is now no forum where it routinely takes place. Party conferences, the site in the earlier (collectivist) era, have rightly long since lost this role. Contemporary society (and citizen identity) has become too differentiated and pluralised to be contained any longer within mass parties. But there has been no replacement of the mobilising and agenda setting functions to which the party organisations formerly made important contributions. As a result, there is a gap at the strategic end of the issue cycle. The public policy system is the poorer for this loss of capacity. But where could a public conversation about the radical changes in strategy and orientation that are advocated by these two books be located? How can the necessary (and protracted) sifting and filtering be engineered? I cannot see how the requirements for breadth of engagement and openness to politically unnerving possibilities can be contained within present executive structures. But that is another story.

In a nutshell, both these books mount a convincing case for paradigm shifts in public management. In their view, this is essential if public support for universal public services is to be sustained. On both social and political grounds, they argue that this move is urgent. They also propose a grammar and an idiom that is intended to shift debate to a new plane. Who can take the conversation forward?

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BOOK REVIEWS

Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?

Christopher Hood and David Heald (eds) (Oxford University Press for The British Academy, Oxford, 2006, ISBN 0197263836, 231 pp.)

The term 'transparency' has enjoyed a considerable vogue in recent years in both the public and private sectors as part of the new governance agenda. It is frequently bracketed with accountability and the absence of corruption as a force for good in keeping the powerful in line. Much current usage, however, is unreflective and ignorant of the concept's history, its various meanings and dimensions, and its potentially ambiguous value. A book-length treatment of the concept is therefore to be welcomed. The present volume, published under the auspices of The British Academy, is an edited collection of 13 chapters in which the two editors, Christopher Hood and David Heald, contribute two chapters each. The focus is largely on the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union but the issues raised will be of wider interest in Australia and elsewhere.

Christopher Hood opens with a typically clear and thoughtful discussion of the meaning and history of the concept. While transparency always entails a core meaning of openness to public scrutiny it also sometimes connotes other aspects of good governance, including government according to known rules and regulations (on the basis that government that is predictable is therefore knowable) and public deliberation (on the ground that the purpose of information is to stimulate debate and feedback). The value of transparency in government can be traced back at least to the 18th century where various enlightenment philosophers, such as Kant and Rousseau, linked government secrecy with corruption. In the English tradition, the main champion of transparency (and apparently the first to use the term in its government-related sense) was Jeremy Bentham. The deviser of the Panopticon held firmly to the principle that 'the more strictly we are watched, the better we behave', a principle that became embedded in the British tradition of progressive reform.

Hood also traces the development of 'open government' measures, such as modern freedom of information legislation, developed in the United States and then gradually adopted in most other democracies (with the UK a comparative latecomer). He also notes how moves for transparency have run counter to other recent trends, including a parallel concern for individual privacy, the managerialist emphasis on outsourcing (which has reduced the transparency of public services now masked under commercial confidence) and, most recently, new anti-terror legislation which has further reduced the transparency of security agencies.

David Heald provides a thorough taxonomy of different types of transparency, including the directions of transparency (upwards, downwards, inwards, outwards), the subjects of transparency (process, outputs, outcomes etc), the time-frame (in real time or after the event) and so on. He also contributes one of the contrasting chapters on the value of transparency, advancing the argument that it is primarily an instrumental value, useful for producing other desirable goods, such as effective government. Patrick Birkenshaw, on the other hand, makes the case for transparency as a human right, while Andrea Prat uses public choice and principal-agent theory to argue that the transparency of the agent's activities is generally (though not invariably) in the principal's interests. Onora O'Neill claims that administrative transparency, such as the Blair government's plethora of performance indicators, can easily become a matter of arcane and routinised reporting which does nothing to encourage genuine communication with the public or to engender public trust in government.

Alasdair Roberts questions the expectation that the new UK Freedom of Information (FOI) Act will introduce 'a new culture of openness'. Using evidence from other Anglo-American democracies with longer experience of FOI, particularly Canada, he shows how governments resist moves to greater transparency, partly through aggressive legal defence of the public-interest exemptions allowed in all FOI laws, and also through informal adjustment of record-keeping and other documentation in order to avoid disclosure of potentially embarrassing information. Such arguments clearly resonate with recent experience in Australia, particularly the Howard government's High Court defence of 'exclusive certificates' and of the right to suppress Treasury research that might undermine cherished government policies.

Other chapters explore more local issues (Andrew McDonald on FOI in the UK; James D. Savage on budgetary transparency in the Economic and Monetary Union; David Stasavage on the European Council of Ministers). The impact and implications of new information technology are discussed by L. Jean Camp and Helen Margetts. Christopher Hood adds a final, concluding chapter. He looks again at the question why 'transparency' should have become so popular at this time and canvasses various options, including pressure from vested interests in the policy process, cultural change to a more open society, and the effects of information technology and the internet. He finds no explanation fully convincing, and points to opposing trends towards privacy and outsourcing. He notes that many contributors have been

generally sceptical of the effects of FOI legislation, particularly in view of the extravagant rhetoric that has usually accompanied it. No one, however, claims that FOI has been totally valueless.

Transparency is not an unqualified good. Excessive transparency certainly compromises other important values, including privacy and the need for confidentiality in conducting sensitive negotiations. For the most part, however, the counter arguments have been used by self-serving politicians and officials to protect their own power. A more transparent government system remains the goal of democratic reformers committed to genuine public deliberation but no one is holding their breath.

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Government Communication in Australia

Sally Young (ed)(Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2007, ISBN 9780521681711, 347 pp.)

Stressing the importance of meaningful dialogue between citizens and their governments as a measuring stick for the health of democracy, Sally Young brings together 16 essays in her edited volume *Government Communication in Australia*. Young has assembled contributions from fellow academics and various practitioners – such as journalists, press secretaries, speech writers, government officials, or individuals in the field of public relations – to describe the current state of interaction 'between government and citizens, government and the media, and media and citizens' (xxxii). For international readers exploring the book from a comparative perspective, such as myself, Young writes a concise introductory chapter explaining the history of governmental communication in Australia citing major events such as the first television broadcast, the internet becoming widely available, and the birth of digital broadcasting. Further, she explains unique traits of Australian government and politics that can influence government communication such as compulsory voting, the mindset of political reporting, and the concentrated nature of media ownership.

The book, divided into five sections with approximately three chapters per section, begins by examining the political, legal, and economic context of governmental communication. This is followed by a detailed examination of how the media reports on government, along with the potential influence government exerts to shape its image. Section 3 looks closely at the role that spin-doctors, speechwriters, and public relations consultants play in attempting to shape public opinion. The following section focuses specifically on how government directly utilises communication when they have complete control over the message being delivered. The book closes with a critical examination of interactions between citizens, governments, and non-governmental organisations.

The organisation of the book provides for more breadth than scope, which is appropriate given the relatively underdeveloped nature of political communication research specific to Australia. Future research could be developed on nearly all chapters throughout the volume to compile a more complete, detailed picture of the state of government communication in Australia. Young, herself, acknowledges the potential drawbacks of limiting the book to mostly federal-level, executive branch examples (xxi). However, one aspect of communication between citizens and governments that appears to be underrepresented is the interaction between citizens and public servants in bureaucratic settings. While Brian Head's chapter touches on the subject, the assumption that many individuals will ultimately shape their opinion of government on encounters they have with public servants would naturally call for more attention to be given to this particular topic.

The book would prove to be useful to students of both political science/government and communication studies at the undergraduate or graduate level. The volume is edited in a comprehensive manner with each chapter standing on its own merits as valuable pieces of academe – a difficult feat to accomplish given