial law. However, he focused on the sovereign's (in this case, the fuhrer's) power to decide situations that trigger the state of exception, during which the sovereign may act "above the law." As Schmitt (1986) wrote, "the exception is not codified in the existing legal order; [it] can at best be characterized as a case of extreme peril and a danger to the existence of the state" (p. 6). The sovereign "decides whether there is an extreme emergency as well as what must be done to eliminate it" (Schmitt, 1986, p. 7). The Weimar Constitution included Article 48, which allowed the President to have undefined emergency powers. Schmitt (1986) himself admitted that "if applied without check, [Article 48] would grant exceptional powers" (p. 11).

The state of exception can lead to bureaucratic mechanisms being abused threefold. First, the state of exception legally allows for the "carrying through" of immoral end products - ex. the sending of Jews to camps or the killing of Jews in the gas chambers. The state of exception allows totalitarians to legally order bureaucrats to participate in activities leading to unethical end products and take advantage of the "manipulative" types or the incredibly divided stages of labor. This makes many complicit in extrajudicial matters that they would not commit otherwise. Examples include Eichmann, who arguably could have known what he was doing when he signed the paperwork, but also include people who opened the doors to the gas chambers or even produced cars where Jews were transported. Moreover, the state of exception gives the sovereign the power to order workers and bureaucrats to do as is demanded of them. After all, the state of exception justifies totalitarian leaders in their forcing of workers to carry out orders that the workers would not perform otherwise.

Furthermore, during the state of exception, the logic of 'doing what is necessary' to save the state, is applied. Therefore, "the entire existing order" is suspended, and "the norm is destroyed" (Schmitt, 1986, p. 12). Two kinds of norms are abolished - legal and moral. First, legal norms are abolished, and whatever evil is being carried out becomes legal. There is no way for workers to legally stand up to their supervisors or refuse to carry out orders. Second, moral norms are abolished. In the state of exception, totalitarian leaders justify different actions to the people as being necessary to overcome the "emergency" or "threat." As Schmitt (2007) describes it in *The Concept of the Political*, during the state of exception, an "existential threat" is often presented to the people, which justifies actions that are "not normal" (immoral) because otherwise, one's life or "way of life" will be under threat (p. 49). The "existential threat" may be presented as another social group, and so many will believe that as long as the other social group lives freely, their own life or way of life is endangered. As Schmitt (2007) writes, everyone "has to judge whether [the enemy] intends to negate his way of life and therefore must be fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence" (p. 27). With time, there is no concept of "normality" that regular citizens can remind themselves of or invoke as reason for their opposition to the status quo, what is demanded of them, or the actions of the government. The citizens themselves are not sure what is lawful, and with time, norms of behavior that restrain people's actions disappear or become vague.

People with "the authoritarian syndrome," as described by Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality*, are particularly susceptible to the way of thinking presented by totalitarian leaders during the state of exception. Adorno (1950) writes how people with that personality type are susceptible to and "take pleasure in obedience and subordination" (p. 759), and they will blindly listen to the state of exception authoritarians declare. As Fromm put it, the "authoritarian" types "tend not to assert themselves, not to do what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces [authorities - leaders]."

Conclusion

Intrinsic traits of bureaucracy are problematic - they make bureaucracy susceptible to be abused. However, only when combined with external conditions do those intrinsic traits allow for bureaucracy to be exploited for totalitarian ends. The intrinsic traits of bureaucracy that are considered problematic in this essay are: the dehumanization of people, the lack of individual moral reflection (on the part of the workers), the lack of mechanism of individual responsibility, and the separation from one's private life and professional life. However, there are several external conditions that allow for bureaucracies to get exploited - the presence of the "manipulative" and "authoritarian" type among the executors of actions as well as the implementation of the state of exception on the part of the government.

Since bureaucracy is something that many consider desirable and will be used in society for a long time, it is imperative to look at external conditions named in this essay and aim to minimize them while recognizing when they may get abused. For example, it is essential that the power to call the "state of emergency" is dispersed so that no one person can call it. However, since it is entirely possible for an entire governing political party, or even a coalition, to wish to invoke and use the "state of emergency" (martial law) for authoritarian purposes, it is the responsibility of democratic governments not to invoke the state of exception or do so only in absolutely necessary circumstances. This would also include governments limiting their extrajudicial actions to the bare necessity, such as not to set a precedent or "normalize" the invoking of the state of exception. After all, Article 48 was declared 63 times in 1923-24, and in 1932 alone, President Hindenburg used it 63 times. Hitler declaring Article 48 and using it to rule by decree was not an extraordinary event - in 1932, more laws were passed by decree than through the Reichstag. Furthermore, as Giorgio Agamben (1998) pointed out, "the first concentration camps were the work of the Social-Democratic governments, which interned thousands of communists" (p. 167). When in 1933, the Nazis "proclaimed the "decree for the protection of the people and the State" indefinitely suspending the articles of the constitution concerning personal liberty [...] they merely followed a practice consolidated by previous [democratically elected] governments" (Agamben, 1998, p. 168) - in the years 1919 to 1924, there were instances, where Weimar governments prolonged the state of exception for up to five months.

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