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Studying the stillborn: the ideology of the estates' absolutism and proto-bureaucratic thought in the 17th century Dutch Republic

Pieter Wagenaar

Introduction

American public administration history traditionally takes Woodrow Wilson's (1887) article, 'The Study of Administration', as the discipline's starting point. Wilson, after all, drew a clear distinction between politics and administration, and proposed a separate theoretical underpinning for the latter. That foundation he sought in European theorizing on bureaucracy which, he claimed, had been fostered by absolutism. In 'The Study of Administration' he explicitly states:

> Those governments are now in the lead in administrative practice which had rulers still absolute but also enlightened when those modern days of political illumination came in which it was made evident to all but the blind that governors are properly only the servants of the governed. In such governments administration has been organized to subserve the general weal with the simplicity and effectiveness vouchsafed only to the undertaking of a single will. Such was the case in Prussia, for instance, where administration has been most studied and most nearly perfected. (Wilson, 1997: 17)

What ideas was Wilson referring to? And how had these come about, one might ask.

Much is written on bureaucracy, bureaucratization and bureaucratic thought, but, surprisingly enough, the emergence of ideas on bureaucracy is a neglected subject. Even Max Weber, who described what modern bureaucracy is, and to a degree why it came into being, pays no attention to its intellectual history. Weber obviously related bureaucratization to the rationalization of the western world view in general, which in his opinion was caused to a large degree by Calvinism. The point to be made here is that, when he focuses on bureaucratization, conscious design caused by 'proto-bureaucratic thinking' plays no part in his argument. No reference to such thought is to be found in his writings. Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, conversely, has demonstrated just how much intellectual effort German theorists devoted to bureaucratic thinking during the Ancien

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Régime. From the second half of the 17th century onwards many practitioners in the public services of Germany's princely states devoted themselves to the construction of a true administrative theory. The tradition these scholars — the so-called cameralists — founded, Rilinger argues, has had a lasting impact on current administrative ideas and practice and, finally, even produced Weber himself (Stollberg-Rilinger, 1986; Lindenfeld, 1997).

Rilinger, of course, belongs to a scholarly tradition too, albeit a rather modest one. The study of proto-bureaucratic thought restricts itself to research on German cameralism. One explanation for this narrow spatial focus could obviously be that proto-bureaucratic thinking was actually limited to the German-speaking parts only during the early modern period. The available empirical research into Dutch bureaucratization, for example, seems to push that conclusion home. No conscious design appears to have been behind the phenomenon. As Holland's government grew and became more intricate, the need to control it simply grew continuously. Government bodies therefore experimented with different ways of functionalizing, and imposed ever-stricter regulations on public functionaries, which were recorded in the form of written instructions. These instructions were gradually refined, adjusted as they needed to be to changing circumstances and, thus, in an incremental, 'accidental' way, patrimonial rule slowly started to change into bureaucracy (Raadschelders, 1990; Wagenaar, 1999).

Could conscious design nevertheless have played a role in the development of Dutch bureaucracy in early modern times? Were there, at least, public functionaries who carried a sort of 'Weberian master plan' in their minds? One might expect the answer to be positive. After all, cameralism owed quite a lot to Netherlandish thinking, especially to that of Justus Lipsius, whose neo-stoicism, by emphasizing discipline, diligence, sense of duty and obedience, contributed heavily to its intellectual foundations (Oestreich, 1982: 5–9, 19, 30, 34, 131; Van Gelderen, 1992: 186).

In a previous publication I discussed Dutch proto-bureaucratic thought as found in the works of Mr Paulus Teding van Berkhout (Wagenaar, 2000). In this article my research continues by also paying attention to the works of the political theorists Van Alphen and Graswinckel, and linking these to their ideology of the estates' absolute sovereignty, but not by limiting myself solely to the history of ideas. Instead, in compliance with Pocock's and Skinner's view that the evolution of ideas can only be properly understood in their economical, societal, political etc. contexts, I also investigate how authors arrived at their opinions, i.e. examine what discussions they were involved in and why. With Bonney I would like to draw attention to the problem of how these ideas then, in their turn, influenced the society from which they arose (Oakley, 1984: 27–9; Bonney, 1995: 61).

Cameralism and absolutism

When searching for proto-bureaucratic thought looking in the writings of absolutist political theorists seems obvious. After all, as Wilson implicitly stated, if one does not adhere to the notion that authority, especially legislative power, should ultimately be concentrated in one central point, the whole idea of bureaucracy is intellectually inconceivable. Yet since Nicholas Henshall, in his book *The Myth of Absolutism*, boldly attacked the very notion that absolutist ideology existed during the Ancien Régime, presupposing such a relationship has become problematic. Henshall states that all early modern political thinking was of the same kind, a kind that is best labelled 'regimen mixtum theory'. According to each of the Ancien Régime's political theorists, who drew heavily on the classics, a polity could best be a mixture between three systems: monarchy, aristocracy and democracy. Scholarly orthodoxy has it that Bodin destroyed consensus among political theorists at the end of the 16th century by concentrating legislative authority in one single point, calling that 'sovereignty', claiming that it should be indivisible and therefore that all other authority in society emanated from it, and then 'pointing it inwards', i.e. defining it towards the citizen instead of the pope. Nevertheless, in Henshall's observation, Bodin spoke out for strong parliaments and the inviolable rights of citizens. Bodin's king acts within strict limitations to his power, the right to property of his subjects, for instance, or no taxation without representation.

In Henshall's opinion the problem can be solved by taking into account that early modern monarchs acted in two spheres of action: one was the king's God-given prerogative, in which he was unrestricted, foreign affairs for instance; and one in which he was not, because in this sphere he had to consult his people as represented by the estates. It is true that in the course of the 17th century ever more attention came to be paid to the first sphere, and ever less to the latter, but that did not mean that political theorists came to deny that subjects had certain inalienable rights. Hence, Henshall writes that far too much has been made of the alleged opposition between the ascending and descending (Ullmann, 1975) view on government. It only exists in the mind of present-day scholars. Discussions on the limitations to the king's power were much less fundamental during the early modern period then we tend to think nowadays; they are best viewed as family quarrels within a grand regimen mixtum consensus (Henshall, 1992: 126–32, 142–5, 204–8; 1996: 31–3).

In my opinion, nevertheless, the early modern period knew a very real opposition between adherents to an ascending and descending theory of government. The reason that these opposing ideologies show certain similarities lies not in consensus, but rather in a shared way of arguing, within an ordering of reality both parties had in common. And that ordering of reality is probably best described by using the concept of 'the political theory of order': W.H. Greenleaf's application of Arthur O. Lovejoy's notion of the 'great chain of being' to political thought. Order thinking is a medieval notion, which stretches back to antiquity via St Thomas Aquinas. Those who adhered to it believed that the entire cosmos was

ordered according to one and the same principle, because it was the expression of a singular celestial will. This singular principle put all of creation in hierarchical order and thus formed it into a chain that extended from the material to the immaterial: from God to man, and on, extending through the realm of animals to that of plants and finally to that of minerals. It could, as we have just done, be subdivided into subsystems, the human body, for example, or especially the body politic, but being part of the chain as a whole, these answered to the same hierarchical principle. Adherents to the political theory of order, when they advocated a particular political system, therefore likened it to other parts of creation, showing that the body politic as they envisaged it answered to the same divine fundamental principles as the rest of creation. They used 'arguments of analogy and correspondence' to show that their political views were backed up by celestial reason. They also utilized these to warn against violations of what they claimed was the political system's divine status quo. Creation, after all, formed a 'cosmic harmony', a balance that could easily be upset by human wrongdoing to one of its subsystems. When that happened, mankind was in for severe punishment (Lovejoy, 1936; Greenleaf, 1964a: 16–22, 25–32; Eccleshall, 1978: 13–14; Daly, 1979: 5–7, 10).

Order thinking was an international phenomenon, which can also be found in Dutch writings. Constantijn Huygens, for instance, the father of the well-known scientist, wrote a poem about his garden, in which he contemplated the way in which it reflected divine hierarchy. He also committed a memorandum to paper, intended for his employer the Prince of Orange, in which he proposed a more systematic organization of the princely secretariat, basing his views on reflections on the divine nature of order as such. Much older examples are also available: in Desiderius Erasmus' works, for instance, or in that of the Leiden town secretary Jan van Hout. And surprisingly enough, younger specimens are at hand too, for order thinking died very slowly. In 1776 the Frisian nobleman Onno Zwier van Haren was still able to publish a translation of the first epistle of Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* (1732) which *centres* around the notion of the great chain of being (Zwier van Haren, 1776; Jorissen, 1873: 15–49; Matthey, 1973: 395–6, 399–410; Van Vloten, 1874: 360–1; Pope, 1887: 15–24; Erasmus, 1997: 22–4, 29–30, 37, 39–40, 43–4, 91–2; Koppenol, 1998: 366–373; Jorink, 1999: 49).

Hierarchical as it was, order theory in itself did not express an ascending or a descending view on government. It was a highly flexible theory, which allowed for both ideologies. After all, it is true that all the subsystems that together made up the cosmos answered to the same principle, yet at the same time there were functional differences between these: they performed different tasks. If one, for example, drew an analogy between the body politic and the human body, it was clear that brain and muscles each had their separate functions. A similar concept, correspondingly, applied to king and parliament. Now what should be likened to what? Was the place of the king analogous to that of brain or to that of muscle? It was left to the theorist to answer that question; and that partially explains the

popularity of the political theory of order. It not only offered an all-embracing theory of the universe, but it was highly malleable into the bargain, allowing its adherents to use it for the defence of any ideology they fancied, and that is exactly what they did. Those in favour of the ascending view on government used it to defend parliament's power against the prince, absolutists did the reverse, while at the same time mixed forms existed, that emphasized prince or parliament, but cannot be simply classified as either ascending or descending theory.

Consensus on the ordering of reality was to vanish, however. In the course of the 17th century, during its notorious civil wars, the two views on government within the same discourse were to drift apart. After all the powers of both parliaments and princes were increasing at the time, which had its consequences for the theoretical underpinnings of their authority, now clearly defined as legislative power. The ascending view abandoned the political theory of order, finding new foundations for its claims. The descending view, conversely, stayed where it was, but sometimes showed a tendency to radicalize, for instance during the English Civil War. Exceptions to this statement are, of course, the works of Hobbes and, to a degree, Filmer, who did find new legitimizations for princely absolutism (Greenleaf, 1964a: 33–57, 80–90, 125–135; 1964b: 747–60; Eccleshall, 1978: 18–19, 32–41, 47–67, 76–96, 152–76; Comstock Weston and Renfrow Greenberg, 1981: 1–17; Burns, 1990: 36–41; Russell, 1993: 101–20; Smith, 1996: 167–84).

Absolutist theory asked for bureaucracy. Did it also cause bureaucratic thought? Truly proto-bureaucratic thought could only be found in the German-speaking world during the Ancien Régime. It existed among the aforementioned cameralists, who were the only ones to reflect on the composition and running of public services, often even drawing on experience as practitioners. That German theorists drew up theories for management and organization is quite remarkable. Their colleagues in other countries considered the subject trivial, and paid no attention to it, which was exactly what their 'Aristotelian view' on the arts prescribed. Yet the cameralist movement did not start with a delivery from the classics, and a shift to a mechanic world view, quite the contrary. Cameralism originated in literature dealing with virtue: how to be a good head of family, judge, king, councillor, burgomaster, diplomat and so on. The political theory of order, heavily inspired by the classics, emphasized virtue, in keeping within one's place in the administrative hierarchy, and fulfilling one's functions as best as one could. Proto-cameralism showed how. Like order theory, the writings from which cameralism originated could therefore be used by proponents of the ascending and descending view on government alike. Cameralism itself, however, was to become something that could not. Eventually it was to evolve into an underpinning of princely absolutism.

The turning point was Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff's *Teutscher Fürsten Stat* (1665). In it the author argued that political theory was quite useless to those actually involved in administration, and advocated a much more practical approach. Later in life he realized just what a contribution he had made to abso-

lutist governments and warned against these, but the movement he had inspired could not be reversed. To cameralism, after Seckendorff, the principle of mono-cratic leadership would become so obvious that it came to neglect political theory entirely. Instead it concentrated on formulating rules for the organization and operation of public service, which it desired to be as efficient as possible. Actually, to cameralists the best form of state increasingly became equivalent to the most efficient one. They were also to abandon the religious world view of order thinking and secularize their theories (Maier, 1966: 130–84; Von Seckendorff, 1976: vorrede v; Stollberg-Rilinger, 1986: 82–4, 124–5; Stolleis, 1988: 334–54; Gagliardo, 1991: 107–22).

It was not absolutism that caused cameralism therefore. Both came about separate from each other, one involved with political theory, the other with administrative practice. Nonetheless, they did spring from the same seedbed, and would soon develop an intimate relationship. When German princes embarked on their absolutist programmes, they found the necessary administrative theory ready to hand, and started founding chairs in cameralism in the universities in their realms.

Bureaucratic thought in the Dutch Republic?

The Dutch Republic would never know academic endeavours of a similar kind, which is remarkable because its point of departure was in a sense better than that of the German polities. After the start of the Dutch Revolt (which lasted from 1568 to 1648), the prince who united the various rebellious provinces in a personal union, and was at the same time king of Spain, had been dethroned. His function had been vacant for a while, as the estates tried to persuade foreign princes to assume his position. These sent governors, who were quite successful in making themselves unpopular. In the course of time the provincial estates therefore took over the prince's function themselves. Consequently the opposi-tion between prince and parliament had disappeared forever. Both parties had merged into one, creating a single point of supreme authority (Groenveld, 1998: 25), which laid the route to a theory of absolutism, that of the estates, wide open.

Theories stressing the Dutch estates' right to sovereignty came about almost at once. François Vrancken, town lawyer of Gouda, defended it against the English Queen Elisabeth's governor Leicester's claims in 1587, after the estates them-selves had taken similar action. Grand Pensionary John de Witt repeated the exercise in 1654. Both these scholarly public officials turned sovereignty out-wards, defending it against the governor, as Vrancken did, or against the 'Estates-General', the collectivity of all provincial estates who worked together in a mili-tary alliance, as was the case with De Witt. By 1654 sovereignty had still not been defined with respect to the citizen, as Bodin had done for the French polity. But it had, by now, been defined as legislative authority (Kossmann, 1958: 79–85; Geyl, 1966: 230–7; 1971: 3–71; Van Gelderen, 1992: 203–7). Pointing it inwards was only a matter of time.

The Holland polity was ruled by its provincial estates, consisting of deputies

from the 18 'voting towns', and from the nobility. This 'central government of Holland' had a small bureaucratic apparatus at its disposal, consisting of two courts of law, three auditing offices and a chief public servant called the Grand Pensionary. The 18 voting towns were internally almost autonomous; they more or less formed city-states working together through the estates, but they were not the only bodies in the Holland polity enjoying such privileges. There were many more towns and villages that had about the same internal independence. If one looks into the way a single one of these towns was governed, one finds the Holland polity mirrored in a microcosm. Towns were made up of 'corporations', like the guilds, the civic militias and sometimes the neighbourhoods who more or less acted on their own, within their specific sphere of authority. Holland was therefore a 'corporatist society', a 'Ständegesellschaft' as a German would say.

Completely fragmented as it was, the Holland polity was nevertheless no anarchy. At times it could be united under the single political leadership of the estates' chief public servant, the Grand Pensionary, but the so-called 'Stadhouder' was sometimes in a position to rival the Grand Pensionary for power. The Stadhouder had originally been the prince's lieutenant. After the deposition of the Prince the logical course of affairs would have been the abolishment of his functions, but that did not occur. He stayed on, acted as military commander and retained many of the prerogatives the Prince had once had. At times of need, at times of imminent war especially, the two functionaries would sometimes rival each other for power, and Holland's political scene could become divided along party lines. Those who supported the Grand Pensionary — known as Republicans — would eventually champion the notion of the estates' absolutist sovereignty. The Stadhouder's followers — called Orangists — adhered to regimen mixtum theory. They admitted that sovereignty rested with the estates, but were of the opinion that Holland was a mixed polity, in which the Stadhouder provided the monarchic element. They almost never defended pure monarchy (Geyl, 1971; Van de Klashorst, 1986: 93–136; Kossmann, 1987a: 211–33; 1987b: 17–126). If we want to explore the question of the existence of proto-bureaucratic thought in the Dutch Republic, Republican writings seem the logical place to look. Their authors, after all, were the only true absolutists in the Holland polity.

Johan van Alphen
A good starting point is probably the work of Johan van Alphen, a scion of a Leiden regent family, who worked in The Hague as a barrister. His father-in-law was the jurist Pieter Bort, well known during his lifetime for a number of works mostly on domain law. When a collection of these was posthumously published in 1681, Van Alphen wrote the introduction, in which he tried to determine a common theme for his father-in-law's treatises. He decided on the absolute sovereignty of Holland's provincial estates (Van der Aa et al., 1852–78: 112; Molhuysen and Blok, 1914: 489–90; Prak, 1985: 69, 129, 370; De Chalmot, 1798–1800: 25; Van Heijnsbergen, 1925: 99–102; Bort, 1681).

In the Dutch polity, Van Alphen wrote, the estates are sovereign. True sovereignty means to be subject to God, but to no one else. It consists of six attributes: the right to declare war and peace, supreme authority over life and property of the subjects, control over the church, administering justice, legislating and appointing public functionaries (Van Alphen, 1681: §3, 8, 9–33). The estates possessed them all, and always had, at least for the previous 1,700 years (Van Alphen, 1681: §47–82, 93, 97).

Every public functionary in the Dutch polity, including the members of the town governments of whose delegates the estates consisted, was understood to be 'servant of the sovereign [the Estates] . . . helpers . . . who fly from his eyes, and try nothing more zealously then to execute his will'. The most senior were appointed by the sovereign, who could also dismiss them at will. These, after all, were the ones who were in a position to really botch up. Less senior public functionaries were designated by their heads, but could also be fired by the sovereign directly. Not all town governments were appointed by the estates directly, though, Van Alphen admitted, but all were dependent on the sovereign, and had to swear an oath of obedience to him (Van Alphen, 1681: §29–30, 88–9).

Van Alphen paid no attention to the desired functioning of the Dutch public service. The principal aim of his introduction appears to be to define Holland's estates' sovereignty with respect to the Estates-General of the confederacy; this still means pointing it outwards. The sole purpose of his piece of work was probably only to find a common denominator under which to group his father-in-law's legal treatises.

Dirck Graswinckel

The work of Dirck Graswinckel, born in 1600 as son of a regent of the town of Delft, is much more interesting. In 1614 Graswinckel became a student at Leiden University, but he completed his formal education in Franeker, in the northern province of Friesland. As it happens Holland, during the period Graswinckel was at university, underwent the worst conflict ever between the followers of the Stadhouder and those of the Grand Pensionary. Graswinckel was from a family of supporters of the Grand Pensionary, his father was removed from office by the Stadhouder in 1618, and Dirck thought it wise to leave his native province. He completed his studies in 1621, and after an interval spent two years in Paris with the famous jurist Hugo Grotius, a distant relative who had fled abroad after the Stadhouder had defeated the Grand Pensionary.

Following his return from France, Graswinckel embarked on a brilliant career in the Dutch public service. He became town lawyer in Dordrecht in 1626, barrister to the Stadhouder in 1632 (a new one, the brother of the Stadhouder who had removed Dirck's father) and barrister to the Estates the year after. In 1641 he became Holland's 'advocaat-fiscaal', a sort of provincial public prosecutor in civil law cases, and ended his career as secretary of the 'chambre mipartie', an administrative body that was to divide Dutch and Spanish possessions after the peace treaty of Münster.

His scholarly career was much more important than his career as a public servant. Graswinckel published quite a number of books on the foundations of states. He held the view that God had created every polity differently, and that these original differences, which expressed God's will, should be preserved. That enabled him to write a treatise defending the liberties of the Republic of Venice, and also publish one defending the English King's case during the civil war. He also wrote two volumes on the sovereignty of the Estates of Holland (Liesker, 1901: 16–57, 189–211; De Blécourt and Meijers, 1929: lviii; Graswinckel, 1956: 90–117).

The first volume, called *Mr Dirk Graswinkel's Inquest into the Right of Supreme Power Belonging to the Estates of Holland* (1667), was meant to lay the foundations. In it, it was argued from the Bible that all power derives from God, who appoints earthly sovereigns to serve as His instruments. In Holland the Estates are God appointed. The Lord uses them to punish or reward their subjects, from whom He demands absolute obedience. There is therefore no right of resistance to the Estates (Graswinckel, 1667: books 1 and 2: 66–338, 337–74).

According to Graswinckel, God's will is codified in 'constitutions', which express the various forms of government of different countries. He then argued that supreme power in Holland rests with the Estates and always has, and demonstrated that, using Holland's privileges, which he understood to be the aforementioned constitutions. The Princes that formerly ruled the province were to be regarded as public functionaries in the Estates' service. The Dutch Revolt was therefore not a war between king and parliament, but an action of the sovereign against an untrustworthy servant. The current Stadhouder too was a mere servant to the Estates (Graswinckel, 1667: 421–758, 777–840).

The second volume is called *Special Description of the Use and Real Possession of Supreme Power of the Estates of Holland* (1674). It offers a treatise on what the Estates' sovereignty is, and how it is used. Sovereignty is indivisible, and not subject to any law. Subjects cannot even claim a right to life and property, let alone a right to resistance (Graswinckel, 1674: 21–30, 44–5, 63–106). The essence of the Estates' sovereignty is their legislative power because that is the tool that sets everything in motion. The Estates' laws therefore exceed the regulations issued by subordinate bodies and functionaries, which the Estates can destroy. They can even destroy existing fundamental laws, because God uses the Estates as an instrument and their will is therefore His (Graswinckel, 1674: 971–92).

The Estates defend the common good and in consequence their will exceeds private individuals' right to property: 'Does not the state have no less power than sailors to throw their cargo overboard if there is no other means to save the entire ship?' He who resists that authority resists God, because He has given the Estates the power to do so. The Lord, after all, distributes power top-down, not bottom-up. Subordinate functionaries should therefore do as the sovereign has decided. Whoever disobeys is a Lucifer rebelling against his master. The collectivity of the people as a whole cannot be more powerful than the sovereign, because God

knows no equality. He who has been favoured by the Lord will stay favoured, and complaining about that is pointless. God after all knows what is best for us and it is not up to us to judge His ways. To sum up: he who resists the sovereign resists God, so obedience to the Estates is a divine command (Graswinckel, 1643: 100–6; 1674: 1073–98).

The Estates have always been sovereign of a state without a single 'eminent head', proof of which can be found in recent history. It is true that they have temporarily transferred part of their authority to princes, governors or stadhouders in the past, but they invariably remained superior to these lieutenants. Graswinckel illustrated that by citing a statement they made at the end of the 16th century declaring to Governor Leicester's Lieutenant Willingby that they, as absolute lords, had the right to wage war against those which it pleased them to fight (Graswinckel, 1674: 602–761).

Internally, they had authority over almost everything: the church for instance, and primary education. Taxation, that main attribute of sovereignty, was their prerogative, as was the administration of the county domains. Graswinckel devoted special attention to 'police', a term he understood as maintaining public order and regulating the economy. The Estates therefore played the principal role in hunting down beggars, gypsies, agitators and vagrants, but also in persecuting monopolists and usurers.

Graswinckel not only described what the Estates did, but also how Holland's administrative machinery was constructed, stressing the supreme authority of the Estates with every constituting part he described. Thus he gave the impression that Holland actually had a more or less rationally constructed public service, that formed a pyramid with the Estates at the top (Graswinckel, 1674: 112–302, 365–7, 762–95). He also furnished the requirements various functionaries should answer to: being pious and able, for example, or not buying office. Public functionaries were also not permitted to fulfil two functions at the same time. It was furthermore absolutely essential that they lived in the place where they held office, and that they were strictly forbidden to have themselves replaced by substitutes. He then added a list of specific criteria various kinds of public functionaries should meet (Graswinckel, 1674: 1003–40).

Graswinckel was obviously interested in the organization of administration, but did not turn the subject into a science. He simply described the apparatus as it was, for argument's sake putting too much emphasis on the degree to which it was subordinate to the Estates. It is true that he supplied rules for the conduct of officeholders, but these were predominantly of a moral character, much like the guidance German pre-cameralist authors furnished. The ones that were not were quotations from instructions to various officials.

Paulus Teding van Berkhout (see also Wagenaar, 2000)
A similar line of reasoning is followed by Paulus Teding van Berkhout, who — like Graswinckel — was descended from a family of regents of the town of Delft. His family's political views also corresponded with those of Graswinckel's kin:

Berkhout, came from a line of supporters of the Grand Pensionary. At the time the Stadhouder outdid the Grand Pensionary, in the first decades of the 17th century, Paulus' father and relatives had fled abroad for a while (Schmidt, 1986: 35–7; Knevel, 2001: 158–9, 161).

Berkhout started his scholarly efforts by reading law at Leiden University, but he defended his doctoral thesis in France in 1633. His career as a public servant started two years later in the small town of Monickendam, with the function of town lawyer. In 1649 he made a giant leap forward. His appointment to councillor of the oldest of Holland's three auditing offices brought him to one of the most sought-after positions in Holland's public service. In 1668 he crowned his career, when he was appointed president and first councillor of his bureau (Schmidt, 1986: 54–64). Berkhout obviously wanted his children to follow in his footsteps. In order to acquaint them with the fundamentals of administration, he laid down his thoughts in a treatise, which forms the core of a collection of essays, all written between 1665 and 1671. Some of these were meant as memoranda for the Estates (Berkhout, 1665a, b; 16––a, b, c, d, e; 1665 and 1671; Schmidt, 1986: 56–63).

Like Graswinckel, Berkhout started out by proving from the Bible that all power arises from God, who uses earthly rulers as instruments. In Holland these instruments were the Estates, who should be obeyed at all times. He then proceeded by pointing out the analogies and correspondences between heavenly and earthly government. Both, according to Berkhout, formed an 'order', a divine harmony that had to be kept in balance. This equilibrium could be endangered by resisting the Estates' authority, and at that time it was. The perpetrators were the stadhouders, whom we have met with before, and local governments (Berkhout, 1665a).

Berkhout wrote a treatise arguing against the stadhouder, in which he contended that his function was utterly superfluous and indeed harmful to the Dutch polity (Berkhout, 16––c), but his main target was in fact local government, a point that comes as no surprise. Berkhout, after all, held office in the small central bureaucracy, which was part of the extremely decentralized Dutch form of government, and he was therefore dependent on centralizing forces in that polity. He also had to do business regularly with local governments that tried to resist his authority as much as possible. That made his already unstable position even worse. As it happens the auditing office over which Berkhout was presiding was under threat of being abolished because of lack of function. For decades the Estates of Holland had been in the habit of using domains as collateral for loans they contracted, and often had to sell them to pay off the debts. Berkhout therefore protested against such sales, arguing that domains were an attribute of the Estates' indivisible sovereignty, which is, by the way, an absolutist hobbyhorse (Graswinckel, 1674: 21–30, 229–302; Henshall, 1992: 130). He also proposed measures intended to defend the Estates' authority against infringement by local authorities. The main antidote, in his view, was bureaucracy and, to this end, he suggested an important role in its supervision for his own bureau.

However, the first thing he needed to do was to establish a clear separation between politics and administration in practice. He therefore proposed to institute, as a rule, that no deputy to the Estates could be an administrator at the same time, nor were administrators to be allowed to enter the Estates' meeting. Deputies to the Estates were to take an oath against favouring candidates for administrative functions to prevent political appointments and encourage nomination of the ablest. Therefore recommendation of candidates should be forbidden. On the contrary, everyone desiring office was to address himself to the Estates as a whole directly, and to include a curriculum vitae in his letter.

Next he had to make sure that administrators followed politics' orders impartially, instead of pursuing their own goals. Therefore administrators needed to renounce their towns of origin to prevent them from furthering the private interests of these (and naturally Berkhout made a special plea for preventing towns from interfering in matters concerning the Estates' domains). To avoid the furthering of family concerns administrators were to be barred from serving on government bodies that already contained relatives of theirs. Nor should they be in a position to handle cases touching the interests of kin.

Finally there were certain quality standards to which administration had to answer, that had to be guaranteed by regulations. Absenteeism had to be prevented by compelling administrators to live in the place where they held office, by inhibiting them from having their work done by substitutes and by denying them the right to hold two offices at the same time. To make sure that regulations like these were kept he suggested a strictly hierarchical structure for the Dutch public service, with his own office at the top. Not only should administrators be made answerable to it, but it should also have the right to elect them in the Estates' absence. It would, furthermore, be a good idea to appoint public servants for a limited span of time only, in order to be able to get rid of them easily if they misbehaved. Reappointment should solely be made after inquiry into their past conduct (Berkhout, 16––d, e).

Berkhout, like Graswinckel, was a thoroughbred absolutist, but unlike the latter he was also a rare example of a 17th-century Dutch official who pleaded the case of the centrally led bureaucracy, and tried to formulate rules for its functioning. That still did not turn him into a Dutch Seckendorff, but he definitely came close.

A stillborn child

A direct line seems to run from Van Alphen, via Graswinckel to Berkhout. Van Alphen still pointed sovereignty outwards, defending it against the Estates-General, but Graswinckel was the first to point it inward — against the subject mainly (Geyl, 1966). Berkhout did the same but pointed it towards local government. The first author simply phrased the Estates' absolutist dogma, and devoted no attention to bureaucracy; the latter already combined political ideology with a fragile proto-bureaucratic theory.

Appearances are deceptive, however. Van Alphen published his treatise in

1681, Graswinckel, posthumously, between 1667 and 1674, Berkhout never published, but wrote between 1665 and 1671. The line runs backwards, therefore: proto-bureaucratic thought and estates' absolutist theory seem to have degenerated between 1665 and 1681. How can that be?

The answer is probably to be found in the political circumstances at the time the three authors wrote; more precisely in the clash between Republicanism and Orangism. When Berkhout composed his essays, the Grand Pensionary ruled supreme. The future Stadhouder, William of Orange, was an under-age orphan boy, and the Estates of Holland had left his position vacant. The Grand Pensionary had even brought about a number of resolutions, forever barring William from entrance to the office to which he was destined. In 1672 fortune shifted, nevertheless. Four enemies attacked the Dutch Republic at the same time, and William used the opportunity to seize the office he and his family had been longing to obtain for so long. The Grand Pensionary was lynched by an angry mob in the streets of The Hague, and William removed many of his adherents from office. That, of course, made the position of the 'Republican party' and its ideology of estates' absolutism rather awkward.

All the same, such opinions could still be voiced. Graswinckel left no doubt about his view of the formal position held by the Stadhouder in the Dutch body politic: a mere Estates' servant. Since he phrased his opinions cautiously, and since the Orangists also acknowledged the Estates' sovereignty, the second volume of his book could still be published after 1672. The same went for Van Alphen, who took care to praise the Stadhouder explicitly in his introduction to his father-in-law's works. Yet the kind of Estates' absolutism he defended, on the one hand, and the position of the now hegemonic Stadhouder in practice, on the other, showed such a discrepancy that an anonymous pamphleteer paraphrased his work to show just how the Stadhouder had violated Estates' sovereignty in the recent past (Anonymous, 1685). What Berkhout wrote on the Stadhouder (he wanted to do away with the function) had become absolutely perilous by the time its author died, however, and the same went for the rest of his writings. Berkhout, after all, not only argued that the Estates were an absolute sovereign, but also by what administrative measures they could realize the possession of such authority in practice.

Ideas like his had probably always been unpopular. The Stadhouder was, after all, not Berkhout's only enemy; to all appearances not even his chief opponent. The largest part of his work was dedicated to fighting the claims of local governments: the governments who sent the deputies to The Hague to form the Estates of Holland. Their partisan view of politics and administration is what Berkhout opposed, and that is why, in a sense, the Estates themselves were the worst enemies of estates' sovereignty in practice. Proto-bureaucratic thought did exist in the Dutch Republic, but was, for obvious reasons, restricted to a small number of county bureaucrats only — Berkhout, for instance, or Graswinckel.

Concluding remarks

Pocock and Skinner have argued that political theories should be studied in their entire societal and political context. Richard Bonney expanded their method, by asking for research into the question of how these theories then influenced the context from which they flowed. If we put their combined approach into practice we see that ideas like Graswinckel's and Berkhout's arose from their political views mainly. They could only be held by confirmed republicans. In Berkhout's case a real loathing of the Stadhouder seems to have been behind them. Graswinckel, conversely, formulated his for ideological, and probably other, reasons for defending the political status quo, whatever the status quo.

Instead of defending the absolute sovereignty of the Estates, however, he could also have advocated *Ständegesellschaft*'s cause, and taken the ascending view on the government's stand, which would have been a far better description of the Dutch polity as it was at his time, but he did the exact opposite. The reason behind that was probably the role he himself played in the Dutch body politic. He was one of the few public servants that formed the small central bureaucracy Holland did have at that time, and was therefore dependent on whatever centralizing tendency Holland featured. The same was true, though more strongly, of Berkhout.

Berkhout never published. Graswinckel did, but his ideas had probably little effect on the context from which they stemmed. During the 17th century the Dutch polity would remain a splendid example of the corporate society that adherents to the ascending view championed. Now what do we make of their ideas? What is their relevance for the future course of events? As it happens they would pop up once more half a century later, when Holland went without a stadhouder again, and Simon van Slingelandt (who would eventually become Grand Pensionary) proposed centralizations in its polity to make decision-making easier. The fear that keeping things as they were would provide opportunities for a new stadhouder was an important reason behind his propositions. When eventually a new stadhouder did assume power, ideas like Graswinckel's and Berkhout's were aired in an altogether different place than we would expect. This time it was one of the Stadhouder's supporters, Willem Bentinck van Rhoon, who expressed them, and that obviously raises the question of whether they had ever disappeared. Could they have stayed alive in a small circle of central bureaucrats, leading a sort of underground life, never being voiced on paper again explicitly? Did they influence the context from which they stemmed, by inspiring the actions these bureaucrats took during their daily work? If that is the case, I would like to call attention to those ideas that have run contrary to their societal, political and ideological context, and which can hardly be explained by it, that have lead an underground existence, but may, nevertheless, have formed the intellectual seedbed for things to come; to proto-bureaucratic thought outside the German-speaking parts, that means.

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