Anarchy in the PA?
Anti-Essentialism, Anti-Statism, and the Future of Public Administration

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Introduction

Authority has been an ongoing focus of scholarly and intellectual investigation for nearly entirety of modern social science. In sociology, this concern can be tracked from Weber’s famous typologies and Durkheim’s exposition of anomie, a state induced by the decline of regulative authority relations, through the 1960’s “twilight of authority” (Nisbet, 1975) and the contemporary declaration of a “post-traditional” order (Giddens, 1994). Authority has also received enormous consideration in political science and political philosophy (Agamben, 2005; Arendt, 1958; Benne, 1943; DeGeorge, 1985; Engles, 1978; Flathman, 1980; Friedrich, 1972; Laski, 2000/1919; Lowi, 1970; McKercher, 1989), anthropology (W. B. Miller, 1955; Turner, 1969), organizational sociology (Blau, 1968; Dalton, Barnes, & Zaleznik, 1973/1968; Meyer, 1972), psychology (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989), and a wide range of provocative interdisciplinary legal, political, and psychological perspectives (Diggins & Kann, 1981; Friedrich, 1958; Horkheimer, 1972; Lincoln, 1994; Pennock & Chapman, 1987; Sennett, 1980). The literature on the topic is internally contradictory and voluminous—not withstanding the fact that consideration of authority readily expands into equally nebulous and complex concepts such as power, legitimacy, the state, and the nature of social order itself with no obvious analytic or historical limit. To paraphrase the instructive of opening of Flathman’s study, “Anyone disposed to study authority need do no more than pass through gates … over which it is written, ‘A certain immodesty is a condition of entering here’” (1).

Whatever complexity of the issue, the dynamics of the contemporary world and the apparent delegitimization of major authoritative social and political institutions make consideration of the concept unavoidable. The matter is especially pressing for public administration to take up since these dynamics raise grave doubts about the identity of a field of
study whose identity has never been very clear to begin with. Indeed while the world of networks and governance appears to make public administration and the study of governing ever more imperative and important (Frederickson & Smith, 2003), the “Copernican” revolution that has disaggregated (Slaughter, 2004) or disarticulated (Frederickson, 1999) public authority, fostered leveling demands for participation that complicate the exercise of expertise, and radically problematized representative government also makes the disciplinary domain of public administration increasingly difficult to localize. In sum, the dislocation and disaggregation of political authority and the erosion of the plausibility of government as the authoritative representative of social values exacerbates all the identity questions that have long dogged the field. I want to suggest, however, that the more profound matter that contemporary trends raise is that they generate conditions that reprise liberalism’s remarkable and profound question, “Why government at all?” This question is particularly pressing for critical and “postmodern” approaches in public administration—perspectives which, paradoxically, sometimes constitute the most ardent defenses of government.

From one vantage, one might dismiss these matters as comparatively minor issues for the profession, ones that can be accommodated by curricular adjustments. For example, if governance decenters governance, degree programs can acknowledge as much, incorporate nonprofit and “global” aspects into course work, train in cultural competence and diversity management. Public administration can be retooled as network management. One simply may dismiss these worries themselves as excessively “theoretical” and deflective from the “real work” of determining and negotiating which set of structures or institutional designs are best deployed to perform public functions in network governance. There is a grain of truth in this position. Theoretical analysis in the academic field cannot and will not halt confrontation with
the ongoing challenges of governance in other social fields, and, to consider a radical view, even
the hollow state will not wither over night.

But this truth takes the form of a lie—that theoretical and symbolic systems are irrelevant
to the work of governing. As Farmer (1995; 2003b; Farmer & Patterson, 2003) has shown the
symbolic and rhetorical choices that we make substantively structure the way we think and
understand the world. They establish distinct relationships of power. At a fundamental level of
socio-symbolic constructions, Farmer writes that we find the “cloacal symbolic” at which basic
divisions are made concerning what counts as civilized and what counts as excremental, the
inside and the outside, visible and invisible (Thorne & Kouzmin, 2004), what is part of “Us” and
a-part from “Us.” “Civilized” humans are bathed, cleaned by a master (Farmer, 2003b, 208-209).
That is, they are “made up” (Hacking, 1999) by this dividing, purifying strategy and kept up by
the cleansing work of a master.¹ This creates a powerful top-down bias in civilization and in
public administration, more immediately. Close to Farmer’s thesis, I have argued (Catlaw,
2006a, 2006b, in press) that basic theoretical commitments about the political, what I call
political ontologies, have profound consequences for the construction and maintenance of a
socio-political order. They guide the structuring and re-structuring of human relationship from
the micro- to the macro-levels, from the highly abstract to the mundane, everyday, and concrete.²
Our own modern political ontology of the People establishes certain relationships of power based
upon the positing of objects of representation and embeds public administration into a
“civilizing” role that reinforces relations of exclusion and domination. Thus while we must
attend to the everyday and disciplinary (what Farmer calls the “transparent” and “disciplinary
symbolic” levels) we cannot neglect re-symbolizing at the ontological, the cloacal symbolic,
level. These dimensions exist in a dynamic interplay with one another, without normative or analytic superiority, though different subjectivities may be drawn to different dimensions.

Central to all political ontologies is an articulated theory of government and political authority (if necessary) and an account of how each works. Theoretical systems and the constitutive narratives that they mobilize open spaces for the governmental and authoritative that guide and inform action; they establish specific relationships and formulas that become inscribed and replicated in practices and institutions. Part of what re-symbolizing at the ontological must entail, then, is a re-sketching or re-narrating of the “governmental” in human society in light of contemporary conditions. Critical, postmodern, or post-liberal retorts to public administration orthodoxy or contemporary neoliberalism cannot expect to advance without articulating a positive conception of government, without symbolizing anew a place for government outside our liberal and neoliberal symbolics. If one cannot answer the question why government at all one cannot govern. At the same time, though, one cannot simply assume a place for government as the various legitimacy projects do. One of the remarkable inventions of the liberal revolution in philosophy and politics was that it generated a theoretical space within which it was plausible to ask why government at all and so subjected the very existence of all forms of authority to withering criticism. In public administration, the defense of government can too often become an apology for existing institutions or domains of power for their own sake. Such a role (if any) must emerge from a distinctive political ontology that accounts for the nature of social order and the role of political authority.

Drawing from post-structuralist and anarchist theoretical sources, this essay considers the implications of postmodern/post-structural theory for authority and, more particularly, government. It argues that post-structural theory offers a unique approach to the question,
though, in the end, it remains unclear what the distinctive role of government might be—and this ambiguity is evident in postmodern approaches in public administration. Supplementing post-structural theory and postmodern approaches in public administration with anarchist theory, I argue that some headway can be made on this problem. This reference to anarchism should not surprise—Dwight Waldo (1974) saw anarchism as one of our two possible organizational futures (the other was authoritarianism). As the early theorists of public administration we not afraid to draw from ideas and practices of authoritarian origins, we ought not be leery of drawing from anarchist sources, particularly in light of its rich intellectual and political heritage.

I begin with a brief overview of the treatment of authority in public administration.

**Authority in Public Administration**

In public administration, there has been a comparable preoccupation with authority that assumes five general forms. I will consider, briefly, exemplars of each form.

Most prominently and familiarly, there is the scholarship on authority and its use and distribution by managers in public organizations, primarily large public bureaucracies (Mohr, 1994; Neuse, 1978; Peabody, 1963; Presthus, 1960; Simon, 1997/1948). Following Barnard, Herbert Simon argues that authority can be understood in terms of an individual’s general “zone of indifference” or area of acceptance—a domain within which one will consent without resistance to the commands of another and submit the goals of the organization. Exercise of authority is, in essence, hierarchical manipulation of various inducements or incentives that establish conditions to influence people do what management or the organization wants them to do in pursuit its “final goals.” Authority is the dynamic interplay between the psychological
profile of the subordinate and the manipulation by management of external stimuli. Simon, of course, frames this dynamic in terms of decision making and decision premises. Thus, for Simon, organizational authority can be “interpreted not as determination by the organization of the decisions of the individual, but as determination for him of some of the premises upon which his decisions are based” (177).

Simon asks why people might submit themselves to organizational authority. He offers several possibilities. First, one might submit on the basis “custom.” He notes that a “great deal of conduct requires no further explanation than that … it is the socially ‘expected’ conduct” (183). So, since we are accustomed to live and work in hierarchical organizations, we “naturally” accept submission to its representatives. He also identifies sanctions (that is, punishment), economic incentives that make obedience “the price of retaining the position” (185), identification with organizational goals, and a “simple willingness or disinclination to accept responsibility” (185) as rational justifications for submission.

Second, analysis of authority takes the form of examining the boundaries of the public, private, and governmental (Allison, 1997; Bozeman, 1987; Moe, 1987; Rainey, 1991). In this regard, the operative question concerns the distinguishing quality of publicness and, by association, political authority. Perhaps the most thorough and impressive inquiry into this question is Bozeman’s (1987) “dimensional” approach in All Organizations Are Public. Building on concepts from Dahl and Lindblom and Zald and Wamsley (Scott & Falcone, 1998), Bozeman identifies several dimensions along which an organization’s “publicness” can be evaluated to unravel the “publicness puzzle.” He argues that “all organizations are public because political authority affects some of the behavior and processes of all organizations” (83). Publicness, then, is defined by “the extent to which the organization is affected by political
authority” (xi). (By implication, of course, all organizations are also private.) Bozeman identifies two forms of authority, the political and economic, which will exist in varying mixtures in different organizations. Economic authority is linked to property rights, whereas political authority is defined in terms of a tripartite schema that includes individual granting of legitimacy to political institutions, authority of public agencies, and the authority of administrators and elected officials. In some respects, however, the publicness puzzle remains puzzling insofar as “political authority” appears to depend upon the integrity of the term “governmental” which implies a pure typological, institutional distinction that Bozeman’s framework does not allow.

Third, some scholars analyze shifts or “relocations” of authority, a topic that has assumed considerable importance in the contemporary world of networks and governance but was explored at least as early as Stahl’s (1958) note, “The Network of Authority.” The exemplary work here is James Carroll’s (1969) prescient article on “noetic authority.” Carroll argues that the state in the United States is withering away in a psychological sense. He writes, “What is withering is confidence in the state … as an open political order for structuring processes of persuasion, bargaining, and trade-offs to make legitimate, binding decisions concerning basic social conflicts and issues of general concern. The withering process extends to the authority of the state … [and] hierarchical control and order” (492). This is, he says, a psychological withering, encompassing a broad and deep transformation of “both the cognitive and affects aspects of experience, both mental and emotional elements” (493) and a growing social and personal awareness. These changes demand that new, open political processes be invented in order to “direct constructively the growing tension between individual freedom and public order in a changing environment” (499).
The *innovative state* is emerging, a state concerned primarily with “channeling mental-emotional or noetic concern into constructive social forms consistent with the idea of individual liberty.” In this context, noetic authority is “the capacity of organizations and individuals to develop and use through political means organized awareness and knowledge to meet the needs and expectations, and values of society” (497); and the most effective way of administering noetic authority is “collegiality.” Noetic authority and collegial administration are distinguished from legal authority and bureaucratic administration in that (1) noetic authority is *intrinsic* to statements and propositions and the “truth” of the statement depends upon the social, historical, and local context of the creators/recipients of the statement. It is not “processes by ordained instruments of government and proclaimed by law” (497). (2) Noetic authority “transcends the distinction between public and private” and its development “depends upon the contributions of many other people” (498). (3) Collegial administration is characterized by a kind of fraternal relationship, a “company of equals,” engaged in the mutual negotiation and discussion of norms and decision processes. Effective use of authority concerns the persuasive use of knowledge rather than the exercise of positional authority. Here, responsibility means “conformity to standards of relevance and validity and peer-group judgment” (498).

I have considered Carroll at length because his noetic authority anticipates contemporary discourse, postmodern, pragmatist, and network (C. J. Fox & Miller, 1995; McSwite, 1997; H. T. Miller, 2002; H. T. Miller & Fox, 2001) considerations of authority that emphasize the role of trust, consent, and a “consensus theory of truth” (J. D. White, 1999). In some respects all these approaches reprise and extend Mary Follett’s notion the *law of the situation*. As Follett argued, in the law of the situation authoritative orders would be depersonalized in a way far more radical than in the legal-rationalistic authority of the rule or law which retains an embodied locus of
authority in a person who acts as the representative of the law, rule, or real. Interestingly, this radical depersonalization of authority can also produce radical personalization (see Hirshhorn, 1997). This can be seen in two ways. First, the decoupling of authority from formal position produced by the “skills revolution” and growing ubiquity and fragmentation of expertise locates an “epistemic” authority in individual capacities and ability. At the same time, growth in “caring” labor in service-based economies increasingly emphasizes “affective” and highly personal, individual qualities (Hardt & Negri, 2000; Leuenberger, 2006). Second, as McSwite (2006) has recently argued, the radically personal, or the singular, could be the basis for a new kind of elementary “social glue,” something to replace both authoritative values or social contract as the foundation of social order.

Fourth, drawing from psychoanalytic sources, some consider the developmental role that authority can play. In considering the role of authority in adult learning, McSwain & White (1979) argue that contemporary authority has been cut off from its mythic foundations (313). The Western tradition of myth links authority to “belief in an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient deity toward whose perfection human beings strive” (313). In modernity, bureaucratic organization transposes this conception onto the formal, objectified, hierarchical delegation of authority and the carrying out of “particular functions according to specific rules” (314), and so brings this awesome individual project of striving for perfection into a manageable, predicable context. Since the 1960’s, though, there has been a rebellion against and critique of bureaucratic authority and a rise of participatory models. The problem is that these participatory models are detached from a new “mythic superstructure.” McSwain and White argue that the central religious myth of these critical and participatory approaches is that they do not depict a status system and that “the project of human life is not to ‘measure up’ to a fixed prototype of
goodness but rather to attend to the choices with which we are presented and to render ourselves responsible for the choices we make” (315). Here, authority becomes a relationship of reciprocity in which the “boss” and the employee are engaged together in and committed to a process of self-transformation, learning, and transcending. It is “process” approach to authority in which each party seeks mutual authorization and searches themselves for “the issues in their own development” (317). Authority in this relationship gives each a position that they must confront and in doing so “come up against themselves.” White (1990) elaborates the political implications of this position in considerable detail.

Fifth, perhaps the most theoretical and sustained considerations of authority takes the form of the “legitimacy question” (Lynn Jr., 1997; McSwite, 1997; Ostrom, 1989/1973; Rohr, 1986; Stivers, 2002; Wamsley et al., 1990; J. D. White, 1999). Indeed the legitimacy question in public administration is really the legitimate authority question, one to which a series of well-known answers have been posed—expertise, neutrality competence, community norms, and various normative framework (e.g. democratic values, Constitutional regime values, etc.). Problematically, however, studies of legitimacy have largely assumed the legitimacy and necessity of government itself.

**Post-Structuralism & Authority: Return to the Tribunal of Reason**

Unlike approaches in public administration which typically assume or seek to legitimize various forms of authority, post-structural theorizing can be read as calling into question the foundations for all forms conventional authority—from the mythic to the political, organizational, and epistemic. It does so in a highly unique manner that imposes formidable theoretical challenges to rethinking political practice and transformation as well as the nature of
social order. The paradox, I want to argue, is that post-structuralist theory also intimates the necessity for some kind of authority by virtue of its re-conceptualization and de-substantialization of the ontology of the social world. As I will argue below, post-structuralism returns us to the tribunal of reason convened by Kant and reveals anew the groundlessness of the social world. (Of course, Kant himself is revisiting one of the oldest disputes in philosophy, that of Parmenides and Heraclites.) In doing so, though, post-structuralism rejects the regulative devices deployed by Kant (and others) to grapple with this aporia and to sustain an intelligible social and political order. At the same time, post-structuralism reaches beyond modernity to the mythic foundations McSwain and White describe and dismisses any theologically-posited unity or oneness as well as those integrating mythologies like the soul or human nature that underlie a humanistic universalism. These moves deprive post-structuralism of the traditional tools of science, a pre-political civil order, and a benevolent human nature that have been used by radical critics of authority and the state, such as the socialists and anarchists (see Carter, 1971; Morland, 1997), to whom post-structuralism often bears the closest resemblance (Call, 2003; Day, 2005; May, 1994; Newman, 2001). Its deep skepticism of unifying strategies, capitalism, and centralized authority also deprive it from any straightforward relationship to the Lockean liberal and Hobbesian solutions. Not surprisingly, then, one might wonder whether post-structuralist theory is sufficiently robust to advance beyond critique or ethics (Farmer, 1995; May, 1995) to articulate a positive conception of order and, more particularly, government. Indeed one might retort that this very demand does violence to its anti-authority, anti-system project. While these are considerable challenges, they also pose unique conditions that, if engaged, might force our thought into new conceptual terrain.
Groundlessness and Authority

Its radically anti-representational critique, post-structuralism exposes political, scientific, and social authority as constitutive acts of power and imposition. However unlike the modernist critical enterprise, this critique does not promise emancipation from “false” authorities of tradition or superstition through reason or science. It, therefore, does not shut one door of authority and open up into another. Rather the all-encompassing nature of its critique constructs a windowless room, the doors of which are all locked. Still, elements of the post-structuralist critique generate an intriguing paradox that helps to outline the distinctiveness of post-structural theory, namely the necessity for some kind of authoritative imposition (Catlaw, 2006b). This paradox follows from the analysis of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and the constitutive, positive affects of power.

First, as Saussure argued, there is no natural or essential relationship between the signifier and the signified, much less between the object of language and the object of visual perception. Rather what stability exists in those relationships is a product of convention. Jacques Derrida, among others, challenged Saussure’s fixing of language and the process of the production of meaning. Sign or signification systems are not stable, as Saussure had suggested. Rather, as Sarup (1989) notes, “signifiers and signifieds are continually breaking apart and reattaching in new combinations. … The process is not only infinite but somehow circular: signifiers keep transforming into signifieds and vice versa, and you never arrive at a final signifier in itself” (35). The consequence of what Jacques Lacan (1981) called the sliding (glissement) among signifiers and signifieds is that meaning (or signification) is itself also highly unstable—it will shift from context to context, moment to moment. Second, power is productive and generative. In different ways, this is visible in both Lacan and Foucault. In Lacan, power
assumes the form of a structuring discursive relationship. In Foucault, power is productive and generative of possibilities, not simply restrictive or limiting.

The point to emphasize is that, at a basic level, intelligibility and coherence in language is produced through the temporary fixing or arrest of the sliding of the signifier. This can be called the post-structural theory of ontological production. With regard to the specific question of authority, we can see the post-structuralist reworking of the practice in several ways. At the most basic, generic level authority can be seen as precisely that mechanism (not necessarily a person, institution, rule, or norm, though these are not excluded) that temporarily arrests the play of differences and produces intelligibility within a bounded domain. The arresting mechanics of authority, however, create fundamental divisions through their selective schemas. That is, divisions between inside and outside are produced since the bounding mechanisms cannot be all-encompassing.9

The imposition of power or discourse is authorizing in a double-sense, indeed in the double-sense of the word. Power is authorizing in that it is productive and creative like authorial invention, though it is neither intentional nor purposive. Power is also authorizing in it that makes possible certain kinds of speech and modalities of relationship. By extension, it also establishes certain asymmetries of speech and position. It is this authorization that grounds and distributes traditional forms of authority, such as the state, tradition, or organizational position, that, in turn, legitimize specific forms of domination in the Weberian sense, “the probability that a command with a specific content will be obeyed by a given group of persons” (Weber, 1978, 53). To avoid confusion here between my presentation of post-structural authority and traditional ideas I will call these forms conventional forms executors or executory authorities insofar as
these stand as representatives and protectors of the underlying discourse and continue to produce the effects and sense of that discourse and power.

In this context, it is critical to appreciate that human subjects are *produced* by discourses and power; we are subjects *of* power and discourse. As such, we will come to see distinct authorizations, executors, and their modes of domination to be *legitimate*. Indeed as subjects, we, too, are authorized by discourse and so affirm and reproduce the distinctive structures and distributions through the everyday practices of living. This is an important critique, for example, of so-called “rational choice” perspectives insofar as we must ask precisely to what extent choice can be considered free and rational if subjects are always-already disposed to feel, believe, and decide in particular manners. In rejecting its “imaginary anthropology,” Pierre Bourdieu has said, “All the capacities and dispositions [rational choice theory] liberally grants to its abstract ‘actor’—the art of estimating and taking chances, the ability to anticipate through a kind of practical induction, the capacity to bet on the possible against the probable for a measured risk, the propensity to invest, access to economic information, etc.—can only be acquired under definite social and economic conditions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 124). This line of analysis also suggests that there is quite a lot at stake for individual subjects in maintenance of the established order of things since their very identities and experience of self are intertwined with the structures of domination and discourses that appear as external to them. There is, we might say, a libidinal or affective, unconscious investment in structures of domination. This can be so, in particular, even for those groups who are most visibly dominated. Bourdieu uses the term “symbolic violence” to describe “the violence which is exercised upon an agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 167, emphasis in original). Rather than being perceived as an act of violence, the experience itself is taken as natural and normal by virtue of
the “correspondence” or “fit” between the subjective structures of perception and bodily disposition (habitus) and constructed objective, executory institutions.

Authority and Resistance

Authorizing discourses and power complicate modern notions of resistance to executory domination. The Foucauldian formulation can be summarized in his well-known notion that “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978). Resistance is internal to the form of authoritative arrest, to the specific discourse. Yet if power is produced by its own opposition, opposition is an element essential to the discursive and spatial configuration of power even it assumes a form that is not symbolically violent. In a Lacanian idiom, we can say, further, that transgression is not something external to the Law but rather a position internal and constitutive of the established order itself. This is, again, a critically important dimension of the post-structural closure in our windowless room. There is no pure place or space outside of discourse and power from which to launch “authentic” resistance (Newman, 2001). Resistance is contaminated on account of its very possibility. This critique extends, of course, to scientific knowledge, and these constitute a particularly important focus of post-structural criticism precisely because they assert their authority as neutral, pure, and objective representatives of the thing itself.

Yet what post-structuralism closes from one side, it explodes from another in its ontological commitment to a non-positive, non-substantial foundation for human experience that establish internal, ethico-conceptual “stops,” namely anti-essentialism and a resistance to categories or assertions that purport to represent a unity or oneness. That is, while non-substantiality seems to necessitate some form of imposition, it also constrains the claims and
authorizations that can be made by that imposition. This argument is usefully seen within the context of the question of the relationship of Structuralism to post-Structuralism, and the Structuralist movement’s relationship to Kant.

**Kant and the Relentlessness of Reason**

In brief, the critical foundation of the Kantian project is transcendental idealism—that space and time are a priori properties of things as they *appear to us*, not of things in themselves. These are the universal conditions of experience and knowledge of the world that the mind imposes on objects of world, which the mind intuits through representations. From this, Kant elaborated what he took to be the general concepts of thought, the categories of understanding (quality, quantity, relation, and modality). All knowledge about objects entails the application of these categories through an act of judgment. Paul Guyer (2004/1998) writes, since “we can have no experience which is immune from conceptualization under [the categories], thus … the categories enjoy universal objective validity. Because these categories originate in the logical structure of our own thought, Kant holds, we must conceive of ourselves as the autonomous lawgivers for all of nature (A 127-8, B 164 ).” While Kant is sometimes seen in public administration as the arch-representative of modernist universalism, he is also certainly an early “constructionist.” He clearly argues that that the *categories of the mind* are imposed upon objects, that knowledge of objects is impossible without conceptualization, and that humans *give* universal laws to nature rather than being the inert receptors of nature’s laws. Neither can ethical or moral law be derived from metaphysical or theological sources.
The paradox that Kant illuminates is this: reason in its pure, theoretical form can establish no conditions for itself but reason’s tendency is to desire unconditioned knowledge of objects about which it cannot know:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to answer.

It soon becomes aware that in this way—the questions never ceasing—its work must always remain incomplete; and it therefore finds itself compelled to resort to principles which overstep all possible empirical employment, and which yet seem so unobjectionable that even ordinary consciousness accepts them. But by this procedure human reason precipitates itself into darkness and contradictions.

Elsewhere, Kant approaches this matter from another angle. In “What is Enlightenment?” (1784/2004) he contends that the Enlightened Age is grounded in the individual authorization and injunction Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding! In the first Critique Kant makes this point explicitly. Everything must be interrogated in the tribunal of reason, including reason itself. “Our age is, in especial degree, the age of criticism [Kritik], and to criticism everything must submit” (Axi-xii).

While I have mixed problems of theoretical and practical reason here, I think that Kant raises the paradox that we must use our own understanding, our universal, reasoning faculties, yet there is, finally, nothing in reason itself to stop us from challenging received views and authority. On what basis does my courageous reason cease in its interrogations? If it must cease at some point, deference is required, a political point that Kant himself seems to indicate in his suggestion that people in official duties must obey orders and his suggestion that we have a moral obligation to uphold the state. But this is a deference that cannot withstand the interrogation of reason. It is necessary yet groundless and unjustifiable except, so it appears, as an “irrational” must if for no other reason than to preserve the conditions for the exercise of
freedom. Kant himself did not locate rational grounds, instead finding recourse to a series of fictional musts and “as ifs” in which we must invest faith—e.g. the thing-in-itself and God. In his own way, then, Kant adumbrates the basic dilemma of post-structural authority: the simultaneous necessity for some mechanism to stop the relentlessness of reason and critique yet impossibility of grounding that mechanism in something other than faith, fiction, or myth (Vaihinger, 1935). Thus Kant demonstrates something that, in the contemporary world, post-structuralist theory has done the work of reminding us: there is no final foundation for the human world and human reason. Left to pursue its own inherent logic, unrestrained reason will reason itself into ruin and darkness.

**Structuralism: Kantianism without the Transcendental Subject**

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur famously described Structuralism as “Kantianism without the transcendental subject” (quoted in Caws, 2000, 142). That is, it retained the basic Kantian concern with understanding the universal conditions of all knowledge as well as a basic commitment to seeing the underlying condition for structuring itself as resting in the mind. Yet it made two radical revisions. First, affecting a Copernican revolution of its own, it dispensed with the knowing subject, what Levi-Strauss called the “spoiled brat of philosophy,” and focused its gaze on unconscious, meaning-producing infrastructures that are external to discrete persons. Still like Kant, both these structures and the capacity for producing them are seen as universal.

Second, it aimed to do away with “things” altogether (Foucault, 1972, 47) and replace scientific and philosophical study with the synchronic examination of structures which were conceptualized as relations. The relations, moreover, are all non-essential; they do not inhere in the thing itself. In its broadest terms,
Structuralism is a philosophical view according to which reality of the objects of the human or social sciences is relational rather than substantial. It generates a critical method that consists of inquiring into and specifying the sets of relations (or structures) that constitute these objects or into which they enter, and of identifying and analyzing groups of such objects whose members are structural transformations of one another. (Caws, 2000, 1).

The most general insight of structuralism … is that the elements of the human world are constituted out of the relations into which they enter, in other words by their place in an intentional structure. (Caws, 2000, 249).

Post-structuralism pushes beyond both Structuralism and Kant. First and foremost, it purports to reject the idea of structure as universal. While the subject remains dead, all underlying logical structure is similarly dismissed, thereby exploding reason into a multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations without any underlying foundation that could assure the possibility for universal experience and validity. (As I shall discuss below, this widely-held view of post-structuralism is not without its problems, though.) Second, post-structuralism aims to re-incorporate the diachronic or historical dimension back into scientific inquiry as well as integrate concerns for the somatic and spatial. Third, it problematizes of the binary oppositions (signifier-signifier, raw-cooked, reality-appearance, form-content, etc.) that structural analysis relied on by showing their mutual contamination, how they constituted one another in their very opposition.

In spite of these differences, philosopher Peter Caws (2000) argues convincingly that post-structuralism should be seen as a critique internal to Structuralism rather than as line of thought that breaks from it. Indeed the “posts” did not abandon the notion of structure or the accumulation of knowledge and understanding that might occur by tracing its effects. Nor was the idea that there were general conditions for the production of structures abandoned. There are many examples of this. In Lacan, we find the ongoing elaboration of what he saw to be the basic, constitutive, structure of human subjectivity (the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic) and the commitment to the fundamental opposition of sexual difference (Lacan, 1999). Despite his own
(1970) protests to the contrary, throughout his work Foucault remains concerned with articulating and analyzing conditional structures in a general, almost formalist way. Beatrice Han (2002/1998) has traced the movement of Foucault’s “critical project” through a series of quasi-transcendental structures: the historical a priori, épistemè, dispositif, power, and, in his final work, “experience.” In Deleuze and Guattari, the ongoing concern with structure is evident in their repeated use of conceptual polarities or “heterogeneous series” (Deleuze, 1990): active and reactive forces (Deleuze, 1983), deterritorializing nomadism and statist territorialization (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), molecular and molar, schizo and paranoiac (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983), major and minor (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), etc.

Since the connection of post-structuralism to Structuralism is ambivalent, so must, too, its relationship to Kant. On my reading, post-structuralism takes two positions vis-à-vis Kant. First, it aims to dispense with Kant’s “as if” philosophy and make do without an object of representation to secure reality. There is no longer any “outside” anchor to representation; all outsides are produces of internal divisions and constructions. The outside is, to borrow a Lacanian neologism, extimate. In other words, post-structuralism rejects the regulatory mythology that underwrites the theoretical coherence, unity, and rhetorical plausibility of Kant’s metaphysics and political liberalism. In this move, post-structuralism, second, radically reframes and extends the Kantian problematic. In Nietzsche and Philosophy, Deleuze (1983), while recognizing that Kant’s genius was in conceiving an immanent critique, writes, “Kant merely pushed a very old conception of critique to the limit, a conception which saw critique as a force which should be brought to bear on all claims to knowledge and truth, but not on knowledge and truth themselves; a force which should be brought to bear on all claims to morality, but not on morality itself. Thus the total critique becomes the politics of compromise: even before the battle
of spheres of influence have already been shared out” (89). Kant did not push past seeing critique as instrument for advancing claims based on truth, knowledge, and morality; he did not reevaluate the values that animated his critique.

There are traces of Deleuze’s argument and the rupture from the West’s mythic foundations that it suggests in Derrida’s (1978, 278-294) “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Human Sciences.” In this essay, Derrida analyzes an “event” in this history of the thought of structure—and here structure is serving as approximate synonym for foundation. This event concerns the moment in human history when it became possible to think what he calls the “structurality of the structure.” In effect, Derrida offers a metacommentary on the concept of structure and describes the way in which the West has historically thought about the very idea of structure itself. The thinking of structure, he argues, has been itself structured by the idea of the center, a fixed point of origin, which provides assurance of certitude and the potential for mastery. Derrida gives several names for this structure/center—God, the Law, Truth, telos, Man, Science, etc. Furthermore, it is generally thought that it is precisely this element that grounds or produces social order (or in normative, instrumental terms towards which social order ought to tend). Derrida, however, is concerned less with the specific historical names of this element than with what these various names share, namely a claim to represent and define the center or origin. In other words, to render it fully present. In a generic sense, the center is the name of the foundation or of Truth. What concerns Derrida is (1) the center-structure, not its many historical names or occupants, (2) the presumption of the positivity of the center, and (3) the concomitant necessity for this displaced origin to be made present through representation. What Derrida will do is to place absence at the “center” of the human world. Along very different lines, Lacan does
the same thing by making constitutive lack the core of his theoretical edifice (Catlaw, 2006a, 2006c).

This post-structural position is, in fact, a *metacritique* for it not only critiques the specific claims to authority but the very structures—in thought and everyday life—that *authorize the recognition* of those claims. If Kant argued that all claims could be brought before the court of reason, post-structuralists call into question the authority of the court itself (Cutrofello, 1994, 12). In this sense it pushes beyond the limit of Kantian critique.

With regard to sociological or political accounts of authority, post-structuralism pushes deeper, to the level of ontology of the human world, to the question of *authority* in its generative, constitutive, and authorizing nature. In doing so it problematizes all second-order executory claims and hierarchies of position and status, but does so at the same time that it suggests that there cannot be a non-coercive normative theory. All theoretical schemas are impositions—authorizing discourses and acts of power. But it asks, how are these impositions made, and responds: representationally, by reference to a center, or being *qua* doctrine of presence. It is beyond this form of imposition that it seeks to move.

*Refounding Foundations*

The ambiguous relation of post-structuralism to transcendental structures creates well-known dilemmas. First, the status of these structures is a real question. Should they taken to be transcendental structures? Are they “useful fictions”? What is the relationship between the transcendent and immanent? Are these truth claims that deny all truth claims, thereby creating a “performative contradiction”? Part of the difficulty in sorting these matters out has been, in my
view, the limited interpretation (one which these theorists themselves no doubt encourage) that these thinkers are anti-foundational, where foundation names a fundamental basis or ground for knowledge, truth, or experience. As Michael Hardt (1993) notes in his book on Deleuze, this gives too much away. He writes, “Post-structuralism does critique a certain notion of foundation, but only to affirm another notion that is more adequate to its ends. Against a transcendental foundation we find an immanent one; against a given, teleological foundation we find a material, open one” (xv). As Hardt suggests, what is of primary concern for the post-structural project is less the displacement of foundations than, in Nietzschean terms, the revaluation of all values—a new way of evaluating, a new way of feeling, a new way of thinking (Deleuze, 1983, 163)—and a total reconsideration of the question of foundations beyond the schema of truth, the metaphysics of presence, and the stopgap measures of executory authority that aspire to bring into presence that displaced wholeness of the object of representation (e.g. Structure, God, People). Thus the question is less anti-foundationalism than affirming a qualitatively different kind or modality of foundation. In Farmer’s terms, we can conceive of this as re-symbolization at the cloacal level.

While post-structuralism is sometimes ridiculed for its determinism and nihilism, there is little question that in its emphasis on conceptual creation and ontological production it opens us to an enormous potential of re-constituting the world from the bottom up, from the inside-out. The issue is not whether these ontologies represent the real reality but rather what kind of work these narratives and fictions can do. What kind of worlds can they open up for us? What kind of sense can they make? The fictional or mythic status of this ontology also should not be ridiculed. The use of fictions in philosophy has a long, illustrious, and productive history—extending from Plato to Hobbes state’s of nature to Rawl’s original position. These are stories that “get the ball
rolling” since, as we have known since Aristotle and the law of (non-)contradiction, conditions for logical and empirical inquiry themselves can be established neither logically nor empirically. It is in this sense that these fictions are foundations, one which acquire their truth and verifiability through use, replication, and structuring of human subjectivities.

**Post-Structuralism, Anarchism, and Political Authority**

Post-structuralism, I will argue next, offers an anti-statist account of political authority. This comes into view when it is juxtaposed with anarchist theories of the state; indeed in this light they are shown to reinforce one another, though in complex ways. This part of the essay explores how this theoretical mixture can be brought to bear on rethinking the question of government in such a way that it connects with the depersonalized, affirmative formulation of authority described above. First, I consider the dominant theories of government in public administration.

**Theories of the State in Public Administration**

Public administration appears to have offered two theories of the state, one (mostly) Hegelian, the other (mostly) Hobbesian. A prominent third stream of theorizing has advanced a theory of governing along the lines of civil association and discourse but it has not, in fact, produced a theory of the state—or an account for the justification of government. It is here that, I think, post-structuralism and anarchist theory might be useful, though the answers it provides are far from definitive.
First, public administration has provided a highly persistent, if dissatisfying (to many) theory of the state in the politics-administration dichotomy, though the dichotomy is not always appreciated for what it is. We must keep in mind, as Rohr (1986; 2003) remind us, that Goodnow’s and Wilson’s understanding of government was deeply influenced by Hegel. Theirs is, as Spicer’s (2001) suggests, a monist account of state. In my view, though, Rohr gets too caught up with the question of Constitutional separation of powers and neglects to pay attention to the fact that, at its core, what we have in the dichotomy is a Hegelian-inspired dualist theory of the state—one that Rohr ardently defends—in which the two functions must operate in harmony such that the true will of the state can be made manifest. Arguably, what we have in politics and administration is a gloss on Hegel’s notion of the objective and subjective aspects of the state. For example, Hegel rejects the idea of majority-rule models of the state since this is only the manifestation of the subjective. There is also an objective, rational dimension of the laws, of universal principles, that govern the state, ones which are understood by an autonomous, trained class of people. It is not hard to see this as administration and the desire for a science of administration as a natural outgrowth of presumption of the objective dimension of the state. It is, then, the harmonization of politics and administration that allows for the true expression of the “rational essence” of a people.

Two additional points are relevant. Hegel also thought that religion gives the state its ultimate foundation, and if we read Waldo’s (1948) examination of “cosmic constitutionalism” we can spy the religious dimension that suffused the reform movement that brought a self-conscious public administration into being. Finally, reading the first chapter of Politics & Administration (Goodnow, 1900) closely, we see very clearly the Hegelian view of history. Goodnow describes how there is a universal movement to the development of political
institutions and that peoples at different stages of history can be expected to display kinds of institutions.

The second major theory of the state in public administration is Hobbesian—it must be stressed, though, that this theory is not necessarily in direct opposition to the Hegelianism of the dichotomy. The foremost proponent of this theory, really the only competitor to the politics-administration formula, is Public Choice (Ostrom, 1989/1973). While this economic approach to government has been equally unsatisfying to many theorists of public administration (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2003; McSwite, 2002; Stivers, 2000b), Public Choice at least defines a fundamental role for government in its responsibility of remedying market failure and founds the existence of government in a contract theory of the state (Buchanan, 2005/1972). Precisely how “Hobbesian” is the basis of this contract theory is an interesting, open question, especially in public administration. Powell (2005) argues that Buchanan’s analytical starting point is Hobbes’ Leviathan and the state of nature. Ostrom (1989/1973), though, famously chides early public administration theorists like Goodnow and Wilson for their embrace of the Hobbesian unitary sovereign and their abandonment of the Constitution’s associationalism and democratic administration—all the while drawing from these “new political economists.” Moreover, not all Public Choice theorists embrace a role for government. Hogarty (2005/1972), Moss (2005/1972), and Taylor (1987) advance a line of free market anarchism more line with individualist anarchism introduced by Max Stirner and expounded by Americans such as Benjamin Tucker than leftist anarcho-communism. Nevertheless, Public Choice plausibly can be read as resting on a distinct ontological conception of the social that articulates a role for political authority.

Critics of the dichotomy and market-based government have yet to articulate a distinct theory of state or of government. Recent, often suggestive theories of “metagovernance”
(Sorensen, 2006) focus more or less on empirical matters on the terrain of dichotomy, on the shifting relationships and roles of political, administrative structures and civil structures, and the de-centering of representative institutions as the authoritative distributor of values than with articulating a theory of government per se. When combined with the blurring or sectoral boundaries and the non-restrictive exercise of meta-governance, the role of government becomes ever more ambiguous. Surprisingly, process and discourse-based theories also do not help much. This dilemma is evident in Mary Follett’s (1998/1920) *The New State*, which like Goodnow and Wilson is enthralled with Hegel and making a “true home in the state.” Follett, however, fails to provide an account of the role of government in her federated network of neighborhood associations. In *Postmodern Public Administration* (1995), Fox & Miller aim to abandon the concept of bureaucracy and advance a discourse-based theory of public energy fields which subsumes “all those activities and recursive practices currently conceived as agencies and institutions in organizational chart boxes in the bureaucracy along with any such closely related sectors of civil society as the nonprofit social service sector, the fourth estate, and citizen groups of all kinds: all those who are engaged in activities with public implications, who are projecting actions in accordance with the implicit question, what should we do next?” (101). Yet amidst these energy fields, what place, role, function for *government* and traditional political authority, if any? No clear answer is forthcoming to this reader.

Perhaps the closest we come to formulating a solution to this problem is McSwite’s (2006) recent account of “public administration as carrier of the new social bond.” McSwite contends that public administration has not considered the question of the social bond, which they define as

the connection among people that makes, for example, the striking of constitutions (or any other form of social contract) possible. It is the necessarily
prior link among people that allows them to arrive at and agree upon mutual value commitments. By contrast, the common misunderstanding is that it is the existence of mutual value commitments that binds people into groups. The impossibility of making social contracts of any sort (normative or otherwise) without a prior bond is an obvious problem of contract theory, but it is one that has been confined, for the most part, to the esoteric space of academic political theory. (178)

They then outline a distinct conception of the social bond grounded in the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan. While there are problems with McSwite’s characterization of contract theory since contract theory does presume the possession by each individual of the law of nature and reason as unifying, bonding connection, there is still no justification offered for public administration (which I assume to be government) as the carrier of this new bond and so no argument for government itself. Elsewhere McSwite (2002) suggest that government is “generic” to human societies and that public administration in unique in bringing one closer to the fundamental human condition, the dialectic of freedom and control. But, again, there is no analytic demonstration of why government is generic—despite anthropological evidence that suggests the contrary (Barclay, 1982)—or analytic justification for why government uniquely provides access to this human condition. It would seem that psychoanalytic theory would point to at least one another domain, namely the psychoanalytic clinic.

It may very well be that I am pushing this point too hard; that in a time when anti-government sentiment disingenuously cloaks the redirection of state resources and power that such insistence is misplaced, or worse, counterproductive. It may very well that, contra Foucault’s injunction, that these questions exemplify a wrong-headed preoccupation with abstractions like “the state” and “what is X?” kinds of questions, when it is more appropriate to inquire into the practices of the art of government and ask, how does this work? It could be that these questions are themselves products of the peculiarities of the author’s American political
culture. Nevertheless it seems that “government” should be something more than a position to oppose the Market, or position of critique. Its defenders should be able to articulate positively what they are defending and why. And, as both the success of the dichotomy and Public Choice indicate, these theories matter profoundly in formulating a coherent practice of governing.

Perhaps part of the problem lies in the fact that there can be profound ambivalence among even the ardent defenders of American government and critics of traditional public administration (i.e. the dichotomy and economic government). Frederickson and Smith (2003, 152) call attention to the anti-statist tendencies in “postmodern” public administration theory. But this is not a new trend in American public administration, nor is it necessarily related to “postmodernism.” As Stillman (1995) observed “rejection of statism has deep roots in American public administration” (29). For example, both the New Public Administration and, as noted, Public Choice, albeit from quite different theoretical directions, mounted considerable attacks on centralized governmental apparatuses. As I have suggested, though, Public Choice has been more successful in formulating an alternative. This trend has continued a pace, and public administrationists continue to explore explicitly anti-statist, even anarchist themes along a distinctly anti-essentialist trajectory (Catlaw, in press; deLeon, 1994; Farmer, 1995). Indeed McSwain and White (1979) explicitly have called themselves “conservative anarchists,” and the limits of their theorization have been suggested already.

Reconstructing Authority

Having considered the question of authority in public administration and post-structural theory as well as examined the operative theories of the state in public administration, we are now in a position to sketch elements of a theory or narrative of post-structural government—the
disciplinary issue of public administration is distinct and I will not consider this here. I will first outline the relevant parts of the foregoing discussion that I will bring to bear.

Post-structuralism revisits the groundless, non-substantial nature the human world, yet it does so without recourse to the various devices of arrest or stoppage deployed in modernity to stop the sliding of the signifier. This creates a problem since, on my reading, the implications of this non-substantial ontology necessitate the limiting presence of authority (in the form of discourse and power) to establish coherent and intelligible contexts for meaning and identity. While there is little question that post-structuralism strives to overcome the philosophy of consciousness, I do believe it aspires to “be done with consciousness” itself. But in closing down these sites of authority, it does not at the same time appear to authorize a distinct class of speech and speakers that could, to paraphrase McSwite (1997), resolve these impossible questions and get on with the program. This is not surprising, though, since post-structuralism rejects representation *tout court*, i.e. both its epistemological and political forms. It resists installing a select Guardian Class for the Good Life (Waldo, 1948); it refuses the representative and the object of representation; it denies, as Deleuze once said to Foucault, the indignity of speaking on behalf of others (May, 1994, 97). This all follows from the *creative* and *generative* (rather than *re-*presentational) quality it ascribes to the concept. Indeed, as Badiou (2005) has written, one of the unifying points of the philosophical program in post-war France was “to be done with the separation of concept and existence—no longer to oppose the two; to demonstrate that the concept is a living thing, a creation, a process, an event, and, as such, not divorced from existence” (75). To create new symbolic forms and concepts is to create new forms and possibilities for living.
But the fact that post-structuralism does not authorize a distinct class of *speakers* (e.g. elected representative, scientific experts, etc.) does not mean that it does not create sites for authority or elevate certain kinds of talk over others. Indeed the preferred kinds of talk (and so positions of resistance) are those that are affirmative of this creative process, ones that affirm, in Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche, *active forces of creation and connection*. The *site* opened by post-structuralism is the internal void or emptiness revealed by the evacuation of the representatives of executory authority, a void that renders talk of oneness, unity, or completeness ontologically impossible (see Catlaw, 2006a, 271-279). Authority, then, is a placeholder rather than a representation. It does not stand in for someone who could not be present but stands in for the impossibility of representation, of making some One present. It works like a keystone in an archway. It is positional but in a structural rather than organizational or hierarchical sense.

This practice of authority must stand in a tentative, dialectical relation with the artifacts of its own (constitutive) imposition and arrest since, while an imposition can never be complete, it is, at the same time, partial and selective. McSwite (2004) offers an instructive formulation of the kind of balance required here in their re-reading of Camilla Stivers’s *Bureau Men, Settlement Women*. Using Lacanian theory, McSwite writes “Man” and “Woman” offer labels to describe the two basic functions for the producing and maintaining of intelligible human worlds. In this view, “Women” is the structural position that produces words. The symbolic function of “Man” is to stop that production so that, like a period at the end of a sentence, we can make sense of the world and establish a stable context for action.\(^{14}\) As I have outlined here, social life is the product of this dialectic of stoppage and generation. McSwite writes,

Both functions are essential and equally important. Distortions of the process can occur as either the function of the man or the woman is overemphasized, thus impairing the
operation of the other function. When the overemphasis is on the function of the man, dogmatism and stasis occur. … [This makes for] a strict linguistic positivism. The feminine function can also be overemphasized. In this case, meaning is destabilized. … Words overwhelm meaning. (117)

Liberalism and Post-structuralism

It must be said that, if correct, this post-structural account of authoritative imposition bears a family resemblance to Thomas Hobbes’s justification for the Leviathan. In the Hobbesian narrative, the violence and caprice in the state of nature persuades rational individuals to surrender the free execution of the law of nature to the sovereign in exchange for security and protection. As the famous image of Leviathan suggests, the body-politic is generated by this act. Order is produced through the creation of a political community from a natural state of war. In a sense, Hobbes offers us a non-substantial conceptualization of social order. This stands somewhat in contrast to the Lockean account, which describes a more mild state of nature with an existing pre-political civil order than antecedes the creative act of the contract and the institution of the “common judge.” Society precedes the State. This difference is not, however, absolute insofar as the Hobbesian sovereign must still govern in accord with the law of nature, which is “to seek Peace” and knowledge of which is a universal capacity of individuals. There is, says, Hobbes, an “equality of ability” that names a kind of pre-political bond that limits the sovereign exercise of authority. Nevertheless, the temporal preeminence of Society in Locke provides the ground from which to criticize and, if necessary, dissolve instituted political authority. Still, Locke shares with Hobbes the presumption that the universal right of all persons in the state of nature is to freely exercise their wants and desires.
Post-structuralism “splits the difference” between Locke and Hobbes. Like Hobbes, order is generated in a creative act; there is not a natural order. But its anti-humanism would reject anything like the possession of natural law, and its embrace of difference points to an understanding of equality that does not rest on equality qua sameness (see Catlaw, in-press, chapter 7). Like Locke, though, post-structuralism opens an internal conceptual position of resistance by virtue of its ontological formulation of non-substantiality, rather than the external position of a positive, constituted civil order. However, unlike Hobbes, post-structuralism explodes executory sovereign authority into a complex network of contexts; it cuts the head off of the king (Farmer, 2003b, 2005) and refuses the requirement of representation (executory authority). This, combined with the robustness of its critique, does not commit post-structuralism to a defense of liberal capitalist symbolizations, institutions, and practices. A different direction is taken, for example, by Richard Rorty, who maintains an ironic distance between the private world his anti-foundational pragmatism and the public world of representation.

Anarchism, Post-structuralism, and Authority

In terms of the traditional categories of political theory, post-structuralism bears the closest resemblance to anarchism. Not everyone would agree with this conclusion. In his lucid use of postmodern theory, Franklin Ankersmit (1996) argues that the breakdown of mimetic or mirroring representation clears the way for a different, aesthetic mode of representation. We need to understand the relationship between the object of representation and its representation in artistic terms. No one expects, for example, a picture of a still life to make present again the actual oranges and apples I see in the bowl. They are different things entirely. Neither should we
expect the state or politics to make the people present again in government. Ankersmit goes on to argue that the nature of representation and the profound nature of contemporary problems demand a more powerful central government. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe make extensive use of Lacan, Foucault, and Marxist theories to generate a non-substantialist account of society to advance a theory of hegemony—a practice in which a particularity comes to stand in temporarily for the empty universal. These hegemonic articulations create political order. In this sense, the state comes to possess a monopoly on both coercive and symbolic resources (Bourdieu, 1994/1991). It represents a *concentration* of these resources. Similar conclusions are reached in other Lacanian-inspired treatments of the political (e.g. Stavrakakis, 1999). In crafting her theory of post-liberal network governance, Eva Sørensen similarly retains the representational category of “the People” as a necessary image of political collectivity, while recognizing the creative, aesthetic, and non-substantial quality of the representation.

Though philosophically compelling and pragmatically appealing, I find these accommodations of post-structural/postmodern theory to be unsatisfactory for reasons both analytical and normative (Catlaw, 2005, 264-266, 2006a, in press, chapter 3). First, these theoretical moves take away the insights and possibilities of post-structuralism in their very application—the critique of (mimetic) representation suddenly becomes the basis for (aesthetic) representation. This strikes me as imposing a *denkverboten* (prohibition on thought) on radically reconsidering the foundations of our socio-political order, and preserves a normative preference for the status quo. On this point Zizek (2000) has written, “the demise of every essentialist fixation” nevertheless takes place against the unquestioned background of “the liberal democratic capitalist framework which remains the same” (321). Second, it is imposes a cynical
Straussian division of esoteric and exoteric knowledge, one that maps onto Rorty’s own private ironism—we scholars and private citizens can know that representation is impossible and assist in maintaining a certain order of things (esoteric) but in our “salutary teaching” we shall publicly insist that such representation is necessary and actually represents a whole (exoteric). We must simply carry on “as it” such a thing were possible and desirable. Third, one is struck by the lingering bias of a particular, literalist conception of political subjectivity—one with a body and a head, representing leadership, rising above the rest of society.

**Government or State?**

Preliminarily, I think one way to reframe this matter and to make use of post-structuralist insights is to examine more fully two terms that I have largely used—and are typically used in public administration—interchangeably, state and government. Surprisingly for a field entrusted with the executing function of the state, considerations of the nature of the state are exceedingly rare (e.g. Harney, 2002; Nickel, 2006; Spicer, 2001; Stillman II, 1991). Here, however, is not the place to engage in such a consideration. Drawing from the discussion above, what I want to do is draw a conceptual distinction between political and authorizing practices resting on the unifying demands of representation and practices resting on post-structural ontology and discursive authority. Following a lead in anarchist theory, I will call the former “state” and the latter “government.”

While it cannot be said that anarchism rejects authority completely (Bakunin, 1916/1882; McKercher, 1989; Newman, 2001), anarchists are united in their unqualified rejection of the state. Unlike Marxism which designates the economic relations of capitalism and private property as the fundamental problem in bourgeois society, anarchists point to the state (Newman,
2001, 25). But, for anarchists, what is “the state”? There are, perhaps, two primarily qualities ascribed to the state. First, the state, Peter Kropotkin writes, “includes not only the existence of a power placed above society, but also a **territorial concentration and a concentration of many or even all functions of the life of a society in the hands of a few**” (quoted in Carter, 1971, 29). This is a definition close to Weber’s. Second, the state names a centralized, unitary power (Sheehan, 2003). As Sheehan writes, “what is rejected by anarchism’s *a priori* opposition to the state is not the concept of government as such but the idea of a sovereign order that claims and demands obedience, and if necessary, the lives of its subjects. Anarchism rejects the form of an imposed, centralized authority enshrined and made material in the state” (26). The state, as Kropotkin’s point about a power above society suggests, becomes a “transcendental reality” and its embedding in the nation gives it “both a rhetorical and seemingly natural claim on our allegiance” (Sheehan, 2003, 26). For this reason, anarchism rejects *all* forms of political representation—from party vanguardism to liberal democratic republicanism—since representation establishes a power above and apart from society. It must emphasized, then, that for anarchists the state is the state—it names a generic form the dominating effects of which exist regardless of which class (e.g. workers or capitalists) or group (e.g. bureaucrats) occupies its throne and aims to perpetuate itself. This capacity and drive for replication and perpetuation is symbolically permitted via its assumed capacity to speak for the universal and whole of the social under guises such as the People or the Public Interest.

Though post-structuralism has generally resisted theorizing the institution of state, focusing attention as did Foucault on the practices of government, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) discussions in *A Thousand Plateaus* echo anarchist themes—but with an important difference. For Deleuze and Guatarri, the state is an “abstract machine” that does the work of “overcoding”
in society. Overcoding stops the flow and becoming of a society. Significantly, for Deleuze and Guatarri, “the state is an abstract form or model rather than a concrete institution, which essentially rules through more minute institutions and practices of domination. The state ‘overcodes’ these dominations, stamping them with its imprint. Therefore, the state has no essence itself, but it is rather an ‘assemblage,’ or even a process of ‘capture’ (Newman, 2001, 98). The important shift that Deleuze and Guattari (and other post-structuralists) advance here is to de-institutionalize the state and to render it as an abstract form.\textsuperscript{17} The state becomes, so to speak, a \textit{formula} that constitutes certain kinds of practices, institutions, and modes of thought. Here, post-structuralism breaks from traditional anarchism since it sees this \textit{state-form} in those concepts and thought that anarchism posited in opposition to the state-institution (or executory authority), such as a benevolent human nature or human essence, or an oppressed civil order. Its anarchism is anti-essentialist and non-substantialist, and it collapses the spherical and modernist, liberal distinctions between the political and the social as well as the micro and the macro (May, 1994).

But is there a form of \textit{governing} that corresponds to the authority of discourse or power, of the dialectic in construction outlined above? Here we can toggle back to anarchist theory.

As Sheehan intimates above, anarchists sometimes conceive of \textit{government} as distinct from the state. From the elements sketched above, we can extract from the anarchist critique of the state a positive conception of governing. First, it is a political authority that does not rise above and stand transcendent to society; it is not hegemonic. That is, it does not purport to represent anything but can be conceived as an immanent, interior placeholder for the imposition of a discourse that produces an intelligible context; power is immanent to the social field and concepts are constitutive rather than representational. In this sense, it can be conceived, perhaps,
as a third modality of ordering distinct from the planned (cosmos) and the spontaneous (taxi) (Hayek, 2003/1976). Second, government is not and does not assert itself as a unitary, unified, or unifying authority. “Government,” as such, does not exist. In the idiom of political representation, the People do not exist (as an object of representation) and government is its symptom. Third, government is not concentrated in the hands of the few and, by implication, does not divide according to a hierarchical distinction between the rulers and the ruled.18

While anarchist theory is helpful with regard to issue of a distinction between state and government, its intersection with post-structuralism does create a wrinkle: what can we say about the relationship between political authority and government, defined conventionally? Are they the same? One critical insight of post-structuralism is that political activity is by no means limited to the straights and narrows of executory, political authorities; all politics is micropolitics, occurring through a network of locations and enclosures and in myriad manners without restrictions concerning the possible objects or subjects of governing (Howe, 2002; H. T. Miller & Fox, 2006, 88-99; Triantafillou, 2004). Post-structuralism does not place an identifiable boundary on the political like the liberal public-private dichotomy does. Science and medicine, for example, are seen to be highly politicized domains of domination and production. By implication, government is a practice that unfolds throughout a social order. We should, then, expect the formulas of government and state as described above to be similarly ubiquitous, rather than institutionally confined. So, while the governmental is linked with the political, both have been clearly decoupled from the traditional institutions that we associate with each. The issue of conventional-government becomes quite muddy indeed.

At this point, I confess that I am uncertain about how to clarify this analytic distinction further. My intuition on the matter suggests several things to me. First, we can see that the
distinction between statist and governmentalist forms does not correspond to the division of politics and administration since either can be constituted or colonized by these formulas. The refusal in government of a non-integrated, fragmentary power above society gestures beyond the Hegelian-model. Thus we have elements of a theory of governing that appears distinct from both the dichotomous and the liberal accounts. The issue of government conventionally understood, again, remains muddy. Second, it could be that the demand for a role of conventional-government commits the essentialist-cum-functionalist error by insisting on essential institutional forms and functions in social orders generally. In my very question, there appears to be an a priori requirement for the existence of a conventional-government. The post-structuralist formulas appears sufficiently abstract and conceptual to conceive of these formulas as potentials for any order that may manifest themselves in unique ways, the composition of which can only be investigated historically, locally, and empirically—always guarding against statism in scientific inquiry. Third, the question becomes less how can we defend government or public service rather how can statism be analyzed, avoided, defended against, and resisted. This seems especially critical in the world of network governance, a world in which collaboration and corporatism can be indistinguishable on the transparent level. Again, addressing these questions can occur, of course, only within a specific historical or disciplinary contexts and existing institutional arrangements and practices. Thus, for example, one must be sensitive and aware of the conjuring and magic that can accompany the symbolic invocations of statism (Bourdieu, 1994/1991) and the extent to which as subjects we have been constituted by and remain hitched to statist, regal forms of thought and being. From here we can explore the potential alternatives to representational, executory authority that exist in any given situation (see Catlaw, 2006a; McSwite, 2003; O. F. White & McSwain, 1979). One good example of possible kinds of work
that are helpful on this score is Farmer and Patterson’s (2003) essay on the practical uses of rhetoric and symbolic action. Excellent histories of the consolidation and limits of statism would include Dvora Yanow’s (2003) study on racial and ethic categorization and Camilla Stivers’s (1993; 2000a) analyses of gender.

Conclusion

Certainly the typical academic caveat applies here—more research is necessary. Substantial theoretical and institutional challenges remain for such a fragmentary, dispersed non-representational formulation of social order and political authority (for example, see Bull, 2005). I have not tried here to articulate recursive practices and mechanisms that would institute this political ontology and its notion of authority. Nor have I succeeded in a lucid way in articulating a distinct position for our traditionally-defined government, but as I noted above this desire may be a remnant of my own statist constitution. But the existence of these questions is hardly unique to this approach (indeed the incomplete nature of thought makes problems endemic) and the persistence of questions does not constitute refutation (certainly not if normal science means anything). As I hope to have at least suggested in this essay, another road to the problems of government and authority is plausible and possible—and desirable. By implication, so is another public administration.
References


Notes

1 An exceptional discussion of public administration and its relationship to the “disgusting” and the work of cleansing appears in Patterson (2001). It may be that public administration is the instrument of “civilization” *par excellence* but that its proximity to the excremental is also its saving grace. How this relates to the “why government?” problem is an intriguing question.

2 The contemporary public administration theorist most sensitive to symbolic and rhetorical forms is certainly David John Farmer. See, in particular, Farmer (1995; 2003a; 2003c).

3 Where might we learn this “customary behavior”? Horkheimer (1972) argues that individuals learn to acquiesce to hierarchy and authority because the patriarchical structure of the bourgeois family conditions us to do so.

4 Scott & Falcone (1998) usefully distinguish three general frameworks for analyzing the question of public and private. The “generic approach” argues that management functions and organizational processes are essentially the same across sectors. The “core approach” argues that there are fundamental differences between public and private organizations by virtue of their formal, legal status and legal and political constraints. Here, traditional public administrationists such as Paul Appleby and Ronald Moe actually share much with Public Choice theorists. Bozeman’s “dimensional approach” refuses both the collapse and the dichotomization of the terms.

5 I will not explore here the possibilities of discourse, deliberation, and the consensus theory of truth as a mechanism for arresting the sliding of the signifier, a process I describe in the next section. Rather in this essay, I focus on the abstract, formal problem of authority. See also note 11 below.

6 For discussions of Mary Follett’s relevance to public administration scholarship, see Fox (1968), Thayer (1975), and Morse (2006). See also Miller (2002), who uses the term “problematic situation.”

7 Here I have in mind the broad question of the legitimacy of the administrative state as political institution rather than with the narrower, but certainly deeply connected, questions of public administration research and the search for a unifying paradigm. For an excellent examination of this relationship, see, in particular, Raadschedlers (1999).

8 Virtually no theorist labeled post-structuralist identifies himself/herself as a post-structuralist as such. I use the term here following Mark Poster (1989, 4) who argues that that post-structuralism largely is the invention of American academics who have drawn “a line of affinity around several French theorists who are rarely so grouped in France and who in many cases would reject the designation.” For discussions of the historical and intellectual issues involved in labeling for this group of thinkers, see Harland (1987), Frank (1989), Caws (2000), and Sturrock (1986). Badiou (2006) provides several philosophical bases for grouping the thinkers together as I do in this essay. I note that I accept Caws’s demonstration that the prefix post- really names a critique internal to the general Structuralist approach than a logical or temporary supercession of Structuralism, a point I will explore later in the essay.
Though I will not discuss this in this essay, I note modern mechanisms of authority establish a distinct relationship with its outside, a pathological one, on account of the presumption of unity and fullness that attaches to its materialization. See Catlaw (in-press, chapter 3).

In a modified form, this paragraph appeared first in Catlaw (2006b).

Habermas is the other alternative, yet he retains the position of judgment that Kant permits. As Cutrofello (1994) suggests, what Habermas proposes is to shift the juridical model of reason implicit in Kant from the individual judgment to the broader, inter-subjective court of judgment. This court and its processes of legitimation remain a priori. This raises some important questions about deliberative and consensus theories of truth.

On my reading, the notable exception in public administration is Louis Howe.

While one might argue that discourse and process approaches in public administration constitute a second alternative to the politics-administration division, I (in press) have argued that this is not the case insofar as even these approaches share an underlying set of politico-ontological commitments with the proponents of the dichotomy. To this point, Public Choice also does not mark a true alternative but it does nevertheless attempt to theorize a distinct role for government.

McSwite’s presentation of this dialectical relationship can also be seen in anthropologist Victor Turner’s (1969) investigations of structure and anti-structure.


For the sake simplicity, in this section I avoid discussion of the distinction between power and authority. For an excellent discussion of this complex difference, see Lukes (1978).

I (in-press) have taken this tact in my critique of the political ontology of the People, arguing that the elementary, abstract form is, drawing from Deleuze, the “model-copy” relationship of representation. It is an abstract form that replicates itself throughout human relationships, producing distinct effects of order whereby the People is “fabricated.” The interest of post-structuralist thinkers in this formalism is not always clear. For a discussion of a potential difference in emphasis in Lacan and Foucault, see Catlaw (2006c).

It should be noted, though, that none of these descriptors necessarily imply a partisan direction or policy content for government action, as the anarchists might suggest.

On my reading, this is precisely what Stefano Harvey (2002) attempts to do in this remarkable study State Work: Public Administration and Mass Intellectuality.