

IN PUBLIC SECTOR ETHICS: FINDING AND IMPLEMENTING VALUES, edited by Charles Sampford, Noel Preston, with C-A Bois (London: Routledge/Leitchardt, Australia: The Federation Press, 1998): pp. 68-81.

## CLARIFYING ACCOUNTABILITY An Ethical Theory Framework

Mel Dubnick

### INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of students of public administration throughout the English-speaking world, Tom Sherman's observations regarding public sector ethics in Australia can be applied world-wide. (See Sherman, Chapter 1.) This is particularly true with regards to pressures from a growing public demand for 'openness and accountability'. Meeting the challenges of developing and maintaining mechanisms for accountability seems especially important in an era of greater discretion to non-elected personnel and the privatisation of government services. We are comfortable with such observations because the idea of accountability makes sense to us. It is as natural to us as the idea that democracy requires competition among political parties or the extension of the voting franchise to all citizens. We take the need for accountability for granted and assume that everyone understands what the concept means and why it is so important.

We may have to reconsider our casual attitude toward the concept of accountability. In a general critique of the existing literature on the topic, 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' (Uhr, 1992, p 18). His advocacy of a 'research project on accountability tensions' (Uhr, 1992, p 1) 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' in perspective. To accomplish this, Uhr argues that both views 'could benefit from a return to the constitutional centre and renounce their accountability frameworks by reference to emerging practices which stand in

open dispute over the appropriate public duties for executive officials' (Uhr, 1992, p 10). 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 past each other. There is a need to deal with the ambiguous application of the term 'accountability' by those who use the term in a less than casual fashion. This task will involve a shift in the conceptual context of the analytic endeavour from that of traditional 'action theory' to a more relevant and reflexive 'ethical theory' focus. These points will be considered in the next section after addressing the surprisingly paradoxical nature of the accountability idea. I then offer a framework for conceptualising accountability in a range of forms covering many of the attitudes and behaviours that term signifies to those who use it in practical situations. Finally, I conclude 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 reconceptualise accountability. First, it is critical that we acknowledge the 'anglican' nature of the accountability idea and its implications for our endeavour. Secondly, we need to acknowledge the dualistic nature of existing accountability studies. Finally, we need to consider a useful theoretical context for conducting a reconceptualisation that will help us advance the study of accountability and public administrative behaviour 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 undertook 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 and Italian as well as Portuguese), various forms of the term 'responsibility' are used in lieu of the English 'accountability'. The issue would seem a petty one were it not for the fact that *accountability* is not synonymous with *responsibility*. As Uhr correctly notes, accountability is at the least complementary to responsibility and certainly not equal to it (Uhr (1992) also speaks of responsibility as derivative from accountability as well). 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 ... (Uhr, 1992, p 4)

In non-English speaking countries, the term 'accountability' has been adopted only out of necessity (eg Japan) or due to the close relationship of the country to anglican governance (eg Israel). For example, in Japanese, a dictionary search turned up the transliterated term *akunatabiriti*, an all too obvious reminder of the Japanese capacity to adopt useful terms from foreign sources. To highlight the point, there were 17 distinctive traditional Japanese terms associated with 'responsibility', none of which were explicitly linked to the English-language notion of accountability. Israelis are familiar with the word and concept of accountability in its British and American manifestations but government officials charged with applying it (eg the State Comptroller) are frustrated by the fact that there is no equivalent term in modern Hebrew.<sup>2</sup>

Even where a term seemingly similar to 'accountability' is found, the concept is typically more narrow than the anglican form. For northern European languages (eg Dutch, Danish, German), accountability is distinguishable from responsibility. None the less, translations of accountability are closer in meaning to 'duty' or 'obligation', eg an accountability is an obligation or duty to live up to terms of a trust. Typical is the way the term is treated by the Finns. Finnish translations for accountability directly relate to the term used to stress an 'obligation' (ie *velvollisuus*). Thus, the three key terms in the Finnish dictionary for accountability are *tivvelvollisuus* (the meaning 'pay' or 'financial tally'), *kirjantapiovelvollisuus* (*kirjantio* meaning 'book-keeping') and *vastuuvellisuus* (*vastuu* meaning 'onus' or 'burden'). But as is the case with responsibility, the term we typically use in English is not synonymous with merely forms of 'obligation' or 'duty'. While one may feel an obligation or duty for being accountable, accountability itself is neither *per se*.

In Russian, accountability is a distinct term with roots in the concept of 'report', especially as it relates to financial matters. In this sense, they have developed a term that captures not the sense of 'responsibility' but what the French call *comptes d'rendre* ('the rendering of accounts').

That French phrase, in fact, does serve as a clue to the anglican conceptualisation of accountability. The key to understanding the anglican nature of accountability is to see its historical and institutional terms and especially its roots in the *idea* of accountability (in contrast to the word *per se*) that takes hold under Norman rule. Etymologically, Middle English terms related to accountability (eg *acompte*, *aconie*) can be traced to at least to the early 14th century and there is no doubt these were derived from the Old French equivalents for *comptes d'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: the 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. The resulting census, known as the Domesday Books, 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 assess his holdings and make revenue collection more efficient. In a broader sense, it was for the time an exceptional accomplishment in the exercise of monarchical 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 of 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 (see Brooke, 1961, pp 91-2, 114-15; also Douglas, 1964, pp 351-4). 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' (Douglas, 1964, p 354, quoting historians F Stenton and VH Galbraith respectively).

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

to Salisbury at Larinas, and there his councillors came to him, and all the people occupying land who were of any account over all England whoseover'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. (Douglas, 1964, p 355, quoting from chroniclers of the time)

While historian David Douglas cautions against attributing too much to William's actions (eg 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 organisation in England was strengthened (Douglas, 1964, pp 355-6). Central to these developments, I contend, was the establishment of accountability (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 13th 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 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. (Given, 1990, p 42)

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. 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.

In contrast, the French did not develop a similar system until several centuries later. They did so in a way that created the institutions of centralisation 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 de Tocqueville in an aside to his commentary in *Democracy in America* (de Tocqueville, 1969, pp 723-4).

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 endeavour unless care is taken not to bias our studies with preconceived (ie anglican) notions of accountability.

Secondly, it should lead us to conclude that careful conceptualisation 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 characterises 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 ethno-methodologists, 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 rationalisations by individuals who face situations where errors or perceived failure have rendered them accountable to some other individual or group (eg, see McLaughlin et al, 1992). Theirs is an empirical endeavour concerned with describing and/or explaining a common human behaviour. 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) behaviour 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 (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 (eg the Friedrich-Finier debate),<sup>3</sup> oftentimes giving more attention to the normative than the empirical endeavour (however, see Gruber, 1987).

The central point for our project, however, is that both approaches require attention in a useful conceptualisation of accountability. Either perspective by itself draws the analysis of public administrative behaviour away from its accountability-core. The AC approach does highlight the role accountability plays for the individual, both psychologically as well as socially. However, applying it out without due consideration for the institutional context trivialises 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 institutionalised accountability systems.

What is required for our conceptualisation of accountability, therefore, is a framework that encompasses both the individualist AC and the institutionalist CA views. This is attempted below. However, such a reconceptualisation 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 behaviour (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 behaviour where accountability has its most significant impact. Secondly, the present perspective minimises, or at least fails to highlight, the ethical nature of the public administrative endeavour.

Advances in the study of human social behaviour have been accomplished through the adoption of some basic assumptions about the foundation or sources of social acts. Call them paradigms or meta-theories, 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 subconscious 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 behaviourists (eg JB Watson and BF Skinner), sees human choices as rational selections in response to immediate situations within the context of learned expectations (see, eg Watson, 1958; and Skinner, 1971; for critiques of behaviourism, see Matson, 1964; and also Homans, 1987). Finally and most significant among current views of public administrative behaviour, human action is regarded as ends-oriented behaviour regulated by social and cultural norms and values. This last approach of social action theory owes much to the work of Talcott Parsons, Niklas Luhmann and other social theorists whose work has been extremely influential (as well as controversial) in the post-Second World War era (eg, see Parsons, 1951; and Luhmann; 1995; for critiques, see Gouldner, 1970; and Munch, 1987).

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

In social theory, the emergence of a 'reflexive action' orientation has gained increasing favour among students of human behaviour (see Giddens, 1979; compare with Coleman, 1990). The work of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens (eg, Bourdieu, 1977; and Giddens, 1979), among others, has given a central place to the individual actor's reflections in the shaping of human behaviour; in the management arena, Chris Argyris and Donald Schön have integrated learning and reflection into the study of organisations and organisational behaviour (see Argyris, 1994; and Schön, 1983). In public administration *per se*, more attention than ever before is

being given to individual perspectives, especially in the work of Robert Denhardt, John Dilulio, Carolyn Ban and others (eg Denhardt, 1993; Dilulio, 1990; and Ban, 1995).

The potential value of a reconceptualisation 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 will emerge of benefit, 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 behaviour 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 emphasises 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 (Nozick, 1981, ch 5).

While Nozick's specific use of the ethical theory approach is interesting, of greater significance for present purposes is its value as a means of qualifying the basic premise of social action theory. Again, social action theory regards individual actions as the product of ends-oriented behaviour 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 pull) assumption as a working premise for what constitutes 'normative regulation' would help keep us focused on the individual level.

Put more explicitly, our ability to understand public administrative behaviour 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 'moral'. Given this basic orientation toward action, the role of accountability in shaping public administrative behaviour becomes an empirical question. What is more, that behaviour 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 behaviour. The defence 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 here (see Friedman, 1953, part I). 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 'idea' form. I will posit a framework intended to conceptualise accountability by categorising several of its more significant species. The reader is reminded that the goal here is not to find the essence of accountability, rather it is 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 'other' — that must be taken into consideration as one contemplates making choices or taking actions. Being accountable is thus a social relationship.

Under Nozick's 'ethical 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 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, with the risks and uncertainty they entail (Kiel, 1994), generates complexity. At other times, it is the turbulence or constraining nature of the task environment that poses the challenge (JD Thompson, 1967, and Waldo, 1971). Complementing, supplementing and manifesting these conditions are multiple, diverse and often conflicting expectations (Dubnick and Romzek, 1993; for other views of the complex nature of public sector management, see Kiel, 1994) 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 (for psychological as well as political reasons; eg, see Festinger, 1957) but also to those who seek to harness or limit the authority and energy of administrative power (Gruber, 1987; Rourke, 1984). Among the various means for

dealing with the complex environment of expectations is the creation and application of institutional structures and rules (March and Olsen, 1995), mechanisms that rely on the *use of accountability*.

### Four Different Contexts and Four Different Institutions

In previous work (Dubnick and Romzek, 1991), Romzek and I applied the term 'accountability systems' to these general institutional forms and posited a framework that highlighted four types: legal, organisational, professional and political.<sup>4</sup> I will rely here 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 (eg the United States), the rule of law principle permeates most, if not all, public sector activities (Rosenbloom, 1983). A typical administrator in the United States, 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 (eg 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, organisational working environments operate as institutional means for narrowing or focusing expectations, primarily through a stress on answerability. The very nature of modern bureaucratic organisations 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 (Hummel, 1994).

The emergence of professionalism as a major factor in the public administrative endeavour 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 organisational instruments would be counter-productive, 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>5</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 an institutional perspective, the question isn't whether there should be political accountability but rather what form it should take. Patronage has been the least favoured approach ever since the logic of meritocracy and civil service reform came to dominate the modern state (see Ingraham, 1995)

various strategies of using representation to enhance responsiveness have been less than effective (Krislov, 1974). Oversight mechanisms (both executive legislative) are common means used to improve responsiveness (Abertsch, 1980, also see Gruber, 1987), although their effectiveness has varied widely. Efforts to develop 'administrative presidents' through strategic use of explicit systems also had mixed records (Nathan, 1983). But none of these explicit attempts to pull the 'pull' of responsiveness has been as successful as the high moral value placed on responsiveness in most democratic political cultures (on the demands democracy makes on bureaucracy and vice versa, see Elzioni-Halevy, 1983).

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 focal points for those who study the 'conduct of accountability'; in that sense, they are merely half the picture. The other half — the 'moral pushes' typically named as the 'accountability of conduct' — can be regarded as the internalisation of the four accountability institutions.

Liabilities, for instance, internalise 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 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 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 acting 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' (Skolnick and Fyfe, 1993, chs 9-11).

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, that is, that they have the right to be obeyed given the organisational context of public administrative actions. This deference and subsequent obedience seems an unlikely basis for a 'moral push', particularly in light of the horrors of the Holocaust and similar events in which obedience was clearly a form of moral bankruptcy (Goldhagen, 1996).

And yet one's sense of self-worth and value can be fulfilled by participating in the kind that can be achieved through hierarchically co-ordinated collective actions. One need only watch the highly visible work of trained fire-fighters or rescuers after a disaster strikes to appreciate why an individual can find moral sustenance in obedience. At the same time, moral push can be found playing itself out in the more mundane roles undertaken by public servants in day-to-day program operations (V Thompson, 1975).

Fidelity (an internalised sense of honour 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 'fidelity' and loyalty with technical expertise and professionalism but those subjective ties are in fact critical to the professional endeavour. 'Professional status is in principle open to all,' notes William M Sullivan, 'regardless of social origins.'

[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. ...

[P]rofessional freedom of opportunity is only realized through the individual's 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.* (Sullivan, 1995, p 146) (emphasis added)

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 (Fletcher, 1993). Its relevance to the public sector is reflected in the census figures indicating that around 40 per cent 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 Watergate and other scandals since the early 1970s imply that members of the 'traditional' professions (eg law) are expected to give priority to their profession when faced with conflicting demands from the workplace. Studies of the traditional government professions (eg military, foreign service, forest rangers) reinforce the contention that loyalty to the collective ideals and standards play powerful roles in the behaviour of these public officials (see Kaufman, 1967). The same strong moral push is developing in the newer government (what Mosher termed 'emerging') professions as well (eg tax assessors, city planners, librarians) (Mosher, 1982).

Finally, the success of establishing and maintaining responsive administrative behaviour depends on the development of an internalised *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 among others (for a recent example in a long and continuing line of critiques, see Rauch, 1995). It is reflected in the oft-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 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 behaviour. 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 conceptualisation that begs to be explored and put to use in the systematic analysis of accountability.

Figure A: Eight Species of Accountability

	Legal Setting	Organisational Setting	Professional Setting	Political Setting
Moral Pulls	Liability	Answerability	Responsibility	Responsiveness
Moral Pushes	Obligation	Obedience	Fidelity	Amenability

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Analysis 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 initially developed 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 the answer is a focused and useful conceptualisation of accountability. I have attempted to provide such a conceptualisation here.

A conceptualisation of accountability should achieve three things. First, it must avoid as much as possible the tendency to rely on an Anglo-centric (as opposed to a merely anglican) approach to the term. I have 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 shifted the focus onto 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.

Secondly, the conceptualisation must attempt to capture the two strong research traditions relating to accountability: the accountability of conduct and the conduct of accountability. This problem was tackled 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 behaviour and thus want this conceptualisation to reflect that assumption. Here again, the ethical theory orientation serves the purpose quite well. It must be emphasised 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 conceptualisation to work to see if it proves useful. If it does, then we have indication that accountability is an ethical tool in governance. If this ethics-based concept does not 'pay 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? Secondly, does its continued use lead to improvements in the framework and thus further advances in our understanding and insights? Thirdly, does the continuous application and improvement of the framework move use closer toward a theory of public administrative behaviour?

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 (eg the Challenger launch decision) (Vaughan, 1996) and to develop more elaborate accountability-based models (Kearns, 1996). I hope this ethics-based effort is at least as fruitful.

## NOTES

- 1 The choice of word here posed a problem, for the term 'Anglican' commonly refers to things of an ecclesiastic sort. The Oxford English Dictionary 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. Hence, I do not capitalise 'anglican' except as necessary at the start of sentences or in titles.
  - 2 My thanks to my colleague, David H Rosenbloom, for relating this to me after his meeting with Israeli officials in October 1996: 'It turns out that there is no precise Hebrew equivalent of "accountability", which makes things hard for those whose mission is to secure it'.
  - 3 In the early 1940s, political scientists Carl J Friedrich and Herman Finer debated the nature of bureaucratic accountability in democratic states. Friedrich took a position that allowed more discretion to administrators than would Finer. For a summary of these 'soft core' (Friedrich) and 'hard core' (Finer) positions, see Harmon (1995) pp 47-51.
  - 4 For a general view of the issues, see Gruber (1987).
  - 5 By their very nature, these labels imply a good deal more and less about the type of institutional setting (ie accountability system) they represent. For a better sense of the characteristics of each, see Dubnick and Romzek (1991) ch 3.
- This is the core of what Michael Harmon terms the 'rationalist' approach to responsibility (Harmon, 1995).

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