

---

---

## CONCLUSION

### Taking Stock and Moving Forward

In history's best known symposium, Plato (in the personage of Apollodorus) speaks third hand of what Socrates and others have told him transpired at a dinner gathering of Athenians who fell into a discussion about a topic that fascinated each of them: love. As related by Plato in *The Symposium*, both the gathering and the debate that ensued were happenstance, an event not unlike others (fictitious we assume) used by Plato to present the multiplicity of views on intellectually challenging issues (Plato 2006). Today, the convening of a symposium is a more formalized and intentional endeavor, but the hoped for outcome remains the same, i.e., to facilitate the advancement of knowledge through an exchange of views on a very challenging topic. In our case, the subject was accountability.

Contemporary symposium conveners have two strategic options when developing the agenda for a meeting such as this. One approach is to provide participants with a predefined framework or theme which they are asked to apply from their distinct perspectives (e.g., (Castells and Cardoso 2005)). The other option attempts to replicate Plato's implied ideal by bringing together a variety of analysts who have common interest in some particular subject or issue, and to operate under the speculative assumption that relevant themes and important frameworks will emerge from the presentations and the interaction of participants.

The Kettering Symposium was convened applying the latter model under the added rationale that after at least two decades of scrutiny by scholars from various disciplines from around the world, it was time to take stock of what we had learned from our own work and those of our colleagues. Despite efforts made to invite presentations reflecting the wide range of perspectives on (and approaches to) accountability, there were admittedly notable gaps in coverage. Nevertheless, from the conveners' perspective this Symposium succeeded in bringing attention to several important research themes and practical lessons

First, if there is a major challenge posed by accountability for those engaged in governance, it is the need for them to realize that they operate in a world of multiple, diverse, and often conflicting accountabilities. Unless you are a Kafkaesque warder at the bottom of some formidable hierarchy who lacks discretion of any sort, there is no escaping that condition. Rather, you must learn to live—and perhaps to thrive—within the constraints and parameters established by multiple accountabilities. The exploration of the redundancies (Schillemans and Bovens), complexities (Romzek; Brown, Potoski, and Van Slyke), and dilemmas (Koppell) of multiple accountabilities remains a fruitful enterprise that enhances our growing knowledge of modern governance.

A second insight drawn from these papers is that context matters. There are two lessons to be drawn here. The first is that the effectiveness of accountabilities is contingent on a range of factors, from public awareness and support (Pollitt) to the institutional settings in which they are applied (Radin; Johnson, Pierce, and Lovrich). At the same time, accountability mechanisms generated and “enact” their own contingencies, which have an impact upon policymaking (Posner and Schwartz)

and institutions (see Ghere), as well as behavior and choices of those being held to account (e.g., Hood; Karns, Shaffer, and Ghere; Kearns).

A third lesson follows: strategies designed to enhance accountability are going to be difficult at best. This is most evident in the two examples of efforts to enhance accountability in the corporate sector (Wheeler; Potoski and Prakesh).

Finally, it is also evident that, despite at least two decades of substantial advances in our understanding of accountability, we have a great deal more to learn about this fascinating subject. Among other things, we need to break free of our cultural blinders and broaden our perspective on what it means to be accountable in other social contexts (Jordan). We also need a greater appreciation of the philosophical (O'Kelly), social (Yang), and cognitive (Dubnick and O'Brien) foundations of our own approaches to accountable governance.

There are no doubt many other (and more specific) lessons to be culled from the growing literature on accountability. While this volume offers a general survey of a wide range of research and writing on accountability, the fruits of the Kettering Symposium should be regarded only as a "sampler" that offers a taste of things to come. The effort of building a useful knowledge base continues.

## REFERENCES

- Castells, Manuel, and Gustavo Cardoso, eds. 2005. *The Network Society: From Knowledge to Policy*. Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations.
- Plato. 2006. *Symposium*. Fairfield, IA: World Library-Literary Society.