

BUT CAN YOU TRUST THEM TO BE ETHICAL?

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The issue addressed in this paper is whether the linkage between accountability and ethics makes sense in light of what we know about social and psychological behavior. And if the connection between the two makes analytic sense, what are the implications of those linkages for our understanding of public administrative ethics? We will show that there is indeed (at the least) an analytic connection between accountability and ethics, and that the relationship is a complex one rooted in the fact that accountability is itself takes multiple and relatively distinct forms in the lives of public administrators. Furthermore, we contend that the ethics that emerge from these relationships pose a challenge to students of public administration ethics who presently focus on normative rather than empirical issues related to ethicality.

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I. (Answer: Yes, but it might not be the ethics you expect.)

For public administration, the promise of accountability has taken three forms. Most recently, it has emerged as the key factor in the improvement of administrative performance. Following on a long tradition of concentrating control and command mechanisms on the need for efficiency and effectiveness (Fried, 1976; Miller, 1984), accountability has emerged as a core concept in the literature on performance and productivity in the public sector (Derthick, 1990; DiIulio, Garvey, & Kettl, 1993; Gore, 1993; Holzer & Callahan, 1998; Hood, 1995; Jones & Thompson, 2000; M. Marshall, Wray, Epstein, & Grifel, 1999; Mulgan & Uhr, 2000; Neale & Anderson, 2000; Radin, 1998; A. Roberts, 1997), especially in the field of education (Cibulka & Derlin, 1995; Fuhrman, 1999; Hanushek & Raymond, 2001; Kearns, 1998; Ladd, 2001; Monk & Roellke, 1995; R. Schwartz, 2000).

Following another long tradition, accountability is central to efforts aimed at assuring democratic responsiveness in states now emerging from decades of autocratic and military rule (Blair, 2000; Przeworski, Stokes, & Manin, 1999; Schedler, Diamond, & Plattner, 1999). Domestically, it has always been an objective of those reformers concerned with the implications of our growing reliance on the modern administrative state (Cook, 1992; Dodd & Schott, 1979; Redford, 1969; Rosenbloom, 2000; Skowronek, 1982; Waldo, 1984; E. P. Weber, 1999).

Related to both the promise of performance and the promise of democratization has been the promise of enhanced administrative ethicality. That is, the accountable administrator would be an ethical administrator. This promise is most clearly stated in the Friedrich-Finer debate that has played such a critical role in shaping contemporary public

administration, for just as Friedrich argued for less reliance on external accountability mechanisms in lieu of the increasing role of professional and personal responsibility (Friedrich, 1940), so Finer contended that responsible behavior depends on the enhancement of external accountability (Finer, 1941). Thus, despite surface disagreements, both Friedrich and Finer stressed the connection between accountability and “responsible” behavior – in our terms, ethicality [see (Cooper, 1998)] -- among public servants.

The issue addressed in this paper is whether the linkage between accountability and ethics makes sense in light of what we know about social and psychological behavior. And if the connection between the two makes analytic sense, what are the implications of those linkages for our understanding of public administrative ethics? We will show that there is indeed (at the least) an analytic connection between accountability and ethics, and that the relationship is a complex one rooted in the fact that accountability itself takes multiple and relatively distinct forms in the lives of public administrators [compare with (Beu & Buckley, 2001)]. Furthermore, we contend that the ethics that emerge from these relationships pose a challenge to students of public administration ethics who presently focus on normative rather than empirical issues related to ethicality.

II. Why Accountability for Performance and Responsiveness Is Not Always Enough

Understanding accountability and moral responsibility from the public’s perspective highlights the limits of systematic approaches to accountability for performance and responsiveness, and helps to explain the demand for more ethically or morally based devices for regulating the conduct of public administrators. Efforts to

tighten up systematic models of accountability, and to strengthen sanctions for unsatisfactory performance, are a common but not always fully satisfying response to public disappointment in the behavior of administrators (Behn, 2001).

Although there are numerous competing definitions of “accountability”—one author claims to have reviewed at least fifty formal definitions of the term in writing on the topic (Brooks, 1995)—the most popular conceptualizations of accountability appears to have a fairly stable set of characteristics. The core meaning is given consistently as including “count,” “make a reckoning,” “render accounts [or reasons or reports],” and additional meanings include “to give a reason or explanation,” and “to answer as one responsible” (Macdonald, 1973; Onions, Friedrichsen, & Burchfield, 1966). This corresponds well with common usage and understanding of the term. Thus Dubnick defines accountability as “the *condition of being able to render a counting of something to someone*” (M. Dubnick, 1998). Central elements of this concept for Dubnick are that it is a social relationship by virtue of involving more than one person, and that it provides a reference point which must be taken into consideration in choice and action.

Performance- and responsiveness-oriented (i.e., democratic) models of accountability in American public (and business) administration often take that social relationship to be a principal-agent relationship, and their prescriptions are devised from the perspective of the principal. Thus we are accustomed in descriptions of (and prescriptions for) accountability to focus on delegation of authority or responsibility to act, from a “manager” or “ruler” to an organizational or individual agent. The accountability relationship then describes a mechanism by means of which that agent is required to perform, then to give an account of that performance, and finally to suffer

sanctions if the performance is deemed unsatisfactory by the principal (Brooks, 1995; Romzek & Dubnick, 2000; Summers, 1950). In a specifically public administrative setting, then, accountability is a means to facilitate the exercise of (legitimate) authority by helping an authoritative principal to exercise control over the performance of an agent to whom some responsibility has been delegated. The anticipation of sanctions for unsatisfactory performance provides a guarantee that performance will be responsive to the requirements of the delegator, and/or will reflect the mutual expectations, promises or contract between the parties. Rationality and the use of objective, measurable, outcome-oriented performance standards and evaluations are generally considered to facilitate effective accountability, and it is assumed that rational calculations of the possibility of sanctions serve as a primary motivator of the agent's choices and behavior (Behn, 2001).

Within public organizations, then, administrators are agents of their organizational superiors, accountable for complying with the performance-related expectations of those superiors. Those administrators and their bureaucratic superiors in turn are agents of elected officials and the electorate. The ethics of individual administrators or groups of administrators are not a central focus for principal-perspective takes on accountability, since it is the principals' moral and instrumental expectations that establish the standards for agents' behavior. Indeed, to the extent an agent's ethics might lead to competing choices and actions, this principals' perspective on accountability might take such ethics to be a hindrance to the achievement of the desired technically efficient and democratically responsive behavior (V. A. Thompson, 1975). While some degree of discretion as to means of goal accomplishment may be accorded the agent(s), particularly in professionalized settings, the fundamental values

and goals underlying the relationship are established by the principal(s). Thus, one classification of types of accountability focuses on two dimensions: the sources of the expectations imposed on agents, and the degree of discretion delegated to them (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). Administrators' ethics, if they matter at all, are much less important than good design of institutional arrangements and incentive structures, and the potential for effective sanctions to be applied to agents whose accounts reveal inefficiency or unresponsiveness. Such an institutional design strategy, while surely necessary to our efforts at ensuring performance and responsiveness, is confronted by at least two broad limitations.

One set of challenges is associated with the contract analogy that underlies performance and responsiveness models of accountability. As with other contract-based approaches to controlling the instrumental behavior of strategic agents, accountability is subject to problems of the types identified in transaction costs approaches to institutional analysis (Williamson, 1975, 1981).¹ Opportunistic behavior, asymmetries of information, the challenges of completely specifying all expectations and contingencies in advance, and the difficulty of achieving more than perfunctory performance through a sanctions-reliant "economy of threats" (Wallace, 1994) all limit the usefulness of enforcement and monitoring as means to guarantee the conformance of public administrative agents to the expectations of their hierarchical or electoral principals.

¹ A powerful critique of transaction cost analysis calls the reader's attention to the problem that a transactional relationship tends to be embedded in a series of other, interacting social relationships (Granovetter, 1985). In an accountability setting, this embeddedness is a key source of dilemmas, and one source of pressures to develop ethics-based approaches to managing public administrators' behavior. Our discussion of challenges facing current ethics-based approaches to accountability, below, highlights some of the complexities created by this embeddedness.

Monitoring and enforcement by principals to achieve performance and responsiveness by agents requires the careful, advance specification of expectations; the rendering of post-behavior accounts which are accurate, complete, and comprehensible to the relevant principals; and sufficient severity and likelihood of sanctions to act as a prospective influence on agents' choices and behavior. The devotion of ever-increasing material and attention resources to monitoring and enforcement efforts aimed at greater accountability can dramatically increase transaction costs,² or even ironically diminish the public organizational effectiveness and responsiveness which are the very goals of accountability (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996). Professionalization and complexity pose additional challenges, as the technology of public services and the content of agents' accounts become difficult for principals to understand (Broadbent, Dietrich, & Laughlin, 1996). The principal-agent aspect of the conventional accountability relationship further poses challenges and creates dilemmas for many street-level administrators of law enforcement and human services, as they try to hold accountable for their conduct the very citizens who expect to hold them accountable (Lipsky, 1980). An additional challenge for principals, and often a dilemma for agents, lies in the inevitability of tradeoffs between reliability and efficiency or bureaucratic performance versus responsiveness to individual citizens and circumstances. Further, it has been pointed out that competitive markets – held up by some advocates of public sector reform and reinvention as a desirable model to be emulated for institutions of accountability – may be relatively *ineffective* at stimulating quality of outputs, as opposed to price (Hirschman, 1970).

² Thus, for example, New York City's School Construction Authority in the early 1990s devoted approximately 12 percent of its total operating resources to its Office of the Inspector General, but was still unable to prevent or detect a costly, long term, crudely operated bid-rigging scheme (Olmstead, 1993).

A second set of challenges from the principal's perspective lies in the failure of even an ideally effective and efficient contractual model of accountability to respond fully to the ordinary human practice of holding people responsible. As explicated by Wallace (Wallace, 1994), this practice includes an admixture of moral reactive emotion (such as guilt, indignation or resentment) in addition to cognition. An agent's conduct is still evaluated by reference to expectations, but those expectations take the form of moral obligations that are accepted by the judging parties as reasonable and justifiable in accordance with the norms of a particular moral community. These norms are independent of the institutional context of a particular set of specific obligations. The obligations need not be accepted by the agent, but merely internalized by him. Fairness is determined by desert rather than by the feasibility of achievement of a particular outcome, and moral judgment is based on whether the agent is deemed first to have correctly applied moral reasoning based on the applicable norms, and then to have sincerely attempted to act in accordance with that reasoning. Reasoning and will on the part of the agent, rather than outcomes, are the central elements judged. Excuses may render an agent exempt from sanctions and disapprobation, if otherwise suitable judgment and intention were defeated by accidents or by forces beyond the agent's control.

Systematic approaches to performance- and responsiveness-oriented accountability tend not to respond to this moral practice (Justice, 2000). First, accountability expectations tend to be narrowly specified, tied to a specific institutionally mediated context and relationship. By contrast, moral obligations, demands or expectations must be susceptible to justifications made through recourse to broad, general

moral reasons. That is, the basis for expectations and obligations is defined externally to the specific relationship within which the immediate occasions for judgments arise. Second, as moral judges, we hold people responsible to apply obligations to circumstances by using contingent moral reasoning and attempting to regulate their behavior accordingly. Agents are held responsible for understanding the moral principles underlying specific obligations, making appropriate moral choices, and willing themselves to behave appropriately. This emphasis on “reflective self control” (Wallace, 1994) and will is not fully addressed by institutional forms of accountability, which instead emphasize compliance and rule-following behavior. Third, as moral judges, we are concerned with whether choices and behavior comport with our values about what is right and wrong, whereas systematic approaches to organizational performance and responsiveness often emphasize the more utilitarian values inherent in the notions of efficiency, effectiveness and responsiveness.

Thus, obedient agents may well make earnest efforts to comply with accountability expectations for performance and responsiveness, in response to carefully engineered and enforced accountability systems, and still fail to satisfy the moral demands and expectations of moral judges. Outcomes can meet specified standards for responsiveness and performance, but we may react as moral judges to an agent’s failure to employ satisfactory moral reasoning in selecting courses of action. Or narrowly accountable rule following may yield undesired consequences that we believe agents could reasonable have foreseen and forestalled. As principals, we are caught to some extent in a bind between holding public servants accountable to strict utilitarian standards governing their behavior, on the one hand, and holding them responsible for internalizing

larger moral obligations and making apt choices to apply those obligations in varying circumstances, on the other. This can also be described as the “paradox of accountability”: “If public servants are accountable solely for the effective achievement of purposes mandated by political authority, then as mere instruments of that authority they bear no personal responsibility as moral agents for the products of their actions. If, on the other hand, public servants actively participate in determining public purposes, their accountability is compromised and political authority is undermined” (Harmon, 1995).

Systematic accountability, through monitoring and enforcement, for performance and responsiveness thus appears to be an incomplete solution to providing guidance for the conduct of public administrators. It is subject to diminishing returns, generates dilemmas and paradoxes, may tend to generate perfunctory compliance rather than “consummate cooperation” and high quality work, often responds poorly to unanticipated circumstances, and fails to respond to our deeply felt needs to hold one another morally responsible. In particular, understanding accountability and moral responsibility from the public’s (moral judges’) perspective highlights the limits of systematic accountability, the importance of ethics and moral reasoning at the nexus of will, cognition and conduct, and our expectations that public servants will internalize and respond to the broad moral obligations that we accept as justifiable and right.

III. Ethics as a Solution to the Insufficiency of Accountability Systems?

A common response proffered to contend with these lacunae of accountability takes the form of normative, hortatory efforts to inculcate professional, institutional and

constitutional ethics in administrators. Here, accountability seeks a basis in primarily intrinsic motivations to comply with ethical standards promulgated by an organization, a constitutional order, or a profession. Ideally, a greater emphasis on ethics and on the links between ethics and accountability might be expected to enhance moral responsiveness, adaptability to circumstances, and internalization of obligations, while reducing the costs of monitoring and enforcement. We argue below, however, that the currently dominant, normative approaches to the study of public administration ethics and prescriptions for practice fail to realize this promise.

First, normative prescriptions for public sector ethics can all too easily degrade into simplistic cookbooks of conduct, externally enforced prescriptions for behavior, more like formal accountability (Backof & Martin, 1991). Thus, ethical codes can establish bases for behavior with more closely resemble utilitarian performance standards, which may not be internalized into personal ethics-in-use and which can be subject to gaming and perfunctory compliance (Ashkanasy, Falkus, & Callan, 2000; McKenzie, 1977), or may even serve as fig leaves covering truly public-harming conduct (Mitchell, Puxty, Sikka, & Willmott, 1994). In this form, ethical accountability is still unable to respond to the expectations gap between institutional accountability and moral responsibility [compare with (L'Etang, 1992; Limentani, 1999; Stevens, 1999; Wulfson, 1998)].

More fundamentally, normative attempts to achieve more ethical public administration tend to neglect the complexity of public administrators' accountability environments and the variety of ethical strategies they devise in response to accountability pressures. Understanding accountability and ethics from the public

administrators' standpoint helps us to see how ethical choices and behavior responsive to accountability standards may not make the administrator or the public any happier.

Conduct responsive to ethical reasoning and the formulation (conscious and/or unconscious) of ethical strategies by administrators may surprise or disappoint us even if it is responsible. Many ethics training or exhortation approaches do recognize, if often only implicitly, that ethics are contextually dependent, social constructions. But normative approaches often fail to take into account the varieties of mutually embedded accountability relationships that public administrators respond to in devising their individual ethical strategies or theories-in-use [e.g., (Macfarlane, 1993)]. This complexity can cause simple, institutionally- or professionally- focused ethical codes or exhortations to have unpredictable and unsatisfying results (McCuddy, Reichardt, & Schroeder, 1993; M. Schwartz, 2000).

IV. The Complexity of Accountability and Ethics from the Administrator's Standpoint

We assume a more analytic approach in this paper by adopting a "middle range" or "concrete theory" perspective (Elster, 1989, 1998; Hedström & Swedberg, 1998a; Lane, 1997) that allows us to reconceptualize both accountability and ethical behavior as "social mechanisms" – that is, in Robert Merton's terms "social processes having designated consequences for designated parts of the social structure" (Merton, 1968). Applying this approach, we assume a sociological and psychological (rather than merely institutional) view of accountability and ethicality. The sociological view stresses the forms and functions of accountability as processes (mechanisms) that impact on social

actors as *situated pressures for account-giving behavior*. The psychological perspective provides a foundation for understanding ethicality as a human response to those situated pressures.

In this essay, we focus on four general types of mechanisms that demand account-giving responses: answerability, blameworthiness, liability and attributability (see Table 1). Each type reflects a distinct context from within which pressures for account giving are generated. Although each context is derived from a variety of sources, we have highlighted two analytically salient factors: first, whether the expectations for account giving are focused on the identity of the accountable individual or the situation and events within which that person operates; and second, whether those expectations are relatively stable (structured) or fluid (emergent) over time.

Expectations are:	Structured/Stable	Emergent/Fluid
Related to Identities	A. ANSWERABILITY	B. BLAMEWORTHINESS
Related to Situations/Events	C. LIABILITY	D. ATTRIBUTABILITY

FIGURE 1: Types of Accountability

The relevancy of one’s social and self identity to expectations has been the subject of considerable attention among both sociologists and psychologists for a number of decades [e.g., (Gergen, 1991; Giddens, 1991; Goffman, 1959)], and has generated a substantial theoretical and empirical literature (Burke & Reitzes, 1981; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Hogg, Terry, & White, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000; Troyer & Younts, 1997). For present purposes, we assume a distinction between identity expectations focused on an

individual's occupancy of relatively structured and stable roles within organizational and institutional context, and contrast those with identities derived from the more informal and fluid context of social interaction outside structured environments. Thus, a police officer assigned to investigate domestic abuse cases has a role identity within her organization, while in the general community she is identified as a "cop." Similarly, one can carry an identity as a human resource manager in a public agency, but be categorized as a "bureaucrat" by the media.

The relevance of situations and events to expectations has also been the focus of important analytic breakthroughs over the past several decades, especially in the study of contingency in organizations and the micro-sociology of "everyday life" (Adler, Adler, & Fontana, 1987; Gonos, 1977). The focus here is also on two distinct expectations-generating contexts: on the one hand, expectations are produced out of the rules and standards of behavior associated with a given situation; and the other hand, they emerge from attributions of appropriate (and inappropriate) social (i.e. nonwork) behavior applied to members of the community. For example, when faced with general situations such as making a traffic stop or an arrest, law enforcement officials are expected to live up to the known standards relevant to those specific situations – or be subject potential sanctioning actions. Due to the nature of their jobs, those same officers are expected to be model citizens in their nonwork activities through community activities and/or avoiding behavior deemed inappropriate for an off-duty cop (Wilson & Musick, 1997).

The analytic challenge is to consider how each of the resulting four types of accountability – answerability, blameworthiness, liability and attributability – relates to ethical strategies of public administrators. For our purposes, ethical behaviors are

regarded as social mechanisms constituted as norms and standards of behavior generated as partial responses to the pressures created by accountability mechanisms. In contrast to both Kantian and utilitarian views of ethics that rely on the existence of *a priori* knowledge or some universal standard, we assume a more naturalistic (Harman, 1977) and pragmatic perspective that stresses the functional role of ethics in dealing with social dilemmas (Flanagan, 1996; LaFollette, 2000; Nozick, 2001; Putnam, 1998). Our focus is on the development and nurturing of ethical behaviors and strategies in response to major forms of sociological accountability.

Type A: Accountability as Answerability

Within a context where the focus of attention is on structured and relatively stable expectations, accountability takes on its convention form as answerability. Role-specific expectations for account giving are those found in highly structured social relationships where the tasks and obligations of individuals are either clearly articulated (i.e., formalized) or so “institutionalized” (in the sense of “regularized”) that they are perceived as inherent to the position a person is occupying (Biddle, 1986; Turner, 1978). We apply the label “answerability” to stress the idea that persons who fall in this category are expected to respond to calls for giving an account upon demand. In short, that expectation comes with their role. This conceptualization of accountability is among the most commonly used, and has been central to contemporary studies of democratic and organizational accountability (Caiden, 1988; Schedler, 1999). It is reflected in (1) principal-agent models, discussed above, the shortcomings of which help to prompt the search for more ethical models; (2) approaches which emphasize institutionalized rule following and “logics of appropriateness” (March & Olsen, 1984, 1989, 1995)); and (3)

an “accountability theory” emphasizing the view of answerable individuals as “intuitive politicians” “whose primary goal is to protect their social identities in the eyes of the key constituencies to whom they feel accountable” (Tetlock, Skitka, & Boettger, 1989).

Answerability ethics. The three perspectives on accountability-as-answerability present us with alternative models of the accountable actor, and thus imply three models of ethical behavior mechanisms. The ethics of Tetlock’s intuitive politician are driven by the psychological need to be accepted by the “audience” – in the case of elected officials, the electorate or the people; in the case of a public administrator, the client or supervisor or stakeholder. This can result in an approach that judges the ethicality of actions on the basis of their strategic value (Paul & Strbiak, 1997). The ethics of the rational self-interested agent is shaped by that individual’s calculation of what actions will best suit his or her interests, whether those interests are focused on the accumulation of power, the accumulation of wealth, or some other goal (Bøhren, 1998; Brehm & Gates, 1997). The rule-follower’s ethics is primarily shaped by role expectations and the individual’s social identity – a fact that leads him or her to select the most “appropriate” action among alternatives based on assessments of what best fits that identity and set of expectations.

What these three ethical roles share in common is a reliance on exogenous signals or structures. The intuitive politician is constantly monitoring his or her audience for signals about appropriate behavior, while the rational agent is engaged in ongoing calculations about that behavior that will provide the best payoff. The rule-follower, in the meantime, is always engaged in balancing the expectations associated with his or her social identity with the demands of the situation. All three look outward as they make their ethical choices, and all three reflect a concern for the consequences of their actions.

In that sense, Type A accountability tends to make administrators rely on various forms of ethical mechanisms stressing the consequences of their actions vis-à-vis the expectations of those to whom they are answerable. This stress on consequences will, in turn, lead to the adoption of ethical strategies drawn from teleological schools of ethics (Scheffler, 1994), giving logical support to the various models of bureaucratic behavior applied or implied in many positive, political and organizational theories. Among positive theories of bureaucratic behavior, mechanisms rooted in utilitarian ethics (act, rule and motive) are the assumed position for administrator actions. Similarly, political theories of bureaucratic behavior emphasize mechanisms that enhance the influence and power of agencies, while organization theories focus on the striving for autonomy, security and resources. Implied in all these models is a set of ethical strategies closely linked to Type A accountability.

Type B: Accountability-as-Blameworthiness

While accountability is most often thought of in terms of answerability, it is not always applied to persons in specific and defined roles. Blameworthiness as a form of accountability involves a shift in focus from relatively structured and stable roles and obligations as an agent to one's perceived membership in some role-relevant group that imposes special status-related expectations. While role identifies what tasks and functions you perform, this "status" implies power and influence within the organization (Stryker & Macke, 1978). Put briefly, one is held accountable not because of one's tasks or formal responsibilities, but because of one's relative social position or identification with and within a certain group. Thus, you are held accountable because you are regarded as a socially, if not organizationally, blameworthy (M. J. Dubnick, 1996).

This distinction is inherent to American military organizations and is actually formalized in its accountability system. In light of an event that requires account giving (e.g., the lack of preparedness of U.S. forces for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the bombing of the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia in 1996; responsibility for the crash of a military transport plane killing Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown and other dignitaries in Croatia in 1996; and responsibility for the accidental sinking of the Japanese vessel "Ehime Maru" in 2001)(E. A. Cohen & Gooch, 1991; W. S. Cohen, 1997; Romzek & Ingraham, 2000), it is the commander who assumes the blame. . "In the military," observed Judith Shklar, "responsibility has to be personalized at the highest level of the organization since its system of command is built on the principles of obedience and reliance.... We cannot afford to be philosophically discriminating when our security depends on maintaining the principles of hierarchical responsibility for victory and defeat, especially the latter" [(Shklar, 1990), p. 63].

In its most extreme form, Type B accountability involves "scapegoating" – that is, imposing blameworthiness on a group simply by characterizing it as the source of the undesirable condition (Douglas, 1995; Girard, 1986). It is, in Peter Gay's words, the construction of a "convenient Other" upon whom one can visit all the blame for any problem – and against whom we can target our anger and aggression (Gay, 1993). From the administrator's perspective, key distinguishing characteristics of Type B accountability compared to the more conventional Type A are that blameworthiness can be assigned independently of any direct causal association with the expectation-violating behavior and consequences, and that the content of the relevant accountability

expectations may be emergent – unstable or posterior – rather than structured or unambiguously specified in advance.

While accountability-as-blameworthiness is an accepted part of military culture (and can be found in some organizations that model themselves after the military, e.g. some police forces), it is more difficult to find in overt form in other organization contexts. However, it is a pervasive presence in the extra-organizational contexts of public service. Our government and its agents operate in a culture where officials are implicitly held blameworthy for all possible misfortunes, regardless of causal responsibility (M. J. Dubnick, 1996; Shklar, 1990). A hurricane is an act of nature, but government meteorologists will be held accountable for forecasting its exact point of impact as well as expected intensity, and local emergency preparedness offices will be blamed if proper steps were not taken to deal with the storm's impact. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, issues were raised about the competence and culpability of the U.S. intelligence community as well as security at America's airports. Within two weeks of those tragic events, the media began to castigate the policies of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service for its inability to track aliens who remained in the country illegally. Like other public sector agencies, they were blameworthy; unlike others, they were called into account for their implied role in facilitating the devastating attack. By late January of 2002, the Congress was gearing up for hearings on the failures of the intelligence community in this tragic episode.

What is involved in this form of accountability comes close to what is traditionally termed "moral responsibility." As Marion Smiley notes, in both its Christian and Kantian forms, moral responsibility implied the existence of some higher or external

authority. Under those forms, blameworthiness was a matter of whether one was in a position to violate the norms of those universal standards that constituted morality. But in discussing accountability-as-blameworthiness, we are focused on the social construction of blameworthiness and the social practice of blaming (Smiley, 1992). We are blameworthy as a result of our status within a community (e.g., the mayor) or organization (e.g., the general), and not due to any specific task responsibilities or actual authority; and we are blameworthy because we are members of a group whose members are regarded as blamable (e.g., bureaucrats, politicians), and not because anyone in that group could really be an effective agent.

Blameworthiness ethics. The ethics of those facing Type B accountability is necessarily pragmatic in the broadest sense of that term, and can take three forms beyond the mere passive acceptance of one's fate as a blameworthy actor. First, accountability-as-blameworthiness can be approached instrumentally. Faced with the social reality of blameworthiness, the accountable individual should use the situation to deal with the challenges within that context (Troyer & Younts, 1997). The heads of agencies that have been subjected to severe criticism for past performance can use the opportunity to strengthen the organizations capacities for the future. In response to their experiences as field-level soldiers in Vietnam, the officers who rose through the military's ranks from the mid-1970s through the 1980s developed ethical strategies that literally transformed the role of the armed forces in U.S. policy as well as the way the military was perceived by the public and perceived itself (Woodward, 1991). An equally dramatic transformation of the ethical and operational norms of the Federal Emergency Management Agency took

place under James Lee Witt, who assumed his position in April 1993 in the wake of severe criticism for FEMA's handling of recent disaster relief efforts.

A second approach is to assume a commitment to a deontological moral standard (Chandler, 1994) that would meet with widespread approval within the community or organization. The call for public administrators to focus on "service" rather than "steering" (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000), to engage in the pursuit of the "public interest" (Huddleston, 1981-1982; Marx, 1949), to adopt a professional standard of social equity (Frederickson, 1997; Marini, 1971), or to "refound" itself in the regime values of the constitution (Wamsley et al., 1990; Wamsley & Wolf, 1996), are part of this effort to fill the moral void implied by the condition of blameworthiness.

The third approach is to engage in an "identity shift" by dissociating oneself from the blameworthy status or group. Under the view of social constructivism, just as certain groups are regarded as blameworthy, so other groups are inherently praiseworthy. In lieu of a tag such as "bureaucrat" or government employee, one can stress a professional identity such as city planner, park ranger or law enforcement official. These identity shifts (Burke, 1991), in turn, have implications for the type of accountability and ethical standards one is subject to. Of course, as social constructions, the blameworthiness of these identities can vary from place to place and overtime. Police officers in a small Midwestern town will face a different set of community expectations than their peers in New York or Los Angeles; similarly, the status and perception of an FBI agent in the 1990s was quite different from that of the 1950s.

Common among these three Type B responses is the establishment of credibility for public administrators as autonomous ethical actors [see (Wuthnow, 2001)] for

distinction between autonomous and embedded moral actors). The post-Vietnam era commanders focused on establishing and articulating basic rules for the use of military force – rules that sometimes led them to openly resist putting U.S. personnel in harm’s way when other options were available. The military professionalism represented by the likes of George Patton was replaced by the model provided by Colin Powell and his cohort. The call for the public service professional to give priority to general ethical commitments is also a step toward asserting an ethically autonomous position, as is the effort to create a distinct professional identity among the public service professions. Each of these is a means toward the realization of Carl Friedrich’s model of the responsible administrator.

Type C: Accountability-as-Liability

Type C, accountability-as-liability, shares several characteristics with accountability-as-answerability. There is a direct causal association between behavior and liability, expectations are likely to be fairly well structured, and it is primarily on-the-job behavior that is subject to scrutiny and demands for accounts. The standards and rules of choice and conduct that inform those expectations, however, are largely defined not within an institution or organization, but rather in the external, larger social or legal context in which the organization is embedded.

As implied in its name, accountability-as-liability is closely associated with a legalist view of the world in which actions are guided and assessed according to rules that carry sanctions for non-compliance (Shklar, 1986). Unlike answerability, where expectations for accountability derive from the actor’s institutional role or organizational position, liability stresses the requirements of the structured situation. The nature of that

structure can vary from the strictures of legal requirements backed by state sanctions to implicit contracts between two parties that carry with them rewards for compliance and/or sanctions for violations. At the core of all these mechanisms is the idea that law, in a very general sense, is an effective way to establish and maintain order and control (Pound, 1997; Schuck, 1999).

In a strictly formal sense, accountability-as-liability would be limited to shaping one's actions according to the "letter of the law" – that is, doing what is required by law, and avoiding those actions prescribed under law. For Type C accountability, however, the conception of law is much broader, taking on the characteristics of both an institutional setting (i.e., the "rule of law") (Hayek, 1972; Ingram, 1985) and a context for social relationships (Fuller, Edelman, & Matusik, 2000; Minow, 1990, 1997; M. Weber, 1978).

The relationships between Type C and other forms of accountability are quite complex for two related reasons. First, ours is an "organizational society" where individuals are constantly identified by their role or status. It is rare to find a structured situation where one is completely without some role identity. Accountability-as-liability, however, tends to focus the act and its consequences rather than the actor or her status-derived blameworthiness. In its most stringent form, Type C accountability seeks out the actor who "did the deed" (was directly, causally responsible) rather than the individual "in charge" or playing some other relevant role. Thus, an individual in a supervisory role/status would not be held accountable *unless* there was both evidence and willingness to link that person to the untoward activity.

The second issue associated with Type C accountability is the problem of collective responsibility (French, 1997). Just as the legal system has difficulty dealing with

collective responsibility, (Stone, 1975), liability-based accountability systems are constantly challenged by the “many hands” problem (D. F. Thompson, 1980). As Dennis Thompson notes, typical solutions to this problem include applying “hierarchical” or “collective” forms of responsibility, and he finds both wanting. In their place, he advocates applying “personal responsibility” approach based on some weak causal connection between an individual and the event. In terms of the present framework, that would mean shifting from Type C to either Type A or Type B accountability – a move that raises issues regarding the integrity and fairness of any sanctions that might be imposed. As important, such an approach does not deal with the complex situations where even a weak causal link cannot be proven. In such cases, even the legal system has had to modify its standards by allowing liability to rest almost entirely on an individual possible “fault” rather than cause (Thomson, 1984).

As with its legal equivalent, the inherent problems of accountability-as-liability are many (P. K. Howard, 1994; Huber, 1988; Levmore, 1994; Lieberman, 1981). Nevertheless, it is an approach to accountability that is extremely important in public administration. A central factor shaping Type C accountability for public administrators has been the judicial treatment of two issues: administrative discretion and administrative immunity. Historical shifts in the judiciary’s handling of administrative discretion and delegation of authority cases (Horwitz, 1994; Stewart, 1975) have altered the jurisdictions and tasks of administrative agencies to such a degree (some have argued) that we have witnessed a de facto constitutional transformation of the American republic (Lowi, 1979). The courts’ willingness to lift the cover of sovereign immunity over the past several decades (Rosenbloom, 1983, 1987) has been as significant in its impact on

the accountability, exposing administrators to legal actions and making it urgent for them to become more “constitutionally competent” (Rosenbloom, Carroll, & Carroll, 2000).

But as significant has been the general impact on public administration of the legalistic mindset fostered by these developments. Almost every area of public management has shown signs of deference to the “lawyers” perspective, and an abandonment of the administrator’s view of the world (Dimock, 1980). The very act of entering the public service places one in a distinctive legal relationship to the state (Rosenbloom, 1971), and efforts to assure public employee integrity through Type C approaches have been pervasive and often counterproductive for the day-to-day operations of government (Anechiarico & Jacobs, 1996).

Law-like ethics. The ethics related to Type C accountability have their roots in distinct and conflicting conceptions of law. Two approaches emerge from debates among philosophers regarding the nature of law, while a third is derived from the analogical reasoning used in the practice of law.

In the philosophy of law, a major division exists between those who assume laws to be human artifacts without any inherent moral value (the *positivist* school) and those who assess laws in terms of their relation to a higher law standard (the *natural law* school). Each of these schools generates a number of ethical positions, but for present purposes we will offer them in caricature as the positivist *ethics of obligation* and the naturalist *ethics of conscience*. As applied by those who are held accountable, the ethics of obligation calls for adherence to the explicit rules that define a situation. Here we find the ethics of neutral competence that has been so central to the norms of American public administration (Finer, 1936; Kaufman, 1956; Lockard, 1962; Rourke, 1992). The ethics

of conscience, in contrast, is manifest in efforts to have public administrators adhere to some “higher standard” when engaged in the enforcement or implementation of the law. Here, again, we find various standards from “regime values” and “public interest” to “social equity” and “justice-as-fairness” (Frederickson, 1997; G. S. Marshall & Choudhury, 1997; Rohr, 1989, 1998).

A third ethical approach relevant to Type C accountability comes from the practice of law. Sunstein (Sunstein, 1996) offers the term “analogical reasoning” to describe the type of thinking that takes place in legal practice. It is reasoning that focuses on applying laws and rules to specific cases based on how that law or rule has been applied in the past to similar (although not identical) cases. Sunstein highlights four features of analogical reasoning. First, it is based on the norm of “principled consistency” – that is, the need to provide some principle to “harmonize seemingly disparate outcomes.” Second, there should be a focus on the details of the case, letting the facts shape the decision. Third, analogical reasoning avoids the application of any “deep or comprehensive theory” that might overwhelm the facts of the case. Finally, this form of reasoning produces and applies standards that should be at a “low or intermediate level of abstraction.” In public administration, the ethics of “constitutional competence” advocated by Rosenbloom and Carroll (Rosenbloom, 1987; Rosenbloom et al., 2000) operates at this analogical level by focusing on the need for public service employees to become familiar with their place and responsibilities within the U.S. constitutional system through relevant cases.

The common thread holding these Type C ethical strategies together is their commitment to determining what is ethical through a reasoning process – one guided by

rules, the second by a higher standard, and the third through analogy. In contrast to the stress on consequences (generated by Type A account giving) and blame avoidance (through Type B), the ethical approaches of Type C accountability rely on ethical behavior mechanisms that call for an actor to engage in a certain type of reasoning that fosters consideration of procedural requirements, legal standards or precedent (Raz, 1990).

Type D: Accountability-as-Attributability

This form of accountability brings scrutiny to public administrators' non work-related conduct. Here, when nonwork behavior violates the expectations of someone, somewhere, attributions transform the behavioral violation into a presumed character defect that renders the administrator subject to sanction, or even unfit for public employment. Thus the instance of the police officer who lost his job not because of any problem with his job performance, but because a photo of him surrounded by scantily clad women at a biker's rally appeared on the website of the motorcycle club he headed. An administrator's "private life" is not entirely distinct from the public life of the government job. In fact, accountability pressures spillover into the private lives of all employees – public and private.

In the nonwork domain, one is subject to accountability standards that are broader in scope, more diverse, and constantly subject to change over time and from place to place. The sources of those standards are other social actors in the domain who regard an action or behavior as requiring an accounting by some actor. In short, they *attribute* an action or behavior to an individual and would *expect* an accounting if they were in a position to demand one. This attributing behavior is regarded by social psychologists as

part of our standard means for making sense of – and dealing with – the world (Crittenden, 1983; Forsyth, 1980; J. A. Howard, 1994). From the perspective of “attribution theory” research, this form of attribution is subject to ideological, cultural and stereotypical bias (Al-Zahrani & Kaplowitz, 1993; Howard & Pike, 1986) as well as situational determinism (Holloway & Fuller, 1983). In addition, attributions tend to be unstable and malleable by changing conditions such as information or expectations (Tetlock, 1981, 1985; Yarkin-Levin, 1983). The shortcomings of such attributions, however, have not diminished their relevance.

The link between specific instances of attribution and our Type D accountability emerges when those attributions lead to the perception of an individual as someone of suspect character given the actions attributed to him or her. Thus, an individual seen emerging in a disheveled state daily from a local bar might be regarded as a “drunk,” and someone cited by police for speeding might be characterized as a reckless driver. An attributed behavior becomes a character attribute, and it is the fact that we are subject to such characterizations that can make us Type D accountable. Exposure to this form of accountability is unavoidable, and yet students of management have paid little attention to it (Cozzetto & Pedeliski, 1996, 1997). Scholars have long acknowledged the intermingling of social and personal factors. They were central to the work of the human relations school, and played an important role in Barnard’s classic analysis of executive management (Barnard, 1968; Roethlisberger, 1941). Interest in the relationship of family life to work has produced a stream of research in sociology and organization studies (Bielby, 1992; A. Cohen, 1995) including the examination of strategies developed to deal with the boundaries between work and nonwork (Kanter, 1977/1993; Kirchmeyer, 1995).

There is also research focused on the nonwork lives of public sector workers in particular (Johnson & Duerst-Lahti, 1991; Romzek, 1985, 1989). But, with few exceptions (Dworkin, 1997) little of this research considers the link between personal life and accountability.

The rules that protect one's private life from public intrusions do not necessarily apply to those in public offices. While modern society might proffer the "principle of uniform privacy" as a desirable standard for all its citizens, for public office holders it is the "principle of diminished privacy" that is more likely to be applied. There are a variety of reasons for this, including the perceived necessity to know more about the behavior of those who wield power over us as well as expectations that public officials must achieve a higher standard of conduct in their private affairs than ordinary citizens (D. F. Thompson, 1987).

Of course, accountability-as-attributability is not limited to those who hold public office. What kind of accountability is involved? Some of it takes the form of formal constraints on the private, nonwork lives of government employees. Hatch Acts, conflict of interest legislation and related policies are designed explicitly to deal with the perceived dangers of having civil servants too actively engaged in politics or private business enterprises (R. N. Roberts, 1992; Rosenbloom, 1971, 1988; Thruber, 1993). Other examples are found in managerial strategies to offset the potentially adverse impact of private preferences. The possibility that employees or their families might grow too attached to local communities ("going native") has led some agencies to establish personnel transfer policies to minimize the influence of nonwork factors (Kaufman, 1967). Concern for an agency's reputation or public image is also used as a rationale for

holding employees accountable for their private behavior and lifestyles. Private behavior has been regarded as grounds for adverse personnel actions, even if the behavior had little or nothing to do with the position of workplace (Lewis, 1997). As significant, the courts have held that the “perception” of questionable private behavior can be used to take action against a public employee (see *Wild v. U.S.*, 1982) (Stark, 1995).

Type D Ethical Strategies. The ethical responses to Type D accountability pressures are likely to require that the individual accept the linkages between one’s personal and professional/work lives. Thus, the individual must constantly contend with an existential conflict between ethical demands generated by one’s role expectations, perceived blameworthiness or liability, and those related to one’s standing as an autonomous private individual or citizen. In some cases, the solution would be an ethical position that subordinates at least some of one’s personal autonomy to the demands emerging from Types A, B or C accountability. Accepting the limits on one’s citizenship rights is the price paid under certain Hatch Act provisions, just as the Forest Ranger accepts the order to move her family to the next assignment station. As significant is the choice to subordinate one’s private tastes and behavior to the demands imposed by one’s job or status (Denhardt, 1981; Hummel, 1994).

A more positive stance has been articulated by Terry Cooper in his calls for a “citizenship ethics” that he later presents as the “responsible administrator” model (Cooper, 1991, 1998). Subordination of the personal is replaced with a commitment to continuously reflect on one’s life as a public administrator. Implied is the idea that one can achieve self-actualization through such an ethical stance, an idea that traces back to ancient ethics and its emphasis on ethics as a means for achieving the good (e.g.,

happiness) in oneself (in contrast to the modern focus on achieving the good for others) (Annas, 1992).

At a more general level, the response to Type D accountability might be the adoption of a virtue or character ethics approach. In an environment where standards and rules are ambiguous or unstable, it would be reasonable to assume that a consistent adherence to some higher standards of personal conduct (e.g., to be trustworthy, honest, benevolent, caring) would provide some protection from the whims of accountability-as-attribution. Some have articulated this in terms of being a person of “good character” (Luke, 1994). It can also involve the a commitment to act virtuously on and off the job as the situation requires (Frederickson & Hart, 1985; Frederickson & Hart, 1997; David K. Hart, 1984; David Kirkwood Hart, 1994; David K. Hart & Smith, 1988) or at least to avoid falling prey to the “ordinary vices” that plagued us in both our private and public existence (Shklar, 1984).

The ethical path selected in response to Type D accountability pressures has implications for the general orientation of the individual toward the other forms of accountability. Deference to the intrusions of accountability-as-attributability is most closely associated with the norm of political neutrality that has characterized mainstream public administration for many decades. A “citizenship ethics” is likely to complement the effort to promote competency-centered ethics, while implied in the virtue/character ethics approaches is a view of the public administrator as a more actively engaged autonomous ethical agent who understands his or her moral obligations (Bovens, 1998).

V. Summary and Implications

Among the various issues raised by the Friedrich-Finer debate, those focused on accountability-ethics relationships are at once the most significant and least explored. Despite the lack of explicit attention to that relationship in the public administration literature, there are obviously considerable resources that can be brought to bear on this topic. Through the reconceptualization of the key terms in that relationship, this essay opens the door to a more thorough examination of the relevant issues.

Such an examination would begin with a further elaboration and empirical validation of the associations summarized in Table 2. If those posited relationships are validated, the implications for our understanding of administrative behavior can be significant. By focusing on accountability and ethical norms and standards as social mechanisms, we can start to re-explore the “black box” of “contingent” administrative behavior that has been so central to public administration scholarship since Herbert Simon began to model the administrative decision maker in the 1940s. Relying on social mechanisms in lieu of models and positive theory assumptions about bureaucratic behavior, we are able to consider various forms of reasoning and “reasons” that help shape administrative choices and behavior (Elster, 1989; Hedström & Swedberg, 1998b).

There are also potential implications for those concerned with institutional design and administrative reform. Reformers who advocate greater accountability, for instance, typically put forward suggestions that create or enhance answerability mechanisms. A more fully elaborated “theory” of the relationship between accountability and ethical strategies would help us assess the potential impact of alternative forms of answerability as well as explain the success or failure of various reforms. The same logic could be

useful in highlighting the source of current problems. What might otherwise be perceived as an arbitrary abuse of discretionary authority, for example, might be back to the absence of (or an indifference to) Type C accountability mechanisms.

Table 2

Accountability-Ethics Relationships

Accountability Type	Ethical Strategies are based on:		
Type A: Answerability	Intuitive politician	Rational agent	Rule-follower
Type B: Blameworthiness	Instrumental	Higher moral standard	Identity shift
Type C: Liability	Positivist obligation	Naturalist conscience	Analogical reasoning competence
Type D: Attributability	Subordination	Citizenship ethics	Virtue/character ethics

In advance of the gradual unfolding of long-term research agendas, we might also advance an immediate proposition for the teaching and practice of administration. In light of the complexity of contemporary administration and society, and the multiplicity of mutually embedded and competing bases for administrative and democratic accountability and ethics, we may do well to strive for a more nuanced understanding of the inevitability of tradeoffs among competing expectations. At one level, this means that sooner or later, particular moral communities will find even highly accountable and ethical administration unacceptable, and that to some extent at certain times a poor bureaucrat just can't win. Professional instruction and practice might, however, seek to

develop an ethical analogue to the “frame reflection” advocated by Schön and Rein (Schon & Rein, 1994). Refinements to institutional mechanisms and hortatory approaches to ethical guidance might usefully be complemented by an effort to provide administrators with the permission and the training which would enable them effectively to employ “powers of reflective self control: (1) the power to grasp and apply moral reasons, and (2) the power to control or regulate [their] behavior by the light of such reasons” (Wallace, 1994). Such an approach may not eliminate occasional scapegoating, scandals, and public dismay, but it can contribute to the ability of technically competent administrators to become ethically competent, as well, and to a more reasoned public discourse on accountability, ethics, and the relationship between them.

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