Montesquieu did not write political philosophy until he was 45. His early works include a satire of French culture and a collection of songs prepared for the Prince of Wales.

Constitutional Ambivalence

"The Modern Doctrine of Executive Power" by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* (Spring 1987), 208 East 75th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

There has been much debate in recent years over the powers of the U.S. presidency. Should the executive branch play the strongest role, or should the legislature be supreme?

This question, says Mansfield, a professor of government at Harvard, is not new. The teachings of three philosophers in particular—Niccolò Machiavelli, John Locke, and Charles-Louis Montesquieu—provided the Founding Fathers with ideas that they used to determine the Constitutional role of the executive branch in American government.

In *The Prince* (1513), Machiavelli first defined the executive as a single man who heads the state. The prince, Machiavelli teaches, must act in secret and rule by conspiring against the people, occasionally through "memorable execution[s]" of leading citizens.

Locke introduced the idea of the "separation of powers." His *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) answered the 17th-century English question of whether the Crown (the executive branch) or Parliament (the legislative branch) was to be supreme. His solution was to divide political power between them. While the executive was to be the "extraordinary sovereign," ruling by natural right, the legislative branch (which he first defined as a collective body) was the "ordinary sovereign," who creates the laws for the executive branch to bend, break, or enforce.

Montesquieu (1689–1755) improved upon Locke by advocating the separation of judicial and executive branches. The executive makes peace

or war, exchanges ambassadors, and prevents foreign invasions, while the judicial branch punishes criminals. But Montesquieu could not determine whether the executive or the legislative branch was to dominate.

The Founders' uneasy solution was to give the U.S. president powers "weak in theory [but] strong in practice." In theory, the president, Mansfield says, is an "errand boy" for Congress, carrying out its laws. But he also has certain special powers (to veto legislation, to command the armed forces). Moreover, he is vested with "the executive power" which, in practice, gives him wide latitude. He takes an oath not to execute the laws, but to faithfully execute his *office*. This Constitutional ambivalence, says Mansfield, is recognition of "the ambivalence of human freedom against, or in concert with, the things that limit and enslave men."

NASA's Troubles

"Accountability in the Public Sector: Lessons from the Challenger Tragedy" by Barbara S. Romzek and Melvin J. Dubnick, in ***Public Administration Review*** (May-June 1987), 1120 G St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

What caused the space shuttle Challenger to explode 73 seconds after lift-off on January 28, 1986?

The president's Commission on the Space Shuttle Challenger Accident seemed to provide clear and succinct answers. The so-called Rogers Commission blamed two factors—design flaws in the solid rocket boosters, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) errant decision to launch in marginal weather. But Romzek and Dubnick, both professors of public administration at the University of Kansas, argue that the commission's focus was too narrow; moreover, its reform proposals, they say, are likely to lead to more, not fewer failures.

Romzek and Dubnick believe that NASA blundered because it became accountable to too many parties, including the White House, Congress, various federal agencies, and the press.

When NASA was founded in 1958, the authors say, it was a simpler, less political organization. Its mission, at least after 1961, was clear: by the end of the decade, they were to land a man on the moon and return him safely to Earth. Aeronautical engineers filled the agency's ranks and made key decisions. NASA became one of "the most innovative organizations (public or private) in recent American history."

During the late 1960s, however, members of Congress and the press began to doubt whether the space effort was worth the cost. To survive, the agency had to become more politically and bureaucratically astute. NASA's future looked promising when administrator Dr. James Fletcher (1971–77) won White House and congressional approval for a continuing, partly commercial venture: the space shuttle.

To control the shuttle's costs, the authors say, NASA decentralized and contracted out many of its tasks. Meanwhile, members of Congress and the press expected the shuttle to perform without a hitch. On the eve of Challenger's last flight, CBS News anchorman Dan Rather announced another "costly, red-faces-all-around space shuttle delay."

After its Challenger investigation, the Rogers Commission called for