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Book Reviews

Christopher Hood and David Heald (eds) (2006)

Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?

Oxford: Oxford University Press, ISBN 978-0-19-726383-9 (hbk), £35.00.

This book examines the theory and practice of transparency in three ways. It traces the history of the term, collects and compares ideas about transparency across different disciplines and fields; and considers the practical consequences of introducing transparency into modern decision-making processes: transparency is more than openness, just as governance is more than government. The workshop and follow-up work was co-sponsored by the ESRC Public Services Programme and the British Academy. The scope and depth of the contributions are impressive. The 13 chapters are arranged in five parts: Transparency as a Term, Idea and Movement; Transparency as a Problem and Solution; Transparency and Institutional Behaviour; Transparency and Information-Age Technology; and Conclusion.

In Part I, Christopher Hood's opening chapter maps out the different strains and meanings of the term, refers to dictionary and encyclopaedia definitions, traces its use back to the Chinese legalists and classical Greeks, through Rousseau and Kant, to Bentham and the French revolutionaries. He considers its use in international governance, as well as in national and sub-national government. His survey and discussion of the term are brought up to date with references to practical experience in various countries and international organizations. In the second chapter, David Heald considers other approaches to the term, by looking at the directions and varieties of transparency. These two theoretical chapters are thought-provoking and ask many more questions than are answered. The next 10 chapters, arranged in 4 parts, are mainly concerned with different aspects or applications of the term. The contributors are all leading social scientists from a variety of disciplines and, as far as possible, their writings are interlinked and develop insights from the introductory chapters.

It is difficult to mention all the contributions in a short review, but this reviewer was especially stimulated by the chapters written by Onora O'Neill, 'Transparency and the Ethics of Communication'; Alasdair Roberts, 'Dashed Expectations: Governmental Adaptation to Transparency Rules'; and Helen Margetts, 'Transparency and Digital Government'. Each of these chapters was not only particularly well written in a clear jargon-free style but also focused on key issues, for example trust, democracy, and Freedom of Information; in addition, they left me worrying about questions being raised on matters I had not previously considered. The design on the dust jacket is stunning: it is a photograph by Marnix Van Esbroeck of the Flemish Parliament Building by night. The suspended auditorium, with a convex glass roof, is said to symbolize the Parliament's transparency to its people.

This is definitely a book for library purchase and for reading by advanced scholars; but undergraduates and practitioners may benefit from reading more introductory writings first.

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Norman Flynn (2007)

Public Sector Management (5th edn.)

London: Sage Publications, ISBN 978-1412929929 (hbk), £70; ISBN 978-1412929936 (pbk), £24.99.

Norman Flynn's book on Public Sector Management needs no introduction to teachers and students of public management as it has long been essential reading for students on both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in public management, public administration, public policy and management. This fifth edition continues to reflect the characteristics for which it is well known – a clear structure, lucid style and user friendliness. It builds on earlier editions by bringing chapters up to date as well as restructuring and adding new ones. It also combines information and data with critical reflections encouraging readers to engage with the material in a thoughtful and questioning way.

Part 1 of the book continues to provide the context of public management including its institutional framework and a historical overview of the changes in the role of the State since 1945. It questions if the period of Thatcherism witnessed a paradigm shift but concludes that although there was a radical programme of privatization and a determined effort to reduce public expenditure and the size of the public sector the major reforms were in fact managerial. Antipathy towards the state continued under Major, whose governments did actually succeed in marketizing public services and changing the relationship between the public and private sectors. The last 10 years of 're-branded' Labour governments under Tony Blair, although committed to a 'third way' of governing and to 'modernization', have