

**CLARIFYING ACCOUNTABILITY:  
AN ETHICAL THEORY FRAMEWORK**

Prepared for delivery at the

Fifth International Conference of Ethics in the Public Service: an International Network  
A Public Sector Ethics C Between Past and Future@

August 5-9, 1996  
Hilton Hotel, Brisbane, Queensland, AUSTRALIA

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In a general critique of the existing literature on accountability, John Uhr rightly concludes that existing frameworks for analysing public accountability are responsible for much of our inability to contribute to more effective institutions of public policy.<sup>i</sup> His advocacy of a research project on accountability tensions<sup>ii</sup> is a welcome call to scholarly action for those of us who regard the topic of accountability as a crucial yet overlooked dimension of the modern administrative state.

Uhr's objective is to develop an approach bridging (1) normative frameworks that stress the need to assess various forms of accountability with those that are (2) more descriptive and realist<sup>iii</sup> in perspective. To accomplish this, Uhr argues that both views could benefit from a return to the constitutional centre and renovate their accountability frameworks by reference to emerging practices which stand in open dispute over the appropriate public duties for executive officials.<sup>iii</sup> By contrast, I will argue that the more relevant metaphor is the need to plant deeper conceptual roots for the two perspectives rather than attempt to bridge them.

Central to my view is a concern for how students of accountability -- both scholars and practitioners -- have been talking passed each other. There is a need to deal with the ambiguous application of the term accountability<sup>iv</sup> by those who use the term in less than casual fashion. This task will involve a shift in the conceptual context of the analytic endeavor -- from that of traditional action theory<sup>v</sup> to a more relevant and reflexive ethical theory<sup>v</sup> focus. I discuss these points in the next section after addressing the surprisingly parochial nature of the accountability idea. I then offer a framework for conceptualizing accountability in a range of forms covering many of the attitudes and behaviors that term signifies to those who use it in practical situations. Finally, I end with some thoughts about the how to assess the framework and where it might lead those of us committed to Uhr's call.

## **JUSTIFICATIONS FOR CONCEPTUAL AND ANALYTIC CHANGE**

There are a number of preliminary steps to be taken in this effort to reconceptualize accountability. First, it is critical that we acknowledge the Anglican<sup>iv</sup> nature of the accountability idea and its implications for our endeavor. Second, we need to acknowledge the dualistic nature of existing accountability studies. Finally, we need to consider a useful theoretical context for conducting a

reconceptualization that will help us advance the study of accountability and public administrative behavior in general.

## **The Anglican Concept**

Accountability is an anglican concept. I first became aware of this while on my way to give a public lecture on *Accountability and the Burdens of Democracy* to a Brazilian university audience. Although my knowledge of Portuguese is extremely poor, I did notice that the posters advertising the talk in the hallways used the term *Responsabilidade* in place of *Accountability* in the title. I politely protested to my host, noting that a major theme of my talk was the distinction between responsibility and accountability. His response: there was no equivalent term -- at least in Brazilian Portuguese -- for accountability as I meant it.

Having survived that episode, I took to the task of investigating just how the term is translated in other languages. As it turns out, the English concept is quite distinctive. In most of the romance languages (French, Spanish, Italian as well as Portuguese), various forms of the term *responsibility* are used in lieu of the English accountability. In Japanese, a dictionary search turned up the transliterated term *akauntabiritii* -- an all too obvious reminder of the Japanese capacity to adopt useful terms from foreign sources, and clearly a result of the US occupation period. To highlight the point, there were 17 distinctive Japanese terms associated with *responsibility* -- none of them explicitly linked to accountability.

The issue would be a petty one were it not for the fact that accountability is not synonymous with responsibility. As John Uhr (I believe correctly) notes, accountability is at the least complementary to responsibility and certainly not equal to it.<sup>v</sup> As he describes the term, it is almost a mirror of responsibility.

Accountability constrains and fetters official discretion, while responsibility releases discretion. Accountability is compliance with authority, whereas responsibility is about empowerment and independence. Accountability is the negative end of the

band in which responsibility is at the positive end. If accountability is about minimising misgovernment, responsibility is about maximising good government. . .

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For northern European languages (Dutch, Danish, German), in contrast, translations of accountability are closer in meaning to *duty* or *obligation*, e.g., an accountability is an obligation or duty to live up to terms of a trust. Russian and Finnish translations also relied on terms much closer to *Aobligation@* in meaning, although the same terms were used for responsibility as well. But as is the case with responsibility, the term we typically use in English is not synonymous with *Aobligation@* or *Aduty.@* While one may feel an obligation or duty for being accountable, accountability itself is neither per se.

What may come closest to a translation of accountability is not a word, but rather a descriptive phrase: the rendering of accounts, or in French *comptes a rendre*. Put more clearly, accountability is the English equivalent of the idea that one is able to render a counting of something to someone. While that idea can be expressed in other languages, English is somewhat unique in having created a single term that signifies that condition and applies it as an institutionalized context.

Reinforcing this view is the derivation of the *idea* of accountability (in contrast to the word per se) under Norman rule. Etymologically, Middle English terms related to accountability (e.g., *acompte*, *aconte*) can be traced to at least to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, and there is no doubt these were derived from the Old French equivalents for *comptes a rendre*. More interestingly, a strong case can be made for a specific link between those Old French phrases and the English concept of accountability by focusing on a watershed event in British political history: publication of the Domesday Books in 1086.

Twenty years after the Norman conquest, William I ordered a detailed enumeration of all property in England requiring every subject to provide access to royal surveyors for the listing and valuation of all holdings. As the Domesday Books, the resulting census is widely cited as a critical factor in the enduring power of central authority in Britain. In some respects, the survey was merely a reflection of William's immediate need to determine the tax base of his conquered lands in order to make revenue collection more efficient. In a broader sense, it was an exercise in applying massive authority -- an effort of such scope and detail that its successful implementation could not help but

enhance the legitimacy of Norman rule.

The conduct of the Domesday survey sent a message to all William's subjects that the conquest was complete and a new ruling order was in place. Completed in an amazingly short time (one year), it relied on units of measure and jurisdictional reconfigurations that best suited the survey task rather than extant arrangements. Farm oxen were counted as a "plough-team" units, and land holdings were designated (for the first time) as *Maneriums* -- or Manors. Thus, not only were property holders required to "render a count" of what they possessed, but they were to do so in the terms set by the king's agents.<sup>vii</sup> Medieval historians have rightly been in awe of what the Domesday Books represent. "As an administrative achievement," noted one, "it has no parallel in medieval history." Still another authority regards it as "marking an epoch in the use of the written word in government."<sup>viii</sup>

Beyond the Domesday surveys themselves, however, William took an additional and complementary step in 1086 when, after traveling about his kingdom as the survey was being conducted, he came

to Salisbury at Lammas, and there his councillors came to him, and all the people occupying land who were of any account over all England whosoever's vassals they might be; and they all submitted to him, and swore oaths of allegiance to him that they would be faithful to him and against all other men.<sup>ix</sup>

While historian David Douglas cautions against attributing too much to William's actions (e.g., developing a modern form of national sovereignty), "his acts. . . were exceptional in their nature, and of high importance." Royal authority was made more effective and feudal organization in England was strengthened.<sup>x</sup> Central to these developments, I contend, was the establishment of accountability (i.e., the idea, not the term) as a foundation for governance.

Historian James Given provides additional support for this argument in his comparative study of two local societies which came under "foreign" rule during the 13<sup>th</sup> century: Gwynedd in North Wales (ruled by the English from the late 1200s) and Languedoc in the south of France (incorporated under the French monarchy from the early 1200s). Given takes special note of the distinctive approaches used by the English and French in governing each jurisdiction. The French took a "minimalist" approach by establishing "a loose hegemony over the local community." As John Uhr would note, the locals in

Languedoc retained responsibility for much of their own governance. In contrast, the English used a maximalist solution to the governing problem, involving

the total recasting of local political structures. Traditional mechanisms and techniques of rule would be abolished and replaced by ones modeled directly on those of the new masters. The governors who wielded these novel mechanisms of power would be either members of the outside ruling organization or local people who had been thoroughly educated in and assimilated to the outsiders' norms.<sup>xi</sup>

Although not referring to accountability explicitly, Given's description of the English system of local administrative governance rings familiar to anyone knowledgeable about the Anglo-Norman system of rule created under William and his successors, who most often used it to enhance the legitimacy of the royal court. Although in certain respects, no state was more completely feudal, noted Marc Bloch about the Anglo-Norman regime, the feudalism was of such a kind as ultimately to enhance the prestige of the crown.<sup>xii</sup> Building on the foundations laid by his grandfather, Henry II structured a system that left much authority in local hands, but tied them firmly to the center through a strong accountability system. The powerful kingship of the conquerors had not destroyed all other powers; but it had forced them to act, even when in opposition to it, only within the framework of the State.<sup>xiii</sup> As authority in England shifted from the crown to the parliament over the next few centuries, that framework -- and the accountability system that underpinned it -- was held in place.

The French, in contrast, do not develop a similar system until several centuries later, and they did so in a way that created the institutions of centralization while undermining the potential for the establishment and legitimacy of accountability. The taste for centralization and the mania for regulations date back in France to the time when lawyers came into government, noted Tocqueville in an aside to his commentary in *Democracy in America*. He quotes a French royal historian who addressed Louis XVI on the matter by recalling that in the past:

[e]ach body and each community of citizens retained the right to administer its own affairs, a right which we do not assert to be part of the primitive constitution of the kingdom, for it dates back further; it is a right of nature and of reason. Nevertheless, it has been taken away from your subjects, sire, and we are not afraid to say that in this respect the administration has fallen into childish excesses.

Ever since the powerful ministers have made it a political principle not to

allow a national assembly to be convoked, precedent has followed precedent until it has come about that the deliberation of villagers may be declared null, if they have not been authorized by the Intendant. As a result, if that community has to make some expenditure, it has to get the approval of the Intendant's subdeputy, and consequently follow the plan he adopts, employ the workmen he favors, and pay them as he indicates. . . . Such, sire, are the means by which men have striven to stifle all municipal spirit in France and to extinguish, if possible, even the citizens' feelings; the whole nation has, so to say, been declared incompetent and provided with guardians.<sup>xiv</sup>

What difference does it make that the political idea of accountability is rooted in British history and is conceptually anglican? Two points are in order here. First and foremost, this finding should give one pause before proceeding with a comparative analysis -- descriptive or normative -- into the role of accountability in political systems past or present. It is clear that we might be flirting with errors of commission or omission in such an endeavor unless care is taken not to bias our studies with preconceived (i.e., anglican) notions of accountability.

Second, it should lead us to conclude that careful conceptualization must precede any such comparative study -- even if that study is limited to equally British Westminster-style democracies (as is Uhr's call for a comparative study of accountability). For despite the relative parochialism of the accountability term, *the idea of accountable government* is an important one in comprehending the operations of the contemporary administrative state in its many and varied forms. In this sense, the British legacy to modern political systems is perhaps even greater than its form of constitutional and parliamentary government. But the notion of accountability that characterizes the world of former British holdings may be too narrow, too parochial to be of relevance to the wide range of political cultures that have taken on the idea, if not the term itself.

## **Two Perspectives on the Issue of Accountability**

The task of developing a useful conceptual framework for studying accountability starts by noting the perspectives developed thus far by two groups of scholars. The first, comprised primarily of social psychologists and ethnomethodologists, have focused attention on the *accountability of conduct* (AC); the second group, embodying political scientists with a legal or institutional orientation, have been concerned with the *conduct of accountability* (CA). Despite indifference toward each other's work, the two groups provide a common foundation for the present task.

The AC/CA approaches are quite distinct on the surface. The AC group looks to the use of excuses or rationalizations by individuals who face situations where errors or perceived failure have rendered them accountable to some other individual or group.<sup>xv</sup> Theirs is an empirical endeavor concerned with describing and/or explaining a common human behavior. When they consider an instance of accountability in government, it is merely as just another case of a generic action. While the distinctive governmental setting has an impact, it is not the focus of attention; the floor of the legislature might as well be the factory floor or the crowded elevator. What is important is how and why individuals account for their (typically erroneous) behavior to others.

The CA group, in contrast, tends to be more institutional in its focus and normative in its purpose. Their focus tends to be on the structures and procedures through which accountability is achieved, and they typically regard the context (i.e., governmental or private, legislative or executive) as crucial. As a subset of that general group, students of bureaucracy and public administration have engaged in debates over the relative value of different forms of accountability (e.g., the Friedrich-Finer debate), oftentimes giving more attention to the normative than the empirical endeavor.<sup>xvi</sup>

The central point for our project, however, is that both approaches require attention in a useful conceptualization of accountability. Either perspective by itself draws the analysis of public administrative behavior away from its accountability-core. The AC approach does highlight the role accountability plays for the individual both psychologically as well as socially, but applying it out without due consideration for the institutional context trivializes the significant and distinctive role played by the governmental setting. The CA perspective, however, undervalues or oversimplifies the influence of individual psychology and social dynamics in the structures and procedures of institutionalized

accountability systems.

What is required for our conceptualization of accountability, therefore, is a framework that encompasses both the individualist AC and the institutionalist CA views. This we attempt in the next section. However, such a reconceptualization must be accompanied by a theoretical reorientation that will focus our attention on the linkage between the two levels of analysis represented by those perspectives.

### **The Ethical Theory Orientation**

The effort to reconceive accountability -- particularly if we regard it as a key to understanding public administrative behavior (as I do) -- must necessarily revisit some fundamental issues of social theory for at least two reasons. First, the current reliance on social action theory diverts attention from individual-level behavior where accountability has its most significant impact. Second, the present perspective minimizes, or at least fails to highlight, the ethical nature of the public administrative endeavor.

Advances in the study of human social behavior have been accomplished through the adoption of some basic assumptions about the foundation or sources of social acts. Call them paradigms or metatheories, they often deal with the key question of social science: why do individuals behave a certain way under given circumstances. At the risk of oversimplifying, there have been four major responses to that question. One, typified by the Freudian approach, regards human action as the product of some unconscious or repressed drives. A second, more Hegelian and Marxian in form, sees human action as the product of historical forces that ultimately manifest themselves as individual choices. A third, closely associated with utilitarians and strict behaviorists (e.g., JB Watson and BF Skinner), sees human choices as rational selections in response to immediate situations within the context of learned expectations. Finally and most significant among current views of public administrative behavior, human action is regarded as ends-oriented behavior regulated by social and cultural norms and values. This last approach owes much to the work of Talcott Parsons and other social theorists whose work has been extremely influential (as well as controversial) in the post-Second World War

era.

Despite challenges from many quarters within the study of public administration, the Parsonsian *social action theory* orientation has been at the heart of most studies of public administrative behavior. Although developed initially as a means for understanding individual-level behavior, it has more often drawn attention toward higher action levels and led to reductionist views of individual choice behavior. In recent years, however, at least two developments have emerged to counter that situation, one in the general area of social theory and the other in the study of public administrative behavior.

In social theory, the emergence of a *reflexive action* orientation has gained increasing favor among students of human behavior.<sup>xvii</sup> The work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens, among others, have give a central place to the individual actor's reflections in the shaping of human behavior; and in the management arena, Chris Argyris and Donald Schon have integrated learning and reflection into the study of organizations and organizational behavior. In public administration per se, more attention than ever before is being given to individual perspectives, especially in the work of Robert Denhardt, John DiIulio, Carolyn Ban and others.

The potential value of a reconceptualization of accountability depends on bringing the role of individual-level reflection into the application of the framework. Without doing so, the firm division between the AC and CA perspectives will remain, and little of benefit will emerge except perhaps new labels for well worn concepts.

To accomplish this linkage task, I turn to the work of Robert Nozick and his concept of an *ethical theory* approach. Nozick uses the label *ethical theory* to highlight a view of human behavior that sees action as the outcome of tensions between forces of *moral push* and *moral pull*. In this regard, Nozick is relying on two great traditions in the history of ethical studies. On the one side is the Greek philosophical tradition with its stress on the urge to be a *good* and virtuous person -- and thus the *moral push* to live up to one's value. On the other side is the Jewish tradition that emphasizes the need to respect the value of others -- the *moral pull*. Ethical action, Nozick argues, is the result when moral push is equal to or greater than the moral pull.<sup>xviii</sup>

While Nozick's specific use of the ethical theory approach is interesting, of greater significance

for the present effort is its value as a means for qualifying the basic premise of social action theory. Again, social action theory regards individual actions as the product of ends-oriented behavior that is norm-regulated. Addressing the question of normative regulation has been the principle motivation for Parsons and others to move away from the focus on individual action and toward concerns for theories of personality, social (as well as political and economic) systems, and cultures. Adopting the ethical theory (moral push and moral pull) assumption as a working premise for what constitutes normative regulation would help keep us focused at the individual level.

Put more explicitly, our ability to understand public administrative behavior will be significantly enhanced if we begin with the ethical theory assumption that actions result from choices public administrators must make among contending values -- values that create moral pushes and pulls in the broadest sense of Amoral.<sup>6</sup> Given this basic orientation toward action, the role of accountability in shaping public administrative behavior becomes an empirical question. What is more, that behavior is viewed as a product of ethical choices thrust upon the individual administrator.

There are, of course, a number of significant drawbacks to this approach, particularly for those bothered by the underlying assumptions regarding the ethical nature of public administrative behavior. The defense of this position can take two forms: either an elaborate tome addressing the nature of social action and its public administrative variant, or a brief assertion that the true test of any theory or model is in its effectiveness for the purposes at hand.<sup>xix</sup> For present purposes the more expedient solution seems wisest.

## A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

As an idea rather than a specific concept -- and especially as an ethical idea -- accountability can be perceived as a genus encompassing a variety of species. Uhr points out that responsibility is a derivative of accountability; I contend that it is one of several such derivatives, each manifesting a particular dimension of accountability in its Aidea@ form. In this section I posit a framework intended to conceptualize accountability by categorizing several of its more significant species. The reader is reminded that the goal here is not to find the essence of accountability, but to develop a potential conceptual tool that might enhance our understanding of -- and ability to systematically study -- the role accountability plays in government in general and public administration in particular.

Let's begin with the simple view of accountability implied in its Anglo-Norman roots. That is, accountability is the *condition of being able to render a counting of something to someone*. How such a condition gets established remains an empirical question. It can be imposed from outside through force or legal mandate; it can come from within, through feelings of guilt or a sense of loyalty. Whatever its source(s), the condition itself is a significant development in social and ethical terms.

Socially, to perceive oneself as accountable is to accept the fact that there is an external reference point -- a relevant Aother@ -- that must be taken into consideration as one contemplates making choices or taking actions. Being accountable is thus a social relationship.

Under Nozick's Aethical theory@ orientation, the condition of accountability is inherently ethical as well. Many forms of social relationships are ethical because they allow us to value ourselves as well as others. Nozick argues that people submit to the push of moral demands because they seek to enhance their self-worth -- they are more valuable people because they value others. The pull of morality is generated by the demands of others to be treated as valued individuals. Even though one might not achieve the status of being an ethical person (again, when moral push is equal to or exceeds moral pull), the condition of accountability as used here is ethically relevant because it subjects one to the tensions of moral push and moral pull.

The basis for this tension in public administrators lies in the very nature of public sector work.

Public administration is a complex undertaking in a number of ways. In many cases, the very nature of public sector tasks -- the risks and uncertainty they entail<sup>xx</sup> -- generate complexity. At other times it is the turbulence or constraining nature of the task environment that poses the challenge.<sup>xxi</sup>

Complementing, supplementing and manifesting these conditions are multiple, diverse and often conflicting expectations<sup>xxii</sup> that emerge from every corner of the public administrator's world.

Dealing with that situation is important not only for the administrator(s) subjected to it,<sup>xxiii</sup> but also to those who seek to harness or limit the authority and energy of administrative power.<sup>xxiv</sup> Among the various means for dealing with the complex environment of expectations is the creation and application of institutional structures and rules<sup>xxv</sup> -- mechanisms that rely on the *use of accountability*.

In previous work,<sup>xxvi</sup> Romzek and I applied the term *Accountability systems* to these general institutional forms and posited a framework that highlighted four types: legal, organizational, professional, and political.<sup>xxvii</sup> In the present effort, I will rely on those institutional distinctions to differentiate among various forms (species) that the idea (genus) of accountability can take.

As an institutional setting, the legal context narrows and manages expectations by establishing *liabilities* for the public administrator that are enforceable through judicial or quasi-judicial actions. Law is central to the modern administrative state. In many countries this is reflected in the fact that a law degree is essential for employment in public sector management positions. Even where this is not the case explicitly (e.g., the United States), the rule of law principle permeates most, if not all, public sector activities.<sup>xxviii</sup> A typical administrator in the U.S., for example, is subject to criminal actions for corrupt acts, civil action for negligent or arbitrary acts, and administrative sanction for violations of due process rules and procedures. Functionally, this exposure to liability is a major factor in determining how the administrator deals with the challenge of multiple, diverse, and conflicting expectations. In some instances -- e.g., the Nuremberg Principle that one should not obey an illegal order -- the priority of legal expectations is made explicit. In many others, however, legal requirements comprise one among several applicable considerations.

Similarly, organizational working environments operate as institutional means for narrowing or focusing expectations, primarily through a stress on *answerability*. The very nature of modern

bureaucratic organizations and their reliance on hierarchical structures promote this form of accountability. But even outside an explicitly hierarchical context, the bureaucratic culture stresses the desirability of and need for answerability.<sup>xxix</sup>

The emergence of professionalism as a major factor in the public administrative endeavor is more than a product of a growing need for expertise in dealing with increasingly difficult tasks. It also reflects the need to create an effective institutional accountability mechanism for public servants whose jobs require significant amounts of discretion. In cases where legal or organizational instruments would be counterproductive, accountability must take the form of *responsibility*. To hold someone responsible is not to free them from accountability, but to create a form of expectations management that relies on professional and strong peer group standards.<sup>xxx</sup>

The political form of accountability -- *responsiveness* -- is also inherent in the modern administrative state, no matter how great the efforts to insulate public servants from its influence. Put in institutional perspective, the question isn't whether there should be political accountability, but rather what form it should take. Patronage has been the least favored approach ever since the logic of meritocracy and civil service reform came to dominate the modern state,<sup>xxxi</sup> and various strategies of using representation to enhance responsiveness have proven less than effective.<sup>xxxii</sup> Oversight mechanisms (both executive and legislative) are common means used to improve responsiveness,<sup>xxxiii</sup> although their effectiveness has varied widely. Efforts to develop administrative presidencies through strategic use of personnel systems have also had mixed records.<sup>xxxiv</sup> But none of these explicit attempts to deal with the pull of responsiveness has been as successful as the high moral value attached to responsiveness in most democratic political cultures.<sup>xxxv</sup>

As manifestations of accountability, these four institutions (liability, answerability, responsibility, and responsiveness) comprise the moral pulls of our conceptual framework. In terms of the general literature on accountability, they are the focal points for those who study the conduct of accountability, and in that sense they are merely half the picture. The other half -- the moral pushes -- typically examined as the accountability of conduct -- can be regarded as the internalization of the four accountability institutions.

Liabilities, for instance, internalize as *obligations*. Being liable for your actions means little unless it is matched with a sense of obligation based on either a positive commitment to the law or a desire to avoid exposure to legal sanctions. In the United States, the efforts to make law enforcement agencies and agents more accountable have for the most part relied on liability pulls: the use of litigation, external review boards, etc.. To the extent that those mechanisms remain *external* from the perspective of the law enforcement official, accountability is at best partial. Accountability will be more whole and effective when it becomes *ethical*-- that is, when the moral push of obligation takes hold. The objective would be to have police conduct themselves in ways that reflect a sense of obligation -- that is, following certain procedures and avoiding legally questionable actions because that is the *right thing to do* rather than *this is what I am mandated to do*. Accountability, in short, would be at the heart of *good policing*.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

Answerability manifests itself internally as deference to one's superiors in the form of *obedience*. It is important to understand that in its deferential form, obedience is not to be regarded as merely a response to coercive acts. Rather, it is based on the perceived legitimacy of those who are being obeyed, i.e. that they have the right to be obeyed given the organizational context of public administrative actions. This deference and subsequent obedience seems an unlikely basis a *moral push*, particularly in light of the horrors of the Holocaust and similar events when obedience was clearly a form of moral bankruptcy.<sup>xxxvii</sup> One of K's warders in Kafka's *The Trial* provides a terrifying but almost sympathetic rationale for administrative obedience:

We are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through a legal document and have nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high authorities we serve, before they would order such an arrest as this, must be quite well informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner. There can be no mistake about that. Our officials, so far as I know them, and I know only the lowest grades among them, never go hunting for crime in the populace, but, as the Law decrees, are drawn toward the guilty and must then send out us warders. That is the Law. How could there be a mistake in that?<sup>xxxviii</sup>

And yet one's sense of self-worth and value can be fulfilled by participating in the good that can be

achieved through hierarchically coordinated collective actions. One need only watch the highly visible work of trained firefighters or rescuers after a disaster strikes to appreciate why an individual can find moral sustenance in obedience. That same moral push can be found playing itself out in the more mundane roles undertaken by public servants in day-to-day program operations.<sup>xxxix</sup>

*Fidelity* -- an internalized sense of honor and loyalty to the peer or professional reference group -- is critical to the success of responsible accountability. At first it might seem odd to associate such emotional commitments as *Afidelity* and loyalty with technical expertise and professionalism, but those subjective ties are in fact critical to the professional endeavor. *AProfessional* status is in principle open to all,<sup>@</sup> notes William M. Sullivan, *Aregardless of social origins.*<sup>@</sup>

Yet individuals can garner the benefits of professional credentials only by joining a corporate group defined by moral expectations as well as standards of technical competence. . . . [B]y becoming professionals individuals integrate their personal identity in important ways with a collective project, and find themselves held publicly accountable for the reliable performance of service according to prescribed procedures.

Entering a profession, then, does more than open up opportunity. It also makes the individual dependent upon the disciplines and control of a quasi-corporate form of life. . . .

[P]rofessional freedom of opportunity is only realized through the individuals acceptance of responsibility for the purposes and standards which define the profession. *Individual initiative and collective loyalty depend mutually upon each other and yet pull in opposite directions.*<sup>xi</sup>

The ethical push of loyalty is a strong and distinct one that often runs counter to more rational and individualistic forces found in the other forms of accountability.<sup>xli</sup> Its relevance to the public sector is reflected in the census figures indicating that around 40 percent of all people employed as professionals and technicians work for governments. Of course, the influence of fidelity depends on the specific professional setting. The individual cases surrounding *AWatergate* and other scandals since the early 1970s imply that members of the *Atraditional* professions (e.g., law) are expected to give priority to their profession when faced with conflicting demands from the workplace. Studies of the traditional government professions (e.g., military, foreign service, forest rangers) reinforce the contention that loyalty to the collective ideals and standards play powerful roles in the behavior of these public officials.<sup>xlii</sup> The same strong moral push is

developing in the newer government (what Mosher termed *emerging*) professions as well (e.g., tax assessors, city planners, librarians).

Finally, the success of establishing and maintaining responsive administrative behavior depends on the development of an internalized *amenability* -- a desire to actively pursue the interests of the public or one's clientele groups. This striving to serve the needs of the *public* (as variously defined) has been perceived with critical eyes by many commentators of American public policy.<sup>xliii</sup> It is reflected in the often told tale of the Department of Agriculture bureaucrat who was found shedding tears in his office because *his farmer died*. And yet that amenability is rewarded and promoted within many administrative cultures where the emphasis is as much on service to the *customer*. At times, however, the amenability is aimed elsewhere -- to an influential member of the legislature or a powerful congressional subcommittee. For those who take a more normative approach to the subject, this form of amenability is the very essence of accountability at its best.

Taken individually, each of these eight species of accountability can and has been used to understand public administrative behavior. Taken together under the genus of accountability (Figure A), they relate to each other -- both within and among institutional pairings -- in potentially interesting ways. The result is a conceptualization that begs to be explored and put to use in the systematic analysis of accountability.

	<i>Legal Setting</i>	<i>Organizational Setting</i>	<i>Professional Setting</i>	<i>Political Setting</i>
<i>Moral Pulls</i>	<i>Liability</i>	<i>Answerability</i>	<i>Responsibility</i>	<i>Responsiveness</i>
<i>Moral Pushes</i>	<i>Obligation</i>	<i>Obedience</i>	<i>Fidelity</i>	<i>Amenability</i>

**FIGURE A: EIGHT SPECIES OF ACCOUNTABILITY**

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Analysts familiar with governmental systems tied to Anglo-Norman roots are quite comfortable with the concept of accountability, just as they are comfortable with their understandings of parliamentary

democracy, federalism, and similar institutional notions peculiar to their shared political cultures. It comes as a shock, therefore, to discover just how anglican such terms are, even to citizens of other countries with well-established democratic traditions.

But while the term itself is not easily translated into some similar word in most languages, the *idea* of accountability as develop initially by the English seems quite evident in modern administrative states. Just what forms and functions accountability take in those systems is an empirical question worthy of greater attention. What is required for developing answers to that question is a focused and useful conceptualization of accountability. I have attempted to provide such a conceptualization in this paper.

I have indicated basically three things that a conceptualization of accountability should do. First, it must avoid as much as possible the tendency to rely on an Anglocentric (as opposed to a merely anglican) approach to the term. I tried to accomplish this by focusing on the idea of accountability rather than on the term per se. Approaching it as a genus with many species, I turned the focus on forms of accountability that would translate across political culture boundaries. Responsibility, as we have seen, is more likely to be comprehended than accountability -- as would liability, obligation, etc..

Second, the conceptualization must attempt to capture the two strong research traditions relating to accountability: the accountability of conduct and the conduct of accountability. I approached that problem by elaborating the theoretical context within which the concept will be most useful -- the ethical theory form of social action theory derived from Nozick's view that human action is the product of moral pulls and pushes.

Finally, I believe accountability to be closely related to issues of ethical behavior, and thus want this conceptualization to reflect that assumption. Here again, the ethical theory orientation serves the purpose quite well. It must be emphasized that the purpose here is not to impose a normative cast on the concept of accountability, but to give this potential analytic tool an ethical dimension. The underlying argument is not that accountability ought to be ethical, but that we ought to put this ethical conceptualization to work to see if it proves useful. If it does, then we have indication that accountability is an ethical tools in governance. If this ethics-based concept does not Apay off@ as an

analytic tool, then it is back to the drawing board as far as this purpose is concerned.

How will we know if this concept is useful? That depends on our standards for assessing conceptual utility. My immediate standards are rather simple, and yet grandiose in the long term. First, does the framework (when appropriately applied in a research design) generate sufficient understanding and insight to warrant its continued use? Second, does its continued use lead to improvements in the framework, and thus further advances in our understanding and insights? Third, does the continuous application and improvement of the framework move use closer toward a theory of public administrative behavior?

These three goals were implied in my earlier work with Romzek on the general concept of accountability. Others have made significant use of that initial scheme to both enhance our collective insights into specific events (e.g., the *Challenger* launch decision)<sup>xliv</sup> and to develop more elaborate accountability-based models.<sup>xlv</sup> I hope this ethics-based effort is at least as fruitful.

## Notes

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i. J. Uhr (1992) *Public Accountabilities and Private Responsibilities: The Westminster World at the Crossroads* Presented at Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, p 18.

ii. Uhr (1992), p 1.

iii. Uhr (1992), p 10.

iv. The choice of word here posed a problem, for the term *Anglican* commonly refers to things of an ecclesiastic sort. The OED does, however, note that it also represents things of an English sort in general. My solution was to apply a violation of English usage to stress the difference: I do not capitalize *Anglican* except as necessary at the start of sentences or in titles.

v. Uhr talks of responsibility as derivative from accountability as well.

vi. Uhr (1992), p 4.

vii. See C. Brooke (1961) *From Alfred to Henry III, 871-1272* WW Norton and Co, pp 91-92, 114-115. Also DC Douglas (1964) *William The Conqueror: The Norman Impact Upon England* University of California Press, pp 351-354.

viii. Douglas (1964) p. 354, quoting historians F. Stenton and V. H. Galbraith respectively.

ix. Douglas (1964) p 355, quoting from chroniclers of the time.

x. Douglas (1964) pp 355-356.

xi. J. Given (1990) *State and Society in Medieval Europe: Gwynedd and Languedoc under Outside Rule* Cornell University Press, p 42.

xii. M. Bloch (1961) *Feudal Society* trans. L. A. Manyon, University of Chicago Press, p 430.

xiii. Bloch (1961) p 431.

xiv. A. de Tocqueville (1969) *Democracy in America* trans. J. P. Mayer, Anchor Books, pp 723-724.

xv. For example, see M. L. McLaughlin, M. J. Cody, and S. J. Read (eds) (1992) *Explaining One's Self to Others: Reason-Giving in a Social Context*, Erlbaum Associates.

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xvi. However, see J Gruber (1987) *Controlling Bureaucracies: Dilemmas in Democratic Governance* University of California Press.

xvii. See A Giddens (1979) *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* University of California Press; compare with JS Coleman (1990) *Foundations of Social Theory* Harvard University Press.

xviii. R Nozick (1981) *Philosophical Explanations* Harvard University Press, chap 5.

xix. See M Friedman (1953) *Essays in Positive Economics* University of Chicago Press, part I.

xx. LD Kiel (1994) *Managing Chaos and Complexity in Government: A New Paradigm for Managing Change, Innovation, and Organizational Renewal* Jossey-Bass.

xxi. JD Thompson (1967) *Organizations in Action: Social Science Bases of Administrative Theory* McGraw-Hill Book Co; D Waldo (1971) *Public Administration in a Time of Turbulence* Chandler Press.

xxii. MJ Dubnick and BS Romzek (1993) Accountability and the Centrality of Expectations in American Public Administration in JL Perry (ed) *Research in Public Administration, Volume 2* JAI Press, chap 2; for other views of the complex nature of public sector management, see Kiel (1994).

xxiii. For psychological as well as political reasons. For example, see L Festinger (1957) *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* Stanford University Press.

xxiv. Gruber (1987); FE Rourke (1984) *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Public Policy* Little Brown and Co.

xxv. JG March and JP Olsen (1995) *Democratic Governance* Free Press.

xxvi. MJ Dubnick and BS Romzek (1991) *American Public Administration* Macmillan, esp chap 3.

xxvii. By their very nature, these labels imply a good deal more and less about the type of institutional setting (i.e., accountability system) they represent. For a better sense of the characteristics of each, see Dubnick and Romzek (1991), chap 3.

xxviii. DH Rosenbloom (1983) *Public Administration and Law: Bench v. Bureau in the United States* Marcel Dekker.

xxix. RP Hummel (1994) *The Bureaucratic Experience: A Critique of Life in the Modern Organization, 4th Edition* St Martin's Press.

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xxx. This is the core of what Michael Harmon terms the Arationalist@ approach to responsibility, and Carl J. Friedrich was historically its most articulate advocate. See M Harmon (1995) *Responsibility As Paradox: A Critique of Rational Discourse on Government* Sage Publications.

xxxi. See PW Ingraham (1995) *The Foundation of Merit: Public Service in American Democracy* Johns Hopkins University Press.

xxxii. S Krislov (1974) *Representative Bureaucracy* Prentice-Hall.

xxxiii. JD Aberbach (1990) *Keeping a Watchful Eye: The Politics of Congressional Oversight* Brookings Institution; also see Gruber (1987).

xxxiv. RP Nathan (1983) *The Administrative Presidency* John Wiley and Sons.

xxxv. On the demands that democracy makes on bureaucracy and vice versa, see E Etzioni-Halevy (1983) *Bureaucracy and Democracy: A Political Dilemma*, revised Routledge & Kegan Paul.

xxxvi. JH Skolnick and JJ Fyfe (1993) *Above the Law: Police and the Excessive Use of Force* Free Press, chaps 9-11.

xxxvii. DJ Goldhagen (1996) *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* Alfred A Knopf.

xxxviii. F Kafka (1964) *The Trial* Vintage Books pp 9-10.

xxxix. V Thompson (1975) *Without Sympathy or Enthusiasm* University of Alabama Press.

xl. WM Sullivan (1995) *Work and Integrity: The Crisis and Promise of Professionalism in America* Harper-Business p 146; emphasis added.

xli. GP Fletcher (1993) *Loyalty: An Essay on the Morality of Relationships* Oxford University Press.

xlii. For example, see H Kaufman (1967) *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior* John Hopkins University Press.

xliii. For a recent example in a long and continuing line of critiques, see J Rauch (1995) *Demosclerosis: The Silent Killer of American Government* Times Books.

xliv. D Vaughan (1996) *The Challenger Launch Decision: Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA* University of Chicago Press.

xlv. KP Kearns (1996) *Managing for Accountability: Preserving the Public Trust in Public and*

