

TRANSPARENCY has become a widespread nostrum of 'good governance' in many different contexts today. But its meaning and history are obscure and so are its consequences. So the aim of this volume is to examine the theory and practice of the doctrine of transparency in three ways.

The first is to trace the history of 'transparency' and cognate doctrines in government and public policy. Where did this now pervasive idea come from? Is transparency an exclusive preoccupation of modern times and democratic government, or does it have an earlier life or lives?

The second is to collect and compare ideas about transparency across different disciplines and fields. Who means what by this term? Do the meanings add up to a single idea, or to multiple or even contradictory ideas?

The third is to go beyond statements of first principles and to accumulate empirical evidence on the benefits and costs of transparency. Is there a trade-off between quantity and quality? What does the introduction of transparency in one or other of its forms do to decision-making processes? How do institutions respond to measures intended to increase transparency and with what consequences, for instance in terms of memory, candour, or cost of service?

TRANSPARENCY: The Key to Better Governance? addresses the contemporary explosion of interest in transparency by bringing together scholars from a range of disciplines to probe its meaning and its relevance to public policy, and to set it in historical and philosophical context. The volume is edited by Christopher Hood (All Souls College, University of Oxford) and David Heald (University of Sheffield). The contributions are:

CHRISTOPHER HOOD on 'Transparency in historical perspective'

DAVID HEALD on 'Varieties of transparency'

PATRICK BIRKINSHAW on 'Transparency as a human right'

DAVID HEALD on 'Transparency as an instrumental value'

ONORA O'NEILL on 'Transparency and the ethics of communication'

ANDREA PRAT on 'The more closely we are watched, the better we behave?'

ALASDAIR ROBERTS on 'Governmental adaptation to transparency rules'

ANDREW McDONALD on 'What hope for freedom of information in the UK?'

JAMES SAVAGE on 'Member-state budgetary transparency in the Economic and Monetary Union'

DAVID STASAVAGE on 'Does transparency make a difference? The example of the European Council of Ministers'

JEAN CAMP on 'Varieties of software and their implications for effective democratic government'

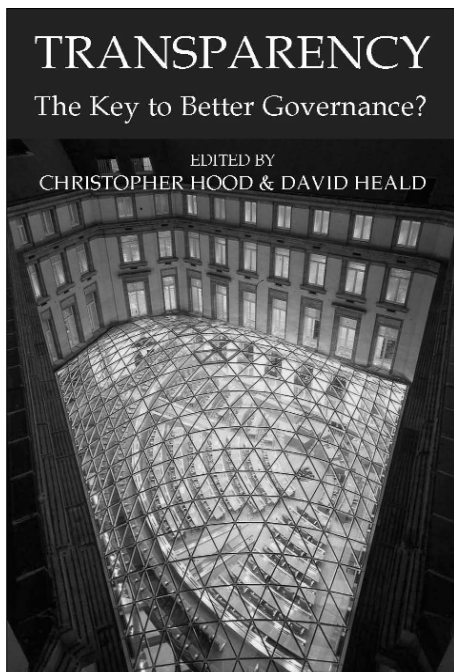
HELEN MARGETTS on 'Transparency and digital government'

CHRISTOPHER HOOD on 'Beyond exchanging first principles? Some closing comments'

TRANSPARENCY: The Key to Better Governance? (Proceedings of the British Academy, Volume 135) will be published by Oxford University Press in September 2006, price £30.

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Transparency: The Key to Better Governance?

Edited by Christopher Hood, Gladstone Professor of Government, University of Oxford; Fellow of the British Academy, and David Heald, Professor of Financial Management, University of Sheffield

'Transparency' is widely canvassed as a key to better governance, increasing trust in public-office holders. But transparency is more often preached than practised, more often referred to than defined, and more often advocated than critically analysed. This volume exposes this fashionable doctrine to critical scrutiny from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including political science, philosophy and economics.

The volume traces the history of transparency as a doctrine of good governance and social organization, and identifies its different forms; it assesses the benefits and drawbacks of measures to enhance various forms of transparency; and examines how institutions respond to measures intended to increase transparency, and with what consequences.

Transparency is shown not to be a new doctrine. It can come into conflict with other doctrines of good governance, and there are some important exceptions to Jeremy Bentham's famous dictum that 'the more closely we are watched, the better we behave'. And instead of heralding a new culture of openness in government, measures to improve transparency tend to lead to tighter and more centralised management of information.

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