Paul du Gay’s book is a defence of bureaucracy against the new politicised managerialism that has changed the nature of state administration over the last thirty years. The book concerns the role of the civil servant and the author attempts to reclaim an ethical dignity of the bureau and bureaucrat. The author’s aim is to make the reader reconsider the contribution of bureaucracy in an age when it has become fashionable to attack inefficient administration. Using a Weberian perspective, du Gay argues that government requires officials to make clear political limits within policy-making. The author compares different ideas with Weber’s approach toward bureaucracy. Alisatar Macintyre’s ideal of administration is religious, traditional and not modern. Macintyre, it is claimed, is looking for intellectuals and priests, not bureaucrats to administer society. It is interesting to note the author’s comparison of Bauman’s critique of modernity and his thoughts on the holocaust with Weberian terminology. du Gay suggests that a substantive rational pursuit of moral ends is not always itself ethically desirable, as the example of National Socialism and Nazism shows. The Nazi’s completely took over bureaucracy. Weber underlined the need for politicians to assert themselves in the political process, not take over the running of the state. Nazi civil servants developed a personal bond of allegiance to the Führer rather than being impersonal within their office. Peters is also criticised for basing his ideas of businessing rather than on bad old bureaucracy.

This theme of old versus new methods of bureaucracy is carried into the second half of the book. Contemporary civil servant reform poses the question: ‘Where does policy end, administration begin and who decides?’ (90) Is administrative reform making things better? The author suggests that political responsibility has become adherence to financial targets and budgets. Efficiency and effectiveness are the goals which bureaucrats have to be ready to meet. Politicians are making bureaucrats more responsive in managerial terms. du
Gay is ultimately critical of managerialism. Politicised agendas are reshaping public services and playing a crucial role in evacuating public administration of its content and role and turning it into something else. (145)

The book is an excellent evaluation of the contemporary importance of using a Weberian perspective when analysing the relationship and role of state civil servants and politicians.