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Carl J. Friedrich on Responsibility and Authority

Book Review
Essay

Carl J. Friedrich's concept of administrative responsibility is examined in his published works from 1935 to 1960. Friedrich's idea of responsibility encompassed not only political and personal responsibility within the hierarchy of bureaucratic organizations, but also functional responsibility based on scientific knowledge and professional standards required by the reality of administrative discretion. Friedrich's notion of responsibility is contrasted with that of Herman Finer, who espoused strict obedience to political and administrative superiors. An examination of the NOMOS series of edited volumes from the later stage of Friedrich's career reflects the consistency of his views on responsibility and on the relationship of responsibility to authority based on reasoned communication. Friedrich's optimism regarding such authority contrasts with Hannah Arendt's view that authority is no longer an operative concept in modern society. Friedrich lays an important foundation for continued interest among public administrative scholars in the concept of administrative responsibility.

In recent years, the concept of administrative responsibility has received a great deal of attention from scholars in public administration (Bertelli and Lynn 2003; Burke 1986; Cooper 2006; Denhardt and Denhardt 2007; Jackson 2009; O'Leary 2006). Is responsibility the same as accountability, or does it require a greater degree of ethical and professional awareness than simply following orders faithfully within a hierarchy? How do we expect administrators to exercise responsibility under conditions of complexity and uncertainty? What role, if any, should professional administrators play in policy formation? Underlying all of the discussions is the realization that administration inescapably involves discretion and judgment and the power to act on judgmental decisions. How can this be reconciled with democratic constitutionalism and personal freedom?

Responsibility as a concept in political and administrative thought dates back at least to the writings of Alexander Hamilton in the *Federalist Papers*.¹ In

public administration thought, however, the guiding figure in advancing the idea of administrative responsibility is Carl Joachim Friedrich. Beginning with his examination of Swiss bureaucracy in the early 1930s and his famous debates with Herman Finer between 1935 and 1941, and continuing through his work with the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s, Friedrich developed a consistent approach to administrative responsibility that required professional civil servants to reconcile what he called the personal aspects of accountability—compliance with authority within an organization—with objective or functional responsibility, which essentially required administrators to be capable of answering why a particular decision was made or an action taken, based on solid professional or scientific grounds.

This review looks at Friedrich's development of the idea of responsible administration by examining two major works from the pre–World War II era and two later essays published in the NOMOS series, the annual publication of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy, an interdisciplinary learned society that he helped form in 1955.² Friedrich's positions on responsibility and authority are contrasted with those of Herman Finer on responsibility and Hannah Arendt on authority. They collectively provide valuable insights on one of the most significant questions facing public administration: how to reconcile demands for professional expertise in administration with the need for accountable and responsible action, a theme that is as relevant to today's world of public administration as it was in Friedrich's lifetime.

Background: Friedrich and Public Administration

Friedrich was born in 1901 in Leipzig, the son of a distinguished professor of medicine and a Prussian countess. Brilliantly educated in the finest German gymnasium tradition, he graduated from the University of Heidelberg, from which he received his undergraduate degree in 1925 and a doctorate in

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1930. In 1926, Friedrich joined the faculty of the Department of Government at Harvard University, which remained his primary professional attachment until his retirement in 1971. Friedrich was a prolific author whose work encompasses a wide range of topics in political science. He wrote or edited more than 50 books and 60-plus articles and book chapters.³ He passed away in 1984.

The concept of responsible administration was the recurring theme in Friedrich's work on public administration from the 1930s through the 1960s. Friedrich's view of responsible government administration was first in evidence in a book published in 1932, *Responsible Bureaucracy: A Study of the Swiss Civil Service*, coauthored with Taylor Cole. Switzerland's public service attracted Friedrich as a subject, he later noted, because its system put responsibility ahead of such purely bureaucratic values of efficiency, rule compliance, and obedience to authority:

For perhaps there is a species of bureaucracy which is not destructive of popular government, just as there are microbes that are not destructive of human life. A deep interest in this possibility caused the author some time ago to investigate the various aspects of the public service of so firmly established a democratic government as that of Switzerland. It appeared in the course of this investigation that the public services of Switzerland, while exhibiting certain characteristics of bureaucracy, did not exhibit others which are closely associated with the notion of bureaucratic government as it is generally held. (Friedrich 1935, 17)

The source of this quote is Friedrich's first major work on American public administration, a 72-page monograph written for the Commission of Inquiry on Public Service Personnel and published along with four other studies in *Problems of the American Public Service* in 1935. The title of the monograph, "Responsible Government Service under the American Constitution," reflects Friedrich's interest in viewing responsible administrative conduct within the constitutional framework of a given political system. Friedrich begins by summarizing the history of the United States, noting five factors that have been most significant in determining how government service has evolved: the absence of powerful neighbors, pioneer traditions, the melting pot of races and peoples, the multiplicity of churches, and the two-party system. At the conclusion of his analysis of these historical factors, Friedrich advances a novel approach to the relationship of politics and merit for a responsible government service:

A way, therefore, must be found to mark out for patronage such positions as do not require special knowledge—and the postmasterships, for

example, seem to offer a good opportunity—in order to enable the parties to carry on. If that sort of arrangement could be supplemented by a cautiously initiated and well-considered scheme of public honors to be bestowed upon deserving men of affairs, it would probably make it possible to take out of patronage some of the important policy-forming and yet highly technical positions of administrative leadership, and to put them under the civil service, i.e., to make them part of the responsible government service, without at the same time sending the American party system tumbling to the ground and American democracy with it. (1935, 14–15)

Friedrich thus disposes of the simplistic notion that politics and administration can be kept wholly separate by turning the equation on its head: policy positions should be accorded to the civil servant, and merely honorific or routine positions to patronage. The concept of responsibility is in need of rethinking in the age of administration, in Friedrich's view, in two respects. First, he notes that "there is a widespread belief in English-speaking countries that there are two kinds of responsibility, political and personal, the one enforceable through elections, the other through courts" (1935, 30). But in developed administrative systems, these are not in themselves adequate: "something beyond these broader types of general responsibility must be found to fill in the interstices, where government service is far-flung and technically competent" (1935, 32). This is what Friedrich terms a third sort of responsibility—objective and functional responsibility. The civil servant, tenured and thus both protected from political manipulation and encouraged to be creative, has a responsibility to be able to exercise discretion and justify acts of judgment by supplying sound reasons based on scientific evidence for such decisions.

Second, responsibility for administrative action must be seen as a corporate matter, not an individual one. This requires special administrative courts of the sort he looked at favorably in his study of Swiss public service (1935, 46–47). Friedrich worded this requirement for corporate responsibility strongly, expressing the view that "if the people through their government are unwilling to accept corporate responsibility for the acts of their officers, they do not yet know what it means to conduct a responsible government in an industrial age" (1935, 46). Liability is moved from the individual and affixed to the corporate entity. As Friedrich notes, "what is the use of granting such [discretionary] powers to various government services if the individual officer recoils from responsible action because he is held personally liable?" (1935, 45).

What emerges from Friedrich's discussion of responsibility is a nuanced view of the politics-administration

dichotomy—or, stated another way, a politics but not policy–administration dichotomy. In moving in this direction, Friedrich expresses confidence that administrators will not misuse their discretionary power:

We realize today, owing to the contributions of modern psychology, that there is no such thing as a specific “will of the people” with regard to the technicalities of revenue collection or any other “objective” task or function. All the people want is “good” execution of the task. Consequently “responsibility” to the people does not require partisans of a particular general outlook, whether Republican or Democrat, conservative, progressive, or socialist, but it does require specialists who “know the ropes” and will therefore effectively execute the general rules decided upon by executive or legislative leadership. Fortunately, people aware of such “objective” standards and sensitive therefore to such “objective” responsibility within a given function are usually glad to be relieved of the obligation of making decisions where no objective standards are available. The very passion for objectivity and impartiality which renders them judicially or scientifically minded, or both, makes them shrink from any rash and arbitrary decision. (1935, 38)

Friedrich’s 1935 monograph has been quoted in some detail because it represents the first expression of the concept of administrative responsibility, which is the foundation of his view of proper public administration. Summarizing his major points, responsible administration is distinguished from simple bureaucracy by the use of, and legal control of, administrative discretion, grounded in the historical realities of a given constitutional framework. Responsible administration builds on the simplistic notion of bureaucracy by adding (not substituting) professional judgment to compliance with hierarchical control and coercion (1935, 54) and the requirement for what he calls “publicity,” the “task to educate the public by making available his findings as a responsible administrator of existing legislation.” Responsibility is enforced not only through the hierarchical chain of command but also through administrative courts and commissions of inquiry. All of this, Friedrich adds, is compatible with American traditions, constitutional arrangements, and federalism. It also shows the method of argumentation that Friedrich typically employed throughout his career, using history, logic, and awareness of government practice to build a strong case for a given position. The only major omission from his usual tool kit is the absence of a grounding of ideas in classical political philosophy.

The Friedrich-Finer Debates

Friedrich’s contrast between traditional accountability and administrative responsibility triggered what

most students of public administration know about his work, the so-called Friedrich-Finer debates of the immediate pre–World War II years (Bertelli and Lynn 2003; Cooper 2006; Denhardt and Denhardt 2007; Jackson 2009). The subject of the debate was the proper understanding of administrative accountability and responsibility within government agencies in democratic systems of government. Finer of the University of London took exception to Friedrich’s distinction between personal responsibility and what, to him, was the more nebulous and troubling concept of functional responsibility. Finer’s view was that responsibility was synonymous with obedience to external controlling authorities (1936, 580) and not to any sense of professionalism or broader scientific truth. As might be expected, Finer found “truly startling” and wrong-headed (1936, 581) Friedrich’s idea that discretionary authority is best lodged in career public administrators and not politically appointed officials.

As Michael Jackson (2009) notes in his comprehensive review of the Friedrich-Finer interchanges, much of the debate centered around two points of divergence: the ability of political principals—ministers—to control and supervise all of the details of administration, and the role that nonpolitical career administrators should play in the policy–administration cycle. Finer argued the traditional view in both the objective question—can ministers in fact oversee all aspects of administrative discretion in complex public bureaucracies?—and the normative question—is this the proper relationship between politics and administration? Friedrich, while not amassing a great deal of empirical data to support his position, argued for a revisionist view in both regards. To him, administration had evolved to the point that it was impossible for political principals to oversee all the aspects of work done by their agents, the professional administrators. He also clearly added a normative element as well: it was preferable for career administrators to make discretionary judgment, as they had a base of knowledge that was in excess of that of the politician, and a professional code of conduct, even if implicit, that led to rational judgment and the ability to provide reasoned answers for why discretionary decisions were made.

Finer and Friedrich continued the debate in a pair of articles in 1940 and 1941. Friedrich revisited his views on responsible administration in 1940 in an article in *Public Policy* titled “Public Policy and the Nature of Administrative Responsibility.” He was particularly busy in 1939 and 1940 as war erupted and the full nature of the evils of totalitarian regimes was revealed, leading to the beginning of his groundbreaking analysis of the origins of totalitarianism in Greek and Hegelian deification of the state (Friedrich 1939, 1940a). His article in *Public Policy* restated many of the themes from the 1935 monograph but also

presented a probing criticism of the failure of British parliamentary government to deal effectively with the challenges posed by the rise of fascism.⁴ Triggered no doubt by Finer's criticism of his positions on responsibility, the 1940 article is written with an underlying passion and sense of personal involvement that sets it apart from the rather slow-moving and careful approach employed in the 1935 monograph, although the argument is essentially the same, as shown by the number of times Friedrich quotes his earlier work. It is full of quotable passages that summarize Friedrich's position on administrative responsibility, which remains tied to both the technical and political aspects of responsible action:

The pious formulas about the will of the people are all very well, but when it comes to these issues of social maladjustment the popular will has little content, except the desire to see such maladjustments removed. A solution which fails in this regard, or which causes new and perhaps greater maladjustments, is bad; we have a right to call such policy irresponsible if it can be shown that it was adopted without proper regard to the existing sum of human knowledge concerning the technical issues involved; we also have a right to call it irresponsible if it can be shown that it was adopted without proper regard for existing preferences in the community, and more particularly its prevailing majority. Consequently, the responsible administrator is one who is responsive to these two dominant factors: technical knowledge and popular sentiment. (Friedrich 1940b, 12)

Responding to the criticism of Herman Finer and others that the British system of parliamentary responsibility is superior to the American system of constitutional separation of powers, Friedrich is dismissive:

As contrasted with the detailed and continuous criticism and control of administrative activity afforded by Congressional committees, this parliamentary responsibility is largely inoperative and certainly ineffectual. When one considers the extent of public disapproval directed against Franklin D. Roosevelt's Congressional supporters who were commonly dubbed "rubber stamps," it is astonishing that anyone extolling the virtues of British parliamentarianism should get a hearing at all. For what has the parliamentary majority in Britain been in the last few years but a rubber stamp of an automatic docility undreamt of in the United States? (1940b, 10)

Friedrich also expands the idea of "publicity" introduced in his 1935 monograph by arguing for a vigorous public relations function:

Put quite broadly, it may be said that the public relations work of the administrative agencies has the task of anticipating clashes between the administrative efforts of effectuating a policy and the set habits of thought and behavior of the public which constitutes its "environment" . . . Many of the questions asked of the information services of important federal agencies have no answer. The questions raise issues of policy which either have not been anticipated, or at least have not been settled by the administrative officer involved, or reported back to Congress for settlement. (1940b, 18–19)

Friedrich's idea of publicity raises issues of the right of dissent and free speech within administrative agencies. In this regard, his approach is clear and unambiguous: there cannot be what he calls a "gag rule" imposed from above that is based solely on bureaucratic notions of personal responsibility. Rather, officials bear the objective responsibility of "addressing themselves to their colleagues in a frank and scientifically candid manner" (1940b, 23).

The only sound standard in a vast and technically complex government such as ours is to insist that the public statements of officials be in keeping with the highest requirements of scientific work. If a man's superiors disagree with him, let them mount the same rostrum and prove that he is wrong; before the goddess of science all men are equal. (1940b, 23)

The 1940 essay essentially lays out Friedrich's view of proper administration. It is proactive, guided by and respectful of both professional and political aspects of responsibility. The aspect of administrative management that is crucial to its success is personnel management, to ensure that morale in agencies is high, rules allowing for responsible conduct are promulgated and enforced, and employees are allowed "a status at least equal in dignity and self-respect to the status its labor laws impose upon and demand from private employers" (1940b, 21). Friedrich's connection to the field of public administration throughout the decade of 1930–40 consisted almost entirely of work that in one way or another connected him to the emerging field of personnel administration (Friedrich 1935, 1937, 1940b), in large part because responsible administration was reliant on civil servants, and the role of civil servants was defined by the personnel system within which they operated.

Finer responded to Friedrich's refined and expanded notion of responsibility with an article in the first volume of *Public Administration Review* that reinforced his earlier contention that a strict interpretation of the politics–administration dichotomy is needed to ensure accountability to the public through obedience

of administrators to their political superiors (Finer 1941).⁵ From the first paragraphs of the article, it is clear that Finer's purpose is targeting Friedrich's position on the role of the career administrator in exercising discretion in the name of professional responsibility:

My chief difference with Professor Friedrich was and is my insistence upon distinguishing responsibility as an arrangement of correction and punishment even up to dismissal both of politicians and officials, while he believed and believes in reliance upon responsibility as a sense of responsibility, largely unsanctioned, except by deference or loyalty to professional standards. (1941, 335)

Finer then proceeds to make his argument in two ways: to restate and defend his position on strict political accountability and to critically examine Friedrich's 1940 article. The tone is combative and often tart, with Finer noting that "most of the things I have to say are extremely elementary, but since it has been possible for a writer of eminence to discount their significance I may be forgiven for reaffirming them" (1941, 335). On administrative discretion, he is clear: "My answer is that the servants of the public are not to decide their own course; they are to be responsible to the elected representatives of the public, and these are to determine the course of action of public servants to the most minute degree that is technically feasible" (1941, 336). To do otherwise is to discard the basic framework of democracy:

But when Professor Friedrich advocates the official's responsibility to "the fellowship of science," the discard of official anonymity, the entry of the official into the political arena as an advocate of policy and teacher of fact versus "partisan extravagance," the result to be feared is the enhancement of official conceit and what has come to be known as "the new despotism." (1941, 340)

Finer is on stronger ground when he challenges Friedrich's optimistic view of the ability of professionals through their professional organizations to use technical knowledge to advance their view of the public interest. He rejects Friedrich's notion that functional responsibility requires professional judgment outside the policies that reflect the will of the people, stating that "it is demonstrable that the will of the people *has* content, not only about what it desires, but how maladjustments can be remedied, and some of its ideas are quite wise" (1941, 346). Finer here plays the role of the populist against Friedrich's professional elitism:

Responsibility in the sense of an interpersonal, externally sanctioned duty is, then, the

dominant consideration for public administration; and it includes and does not merely stand by the side of responsibility to the standards of one's craft in the dubious position of a Cinderella. (1941, 347)

Finer's final criticism of Friedrich concerns the latter's notion of "publicity." Whereas Friedrich advocates open communication between administrators and the public in instances in which factual information can and should be provided for the public to reach rational conclusions on issues of policy, Finer again takes the opposite position, arguing for a closed bureaucracy communicating to the public only through its elected representatives and political institutions:

A wise civil servant, careful to preserve his own usefulness and that of his colleagues, and not reckless in the face of the always imminent cry of bureaucracy and despotism, would not urge a policy upon it. Still less would he use public advocacy to spur on his political chief or connive with reformist groups having a purposeful policy. He would rather confine himself to frank private demonstration of the alternatives and their advantages and disadvantages, to his political chief, or where the political system requires, to the committee of the assembly at their request. (1941, 349)

Finer concludes his biting attack on Friedrich with a statement of his belief in the "adequately sagacious" nature of the public and their political leaders, who "know not only where the shoe pinches, but have a shrewd idea as to the last and leather of their footwear" (1941, 350). Administrative discretion may be found to have a role in modern democratic governance, but should result in advice to political officials, not autonomy to speak and act according to professional judgment:

Contemporary devices to secure closer cooperation of officials with public and legislatures are properly auxiliaries to and not substitutes for political control of public officials through exertion of the sovereign authority of the public. Thus, political responsibility is the major concern of those who work for healthy relationships between the officials and the public, and moral responsibility, although a valuable conception and institutional form, is minor and subsidiary. (1941, 350)

Friedrich chose not to respond to Finer, and thus ended the famous debate. Each man gave as good as he got, with the developing field of public administration the winner by having the sides so clearly drawn on the role of administration in developed democratic nation-states. After 1940, Friedrich moved away from

his earlier concern with personnel administration toward broader concerns raised by the war and the postwar peace (Friedrich 1943, 1945, 1947a, 1947b). During this time, he published for the first and only time in *Public Administration Review*, an article titled “Planning for the Greater Boston Metropolitan Area” (Friedrich 1945). But his concern with public administration was largely embedded in his broader examination of constitutional government and federalism (Friedrich 1948, 1949a, 1949b, 1950, 1953), political theory and philosophy, and dictatorship and totalitarianism. By the mid-1950s, as the NOMOS series was launching, Friedrich’s concern was increasingly the intersection of political science, law and jurisprudence, and philosophy. He never returned to his earlier efforts to share his work directly with the field of public administration, but he did use the NOMOS series to advance the concept of administrative responsibility to the broad interdisciplinary community that he helped form as vehicle to explore the pressing problems of modern society.

The NOMOS Series

In 1955, Friedrich played the leading role in organizing the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy. The new learned society was, as described by Friedrich, “founded in 1955 by a group of friends in the social sciences, law, and philosophy who share an interest in the range of problems traditionally treated within the broad framework of political and legal philosophy” (1958a, v). The society’s activities were based around an annual conference and an annual volume on a topic determined for the annual conference.⁶ The annual volume series was called NOMOS, which Friedrich described as “the broadest Greek term for law, because in this term there are also traditionally comprised the notions of a basic political order and of customs and a way of life (1958a, v). The series afforded an opportunity for Friedrich to revisit for the first time since his debate with Finer the meaning of administrative responsibility and its critical importance to the balance of professional expertise and democratic accountability in modern society.

Authority

The first volume of the NOMOS series, *Authority*, appeared in 1958 and represented the discussion on the topic at the 1956 meeting of the society. Like subsequent volumes in the series, it was not simply a set of proceedings, but a combination of papers delivered at the meeting along with papers developed afterward from comments at the meeting or elicited by Friedrich “to round out and balance the presentation” (Friedrich 1958a, vi). Friedrich offered a short preface, but not, at least in his role as editor as opposed to contributor, an introduction to the separate essays or a summation or synthesis at the end. This light editorial touch, initiated in *Authority*, became characteristic of all the NOMOS volumes. After all, this was a society of equals, and the

contributors were the superstars of their day, whose work and reputations stood on their own.

Authority is in many ways the strongest and most useful of the nine NOMOS volumes edited by Friedrich. In the aftermath of World War II and the rise of the Cold War, authority became entangled with authoritarian rule and totalitarian excess, so it was a logical first topic for the society to explore under Friedrich’s guidance. Friedrich’s essay, “Authority, Reason, and Discretion,” appeared as the second of 13 contributions, which were grouped into three parts: authority in general; authority in historical perspective; and authority in sociopolitical perspective. Contributors included such well-known writers as Hannah Arendt, Herbert J. Spiro, Bertrand de Jouvenel, David Easton, and Talcott Parsons.

For our purposes, it is the contrast between the views of authority posed by Friedrich and by Arendt that is most useful to explore. By this time, Friedrich and Arendt were arguably the leading thinkers on authority and totalitarianism, so the variance in their perspectives is worth examining in some detail. Most relevant for our discussion, Friedrich used the essay on authority to revisit some of the themes contained in his earlier writings on responsible administration.

Friedrich begins his essay with a statement of the problem he will address:

Ever since the eighteenth-century revolt against the established authorities in church and state, there has been a marked tendency among freedom-loving intellectuals to view “authority” with a jaundiced eye, if not to denounce it. (1958b, 28)

Why has this been the case? Authority has been confused or conflated with power; or, authority has been seen as related to tradition and faith rather than reason. Friedrich quickly moves to advance the view that there is a rational component of authority, and that analysis of this rational element is the key to understanding why authority is critical to the functioning of modern society. To arrive at a proper understanding of the concept, Friedrich carefully separates the meaning of authority from power, and from a concern solely with authority as a political phenomenon. Instead, it becomes a particular sort of communications:

When I speak of authority, I wish to say that the communications of a person possessing it exhibit a very particular kind of relationship to reason and reasoning. Such communication, whether opinions or commands, are not demonstrated through rational discourse, but they possess the *potentiality of reasoned elaboration*—they are “worthy of acceptance.” (1959b, 35)

Such a definition allows Friedrich to expand the notion of authority from power or politics to roles based on education, expertise, and professional standing, such as the scholar, teacher, lawyer, and doctor. It is also strikingly similar to the justification for responsible administration found in his earlier writings: the professionally trained civil servant, more than the political appointee, is able, in fact obligated, to engage in such communications. As he points out later in the essay, the theory of authority drawn from this definition justifies—indeed, demands—discretion to be placed in the hands of administrators:

Authority interpreted as involving the potential reasoning in interpersonal communications, that is to say as the capacity for reasoned elaboration, provides the clue to the problem of why discretion is both indispensable and manageable in all political and legal systems. (1958b, 40)

It is important to point out that Friedrich's idea of rationality is not limited to a strictly fact-based or positivistic approach; rather, "the fact that his decisions, commands, or other communications could be reinforced by reasoned elaboration relating them to established values and beliefs will lend his acts that 'authority' without which discretion becomes arbitrary abuse of power" (1958b, 45).

Friedrich thus not only accepts authority but also sees it as a necessity for civilization. He ends his essay with language reminiscent of Max Weber in "Politics as a Vocation."⁷

As long as we can maintain a measure of authority, that is to say, as long as those who wield power recognize their responsibility for discretionary acts in the sense of an obligation to retain the regard for the potentiality of reasoned elaboration, a constitutional order can be maintained. Once this regard is lost—and it may be lost by man at large no longer accepting reason as a guide—the night of meaningless violence is upon us. (1958b, 48)

The argument advanced in the essay is largely the same one advanced by Friedrich in his 1935 and 1940 works on responsible administration. The difference is largely one of context: in the earlier works, Friedrich's position on responsibility was challenged by those such as Finer who argued for traditional notions of bureaucratic and parliamentary control and command. In the context of the 1950s, the challenge to authority came from those who saw it as an element of totalitarianism or those who saw the preconditions for its acceptance as relics of a fast-receding past order. Friedrich was also more explicit in drawing the connection between authority, responsibility, and effective communication, as one

recent scholar has noted in a highly perceptive essay (Herbst 2006).

The use of the past tense in the title of Hannah Arendt's contribution, "What Was Authority?" immediately suggests a very different perspective from that of Friedrich. While Friedrich sees the potential for rational communication as the foundation of genuine authority, Arendt feels that "authority has vanished from the modern world, and if we raise the question what authority is, we can no longer fall back upon authentic and undisputable experiences common to all" (1958, 81). Like Friedrich, Arendt bases her thoughts on authority with reference to the difference between power and authority and the need to see it as related to communications, but she comes up with a very different conclusion. She poses a dichotomy between authoritarian command and egalitarian persuasion that does not include the possibility for the "reasoned elaboration" so basic to Friedrich's position:

Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet, authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order which is always hierarchical. (1958, 82)

The difference between Friedrich and Arendt on authority, so striking given their similar intellectual and cultural heritage, and their shared criticism of the Greek tradition in political theory,⁸ seems to rest on two fundamental differences in outlook. First, Arendt does not give to reason and scientific method the role that Friedrich ascribes, to be the basis of noncoercive authority relations between those with knowledge and those who appreciate the need to defer to those with greater knowledge and expertise. Thus, reasoned explanations from professionals do not figure into Arendt's view of social dynamics. In fact, we are left without tradition and faith to counter power:

To live in a political realm with neither authority nor the concomitant awareness that the source of authority transcends power and those who are in power, means to be confronted anew, without the protection of tradition and self-evident standards of behavior, by the elementary problems of human living-together. (Arendt 1958, 110)

Second, Friedrich's interests reside more closely with the practical application of his theory than do those

of Arendt. Friedrich's interest in professional administration, the discretionary use of expert power, and the development of constitutional government in the aftermath of political collapse provided him a view of the actual operations of government that Arendt's career did not. Or, to state it differently, Friedrich never stressed the tragic element in human existence that is so evident in the work of Arendt.

Responsibility

The second of the NOMOS series, *Community*, was, in Friedrich's own assessment, a disjointed and somewhat vague set of essays. The following volume, *Responsibility*, could be expected to have a much sharper focus given Friedrich's quarter century of concern with the topic. The volume is divided into four major parts: responsibility in general, criminal responsibility, responsibility in modern government, and responsibility of citizenship. Friedrich might have been expected to author the first chapter, as he did in *Community*, given the central role that responsibility plays in this work. Instead, his essay, "The Dilemma of Administrative Responsibility," appears as the second in the section on responsibility in modern government. Nonetheless, the lead essay by J. Roland Pennock, titled "The Problem of Responsibility," echoes many of the thoughts of Friedrich's prior work on the subject.

Pennock begins with a statement that parallels Friedrich's thinking on responsibility:

I believe that among various usages (possibly not *all* usages) of the word "responsibility" there *is* a common core of meaning, that part of the core relates to the exercise of discretion, and that herein lies *the* modern problem of responsibility. (1960, 4)

He follows a line of reasoning almost identical to that developed earlier by Friedrich. Pennock notes that "responsibility" has two primary meanings, or what I have called the core of meaning has two facets, (a) accountability and (b) the rational and moral exercise of discretionary power (or the capacity or disposition for such exercise), and that each of these notions tends to flavor the other" (1960, 13). Like Friedrich, Pennock notes that responsibility "implies deliberation and rationality as well as liability" (1960, 17), and must be paired with power, that is, the actor must have the necessary power to carry out the tasks for which she is assumed to be responsible. Responsibility is thus the "exercise of judgment and discretion in light of careful analysis and conscientious weighing of values" (1960, 27), identical to the idea of responsibility laid out by Friedrich in his debates with Finer two decades earlier. Pennock acknowledges his debt to Friedrich in a footnote, noting that "the classical statement of this argument has been set forth by the editor of this volume" in the 1940 essay (1960, 25). The only major

difference between the two scholars is Pennock's failure to relate the concept to the work of professional administrators.

By 1960, Friedrich must have known that his position on responsibility had won the debate on the relationship between the political and administrative aspects of modern government. Would he use the NOMOS essay as an opportunity to restate his earlier position, or to stake out new territory? The answer is the former. "The Dilemma of Administrative Responsibility" is largely a restatement, albeit a concise, focused, and highly persuasive one. That the essay is a reflection on his earlier views and not an attempt to move much beyond them is indicated by his several references to "Authority, Reason and Discretion" in *Authority* and the 1940 essay, "Public Policy and the Nature of Administrative Responsibility." The essay is also relatively brief, only 14 pages in length.

Friedrich begins the essay by linking the concept of responsibility to public administration, stating that "among the spheres within which the problem of responsibility is of primary importance, administration ranks high. No large-scale administration, no rationalized bureaucracy, whether governmental or non-governmental, is possible, without making the staff members responsible *for* their work, and *to* their superiors" (Friedrich 1960, 189). The connection of public administration to authority is made early in the essay. Noting that "responsible conduct is closely linked to the problems of authority" Friedrich sees it in principal-agent terms:

Whenever B is responsible to A, the presumption is that A has conferred upon B discretion to act upon certain issues, to decide them on A's behalf, i. e., to choose between several available alternatives or to discover a new one, not arbitrarily, but in accordance with what the situation requires. (1960, 190)

As he identified in 1940, the dilemma of responsibility for Friedrich lies in the existence of two aspects of responsible behavior, the personal and the functional. The problem is exacerbated by the increasingly complex and technical nature of public policy:

For this gulf of technical knowledge which separates the professional from the layman causes the most serious conflicts arising in the field of administrative responsibility. They are most serious in the government service, because the prevailing tendency to stress the *will* of the principal, be it the people or its representatives, creates an irresolvable conflict. Only an approach which will bridge the gap between the personal and the functional aspect of

responsibility can show a way out of these difficulties. (1960, 193)

What is this bridging approach? Friedrich here succumbs to the temptation to dance on the grave of the losing side in the Finer debates, noting that the development of the “science of public administration” “clinches the argument about the ‘inner check’ which must reinforce the crumbling institution of parliamentary responsibility” (1960, 194). The dichotomy between policy formation and execution is seen to be false. The responsible administrator, armed with discretionary authority, needs to be responsive to two factors, technical knowledge and popular sentiment, in both policy formation and execution (1960, 199).

Having assumed that the position on responsible administrative behavior he has staked out over the years has achieved universal acceptance, Friedrich turns to the issue of enforcement. This is perhaps the section of the essay that shows the greatest degree of originality and development over his earlier works on the topic. First, he rejects the idea of dismissal as an approach to enforcement as “crude” and instead lists five measures that have greater promise: disciplinary measures short of dismissal, promotional measures, financial measures, judicial measures, and professional approval and disapproval (1960, 201). His preferred approach is a melding of the judicial and the professional. This echoes his thoughts on the value of administrative law as a factor in responsible administration, which date back to his works on Swiss government in 1932 and responsible administration in 1935 and 1940. If done properly, “when such institutionalization occurs, the professional standards become assimilated to judicial measures as a means of maintaining administrative responsibility” (1960, 201). Friedrich notes “favorable signs” that this European approach may be developing in the English-speaking nations, but he offers few specifics on the professionalization of administration in the United States.

Friedrich concludes the essay with a passionate appeal to view administrative responsibility within the context of public policy development:

Only within well-developed policy can responsible conduct on the part of administrative officials be expected. As we have seen, well-developed policy means a policy developed with the active and responsible participation of the officials who are to execute it. (1960, 201).

The dilemma of the title, between personal and functional responsibility, is thus related to the need to dispense with the idea that public policy formation is the task of political officials and not professional civil servants. It is not enough that responsible administrators exercise discretion in a reasoned manner. Policy

itself must be “adequately discussed and rationally adapted to changing situations and their requirements” (1960, 202).

Discussion: Is Friedrich Still Relevant to Public Administration?

Friedrich’s revisit and refinement of the concept of administrative responsibility in the NOMOS volumes represent his final contribution to the field of public administration. After *Responsibility* appeared, two subsequent volumes, *The Public Interest* (1962) and *Rational Decision* (1964), offered Friedrich an opportunity to connect the major topic with public administration, but in neither case was this opportunity taken. Friedrich’s vision of a professionalized and responsible public service remains his primary contribution to public administration. From the 1930s to his final essay on the topic in *Responsibility* in 1960, Friedrich established the importance of responsibility as transcending simple bureaucratic accountability to require administrators to engage in reasoned judgment when exercising discretion. His work stimulated others in the field to examine this critical aspect of administration (Gaus 1936). By arguing that simple notions of accountability based on a clear distinction between policy making and policy execution were neither feasible or desirable, he helped establish the idea of public administration as a professional field, with responsibilities beyond simple accountability for actions within a hierarchy.

Since the Friedrich-Finer debates and the final contributions of Friedrich in the NOMOS essays, a good deal has fundamentally altered the debate over what constitutes the proper grounds for administrative responsibility. Public administration, either in its professional or in its academic dimension, is profoundly different than it was in the period of time, from the 1930s to the 1960s, that Friedrich witnessed. Faith in government, and especially in the role of bureaucracy, has been replaced by cynicism and a lack of trust. The uncomplicated view of administrative agencies implementing legislation in a direct and monopolistic manner has been challenged by the reform ideas of New Public Management, the rise of “hollow government,” and third-party policy implementation. The view of public responsibility and the public interest as derived from political theory has been countered by ideas whose theoretical foundations rest in economics, such as public choice theory and market economics. Public management is now seen in the context of networks, where accountability and responsibility are diffuse and often the question is whether anyone is in charge and answerable to the public.

As it was for Friedrich and Finer in the years before World War II, the key issue for public administration is the appreciation and proper use of administrative discretion. The successors to Finer, whether they

acknowledge his position or simply follow the same logic, seek ways to limit discretion either by admonishing political institutions to create policy that is unambiguous and restrictive, or by enforcing strict standards of accountability and performance (Moe and Gilmour 1995). Those who tack more to Friedrich's position on the need for inner checks stress the inevitability of administrative discretion and the need to exercise judgment in ways that meet high ethical standards (Cooper 2006), dialogue with citizens (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007), or administrative leadership to correct the flaws in the constitutional order (Behn 1998; Bertelli and Lynn 2003).

Although it would be misleading to characterize Friedrich as an ethicist, more than any other factor, it has been the development of administrative ethics as a prominent element in public administration that has kept Friedrich's work part of the ongoing dialogue in the field. The Friedrich-Finer debates highlighted the issue of whether external or internal controls should guide administrative behavior. Since the time of the debates, there has been an explosion of external ethical controls—ethics laws, standards and codes of conduct, inspectors general and internal auditors—and a growing body of literature arguing for an administrative ethic focused on inner checks and a concern for the public interest (Burke 1986; Cooper 2006). Accountability to political and administrative superiors has been seen as requiring balance with a broader sense of responsibility to citizens and the community (Denhardt and Denhardt 2007; O'Leary 2006).

It is important to recognize, however, that, especially by today's standards, Friedrich's contribution is limited in several important respects. First is his disinterest in moving beyond the theoretical to empirical examinations of how administrators actually perform their tasks and use discretion. While he did venture into applied research, especially in regard to the development of constitutional government in the aftermath of World War II, he did little applied work directly related to public administration. Had he chosen to do so, it would probably have been in examining the exercise of professional discretion in policy formation and execution, and in the personnel rules and procedures best adapted to professionalized administration. It fell on such later writers as Frederick Mosher (1968) and Don K. Price (1962) to examine in detail the impact of professionalization within administrative agencies.⁹

The approach taken in NOMOS, of collecting a series of essays on broad topics with little editorial explanation of the connections between the separate contributions, makes the contribution of the series to public administration problematic. Even the most relevant of the group, *Authority and Responsibility*, have only modest value to today's major issues in

public administration, largely the contributions of Friedrich and one or two others in each volume. What is most useful, though, is the recognition that the major problems faced by today's administrators can be traced through historical analysis and the literature of political philosophy to the present.

A third limitation of Friedrich's work is perhaps his assumption that administrative behavior be measured by its quotient of rationality. His formulas are not only ungrounded in empirical evidence but also relatively optimistic—one might even say naive—regarding the acceptance by politicians and the public of the expanded role of nonelected career civil servants. The belief in reasoned analysis and scientific analysis of issues downplayed the ethical issues involved in the wicked problems encountered in public policy and administration. Friedrich's rather elitist ideas of administrators educating the citizenry based on superior knowledge runs counter to ideas of administrators as facilitators of dialogue between citizens and government. Again, it has fallen to later writers in public administration such as Terry Cooper (2006), Janet and Robert Denhardt (2007), and Rosemary O'Leary (2006) to explore the ethical dimension of responsibility under the less than optimal conditions of actual governance activities.

Despite their limitations, Friedrich's thoughts on administrative responsibility and political authority remain relevant today. By seeing responsibility as the most significant issue raised by the development of the modern administrative state, Friedrich combined public administration's concern for administrative competence with deeper questions of institutional and personal responsibility in a constitutional democracy. They are, as Friedrich notes, only a chapter in dealing with the competing demands for individual freedom and the collective public good in a constitutional order.

Notes

1. Pennock (1960, 5 n.) provides a useful discussion of the use of the term "responsibility" in the literature on politics. The earliest example of the term in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from Alexander Hamilton's discussion of the concept in *Federalist* No. 63, published in 1787. Pennock notes, however, that Jeremy Bentham used the term 11 years earlier in *A Fragment of Government*, and it was used as early as 1643 in regard to the king being "responsible" to Parliament. Most agree, though, that Hamilton's *Federalist* No. 63 was the first example of political theory based around the concept.
2. The title of the series, NOMOS, is usually but not always treated with all capitals; I use that usage throughout.
3. His work appeared in such major journals as *Foreign Affairs*, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *American Political Science Review*, *Journal of Politics*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Review of Politics*, *Public Administration Review*,

- Harvard Educational Review*, *Western Political Quarterly*, *Public Policy*, *Harvard Law Review*, *Orbis*, and many others. For those who categorize by specialty, the most common designation for Friedrich was political theorist. But a review of his corpus of works suggests that political theory was more a foundation for all of his work than a narrow specialization.
4. Friedrich's harsh criticism of the British failure to address the threat posed by Nazi Germany in the 1930s is an often overlooked aspect of the Friedrich-Finer debate. Finer responded in kind by associating the sort of administrative discretion favored by Friedrich with a form of despotism associated with such regimes as Nazi Germany, a harsh accusation given Friedrich's expatriate status.
 5. Finer's choice of the new journal founded by the American Society for Public Administration must surely have pleased the society's founders, who anticipated that *Public Administration Review* would become the major forum for debating the critical issues of the field.
 6. The annual meeting of the American Society for Political and Legal Philosophy rotates on a three-year cycle in conjunction with the annual meetings of the American Association of Law Schools, the American Political Science Association, and the American Philosophical Association; the presidency of the society also rotates among the three disciplines.
 7. Although the language is similar, Friedrich is critical of Weber's conflation of authority and legitimacy. In a footnote, he notes that "the close relation between the psychological and the nominalist misinterpretation of phenomena like authority is strikingly illustrated in the approach of Max Weber, who, confusing authority with legitimacy, misses one of the key aspects of authority, by minimizing its rational aspect" (1958b, 32). Somewhat curiously, Friedrich does not cite Weber extensively in his treatment of bureaucracy and political responsibility. In his major public administration essays, in 1935 and 1940, he relies instead on American students of public administration such as Leonard White and Luther Gulick to derive his description of bureaucracy.
 8. Friedrich's criticism of Greek political theory is most evident in his 1940 essay, "Greek Political Heritage and Totalitarianism" (Friedrich 1940a). Friedrich's argument is that the Greek political tradition exalts the state, which, in turn, is based solely on power. Friedrich considers the legacy of Greek political thought "the adoration of power for its own sake" (1940a, 224). In other writings, he also condemns the Greek tradition for failing to come up with a theory of federalism that could unite the micro-states of ancient Greece politically. Friedrich concludes his essay, written as Europe descended into war and barbarism, with a defense of the role of religion outside the control of the state as a counterforce to the exaltation of the state. Noting the line of thinking from the Greeks through Cromwell, Bonaparte, Hegel, Marx, and fascism, he opines that if we continue this line of state worship and state power, "culture will wither and perhaps die, as the ruthless pursuit of power in the name of the secular church-states leads to ever more exhausting struggles for power and supremacy. Therefore, let us beware of the heritage of the Greek polis: it is a veritable Trojan horse, smuggled into our Christian civilization" (1940a, 225). Arendt bases her major critique of Greek thought on the fact that "in the realm of Greek political life there was no

awareness of authority based on immediate political experience" (1958, 97–98); instead, political theory was based on utopian notions of the *polis* as a way of fusing the individual and the state.

9. While serving as Frederick Mosher's research assistant in the 1970s, I do not recall him referencing Friedrich as a source of inspiration for his work on professionalism. He credited Don K. Price and his work on science and government as a major factor in examining government professionalization in *Democracy and the Public Service*. Mosher was, however, familiar with the NOMOS series and acquired the first volumes for his private library collection.

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