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Situating Accountability:
Seeking Salvation for the Core Concept of Modern Governance

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Introduction:

The obsessive and extensive attention given to "accountability" over the past several years has not been matched by sufficient attention to the concept's place and role in modern governance. Its undisciplined application in rhetorical, critical and analytic contexts has reduced the concept to a pointless and free-floating label that has lost its value as a meaningful term of art in the study of government and political life.

This paper is an effort to remedy that circumstance – to seek a form of "salvation" for the idea of accountability by engaging in an effort to "situate" the concept linguistically, functionally, historically and theoretically. The central and ultimate objective of this exercise is to (re)locate the concept in its proper form to its place within the political ontology of modern governance.

The ontological approach:

First, a comment about what I mean by "political ontology". In philosophy, ontology is a branch of metaphysics concerned with the study of being or the structure of reality. Despite empiricist, positivist and postmodernist challenges to the metaphysical foundations of classical (e.g., Platonic, Aristotelian) forms of ontology, it remains an important tool for studying different perceptions of how the universe (or at least different

parts of it) is "ordered",[1] and has even found its way into the computer sciences as a means for solving problems of incommensurability and advancing the development of artificial intelligence (Guarino 1995; Gruber 1995). Among students of political thought it has reemerged as a way comprehending the underlying content and logic of theoretical constructs from general paradigms (e.g., (Almond and Genco 1977)) to the work of particular theorists (e.g., (Pettit 2005; White 1999)).[2]

The present effort is guided by an ontological methodology[3] associated with the work of Michel Foucault and others who have stressed the need to apply the approach as a combination of *both* history and archeology. Foucault is perhaps best known for his archeological studies of madness (Foucault 1973) and punishment (Foucault 1977) in which he situates the development and transformation of those modern social forms of control. Many others[4] have adopted this approach which Foucauldians posit as an alternative to the more ahistorical analytic perspectives (Ophir 2001).

Ian Hacking has made significant use of the Foucauldian approach, especially in his work on various mental health issues (Hacking 1991b, 1994, 1992, 1991a). Methodologically he refers to his particular approach as "historical ontology"[5] and has stressed what he has called the "Lockean imperative" to develop an understanding of an important concept by elaborating on its situatedness and origins(Hacking 1990). More specifically, involves engaging in the Foucauldian exercise of conducting a "history of the present" for the concept accountability, and in that sense my reference point will be a meaningful sense of accountability as historically situated in contemporary governance.[6]

[1] Mainly thanks to the work of W.V. Quine; see (Quine 1951; Quine 1948/1949). Also (Smith 2004).
[2] Although not explicitly ontological, a related effort is found in (Crawford and Ostrom 1995).
[3] For a critical overview of what constitutes ontological methodology from the view of computer and information sciences, see (Poli 2002).
[4] Of special note in regard to the issue of accountability is the work of Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller; see, for example, (Miller and O'Leary 1987; Miller 1990; Rose and Miller 1992; Miller 1994; Miller and O'Leary 1998; Rose 1998, 1999)
[5] To trace Hacking's views on methodology, see (Hacking 1979, 1990, 2004). His approach is not without its critics; see (Schmaus 1992; Agassi 2005).
[6] In that regard, I will make an explicit effort to avoid slipping into a genetic fallacy error by keeping the situated concept developed in section one as a constant reference point.

At the outset of this work I will be concerned with situating and differentiating accountability using a variety of approaches, eventually zeroing in on the concept's historical roots as a part of a political ontology of modern governance. It is not possible to appreciate the value of the concept without comprehending the extent to which it has been transformed and distorted out of its historical (ontological) context. Once located within its original context it is possible to consider how it is situated within a broader ontological (theoretical) setting, which in turn provides the foundation for understanding both the problems and prospects of contemporary effort to enhance accountable governance.

Situating Accountability:

Before we can posit a meaningful sense of accountability (or any other word) we must "site" it – that is, put it in a relevant context. This broad instruction does little more than confirm the premise that all concepts derive their significance from the meaningful "space" (e.g., in a sentence, in a proposition, in an argument, etc.) in which we analyze them. Simple enough on the surface, but the choice of context makes a substantial difference.[7]

There are three general traditions for situating a concept such as accountability: linguistic, functional and socio-historical (cf. (Mashaw 2006)). In the linguistic tradition, linguists have established the generic standard for this "siting" exercise through the application of three distinct relational dimensions; syntax (syntactics), semantics (semiotics) and pragmatics. Syntactics focuses on the relations among words and concepts within linguistic grammars (Geach 1970); semiotics stresses the meanings of words and concepts as the signifiers of the objects they represent or symbolize (Lewis 1970; Eco 1976); while pragmatics considers the relationship between terms and the situations of their use and users (Montague 1970; Stalnaker 1970).

[7] Perhaps the classic expression of this approach is found in the work of Kenneth Burke, e.g., (Burke 1969a, 1969b).

The functionalist tradition is primarily associated with the work of philosophers linked to the ordinary language philosophy movement grounded in the work of Wittgenstein, Austin, and Searle. Here the central perspective is reflected in the title of Austin's work: "How to do things with words" (Austin 1975).

Those following an socio-historical tradition favor siting the concept in terms of temporal spaces of various forms (Hacking 1990)or engage in anthropological sitings that attempt to locate the concepts in cultural or other frame-of-reference spaces ((Hodge and Kress 1988); also (Somers 1995)).

In the present effort I will draw from each of these traditions, focusing on accountability as *word*, *evocative*, *performative* and *concept*. An appreciation of the term and its place (or, more appropriately, *places*) in the political ontology of modern governance requires this first abstract step if we are to develop an analytically fruitful theory of accountability. My objective in making this preliminary distinction among the four forms of "accountability" is to set the stage for exploring the origins and development of the concept itself. In that sense this is admittedly a limited exercise that begs for further development, for each of the alternative uses of accountability (as word, evocative and performative) are significant in their own right.

Figure 1 illustrates the dimensions along which we differentiate the four situated forms of accountability. The vertical distinction is between accountability as a "signal" and a "sign". In its purist form, as signal is just that – a notation without inherent or implicit meaning; as a sign, however, it represents something meaningful (something "signified") that is external to its own form.[8] The horizontal aspect of the figure distinguishes between the term's status as either passive (i.e., a signal or sign that must be acted upon to generate meaning) or active (in the sense of being an inherently dynamic factor in shaping its meaning).[9]

[8] These distinctions general rely on the discussion of signifiers and signified in (Barthes 1968).
[9]For general overview of role of sign-signifier distinction in social theory, see (Rochberg-Halton 1982); also see (Taborsky 2001).

		Role in generating meaning: Passive	Active
Representation of notation:	Sign	WORD	CONCEPT
	Signal	EVOCATIVE	PERFORMATIVE

Figure 1
Forms of Accountability

Notationally, the relevant four forms of accountability-as-word, accountability-as-evocative, accountability-as-performative and accountability-as-concept are designated in this paper as Accountability$_w$ (A_w), Accountability$_I$ (A_E), Accountability$_P$ (A_P) and Accountability$_C$ (A_C) respectively.

Accountability-as-word:

In classic semiotics, a sign has two dimensions: the signifier and the signified (Barthes 1968). As with all signs, accountability is necessarily associated with something signified. In the distinction we rely on here, accountability$_w$ is a passive form of the term that is subject to use or application in a range of situations. What the signifier signifies will depend on the context or setting in which it is placed.

When faced with a passive form of a sign, it is commonplace for any search for meaning to use the dictionary as an authoritative starting point, and while we do the same here it is with the stress placed on the *limitations* of the lexiconic approach to "situating" accountability.

As a "word", accountability signifies most of what the *Oxford English Dictionary* attributes to it:

> The quality of being accountable; liability to give account of, and answer for, discharge of duties or conduct; responsibility, amenableness. = ACCOUNTABLENESS [= The quality or fact of being accountable or liable to give account and answer for conduct; responsibility, amenableness (*to* a person, *for* a thing).] (OED 1989)

Most notable about the passive nature of accountability$_W$ is its synonymic nature – its capacity to stand in for so many other terms. As noted below, this characteristic of A_W makes it an excellent tool for rhetoricians who can use the term as a stand-in for other words (e.g., responsibility, answerability, fidelity) either for stylistic variety or because of its facility to generate a desired affect in the target audience. Analytically, however, this synonymic quality creates a problematic ambiguity as to the meaning of accountability, or at least what differentiates from its rhetorical siblings. [10]

The "problematic" condition fostered by the ambiguity has been resolved by analysts in three ways. The first approach is to explicitly subordinate A_w to one of its synonymic siblings, a step most often taken presumptively and to good analytic effect by Mark Bovens in his classic exposition of the role of responsibility in governance(Bovens 1998). At the other extreme is my own effort to establish A_w as taxonomic term that encompasses its siblings (including responsibility, liability, fidelity, answerability, etc.) as species of the genotype (Dubnick 1998). A third, and most common, approach is to preemptively (by definition) equate A_w with one of its stronger siblings and to proceed with the analysis without concern with the implications of that choice. The most frequent instances of this approach are related to studies of control (e.g. (Gruder 1987)) and answerability (e.g. (Tetlock 1985)).

The issue highlighted by all these synonymic approaches to dealing with A_w is the obvious one: as a signifier A_w relies on its family resemblances for its meaning and is thus necessarily contingent whether subordinated to a dominant sibling, dominant over a number of subordinated siblings, or tied to an equally powerful sibling. Sinclair has noted

[10] However, see (Hirsch 1975).

the term's chameleon-like character (Sinclair 1995), a feature that adds to its value as a rhetorical device but detracts from its value as a distinct feature of social or political life to be analyzed.[11]

Accountability$_W$ also has indexical qualities that are more closely related to its usefulness in rhetorical exchanges. Overtime, accountability has become closely identified with several highly desirable conditions for modern governance. For example, it is common place for accountability to be regarded as a "necessary condition" for democracy – that is, any claim to democratic-ness for an institutional arrangement must include some mechanism for accountability either in the form of answerability (e.g., through elections) or control (e.g., through a form of checks and balances). Similarly, contemporary efforts to develop institutional mechanisms for achieving "justice" have been tied directly to the creation of accountability mechanisms, as have reforms aimed at assuring both ethical behavior and effective performance on the part of public officials. These are the widely accepted "promises of accountability" that have made accountability$_W$ synonymous with international standards of "good governance" (Doornbos 2001).

As these associations rooted in promises have taken hold, A_w has become increasingly "indexical" in the semiotic sense, i.e. as *indicative* of some other focal concept. Thus, just as "smoke" stands as an index (indicative) of the presence of fire, A_w is taken to indicate the existence of democracy -- or justice, or ethical behavior, or effective performance. Of course, any index can prove problematic; the presence of smoke may be a false signal since its presence can just as easily indicate steam generated by a heat source or the misidentification of thick fog for smoke. The problem of using A_w can be more fundamental since the basic assumptions associating accountability with democracy, justice, etc. have yet to be theoretically or empirically established (e.g., (Dubnick 2005, 2003)).

[11] A more appropriate characterization might be to label it "tofu"-like since it is less likely to visually disappear into the background and more likely to take on the feel and consistency of its familial context.

To a considerable degree, the indexicality of accountability$_W$ implies that the word itself has started to emerge as a meaningful symbol of political action and reform. Among students of semiotics, this symbolic status is associated with *iconicity* – that is, using the images provoked by the term itself to give some meaning or coherence to actions and activities that might otherwise seem ambiguous, disparate or unconnected.

Consider, for example, the decision of David Walker, the Comptroller General of the United States, to seek a change in the title of his agency from the General Accounting Office to the Government Accountability Office. Formalized in legislation passed in 2004, Walker's explanatory memorandum (Walker 2004) noted that this step was an effort to bring the congressional agency's title in line with the reality of its tasks and functions. He admitted as well that the move was intended to rid the organization of its unexciting "accounting" image among the press and general public.[12]

The iconic value of A_w is also evident the proliferation of public bills having the term "accountability" in their titles. A total of 56 such bills were placed in the congressional hoppers during the 107th Congress (2001-2002), 92 in the 108th (2003-2004), and 96 in the 109th. The range of subjects to which the term is attached runs from the "Saudi Arabia Accountability Act of 2006" and the "Corporate Accountability Tax Gap Act of 2005" to the "Self Sufficiency and Accountability Act of 2002" and "Country of Origin Healthcare Accountability Act of 2004".[13] The increasing frequency of such titles, however, is not often reflected in the content of the legislation. Examining a random selection of these bills shows that the only mention of accountability within the proposals is self-referential, e.g. making reference to the title itself. In one bill associated with educational assessment, the major purpose of the proposal seemed to be having all references in the current statutes to assessment replaced with the term accountability.

[12] In that memo, which was also published as an OpEd piece in some media outlets, Walker took umbrage at a recent *Washington Post* Crossword Puzzle clue that sought a three word for "GAO employee" – seeking the response "CPA".

[13] This analysis was conducted using the information posted at "Thomas", the official site of the Library of Congress; http://thomas.loc.gov/home/bills_res.html.

The cache of adding A_w to agency names, legislation and the like may serve an important political purpose, but it draws down the value of relying on the term as a meaningful concept of governance. Rather than being a "term of art" for students of governance, accountability$_w$ is used today more often as a term of rhetoric – one applied to haphazardly and without reflection. The analytic challenges posed by the synonymic, indexical and iconic qualities of accountability$_w$ are in evidence whenever scholars attempt to get a useful handle on the term. And the problem is magnified by the term's increasing use as both an evocative and performative.

Accountability-as-evocative:

The success of accountability$_w$ as an icon is complemented and enhanced by its emergence as a functional term capable of evoking a response tied to emotions rather than meaning. Here I am using the term "evocative" to describe a passive "signal" that stands free of any particular signified something, and yet can be counted on to generate and *affective* response (positive or negative) once put into play in the political arena.

An evocative is, like a performative (see below), a form of "speech act" in the functionalist sense described by Austin, Searle and others(Austin 1975; Searle 1962; Grice 1969; Searle 1969). Speech acts are meaningful not in the lexiconical or conceptual sense, but rather as drivers of actions through the reactions and responses they provoke. Following the approach initially developed by Austin, speech acts are characterized as locutionary (the act of saying something – or "uttering"), illocutionary (intentionally acting through the utterance – e.g., promising, warning, etc.) and perlocutionary (acting through the utterance without necessarily intending to do so). For present purposes, accountability$_E$ (A_E) focuses on the perlocutionary form of accountability while accountability$_P$ (A_P) relates to it illocutionary form.

In its evocative form, the affective impact of accountability is dependent on how the utterance of the term is understood or interpreted in the cultural context in which it is uttered. Within a context defined by hierarchical relationships, accountability evokes a

sense that one has an obligation to answer to those higher up the organizational chain of command. In a legal context, it is an affective sense of liability and guilt-avoidance that can take hold; while in a culture that emphasizes solidary and strong community ties, accountability evokes a "feeling" associated with the maintenance of fidelity.

While the relevance of the emotions and evocative feelings in governance and human judgment is getting increasing attention (Krausz 2004; Pawson 2002; Moldoveanu and Nohria 2002; Hoggett and Thompson 2002; Thompson and Hoggett 2001; Nussbaum 2001), the evocative dimension of accountability has yet to receive the attention it warrants among scholars. A framework for examining "blame cultures" was put forward by this author (Dubnick 1998; Dubnick 1996), and more recently the cultural factor related to shame and accountability in Asian nations was explored by Velayutham and Perera (Velayutham and Perera 2004). In addition, linkages between accountability$_E$ and emotions such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, etc. are implied in the work of a number of philosophers and ethicists (Morris 1971, 1981, 1988; Greenspan 1994; Gilbert 1997; Deigh 1999; Murphy 1999), social psychologists (Lewis 1971; Tetlock 1983b; Tangney 1991; Lewis 1995; Tangney et al. 1996; Keltner and Buswell 1997), sociologists(Scheff 2003, 2000, 1988), criminologists (Braithwaite 1993, 1989) and ethnographers (Goffman 1959, 1963; Howell 1997; Reddy 1997).

The analytic relevance of A_E is significant if we wish to understand both the problems plaguing existing accountability systems and the potential for improving or designing more effective accountability mechanisms. If, as is argued below, the goal of contemporary accountability reform in governance is to enhance the capacity and commitment of human agents to be held to account, then fostering an emotional attachment (positive or negative) to the evocation of accountability is important. Understanding the cultural and psychological dimensions of that attachment is thus crucial in the assessment of reform failure as well as the task of reform design.

<u>Accountability-as-performative</u>:

As noted above, among those who take a functionalist approach to the philosophy of language, a performative is an utterance that is intended to elicit a change in the behavior of others or to shape the situation to which it is spoken. The word itself – by itself or in combination with other utterances -- is therefore seen as an intentional act in what it accomplishes or seeks to accomplish.

For example, a simple request such as "Pass the salt, please" is a locutionary act in the sense of having been uttered, but the words are an illocutionary act as well by the way they shape or reshape the situation and the relationships within the setting. A request has been made, which is the performative act of the utterance, and the circumstances that existed before that request have changed as a result. More famously, to describe a performative, Austin uses the examples of the words "I do!" or "I now pronounce you man and wife!" uttered in the context of an official marriage ceremony.

Viewed in this way, accountability$_P$ possesses more than the affective quality of A_E that might be triggered by someone puts it to use. Rather, the utterance of A_P within some situations is an act that reconstitutes the situation. For example, the term is often used in situations where one party seeks information from another party – a journalist wants to know about how much money was spent on a campaign or a parent wants to find out where a child was the night before. The utterances used to make these requests can take a variety of forms, and each form constitutes the relationship (between journalist and politician, between parent and child) in a different way and can therefore generate different types of reactions and responses. The utterance that includes a form of A_P will stand as a distinct act from other options. The journalist, for instance, can approach politician X and demand "Let me see your campaign spending records!" and perhaps back up the request with a threatening look. Or, the journalist might take a different tact by publishing a story or editorial noting that "democratic accountability demands that politicians like X release information to the press" about her campaign spending. Similarly, parents can make their request to know of a child's whereabouts by threatening punishment for not doing so or by noting that convincing her that as a minor in their

charge she owes them an account of last night's activities. While the result of either performance might be the same (or not), the use of A_P makes it a different act.

While the distinction between A_P and A_E may seem ambiguous on the surface, the key to differentiating the two is their respective relationship to the cultural context in which they operate, for while $accountability_E$ reflects the cultural context, $accountability_P$ helps construct it.

There is perhaps no better case study example of A_P on a grand scale than Herbert Kaufman's classic study of the U.S. Forest Service, The Forest Ranger (Kaufman 1967). The various means established by the Service to maintain their coordination of a Ranger force scattered throughout the country – from training and reporting, to inspections and audits, to recruitment and retention policies – are more than merely accountability "mechanisms"; they are accountability performatives that continuously constitute and reconstitute the relationship between and among the various agents that comprise the Forest Service.

Understanding accountability from an A_P perspective brings to the fore the tools used by Foucauldian analysts, particularly the approach of "governmentality" that became central to Foucault's later work (Barry et al. 1996; Burchell et al. 1991; Inda 2005; Lemke 2001; Marinetto 2003; Rose 2000; Rose 1998, 1999). Under this performative notion of accountability, the various acts we perform are not in response to some external force attempting to control or direct us to do X or Y; instead, A_P is manifest in the way we define ourselves and carry out our commitments, obligations, duties, etc. as we believe them to be. We constitute ourselves as governable and self-governing agents, and in that regard knowledge about A_P provides us with insight into the role that accountability plays in the political ontology of modern governance.

Accountability-as-concept:

In setting the stage for discussing an analytically useful concept of accountability (A_C), I have highlighted both the shortcomings of relying on linguistic and functional sitings accountability. Situating A_C requires the additional step of exploring the historical development of modern governance which, I will argue, situates accountability at its appropriate ontological core.

The traditional historiography of the modern state – and for many, modern governance -- dates their emergence to the 16th century. But the roots of modern governance can be more distant, for the emergence of the modern western legal system can be traced back to major changes in the last half of the 11th century when the Holy Roman Empire started to give way to the papal state; the resulting political tumult created openings for new relationships within existing political systems (Berman 1977, 1983a, 1983b). The context provided fertile soil for planting the seeds of modern governance in its many forms.

It was within this context that the Normans conquered both Sicily and Britain, and in both cases the warrior cousins attempted to consolidate their kingships through force of arms and the development of alliances. In England, William the Conqueror's difficulties were magnified by the fact the throne he assumed in 1066 was constructed on a system where considerable power had rested with the local lords, and his first two decades as the king of England were spent establishing the crown's ecclesiastic[14] and secular authority.

Questions about how he did this have generated heated controversy among modern historians. While some have argued that the conquest led to a "revolution" in governance as Norman feudalism completely displaced established Anglo-Saxon arrangements, others point to evidence that Anglo-Norman governance was a continuation of local traditions with new occupants filling in well established roles and relationships. More likely is a narrative stressing the "mixed" nature of Norman rule as William adapted to the recalcitrance and demands of locals, the claims of his Norman supporters, and the

[14] William had papal backing for his claim to the English throne in exchange for a promise that he wrest control of ecclesiastic estates from local lords. After doing so, however, he effectively asserted his own control in this realm in the face of papal claims.

constant threat of invasion from the Danes and others (Daniell 2003; Douglas 1939, 1964; Hollister 1961, 1968; Richardson and Sayles 1963).

What is less controversial is that by 1085-1086 William I was in a position to assert his all- inclusive claim to the English *realm*.[15] It is important to focus on the nature of that claim, for it involves more than possessing the throne and the right to demand deference from those situated immediately below him in some hierarchical relationship (who, in turn, could claim sole authority over their subordinates, and so on). Rather, asserting authority over the realm extended the king's reach to all corners of England and rendered *all* intermediaries formally beholden to the crown. In this context, William's commissioning of the all-encompassing Domesday census of the realm was a brilliant assertion of his authority, for in making the material content of the realm *legible* he rendered it governable (see (Scott 1998)).[16] He 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 surveys (now compiled as the Domesday Books) were not intended (as often assumed) as assessments of property holdings for revenue raising purposes (Hoyt 1950); rather, they involved an unprecedented census of the realm (defined as the king's property holdings – which was, in fact, everything in the realm) that is widely cited as a critical factor in the enduring power of central authority in Britain. The conduct of the survey sent a message to all William's subjects that the conquest was complete and a new ruling order was in place. Completed in an amazingly short time (one year), it relied on centrally-determined units of measure and jurisdictional reconfigurations that best suited the survey task rather than

[15] For an analysis in sharp contrast to the one presented here, see (Richardson and Sayles 1963), esp. pp. 27ff..

[16] Scott's analysis follows the more traditional periodization that would locate the roots of modern governance in the creation of the legibility fostered by the organization of the modern state. In that regard, his view is in sync with Peter Miller's views about the creation of the governable individual fostered by making life calculable. (Miller and O'Leary 1987; Scott 1998) My position is that rendering individuals and their lives "legible" does not require that also be calculable. The Domesday census is an example, for it was not systematic or consistent in any respect, nor was it intended to be so. For William's purposes, it was sufficient that the census demonstrated his capacity to perform it.

existing arrangements.[17] Thus, not only were property holders required to "render a count" of what they possessed of the sovereign's realm, but they were to do so in the terms set by the king's agents. Medieval historians have rightly been in awe of what the Domesday Books represent.[18]

Beyond the Domesday surveys themselves, William took an additional and complementary step in 1086 when, after traveling about his kingdom as the survey was being conducted, he came "…to Salisbury at Lammas, and there his councillors [sic] came to him, and all the people occupying land who were of any account over all England whosoever's vassals they might be; and they all submitted to him, and swore oaths of allegiance to him that they would be faithful to him and against all other men."[19] These actions, notes medievalist David Douglas "were exceptional in their nature, and of high importance."[20] What it involved was the performative enactment of a governance system through the creation of a moral community based on sworn oaths of obedience – a governance relationship that simultaneously (and brilliantly) enveloped and preempted local and traditional governance arrangements.

And so was born the concept of accountability in governance, for although the English word itself would not appear in print until the late 14th century (and gain frequency in the 1600s), Salisbury represented the first modern enactment of accountability as a foundation for governance. William I effectively asserted a claim to sovereignty over all holdings in the conquered realm. Thus, in addition to having literally conquered them by force of arms, William was now establishing a direct moral relationship between the crown and its subjects based on the fact that (1) he now knew (to the extent then possible) what was his (i.e., everything in "realm" was now accounted for through the census) and

[17] While the standards and units used may have been centrally determined, they were not necessarily uniformly applied. Historians note the wide discrepancies in the details among different jurisdictions found in the Books.

[18] "As an administrative achievement," noted F. Stenton, "it has no parallel in medieval history." Still another authority (V.H. Galbraith) regards it as "marking an epoch in the use of the written word in government." Both quotes are cited in (Douglas 1964), p. 354. Also see (Hoyt 1950; Hollister 1961). However, see (Richardson and Sayles 1963), esp. chapter 2..

[19](Douglas 1964), p. 355, quoting from chroniclers of the time.

[20](Douglas 1964), pp 355-356. These comments from a historian noted for his restraint in attributing too much to what William actually accomplished.

(2) that he had established their sworn obligation to give him an accounting of all that to which he could possibly lay claim (again, meaning everything within the realm). What was theirs was his, and they were beholden to him for the use of all that was his.

What is notable about this historical development is the shift it represented in the political ontology of governance, at least in Anglo-Norman England. *It effectively represents the first clear acknowledgment by a secular ruler of the existence of a form of autonomous agency among those being governed.* In seeking the oath of fidelity from all those who inhabit the realm, William was in effect acknowledging the capacity of his supplicants to take actions averse to his desires and interests while at the same time recognizing their fitness to be held responsible and answerable for their actions. By creating a moral obligation among these agents, William was creating a governable population tied to their capacity to give an account of their actions when called upon to do so. Thus the British version of modern governance was born, and at its core was accountability$_C$.

The meaning of accountability$_C$ derived from this historical siting of the idea is obviously (and intentionally) much narrower than the more general derivations culled from a review of accountability$_W$. Rather than an expansive association with its synonymic siblings such as control, answerability, liability, responsibility, etc., A$_C$ is regarded as ***a form of governance rooted in discretion provided an agent who is capable and willing to adhere to a moral obligation to be called to account for her or his actions as they relate to a principal's claim on those actions.***

It is important to stress at this point how this historical *conceptualization* of accountability relates to the other forms discussed thus far.

1. Viewed in this light, accountability$_C$ emerges as a distinct term of art in contrast to its synonymic (A$_W$) competitors which, when situated within the context of governance, stand as mere derivatives or aspects of A$_C$ (see (Dubnick 1998)).
    a. For example, there are indeed some aspects of answerability implied in this conceptualization, for the agent must adhere to a moral obligation to

give an account. But A_C requires more of both the agent (who must exercise discretion) and the principal (who must provide such).

   b. Similarly, the grant of discretion given the agent implies responsibility, but requires that the agent be obligated to answer for his or her actions.
   c. In the same fashion, other forms of A_W (e.g., fidelity, responsiveness, liability) can be read into this conceptualization, but none arises to complete the picture of A_C by itself.

2. As a characteristic of a generic and inclusive conception of modern governance that can encompass monarchial and other (e.g., totalitarian) forms as well as democracies of all varieties, A_C is also free of any specific or arbitrary indexical association (characteristic of A_W) with particular outcomes such a justice, ethics, bureaucratic performance or democracy.
3. It follows that the cache associated with the iconic application of A_W is minimal when the more restrictive A_C is used.
4. To the extent that the evocative and performative forms of accountability are derived from the ambiguities produced by A_W, both will merely serve to reinforce the resulting distortions for analysts of accountable governance.
5. However, there is a symbiotic relationship between A_C and those functional (evocative and performative) forms that reflect and enhance the role that accountability$_C$ – as the "capacity of a governable agent to give an account" -- plays in governance arrangements.
   a. As reflected in the role that a "moral community" plays in accountable governance, that "capacity" depends on the existence of an appropriate cultural context (A_E) that can foster (or undermine) its strength or effectiveness as a determinant or regulator of the agent's actions.
   b. Similarly, the performative mechanisms (A_P) in place can have a positive or negative impact on that capacity.

Of course, situating A_C by noting its historical roots is only an initial step if we are to appreciate and understand its place in our current political ontology. It is also necessary

to establish the historical credentials of the concept's role in modern governance and to place it within an ontological tradition of political thought.

Tracking the Historical Concept:

If, as the previous argument attempts to establish, the roots of accountability$_C$ are found in events that took place more than nine centuries ago, then tracking the historical development of the concept poses a formidable challenge. At best we can only initiate that project here with a superficial and somewhat spotty exploration of how the seeds planted by William at Salisbury grew into institutionalized forms that sustained the notion of accountable governance.

The historical development of A_C from its Anglo-Norman roots highlights both its parochial nature and its emergence on the global stage in recent years. Other, competing forms of modern governance also took root as the modern state began to emerge. But it is the British track that carried the form based on accountability$_C$.

During his relatively short reign, William I's son and successor, William Rufus, sustained his father's rule as much through coercion as through the sworn oaths of his subjects. Upon assuming the throne in 1100, Henry I demonstrated a greater appreciation of what took place in 1086 and relied more on the Conqueror's approach. He established a realm-wide administrative system[21] where centralized auditing and semiannual account-giving mechanisms took the place of armed force. By the 1130s, this had developed into a highly centralized "administrative kingship" ((Hollister and Baldwin 1978), pp. 868-891) steeped in governance through mechanisms that resemble those of the modern state. The reign of Henry I's successor, Stephen, was notable as years of increasing chaos resulting from his weak rule in the face of church-related disputes. When Henry II succeeded to the throne in 1154, however, he was able to structure a system that left much authority in local hands, but tied them firmly to the center through even stronger forms of institutionalized accountability.

[21] Which include the duchy of Normandy as well as Britain.

It is important to highlight the administrative accomplishments during this period, for accountable governance has less to do with making laws and policies than in conducting government business and sustaining the rule of law. Historian A. L. Poole notes that the period from the Conquest to the Magna Carta was not one known for legislative advances. The Norman kings and their Angevin successors professed to rule by the laws and customs in place at the time of the Conquest. "Yet, notwithstanding the apparent lack of what may be properly called legislation," Poole argues, "no period of English history has witnessed more far-reaching changes or marked a more steady growth in the sphere of administration of justice than the twelfth century." He goes so far as to claim that this period generated "nothing short of a revolution" in this important aspect of governance. ((Poole 1993), pp. 385-386) Building on the foundations of A_C and the effective use of juries and writs to deal with disputes, the period witnessed the development of a range of administrative offices – from sheriff to exchequer to coroner to bailiff ((Poole 1993), pp. 387-392) – that institutionalized, sustained and nurtured the legitimacy of accountable governance until critical disputes surrounding the action of King John led to the articulation of existing laws and customs in the form of the Magna Carta in 1215. Seen in this light, that document was an explicit articulation of the political relationships institutionalized during the twelfth century under the long reigns of Henry I and Henry II. The capacity of governable agents (the royal "subjects") was no longer to be merely assumed, but rather it was to be accepted as a formal foundation for governance.(Holt 1992; Poole 1993; Daniell 2003)

Historian James Given provides additional insight into the operations of this institutionalized form of accountable governance under British rule 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, and thus allows us to appreciate how A_C-based governance differed from emerging alternatives. The French took a "minimalist" approach by

establishing "a loose hegemony over the local community."[22] The locals in Languedoc, although conquered, retained responsibility for much of their own governance, but in contrast to the British approach little was done to link the governance of Languedoc to the emerging French state. 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 I and his successors who most often used it to enhance the legitimacy of the royal court. "Although in certain respects, no state was more completely feudal," noted Marc Bloch about the Anglo-Norman regime, "the feudalism was of such a kind as ultimately to enhance the prestige of the crown." Building on the foundations laid by his grandfather, Henry II was especially

[22] The French approach would radically change by the 1700s, a point made by Tocqueville in a commentary on French governance in *Democracy in America*. "The taste for centralization and the mania for regulations date back in France to the time when lawyers came into government," noted Tocqueville. He quotes a French royal historian who addressed Louis XVI on the matter by recalling that in the past:

> "[e]ach body and each community of citizens retained the right to administer its own affairs, a right which we do not assert to be part of the primitive constitution of the kingdom, for it dates back further; it is a right of nature and of reason. Nevertheless, it has been taken away from your subjects, sire, and we are not afraid to say that in this respect the administration has fallen into childish excesses.
>
> "Ever since the powerful ministers have made it a political principle not to allow a national assembly to be convoked, precedent has followed precedent until it has come about that the deliberation of villagers may be declared null, if they have not been authorized by the Intendant. As a result, if that community has to make some expenditure, it has to get the approval of the Intendant's subdeputy, and consequently follow the plan he adopts, employ the workmen he favors, and pay them as he indicates. . . . Such, sire, are the means by which men have striven to stifle all municipal spirit in France and to extinguish, if possible, even the citizens' feelings; the whole nation has, so to say, been declared incompetent and provided with guardians." ((de Tocqueville 1969), pp. 723-724)

adept at structuring a system that left much authority in local hands, but tied them firmly to the center through a strong system of account giving. "The powerful kingship of the [Norman] conquerors had not destroyed all other powers; but it had forced them to act, even when in opposition to it, only within the framework of the State" ((Bloch 1961), p. 430-431).

The distinctive political ontology of English accountable governance survived the revolutionary shifts from monarchial to parliamentary and popular sovereignty in part because the ontology of accountable governance was suitable to both (cf. (Bendix 1978)). Furthermore, its idiosyncratic form might have remained confined to the British Isles were it not for the reach of Britain across the Atlantic and elsewhere.[23] The colonial governance of North America is an obvious example, and we gain considerable insight into the resulting adaptations in the works of Tocqueville and other commentators (de Tocqueville 1969; Bryce 1959). An argument can also be made that the British reliance on "indirect rule"[24] approaches to colonial governance in the Asian subcontinent (Stokes 1973; Scott 1995)and Africa (Killingray 1986; Blanton et al. 2001; Joireman 2001)is a direct manifestation of the primacy of A_C in the UK political ontology.

As the forces of British (and American) colonialism resulted in the extension of the A_C model during the 19th and 20th centuries, it is the economic hegemony of the Anglo-American systems in an age of globalization that is leading to its adoption as the undisputed form of modern governance. Globalization, whether through trade or the financial ties or culture, is permeating the governance structures of nations that had to some degree retained a governance ontology distinct from the A_C form.[25] This has most directly happen through reforms, including:

- major market-friendly legal reforms in China (Tenev et al. 2002),

[23] Cf (Simms 1999).
[24] The British colonial model stood in stark contrast to the direct (and often catastrophic) rule applied by the Germans, Belgians and Dutch. See (Emerson 1960); cf (Kiwanuka 1970). For a description of how the British form of "indirect rule" differed from the French, see (Crowder 1964).
[25] An alternative view is that what is emerging is a "new world order", implying that a new form of governance is developing as a result of globalization; see (Sending and Neumann 2006; Slaughter 2004). If this was the case three would be a good deal more reform taking place in the Anglo-American systems that seem to be the drivers of the global economic trends.

- the widespread use of "conditionalities" by the World Bank and IMF to mandate "good governance" practices in recipient nations (Tsai 2000),
- major changes in the regulatory regimes of nations must deal with NGOs and a variety of other transnational entities (Senarclens 1998; Koehn and Rosenau 2002),
- the widespread Americanization (and Anglicization) of private, corporate and public law (Shapiro 1993-1994);
- and many more….

These developments are reflected in the growing salience of accountability in practice as well as rhetoric. As I noted in an earlier work on the concept of accountability (Dubnick 1998), the unique (and very Anglican) nature of the concept has been most evident in the fact that the term was typical translated into some variation of "responsibility" – and thereby certainly losing the essence of A_C in the translation (Evans 2004). This problem is being confronted in a number a ways, including the formal adoption of accountability as a technical term among members of a country's legal profession (e.g., Brazil) or the adoption of English as the working language of those who deal with matters of international trade.

While these efforts highlight the current and growing salience A_C on the world scene, it is also evident that the concept's meaningfulness and the weight of its ontological anchor are less central to the expansive use of the term (Mulgan 2000).

Theoretical foundations:

Which leads to a final objective in this "siting" project, and that is to locate A_C within an explicit political ontology directly tied to a theory of governance.

W.V. Quine posited a simple definition of general ontology: it is an elaboration of "what there is" – and for Quine that meant it was therefore about "everything" (Quine 1948/1949). Applying that sweeping view to the political realm, a political ontology

would attempt to elaborate "what there is" politically – that is, all those factors and thing that are included in our view of the political world. Patchen Markell defines it as "an implicit or explicit interpretation of the fundamental conditions of life in the social and political world, the kinds of things that exist there, and the range of possibilities that it bears" ((Markell 2006), p. 29). To be useful of course, we must set parameters around the political "object" we wish to focus on. For students of political thought, for example, the work of a specific theorist or school of thought might be the subject of an ontological analysis as one explores the theorist's (or school's) presuppositions "of the relationships and structure in virtue of which individuals in a polity constitute a people, a nation, and a state" (Pettit 2005). For those interested in paradigms or political world views, a political ontology might include those symbols, analogies, metaphors, etc. that might be found in common political discourse (e.g., (Lakoff 1996)).

The task we face is determining the appropriate political ontology within which to find (or, more prescriptively, to place) accountability$_C$. The problems we have faced in trying to capture a meaningful and analytically useful conceptualization of accountability can be traced to the existence of several competing political ontologies, each capable of highlighting different forms of accountability. In the current literature on governance, there seem be several powerful political ontologies vying for attention.

Political ontologies of answerability and responsiveness are much in favor. In the context they establish, whether hierarchical or electoral, account giving plays a major role in fostering actively responsive behavior. What is required and expected of the accountable individual is the ability to report in a responsive way – through either justifications or excuses or explanations -- to some audience. The influence of this ontology in defining and directing public discourse about accountability is substantial, and it has shaped studies of accountability at both the macro and micro levels.

As a case in point, with one notable exception (which will be discussed below), a recent volume of essays devoted to "public accountability" (Dowdle 2006) reflected an obsessive focus on answerability and responsiveness as the essence of accountability.

Among contributions to the collection, the one credible effort to "unpack" the subject and elaborate the concept (Mashaw 2006) did so by generating a taxonomy of "accountability regimes" which sorted regime types by six criteria that effectively begged the question of what defined accountability. Each of the six (*who* is giving the account, "*to whom*, *about what*, *through what processes*, *by what standards*, and *with what effect*") assumes that accountable governance is merely answerable and responsive. Lost in the process is the historical basis of accountability in responsibility tied to moral commitment.

The same is true of micro level studies of accountability conducted within this ontological frame. Philip Tetlock is one of the few social psychologists who have undertaken experimental work on accountability, and his findings have without question enhanced our knowledge of the conditions under which account giving behavior varies within small group situations (Tetlock 1983b, 1983a, 1985; Tetlock and Kim 1987; Tetlock and Boettger 1989; Lerner and Tetlock 1999). However, it is clear that what he and his colleagues address in their studies is the social psychology of "answerability" rather than the concept of accountability which is central to governance.

Alternatively, *political ontologies of management and control* have come dominate discussions of accountability among students of public administration. To be accountable in this context is to be subject to direction or influence by others. Much of the ambiguous logic of the New Public Management (Hood 1991, 1995; Lynn 1998a; Hood 2000; Lynn 1998b; Kettl 1997) is reflected in this ontological setting. In one major effort to develop and test an explicit political ontology of control, Christopher Hood and his colleagues (Hood et al. 2004) framed the alternative forms in terms of oversight, mutuality, competition, contrived randomness and a variety of hybrids derived from those types (Hood 2004b, 2004a). What is most important for the present argument is that each ontological variation within that typology relied on vague or selective forms of A_W (Cunningham and Harris 2001), and none provided a suitable context within which $accountability_C$ or some near variant can operate.

Political ontologies of transparency and performance operate under the general premise that knowledge and awareness of what occurs in and around government – from inputs to throughputs to outputs to outcomes – is critical to the development and maintenance of effective government operations. Attempts to specify the meaning of the core terms as well as the structure of these ontologies has proven difficult, with the result that situating of any form of accountability has proven problematic at best (Hood 2006a, 2006b; Heald 2006; Behn 2003).Transparency, for example, implies constant attention to account giving of the most mundane sort (e.g., reporting actions, responding to requests for information, answering queries seeking explanations for actions, etc.), with the result that accountability efforts often interfere with the very operations they are intended to enhance (O'Neill 2002, 2006). Taken to the extreme, transparency subjects the accountable individual to constant surveillance (Anechiarico and Jacobs 1994, 1996). The focus on performance, in contrast, seems to lack any firm theoretical or empirical connection with the various notions of accountability (Dubnick 2005).

Relatedly, the *political ontologies of liability and justice* have hosted a good deal of the recent discussions about accountability. Here the stress is as much on being held to account for wrong-doing (or possible wrong-doing) than it is on account giving (Bovens 1998). These ontologies, typically related to issues ethics or corporate responsibility, help define several works in the field (e.g., (Huber 1988; Lieberman 1981; Hart 1968)) and they are increasingly central to discussions about the role of accountability as part of regulatory regimes (Parker 2007; O'Brien 2007, 2006 (forthcoming); Braithwaite 2002).[26] At their core, however, is a narrow view of calling people to account for wrong-doing in a way that produces some form of either retributive or restorative justice (Braithwaite 2006; Borneman 2005; Elster 2004; Teitel 2000; Rotberg and Thompson 2000). In this sense, accountability is answerability with the threat of legal punishment attached.

The most promising theoretical contexts for accountability$_C$ are found among the *political ontologies of responsibility and obligation*. There exists a strong historical connection between A_C and these ontologies since accountable governance developed as a response

[26] Cf., (Makkai and Braithwaite 1994; Braithwaite and Makkai 1991; Braithwaite 1985, 1982)

to problems associated with the emergence of the king's "subjects" as an autonomous agents – a development that ultimately brought to the fore questions of how to foster responsibility and obligation in a secularized setting where subject were no longer "born governed". In response, ontologies based on oaths, covenants and contracts have framed the development of institutions and political theories, and in each some form of account giving relationship plays a role.[27]

Although developed and nurtured as a distinctive construct of governance within the conditions of late medieval Britain, A_C took its most clear theoretical form centuries later within the social contract theories of Hobbes and Locke, with each addressing the issues of responsibility and obligation in his own way (see (Hill 1995; Freeman 1990; Ripstein 1987)). In these theories the emphasis is on the status and role of the autonomous individual, and in that sense they provided an ontological setting that focused on the account giver rather than account giving.

It is that very *focus on the autonomous account giver* in the historical concept of accountability – on the agent with discretion "who is capable and willing to adhere to a moral obligation to be called to account for her or his actions" – that is missing in the alternative ontologies that currently dominate the discourse on accountable governance. And as a result the historical concept of accountability has itself gone missing from much of the discussion, being replaced by a focus on its more vacuous siblings.

There are exceptions, of course. Although not explicitly dealing with accountability, Henry S. Richardson's notable effort to solve the problem of fostering democracy within the American administrative state does integrate a strong version of A_C into his work (see (Richardson 2002), esp. chapter 16).

More directly, John Gardner of Oxford University has breathed new life and relevance into the Aristotelian view of responsibility as an aspect of governance, and in the process has made a distinction between accountability based on trust of a responsible agent and

[27] See (Höpfl and Thompson 1979) for a discussion of the contracturalist "motif" of the period.

the dominant form today which is rooted in a "culture of suspicion and accusation" (Gardner 2006).[28]

Another noteworthy theoretical context for A_C linked to the ontologies of responsibility and obligation is emerging in the work of political philosopher Philip Pettit whose "theory of freedom" is based on a view of "agency" that complements our historical concept. Central to Pettit's theory stands the free agent as a person deemed "fit to be held responsible" for his or her actions (Pettit 2001). Although Pettit scrupulously avoids any mention of the term accountability[29], he effectively (if not intentionally) establishes the foundations for radically transforming our view of what it means to be an accountable person within the sense of A_C. He does so by stressing the link between responsibility and freedom – a link that is lost within those political ontologies and theories that define the accountable individual as someone who is sunder constant scrutiny, manipulated through various forms of control, and constantly subject to the demands for transparency and pressures for performance.

Concluding observations:

The objective of this exercise was to re-establish a meaningful concept of accountability by situating it within a range of contexts (linguistic, functional, historical and theoretical) with the intent of better understanding both the problems of -- and prospects for -- improving modern governance. That effort yielded a conceptualization born of a conquering monarch's need to foster a sense of responsibility and obligation among the autonomous agents upon whom his rule depended. Strengthened and institutionalized by royal successors, transformed as a foundational premise for popular rule, and diffused through colonization and globalization, accountability remains at the heart of modern governance – or at least what aspires to be modern governance.

Much of what we regard as accountability today is based on control, answerability and other manifestations of distrust – or, in Gardner's terms, a "culture of suspicion and accusation" which, ironically, was what William intended to replace with his actions at

[28] Also see the comments of philosopher Onora O'Neill; (O'Neill 2006, 2002).

[29] To his credit in this case, for by avoiding its use as a synonym for responsibility he remained true to the logic of his argument throughout.

Salisbury. The desire to have a governance arrangement in which we can trust our autonomous agents to carry out their tasks responsibly and with a sense of moral obligation to account giving remains strong. Such a governance arrangement would still require reports and measures some degree of monitoring, but this "legibility" would serve as a means to establish and enhance the sense of responsibility rather than as a synoptic policing tool designed to catch assumed violators in the process of committing some sanctionable acts. Similarly, the threat of sanctions would be present, not as an active tool of management and oversight, but rather in the background as a reminder that, as autonomous agents, truly accountable individuals have a moral obligation to account for their actions.

Accountability$_C$ stands not as some relic of our past, but instead as an achievable ideal that underlies our expectations of elected officials, public sector employees and those who head public corporate and their entities. It is such a desire that drives most efforts at political, administrative and even corporate reform and change, but those attempts are increasingly distorted in design or implementation by the culture of distrust which pervades much of our efforts to deal with governance issues.

For those of us who study the accountable governance, this siting exercise can pay off in two ways. First, it offers a rationale for a research agenda to further our understanding of A_C and its role in modern governance. Historical, anthropological and empirical knowledge about the development and problematics of accountability$_C$ (as well as the cultures that foster or distort them) would serve to improve our capacity to inform, critique and advise today's efforts to enhance governance through changes in laws and practices offered as so-called accountability reforms. There are examples of contemporary cultures that do (or would) nurture A_C governance practices. H. George Frederickson's examination of the administrative implications of Confucian cultural settings serves a good example (Frederickson 2002), as do examinations of command responsibility in military organizations (Bantekas 1999; Feld 1959; Romzek and Ingraham 2000; Smidt 2000).

Second, with a firmer intellectual grasp of accountability$_C$, the concept can also serve as a standard against which to measure and assess reforms, policies and regulatory programs such as the Government Performance and Reporting Act and Sarbanes-Oxley. As the audit society expands itself into the accountable and regulated society (Power 1999; Scott 2000, 2003), the capacity to conduct such analyses becomes increasingly important, as does the value of some historically situated standard such as the one proposed here.

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